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**Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy**

**April 2024**

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**Documentation Master Sheet**

**Amendments to this Document are Detailed Below**

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| **Version**  **Number** | **Date** | **Amended**  **Comments** | **Date**  **Approved** | **Author** | **Approved**  **By** |
| **01** | February 2023 | New Policy | 28 March 2023 | Jason Crews | Board |
| **02** | April 2024 | Amendments to complement latest government guidance | February 2024 | Phil Headley | Housing Performance Panel |
| **03** |  |  |  |  |  |
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1. **Introduction**
   1. South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes are committed to providing safe, healthy, energy efficient and comfortable homes for its customers. We have designed a policy with residents to enable us to diagnose, respond to and effectively manage reports of damp, mould and condensation within our properties.
   2. This policy applies all homes owned by South Tyneside Council and managed by South Tyneside Homes.  South Tyneside Homes is an arms length management organisation (ALMO) created by South Tyneside Council to manage, maintain, and improve its Council homes. It covers all staff, including contractors and sub-contractors too. South Tyneside Council has a responsibility to ensure our homes are safe, healthy, and free from hazards, including damp, condensation, and mould.
   3. South Tyneside Homes has a responsibility to manage repairs and complete any work required to prevent damp, condensation and mould occurring. It is also important that tenants report any issues, so we can work quickly to help resolve the problems. We recognise the impact that damp, condensation, and mould can have on tenants, including distress, inconvenience and concerns about health and wellbeing.
   4. We will ensure that we take prompt action to remedy issues and support tenants, offering guidance, advice, and assistance throughout the process to all tenants living in Council properties.
   5. The Regulator of social housing expects that as a minimum we:

* Take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of tenants in their homes and associated communal areas.
* Provide an effective, efficient, and timely repairs, maintenance and planned improvements service for the homes and communal areas for which we are responsible.
* Collect and provide information to support effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord’s performance in delivering landlord service.
  1. We will treat all reports of damp and mould seriously, ensuring we understand any health implications, including respiratory problems or other conditions that impact on the immune system, whilst recognising the potential impact on customers mental health if left untreated.
  2. It is totally unreasonable to blame damp and mould in the home on ‘lifestyle choices’. The fundamental causes of damp, mould and condensation are building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation, inadequate heating and/or poor energy efficiency.
  3. The Housing Ombudsman spotlight report on damp and mould (October

2021) highlighted the seriousness of dealing effectively with damp and mould

in properties, following a high number of complaints from tenants that certain

landlords did not act appropriately to deal with these issues.

1.9 We recognise the importance of addressing the problems damp, mould and condensation can cause and the importance of ensuring we have preventative measures in place to tackle and reduce issues in our properties. This policy has been developed to specifically address the problems associated with damp and mould highlighted in the Ombudsman’s report and ensures proactive interventions, set out the approach to diagnosis, the actions considered appropriate in different circumstances, effective communication, and aftercare.

1. **Aims and objectives**
   1. This policy aims to assist in the delivery of a damp and mould service that will be able to:

* Take a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould.
* Ensure that customers are treated in a fair, respectful, empathetic, and consistent way.
* Comply with legislative and regulatory requirements and good practice.
* Focus on working in partnership with customers ensuring that a safe and healthy internal environment is provided.
* Undertake effective investigations and implement all reasonable remedial repair solutions and improvements to eradicate damp, manage mould and control condensation.
* Ensure customers have access to and are provided with comprehensive advice and guidance on eradicating damp, managing mould, and controlling condensation.
* Maximise the available budgets and ensure that they are used effectively and efficiently to deal with damp, mould, and condensation problems.
* Ensure that the fabric of our property is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp, mould and condensation.
* Ensure the service provided is accessible to all so everyone can easily report damp, mould, and condensation issues.
* Provide effective assurance to customers and stakeholders on the management of damp, mould, and condensation.
* Focus on working in partnership with the Council and tenants, ensuring that a safe and healthy internal environment is provided.

1. **Scope of policy**

3.1 South Tyneside Homes is an ALMO wholly owned by South Tyneside Council, managing the housing stock on their behalf. The scope of this policy covers how South Tyneside Homes and council tenants can jointly control, manage, and eradicate damp, mould, and condensation this includes:

* Identifying the types of damp: rising, penetrating and condensation damp, including internal leaks.
* Identifying South Tyneside Homes responsibilities for dealing with damp, mould, and condensation.
* Identifying the tenants’ responsibilities for dealing with damp, mould and condensation.
* Offering guidance, advice, and assistance throughout the process to all customers living in a council property.

1. **Legislation and regulation**

4.1 South Tyneside Homes comply with relevant legislation and regulation, on behalf of South Tyneside Council:

* The Housing Act 1985
* The Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018
* The Landlord and Tenant Act Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance
* The Housing Act 2004 – Housing Health and Safety Rating
* Environmental Protection Act 1990
* Defective premises Act 1972
* The Home Standard
* The Decent Homes Standard

1. **Related Policies and Procedures**

* Equality and Diversity Policy
* Repairs and Maintenance Policy
* Tenancy Agreement

1. **Causes of damp, mould, and condensation**

**Rising Damp**

* 1. The movement of moisture from the ground rising through the walls of a building.

**Penetrating Damp (including internal leaks)**

6.2 Water penetrating the external structure of the building or internal leaks causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and structure. The cause can be the result of, for example:

* Water ingress due to defective or poor original design or workmanship of the structure.
* Defective components for example roof coverings, external wall doors and windows.
* Defective or blocked rainwater gutters and pipes.
* Defective or leaking internal waste pipes, hot and cold water and heating systems.
* Flooding due to burst pipes.

**Condensation Damp**

6.3 Condensation occurs when moisture held in warm air meets a cold surface and then condenses producing water droplets. This can take two main forms:

* Surface condensation arising when the inner surface of the structure is cooler than the room air.
* Condensation inside the structure where vapour pressure forces water vapour through porous materials (e.g. walls), which then condenses when it reaches colder conditions within the structure.

6.4 The conditions that can increase the risk of condensation are:

* Inadequate ventilation such as natural opening windows and trickle or background vents and mechanical extraction in bathrooms and kitchens.
* Inadequate heating such as undersized boilers and radiators.
* Inadequate thermal insulation. Such as missing, dislodged, or defective wall and loft insulation.
* High humidity in cases of rising and penetrating damp.
* Poor building design and construction – specific cold areas (bridging) which are integral with the building construction.

6.5 Conditions that can lead to condensation are:

* Poor ventilation – not opening windows, blocking up vents not turning on extract fans, not allowing air to circulate around furniture.
* Poor heating – not heating the house adequately, which can be a result of fuel poverty.
* High humidity - not covering pans when cooking and drying laundry inside the house can contribute to this.
* Overcrowding.

6.6 Mould is a natural organic compound that develops in damp conditions and will only grow on damp surfaces. This is often noticeable and present in situations where condensation damp is present.

**7. Roles and responsibilities**

**Our Responsibilities**

7.1 Following a report of damp, mould, or condensation from a customer, we will offer immediate advice until a property inspection can be carried out and triage the call to assess if the customer is vulnerable or has any health priorities. Inspections will be carried out in a timely manner and at a mutually convenient time. We will:

* Undertake a property inspection when a repair is reported relating to suspected damp, mould, and condensation.
* Diagnose the cause correctly and deliver effective solutions based on the ethos of dealing with the cause of the problem not just the symptom and wherever possible, fixing the problem first time.
* Inform the customer of the findings of the investigations following a property visit. This will include identifying the possible causes, recommending effective solutions and all necessary remedial works, actions, enhancements, and the estimated timescales to complete the works /measures; and keeping the customer updated throughout the process from inception to completion.
* Carry out remedial repairs and actions in accordance with the tenancy agreement and our Repairs and Maintenance Policy, ensure only competent staff or contractors are employed to carry out any works and that the customer’s possessions are adequately protected during the works, completing any remedial works or measures within reasonable timescale in accordance with the processes and procedures, dependent on the severity and urgency of the problem and on the complexity of the solution of the remedial works/actions required.
* Ensure the customers home has a reasonable degree of thermal comfort in accordance with Decent Homes Standard to help reduce the likelihood of condensation occurring.
* Take responsibility for maintaining customers’ homes to avoid penetrating and rising damp and for carrying out remedial action if these problems occur.
* Undertake reasonable improvement works required to assist in the management and control of condensation dampness. This may include but is not limited to upgraded ventilation system installation, improved indoor air movement and quality best practices.
* We will set a timescale to revisit customers to check that the remedies suggested have been effective.
* Install smart sensors where appropriate.
* Make good internal surfaces following any repairs work carried out ensuring that surfaces are prepared to a condition ready for the Customer to redecorate. Where there is need to decorate following remedial work, we will provide a decoration voucher to cover the cost of the materials needed to make good the decoration.
* Promote and provide general advice and guidance on how to minimise damp, mould, and condensation, particularly when there are no apparent causes relating to design or construction. All customers reporting damp, mould or condensation will receive a copy or our latest guidance.
* We will offer advice regarding the management of mould in a property and under certain exceptional circumstances where the customer is unable to carry out mould washes or redecoration South Tyneside Homes will provide support and assistance.
* Ensure that all employees have an awareness of the policy and relevant employees receive adequate and appropriate training to enable them to report issues of damp, mould, and condensation and to support our customers.
* Ensure that technical staff are trained and competent in the diagnosis of damp, mould, and condensation issues.
* Introduce a new data intelligence framework to enhance our customer and property information, which will shape our future investment programmes.
* We will always first consider whether the source of the damp and mould is a design, construction, or maintenance issue which we can eliminate through work to the home. Where this is not the case additional support and advice will be provided to the customer on managing and controlling the occurrences of condensation damp. This support will be provided through the provision of advice and guidance literature.
* If it is unsafe for the occupants to remain in the property while the works are carried out, alternative accommodation arrangements will be made. The customer will be supported through this process to find suitable accommodation. We will always consider decanting (moving) tenants temporarily if they have a health problem that can be made worse by damp and mould.
* In some cases, it may be necessary to re-house a family on a permanent basis if for example a medical professional advises that re-housing is the most suitable option.
* Make reasonable attempts to access the property to inspect and carry out the works and if required implement our no access Policy and Procedures.
* We will not be able to control condensation damp where it is unreasonable or impractical to do so or if any remedial action would be ineffective e.g. non habitable rooms such as out –buildings or sheds that have been converted including linking buildings between the house and outbuilding and other add-on structures.
* Where internal conditions within a home for example, overcrowding or excessive hoarding of personal belongs are impacting on the health and wellbeing of the occupants are preventing inspections or remedial works being carried out, we will provide support and assistance to review the customer’s options that may include moving to more appropriate alternative suitable accommodation.

7.2 If there are concerns raised that the damp, mould or condensation issue may relate to cost-of-living pressures, Officers will refer residents to our Social Navigators/Welfare Support team and offered support with their financial wellbeing.

7.3 Guidance on how to use a heating system will be given verbally and made available in writing upon request.

7.4 We will carry out checks for damp, mould and condensation during the void process, plus regularly check that heating systems/extractor fans are in working order.

7.5 Homes will be periodically checked for signs of damp, mould, and condensation, plus for any risk factors such as inadequate ventilation and condensation.

**Customer responsibilities**

* 1. It is the customer’s responsibility to immediately report any evidence of damp mould or condensation along with any faulty equipment that will affect the management of humidity and moisture in the home (faulty extract fan, unable to open windows, heating system failure, etc.).
  2. Customers must allow reasonable access for inspections and for the carrying out of all remedial works. Where customers are considering making any changes within their home: for example, converting rooms into one room, adding extensions, converting non–habitable buildings/spaces into habitable, they must seek advice and permission from us in accordance with their tenancy agreement, to ensure that the proposed alteration would not contribute to the accumulation of damp, mould, or condensation, as well as ensuring alterations comply with building control and planning guidelines.

**8. Guidance for customers**

8.1 Customers can help reduce the conditions that lead to condensation dampness by:

* Keeping the presence of moisture to a minimum e.g., covering pans when cooking, drying laundry outside (where possible), where it is safe to do so, keeping the kitchen or bathroom door closed when cooking or bathing.
* Adequately heating rooms – The World Health Organisation recommends 18°c.
* Avoiding using paraffin or portable gas bottled heaters.
* Ensuring tumble dryers are adequately ventilated.
* Keeping the home well ventilated e.g., opening windows during cooking or bathing, turning on and ensuring that the extractor fan or ventilation system installed in their home is regularly cleaned and working, keeping trickle vents in windows open, not blocking air bricks and allowing air to circulate around furniture.
* Wiping down condensation
* Following all advice and guidance issued by us on managing humidity and moisture in the home which can lead to condensation.

8.2 We recognise that fuel poverty is a factor in damp, mould and condensation issues and will make referrals to our welfare support team to provide advice, support, and assistance where there is poverty, debt, or welfare concerns.

1. **Complaints**

9.1 Any customer who is not satisfied with our approach in assessing and managing their damp, mould or condensation concerns can make a formal complaint. If the customer is dissatisfied with actions and decisions made under this policy, it will be dealt with under our Customer Complaints Policy.

1. **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**
   1. South Tyneside Homes is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity, and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. In delivering this Policy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.
   2. This policy aligns to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment
2. **Performance, monitoring and review**

* 1. We will continue to monitor the number of damp, mould, and condensation related reports we receive, and the remedies put in place to resolve the issues through our performance and assurance framework.
  2. This policy will normally be reviewed every three years to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, unless an earlier review is required due to regulatory, statutory, or other requirements.
  3. South Tyneside Council will monitor our damp, mould and condensation reports, repairs, risk, and planned maintenance reports and we will provide the information to Housing Performance Panel on at least a quarterly basis.
  4. We will establish a system to collect data (for example, no. of cases, response times, recurrence, tenant satisfaction and complaints) about damp, mould, and condensation.
  5. This data will be used to review performance, improve practice, and learn how to better address damp, mould, and condensation. For example, changes to policies, procedures, or additional staff training.
  6. We will continue to proactively use data to identify other homes potentially at risk of damp, mould, and condensation.
  7. We aim to learn from the data and continue to ensure a safe, healthy, and comfortable environment for our residents, as well as to protect the fabric of our buildings.
  8. Reviewing data, risk information and feedback from residents will also ensure that appropriate budget levels are available and used effectively and efficiently to deal with issues of damp, mould, and condensation.
  9. Repairs or remedial work carried out in response to cases of damp, mould and condensation complement our programmes of planned maintenance.