



## Damp and Mould Policy

### 1 Introduction and Aims

- 1.1 This policy sets out Irwell Valley Homes' (IVH) approach to dealing with damp and mould in our rented homes and outlines how we will comply with statutory and legal responsibilities relating to providing safe and good quality homes.
- 1.2 The policy aims to ensure:
- Customers who experience damp or mould issues are supported within their home and treated fairly and with respect.
  - We support customer wellbeing and minimise any risk to their health and wellbeing.
  - We support and enable our customers to maintain dry, safe and good quality homes.
  - We have a clear process to enable reports of damp and mould to be assessed and responded to promptly
- 1.3 The policy supports our mission to “enable people to live well in their homes and their communities” and supports our corporate strategic priority to provide “affordable, safe and good quality homes and services”.

### 2 Background

- 2.1 We recognise the impact of living with damp and mould on both customer’s wellbeing and the quality of the home. We want to work with the customer to resolve issues and protect their wellbeing, therefore this policy is concerned with both the customer’s wellbeing and the condition of the property.
- 2.2 The type and causes of damp and condensation in the home are varied and include:
- Condensation is the most prevalent type of dampness and is caused by moisture in the air (water vapour) inside the dwelling coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The drop in temperature causes liquid water to form on the surface and then soak in. It is usually found in kitchens, bathrooms, the corners of rooms, on north facing walls and on or near windows – all places that either tend to have a lot of moisture in the air, or to be cold generally. It is also found in areas of low air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially when they are pushed up against external walls.
  - Damp - Dampness is an excess of moisture that can’t escape from a structure, which may go on to cause significant damage to the building such as collapsed ceilings and rotten timber elements.

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- 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.
- Water leaks from defective supply and waste pipework (especially in bathrooms and kitchens) can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and stays damp regardless of the prevailing weather conditions. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair.
- Rising damp is caused by water rising from the ground into the home. Water gets through or around a defective damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the masonry that was built without a DPC. Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms it will be present all year round but can be more noticeable in winter. It is uncommon but is generally the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair.
- Penetrating damp appears because of a defect in the structure of the home, such as damaged brickwork, missing roof tiles, loose flashing, or leaking rainwater goods. These defects allow water to pass from the outside to the floors, walls, or ceilings. Penetrating damp is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined 'damp-patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires a repair.

2.3 Evidence shows that residents living in homes with damp and mould may be more likely to have respiratory problems, allergies, asthma and other conditions that impact the immune system. There are also broader impacts on the mental health, education and career prospects of residents living with damp and mould.

2.4 In 2021, the Housing Ombudsman produced a report entitled “Spotlight on damp and mould: it’s not a lifestyle”, which set out 26 recommendations relating to:

- Taking a more proactive approach and responding to reports of damp and mould
- Taking responsibility
- Resolving disrepair claims
- Learning from complaints

2.5 The Ombudsman made it clear that social housing providers must listen to customers and take seriously their complaints, including using the organisation’s complaints processes to mitigate against any potential future legal action or costly disrepair cases. We support this and have based our policy around these principles.

### 3 Our Approach

3.1 In line with recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman, we will take a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould and adopt a person-centred approach that considers customers’ individual needs and will take account of factors such as additional tenancy sustainment support that may be required, rehousing or other support and advice needs, in addition to dealing with property related issues.

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## Identifying damp and mould

### 3.2 We identify damp and mould in the following ways:

- Stock condition survey – Our stock condition detects damp and mould issues and where detected, action is taken to treat the issue and a support request is generated, if necessary, around any related issues.
- Asset investment – our Asset Management Strategy provides a proactive approach to ensure we manage, maintain, and invest in our properties. Working to improve the thermal efficiency of homes and helping our customers break free from fuel poverty is a priority area. Our fabric-first approach to our investment programme also reduces risks that can lead to damp or mould.
- Property inspections – Property inspectors complete a full property check each time they inspect day-to-day repairs in customers’ homes. Action is taken to address damp and mould issues when identified and a support request is generated if necessary, around any related issues.
- Tenancy reviews – We routinely visit customer’s homes and undertake tenancy reviews. These focus on customers who have been identified as reporting higher than average repairs or contacts, as well as customers who have not contacted IVH for 2 years or more. As part of these visits, property condition is checked, and damp and mould issues are reported and customer wellbeing is discussed.
- Colleague visits – Colleagues visiting our properties are required to report concerns over property condition and concerns over customer wellbeing via their mobile device.
- Customer complaints and feedback – We review all complaints, feedback from customer surveys, and repair requests (from both customers and colleagues), tenancy sustainment cases and overcrowding transfer requests to identify issues relating to damp and mould. Where identified this generates an inspection by a trained property inspector.
- Proactive risk assessment - We will take action to identify homes that have or may be at risk of developing problems with damp and mould using data on our households and homes to help us understand the risk profile and prioritise customers for support, rehousing and property repairs, as required.

### Responding to individual reports of damp and mould

3.3 We have a detailed process for dealing with damp and mould cases, regardless of how these are reported. Colleagues across our customer facing teams have been involved in developing this process and all teams have been trained in terms of following the process.

3.4 All reports of damp and mould are recorded on our housing management system and we receive regular automated reports of open cases, which are monitored through to completion by a specialist team, led by the Head of Repairs and Estates.

3.5 When damp and mould is reported, an order will be raised for a Property Inspector or Homes Supervisor to attend the property to determine the cause and seek to resolve the immediate issue. The visit may also be attended by the Community Co-ordinator to identify any other support or advice may be required to support the customers wellbeing. Inspectors visiting the property have received specialist training and have sophisticated equipment to help detect the presence of damp and identify causes.

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- 3.6 Any required repairs will be arranged with the customer and we will explain to them why work might be needed and what work may be carried out. If any changes to the programme of works are needed, we will keep them informed.
- 3.7 Our target time for damp and mould inspections is 10 working days and our target timescale for completing works required is 28 working days, but this may be extended depending on the extent of the works required, and whether the customer must be temporarily rehoused while the works are completed.
- 3.8 10% of damp and mould works is post inspected and we contact the customer 6 months post completion, to check that the issue has been fully resolved. We visit earlier if the customer contacts us to report that the remedial works have not been effective.
- 3.9 All reports of damp and mould received through the complaints process result in a property inspection and full response within our 10-working day target response time and timescales for any works required or tenancy support needed are arranged in consultation with customers. We track progress with these complaints using automated, weekly reports, that provide details of all open and closed customer complaints. We also use the learnings from this information to identify trends or action points that we then address.

#### Taking responsibility

- 3.10 Customers who experience damp or mould issues will be supported within their home and treated fairly and with respect and in a way that doesn't lay the blame on their lifestyle.
- 3.11 We will undertake comprehensive diagnosis of the problem and carry out repairs as required. In addition, we will offer the customer support and advice where necessary and consider the need for rehousing.
- 3.12 Our customer communications will reflect this approach and we will provide information on our website and through other channels, to raise awareness of the causes of damp and mould, highlight the support available to customers and encourage customers to tell us if they have a damp and mould problem in their home. All communications will be accessible in a variety of formats to support easy access for all.
- 3.13 We will ensure our staff and contractors have the skills and knowledge to identify signs of damp and mould and discuss with residents how to manage the problem. Staff will be encouraged to look out for signs whenever they visit a resident's home.
- 3.14 We will provide safeguarding training for all front-line teams to identify concerns over wellbeing.

#### Resolving disrepair claims

- 3.15 We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and will also carry out work regardless of the legal status of a repair.
- 3.16 There may be some damp and mould cases that are more difficult to diagnose and/or repair and, therefore, take longer to rectify. We will ensure that these types of cases are handled with particular care to ensure they are resolved effectively and reduce the risk of the customer

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feeling the need to resort to a disrepair claim. A dis-repair claim will never hold up or affect our process for dealing with the issues.

- 3.17 We will promote the benefits of our complaints process and the Ombudsman to customers as an appropriate and effective route to resolving disputes.
- 3.18 We will continue to use the complaints procedure when the pre-action protocol has commenced and until legal proceedings have been issued to maximise the opportunities to resolve disputes outside of court.
- 3.19 When specialist surveys are required, we will ensure that the need is identified early on and that work orders are progressed in a timely manner. We will also highlight instances where using an independent, mutually agreed and suitably qualified surveyor may be useful to avoid any concerns the resident may have of bias to obtain parity with the housing conditions pre-action protocol. The outcome of these surveys, and any other inspection at the resident's property will be routinely shared with, and explained to, the resident. This includes being clear on where any recommendations or actions that are not going to be followed up and rationale for this to aid the resident's understanding.
- 3.20 When extensive works are required, we will consider the individual circumstances of the household, including any vulnerabilities, and whether it is appropriate to move resident(s) out of their home at an early stage.

#### Learning from complaints

- 3.21 We aim to deal with complaints courteously, systematically and fairly in line with complaints policy.
- 3.22 We will undertake analysis of our complaints data, customer feedback and enquiries from councillors or MPs made on behalf of customers to identify themes, trends and learning opportunities. This will enable us to be proactive rather than reactive and update our approach to handling complaints relating to damp and mould to improve our future responses.
- 3.23 Our customer complaints panel will help us to review complaints involving damp and mould and will ensure we take any action resulting from this in terms of learning for the future.

## 4 Responsibility

- 4.1 The Executive Director of Customers and Communities and Executive, Director, Finance, Governance and Assets are jointly responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.
- 4.2 Overall responsibility for the management of the services being delivered to customers sits with the Head of Tenancy Services, Head of Asset Management and Head of Repairs and Estate Management.

## 5 Performance Indicators/Targets/Standards

5.1 Performance will be measured using the following indicators:

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- Compliance with the Decent Homes Standard (DHS)
- A performance summary to include additional compliance measures will be reported quarterly to Board.

## 6 Regulation and Legislation

6.1 We will ensure that we carry out damp and mould services in accordance with best practice, relevant regulatory guidance and legislation including:

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
- Housing Act 2004 – Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Regulator of Social Housing Home Standard and Tenant Involvement and Empower Standard
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Decent Homes Standard

## 7 Equality and Diversity Implications

7.1 Irwell Valley Homes is committed to treating people with honesty, dignity, respect, and trust. This applies to colleagues, customers potential customers, contractors, and Board Members. At IVH:

- Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents.
- Diversity is recognising difference and responding positively to those differences.
- Inclusion is about creating an environment where our services and employment opportunities are accessible to all.

7.2 We will be mindful of the Equality Act 2010 in all its actions and will consider all the protected characteristics of the Act which are: Race, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Religion or Belief, Age, Marriage/Civil Partnership and Pregnancy and Maternity. Further to the protected characteristics, IVH will be mindful of socio-economic disadvantage and will do everything in its power to minimise this and other forms of disadvantage.

7.3 We take a person-centred approach to dealing with damp and mould – considering the customer’s protected characteristics and any needs for support, bespoke communication, or rehousing, as well as dealing with repairs required.

7.4 Where customers are at greater risk of exposure to damp and mould due to their health, property condition, affordability, or overcrowding (or a combination of these factors). We will prioritise these customers, for support, rehousing and property repairs.

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## 8 Cross Reference Documents

8.1 This Policy should also be read in conjunction with the following associated policies or strategies:

- Home Move (Allocations) Policy
- Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Asset Management Strategy
- EDI Strategy
- Customers and Communities Strategies
- Repairs Policy

## 9 Policy Review

9.1 The policy will be reviewed annually, or earlier if there is a change in regulatory standards or legislation.

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