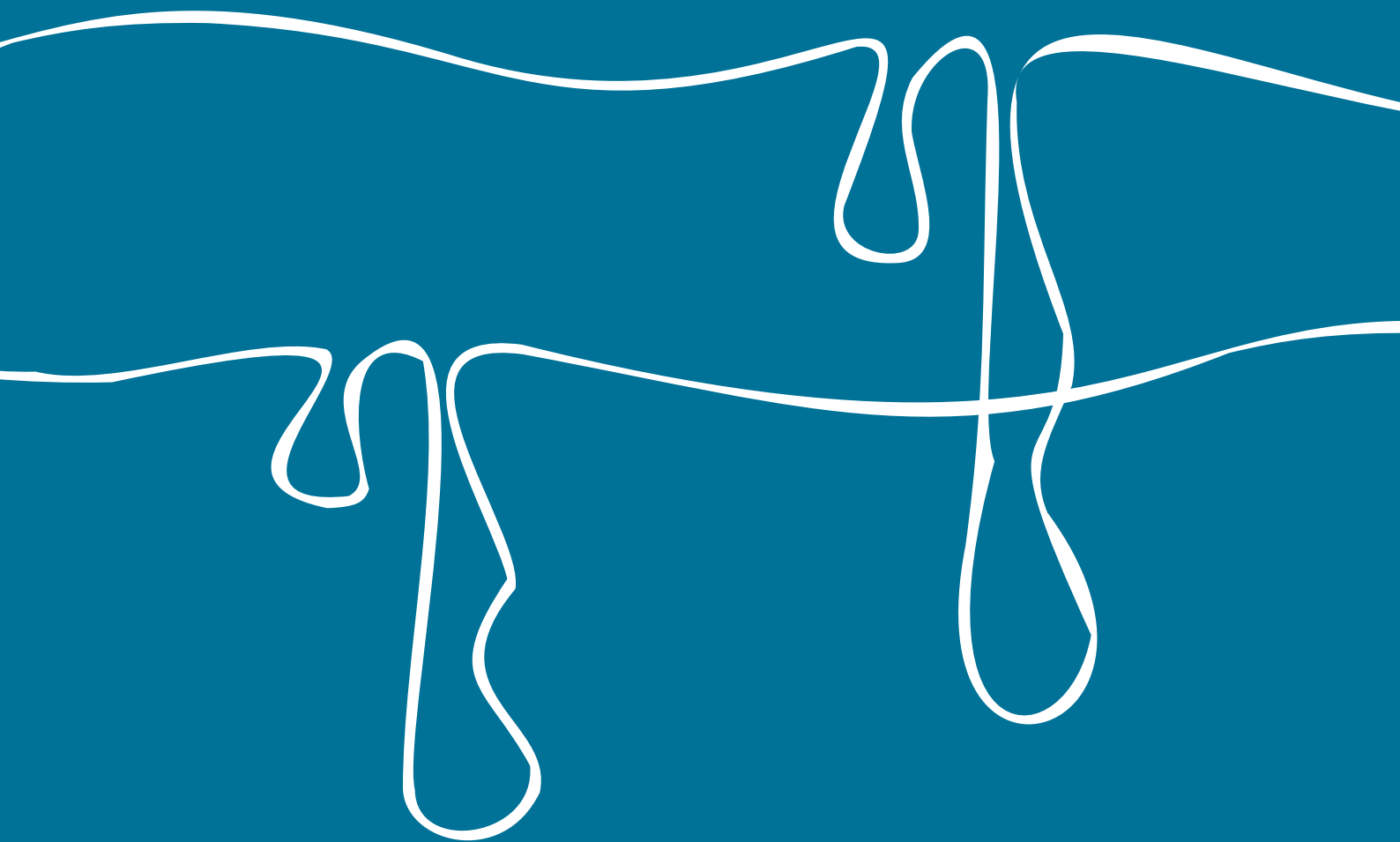




DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Housing Services Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy 2023-2027



Contents

- Introduction 3
- Aims of the Policy..... 3
- Scope of the Policy..... 3
- Types of damp 3
- Inspections 4
- Housing Services Responsibilities 5
- Tenants and Licensees Responsibilities..... 6
- Leaseholder Responsibilities 7
- Information Sharing 7
- Performance Monitoring and Review 7



Introduction

Housing Services are committed to providing safe, energy efficient and comfortable homes. We have a responsibility to ensure our homes are safe, healthy, and free from hazards, including damp, condensation, and mould.

We have a legal 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 our tenants, including distress, inconvenience and concerns about health and well-being.

We will ensure that we take prompt action to remedy issues and support our tenants, offering guidance, advice, and assistance throughout the process to all tenants living in Council properties.

Aims of the policy

This policy aims to:

- Re-enforce our zero tolerance to damp, condensation, and mould.
- Ensure that tenants are treated in a fair and consistent way.
- Focus on working in partnership with tenants 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 including, managing, and controlling condensation.
- Ensure that tenants have access to and/or are provided with comprehensive advice and guidance on managing and controlling damp and condensation.

- Comply with statutory and regulatory requirements and good practice.
- Ensure that the fabric of our properties is protected from deterioration and damage, resulting from damp and condensation.

This policy will:

- Explain the types of damp: rising, penetrating and condensation damp.
- Identify Housing Services responsibilities for dealing with damp and condensation.
- Identify tenants' responsibilities for dealing with damp and condensation.
- Identify leaseholders' responsibilities for dealing with damp and condensation.

Scope of the policy

The scope of this policy covers how Housing Services, and our tenants are able to jointly control, manage, reduce, and eradicate damp, condensation, and mould within our properties.

This policy relates to all Housing Services owned properties that are tenanted, empty and communal. It also includes emergency / temporary accommodation.

Types of damp

The types of damp covered by the policy are:

- a. Rising Damp – This is the movement of moisture from the ground rising up through the structure of the building.
- b. Penetrating Damp (including internal leaks) - 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.
 - Defective components such as 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.
- c. Condensation Damp - Condensation occurs when moisture held in warm air comes into contact with 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 (interstitial) where vapour pressure forces water vapour through porous materials (such as walls), which then condenses when it reaches colder conditions within the structure.

Condensation is by far the most common cause of damp and mould within properties, particularly during the winter months. It is often seen as water on windows and is more noticeable when the weather gets colder and the outside temperature drops. Moisture in the air can cause mould growth on walls and ceilings as well as on furniture and possessions.

The risk of condensation can be reduced through:

- Adequate ventilation such as, opening windows and trickle vents, air bricks, ensuring space around furniture to assist air flow and mechanical extractors.
- Adequate heating such as, energy efficient boilers and radiators which maintain an appropriate heat level.
- Adequate thermal insulation such as, wall and loft insulation.

Inspections

Following a report of damp, condensation, or mould in a tenanted property, we will:

- Investigate to determine the cause of damp, condensation, and mould through a robust and extensive internal and external inspection of the property and, if appropriate, neighbouring properties.
- Carry out remedial repairs and actions in accordance with the tenancy agreement.
- Refer to specialist damp contractors where there is evidence of defective damp proof courses.
- Provide advice and support to tenants.
- Refer when appropriate to external agencies such as Social Care and debt management agencies for additional support to the tenant (where tenants have advised on income and health issues).

- Diagnose the cause of damp and deliver effective solutions, dealing with the cause of the damp, not just the symptoms and wherever possible, “fixing first time”.

We will inform the tenant of the findings, advice and actions from the investigation following the inspection in writing.

A full inspection of all empty properties will always be carried out to identify any signs of damp or mould and repairs carried out prior to a new tenant moving in.

We also carry out stock condition surveys on our tenanted properties, which assist us to identify issues, including damp, condensation and mould and support us to anticipate and prioritise interventions before a complaint or disrepair claim is made. These surveys assist us in highlighting if a particular area or house type requires works before problems arise.

Housing Services Responsibilities

Following a report of damp, condensation, or mould from a tenant, we will offer immediate advice until a property inspection can be carried out. Inspections will be carried out in a timely manner and at a mutually convenient time. Should tenants refuse access, in line with our Tenancy Agreement, appropriate action, which may include legal action, will be taken to ensure we can access the property and take actions to remedy issues.

We will:

- Inspect the building itself, including brickwork, windows, external doors, guttering, downpipes, drains and damp-proof courses.
- Inspect the home internally, including radiators, windows, trickle vents, extractor fans, visible pipework, bath seals and walls and ceilings for signs of mould growth.
- Check that internal extractor fans are fitted to the kitchen and bathroom or a whole house Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) unit is installed, turned on and in good working order.
- Take damp meter readings and air moisture (humidity) readings in each room and record these (ideally moisture in the air should be between 40%-60%)
- Refer to our specialist damp contractors if there are signs of rising damp or if the damp proof course has failed.
- Arrange any necessary repairs to the property and install extra ventilation units or air bricks to assist with air flow.
- Offer advice and assistance to our tenants on how to clean any signs of mould and any additional actions they can take to help mould spots from forming.
- Refer tenants to our Tenancy Sustainment Team to ensure they have maximised their income and where appropriate refer to specialist debt advice to ensure they can afford to effectively heat their home.
- Refer tenants who tell us they are struggling due to health reasons, to manage damp, condensation and mould to Adult and Children's Social Care and support agencies for further assistance within their home.

- Offer advice, support, and take appropriate actions to households where there are other contributing factors including, hoarding, and overcrowding, to find a best possible solution.
- Proactively raise awareness to our tenants around damp, condensation, and mould through publicity in Housing Connect, our webpages and social media. New and existing tenants will be provided with a damp, condensation, and mould prevention leaflet.
- Carry out stock condition surveys on a 5-year rolling programme to ensure that 100% of our properties receive a thorough inspection regularly whether tenanted or empty.

Remedial works will be carried out where it is reasonable and practical to do so. We will have regard to the constraints of the existing building design and structure and will take a pragmatic approach in finding appropriate solutions. On properties where we have completed all the relevant preventative works we may also install monitors on equipment such as boilers, mechanical ventilation, humidity sensors and temperature sensors.

Where remedial works have caused damage to internal decoration, we will offer a decorating voucher to assist with redecoration of the damaged area(s). Under certain exceptional circumstances, where the tenant is unable to carry out mould washes or redecoration, we will provide support and assistance.

In some cases, remedial work may not be necessary, and an inspection may find that additional support and advice can be given to the tenant on managing and controlling the occurrences of condensation damp.

If it is unsafe for tenants to remain in the property while the works are carried out, alternative accommodation arrangements will be made. This may be on a day-by-day basis or a temporary decant to an alternative property. The tenant will be supported through this process to find suitable alternative accommodation.

Tenant & Licensees Responsibilities

We recognise that not every case is the same and there are some actions that tenants can implement to help reduce condensation in their homes such as:

- Ventilate the home to help stop the build-up of damp by:
 - Keeping trickle vents open in window frames.
 - Drying any wet windows and frames regularly.
 - Opening windows, even if only slightly and on the security setting.
 - Opening windows while cooking, washing, drying clothes and bathing.
 - Ensuring all extractor fans are used.
 - Ventilating cupboards and wardrobes by providing breather holes in false backs.
 - Don't overfill cupboards and wardrobes – make sure there is enough space for air to flow.
 - Leaving a gap between walls and furniture to allow the air to move.
 - Don't block air vents, air bricks or trickle vents – these help to keep the air moving.
- Heat the home effectively. It is best, where possible, to have a constant, low background heat which helps to create warmer surfaces and reduces the chance of damp, condensation, and mould.
- Report repairs and signs of water leaks or water ingress straight away, so problems can be dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Treat any signs of black mould straight away and do not let the mould growth spread.
- Reduce the presence of moisture to a minimum within the property by:
 - Covering pans when cooking.
 - Don't leave kettles boiling.
 - Keeping kitchen doors closed when cooking.
 - Using extractor fans.
 - Keeping bathroom doors closed when bathing and open the window.
 - Drying clothes outside if possible.
 - Using a ventilated tumble dryer.
 - Avoid using portable fuel-less heaters.
 - If you are drying washing inside, do so in a closed, heated, and well-ventilated room.

Tenants are responsible for following all advice and guidance issued by Housing Services on managing and controlling damp, condensation, and mould. If the tenant fails to take the advice and reasonable steps to reduce damp, the tenant may be recharged for any resulting repairs required, which are considered to be a result of neglect.

Leaseholder Responsibilities

Leaseholders are responsible for managing and maintaining their own properties including damp, condensation, and mould, in accordance with their lease agreement. Leaseholders are responsible for any repairs to their own flat which are due to their actions or inactions.

As the freeholder we are responsible for repairs to the fabric of the building, such as roof repairs and will

carry out appropriate repairs to these. We are only responsible for repairs to a leaseholder's property if we have not complied with this obligation.

Any neglect by the leaseholder to manage or carry out repairs for which they are responsible for, that has a direct impact on the condition of a Council owned property, will be dealt with in accordance with the lease.

Information Sharing

Where appropriate, we will share information with Social Care and other key agencies so that all agencies can carry support residents in dealing with the effects of damp, condensation, and mould. We will make referrals to internal services in relation to income maximisation and refer, as appropriate, to specialist debt advice agencies.

Performance Monitoring and Review

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we will use customer feedback to improve our service. We will carry out a regular review of this policy with appropriate Customer Panels such as the Tenants Panel, ensuring that we include any legislative or regulatory changes and good practice examples from other Housing providers and the Housing Ombudsman.



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