

222 Upper Street  
London, N1 1XR

Meeting of: Housing Management Team

Date: 11 November 2022

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## Completion of project summary in response to Housing Ombudsman report ‘Spotlight on damp and mould – it’s not lifestyle’

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1. This report summarises the keys actions completed as part of the project to review our service response to damp and mould against the recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman in its report.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To review and comment on the detail set out in this report of the work carried out by the housing repairs service in response to the ombudsman recommendations.
- 2.2. To approve the completion of project.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. The Housing Ombudsman report was published in October 2021. A project team was set up within Housing Property Services to consider the content of the report and its recommendations in early 2022. A summary of the action plan and milestones for the project was considered by Housing Management Team in March 2023. HMT asked that a further report be drafted on completion of the project and submitted to HMT advising of the actions resulting from the project.
- 3.2. The Ombudsman report is split into four broad categories, and these are used to report back to HMT on the actions taken to ensure the service provided to Islington

tenants has taken account of the Ombudsman's recommendations.

### 3.3. **Category 1 – Reactive to Proactive**

#### 3.3.1. Review of the existing Damp and Mould procedure

The procedure has been reviewed with input from the Diagnostic Surveying team and oversight from the wider damp and mould project team. The review has confirmed the existing procedure is essentially compliant with the Ombudsman's key recommendations. Main developments resulting from review include reviewing the existing damp survey completed by diagnostic surveyors, introducing a new post damp work survey to gather resident feedback following completion of the repair job and delivering a programme of estate-based resident engagement events on the issue of damp and mould.

#### 3.3.2. Developing a data driven proactive approach to identifying damp cases

Extensive analysis of Oneserve data has been completed. The data reviewed covers reports of damp and mould by residents alongside completions of routine mould removal tasks carried out by repair operatives over the previous four years 2018-2021. This has helped identify the blocks on estates which have the highest instances of reports of damp and mould. This analysis is being used to help target further resident engagement on estates which are listed as having higher rates of reported instances of damp and mould in residents' homes.

#### 3.3.3. Review of Mutual Exchange process and link to damp cases

A small group of staff from Property Services, Housing Strategy, Housing Needs and Homes and Communities have used this opportunity to carry out a wider review of the existing mutual exchange procedure. This incorporates recommendations from the Ombudsman linked to damp and mould. Updates for Property Services have been agreed and Housing Strategy team are currently finalising updates for the other areas of housing prior to relaunch.

#### 3.3.4. Focus on resolution of damp and mould cases during void period

The issue of damp and mould is being considered as part of the wider review of the existing void standard. Checks have been carried out of the new tenant sign up pack which has confirmed that new tenants are advised about the issue of damp and how to prevent mould and condensation in the home with links to the existing webpages and video on the council website. The voids team and the legal team meet fortnightly to discuss outstanding cases for resolutions and will discuss if there has been any previous history of damp.

Connections are also being made with the existing net zero carbon Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund projects to explore how current voids within the scope of the projects can be included so works are done to help improve the insulation and energy efficiency of these properties which should help to reduce the risks of

damp and mould. It is confirmed all net zero carbon works must take account of damp and mould under the PAS 2035 regulations.

#### 3.4. **Category 2 – Inferring blame to taking responsibility**

##### 3.4.1. Review of our communications to residents on damp cases

Discussions have taken place with Housing Direct and Customer Services team to reinforce the communication and language standards linked to the handling of reports of damp and mould. The service is very confident terms such as 'lifestyle' are not used when liaising with customers because of previous work in this area. Customer services team manager ensuring consistently empathetic response given to complaints received linked to damp and mould. Follow up damp surveys are arranged as standard alongside reinforcement of signposting to other services that can support e.g., SHINE and housing needs. In addition, we have undertaken further resident communication campaigns on the issue of reporting damp and mould and the support that is available through recent articles in the Housing Matters quarterly mailout and also within the housing sections of Islington Life. We are currently speaking with Communications about running similar campaigns using electronic noticeboards on estates.

##### 3.4.2. Review of staff training

Diagnostic surveyors, Void Surveyors Direct Works Team Leaders and Chargehands and members of the Customer Services team and Housing Direct team are attending training sessions on damp and mould delivered by a specialist mould treatment supplier. The Surveyors are also attending more in-depth training delivered by Housing Quality Network and Property Care Association. The specialist mould treatment supplier has delivered a trade specific training course to relevant repair operatives that attend damp and mould jobs as reminder for the correct use and application of mould treatments. All training sessions reinforce the customer care aspects of the response to these reports including details on the correct language and approach to be used. All electricians are receiving training in maintaining storage heaters and repairing faulty control systems.

#### 3.5. **Category 3 – Disrepair claims and resolution**

##### 3.5.1. Embed new pre-action protocol and consider 3rd party surveyors use

Existing compliance with this recommendation has been confirmed. The council's legal department are using the new pre-action protocol and the practice management procedures have been reviewed to improve the management of legal cases. The council has had the ability to use 3<sup>rd</sup> party surveyors when needed for legal cases and this practice has been in place for over the past five years.

##### 3.5.2. Process to proactively share survey results and agreed actions with residents

Previously the repairs service would issue copies of completed damp surveys on request from residents. In order to improve our service offer and meet the expectations of the ombudsman the damp survey template has been reviewed. As part of this review the survey has been simplified and made more resident friendly whilst ensuring the key technical details needed from the survey are retained. A process is being implemented to forward completed damp surveys to the resident without the need for them to make this request. Checks has also been made to ensure residents are informed about the next steps for their job as part of the damp survey appointment.

3.5.3. Review of process followed when residents need to be moved

There are already established process for the management of major works transfer requests and there are regular meetings taking place between key managers in both Property Services and Homes and Communities to discuss active cases.

3.6. **Section 4 – Complaints to learning culture**

3.6.1. Process in place to gather and implement learning from complaints

There are already established processes in place to review complaints and extract learning. Further work has been undertaken to strengthen this further focussed on damp and mould related complaints. Monthly detailed reviews of complaints received linked to damp and mould will be undertaken and any learning points will be discussed within the service. Ways of engaging with residents to assist with reviews of learning are also being explored currently.

## 4. Conclusion and reasons for the decision

4.1. Following the review by the repairs service of its response to reports from residents of damp and mould in their home in line with the detailed recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman, we are confident that the service complies with the recommendations made.

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