



HONEYCOMB
GROUP

Damp and Mould Policy

Policy owner/author:	Director of Housing Services
Team:	All
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Approved by:	Board of Management
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1. Introduction and Policy Objectives

As a landlord, Honeycomb Group (Honeycomb) is responsible for maintenance and repairs to its homes, communal blocks and other properties it owns and manages. Tenants in some of these properties may experience problems with damp and mould. Honeycomb has a duty to manage and minimise damp and mould, to prevent it becoming a health hazard for residents and to stop properties deteriorating because of damage caused by damp and mould.

The Decent Homes Standard requires that properties must not have serious (Category 1) hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Damp and mould is one of the 29 hazards identified in the HHSRS system:

This category covers threats to health associated with the increased prevalence of house dust mites and mould or fungal growths resulting from dampness and/or high humidities. It includes threats to mental health and social well-being which may be caused by living with the presence of damp, damp staining and/or mould growth. (Annex D, HHSRS Operating Guidance).

A HHSRS assessment considers the severity of a hazard and the likelihood of harm that could be caused. In the case of damp and mould the health effects are allergies, asthma and the effects of toxins from mould and fungal infections. Homes which are damp due to condensation and/or high humidity levels can create an environment in which mould or fungal growths can develop. There are many

varieties of mould and fungi and spores from moulds can be allergenic and create health risks, particularly to those vulnerable to infection. There are also mental and social health affects as damage to decoration from mould or damp staining and smells associated with damp and mould, can lead to anxiety and depression for residents and to social isolation.

The aim of this policy is to reduce the likelihood of residents experiencing severe damp and mould problems and to ensure that there are no Category 1 (HHSRS) damp or mould hazards in Honeycomb homes.

A key objective of this policy is to ensure the Board, Executive Team, staff, partners and residents understand Honeycomb's health and safety obligations and take necessary actions to minimise damp and mould problems. This policy provides the framework staff and partners will operate within, in order to meet these obligations.

This policy forms part of a wider organisational commitment to driving a health and safety culture amongst staff and contractors (as detailed within our Health and Safety Policy). It will be saved on the intranet and distributed to all relevant staff and contractors.

The Housing Ombudsman Service's Spotlight report: *Damp and Mould: It's not a lifestyle* and its recommendations have informed this policy and will be communicated with all staff.

2. Principles for dealing with damp and mould

- We will provide homes which are safe, warm, dry and free from health hazards meeting Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 expectations
- We will comply with legislation and regulatory standards
- We will ensure customer can easily report concerns of damp and mould and are treated with respect and empathy
- We will ensure that Honeycomb properties are protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp, condensation and mould
- We will have transparent and robust reporting measures within our governance processes
- We aim to resolve customers' concerns about damp and mould as effectively as possible, taking responsibility for diagnosing, carrying out necessary works and keeping customers informed (including legal disrepair cases)
- We will ensure that staff (and contractors) are trained to identify issues relating to damp and mould, and are clear on our processes and procedures to support customers to resolve the issues
- We will ensure that staff are empowered to make decisions and escalate concerns in a timely manner, ensuring effective collaboration between teams to achieve the best outcome for the customer
- We will take ownership to undertake comprehensive analysis and investigation where we have not been able to determine the root cause of damp

- Upon completion of remedial works, we will continue to monitor the situation to ensure the issue has been resolved, which may include the installation of sensors in customers' homes.
- We will work with customers to provide clear, practicable and accessible support and advice on matters such as the actions they can take within the home, being clear and communicating what action Honeycomb will take
- We will ensure that we take the opportunity to assess homes for damp and mould during visits such as housing management visits, repair visits, stock condition surveys and record the findings and escalate where appropriate
- We will improve our data on damp and mould and move to more proactive ways of working with less reliance on customers' reporting issues
- We will build into our planned, investment programmes the use of products proven to reduce damp and mould, such as use of positive pressure ventilation systems.
- We will ensure that any new build homes, still within the Defects Liability Period which have damp or mould identified, are monitored through the same processes and look to escalate the issue, if the contractor is deemed to be taking an excessive period to address the matter.
- If we have assessed that the prevalence of damp and mould is creating an immediate danger to health, or if remedial works will create significant disruption, alternative accommodation will be offered to the customer. The customer will be supported throughout this process.

3. Scope

This policy is specifically for use and implementation by the Property Services, Customer Services and Housing Services teams.

This policy is relevant to all staff, residents, contractors and other stakeholders who may work on, occupy or visit Honeycomb properties.

The policy will be used by all to ensure they understand the obligations placed upon Honeycomb to maintain a safe environment within the home of each resident, and within all communal areas of buildings and other properties owned or managed.

4. Regulatory Standards and Legislation

4.1 Regulatory Standards

We will ensure we comply with the Regulator of Social Housing's regulatory framework and consumer standards for social housing. The Home Standard is the primary one applicable to this policy.

4.2 Legislation

Legislation applicable to this policy is included in:

- The Housing Act 1985

- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Landlord and Tenants Act 1985 Section 11, Repairs and Maintenance
- Housing Act 2004 – Housing Health and Safety Rating
- Decent Homes Standard 2006

4.3 Sanctions

Failure to discharge our responsibilities and obligations properly could lead to sanctions, including: a regulatory notice from the Regulator of Social Housing and disrepair claims.

5. Definitions of causes and symptoms of damp, condensation, and mould

5.1 Condensation

All homes are exposed to damp due to household activities such as cooking, bathing, showering, washing clothes and breathing which create water vapour. Water vapour needs assistance to escape the property, or it will increase humidity within the home and condense on colder surfaces.

Condensation is typically caused by water vapour which has 'condensed' from warm, moist air on contact with a cold surface. Warm air holds more moisture than cold air. The amount of moisture in the air is usually expressed as relative humidity (RH). Air which contains its maximum moisture content is saturated, at the point it has 100% RH. Indoor relative humidity should be between 40% and 60%, except for short periods of fluctuation. This range is the optimum to limit the occurrence of condensation and mould growth.

In some circumstances, condensation can occur when there may be no obvious causes, or a combination of less usual events occur. A Building Research Establishment (BRE) report states *“Condensation is always the result of air becoming saturated when it meets a cold surface, but the conditions under which it may occur in dwellings vary considerably. Broadly speaking, condensation is dependent on three interacting factors: the environment within the building, the building structure and the natural climatic conditions outside the building.”* (BRE Digest 297).

Condensation can occur anywhere in a home, though is typically found on walls and ceilings in kitchen and bathrooms, the perimeter of ceilings/top of walls in bedrooms. It can occur around the edges of, and on the surface of windows, and occasionally it can appear as a patch in the middle of a wall. It can also be found on the lower part of walls in ground floor rooms, or within the floors. Its appearance can show as a wet

patch, mould growth, or with visible signs, such as salts coming out of the wall. In severe cases plaster decay or blowing can occur. Condensation can also occur in roof spaces if they are not properly vented or insulated, forming on the underside of roof felt.

5.2 Interstitial condensation

Interstitial condensation can occur within an enclosed wall, roof or floor cavity where water vapour from inside the building condenses on cold surfaces within the structure. This can lead to progressive saturation of masonry, timber or cavity wall insulation.

5.3 Cold Bridging

Cold bridging tends to occur in isolated areas, where a structural feature, or partial omission of insulation, lowers the temperature of part of a surface. This means this area will be colder and can trigger condensing of water vapour just at that point.

5.4 Moulds and Fungal Growth.

This is the effect of damp. Moulds can grow when the indoor relative humidity persistently exceeds 70%. Most cases of mould are slight to moderate, but more severe cases can lead to the visible release of spore dust which can be allergenic. Fungal growth is less common, and more associated with leaks and water penetration. Typically, the types are wet or dry rot in timber.

5.5 Leaks

Leaks may be apparent where a pipe bursts or cracks. However, it can be more difficult to identify if there is a hidden cause gradually soaking the area affected. e.g. leaking underfloor pipes can give an impression of rising damp, as the structure will gradually absorb the water through capillary action.

5.6 Water penetration

Water penetration occurs where rainwater penetrates through the tiles on the roof, or the walls, windows or doors. This may be due to a fault with one of those components, or as a greater volume of water is affecting an area e.g. leaking gutter saturating the wall. It can also occur when ground levels outside are higher than the buildings damp proof course causing water to soak through the walls.

5.7 Flooding

Properties can be affected by overflowing storm water drains and extreme rain events can cause flooding. Where this occurs any weakness in construction can lead to water penetration.

5.8 Rising Damp

This is damp visible at low level to ground floor walls, or where a concrete floor is damp. This is typically defined by a tidemark or change in surface condition of the plaster. It is important to differentiate this from water penetration due to raised ground levels. Rising damp is primarily caused by the capillary action of ground water through the structure when the DPC (damp proof course has failed). However, it can over time be due to the salts that are left from the ground water that has evaporated, causing walls or floors to become porous i.e. hygroscopic. Here the walls can absorb humid air from within the property.

5.9 Perceived damp

This typically relates to reports made by residents who sense that a room or home feels or smells damp. In cases where there is no visible damp, this can occur where the relative humidity in the property is naturally high, but the building structure is such that surfaces do not get cold enough for condensation to occur. If a home smells damp, with no visible damp, musty smells could be due to a lack of ventilation in the property. In such cases it is important to investigate if there is potential for hidden damp or fungal growth, or interstitial condensation within the building structure.

6. Wellbeing Implications risks from mould and dust mites

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) Operating Guidance sets out the potential for harm and identifies that those aged under 14 are the most vulnerable group. Spores of many moulds and fungi (including timber attacking fungi) can be allergenic, and that risks of health effects are greater to those vulnerable to infection, or with predisposition to sensitisation. Health symptoms such as: rhinitis, conjunctivitis, eczema, coughs, wheezing and asthma can affect sensitised persons where there is repeated exposure. The severity of asthma can intensify with increasing humidity, house dust mites and mould levels. Spores from certain types of mould can be toxic and carcinogenic.

The HHSRS guidance also refers to research that shows low levels of background ventilation, without visible mould or dampness, can result in high indoor humidity levels and greatly increased house dust mite populations.

7. Mitigations - managing condensation, damp and mould.

Condensation cannot be wholly eliminated but it can be managed by the actions of residents and Honeycomb. The main steps to reduce the risk of condensation are raising the temperature of the air, raising surface temperatures, removing humid air and replacing it with dry air.

Reducing occurrences of reported damp requires the right balance of building fault remedy, heating, ventilation and this will vary, based on the design and building construction. Some properties, or residents' medical needs, may benefit from enhanced ventilation to overcome situations where technical characteristics of homes cannot be improved. Managing humidity levels and condensation can be a complex balance of heating and ventilation in homes. This relies on providing good information and advice to residents as well as ensuring homes are adequately heated, insulated and ventilated.

7.1 Ventilation and heating

There should be continuous low-level of background ventilation in homes which allows 0.5 air changes per hour (i.e. half the air in a room is replaced). Building regulations require that all new windows are fitted with trickle ventilation to allow fresh air to enter the room. In some cases, tenants may close these vents and this will restrict fresh air coming into the room. Extract ventilation in kitchens and bathrooms is also important to remove steam from cooking, bathing and showering. A property should be heated to maintain a temperature between 16 (at night) and 21 degrees, and heating should be utilised in all rooms to avoid cold spots in the home for water to condense. There can be a conflict with affordability for some tenants which may lead to some rooms being unheated.

7.2 Our approach to investigating damp and mould issues

Damp and mould issues affecting Honeycomb properties are identified through a range of mechanisms:

- Customer reports of faults direct to the Customer Services team
- Property services team inspections of properties – for example, when planning improvement works
- Contractor referrals - when operatives identify issues which cause concern within the home they are maintaining or improving
- Stock condition surveys
- Tenancy management visits from housing management staff
- Complaints made by tenants or their advocates.

We will ensure staff are trained to complete HHSRS hazard assessments within 6 months of this policy to determine whether the presence of damp and or mould is a

Category 1 or a Category 2 hazard. This will assess whether the fault is extensive damp or mould which is likely to cause harm to a vulnerable person without effective intervention. Staff will also consider whether the damp/mould issues are having a detrimental effect on the mental health or wellbeing of the residents.

7.3 Tenant-centred approach to condensation

- We will take an open-minded approach to dealing with reports of damp
- We will provide good general information to residents on the issues they may find, explaining the main causes of damp and condensation and encourage reporting of potential repairs
- We recognise the further impact of fuel poverty on condensation issues and will provide support and advice to residents.
- We will improve training for all staff who have contact with customers on damp and condensation ensuring reports are reviewed at each contact to ensure nothing is missed within 6 months of this policy being adopted.
- We recognise the importance of early escalation and third-party diagnosis when required.
- When no clear defect is found we will consider multiple methods of alleviating the symptoms, recognising that these may be directly linked to fuel poverty.
- We will consider whole property improvements, with a clear understanding of how components interact and consider adequate ventilation or mechanical extraction.
- We recognise that condensation can occur for a number of reasons and may be different for each room in a house so we will not generalise solutions and we will ensure that residents understand how to operate heating, windows and fans in a coordinated way.
- We will ensure that any mould growth is first removed by suitably trained operatives and take time to assess the underlying cause of the condensation before introducing additional controls.
- Where there are significant condensation issues we will monitor humidity levels with data loggers over a period of time to help understand the patterns of humidity which are creating condensation. This is to help us work with the residents to get the best out of their heating system and how to best ventilate their homes which will be key to managing condensation and mould.
- Investigations may identify that issues of fuel poverty are contributing to underheating of properties. In these circumstances we will provide money advice support and sign-posting to organisations who may be able to assist residents.

8. Proactive approach

Our own analysis of damp related faults reported over 3.75 years, found that:

- Tenants in family houses are more likely to report damp problems.

- Terraced houses built before 1919 are over-represented with damp faults.
- Family/terraced houses built before 1919 were the most likely property type to experience damp faults – representing 16% of all faults but comprising 7% of the stock.
- The next most prevalent property types for which damp faults were reported were purpose built flats from the period 1965-1980 and 1991-2000. However, the prevalence of damp faults was proportionate to their representation within the general stock.
- Tenants in two post-codes were more likely to report damp faults, ST5 (Tunstall) and ST6 (Fegg Hayes). These are the areas where we have the highest concentrations of street terrace properties.
- At housing scheme level, we identified one purpose built scheme of walk up flats with open balcony access built in the late 1960s/70s where there were higher incidences of reporting damp compared with other schemes.

From this analysis, we have identified properties which are the focus for proactive stock condition surveys to assess if similar property types (where faults have not been reported) have problems with damp and mould. We have assessed that up to 3.5% of the stock could be affected by damp and/or mould issues. Therefore, we will use this assessment to target specific property types and locations for surveys where there is likely to be a higher prevalence of hazards because of damp and mould and we will ensure that sufficient maintenance budget is provided for dealing with damp and mould issues.

We will also continue to monitor the impact of interventions at the scheme of flats where we have insulated areas to eliminate cold bridging and introduced positive pressure ventilation systems to address wider condensation issues.

During 2023/24 our business analysts will develop a predictive model for damp and mould. This will build on the data we have collected to predict with more accuracy the properties and locations likely to report damp/mould faults. This will enable us to continue to target these homes for proactive property inspections and stock condition surveys. This will build on those properties we have already identified for proactive stock condition surveys to assess the presence of damp and or mould problems.

9. Resident Involvement and Engagement

Good communication with residents is essential in the effective management of damp and mould. In accordance with our Customer Voice approach, we will continue to develop our resident engagement strategy and communication programme. This will support residents in their understanding of damp and mould, advise them how they can manage any risk if there is damp and mould within their property, and encourage them to report any damp and mould concerns

We also aim to successfully engage with vulnerable and hard to reach residents. We will share information clearly and transparently and will ensure that information is available to residents using regular publications and information on the website.

10. Key Roles and Responsibilities

10.1 Operational responsibilities

- We will inspect the property when damp, mould and/or condensation is reported. We will investigate to determine the cause of damp, mould and condensation and carry out remedial repairs and actions in accordance with our repairs policy.
- We will seek to deal with the cause of the damp, mould and condensation not just the symptoms and where possible fix first time.
- We will promote and provide general advice and guidance on how to control damp, mould and condensation.
We will ensure that staff are trained and are aware of and understand the aims of this policy.
- We will proactively survey properties to assess those at greatest risk of having damp and mould problems.
- We will inform the customer of the findings of the inspection. This will include identifying the probable causes of damp, mould and condensation, recommending effective solutions including any remedial works, and the estimated timescales to complete any such works. The customer will be kept updated throughout the process.
- We will ensure that competent and skilled contractors are employed to carry out any works and that the customer's possessions are adequately protected during the works.
- We will be responsible for insulating customers' homes in accordance with the Decent Homes Standard and achieving a minimum EPC C by 2030 where this is economically viable.
- We will undertake reasonable improvement works to assist in the management and control of condensation dampness. This may include but is not limited to, upgraded ventilation system installation to improve indoor air movement.
- We will make good internal surfaces following any repairs work ensuring that surfaces are repaired to a condition ready for the customer to decorate. Where there is need to decorate following remedial work, we will provide a decoration voucher to cover the cost of the materials.
- In some cases, remedial work may not be necessary, rather we will provide support and advice to the customer on managing and controlling occurrences of condensation.

10.2 Governance responsibilities

The Board has overall governance responsibility for ensuring this policy is implemented to ensure compliance with legislation and regulatory standards. As

such, the Board will formally approve this policy and review it every two years (or sooner if there is a change in legislation or regulation).

For assurance that this policy is operating effectively in practice, the Board will receive updates on its implementation and any non-compliance.

The Executive Team will receive performance reports in respect of mould and damp problems and ensure compliance is being achieved. They will also be notified of any non-compliance issue identified.

The Director of Housing Services has strategic responsibility for the management of damp and mould and ensuring compliance with this policy is achieved and maintained.

The Head of Assets and Property Services has operational responsibility for the management of damp and mould and will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of the maintenance service. The Head of Assets and Property Services will be the overall Responsible Person on behalf of the Director of Housing Services.

The implementation of this policy will be reviewed every 2 years by internal audit

10.3 Customer responsibilities and expectations

- We will ask customers to report any evidence of damp and mould and faulty equipment which will affect the management of humidity and moisture in the home in a timely manner.
- We will work with customers to identify practical ways to help reduce the conditions that lead to condensation by:
 - Reducing moisture e.g., covering pans when cooking, drying laundry outside (where possible), keeping the kitchen or bathroom door closed when cooking or bathing
 - Aim to adequately heat rooms.
 - Keeping the property well ventilated e.g., opening windows during cooking/bathing, turning on and ensuring that the extractor fan or ventilation system installed in the property is regularly cleaned and working, keeping trickle vents in windows open, and allowing air to circulate around furniture.
 - Follow advice and guidance issued by us on managing humidity and moisture in the home which can lead to condensation. This information will be available on our website and in leaflets on condensation and mould control
- Customers are expected to allow access for inspections and carrying out of remedial works

- If, following an assessment, all reasonable measures are in place for the customer to adequately control condensation and mould, we will consider how we can tailor further advice and support to the customer
- We will advise customers on arranging adequate household contents insurance for their home
- Where customers are considering making any changes within their home. e.g., converting rooms, adding extensions, converting non-habitable buildings or spaces; they must seek advice and permission in accordance with their tenancy agreement and the tenant's improvements process.

11. Training

We will deliver training on this policy and the procedures that support it, including team briefings; damp and mould awareness training; and on the job training for those assessing damp and mould repair works as part of their daily job. All training undertaken by staff will be formally recorded.

12. Performance Reporting

We will introduce report key performance indicator (KPI) measures for damp and mould during 2023. These will be provided to the Executive Team and to the Audit and Risk Committee on a quarterly basis. We will report:

Data – the total number of:

- Properties where there have been reports of damp/mould faults or this has been identified by property inspections.
- Open cases where there is ongoing or overdue follow-up works/actions arising from fault reports and surveys.
- The number of Category 1 (HHSRS) hazards due to damp and mould.

Narrative - an explanation of the:

- Current position;
- Corrective action being taken;
- And; progress with completion of follow-up works.

13. Non-Compliance/Escalation Process

Our definition of non-compliance is: any damp and condensation occurrence which has not been responded to correctly and has the potential to result in a potential breach of legislation or regulatory standard, or which causes a serious risk to health or safety. All non-compliance issues will be reported and escalated as soon as possible.

Any major damp and mould issues which are not addressed in accordance with the timeframes set out in the procedures will be reported to the Head of Assets and Property Services, who will agree an appropriate course of corrective action with the Director of Housing Services and report details of the same to the Executive Team.

Serious incidents will be reported to the Executive Team within five working days of a serious breach being identified. Serious non-compliance incidents will be reported to the Board within 10 working days of an incident being identified.

In cases of serious non-compliance, the Executive Team and Board will consider whether it is necessary to disclose the issue to the Regulator of Social Housing as required by the regulatory framework, or any other relevant organisation such as the Health and Safety Executive.

14. Linked Policies/ Procedures

Health and Safety policies

Stock condition policy

Damp and mould process and procedures

Complaints and compensation policies

Asset Management Strategy