

# D·A·M·P

DRY AND MOULD-FREE PROPERTIES

# TACKLING DAMP AND MOULD

FIND IT · FIX IT



City of  
Stoke-on-Trent

# INTRODUCTION

## **We take the issue of damp and mould in housing extremely seriously.**

We're Stoke-on-Trent's biggest social housing provider and we care deeply about the quality of accommodation that people live in. Not just in our housing, but all housing types and tenures.

We do not want residents living in properties that suffer from damp and mould. We believe people should live in properties that are safe and healthy. This plan sets out our commitment to doing this, and how we are moving quickly to put in place a range of measures that support our tenants.

Since we came into office in May 2023, we have committed the work of the city council to put improving the lives and wellbeing of residents as our top priority. It is the first concern in everything that we do.

We know that there are challenges with our council housing stock due to when and how some of it was built. But we're adopting a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould: we will find it and fix it.

### **Since May 2023, we have prioritised:**

- A £117m clear programme of investment into council homes.
- Addressing the issue of missed housing repairs and maintenance appointments by establishing clear service standards.
- Established a new programme of work to find and fix damp in council properties and to make council homes better insulated.
- Working collaboratively with other Registered Providers of social housing in Stoke-on-Trent to address damp and mould and raise standards across the city.

### **In our first 100 days in office we have worked at pace to:**

- Launch a new strategy for older people's housing.
- Refresh repairs and maintenance policies and launch a new, specific Damp and Mould Policy.
- Issue for consultation an updated Fuel Poverty Strategy.
- Meet with Registered Providers and agreed to develop a Charter together to raise housing standards across the city.

We are committed to tackling damp and mould in our housing stock as quickly and as completely as we can. In terms of the private rented sector, we will continue to work with and support landlords and tenants to ensure minimum standards are maintained in rented homes, including where necessary through enforcement action. We will also support vulnerable homeowners to tackle cold, damp and mould in their homes. Critically, we want to work with local residents to understand and address barriers to accessing advice, support and services. Help is at hand, and together we will stamp out the pernicious problem of damp and mould in tenants' homes.

### **Councillor Jane Ashworth**

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Leader

# WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

## Council Homes

We know that every year between 15-20% of tenants report some form of damp or mould in their property - and the majority of these reports are made during the autumn and winter months. To meet this demand, we are setting up a dedicated team to respond to reports and complete repairs as quickly as possible.

We will also be reviewing where reports of damp and mould are being made to see if there are any trends in property types or areas. We will be proactively contacting tenants in these areas to ensure that any early signs of damp and mould are addressed. These properties will also be prioritised for works to ensure that any issues due to construction or layout can be addressed.

Finally, we know that some tenants do not access the services they are entitled to and we will be reviewing all of our data to identify these tenants and proactively contacting them to offer support and check on the condition of their home.

**To report a case to us you can fill out our online form by using the QR code on the back page or via the following link: [www.stoke.gov.uk/dmc](http://www.stoke.gov.uk/dmc). Alternatively, you can call: 01782 234100.**



# OUR APPROACH

Through our Damp and Mould Policy we want to create a culture of zero tolerance – where incidents of damp and mould are rare, brief and resolved first time. We will be working collaboratively with our tenants, partners and other housing providers to identify those homes and residents most at risk of the impacts of damp and mould and to tackle the underlying causes. We will achieve this through a combination of preventative and responsive measures by:

- Using a mix of regular expert surveys and technology to ensure that our investment programme is targeted at the properties most susceptible to damp, mould and condensation with the most effective solutions and programmes of work.
- Carrying out a cycle of responsive repairs to alleviate damp, such as work to guttering and drains, and replacing tiles. We will do this as quickly and efficiently as possible to minimise impact on the health of residents and damage to the structure, fixtures and fittings of the property.
- Ensuring that the fabric of properties is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp and mould.
- Raising awareness of issues relating to damp and mould, to ensure residents are able to report concerns easily and in a way that suits them – and we'll investigate those reports in a timely manner.
- Providing access to information in a variety of formats and access to support to help residents prevent and reduce risks of damp and mould in their homes.
- Recognising when residents may be vulnerable and unable to deal with damp and mould issues in their home, ensuring that they get proactive support from us to get the problem solved.
- Working with residents to reduce the number of complaints and disrepair claims regarding damp and mould, and where these occur ensure that they are investigated in a timely manner.
- Helping residents to keep their properties warm. We are consulting on an updated Fuel Poverty Strategy, which is focusing supporting people heat their property efficiently. This is a major part of preventing damp, mould and condensation.
- Ensuring all residents are treated in a fair, respectful, empathetic and consistent way.

To support this work, we have refreshed our leaflets and information to tenants on how to identify and report incidents of damp, mould and condensation. We have established a dedicated website [www.stoke.gov.uk/dmc](http://www.stoke.gov.uk/dmc) so that all residents can get ready access to rapid advice. We have also arranged for all relevant staff to receive appropriate training and we will be extending this programme to cover all staff and sub-contractors who visit residents in their

own home. We will also extend this to other public agencies, like the fire service and health visitors, that may be in people's homes so they can also recognise issues.

We have met with other social housing providers in the city to share with them our commitment and to develop a wider partnership approach to tackling damp and mould in all properties in the city.

## COUNCIL HOUSING

We have agreed to increase our investment programme in council properties to £117m over the next 5 years. This money will be used to make all our properties 'decent' and help tackle the main causes of damp and mould, for example through replacement roofs, upgrading insulation, putting in new boilers and making homes more energy efficient.

We continue to identify types of properties which are susceptible to damp and mould and we will tackle those as early as possible in our planned programmes around energy efficiency and decent homes standards. We have entered into a partnership with Switchee to install damp and humidity meters in a number of properties to help us monitor issues and improve the information we hold about potential risks in some property types.

We are now carrying out annual checks for damp and mould across all our properties and ensure effective repairs are arranged and carried out, in conjunction with our planned programme of works. These inspections will be carried out alongside the work of gas safety engineers as part of our commitment to making every contact count when it comes to providing good quality, safe homes to all tenants. We are also continuing our programme of proactive calls to all tenants to ensure that we have up to date information about the household, including any vulnerabilities, and to check over the phone if there are any issues of damp and mould in the property.

By doing this, we are working to minimise any damage resulting from damp and mould to properties and tenants' personal belongings. Uritas works closely with our Housing Management Teams to obtain access to all properties to ensure that these checks are completed.

Where issues are identified, we will work quickly to resolve underlying causes in order to eradicate damp and mould wherever possible. Throughout this process, we will keep tenants informed about the works and planned timescales. If

works proves to be significantly disruptive, our Housing Management and Repairs teams will ensure appropriate support is put in place – particularly for vulnerable residents.

We will make sure that tenants are aware of how to use ventilation and heating systems efficiently. But we know that the cost of energy is high is a concern to a lot of households. So, we will be providing,tenants with advice and support with the cost of living including access to fuel vouchers to those most in need.

We want to fix issues at the first opportunity, and to help with this, we’ll be following up on the repairs that we carry out to make sure the same issue isn’t reoccurring. We know that there may be times when things go wrong and should this happen we will respond swiftly and thoroughly to rectify mistakes – avoiding the need for tenants to take matters further.

All of these actions and improvements have been developed by working closely with tenants through our the Tenants Voice initiative. We are committed to continuing to work collaboratively with our tenants to deliver the best possible standards of service.

## Our Commitments

Guidance says Housing Providers should:	We will
Undertake periodic checks on their properties to check for damp and mould	Undertake an annual review of properties to check for damp and mould and use this information to target repairs and planned programmes of work.
Adopt a strategic approach to energy efficiency	Prioritise energy efficiency measures within the investment programme.
Work with tenants collaboratively to address and prevent issues of damp and mould	Continue to work with tenants through our tenant’s voice initiative to help us to continue to improve.
Use stock condition information to predict properties susceptible to damp and mould	Review our Asset Management IT system to improve the recording of data on damp and mould to inform our programmes of planned works.
Promote multi-disciplinary working	Work with colleagues across the council to ensure that they know how to report concerns about damp and mould in residents’ homes.

Over the next five years we will be investing £50.6 million on works to ensure all council properties meet the Decent Homes Standard, we will also be investing an additional £16.2 million in energy efficiency measures.

## CASE STUDY 1 - UNITAS RESPONSIVE

We received a call from a tenant experiencing mould in one of the bedrooms of their home. At the inspection we identified that the pattern of the mould indicated a lack of insulation and defective guttering was making the problem worse. Within three weeks we had cleared all of the mould, installed new loft installation, repaired the gutter and repainted the ceiling where the mould had stained the paintwork.

Twelve months on and the tenant reports that there have been no further issues of damp and mould in the house.



Before and After



# PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

We recognise that issues of damp and mould are also prevalent in the private sector housing, particularly in the private rented sector. We are working to ensure support is in place for homeowners, landlords and tenants to address issues in this sector and our Enforcement Teams are working to take action where landlords fail in their duties.

Our teams have reviewed cases where damp and mould was an issue to ensure all appropriate actions have been taken and the issues have been addressed. We are ensuring that our offers of financial support to vulnerable home owners are appropriate to help address issues where they are identified.

We have put in place new reporting arrangements to enable so that tenants can to include photos to more easily explain the damp and mould that they experience can be made using a number of methods including email, phone or the website. See the information on page 11 for more. In addition, teams have reviewed all processes and procedures to ensure that reports of damp and mould are effectively managed. All complaints relating to property conditions in the private-rented sector are inspected by the Private Sector Housing Team to ensure that issues are properly assessed. Any reports of damp and mould in privately rented homes will be treated as high priority cases.

Our aim is to ensure that all landlords are aware of their responsibilities in relation to tackling damp and mould and we will raise awareness of national guidance on managing damp and mould through all of our contacts with private sector landlords.

## **CASE STUDY 2 - PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT**

Over the past five years we have received 2,684 complaints about property disrepair in the private rented sector.

When we receive complaints, we arrange an inspection and assess the property for hazards. Damp and mould is one of the 29 hazards assessed at a property.

In 2022 the team received 656 complaints of disrepair/dampness in private rented properties and served 16 notices/orders.



## Our Commitments

Guidance says Landlords should:	We will
Be aware of their legal responsibilities in relation to providing rented accommodation – including the standards required	Ensure that all contacts with landlords highlight the national guidance on addressing damp and mould.
Urgently assess damp and mould reports to identify severity and tackle underlying cases promptly	Inspect rapidly all private rented properties where complaints of damp and mould are made by the tenant and take enforcement action against landlords who do not address the issues.
Understand barriers which may stop people reporting damp and mould issues	Promote the role of the Private Sector Housing Team, particularly in locations where we know households are at higher risk from the impacts of damp and mould

### CASE STUDY 3

We are delivering the third phase of an initiative to improve energy efficiency measures in private sector housing. Overall this project is providing 349 energy efficiency measures across 260 properties.

Since April 2023 we have completed Safe and Warm Home Grants for vulnerable home owners in 50 properties. A total of 42 households have received works to treat the underlying causes of damp, mould or condensation.

#### Example:

Works to this property were funded by a combination of the Local Authority Delivery Scheme and the Safe and Warm Homes Grant. Works funded by this scheme included:

- Removal of radiators and pipework
- Replacement central heating system
- wall Insulation
- Isolate and reinstate electrical sockets and carry out remedial electrical works
- Plumber on site to isolate water, remove and reinstate WC, basin and complete other plumbing works



The homeowner stated that ‘the end product is fantastic and I can feel the difference in my home already. I am very happy and very grateful.’

# TRACKING PROGRESS AND ENSURING DELIVERY

We will be fully transparent with respect to both the scale of the works we undertake and the progress we are making in addressing it.

With respect to our own council housing, each year we will publish the number of properties where we judge that there is a damp and mould issue based on our survey work. We will set out how many properties will be addressed through our investment programme. We will also publish the number of cases we receive and poor timeliness in dealing with them.

And if we don't always get it right, we will also publish the number of complaints we receive and how we deal with them.

Where necessary we will encourage other social landlords in the city to be equally transparent.

With respect to private landlords, we will publish information every six months about the number of complaints we have received and how we have dealt with them, including use of any enforcement action.

The council's cabinet – the main decision-making body – will endorse and monitor progress of this plan, with the involvement of the Housing Development and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Tenants Voice, plus the Shareholder Group which monitors the delivery and performance of the repairs service. The Shareholder Group consists of the Leader of the Council, City Director, Cabinet member for Housing and the Director of Housing, Development and Growth plus other relevant senior officers.



# REPORTING DAMP AND MOULD

## Council Tenants:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council and our repairs company Unitas are committed to keeping your home free from damp, mould and condensation. We take all cases seriously, and want to know if there is an issue in your home.

To report a case to us you can fill out our online form by using the QR code on the back page or via the following link: [www.stoke.gov.uk/dmc](http://www.stoke.gov.uk/dmc).

Alternatively, you can call: **01782 234100**.

Tell the operator right away that it is a damp and mould issue and they will get you through to the right team who will deal with your report as soon as possible.

**If you would like to be involved in our work on damp and mould, or any other issue affecting your home, tenancy or neighbourhood please contact us at [Housing.Engagement@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:Housing.Engagement@stoke.gov.uk) or call 01782 235916.**

## REPORTING PROBLEMS

If you wish to complain about a privately rented property which is affecting your safety or health, you can follow these steps in order to report it to your landlord.

- You must give your landlord or agent the opportunity to respond before contacting us.
- If you think the problem is posing a risk to your health and safety, then contact your landlord or agent verbally now.

Contact us if no action is taken: If you have followed the steps listed inside this document and need to report this to us, please use our online form: [Report an issue with your property | Instructions \(stoke.gov.uk\)](#)

Safe and Warm Homes grants are available to help improve living conditions by increasing energy efficiency and alleviating the impact of cold homes on residents who are vulnerable to the cold. The eligibility criteria for this grant is contained within the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy available here: [Housing Renewal Assistance Policy | Stoke-on-Trent](#)

If you believe that you or someone you know in the city may be eligible, please contact the Private Sector Housing Team on 01782 234474 or email [safeandwarmhomes@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:safeandwarmhomes@stoke.gov.uk)

