

**Homes and Neighbourhoods**

**Islington Council**

**222 Upper Street**

**N1 1XR**

**Report of: Rebecca Nicholson, Head of Integrated Services**

**Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

# Damp, condensation and mould programme

## June 2023 Update Report

### 1. Recommendations

- 1.1. This report aims to provide the Housing Scrutiny Committee with information and progress made to date on the damp, condensation and mould programme since the previous update to the Housing Scrutiny Committee in May 2023.
- 1.2. Officers encourage the Housing Scrutiny Committee to appraise this work and make suggestions of how the council's work in this critical area can be improved.

### 2. Update overview

- 2.1. In the past month, since the last update to the Housing Scrutiny Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023, there has been further progress made on the damp, condensation and mould programme.
- 2.2. We have received feedback on key performance indicators, and this has informed headline key performance indicators. A sub-set of indicators are being scoped. See section 3.3. for more details

- 2.3. Further demographics data and “known to” Adult Social Care and Children Social Care has been added to the One View dashboard, which is the dashboard created specifically for the damp, condensation and mould programme’s urgent response. See sub-section 3.1.2. for more details.
- 2.4. Phase two of our Urgent Response is being designed using the data we have matched, the learning from our on-going engagement with residents the learning from benchmarking and Housing Ombudsman special investigation reports. The council is also studying the outcomes of all Housing Ombudsman investigation reports into other council’s and housing associations to learn from these reports to ensure Islington Council continuously improves the services for our residents.
- 2.5. Analysis of equalities data is underway to identify if there are any disproportional impacts to residents in our service delivery, ensuring we also integrate qualitative data into this work so that the voice of resident is front and centre.
- 2.6. Discussions have begun to integrate dashboards as part of our continued mission to improve services and monitor what is important.
- 2.7. The findings from the tenancy and property visit pilot at Halton Mansions have been presented to the Housing Management Team. See section 3.2. for more details.
- 2.8. A dedicated referral form for local partners like health and social services has been designed and a proposal paper to the Damp and Mould Taskforce Board with further engagement with partners to refine the process.
- 2.9. Members training on the programme has been scheduled, see sub-section 3.4.2 for more detailed.
- 2.10. Remote monitoring sensors, that measure humidity, temperature and air quality, are being piloted on various estates.
- 2.11. As per the previous update to Housing Scrutiny Committee new and existing policies and procedures relating to damp, condensation and mould service activity are being created or amended based on evidence-led learning to improve service delivery and joint working. These are due to be completed in the upcoming months and will go through the relevant governance processes.
- 2.12. In June there will be a meeting with University College London to discuss a research project to inform the services we deliver in relation to damp, condensation and mould. This will be an academic input and review of damp techniques and processes to ensure the most up to date and rigorous systems are adopted. Reusing Net Zero Carbon data to prepare funding/investment bids targeting damp and Net Zero Carbon.
- 2.13. Islington Council’s Homes and Neighbourhoods service aims to be the best Housing service in England within the next three years. The service will ensure everyone

deserves a quality home that provides them with the opportunity to live a better life, and our purpose is to provide homes and neighbourhoods everyone can be proud of. We'll do this by delivering safe, high-quality homes, and support for all our residents. This will be achieved by working in partnership with all agencies to meet this ambition. The strategic approach of the service will ensure residents are always placed at the heart of our service, as we strive to make the best use of our resources.

- 2.14. Establishment of the Tenant Empowerment framework continues. The proposed framework structure (appendix 1) is in the process of consultation with leads.
- 2.15. The council is piloting the Regulator of Social Housing new Inspection Framework to help further improve our services to our residents. The findings of this work will provide the council with an action plan to deliver further improvements.
- 2.16. We recently commissioned Housing Quality Network (HQN) to conduct a complaints benchmarking exercise, to carry out a survey of HQN's member organisations to understand whether the level of complaints we receive related to housing is consistent with other organisations, especially those of a comparable size and/or similar location. HQN also set out to understand whether there may be any correlation (in terms of percentages) between stock numbers, repairs volumes and complaints. For local authorities, in particular, we further sought to understand whether there may be a correlation between complaints received and numbers on the housing register, numbers of homelessness approaches and numbers in temporary accommodation.

HQN received 25 responses, including that from Islington. Those who responded included 8 Local Authorities, 2 Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMO) and 15 Housing Associations from across England and Wales.

HQN concluded:

"It is clear that, while the London Borough of Islington receives a high level of complaints and has also received a significant number of maladministration findings from the Housing Ombudsman, when compared with the respondents to HQN's survey, it is not an outlier in terms of "performance".

In fact, in some respects it is arguably performing better than similar organisations, who took part in the survey. We expect to see lower levels of satisfaction within London-based providers, and perhaps also higher proportions of complaints.

This is borne out, to a degree, by our survey findings. However, it is also notable that LBI generally compares well with the other London-based providers who took part in the survey. We see a similar pattern in when LBI is compared with other landlords with significant numbers of homes. So, while LBI receives a higher proportion of complaints than the average for London-based providers, a lot fewer of the complaints escalate beyond stage 1 of the process. This may (though this is not a definitive finding) indicate effective complaint resolution process.

It is also clear from the survey that LBI receives fewer complaints when compared to repairs volume than similarly large providers. Clearly LBI does not get its complaints resolution right all the time and has received a number of maladministration findings from the Housing Ombudsman, so there is always room for improvement. However, again, LBI is not an outlier in this respect and among the respondents to the survey, there were organisations, which had received more maladministration findings.

While LBI should continue its efforts to reduce complaints levels, and resolve complaints that are made to the complainants' satisfaction, LBI can be encouraged by the findings of this survey."

### 3. Focussed update

#### 3.1. Urgent response

3.1.1. As outlined in the revised Update Report on our damp, condensation and mould programme presented to Housing Scrutiny Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023, there are 1,845 households who have either expressed that they do not want to engage, or we have not been able to make contact, there will be a phase two of contact. This is still being designed and will take into consideration information from health and social care colleagues.

3.1.2. The breakdown of the data shared with us from social services, of the 3,471 households that had reported damp and mould from January 2020 – December 2022, there are:

- 162 households (186 service users) known to Adult Social Care (ASC)
- 154 households (292 children or young people) known to Children Social Services (CSS)
- Total of 310 households are known to either ASC and/or CSS.
- 6 households are known to both ASC and CSS.

3.1.3. Public Health are supporting our deeper understanding of demographics and disproportionality.

#### 3.2. Tenancy and Property Audit/visit

3.2.1. The pilot started 2nd March 2023 and concluded 19th April 2023.

3.2.2. Halton Mansions estate was chosen to be the pilot because of a variety known historic issues with stock condition and tenancy related issues, the size of the estate to make this a viable pilot and recent councillor casework enquiries.

- 3.2.3. In the initial stages of the pilot only one housing officer was conducting the visits, on average the housing officer was carrying out 8 visits per day which averaged 30 – 40mins per visit. However, very quickly it was apparent the officer lacked time and workload capacity to conduct this number of visits. We had to involve more housing officers who conducted over 159 visits during the pilot.
- 3.2.4. Following the visits, the captured information has been analysed and we identified the following trends and issues raised by residents. We recognise that the issues raised by tenants of Halton Mansions may differ from other locations in the borough due to the type and condition of stock, location, landscaping and greenery surroundings, availability of parking and other locally related issues.
- Communal heating times
  - Poor quality of windows - damp and mould around the windows
  - Rehousing issues – where residents did not feel they are living in suitable accommodation for their needs
  - Heating and hot water complaints
  - Parking issues within the estate
  - Tree issues
  - Anti-social behaviour
  - Guttering issues
- 3.2.5. There are 152 properties, with 110 tenanted properties and nine blocks. Approximately 60 tenanted households completed the form during the period of time of the pilot and with appointments booked for visits in the following weeks, due to tenants receiving a letter and arranging a suitable time.
- 3.2.6. Some of the data we captured following the visits are as follows: 15 reported they have never been previously inspected, 6 reported they needs aids and adaptations, 22 reported damp & Mould, 28 reported other property issues conditions, 7 reported they have not been previously inspected but has damp and mould, 18 reported visible damp and mould and has other property issues, 3 did not have a working smoke alarms, 11 reported anti-social behaviour, 9 reported they are experiencing financial challenges, 6 currently receives support from supporting agencies, 7 reported additional support needs, 34 registered with the GP, 4 are carers for someone else within the household, 1 household had care assessment need carried out.
- 3.2.7. Feedback from tenant's who we completed the visit with, were happy to receive a visit because they appreciated that we had taken the service to them and listened to their concerns. It allowed residents to speak to us and connect with their housing officer. During these conversations, some tenants outlined currently they have no point of contact within the council and cannot contact anyone to deal with their concerns. They felt they were being passed from one person to another and could not get actions addressed.

3.2.8. On the occasions the officers did not gain access to conduct the visit we created a letter/ calling card to explain the reasons why we are visiting, and the tenant was encouraged to re-book the visit. This is understandable because majority of the residents were working when visits were conducted during times between 9am to 5pm.

3.2.9. We included a section to record demographic data. Tenants were very forthcoming in sharing this data and when they were not, we were ok to note this down.

3.2.10. The full report of the findings from this pilot, including recommendations, was presented to the Housing Management Team on Tuesday 23rd May. To improve our evidence-base for this programme we will conduct more research/further pilots, this will provide us with a better representational understanding of differences with areas, identify different trends and feedback from tenants.

### 3.3. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

3.3.1. Table 1:

Damp and Mould Key Performance Indicator Proposal
1. Number of damp and mould cases reported every month
2. Remediation actions within timescale
3. Breakdown of cases by Cause (Tenancy Support, Repairs, Improvement, Fuel Poverty, overcrowding)
4. Number of repeat damp and mould cases
5. Number of stage 1 and 2 complaints
6. Equalities – indicator might change depending on deep dive analysis
Demographics: Number of damp and mould cases by ethnicity
Vulnerabilities: Number of damp and mould properties with adult social care or children social care residents

### 3.4. Training

3.4.1. Table 2: Housing Property Services officers

Course	Course details	Attendees	Number trained	Number pending
Damp & Mould awareness CPD	Identification/location/types/spread/leaks/condensation/ health impacts/not blaming residents	Housing Direct & Customer Service	26	29
Condensation, damp & mould Causes, Cures and the courts	Damp: Condensation, damp and mould – causes, cures and the courts   Housing Quality Network (hqnetwork.co.uk)	Void Surveyors Chargehands	5	6
Storage Heater refresher	Maintenance issues including managing heating controls	Electricians	15	
Diagnostic Approach to Understanding Condensation and Mould	Online Training A Diagnostic Approach to Understanding Condensation and Mould	Diagnostic & Legal Disrepair Surveyors	1	10
Damp & Mould awareness CPD	Identification/location/types/spread/leaks/condensation/ health impacts/not blaming residents	Diagnostic & Legal Disrepair Surveyors	9	
Damp & Mould awareness CPD	Identification/location/types/spread/leaks/condensation/ health impacts/not blaming residents	Chargehands, Gas engineers, Roofers	7	10
Damp & Mould awareness TBT	Identification/location/types/spread/leaks/condensation/ health impacts/not blaming residents	Painter & Decorators	22	4
Refresher on extractor fans	Update on product changes/heat recovery/check data on usage/trickle speed	Electricians		15
Damp & Mould	<b>Building defects and your health.</b> In depth analysis of causes of damp & mould and how to how to manage. Targeted at Surveyors & Managers	Surveyors, Team Leaders & Gas team managers	12	22
Customer Care training	In the light of D&M, look at what is quality service, impact of poor service, LBI expectations of staff. Quality conversations,	All staff in contact with residents	75	79

Course	Course details	Attendees	Number trained	Number pending
	understanding impact of behaviour			
HHSRS	<a href="https://www.nutsandboltstraining.co.uk/hhsrs-inspection-assessment/">https://www.nutsandboltstraining.co.uk/hhsrs-inspection-assessment/</a>	Surveyors	18	

3.4.2. Council Members training will be delivered on 26<sup>th</sup> June and 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023. Which will include:

- Defining Damp and Mould
- What is damp
- Mould and the health risks
- The risks in our properties
- The Law
- The process
- Your role and how you can help
- Challenges and costs

### 3.5. Housing Ombudsman

3.5.1. A list of cases within scope of the Housing Ombudsman's special investigation has been shared with Housing Leads.

3.5.2. Meetings have been scheduled with the lead investigator over the next couple of months.

## 4. Appendix

Appendix 1. Draft Tenant Empowerment Framework



