

01 October 2023

## Action plan for addressing damp and mould in private rented properties

This plan sets out how we aim to systematically address damp and mould issues in private rented properties, prioritise the health and safety of occupants, and work towards improving housing standards across the region.

### Data gathering and analysis

We review the housing stock within our area primarily through a 5 yearly stock modelling exercise undertaken on our behalf by the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

The latest report, issued in August 2023, provides property level modelled data on housing stock condition and decency including excess cold hazard and fuel poor households, which helps to identify properties where damp and mould may be an issue.

This data, as well as supporting [MEES](#) work and enforcement, allows us to better target our fuel poverty and affordable warmth work delivered for the past 20 years in partnership with the Gloucester Authorities under [Warm & Well](#).

### Prioritisation of Category 1 and 2 hazards

Damp and mould issues are one of the 29 hazards we enforce under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Enforcement action is guided by our [Private Sector Housing Policy](#) and, as well as taking action on Category 1 hazards, section 3.6.5.3 makes specific reference to Category 2 hazards:

Category 2 hazards falling within one or more of the following criteria will be considered for formal action:

- where there is still significant risk to health and safety of the occupant (such hazards are likely to be those rated at band D).
- The defects/disrepair contributing to the hazard are such that if not dealt with in a reasonable amount of time, are likely to deteriorate to an extent that the hazard rating will increase.
- The individual hazards, though of a minor nature, their cumulative effect is to render the property a serious risk to the health and/or safety of any occupier or resident to the property.

Whilst we always try to work positively with landlords and tenants to resolve complaints, where landlords are not dealing with defects giving rise to a damp and mould hazard which

is significantly affecting the physical and or mental health of tenants, we will take enforcement action under the Housing Act 2004.

If works are not carried out in specified timescales, we may decide to undertake the works in default and claim the costs back from the landlord and we will prosecute or issue a Civil Penalty Notice for non-compliance.

## **Initial assessment and inspection**

Housing Association tenants and private rented tenants are always encouraged to speak to their landlords first to give them the opportunity to assess and remedy any defect that may be present.

If the landlord does not respond in a satisfactory way, then the next step would be to complain to [Private Sector Housing](#), we will then inspect and action as appropriate under the Housing Act 2004.

We ensure that tenants of social landlords are also aware they have the option to complain to the [Housing Ombudsman](#).

When we first receive a complaint about damp and mould, it is always allocated promptly to a trained housing professional who conducts an initial assessment as to the severity of the damp and mould. We may contact the tenant to ask them to provide more information or photographic evidence of the mould.

In appropriate cases we will send a letter with advice, FAQs and a questionnaire to the tenant. Sometimes the tenants can make small changes to their behaviour that will reduce the condensation levels in their home and prevent mould from recurring in their home.

We monitor the service request to check if forms are returned to us and in either case, contact is made with the tenant to check if they still require advice or assistance from our team.

In most cases a visit will be necessary to make a judgement on the potential root cause (or causes) of the issue. A qualified Private Sector Housing Officer will visit and use the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to assess the property for any hazards, including damp and mould.

## **Tenant engagement and education**

We support tenants to understand how to reduce condensation in their homes, when to ventilate, how to get the best out of their heating systems and where to go for further advice and information.



Last winter, because of the energy crisis, we anticipated that there would be more issues with mould due to people not being able to afford to heat properties.

As a result, we purchased hygrometers to help people see the temperature and humidity levels in their home, and to enable them to try and prevent the cold humid temperatures where mould grows.

The hygrometers are accompanied by an instruction sheet and advice on minimising condensation.

The hygrometers are branded with the Warm & Well logo and contact details.

This also helps promote and direct tenants to Warm & Well for further [advice](#) on keeping warm and reducing energy costs, along with access to grant funding to improve heating and ventilation.

We also have damp and mould information leaflets and Warm & Well leaflets that are given to tenants to help minimise damp and mould problems in their homes.

For students in private rented accommodation, we have an advice leaflet produced by Severn Wye, [A Student's Guide to Energy](#) which gives practical advice on energy bills and saving energy.

## Social media and awareness campaigns



Under the banner of Warm & Well we have been putting out regular social media posts about Warm & Well including energy saving tips and information on damp and mould.

We will continue to look for opportunities to promote tenant and landlord advice and support services via South Gloucestershire Council's social media communications.

We have also helped publicise the [Make Things Right \(MTR\)](#) campaign which aims to ensure that more social housing residents who need support know how to make a complaint.

## **Support for landlords**

The council funds [low interest loans](#) available to support landlords to carry out all repairs and improve heating and insulation, delivered by Lendology CIC an ethical lender.

We also have a web page with energy efficiency advice for landlords and advice on Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards [Energy advice for landlords | BETA - South Gloucestershire Council \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)

This page will be updated with any offers for grants and support for landlords to improve their energy efficiency, especially those with EPCs below EPC-C.

## **Enforcement capacity**

In the government's recent publication on damp and mould in the private rented sector, over 60% of local authorities noted capacity as having the highest or second highest impact on enforcement action relating to damp and mould.

Our Private Sector Housing Team at South Gloucestershire Council delivers a statutory regulatory service and as such is recognised as a fundamental service delivering clear benefits to the people and businesses of South Gloucestershire and the wider environment.

Following the recent Resource Planning process at South Gloucestershire Council, which entailed several service reductions, the Private Sector Housing Team saw no staffing reduction enabling us to continue to deliver both a positive proactive and reactive service to tackle poor housing standards.

Although we have limited capacity to proactively target damp and mould in the region, the Private Sector Housing Team has recently secured revenue funding to tackle MEES via an additional 0.5 FTE equivalent for 2 years.

This work will be vital to ensure that properties with an EPC of lower than E are either improved or taken out of the private rental market (unless they have a valid exemption) and will consequently target those properties that could be more susceptible to damp and mould problems.

The Private Sector Housing Team at South Gloucestershire Council are all qualified and experienced Housing Officers. Staff have also attended specific training courses on damp and mould growth.

We intend to build on this expertise and for officers to attend further damp and mould training from a construction and solutions perspective so they can improve their technical knowledge in this area.

## **Collaboration and partnerships**

The Warm & Well scheme has been successful in securing government funding historically for Central Heating Fund, LAD 1a and 1b, Sustainable Warmth Fund, and most recently have gained funding under HUG2. We will continue to explore further opportunities for joint initiatives and funding applications.

Earlier this year we met with Bromford, our largest provider of social housing, to ensure they take proactive action regarding damp and mould in their tenants' homes and that any complaints are dealt with seriously, effectively and within reasonable timescales.

Our view is that Bromford should demonstrate best practice as a social landlord and that their tenants should not have to resort to contacting the local authority regarding their social housing conditions.

However, in instances where complaints are received, we will take proportionate enforcement action as we would for a private landlord.

South Gloucestershire Council no longer holds any stock of its own.

We will continue to collaborate with our West of England local authority partners, housing associations and other stakeholders to share best practice and resources.

### **Ongoing monitoring and evaluation**

We will regularly review the effectiveness of the plan's implementation through monitoring our service requests for damp and mould complaints and recording number of category 1 and 2 hazards removed.

We will adjust this plan and take forward key points based on any future government guidance or following implementation of the new Decent Homes standard for the private rented sector.

### **Contact information**

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