



Damp and Mould Policy

1 Introduction and Aims

- 1.1 The health and safety of customers living in the homes we rent is our top priority. This policy sets out Irwell Valley Homes' (IVH) approach to dealing with damp and mould 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 are supported and treated fairly and respectfully.
 - We support customer's 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 for customers to report issues.
 - We have a clear process for assessing and categorising issues and responding to them within clear timescales.
 - That we follow the latest guidance and legislation and feedback from our Resident Scrutiny Panel.
- 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 damp and mould has on the quality of a home. Living with damp and mould can also affect your health and wellbeing and people living with conditions that affect their immune system are at greater risk of harm.
- 2.2 We know that there may be several reasons why damp and mould occur, and it is our responsibility to investigate this and carry out any necessary work. In doing this, we want to work with the customer to resolve issues and protect their wellbeing, therefore this policy covers customer wellbeing and the condition of the property.
- 2.3 The type and causes of damp and condensation in the home are varied and include:
 - Damp occurs when excess moisture can't escape from a structure such as a wall or floor, which may go on to cause damage to the building such as collapsed ceilings and rotten timber.
 - Mould is a fungus that spreads through spore. These are invisible but are in the air around us all the time and can quickly grow on surfaces which are damp. Mould can damage your home and belongings and make you unwell.

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- Condensation. Moisture is produced in your home every day, from cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, and other everyday activities, therefore most homes get some condensation from time-to-time. When this is persistent, it can lead to damp and mould. Condensation occurs when water vapour (moisture) in the air meets a cold surface like a window, tile, or outside wall. It's worse in the winter and will appear on cold surfaces and in places where there is little air circulation, like behind furniture or in the corner of rooms. Persistent condensation that isn't dealt with will cause mould to grow.
- Water leaks – Faulty or broken pipes (especially in bathrooms and kitchens) can mean that water leaks into walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and stays damp regardless of the weather outside and is only solved by carrying out repairs.
- 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 brickwork. Rising damp only affects basements and ground floor rooms. It can be present all year round but will be more noticeable in winter. It is uncommon and requires repairs.
- Penetrating damp – This happens when there is an area of the home that needs repair such as damaged brickwork, missing roof tiles, loose flashing, or leaking gutters or downpipes. It is far more noticeable when it has been raining and will normally appear as a 'damp-patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch.

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 their complaints seriously, 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.

2.6 In September 2023, the government published guidance on understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home. This policy and supporting procedures have also adopted best practice from this.

2.7 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 reducing the risk of fuel poverty is a priority area. Our fabric-first approach to our investment programme also reduces risks that can lead to damp or mould.

3 Our Approach

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3.1 Our approach has been developed using the recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman, latest government guidance, and the recommendations from our Resident Scrutiny Panel's review into our Damp and Mould Service.

Identifying damp and mould

3.2 We identify damp and mould in the following ways:

- Stock condition survey – We use both in-house surveyors and third parties to carry out surveys of our homes to assess the condition of them. These surveys detect damp and mould issues. Where detected, action is taken to treat the issue and a customer support request is generated, if the customer would benefit from this.
- Property inspections – Our in-house property inspectors carry out checks when assessing repairs needed in homes. Action is taken to address damp and mould when identified and a customer support request is generated if the customer would benefit from this.
- Tenancy reviews – We visit customer's homes to carry out tenancy reviews on an annual basis. Customers are prioritised based on a number of factors, including where we have not had contact with the customer for a period of time. As part of these visits, the team discuss both customer wellbeing and review the condition of the property.
- Visits to customers homes – Whenever a colleague visits a customer at home, they are required to report any concerns with the property or concerns for the customer via their mobile device. This will include assessments during our statutory visits such as the Landlord Gas Servicing visit. Where concerns are flagged in the system, the relevant team is assigned an action to investigate this.
- Customer complaints and feedback – We review all complaints, plus feedback from customer surveys, and requests for services (from both customers and colleagues), to identify issues relating to damp and mould. Where identified, this generates an inspection by a trained Property Inspector.
- Proactive risk assessment – Using data we hold about our homes and customers, we identify homes that are, or may be at risk of damp and mould due to how they were built or known vulnerabilities of the people living there. This is used to prioritise support for customers.

To ensure Damp and mould works are attended prioritised based on the impact to the customer and the home, we have defined the following hazards which will be reviewed in conjunction with the customer vulnerabilities.

- Category 3 – This is where there is a small amount of mould around a window frame/ledge (usually caused by minor condensation) which is easily treatable with regular cleaning.
- Category 2 – This is where an area in a bathroom or kitchen is affected (usually caused by minor water ingress or high levels of condensation on cold areas) which is treatable with regular cleaning.

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- Category 1 - This is where there is mould on a wall or ceiling in a bedroom or living space larger than 2 square metres, particularly if there is a child under 14, someone over 65, or someone with health issues using the room. Or where there is severe damp and mould anywhere in the property usually caused by severe condensation and lack of ventilation or a major leak /failure of the property fabric/insulation.

All the categories require a ventilation assessment which will be completed in the initial survey.

Responding to individual reports of damp and mould

- 3.3 We have a process for dealing with all reports of damp and mould. Colleagues have been involved in developing this process and teams have been trained in following the process.
- 3.4 When damp and mould is reported, we will triage the severity of the issue using the Housing Health and Safety Rating systems (HHSRS), this will result in either:
- an Inspection being ordered to further assess the issue, or
 - a job being raised for our repairs team to visit and to resolve the issue.

Inspectors visiting the property have received specialist training and have specialist equipment to help detect the presence of damp and identify causes.

- 3.5 Where required the Community Co-ordinator will conduct a joint visit with the inspector to provide support and advice to the customer. Inspectors visiting the property have received specialist training and have specialist equipment to help detect the presence of damp and identify causes.
- 3.6 Any required repairs will be arranged with the customer. 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 Timescales for all D&M instances;

- Inspection
 - Category 1 hazards will be inspected within 10 working days.
 - Category 2 and 3 hazards will be inspected within 20 working days.
- Make safe - Where the inspection identifies Category 1 or 2 hazards, we will treat and remove the hazard within 10 working days of the inspection.
- Repair works
 - Associated works to fix the cause of the issue for all category 1 Hazards will be completed within 28 working days of the survey date.
 - For category 2 and 3 hazards, associated works will be scheduled as a routine repair.

These timescales may be extended depending on the extent of the works required, and whether the customer must be temporarily rehoused while the works are completed.

The timescales are subject to access to the property. If we fail to gain access to a property to carry out the works three times, we will refer the customer to our communities' team who will attempt one further visit before we will begin the legal process of gaining entry.

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- 3.8 We will contact the customer at least 6 weeks after repair work has been completed. This may be done via an inspection, or by contacting the customer by telephone or email to make sure that the issue has been fixed and not reoccurred. If damp or mould has re-appeared, then we would repeat the stage 1 process listed in the timescales above.
- 3.9 All reports of damp and mould received through the complaints process will result in a property inspection following the timescales listed above. If tenancy support is needed this will be arranged in consultation with customers. All complaints are tracked 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.
- 3.10 All reports of damp and mould are recorded on our housing management system with photographs and details of the location of the mould, to help identify the source. 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. Our performance is reported through our governance within our Health, Safety, and compliance report to Board.

Taking responsibility

- 3.11 We will always tackle the underlying issue promptly, and act quickly when concerns are raised about the customers health or wellbeing. We will not delay taking action to wait for medical evidence or opinion.
- 3.12 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 the blame their lifestyle.
- 3.13 We will offer support and advice where necessary and consider the need for rehousing. We will comprehensively diagnosis the problem and carry out repairs as required. We will ensure tenants are informed about the steps that will be taken to remove mould and address any underlying issues and the timeframes for the work.
- 3.14 Communications will reflect this approach and we will provide information to customers 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.
- 3.15 We will ensure our colleagues 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.
- 3.16 We will provide safeguarding training for all front-line teams to identify concerns over customer wellbeing.

Resolving disrepair claims

- 3.17 We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and carry out work and so a dis-repair claim will never hold up or affect our process for dealing with the issues.
- 3.18 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 these cases are handled with particular

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care to ensure they are resolved effectively and reduce the risk of the customer feeling the need to resort to a disrepair claim.

- 3.19 We will promote the benefits of our complaints process and the Housing Ombudsman to customers as an appropriate and effective route to resolving disputes.
- 3.20 When specialist surveys are required, we will ensure that this is identified early on, and 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.
- 3.21 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

- 3.22 We aim to deal with complaints courteously, systematically, and fairly in line with complaints policy.
- 3.23 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.
- 3.24 IVH are accountable to the Customer Offer Panel to ensure actions and learnings have been undertaken.

4 Responsibility

- 4.0 The Executive Director of Homes is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.
- 4.1 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 Maintenance.

5 Performance Indicators/Targets/Standards

5.0 Performance will be measured using the following indicators:

- 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:

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- 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.

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

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legislation.

Control Log.

Version2 – Policy updated October 2023. Upon implementing recommendations from IVH's internal audit along with the latest Government Guidance on D&M in September 2023 and feedback from IVH Resident Scrutiny Panel review of this service area.

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