

# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Damp &amp; Mould Policy</b>			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	The purpose of this report is to present a new Damp and Mould Policy to replace the existing 2017 Damp & Mould Policy.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<b>The Committee RESOLVES to:</b> a) <b>approve the Damp and Mould Policy with effect from 01 October 2023</b> b) <b>delegate authority to the Strategic Head of Housing to make changes to the policy in consultation with the chair and vice chair of Housing Committee</b>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	A project group comprising of SDC officers has been established to lead on the development of the Councils approach to damp and mould, including the drafting of a new Damp and Mould Policy.  A members evening was held on 09 August for all Council members and tenant representatives to discuss damp and mould and to invite involvement and suggestions in the drafting of the new policy.			
<b>Report Author</b>	Andy Kefford, Strategic Head of Housing Email: <a href="mailto:andy.kefford@stroud.gov.uk">andy.kefford@stroud.gov.uk</a>			
<b>Options</b>	The following alternative options were considered: 1. Keep the existing 2017 Damp & Mould Policy 2. Update the 2017 Damp and Mould Policy  Both of the alternative options were considered and discounted because of the importance of this issue and due to the increasing number of reports of damp and mould within SDC owned stock. The best option is to present a new policy that is fit for purpose and represents best practice.			
<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix A – Damp & Mould Policy Appendix B – Notes from the damp and mould members evening held on 09 August 2023.			
<b>Implications (further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	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, this report presents a new Damp and Mould Policy to replace the 2017 version.
- 1.2 This Policy has been written taking into consideration best practice, information from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman's 2021 Spotlight Report into damp and mould in social housing, "it's not lifestyle" as well as the 2023 follow up report. These documents make a number of recommendations for social landlords, such as:
  - Review and update policy, with streamlined processes for identifying and responding to damp and mould,
  - Remove blaming of residents and their lifestyle both from policies, procedure but importantly, from culture within the organisation and instead focus on dignity, respect and fairness,
  - Have good governance and knowledge of our homes i.e. be able to identify which homes are at risk of damp and mould and acting to tackle these,
  - Have a clear void standard and mutual exchange policy so that residents do not move into properties with outstanding damp and mould issues.
- 1.3 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 death of a toddler in Rochdale. The report found that the two-year-old boy had died of respiratory disease 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.
- 1.4 Since the coroner's report was made public in November 2022 most, if not all, social housing providers have experienced an increase in the number of damp and mould issues being reported. The Council have experienced the same, with a much higher number of reports of damp and mould being received that have required Council intervention and remedial action.

## **2. Main Points**

- 2.1 Damp and mould is of high national interest and has become a key focus for the Social Housing Regulator and the Social Housing Ombudsman. Social housing landlords are required to have a robust response to damp and mould that is evidenced through policy, procedure and action.
- 2.2 Since March 2023, relevant members of the housing team have formed a project group to review our approach to damp and mould. This is to ensure the Council has a clear approach to the management of damp and mould in our properties that is fit for purpose. The project group have formulated an action plan, which included carrying out a self-assessment against the Social Housing Ombudsman's 26-point recommendations contained within their spotlight report "it's not lifestyle". The self-assessment was presented to Housing Committee on 27 June 2023.
- 2.3 An all-Council members evening was arranged for 09 August 2023 and attended by nine members, two tenant representatives and Council staff, including the Chief Executive and Director of Communities. This event invited member and tenant representative involvement

in crafting the new policy. Attached at Appendix B are the notes of the meeting, which include the recommendations made and the Council's response to how we will action these.

2.4 The Council have included internal audit in the process of reviewing our damp and mould approach and the drafting of a new policy. Audit has given acceptable assurance that our work is on the right track and the recommendations from the audit report have been factored into both the action plan and the new damp and mould policy.

2.5 The key aims of the policy are to:

- Ensure we meet our statutory obligations as a landlord
- Comply with statutory regulation and good practice
- Be proactive in addressing reports of damp and mould
- Investigate the root cause of damp and mould in order to take effective remedial action
- Take appropriate and timely action
- Ensure tenants and leaseholders are treated in a fair, respectful and consistent way

2.6 The policy sets out the types of damp that can lead to mould, and the preventative measures the Council will take to reduce the instances of damp and mould. This includes the use of stock condition surveys and ongoing monitoring of our housing stock condition. We will use a proactive data driven, risk based approach that will assist in improving the condition of our homes and enable the Council to tackle instances of damp as early as possible to lead to better outcomes for our residents.

2.7 Where damp is reported, the Council will carry out an inspection in an attempt to establish the cause of the issue and take appropriate remedial action within the timescales set out in our repairs policy. For example, emergency reports where there is extensive damp and mould in multiple living areas and highly vulnerable residents, we will attend within 24 hours and ensure we act accordingly.

2.8 Once improvement works are complete, we will also provide an aftercare service to follow up with the tenant to ensure the remedial works have been effective and to respond to any issues that may not have been resolved.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 The drafting of the policy has included members and tenant representatives involvement and takes into account best practice, regulatory and legislative guidance with the aim of ensuring our management of damp and mould is fit for purpose.

3.2 It is recommended that Housing Committee approve the adoption of this new policy to replace the existing 2017 policy.

### **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 throughout the year.

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

Jon Coldridge, Principal Accountant

Tel: 01453 754030 Email: [jon.coldridge@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:jon.coldridge@stroud.gov.uk)

#### **4.2 Legal Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

Vikki Fennell, Senior Lawyer

Tel: 01684 272015 Email: [legalservices@onelegal.org.uk](mailto:legalservices@onelegal.org.uk)

#### **4.3 Equality Implications**

An EIA is not required because the policy applies to all tenancies and leaseholders, and it is believed that there will be no negative impact on the experience of residents with protected characteristics.

#### **4.4 Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category. This policy sets out the aim of managing damp and mould to ensure tenants are living in good quality housing, free from damp and mould which will reduce the risk of potential serious health implications.