

# PH Self-Assessment

## Spotlight on Damp and Mould – It’s not lifestyle

Feb 2023

### Revision Timetable

| Review date  | Reviewed by                                 | Approved by                   |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------|
| March 2022   | Elizabeth Williams. DD, Technical Resources | Services Committee March 2022 |
| January 2023 | Elizabeth Williams. DD, Technical Resources | Services Committee March 2023 |

### Introduction

The Housing Ombudsman introduced the Spotlight on Damp and Mould; It’s not lifestyle report in October 2021. In February 2023, the Ombudsman issued a follow up to the report outlining data, lessons learn and tips on dealing with damp and mould. Below is our self assessment against the recommendations made by the Ombudsman.

### Useful information

Customer Care & Complaints Policy

Complaints Procedure

Repairs Policy

Damp and Mould Policy

[Housing Ombudsman Service](#)

|   | Housing Ombudsman Service recommendation  | Self-assessment  |
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| 1 | Landlords should adopt a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould interventions. Landlords should review their current strategy and consider whether their approach will achieve this.   | A staff led project group has reviewed Poplar HARCA's damp and mould procedures in detail, resulting in a process redesign and implementation plan.  |
| 2 | Landlords should consider whether they require an overall framework, or policy, to address damp and mould which would cover each area where the landlord may be required to act. This would include any proactive interventions, its approach to diagnosis, actions it considers appropriate in different circumstances, effective communication and aftercare. | We have drafted a Damp and Mould Management Policy which will be presented to the Services Committee for consideration and approval.   |
| 3 | Landlords should review the accessibility and use of their systems for reporting repairs and making complaints to 'find their silence'.   | <p>Grey areas and gaps have been considered by the action group. Action taken to date includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording all cases of Damp &amp; Mould on Orchard. Raising a case file in every instance</li> <li>• Installing environmental sensors (IoT) in some homes where mould has been reported previously to proactively identify problems without relying on resident reports</li> <li>• Rating buildings based on mould risk to aid proactive engagement</li> <li>• Identifying overcrowded properties and developing a strategy for proactively engaging with them</li> </ul> |
| 4 | Landlords should identify opportunities for extending the scope of their diagnosis within buildings, for example by examining neighbouring properties, to ensure the response early on is as effective as possible.   | Surveyors and contractors have been trained to take a whole building approach to damp & mould management. This includes inspecting the outside of buildings and neighbouring properties to identify water penetration and thermal issues. Standard inspection forms have been developed to support this information gathering.   |

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| 5 | <p>Landlords should implement a data driven, risk-based approach with respect to damp and mould. This will reduce over reliance on residents to report issues, help landlords identify hidden issues and support landlords to anticipate and prioritise interventions before a complaint or disrepair claim is made</p>  | <p>All buildings have been risk assessed using data we hold on them. This includes historical issues, building design, type of heating system etc.</p> <p>This is supported by data collected through Internet of Things devices.</p> <p>We'll be developing a performance dashboard in PowerBI or Business Objects to report on Damp and Mould cases and analyse trends in data.</p> <p>We'll be exploring the use AI technology to identify repeat repair issues relating to damp, mould and leaks</p> <p>Savills are undertaking stock condition surveys and identifying CAT 1 and 2 hazards.</p> |
| 6 | <p>Where properties are identified for future disposal or are within an area marked for regeneration, landlords should proactively satisfy themselves that residents do not receive a poorer standard of service or lower living conditions, that steps are taken to avoid homes degrading to an unacceptable condition and that they regularly engage and communicate with these residents.</p> | <p>We'll ensure that all properties marked for disposal or regeneration will continue to be safe, maintained to a high standard, and free from damp by following our Repairs and Damp and Mould policies.</p>  |
| 7 | <p>Landlords should avoid taking actions that solely place the onus on the resident. They should evaluate what mitigations they can put in place to support residents in cases where structural interventions are not appropriate and satisfy themselves they are taking all reasonable steps.</p>   | <p>We'll follow our new Damp &amp; Mould policy to ensure we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat residents reporting damp and mould with empathy and respect and not prejudge the reason for any issue.</li> <li>• Support residents in resolving damp and mould where they result from the use of the home, and provide our residents</li> </ul>  |

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|    |  | with appropriate, clear, sensitive, practical and accessible advice.  |
| 8  | Together with residents, landlords should review the information, materials and support provided to residents to ensure that these strike the right tone and are effective in helping residents to avoid damp and mould in their properties. | <p>Our project group is working with our Comms team to review the information and materials we use for damp, mould and condensation.</p> <p>We're creating a resident engagement plan to work with residents to create content and advice for our website and social media channels. We'll consult with our residents to ensure these strike the right tone and are effective.</p>  |
| 9  | Landlords should be more transparent with residents involved in mutual exchanges and make the most of every opportunity to identify and address damp and mould, including visits and void periods.   | A Damp and Mould inspection will be undertaken for all mutual exchanges and when a property becomes void.   |
| 10 | Landlords should ensure their strategy for delivering net zero carbon homes considers and plans for how they can identify and respond to potential unintended consequences around damp and mould.  | Carbon reduction plans for our homes are at an early stage of development. As part of this work ventilation, heating, insulation and potential triggers for damp and mould are being carefully considered.  |
| 11 | Landlords should review, alongside residents, their initial response to reports of damp and mould to ensure they avoid automatically apportioning blame or using language that leaves residents feeling blamed.                              | <p>Our policy sets out that Poplar HARCA will never blame residents. When mould is reported we will remove the mould and investigate.</p> <p>We'll:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat residents reporting damp and mould with empathy and respect and not prejudge the reason for any issue.</li> <li>• Support residents in resolving damp and mould where they result from the use of the home, and provide our residents</li> </ul> |

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|    |  | <p>with appropriate, clear, sensitive, practical and accessible advice.</p> <p>We'll work with a group of residents who have reported damp and mould in the last 3 years, to hear about their experiences and how we can improve.</p>  |
| 12 | <p>Landlords should consider their current approach to record keeping and satisfy themselves it is sufficiently accurate and robust. We would encourage landlords to go further and consider whether their record keeping systems and processes support a risk-based approach to damp and mould.</p> | <p>Our Project Team has reviewed and drafted a new damp and mould process.</p> <p>Any reports of damp and mould are recorded on Orchard and a case file opened.</p> <p>We monitor the volume of cases on a monthly basis and undertake a review every 3 months for a period of 12 months, before the case is closed or extended if issues still remain.</p>  |
| 13 | <p>Landlords should ensure that their responses to reports of damp and mould are timely and reflect the urgency of the issue.</p>  | <p>We'll respond promptly to all reported issues of damp &amp; mould. Instructing a contractor to attend to wash down and treat the damp.</p> <p>A surveyor will then arrange to inspect and prepare a schedule of work to ensure we manage and eliminate the damp and mould.</p> <p>During February 2023 we're piloting using our Estate Services team to carry out a rapid initial inspection of damp and mould.</p> |
| 14 | <p>Landlords should review the number of missed appointments in relation to damp and mould cases and, depending on the outcome of any review, consider what steps may be required to reduce them.</p>  | <p>A case file is opened on Orchard for all reported instances of damp and mould. We'll track any missed appointments and follow our No Access Procedure, working with our Housing Team to assist with access if needed.</p>   |

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| 15                              | Landlords should ensure that their staff, whether in-house or contractors, have the ability to identify and report early signs of damp and mould.   | We're working on a Comms campaign to raise awareness to staff, residents and contractors. Including a training program for staff.   |              |   |                                 |  |
| 16                              | Landlords should take steps to identify and resolve any skills gaps they may have, ensuring their staff and contractors have appropriate expertise to properly diagnose and respond to reports of damp and mould.   | We'll run a training program for staff and contractors during 2023/24.  |              |   |                                 |  |
| 17                              | Landlords should ensure that they clearly and regularly communicate with their residents regarding actions taken or otherwise to resolve reports of damp and mould. Landlords should review and update any associated processes and policies accordingly. | <p>As per our Damp &amp; Mould policy we'll:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate with our residents clearly and regularly regarding any actions we plan to take and any actions our residents are advised to take.</li> </ul>  |              |   |                                 |  |
| 18                              | Landlords must ensure there is effective internal communication between their teams and departments, and ensure that one individual or team has overall responsibility for ensuring complaints or reports are resolved, including follow up or aftercare. | <p>We'll be running a staff awareness campaign in Qtr. 1 of 2023/24.</p> <p>Our Damp &amp; Mould policy clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1144 1042 2031 1356"> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="1144 1042 1458 1201">Poplar Board</td> <td data-bbox="1458 1042 2031 1201">Overall governance responsibility for ensuring that the organisation is compliant with regulatory standards, legislation and codes of practice.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1144 1201 1458 1356">Director of Technical Resources</td> <td data-bbox="1458 1201 2031 1356">Strategic responsibility for the management of damp and mould and for ensuring that compliance is achieved and maintained.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Poplar Board | Overall governance responsibility for ensuring that the organisation is compliant with regulatory standards, legislation and codes of practice. | Director of Technical Resources | Strategic responsibility for the management of damp and mould and for ensuring that compliance is achieved and maintained. |
| Poplar Board                    | Overall governance responsibility for ensuring that the organisation is compliant with regulatory standards, legislation and codes of practice.   |   |              |   |                                 |  |
| Director of Technical Resources | Strategic responsibility for the management of damp and mould and for ensuring that compliance is achieved and maintained.  |   |              |   |                                 |  |

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|  |   | Assistant Director of Asset Management   | Responsible for the implementation of the Damp and Mould Management Policy.  |
|  |   | Head of Repairs  | Responsible for the overall day to day delivery of survey inspections and repairs. Monitoring of performance and compliance. |
|  |   | Repairs Manager  | Responsible for scheduling and planning survey inspections and repairs.  |
|  |   | Surveyors  | Responsible for surveying and investigating the causes of damp and mould.<br>Specifying remedial works and solutions.        |
|  |   | Competent Contractors  | Responsible for the operational delivery of work to remove and eliminate mould and damp.                                     |
| <b>19</b>                                | Landlords should ensure that their complaints policy is effective and in line with the Complaint Handling Code, with clear compensation and redress guidance. Remedies should be commensurate to the distress and inconvenience caused to the resident, whilst recognising that each case is individual and should be considered on its own merits. | Our Customer Care Policy outlines how we manage complaints in line with the Complaint Handling Code.                                     |  |
| <b>20</b>                                | Landlords need to ensure they can identify complex cases at an early stage, and have a strategy for keeping residents informed and effective resolution.  | We'll respond to all reported instances of damp and mould and instruct a contractor to attend to wash down and treat the damp and mould. |  |

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|    |  | A case file is then opened and remedial repairs raised or if more complex a surveyor arranges to attend and inspect. For more complex cases and specialise work, external consultants and specialist contractors will be used.     |
| 21 | Landlords should identify where an independent, mutually agreed and suitably qualified surveyor should be used, share the outcomes of all surveys and inspections with residents to help them understand the findings and be clear on next steps. Landlords should then act on accepted survey recommendations in a timely manner.   | We'll be piloting the use of a specialist company called 'Zap Carbon' to attend and carry out a Healthy Homes Assessment on 40 homes.  |
| 22 | Where extensive works may be required, landlords should consider the individual circumstances of the household, including any vulnerabilities, and whether or not it is appropriate to move resident(s) out of their home at an early stage.   | Our Surveyor's will inspect and assess each individual case and determine if the property is still habitable. If not, will take action to move the residents out on a temporary basis so we can carry out the appropriate repairs. |
| 23 | Landlords should promote the benefits of their complaints process and the Ombudsman to their residents as an appropriate and effective route to resolving disputes.  | During Qtr. 1 of 2023/24 we'll work with our Comms team to run a campaign to promote our complaints process.   |
| 24 | Landlords should 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. Landlords should ensure their approach is consistent with our jurisdiction guidance and their legal and complaint teams work together effectively where an issue is being pursued through the complaints process and protocol. | Our objective is to work with our customers to resolve issues and disputes promptly without the need to go to court.   |



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| 25 | Landlords should consider how best to share learning from complaints and the positive impact of changes made as a result within the organisation and externally. Systems should allow the landlord to analyse their complaints data effectively and identify themes, trends and learning opportunities. | During Qtr. 1 and 2 in 2023/24 our Customer Service team will be running sessions with all teams to discuss and share learning from Complaints.   |
| 26 | Landlords should ensure they treat residents reporting damp and mould with respect and empathy. The distress and inconvenience experienced by residents in this area is some of the most profound we have seen, and this needs to be reflected in the tone and approach of the complaint handling.      | <p>Our Damp &amp; Mould policy states:</p> <p>We'll:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat residents reporting damp and mould with empathy and respect and not prejudge the reason for any issue.</li> <li>• Support residents in resolving damp and mould where they result from the use of the home, and provide our residents with appropriate, clear, sensitive, practical and accessible advice.</li> </ul> <p>We'll work with a group of residents who have reported damp and mould in the last 3 years, to hear about their experiences and how we can improve.</p> |