
To: Communities and Housing Policy Board

On: 17 January 2023

Report by: Director of Communities and Housing Services

Heading: Housing: Tackling Dampness, Mould and Condensation

1. Summary

- 1.1 The recent investigation and inquest into the tragic death of a two-year-old boy in Rochdale in Dec 2020 concluded that this was due to environmental mould exposure over a prolonged period.
 - 1.2 Housing Services have reviewed the Inquest results, the Coroner's Report and the Ombudsman Report and have taken immediate action to review their current processes.
 - 1.3 An increase in reports of mould and dampness have materialised over the past month which is common at this time of year but may also in part be due to the media coverage of the Rochdale Case.
 - 1.4 The Cost of Living Crisis and the Energy Crisis are expected to result in an increasing number of tenants being unable to adequately heat their homes with the potential consequence of increased problems with damp, mould and condensation.
 - 1.5 This report outlines the current processes in place to deal with reports of dampness and mould, the actions we have already taken to review these and further actions to be undertaken. Statistical reports on volumes of repairs of this nature are included.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked:
 - (i) to note the measures in place, the actions taken and proposed future actions to ensure the effective management of dampness, mould and condensation cases within Renfrewshire Council housing stock
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3. Background

3.1 The inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale in Dec 2020 concluded that the cause of death was

- a. *1a) Acute airway oedema with severe granulomatous tracheobronchitis due to*
- b. *1b) Environmental mould exposure*

This tragic case has led to an increased focus on landlords and how they deal with reports of mould and dampness.

3.2 The Housing Ombudsman produced a report entitled Spotlight on: Damp and Mould which contains several recommendations.

For Local Authority providers of social housing, this has prompted reviews of the strategy for dealing with cases of dampness and mould.

3.3 Renfrewshire Council's current process for dealing with cases of dampness and mould is as follows:

- Dampness, mould, and condensation problems are reported by tenants or other parties through the customer contact centre.
- A Repairs and Maintenance officer (RMO) will attend and assess any repair requirements. All RMOs have damp meters which they use to check the levels of dampness within walls. They will look for potential causes of dampness such as leaks, gutter damage, chimney, roofing problems etc. They will also check that extractor fans are present in bathrooms and kitchens and ensure they are in working order. A checklist is completed to ensure that all the usual potential causes are assessed.
- Repair lines are raised for any issues identified. This may include fixing the cause of the problem e.g., a leak and/or issuing works to clean the damp/mould and apply anti-fungal paint.
- Anti-fungal paint application is carried out by Building Services. The RMO will arrange the first appointment and Building Services will arrange further appointments as required. Normally at least 2 visits are required for paintwork.
- Dampness and Condensation leaflets are issued where appropriate.
- Severe cases or cases where there is no obvious cause are passed to our specialist rot works contractor who will provide a detailed report, identifying factors contributing to the dampness problem and recommendations for works to be carried out. The contractor will offer advice to the tenant where appropriate.
- The recommended repairs are undertaken. If the property is within a block with owners, the owner consent process may be required.
- Regular meetings are held with the Rot works contractor to review progress of all cases.

- 3.4 In addition to responding to reports of damp and mould, Renfrewshire Council have been proactively installing monitors which measure temperature and humidity levels. Properties identified as at risk of damp and mould are visited by the Housing Energy Team in the first instance who provide advice to tenants and identify if further follow up inspection or repairs are required.
- 3.5 Actions that have already been taken since the Rochdale case has been reported are as follows:
- Improvements have been made to RMO processes to ensure that checklists are always completed for all damp/mould inspections and that records are stored within the repairs system.
 - Repairs and Maintenance Officers have been reminded of the need to be vigilant and look out for cases of potential mould/damp when carrying out any inspection even if the tenant has not reported it directly.
 - A further training session on Dampness and Mould for the RMOs has been arranged for February 2023. This will be carried out by a specialist in the field.
 - The condensation leaflet has been reviewed internally and with input from our specialist rot works contractor. A revised leaflet has been agreed and will be distributed to all RMOs and other relevant staff.
 - Discussions have taken place with Building Services to ensure that adequate resources are in place for anti-mould paint applications in the light of an influx of inspection in recent weeks. Building Services operatives will also be issued with the condensation/mould leaflets to issue to tenants where appropriate.
 - Discussions have taken place with our specialist rot works contractor to consider the recommendations made as a result of the Rochdale case.
- 3.6 The processes and procedures will be subject to an ongoing review but further actions that have already been identified are as follows:
- The dampness checklist to be rolled out to the void team.
 - The void team to review any history of damp to ensure potential problems can be rectified whilst the property is empty.
 - New category of work to be set up to enable damp/mould treatment to be more easily identified on Workhub (Repairs System)
 - Streamlining of the process for installing monitoring equipment in tenanted properties that have ongoing dampness issues.
 - Process to be put in place to ensure 'no accesses' for mould treatment are followed up.
 - Additional training session to be set up with the specialist rot works contractor and RMOs
 - Liaise with Corporate Energy team and Cost of Living crisis team in relation to Energy Advice and Fuel poverty issues.
 - Contact centre scripts to be reviewed.

- A strategy to be developed for managing dampness, mould, and condensation linked to the overall Asset Management Strategy.

3.7 Challenges that will require ongoing monitoring are as follows:

- Energy crisis – tenants unable to afford to heat their homes is likely to result in an increase in damp/mould/condensation cases.
- Building Services Resource – requires to be monitored in line with demand.
- Rot works contractor resource – requires to be monitored in line with demand. Prioritisation of workload to ensure most severe cases are dealt with.
- RMO resource – Requires to be monitored in line with demand. Severe cases to be prioritised.

3.8 Around 630 properties have reported instances of damp, mould or condensation over the course of the current financial year. This compares to 665 cases in the previous year. Officers will continue to proactively manage any reports of damp, mould or condensation, and to improve practice in line with the actions outlined in para 3.6.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None – Budget provision is in place
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - Building strong, safe and resilient communities – the range of measures that are in place help to ensure tenants are safe.
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** - None.
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety - None**
9. **Procurement - None**
10. **Risk - None**
11. **Privacy Impact - None**
12. **Cosla Policy Position – N/A**
13. **Climate Risk -**

List of Background Papers

None

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