

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

**Report by Chief Officer – Supply, Distribution & Property
Chief Officer – Housing and Employability**

**Housing and Communities Committee
3 May 2023**

Subject: Housing Repairs - Addressing Dampness and Mould in Council Houses

1 Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with an overview of the services' approach to the management and future prevention of dampness and mould in council houses.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that Committee:

- Note the contents of the report and the progress to date; and
- Approve the recommendations outlined in 4.3.2 – 4.3.6.

3 Background

- 3.1** Members are aware of the tragic case of the death of a young child in Rochdale, England. The young child had suffered prolonged exposure to mould as concluded by the Coroner in November 2022.

- 3.2** The council agreed at its meeting on 21 December 2022, the following motion:

This avoidable death should be a wake-up call for all social housing providers including West Dunbartonshire Council, and local, regional and national Housing Associations. Council therefore asks the Chief Officer of Supply, Distribution and Property and Chief Officer, Housing and Communities to:

1. Review our approach to dampness in Council properties and how best to prioritise associated repairs.

2. Introduce a process to ensure all dampness/mould repairs are checked and signed off by Maintenance Co-ordinator before the case is closed. This quality control check should ensure the action taken has fully resolved the complaint.

3. Produce a briefing note setting out the outcome of the review to be sent to all elected members for information.

Council further notes that we will take all appropriate actions to address any concerns tenants may have.

4 Main Issues

4.1 Immediate Response

- 4.1.1 In November 2022, Housing, Building and Citizens Services taking a joined up approach, responded immediately to the coroner's decision. The teams discussed the current approach to repairs requests, and reviewed ideas and ways to ensure appropriate, sensitive communication, clear information and responsive actions to support tenants.
- 4.1.2 The leaflet for tenants - as provided by Scottish Government and adapted locally – was updated. This provides information for tenants on how to address condensation, prevent dampness and importantly report a concern about mould / dampness
- 4.1.3 A consistent communication was developed for services dealing directly with tenants, for example through our contact centre, face to face and via social media.
- 4.1.4 A clear system was introduced for collating, monitoring and reporting statistics in relation to requests for inspection / repair in relation to dampness. Analysis of housing property data was made available to inform this process.
- 4.1.5 A triage approach was introduced to respond to tenants' requests for inspection and repair with the aim of responding to initial inspection for urgent cases within 48 hours.
- 4.1.6 It was agreed there would be a commitment to undertaking a technical survey within 14 days with priority for those urgent cases.
- 4.1.7 Resources were prioritised and reviewed on a weekly basis with additional resource being progressed to ensure continued commitment to inspect urgent cases within target timeline.
- 4.1.8 As agreed by Council, a full review of the process was undertaken. The revised process is attached at Appendix 1.

4.2 Current Position

- 4.2.1 The following data provides an overview of the position during 2022/23:
- 6,907 repair inspection have been carried out from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023
 - of these, 932 inspections for dampness and condensation, 14% of total inspections undertaken
 - following inspection 270 repairs were raised with 42 remaining active at 31 March 2023
 - 29% of inspections resulted in further repairs work being required

As a comparison, In 2021/22 a total of 169 repairs were completed associated with dampness; this equates to 1% of all response repairs

4.3 Proposals

4.3.1 The revised process as outlined at Appendix 1, includes the following key steps to address and prevent dampness and mould:

- Housing and Building Services teams will continue to offer advice where appropriate.
- Any employee visiting a tenant will be vigilant and look for signs of dampness or mould in every home.
- Dampness inspection requests will be prioritised to be undertaken within 2 working days.
- Repairs resulting from an inspection will be re-categorised to urgent (10 day) repairs where appropriate.
- Following the outcome of all dampness inspections, housing officers will arrange a follow up visit within 2 working days.
- Housing solutions and decisions – for example decant - to address dampness and mould take account of all factors including building and family circumstances

4.3.2 Housing Development have been investigating technology solutions to help identify, tackle, and prevent damp and mould issues proactively. The preferred solution identified are environmental sensors. This technology has been relatively recently developed and can track temperature, humidity and Co2 in the home. Linked to a gateway, to which we can also connect the home's fire/smoke alarms, we can track the fluctuations in the home's temperature and humidity and air quality if we include the Co2 feature (extra cost, recommended for bedrooms, living rooms etc.).

4.3.3 The gateway links to a dashboard which will provide WDC staff with information such as high levels of humidity, which can create conditions for mould growth if not managed appropriately, for example if it peaks in the evening (typically time for cooking, washing etc.) and does not return to a normal level within a reasonable time frame then the home is not being appropriately ventilated.

However, if the humidity levels are high at all times despite ventilation this suggests that moisture may be coming from elsewhere e.g. a leak or rising or penetrative damp. Air quality data (co2 sensors) can help understand if a room is being ventilated because it will tell us about the freshness of air in a room. Poor quality air can lead to headaches, fatigue and support the spread of disease.

4.3.4 Appropriate officers would have access to the dashboard to help provide both informed support to tenants and facilitate decisions about next steps e.g. installing more fans, investigating leaks and take the necessary action.

Further, a very attractive attribute of the sensors is the tenant app which allows tenants to receive real time information about their home. This helps

tenant engage in managing their home and make the connections between their activities and any related damp and mould risk and take action to improve air quality.

- 4.3.5 With the council approved additional funding for the HRA capital programme, it is proposed to install these sensors in a first tranche of approximately 2,000 homes. These homes will include void properties, multi storey flats, sheltered homes and those identified as priority homes experiencing damp and mould.

This programme will be delivered over five years (total budget £10million) with sensors installed in all homes.

In order to deliver this project we will require this to be delivered in partnership with appropriate contractors. As outlined in the previous report to Housing and Communities Committee – HRA Capital Programme, , approval has been sought to proceed and undertake procurement activities.

5 People Implications

- 5.1 Implementation of the proposals in relation to the technical solution will require appropriate resource allocation which is currently being reviewed and planned.

6 Financial & Procurement Implications

- 6.1 The commitment to address dampness and mould was approved by Council at it's meeting on 1 March 2023. The additional funding requirements have been set out in the previous report to Housing and Communities Committee – Capital Programme report together with the request to proceed with procurement activities..

7 Risk Analysis

- 7.1 Failure to address dampness and mould may have a direct impact on the delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan and potentially impact on residents' health and wellbeing

8 Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Screening and impact assessments will be carried out on specific activities as required.

9 Consultation

- 9.1 The dampness policy and processes were developed through consultation with officers from the strategic service areas.

10 Strategic Assessment

10.1 The dampness policy and processes set out support the successful delivery of the strategic priorities and objectives of the Council.

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Date:

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Appendices: Damp Mould Process

Background Papers:

Wards Affected: All