



The following report covers Notting Hill Genesis response to damp and mould. The committee is asked to note the report.

### Background to Damp and Mould Environment

Since the start of the new year there have been important announcements on damp and mould from the Government, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and the Housing Ombudsman (HO).

### Government

Following the death of two-year old Awaab Ishak, the [Housing Secretary and the Health Secretary responded to the Coroner's Report to Prevent Future Deaths](#). In the letter the Housing Secretary made clear that it is 'his relentless focus to restore the right of everyone in this country, whatever their race or cultural background, to live somewhere warm, decent, safe and secure.' He pledged to table an amendment to the Social Housing Regulation Bill relating to hazards in social homes.

He set out that the government will take the following further steps to drive up standards:

- The Health Department and the Levelling Up Department (DLUHC) will lead a review of existing guidance on the health impacts of damp and mould in homes and following consultation will develop new consolidated guidance tailored to the housing sector. This will be published by the summer.
- The DLUHC also set out an indicative timetable for changes to housing standards and guidance. This included the HHSRS review which is nearing completion and the Government will publish a summary of findings and set out next steps by the spring.
- The DLUHC will set out the next steps to the decent home's standard in 'due course.'
- The DLUHC also intends to create the new Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman through the upcoming Renters Reform Bill.

## Regulator of Social Housing

In November 2022, the RSH asked all larger registered providers of social housing (Housing Association's and Local Authorities), including NHG, to submit evidence about the extent of damp and mould in tenants' homes and their approach to tackling it.

In February 2023, the RSH published a high-level analysis report based on all the submissions it had received, covering over four million homes.

The initial findings from the responses show:

- Most social landlords understand the extent of damp and mould in their tenants' homes and take action to tackle it but could strengthen their approach.
- Most people living in social housing have homes that are free from damp and mould. However, living with damp and mould can have a serious impact on tenants' health and wellbeing. It is essential that landlords identify and address these issues promptly and effectively.
- Some landlords submitted poor quality responses that lacked the detail needed for RSH to have confidence about their approach to tackling damp and mould.
- While the picture is incomplete, RSH's best estimate is that less than 0.2 per cent of social homes have the most serious damp and mould problems, 1-2 per cent have serious damp and mould problems, and a further 3-4 per cent have notable damp and mould.

The regulator will now follow up directly with landlords who submitted poor quality responses and those reporting high numbers of cases of damp and mould.

The strongest responses demonstrated robust data on the condition of tenants' homes, as well as processes for investigating and remedying the root causes of damp and mould, and robust oversight from boards. Poorer responses relied more heavily on reactive approaches rather than proactively looking for evidence of damp and mould and had weaker data and evidence about the condition of tenants' homes.

The RSH stressed that residents who have damp and mould in their home should tell their landlord, and landlords should act promptly to address it and the underlying issue. The regulator will introduce more active consumer regulation from April 2024, including inspections, and the quality of homes, including the presence of damp and mould, will be a key focus.

### The Housing Ombudsman

In February 2023, the HO issued an updated damp and mould report reflecting the renewed focus after the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak. They have proposed key tests for landlords who are producing action plans to deal with damp and mould. It comes as they recorded a 77 per cent increase (3,530) in the number of enquiries and complaints due to damp, mould, and leaks from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

Analysing responses, they found that only 35 per cent of landlords have a specific damp and mould policy with streamlined processes for identifying and responding to damp and mould reports. A further 12 per cent said they were in the process of implementing one.

There was some good practice detailed, including installing sensors, conducting property MOTs, and undertaking root cause analysis modelling and staff training. However, there are areas of concern and they have identified ten key tests for landlords to evaluate its response to damp and mould, and highlighted areas that need continued focus: disrepair cases, fairness, good governance, and continued learning.

### What Are NHG Doing?

We recognise the impact that damp and mould can have on our residents and ensuring healthy, safe homes now and in the future is fundamental to our operations, repairs, and asset management plans.

### Damp and Mould Project Group

We have recently established a damp and mould project group made up of key staff from across the organisation. The group acts to review, challenge, learn and improve how we do things on damp and mould, as well as responding to the challenges of the external environment, particularly the approaches being taken by the RSH and the Housing Ombudsman.

### Residents' Group

We have established a damp and mould residents' group. They have already provided valuable feedback on training, communication materials, communication messaging, damp and mould policy, and new processes.

We have agreed with the residents' group the following commitments.

- We will provide clear and concise guidance to help identify what may be causing a problem in the home and what actions will be taken.
- We will visit every resident who raises concerns with damp and mould to inspect and understand the issue within 10 days of reporting.
- We will discuss in person whether the issue could be caused by damp or condensation.
- We will discuss the ways to manage condensation, personally explain the literature and advise of next steps.
- We will check that ventilation facilities and equipment are operating satisfactorily and explain how they work.
- We will proactively follow up to ensure works are completed and that the issue is resolved long term

#### Policy and Processes

A damp and mould policy has been published and damp and mould processes have been updated.

#### Identifying Damp and Mould

We own and manage 4,177 homes in Barnet. At the end of February our rolling programme of surveys in Barnet had identified 2 category one hazards and 57 category two hazards.

At the end of February, we had 122 open damp and mould repairs, as well as 7 damp and mould disrepair cases.

We have a risk-based approach to identifying properties that might have damp or mould.

We conduct stock condition surveys on a five-year cycle, allowing us to continuously assess and monitor our homes. Considering factors such as the age and property type, EPC rating and history of repairs of a property, as well as the presence of any HHSRS hazard we determine which properties are more likely to require investment.

Along with stock condition surveys, we capture high-resolution 'upshot' images of all our externals of buildings every seven years to ensure the fabric remains in good condition and free from rising damp. These aerial photos capture the conditions of the roofs, chimney stacks and anything that is visible.

In addition, our programme of annual visits to each rented home provides us with further opportunity to identify any potential issues. Our staff discuss with the tenant if there are any damp and mould issues at the property at each visit, and if necessary, inspect the property.

To do this we recently improved the training we give to staff on damp and mould, and over the last 3 months all our housing officers and property managers have completed it. Training is mandatory for resident facing staff. Going forward we will hold training monthly and all new starters will need to complete it during the probationary period.

Residents can report suspected damp and mould through a variety of methods:

- Calling us directly on our dedicated damp and mould phone number
- In person, for example, at their annual visit
- Online through their individual 'My Account' housing account
- By email or phone to their named local officer

We visit a property where damp or mould is reported within 10 days of receiving a report. At the visit, our staff will determine the severity of the issue, and where possible, the cause. They will also consider any evidence of detrimental impact the damp is having on the resident's or anyone in the household's health. We have introduced a damp and mould section for residents on our website with latest information and resources to help identify, report, and manage damp and mould in homes.

### Remediation Works

If minor repairs are needed, we will arrange for remediation works to take place and will contact the resident to ensure they have been completed and the issue has been resolved.

For more severe cases, a follow-up inspection by a surveyor will be arranged within 10 days of the first inspection. Remediation works will be prioritised according to the severity of the risk the damp or mould poses. Where a risk to the health and safety of the household is identified, works will be arranged immediately.

Where damp and mould are a result of condensation, we support residents to alleviate any contributing factors that might exacerbate the issue, for example, by improving poor ventilation or offering advice about how to control moisture levels.

### Asset Management Strategy

At a wider level, we are using the stock condition surveys and prevalence data to inform our asset strategy with the aim to consistently improve standards and prevent failure over the long term.

Our strategy sets out three key strands of work to improve our homes: a planned investment programme, a retrofit programme and a refreshed void upgrade programme ensuring new residents move into fully updated properties which have been assessed and where needed treated for damp and mould.

Underpinning this is a commitment by our Board to investing a total of £495m in our homes between now and 2032.

We are targeting work to the homes that need investment most. Any homes with an aging component where failure that could impact the health and safety of a resident are prioritised. We have then looked across the portfolio at investment need and considered customer experience indicators, history of repairs, risk factors for damp and mould (e.g. basement homes, low EPC rating) to set the longer-term approach.

This has led to a 3-year planned programme and we are now working on a 10-year programme as well. Where there are significant concerns about a home, we have recently commenced a programme to offer voluntary opportunities for residents to move to already upgraded home.