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# Damp & Mould Policy

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**Department:** Property Maintenance

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## Version Control

| Item | Reason for Change                                         | Officer/Manager | Version | Date           |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------|
| 1    | First draft                                               | Vanessa Reilly  | 0.1     | March 2023     |
| 2    | Feedback from Customer Services Committee & DLUC guidance | Chris Wait      | 0.2     | September 2023 |

### Related Documents

- Responsive Repairs Policy
- Decant Policy

### Legislative and Regulatory Framework

- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 - requires landlords to carry out basic repairs within a reasonable time
- Housing Act 2004 which introduced Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Decent Homes Standard 2006
- Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Consumer (Home) Standards, Regulator of Social Housing, requires registered providers to provide a cost-effect repairs and maintenance service.
- Minimum Level of Energy Efficiency Standard

#### 1. Policy Statement

Our aim is to maintain and improve our homes to a high standard, and to develop high quality housing. The purpose of this policy is to ensure Origin has a broad approach that enables and empowers our staff, engages with residents and monitors performance, to ensure we effectively manage damp and mould in our homes and address any poor housing conditions.

We take all reports of damp and mould seriously, encouraging residents to report any concern to us whilst also recognising we need to identify instances where residents may not report concerns to us. We will take a proactive approach to promptly diagnose, remedy, and manage issues arising

from damp and mould in our properties including communal areas and ensure we meet the needs of our residents and provide homes that are safe and dry. Our approach recognises the impact that damp and mould can have on our residents physical and or/mental health and well-being, and we tailor our approach according to household circumstances.

We have considered, and reflected in our approach, the lessons learnt from the tragic death of the 2-year-old boy, Awaab Ishak, in Rochdale who died because of poor living conditions linked to damp and mould in the family home and the recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman Spotlight Report on Damp and Mould.

## 2. Scope of the Policy

This policy sets out our approach on managing reports of damp and mould from Origin residents in relation to their homes and communal areas.

This policy applies to all properties for which we are responsible for carrying out repairs as determined by their tenancy, licence, or lease agreement.

## 3. Definitions

**Damp:** an excess of moisture that cannot escape from a structure, which can also go on to cause considerable damage to the building. There are three/four main causes of dampness in homes, which each require different solutions.

**Mould:** is a type of fungus. It spreads through spores, which are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air around us all the time and can quickly grow on surfaces where dampness persists, or water has formed into a visible covering.

**Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS):** places a legal duty on landlords to assess and regularly review the condition of their properties to ensure that properties are safe and free from hazards. This includes issues related to damp and mould.

**Rising damp:** water that rises through fabric and brick walls of a building after being absorbed from the surrounding ground.

**Penetrating damp:** water penetrates the fabric of the building from the outside to the inside, for example, because of a leak.

**Condensation:** occurs when warm, moist air touches a cooler surface such as tiles, windows, or walls. If left for a prolonged period, it can cause damp and/or mould. Property ventilation, heating and use of extractor fans can assist with prevention of condensation forming

## 4. Policy principles

Our aim is to:

- Meet our landlord repairing responsibilities and maintain our homes so that they meet the Decent Homes Standard
- Ensure staff and contractors are trained on how to recognise, manage, and identify solutions to damp, mould and condensation within our homes and communal areas

- For residents to have trust and confidence in us so that they report concerns of damp and mould and feel that they will be treated with respect and their concerns taken seriously
- Investigate and diagnose the cause of damp and mould in a timely and effective way and deliver effective remedial solutions
- Use our stock condition data, reactive reports of damp and mould and customer insight to inform proactive programmes of inspection and property improvements to mitigate and reduce the possibility of damp and mould issues.
- Offer advice, guidance, and support to residents on how to spot and manage damp, mould or condensation.
- Track and monitor damp and mould remedial works and maintain regular 'after care' contact with residents to determine no recurrence of the issue.

The responsive repairs service complements our programmes of planned and cyclical maintenance to ensure our stock is well maintained, up to date and meets the needs of our residents.

## **5. Identifying and Reporting Damp and Mould**

We will make sure the process of reporting an issue of damp and mould is straightforward and easily accessible for all residents. Residents can report damp and mould in a variety of ways including by phone, email, letter, in person, WhatsApp or through our website and chatbot. We provide information on damp, mould, and condensation in a variety of ways including on our website, social media, resident newsletters, and noticeboard posters. Periodic campaigns are also undertaken to encourage residents to report damp and mould issues as well as day to day repairs and we follow up on previously reported cases of damp/mould.

- Our staff and contractors are encouraged to look out for signs of damp and mould whenever they visit a resident's home. To support this our surveyors are provided with additional technical training, and basic awareness training provided to other key staff and contractors.

We carry out stock condition surveys, allowing us to regularly assess and monitor our homes.

## **6. Investigating and completing remedial works**

Damp and mould issues reported directly to Origin Housing will be recorded on our CRM system either as a General Enquiry or complaint and monitored and tracked with all information being recorded via the timeline of the case. A dedicated project team will manage escalations of damp and mould concerns. Where reported to our contractor as a repair they will liaise with us and report any concerns or issues directly to the damp and mould project team.

Each report is risk assessed based on the initial report by the resident and our surveyor's inspection. We categorise damp using a RAG rating system (table below) and assess whether the property meets the Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018 and if a category 1 or 2 hazard is present under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

The RAG ratings will be reviewed and aligned to all current and future regulatory changes.

Our surveyors will visit to investigate the cause of the damp and mould and arrange remedial works. Our remedial work is focused on addressing the root cause of the problem and the level and type of work is tailored to each property and may include any of the below:

- Roof repairs where the damp might be caused by rain penetration through missing or slipped tiles or slates or deterioration of a flat roof covering
- Unblocking and repairing guttering and other rainwater goods
- Ensuring windows are in good working order, sealed and have trickle vents and consider fitting ventilation if not present
- Addressing rising damp caused by a defective or missing damp proof course
- Installing /upgrading extractor fans within the property to constant duty humidistat fans.
- Checking radiators/ boiler are in good working order and working efficiently
- Internal dry lining of external walls with thermally insulated boarding

We also undertake mould washes and can provide a room hygrometer to help monitor humidity levels.

Timescales for the completion of work will be dependent on the risk rating, the resident's needs, and circumstances and the extent of remedial work required.

Our surveyors will capture information on the household including health issues, vulnerabilities, overcrowding and identify if a temporary move should be offered to the household whilst the remedial works are completed. Where required we carry out heat loss surveys and obtain an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for the property and ensure recommendations considered as part of our remediation work.

At the time of a void inspection, each room will be checked for damp, mould, and condensation. If identified, it will be managed and rectified as part of the void works.

As part of a Mutual Exchange, a property inspection is completed at which time, each room is checked for damp, mould, and condensation. If identified, it will be managed and rectified before the Mutual Exchange completes

We require our contractors to be competent and experienced to work on damp and mould and hold them accountable via our contracts and contract management meetings. In some circumstances we will use specialist damp experts to make an assessment of the property.

Where damp and mould is caused by condensation (where there are no issues with the property itself causing the condensation), we will work with residents to take appropriate measures to resolve the issues. This may include providing self-help advice about how to control moisture levels; increasing ventilation or heating and/or providing financial guidance or support for those in fuel poverty. Equally, residents may be advised what not to do, for example, turning off ventilation systems or sealing over air vents, which may exacerbate issues. Where we provide such advice, we will communicate in a way which ensures that residents feel treated with respect. We may also refer residents to our lettings team for advice on housing options as sometimes overcrowding may be a factor - the shortage of larger homes in our key operating areas makes this a difficult challenge to address.

## **7. Aftercare**

We will monitor all of the work we carry out to tackle the issue for a year afterwards. This allows us to make sure that any work we have carried out, and advice that we've given, have been effective and resolved the issue.

We will make sure that each resident has been contacted and is happy to close the issues that were raised.

## **8. Record keeping and reporting**

We will track and update all open cases via an internally shared tracker report.

The report shall contain data from the Origin Housing CRM and MRI system and the contractor appointment system.

Documents such as Heat Loss surveys, surveyor inspection reports, EPC information will be saved on CRM and available to relevant teams.

Reports of damp and mould reported directly to our contractor are monitored via a live orders report and monitored to completion.

We record and report on complaints about the quality of home and whether damp and mould is a contributory factor. We will continue to use our robust complaints process with dedicated Customer Relations Officers to support a culture of learning.

We report on damp and mould cases within our homes to our Executive Team and through our Governance structure.

## **9. Asset Management**

We are strengthening our analysis of damp and mould cases to understand homes and buildings where there are recurring issues, and a broader asset management approach is needed.

The Repairs and Maintenance Team will work with the Assets Team to identify where an enhanced specification of works is required to help tackle damp and mould in circumstances where we are planning new component replacements, such as kitchens, bathrooms and windows.

Our Assets team will also review the data gathered, both from the stock survey data and from the repairs activities/damp and mould data and ensure that investment plans reflect the need for programmed major improvement works to properties that suffer repeatedly from damp and mould. Where appropriate we will also consider other asset management solutions.

Stock condition surveys are undertaken to our properties every 5 years. Our Asset Team expect to gain access to around 80% of our properties leaving the remaining properties reliant on cloned data.

We will ensure that our journey to net zero adopts a fabric first approach.

We will explore the use of technology (eg sensors) to help provide information on the environmental conditions within a property to enable a proactive approach to be taken.

## **10 . Supporting Residents**

We will ensure:

That residents who report damp and mould in their properties are treated with respect and empathy.

- That we clearly and regularly update residents with advice or regarding any actions we can take/have taken to resolve reports of damp and mould in their homes
- That we understand the circumstances of everyone living in the home and any health issues or vulnerabilities. This will be recorded as part of our inspection process and considered in the planning of remedial works and assessing if any temporary accommodation is needed until the works are complete.

Where homes are overcrowded, humidity will tend to be higher, and this increases the likelihood of condensation. In a situation of statutory overcrowding resulting in damp and mould, we will work with the resident to explore their housing options in accordance with our Allocations & Lettings Policy.

We know that some residents cannot afford to heat their homes adequately due to income levels and rising costs of living. Our surveyors will refer residents to our in-house Financial Support Team who can give advice on money management and hardship support funding that might be available

In a situation of a hoarding contributing to damp and mould, we will refer to our safeguarding policy and hoarding policy for further guidance on how to best support the resident.

## **11 Equality and Diversity**

We will consider all requests from residents to accommodate their needs in line with our Reasonable Adjustments policy.

We will continue to encourage residents to contact us with any concerns recognising that some residents may find it harder to report damp and mould to us. We will analyse the resident profile of those reporting concerns to understand if this is reflective of our resident profile and if there are any 'silent voices'.

Our staff undertake equality and diversity training and through the application of our values and Origin Oath customer service principles are required to treat all residents with respect, empathy and take a 'no blame' approach.

This policy can be translated or provided in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, audio, or Easy Read upon request.

## **12. Communication of Policy and engagement with residents.**

The Damp and Mould policy and all related documents are stored in the corporate policies and procedure folder on the O-net and are available to all staff. New staff should be given the policy and procedures and their responsibilities in respect of delivering repairs to Origin Housing residents. The policy should be read in conjunction with our Access policy to ensure we are able to gain access to properties that are causing or suffering from damp and mould.

This approach taken in this policy has been shared with our resident Spotlight Committee and we will continue to involve residents in further shaping our services and monitoring our performance in this area.

### **13. Review**

This policy will be reviewed formally every two years unless changes in legislation, regulations or best practice require an earlier review.