



# Damp, Mould & Condensation Policy

## Document Control

Responsible Department	Housing Operations
Author	Service Manager (Housing Operations)
Consultation	

## Revision History

Date	Previous Version	Description of Revision
08/12/2022	N/A	Creation

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## 1. Introduction

Gravesham Borough Council is committed to maintaining its homes to a high standard. Maintaining high quality and secure homes can improve the lives of our tenants and achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction. Our homes provide the space and security for our tenants to build the best possible life. It is recognised that in providing homes as a space for households to live and grow, they must be kept free of mould and the council and its tenants must work together to achieve this.

The main cause of mould in homes is due to insufficient heating, lack of ventilation and lifestyle issues all of which cause condensation. Condensation occurs when moist air produced by ordinary household activities such as cooking and bathing hits a cold surface e.g., a cold wall or window, which causes damp and mould growth. This can usually be resolved by making some simple changes within the home.

Regardless of the cause, the Council will ensure that tenants feel supported and listened to when they report cases of damp, mould, and condensation.

This policy considers recommendations made in the Housing Ombudsman Service Report, Spotlight on: Damp and Mould issued in Oct 2021 highlighting the approach they expect social landlords to take when dealing with tenants who complain about damp to them. This policy has been developed to sit alongside and complement our Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

## 2. Legislation and Regulation

Gravesham Borough Council will meet all its obligations as a landlord in relation to:

- Housing Act 1985, 2004
- The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Decent Homes Standard
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Secure Tenants of Local Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations 1994
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Tenancy Agreement
- Equality Act 2010

## 3. Principles of this policy

The key principles of the policy are:

- To ensure the Council provide and maintain dry, warm, healthy homes for our tenants.
- To ensure that the fabric of our homes is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp and mould and ensure the relevant repairs are raised and completed.

We will look to achieve this by:

- Informing both tenants and staff about the health risks of living in damp and/or mouldy homes and how this should be reported if it is identified.
- Introduce an 'Every Visit Counts' approach to all home visits to ensure that all Council staff and representatives have a duty to report damp and mould in any of our homes.
- Ensuring that all tenants are aware how to report damp and mould and ensure the process for them to do so is straightforward.
- Working with and supporting our tenants to make changes which reduce condensation in the home.
- Focussing on working in partnership with tenants ensuring that a safe and healthy internal environment is provided.
- Identifying properties that are prone to damp and mould and identifying a programme of preventative measures (e.g., insulation and ventilation fans).

- Introducing a reinspection process of properties that have had damp and mould in the last two years.
- Referring cases to specialist surveyors if there is a repeat instance or more serious case of damp and mould
- Introduction of enhanced damp and mould training for all frontline staff working within the Housing directorate.
- Diagnose the cause of damp correctly and deliver effective solutions based on the ethos of dealing with the cause of the damp not just the symptom and wherever possible “fixing first time”.
- Ensuring that more Officers are allocated to deal with reports of damp and mould at times of the year with higher demand such as the winter.
- Creation of a ‘Healthy Homes Taskforce’ made up of a number of Officer’s from different teams in the Housing directorate including Repairs, Energy & Sustainability and Housing Tenancy Management to discuss common issues and trends being found by the frontline Officers and ideas on how more proactive approaches can be taken to resolve damp and mould issues.

#### 4. Types of damp

##### Mould caused by condensation

Mould can be caused by condensation and may adversely affect our tenant’s health and the fabric of our homes. Tenants are responsible for making sure that the way they live their lives does not cause significant amounts of condensation that results in mould growth.

Condensation is caused by:

- Humidity of indoor air.
- Low temperature.
- Poor heating.
- Poor ventilation.
- Poor building design (e.g. cold bridging).

Advice on how to prevent or reduce condensation can be found on the Council website - [Condensation | Safety in your home – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

The Council will work with its tenants to ensure that support and advice is provided on how to reduce condensation. If condensation is found to be the cause, the Council will also ensure that that sufficient ventilation and insulation is in place to help combat this.

The Council will not be able to control condensation or damp where it is unreasonable or impractical to do so or if any remedial action would be ineffective for example:

- Poor construction or design (not meeting current construction and living standards) for example, Cold bridging areas in the fabric of the building that cannot be eliminated.
- Non habitable rooms - for example, out-buildings / sheds that have been converted including linking buildings between the house and out building and other add-on structures and unheated/ uninsulated semi external toilets and store rooms.

##### Rising damp

Rising damp is the movement of moisture from the ground rising through the structure of the building through capillary action. Rising damp usually leaves a tide mark on the internal and external walls.

Rising damp can be caused by:

- High ground levels.
- Bridging of damp proof course.
- Defective or non-existent damp proof course.

## Penetrating Damp (including internal leaks)

Penetrating damp is where water penetrates the external structure of the building or where there are internal leaks causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and the structure. The cause can be the result of, for example:

- Water ingress owing to defective or poor original design / 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 because of burst pipes.

## Common trends identified within the stock

A number of common causes of damp and mould within the Council's housing stock have been identified and listed below:

- Living in a modern home –everyday living can cause excessive humidity within a property, creating conditions where mould can thrive. Lack of adequate ventilation is the primary cause, but drying clothes on radiators, cooking with lids off pans and even tropical fish tanks all add to the moisture levels within a property.
- Cold Bridging- this can be in many areas of the property including insulation not fully going in the eaves of a roof, concrete lintels, poorly installed cavity wall insulation and many other examples.
- Blocked vents- ventilation provided either mechanical or background ventilation being blocked off, broken or covered.
- Finlock concrete gutters- this type of guttering is notoriously defective and leaks leading to penetrating damp and cold bridging for condensation.
- No extractor fans present in kitchens, bathrooms, and utility rooms.
- Unvented and condensing tumble dryers - these produce a serious amount of water vapour in the space encouraging condensation.
- Leaking gutters - there are many cases where guttering is overflowing and leaking joints
- Missing pointing on brickwork- poor or broken away pointing on parts of brick walls; this may have created cold spots for condensation and opportunity for penetrating damp.
- Fuel poverty / cost of living – it is recognised that fuel poverty is a major factor in the increase that has been seen regarding damp and mould cases. Tenants may be unable to afford to heat their homes effectively or evenly which then creates conditions for mould to thrive.

## **5. Damp and mould Process**

- Damp and mould can be reported through the Council's repair line 01474 337777 or reported on the Council's website using the damp and mould reporting form - [Report damp and mould - Introduction - MyGravesham](#)
- If reporting by telephone, a diagnostics questionnaire will be completed when a problem is reported to ensure we have enough information and can keep records.
- A surveyor from the Housing team will attend the property to inspect the damp and mould. A full survey will be carried out including an inspection of the insulation, ventilation and damp and humidity measurements.
- If the outcome shows that condensation is likely to be causing the problem we will work with and support our tenants to make changes to improve the situation and create an action plan to confirm what they need to change..
- If the outcome shows that rising or penetrating damp is present, we will arrange to carry out the necessary repairs to fix the issue within the required timescales.

- Follow-up visits will be arranged following completion of the works to see whether the issue is still present and whether the tenant requires more assistance.
- We may on occasion refer a case to other departments or agencies that may be of assistance in relation to with fuel poverty or lifestyle issues that may be contributing to damp problems within the property.

The council will inform the tenant of the findings of the investigations following a house visit. This will include identifying the possible causes of damp, recommending effective solutions and all necessary remedial works / actions / enhancements and the estimated timescales to complete the works /measures. This will be communicated to the tenant keeping them up to date with their enquiry through the process from inception to completion.

## **6. Preventative works carried out by The Council**

To reduce the occurrence or development of condensation, damp, and mould in our homes we will:

- Promote information to our tenants about how to reduce condensation in the home
- Identify properties that are prone to mould growth and identify a programme of preventative measures
- Introduce an 'Every Visit Counts' approach to ensure that all Council staff and representatives take responsibility for reporting damp, mould, and condensation in our homes.
- A yearly programme of loft and cavity wall insulation including installation of new extractor fans, window and wall vents to properties that do not currently have insulation.
- A yearly programme of replacing inefficient heating with traditional or renewable systems.
- Enhance the void standard to ensure that further preventative measures are implemented before the property is tenanted.
- Large scale roll-out of smart monitoring technology in our homes so we can identify properties at risk of damp and mould, before it is reported to us.
- Review each damp and mould works order raised after six months to see if the proposed solution has been effective.
- All maintenance teams to follow the damp and mould policy to prevent damp and mould by tackling issues when involved with works on the property.
- Toolbox talks to be held frequently with maintenance staff in relation to damp, mould and condensation.
- A yearly programme of stock condition surveys which will be carried out by the surveyors within the Housing Operations service, providing greater confidence in identifying damp and mould and ensure that the required remedial works are processed.

## **7. Energy Champions**

In 2022, the Council partnered with the Energy Saving Trust to deliver energy advice training to create Energy Champions within the Housing team. These Champions provide support and advice to Council tenants who may need assistance with saving money on their energy bills, using their heating sufficiently and reducing condensation in their homes.

These Champions will be engaged during cases of damp and mould where it is felt that the tenants may need support in regards to heating and ventilation their homes.

## **8. Performance and monitoring**

Feedback from tenants on the quality of the service received is important to the Council to help in the continuous improvement of the service. Regular and random tenant satisfaction surveys will be conducted following the completion of a repair and this data will be used to shape the service improvements in the future

If our residents at any time, feel they have been aggrieved or treated unfairly throughout any process they can appeal in accordance with our complaint's procedure. A copy of Gravesham Borough Council's Complaints policy and procedure is available upon request or via the website

To ensure that the Council maintains high service standards, we will monitor the effects of this policy using a range of key performance indicators. Performance data will be shared on a regular basis with Housing Tenancy Management, tenants and will be available on our website.