

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 27 JUNE 2023

Report Title	Damp & Mould Self-Assessment			
Purpose of Report	This report presents the Council's damp and mould self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's 26 recommendations taken from their spotlight report into damp and mould.			
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to note the content of the self-assessment.			
Consultation and Feedback	<p>A working group comprising of SDC officers has been established to review our approach to damp and mould and to lead on the development of the Council's Damp & Mould Policy. This work will involve creating a proactive action plan to positively resolve instances of damp and mould in our residents homes.</p> <p>The Council's self-assessment, discussions and actions arising from the working group have been discussed and shared with tenant representatives.</p>			
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Options	<p>The Housing Ombudsman wrote to all Chief Executives in late 2022, urging all social housing providers to consider their damp and mould spotlight report and to self-assess against the recommendations. The Housing Ombudsman advised social housing providers that they will request a copy of this assessment as part of its investigations into relevant complaints.</p> <p>We have determined that this self-assessment is a valuable tool that must be completed to establish our current damp and mould position and to use it, as part of wider considerations, whilst formulating a new policy.</p>			
Background Papers	None			
Appendices	Appendix A – SDC Self assessment			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	No	Yes	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's Damp and Mould Policy was approved by Housing Committee in 2017 and had been due for review in September 2021. Given the passage of time, new regulatory direction and changes to demand, the Council has formed a working group to review our approach to damp and mould. This is to ensure the drafting of a new policy is fit for purpose,

meets resident demand, and offers value for money and best practice. A new policy will be presented to Housing Committee during 2023 for approval.

- 1.2 As part of the process of updating the Damp & Mould Policy, the Council have utilised the Housing Ombudsman's self-assessment tool, published as part of their spotlight report into damp and mould, entitled "It's Not Lifestyle". The Housing Ombudsman has urged all social housing providers to use the 26 recommendations from their report, to self-assess against them and to share the findings with their governing body.
- 1.3 Should a complaint be escalated to the Housing Ombudsman regarding damp and mould in a tenant's home, the Housing Ombudsman will request a copy of our self-assessment against their recommendations as part of its investigation into relevant complaints.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 Damp and mould is not a new phenomenon in social housing, but the catastrophic impact of not responding with meaningful action to reports of damp and mould were highlighted in November 2022 following the coroner's report into the tragic death of a toddler in Rochdale. The report found that the two-year-old boy had died of respiratory disease which was caused by severe and prolonged exposure to mould in his home. This mould had been repeatedly reported by his parents and health professionals to their social housing landlord, but the landlord took little or no action in response.
- 2.2 The Council, as a responsible landlord, takes our responsibilities seriously and have set up a working group made up of officers across the relevant teams within the Council. The group have explored the topic of damp and mould, our current policy, our approach, levels of demand and begun to formulate an action plan to ensure we have a policy to ensure the Council take a zero-tolerance approach to all instances of damp and mould. Damp and mould remain a priority for the Council so that our residents can live in homes that are decent, safe and secure.
- 2.3 The Council has conducted the self-assessment against the recommendations in the report. The detail and actions arising from the assessment can be found in the appendix accompanying this report.
- 2.4 There are a number of positives coming out of the self-assessment, such as the Council's commitment to positively tackling damp and mould which is being formulated into a tangible action plan. Even where the Council are working positively towards recommendations in the report, we still aspire for more. The Council are investing significantly in our retrofit programme to increase the energy efficiency of our stock. This work includes a pre and post retrofit assessment to ensure the property has sufficient ventilation once retrofit works are complete. This is to ensure the retrofit interventions do not cause excessive condensation which could lead to damp and mould. In response to the self-assessment, we acknowledge that we could take this one step further by carrying out additional customer contact after works are complete to ensure any unintended consequences are mitigated and to ensure the tenant is aware of how to operate any new equipment efficiently. This is included in the action plan at recommendation 10 and will be built into the retrofit process.
- 2.5 The Council has an accessible repair reporting service and housing staff support tenants to report repairs by email, text message and telephone. This service will be enhanced through the implementation of a new housing management system (recommendation 12) The new system will provide tenants with 24/7 digital access to an online self-service portal, enabling repairs to be reported and tracked through tenants own online accounts.
- 2.6 When a report of damp and mould is made, the Council have implemented a set of triage questions and dedicated report monitoring (recommendations 12 & 20). The system is

used to track the status of actions being taken, assign priority levels and capture details relating to possible causes. Since November 2022 when this recording mechanism was introduced, there have been 121 reports of damp and mould.

- 2.7 The Council has a robust complaints process that is compliant with the Housing Ombudsman's complaints handling code which sets out good practice. The Council carries out an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's code to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with its requirements (recommendations 3, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26).
- 2.8 Whilst there are positives, the Council is aware that there are areas for improvement and the working group are in the process of completing gap analysis and putting together proposals for improvement. The team have initiated a data led project (recommendation 3 & 5) to profile our stock and to identify properties that may be at higher risk of damp and mould. Using the data and intelligence we have will enable the Council to intervene early and to put measures in place to reduce instances of damp and mould forming.
- 2.9 The Council are actively working towards improving our approach to damp and mould, for example we have invested in specialist equipment such as thermal imaging (recommendation 1). This will assist in the identification of damp and mould causes, as well as identifying peak humidity levels in properties. The Council acknowledges that staff training is crucial to identifying signs of damp and mould early and to enable the Council to take a proactive preventative approach. Training has been delivered to Property Care through their toolbox talks and a programme of training for the wider team is in development (recommendations 1, 13, 15, 16 and 25).
- 2.10 The Council is reviewing all information that is provided to tenants to ensure these do not infer blame to the resident and to ensure all communication with residents is positive and focussed on joint working to mitigate and reduce instances of damp and mould. We will create a damp and mould checklist that housing staff will use at appropriate opportunities to spot signs of damp and mould early to ensure a proactive remedy can be put in place. We will ensure new tenants, especially first time renters, are aware of damp and mould and how they can report instances (recommendations 1, 7, 8, 10, 11, 17).
- 2.11 The Council will use the results of this self-assessment, the information from the data led project, and further consultation with tenant representatives and tenants to formulate an updated Damp and Mould Policy for approval at Housing Committee during 2023.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Council take damp and mould seriously and are committed to ensuring a zero-tolerance approach to all instances. This paper is to note the work that the team are undertaking on damp and mould. A number of actions have been initiated to support the team and our residents and this work will continue over the next few months to ensure the Council have a robust approach that represents good practice and keeps our residents safe.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

The cost of damp and mould prevention and intervention, where identified within tenancies, will be closely monitored. Any financial implications arising will be identified and reported to Housing Committee through the year.

The HRA has reported an underspend for 2022/23, and it is proposed that part of this will be used to fund an additional Stock Condition Surveyor for one year, to support the Damp and Mould Strategy.

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4.2 Legal Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

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4.3 Equality Implications

This report is to note the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations only. The Council have considered equality whilst carrying out the self-assessment to ensure our services are accessible and that our action plan supports all of our tenants, including those with a protected characteristic. An EIA is not required for this self-assessment; however, an EIA will be completed as part of the drafting of the new damp and mould policy that will be presented to Housing Committee later in 2023.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.