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# NOTICE OF MEETING

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## HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 13 MARCH 2024 AT 4.00 PM

THE EXECUTIVE MEETING ROOM - THIRD FLOOR, THE GUILDHALL,  
PORTSMOUTH

Telephone enquiries to Anna Martyn Tel 023 9283 4870

Email: [democratic@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:democratic@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

If any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting has access requirements, please notify the contact named above.

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### Membership

Councillor Raymond Dent (Chair)  
Councillor Graham Heaney (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Lewis Gosling

Councillor Leo Madden  
Councillor Leonie Oliver  
Vacancy

### Standing Deputies

Councillor Ryan Brent  
Councillor Jason Fazackarley  
Councillor George Fielding

Councillor George Madgwick  
Councillor Daniel Wemyss

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(NB This Agenda should be retained for future reference with the minutes of this meeting.)

Please note that the agenda, minutes and non-exempt reports are available to view online on the Portsmouth City Council website: [www.portsmouth.gov.uk](http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk)

## AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Declarations of interest
- 3 Minutes of previous meeting held on 13 July 2023 (Pages 3 - 6)

**RECOMMENDED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

**4 Response of the Local Authority and Landlords in the city to the issue of damp and mould in social housing and private rented housing (Pages 7 - 66)**

**RECOMMENDED that the panel sign off its report and submit it to Cabinet for consideration.**

Members of the public are now permitted to use both audio visual recording devices and social media during this meeting, on the understanding that it neither disrupts the meeting or records those stating explicitly that they do not wish to be recorded. Guidance on the use of devices at meetings open to the public is available on the Council's website and posters on the wall of the meeting's venue.

# Agenda Item 3

## HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held in the Guildhall on Thursday 13 July 2023 at 3 pm

### Present

Councillor Kirsty Mellor (in the Chair)  
Ryan Brent  
Graham Heaney  
Leo Madden  
George Madgwick

Resident Consortium representative  
Maria Cole

James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services  
Steve Groves, Head of Building Maintenance  
Adam Hardwick, Assistant Director (Buildings)  
Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director (Buildings)  
Sally Scattergood, Assistant Director, Housing

#### 5. Apologies (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Raymond Dent and Lewis Gosling. Councillors George Madgwick and Ryan Brent deputised for them respectively.

#### 6. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 7. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 March 2023 (AI 3)

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

#### 8. Review into "Response of the Local Authority and Landlords in the city to the issue of damp and mould in social housing and private rented housing" (AI 4)

Councillor Mellor welcomed those present and gave a brief introduction to the review.

In response to Councillor Brent's comment that the panel should focus on outcomes, James Hill advised the panel could assist Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services (HNBS) in its approach to damp and mould and how it responds to damp and mould in its own housing stock. It could suggest changes in approach to other registered social landlords and the private rented sector. The panel needed to be mindful that in the background the government were scrutinising how landlords deal with damp and mould and further guidance may follow.

The panel agreed they wanted to hear residents' perspectives. It was harder to reach private sector tenants but officers said contact could be made via the Private Sector Housing team and tenants' forums. At a development session of the Health & Wellbeing Board that Councillor Heaney had attended the previous day it was noted that the cause of damp and mould was often attributed to tenants' lifestyles and the aim was to move away from that assumption.

Tenants could put their experiences in writing if they felt uncomfortable about attending a meeting. The panel thought it was sensible to have separate meetings for council and private sector tenants as the processes for dealing with damp and mould were very different in different sectors. Councillor Brent urged that tenants from all of Portsmouth's geographical area should be represented so that the review would show findings from the entire city.

Maria Cole suggested publicising the review via the minutes of the Residents' Consortium meetings as the minutes were seen by far more people than attended the meetings. Heidi Golder, Resident Engagement Team Leader, was the point of contact for the Consortium.

Councillor Madgwick asked if residents were aware of the process for reporting damp and mould. A resident at his surgery could not find information on the council's website on how to report it.

Officers said it was up to the panel if they wanted to talk to landlords and, if so, before or after they met tenants. It might be advisable to hear tenants' experiences first and then talk to landlords. Councillor Brent said the review should focus on good news stories as praise was just as important.

Councillor Madgwick asked how long tenants waited before reporting damp and mould. Some might wait until the situation was extreme. Councillor Madden said his first case as a councillor was damp and mould and the response every time was that the cause was condensation. It was unfortunate it took a child's death (two-year-old Awaab Ishak in December 2020 from mould related causes) for the government to act. He asked the following questions:

- How many tenancies had damp and mould?
- What is the attitude to tenants now and is it different from before?
- What happened when damp and mould came from an adjoining private sector property?
- What were the timescales? How long did it take to resolve problems from start to finish?
- How many people have to be rehoused because of damp and mould?
- How many have to be rehoused because of the state of buildings?

He asked if the training on regulating non-compliance in the private rented sector could be truncated so officers could be trained sooner. Officers explained half the team were currently studying and due to complete shortly and then more of the team would be put through the course from September. All regulation team members undergo Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and enforcement training as part of their induction and

receive specific training in damp and mould and enforcing on this in line with the HHSRS.

Councillor Mellor said residents had told her they had been told it was condensation. However, tools and training for dealing with damp and mould were also important. Councillor Brent said people being listened to was key but expectations needed to be realistic so residents should not be told the matter would be resolved in two days when it could not.

The panel agreed the scoping document, whilst being aware it was a flexible document that could be adapted as the review progressed.

The meeting concluded at 3.24 pm.

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Councillor Kirsty Mellor  
Chair

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# Portsmouth

## CITY COUNCIL

### HOUSING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

### REVIEW INTO THE RESPONSE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AND LANDLORDS IN THE CITY TO THE ISSUE OF DAMP AND MOULD IN SOCIAL HOUSING AND PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING

Date published: 13 March 2024

Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.

## PREFACE

As the Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (published in 2020) states, "A home should always be more than just four walls and a roof. A home should provide safety, security and dignity." Everyone should have a decent and safe home to live in.

The council has seen an increase in reported incidents of damp and mould so this could be an opportunity to understand the issue better. Damp and mould has also increasingly come under the spotlight, particularly after the death of a two-year-old boy, Awaab Ishak, in 2020 from a respiratory condition caused by prolonged exposure to mould.

If residents have poor quality housing their quality of life will be severely impacted, affecting their health, wellbeing and daily life. The World Health Organization calls damp and mould a key element of indoor air pollution, and a major cause of illness and death worldwide. In the wake of the Covid pandemic preventing respiratory conditions is even more vital.

Therefore, the main objective of the review was to learn about tenants' experiences of damp and mould and what could be done to provide consistent and good services and improve standards.

The panel would like to thank James Hill (Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services), Jo Bennett (Assistant Director, Housing Need & Supply), Martyn Collins (Building Repairs Manager), Michael Conway (Senior Housing Regulation Officer), Antonia Craze (Senior Energy Officer), Mark Fitch (Head of Local Authority Housing), Steve Groves (Head of Building Maintenance), Adam Hardwick (Assistant Director, Buildings), Clare Hardwick (Head of Private Sector Housing), Meredydd Hughes (Assistant Director, Buildings), Gemma Moreau (Landlord & Tenant Support Officer), Sally Scattergood (Assistant Director, Housing), the Residents' Consortium, Southern Housing and local landlords for providing information and responding to members' questions.

The Chair would like to record thanks to the panel and in particular to Councillors Graham Heaney and Leo Madden for attending all seven scrutiny meetings this year. The Chair did however note that some members of the panel did not attend the meetings or participate in the review and encourages Democratic Services officers to reach out to councillors with low or no attendance to see how to encourage or assist them in improving their future attendance.

Councillor Raymond Dent  
Chair, Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel.

Date: 13 March 2024



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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel's review into the response of the Local Authority and Landlords in the city to the issue of damp and mould in social housing and private rented housing.

### **Objectives**

On 15 June 2023 the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel (henceforth referred to in this report as "the panel") met informally with Andy Biddle (Director of Adult Social Care), James Hill (Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services), Jo Bennett (Assistant Director, Housing Need & Supply) and Sally Scattergood (Assistant Director, Housing), to discuss ideas and topics for a review in the 2023-2024 municipal year. The panel agreed the topic should focus on housing as the previous review was social care related.

On 13 July 2023 the panel met to agree the scoping document and plan a timeline for the review.

The panel agreed on the following objectives:

- Seek to understand the cause and extent of any damp and mould in council owned and socially rented properties in the city
- Examine the current approach that the council and landlords take in preventing and dealing with damp and mould in properties, with a view to making recommendations for improvements, if necessary.
- Assess how effective the council's regulatory framework is in addressing damp and mould issues, with a view to making recommendations for improvements, if necessary
- Calling upon tenants and their experience to inform the scrutiny

Findings from the review could help improve standards and share good practice amongst providers. The review could also show the advantages and disadvantages of different practices amongst different housing sectors.

The topic was formally approved by the Scrutiny Management Panel at its meeting on 26 July 2023.

On 5 October 2023 the panel heard from council tenants, including representatives from the Residents' Consortium.

On 9 November 2023 the panel heard from housing association tenants.

On 7 December 2023 the panel heard from private rented sector tenants.

On 21 February 2024 the panel heard from private rented sector landlords.

On 27 February 2024 the panel heard from a housing association.

The review was started by the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel which comprised:

Councillors    Kirsty Mellor (Chair)  
                      Raymond Dent (Vice-Chair)  
                      Lewis Gosling  
                      Graham Heaney  
                      Leo Madden  
                      Leonie Oliver

Standing Deputies were Councillors Ryan Brent, Jason Fazackarley, George Fielding, George Madgwick and Daniel Wemyss.

Councillor Mellor stood down as Chair on 11 September 2023. Councillors Dent and Heaney were appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively at Full Council on 17 October 2023.

The minutes of the panel's formal meetings are published on the council's website at

[Browse meetings - Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel Portsmouth City Council](#)

### **Background to damp and mould**

#### **What causes damp and mould?**

There are four types of damp:

- Rising damp - water rising through ground into home
- Penetrating damp - external walls or ceilings because of external defect
- Defective plumbing - leaks from water and waste pipes
- Condensation - when moist air comes into contact with colder surfaces

With regard to penetrating damp and plumbing as a cause of damp, it is interesting to note that a survey carried out as part of the Housing and Social Care Scrutiny Panel's review in 2021-2022 into "Procedures and performance of PCC and housing associations in relation to response repairs and maintenance" leaks were the most common problem. Sources of leaks were ceilings, taps, showers, toilets, gutters, overflows and roofs. One response was "leaks, leaks and more leaks."

#### **Why is damp and mould dangerous?**

As explained in an article on the BBC News website (15 November 2022) about the death of Awaab Ishak, moulds are caused by too much moisture in a building and they emit spores which can cause a variety of health effects. Inhaling or touching mould spores may cause an allergic reaction such as sneezing, a runny nose, red eyes and a skin rash. Some people are particularly sensitive to spores, such as babies, young children, older people, those with allergies, asthma, skin problems or a weakened immune system. It can worsen musculoskeletal conditions such as arthritis. It affects mental health, with depression and anxiety more common among people living in these conditions. For those with allergies, breathing in or touching mould spores can cause severe reactions, including asthma attacks, fever and shortness of breath. This is why respiratory problems, infections or asthma are more likely if there is damp or mould in homes and why the World Health Organization calls it a key element of indoor air pollution, and a major cause of illness and death worldwide.

[Awaab Ishak: Mould in Rochdale flat caused boy's death, coroner rules - BBC News](#)

According to the "Health inequalities report: Cold or damp homes" from the House of Commons Library (published in February 2023), the NHS spends an estimated £1.4 billion annually on treating illnesses associated with living in cold or damp housing. When wider societal costs are considered, such as healthcare, that figure rises to £15.4 billion. According to [the English Housing Survey](#), around 904,000 homes in England had damp problems in 2021. Of these, around 11% in the private rented sector had damp problems compared with 4% in the social-rented sector and 2% of owner-occupied homes.

[CBP-9696.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

### **Background to review**

At its meeting on 13 July 2023 the panel heard from Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services officers. The following information was given to the panel in advance of the meeting (included in the report as appendices):

- Letter from Secretary of State on rented property standards
- Letter to CEOs of large registered social housing providers
- Initial response to Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
- Local authority returns for damp and mould in private rented sector
- Registered Social Landlord damp and mould return
- PCC Housing staff bulletin
- Damp and mould leaflet for PCC tenants

Officers explained damp and mould is not a new phenomenon in UK homes but following the coroner's November 2022 report into the death of two-year old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale in 2020, which made a direct link between the damp conditions in his home and his death, the issue has been given more focus both nationally and locally.

As a local authority PCC's responsibilities to manage damp and mould varies dependent on the tenure type of the property concerned:

- Local Authority Housing role of the landlord.
- Private Rented Sector supporting landlords and tenants and where necessary taking enforcement action.
- Housing Association working collaboratively to ensure consistent approaches across the city.

In November 2022 DLUHC (Department for Levelling, Housing & Communities) asked all larger registered providers of social housing to submit evidence to them about the extent of damp and mould in tenants' homes and their approach to tackling it. As the largest provider of social housing in the city PCC has always investigated and responded to incidents of damp and mould where they have come to attention. As a landlord PCC was already reviewing how it responded to these incidents and had made improvements to the process which allowed it to provide a more robust response with the intention that residents feel more supported to get damp and mould incidents in their homes resolved.

The panel could assist Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services in its approach and response to damp and mould in its own housing stock. It could suggest changes

in approach to other registered social landlords and the private rented sector but needed to be mindful that the government were scrutinising how landlords deal with damp and mould and further guidance may follow.

In response to a query about truncating training on regulating non-compliance with housing standards in the private rented sector so that staff could be trained sooner, officers explained half the team were currently studying and due to complete shortly and then more of the team would be do the course from September 2023. All regulation team members undergo Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and enforcement training as part of their induction and receive specific training in damp and mould and enforcing on this in line with the HHSRS.

### **Meetings with tenants**

The panel thought it sensible to have separate meetings for each category of tenants as the processes for dealing with damp and mould were very different in different sectors. All tenants were offered the opportunity to submit written comments if they were unable to or preferred not to attend a meeting. The meeting for PCC tenants was publicised through the Residents' Consortium. Meetings for housing association and private rented sector tenants were publicised through posts on the council's Facebook page, direct contact with a private tenants' forum, and tenants who had participated in informal meetings for the Repairs review. The panel had mentioned the meetings to residents but found some non-PCC tenants were reluctant to attend as they were wary it could affect their tenancies even though the meetings were not public and participants would remain anonymous.

### **Meeting with PCC tenants**

On 5 October 2023 four PCC tenants attended an informal meeting together with Martyn Collins (Building Repairs Manager), Mark Fitch (Head of Local Authority Housing), Steve Groves (Head of Building Maintenance), Adam Hardwick (Assistant Director, Buildings), James Hill (Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services) and Sally Scattergood (Assistant Director, Housing). The tenants lived in the central, south and north of Portsmouth so there was good geographical representation of the city.

### **Experiences with damp and mould**

Tenants shared their experiences of damp and mould. Square-ended guttering was a problem when it got blocked. Officers said PCC could clean it out if details were provided. PCC wanted to resolve and prevent damp penetration, especially where there were trees, and wanted tenants to say when there were problems. Another tenant had problems with guttering which was screwed together so "drips like mad" when it rains. When some work was done (not by PCC) four to five years ago scaffolding was not used and created holes in the roof tiles. Officers said it was rare for a PCC property to have damp and mould because of a neighbouring non-PCC property but in such cases Housing would speak to the owner as it would probably be very bad in their property. Guttering and water services were the most likely causes in such situations.

Another tenant had damp in his property since 2014 and mould but his neighbour did not. When he had a wet room installed in 2015 the plumber did not make the connections very well so it was leaking. In 2020 it was ripped out and then a very good plumber fixed it. PCC had told him that with a north-facing bathroom wall he would always get damp and condensation unless the windows were open or the

heating on. A pine chest of drawers in a bedroom and pouches for a laminating machine have got damp and mould and he has complained many times. He was told he was putting damp clothes in a wardrobe. Water has poured through a light fitting and come through walls. He had been given a voucher for cleaning and painting. The property was built on a marsh. Officers said damp in a south-facing room could be due to several factors, for example, less thermal heat from the sun.

Another tenant had a severe reaction to dry heat so cannot use radiators. Advice on heating properties was usually to have a low constant heat rather than full blast all day. When there was a bath there was mould all the time but not since having a shower installed 2.5 years ago so the tenant wondered what made the difference. The mechanical extraction system had not been upgraded. The maisonette was very old and the property underneath had damp and mould. She had been there for 34 years and if she saw mould she would spray and scrub it with watered down bleach, as advised. There was a leak at the front of the property and the bathroom ceiling fell into the bath of the flat beneath. Something like mould is a continual thing. The tenant had heard it was a priority but not always now and sometimes got the feeling that if tenants mention damp and mould they were being a pain. PCC should tell residents how to deal with it and not have the attitude "that woman's phoned about mould." In his working life one of the officers had come across the "it's your problem" attitude but PCC has taken steps to improve as it has a duty of care. Condensation mould was the most difficult type to fix and eradicate and for residents to manage. Every case was different so Housing had to work with residents and contractors.

One tenant had spoken to residents and scheme managers in the Somerstown area who reported no problems with damp and mould in the high-rise blocks. Officers said there have been incidences in high-rise blocks but the construction was noticeably different from other buildings.

### Processes

With regard to reporting damp and mould, officers explained the service was demand led but Housing always emphasised to staff, including Estate Service Officers, to notice the conditions of properties when they did block inspections. Some problems like guttering might only be noticed when it was raining but all staff should go around with their eyes open. Even if there were no obvious repairs Housing could add more ventilation or an extra radiator.

Housing staff have had additional briefings so even if a resident did not mention damp and mould but staff noticed it they would act. Housing were talking to colleagues and were keen to share their training across Directorates via the Health & Wellbeing Board so people like social workers or midwives could act if they saw it when they visited homes. Steve Groves and his team were creating a new damp and mould policy which the scrutiny process would feed into. Housing would continue to take feedback and could learn from what the panel reported works and what does not so it relies on councillors and residents to keep officers informed. Housing will consult with the Residents' Consortium on the policy.

Officers were learning from the increased reporting of damp and mould in the last year. Housing always send a surveyor to do an initial diagnosis and to test humidity, not just ventilation, as the problem could be rising damp or a roof leak. Surveyors arrange any necessary repairs, provide advice to residents and offer support,

especially bearing in mind the cost of living crisis. LEAP referrals are offered to Switched On Portsmouth as officers recognise that heating properties is difficult. Housing was increasing the surveys it was doing on damp and mould rather than waiting for residents to notify them. It carried out surveys as part of the decision making process when buying properties.

Within a six-month period officers contact the resident again to ensure the situation has not recurred. A whole raft of reasons like construction and maintenance can cause damp and mould; there was not one answer. The surveyors try to give quick tools to resolve it; they can instal data loggers in more extreme situations. A difference this year is a more robust survey form, for example, what caused it, taking photos so after six months other staff can see what was done. Traditionally Housing had been more reactive but it was being more proactive to resolve issues, for example, surveys on the type of properties affected. Energy Performance Certificates sometimes indicate problems with damp and mould so Housing could examine energy performance data to target issues.

Martyn Collins said PCC had a duty of care and wanted to work with residents, at least until the mould was at a manageable level. The new policy had a hierarchy of engagement with the first level being low level advice, for example, easy washdowns. The next stage might be upgrading existing mechanical ventilation, warming up surfaces or a desk study. Issues would not go to the bottom of the hierarchy but could skip stages.

### Communications

Housing had a new leaflet explaining how to prevent and treat damp and mould but they were not hand delivered; they are given to tenants where officers see a problem in a property. House Talk (the council's quarterly magazine for tenants and leaseholders) had regular items on damp and mould. The panel suggested giving supplies of leaflets to councillors, especially in areas with higher levels of social housing, to give to tenants who might need or benefit from them.

A tenant asked if community leaders could be given leaflets as residents might be more likely to listen to them than people from the council. She is a community champion and trustee of the Urbond charity which works with refugees, unaccompanied minors, City of Sanctuary so could help disseminate information. Other organisations like mosques or groups such as Chinese residents have their own support groups. A bugbear was forms, leaflets, House Talk etc giving advice about getting versions in braille or another language in English which people might not understand. Officers agreed it was difficult trying to reach tenants but leaflets are published in different languages with mainly pictorial content. Housing was constantly working on communication needs with residents and are seeing if particular needs could be put on record. Housing was thinking of short, sharp videos as dealing with multiple languages was easier on video than printing lots of leaflets, though they appreciate residents need access to social media. Tenants thought some residents would benefit so the idea should proceed. The panel asked if councillors could have copies of House Talk so they could be aware of advice given to PCC tenants and leaseholders.

With existing and new tenants the biggest issue was that Housing sent letters, had posters in Community Centres and articles in House Talk and still residents say they do not know how to contact Housing so PCC needs to pause and listen carefully on

how to reach them. A resident at the surgery of one of the panel members could not find information on the council's website on how to report it. A tenant suggested noticeboards in stairwells could have information in addition to how to contact councillors. She realised it was hard for PCC and it was not a failure on PCC's part to use people like her to get messages out on what residents and PCC do with damp and mould.

### Responsibilities

A tenant noted that with all dealings with PCC tenants have obligations to know what is down to them and what is down to PCC. With mould what is the residents' responsibility to deal with it and when does PCC come into it? It was really hard to differentiate where the residents' and PCC's responsibility ended. It has to be treated on a case-by-case basis. Officers totally agreed every case was slightly different with regards to who does what or where the problem is occurring which is why PCC was tracking reports on how often it was happening. Either messaging on how to prevent it was not getting through or was not working. New tenants receive the damp and mould leaflet as Housing wants people to report it as soon as possible. Housing could remind them of the full advice in the leaflet or suggest Switched On Portsmouth. The burden was on PCC to get residents to tell them rather than deal it with themselves. Some residents will call to report problems but others do not so Housing has a responsibility to be pro-active.

With regard to decoration, Housing would decorate at the same time as doing repairs if the tenant was part of a special decoration scheme, for instance, they had a disability. However, if a room needed painting, Housing would probably do it, particularly in bathrooms where there was not usually much wall space. Housing does not use anti-mould paint; over time the anti-mould agent disappears so the paint becomes like an ordinary emulsion.

### Collecting data

Housing has collected data for the last three to four years so they could learn demand and find out how quickly it had reacted. This year complaints are being recorded slightly differently in order to learn more, for example, the types of property which get the most condensation, the causes of damp and how to be more pro-active. These were usually properties PCC had bought but not built with pre-war terraced housing comprising the highest percentage, followed by those with concrete ring beams, especially where the beams were not insulated. PCC had given a submission to central government as requested describing how it dealt with damp and mould (included in the background information for the panel). However, the process was not perfect and Housing could consider and implement ideas from residents and councillors. The panel's recommendations were about PCC as a landlord and PCC had to be consistent across all its housing stock in Portsmouth and Havant. Housing wanted to return to residents to see if policies were working.

Housing Associations (HA) collected data and many had written to PCC setting out their approach which was often similar. HAs also had to provide data to central government and some were creating special damp and mould teams. HAs were consulting with tenants and although they would take on their views, writing policies and processes was usually done at quite a high level in HAs.

PCC had 14,700 rented properties and 1,700 leasehold properties. Leaseholders who lived in flats received the same services as tenants so Housing would inspect to see if it was rising damp, penetrating damp or condensation. Housing has not been



inundated with damp and mould problems and there was no significant cause for concern but in the light of the Rochdale case it was an opportunity to review its processes. The number of complaints about damp and mould is very low. Only 11 applications to the Housing Needs & Advice Service to move cited it as a reason and that was alongside other reasons. It was not the same situation as Rochdale where perhaps there was a one-size-fits-all approach to treating damp and mould and it was seen as a lifestyle issue. However, occasionally it is caused by a lifestyle issue or could have been hidden for several years.

### **Meeting with Housing Association tenants**

On 9 November 2023 one Housing Association (HA) tenant and an observer attended an informal meeting together with Antonia Craze (Senior Energy Officer), Clare Hardwick (Head of Private Sector Housing) and Sally Scattergood (Assistant Director, Housing).

### **Processes**

Officers outlined the process for housing association (HA) tenants if they have problems with damp and mould. The first port of call was their landlord who should advise, support and rectify the matter. If that route fails then tenants should follow the HA's internal complaints procedure and if that was unsuccessful then go to the Housing Ombudsman. If there is no support and a risk to health tenants can contact the Private Sector Housing (PSH) Team, who will ask if the steps outlined above have been taken. The PSH Team will inspect the property using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) criteria which identifies potential hazards. The HHSRS is a statutory government policy, not the council's own policy. However, damp and mould does not always score highly on the HHSRS framework. Operating guidance for the HHSRS had not changed in a number of years but the government recognises it needs updating so as a result of their review hazards may be higher scoring. Officers assess how much exposure there is to damp and mould, for example, there is less exposure by a front door than in a bedroom. They look at "harm outcomes" and the likely consequences. Unless it is particularly severe it is unlikely to score as category 1 (the most severe) where PCC has a legal duty to deal with it. However, PCC's local policy is to take action when there are risks. PCC does not step away completely and would tell the landlord what they would expect them to do to address the situation in the property.

Officers will see if damp and mould is connected to repairs as that is where landlords are expected to act. However, PCC would still step in to help. At the end of 2022 some providers had provided information on how they support and advise tenants. When officers visit properties for any reason they may notice issues with heating, for example, someone worried about using it because of the cost, but officers are trained to refer them to Switched On who can help advise with reducing fuel costs. Switched On has a free phone advice line. Qualified energy engineers could do home visits and carry out small improvements such as providing LED light bulbs and installing draught proofing. If someone is struggling to pay bills Switched On can refer them to funded schemes, for example, for more energy efficient white goods. The energy advisors are from LEAP with whom the council works in partnership. It is a nationwide organisation but impartial so not part of the government.

### **Complaints**

A panel member had a case where the HA said it needed the tenant's permission to become involved in a complaint. Housing providers were responsible for protecting

tenants' data and had to be mindful of GDPR requirements. Damp and mould sometimes involved personal information as it affected health. The requirements could perhaps be by-passed if there was some sort of standing agreement. HAs would have to agree how to deal with such complaints where there was no explicit consent. However, permission is assumed when the tenant is included in an email trail. The point could potentially go on the agenda of the regular forum meetings with registered social housing providers.

Tenants might contact councillors if they had spent a lot of time trying to get help or perhaps were afraid to complain. They cannot complain anonymously as the landlord needs to know which property to go to in order to assess it. HA tenants have assured tenancies and from officers' experience of working in HAs would be surprised if there was any push back with complaints. Where situations become entrenched Housing can step in, not so much to enforce but to see what the landlord has done already.

The tenant said they may have exhausted all other options and be infuriated or have communication problems or no trust in the landlord. PCC should get involved earlier as tenants could get fobbed off trying to get a result from the HA. He asked what they can do if they run into a complete dead stop. Officers said it was not a black and white process of going to formal complaints and then the Ombudsman. Complaints should have been resolved before going to the Ombudsman. PCC's involvement is around the severity of the issue and mostly deals with the private rented sector where there is no other clear procedure. Its role is to intervene to ensure the landlord meets their legal obligation of providing a safe property to live in. PCC can advise on how to report the issue and maintain an auditable trail. It will always triage enquiries and go out to assess properties and make contact directly. Sometimes the issue is a breakdown in communications and it is surprising how often that happens. If the landlord ultimately refuses to do anything or ignores emails and phone calls from the tenant, PCC has an enforcement policy so can escalate matters if there is no progress. It can serve notices (quite a lot had been served in the last ten years) with financial penalties and apply sanctions including prosecution and hefty fines. If "works in default" were needed PCC would do the work and charge them back to the landlord.

### Communication

As to how tenants know help from PCC exists in the first place, there were various communications with information on the website, workshops and tenants' forums.

The tenant said with his HA the only source of information was one result on the website, leading to a condescending leaflet which put all the blame on the tenant and their lifestyle choices. It suggested using chemicals and bleaches which could be a significant cost or dangerous. It contained stereotypical information such as too many people in the property or wiping down the shower after use. It is case of "do these things and then we'll come out" whereas it should be "probably our fault, we'll come and look but in the meantime do this." There is a lot of information on what tenants can do but not what the HA can do.

The tenant's HA had carried out their own review into damp and mould as part of greater engagement with tenants and one finding was that information about work was not passed on or appointments were missed with no explanation. The panel

noted some HAs did not always have dedicated phone lines and have to go through a contact centre and repeat their story. Contact centres can create barriers.

One tenant had five missed appointments. Having had to tell a white lie to their employer why they could not come to work they could not then go when the appointment was missed. It was not so much negligent work but communication problems. The panel noted communications were a major problem and asked if there was anything PCC could do. Officers could raise the issues at the forum. Communication is an issue which comes up all the time, including at PCC. Sometimes there is too much focus on doing the work and parts of the communication loop are missed.

### Responsibilities

With regard to tenants' liability, officers said that under tenancy agreements they had a responsibility to keep the property in good order. Repairs are the landlords' responsibility. If there were no extenuating circumstances like illness the landlord could take action against a tenant and end the tenancy, more so in the private rented sector. Managing damp and mould is for everyone so tenants need to manage it, for example, by managing moisture levels.

As to tenants being liable if they could not afford to heat their homes, for example, a large Victorian house, officers said they would not. They would be advised to contact Switched On who could help see if there was any income they could receive which they were not already, for example, benefits they were entitled to, and if any modifications could be done to the property. There may be a time when the property is not right for the person so Housing Need & Supply could support them meet their needs. One of the surprising findings from the HA's review was that a house can be too warm; it sometimes needs an extractor fan.

The tenant asked where the carrot and stick were when landlords use contractors as it seems the former blame the latter. It seems there is a lot of slack so landlords get away with it. Officers said the contractor is ultimately there on behalf of the HA, who should investigate any problems. With missed appointments or poor repairs the HA could award compensation to the tenant and then make the contractor reimburse the costs. Managing contracts involves managing performance data, for example, missed appointments and key performance indicators. PCC usually meets contractors monthly. Some contracts have clauses for poor performance. It was important for tenants to log complaints. Often with call centres tenants press the repairs button and keep getting the contractor. Tenants need to step out of the loop and use the complaints route if they are not getting service.

### **Meeting with Private Rented Sector tenants**

On 7 December 2023 two private rented sector (PRS) tenants attended an informal meeting together with Clare Hardwick (Head of Private Sector Housing) and Sally Scattergood (Assistant Director, Housing).

### Experiences with damp and mould

The tenants and their young child lived in a two-bedroom terraced house with no garden. There was a garage on one side and a house on the other. The property had been recently painted when they moved in so the damp and mould was not immediately apparent. There was a whole wall that drips so they cannot put anything by it. Their bedroom has damp and mould and clothes in a chest-of-

drawers had to be moved because mould was on them. There is mould on their child's cot. They had sent photos to the landlord and letting agency. The bathroom window is rotting. The landlord had told them to say when it has fallen through but it could fall in the bath at any time. They have a humidifier but cannot afford to keep the gas and electricity on all the time. The external wall stone is stone cold when the heating goes off; the house does not retain heat. The letting agent tells them to open the windows (not practical in cold weather) and put the heating on which they cannot afford.

Although the boiler was serviced annually there were non-stop problems and the plumber said it should be replaced; it was so old it did not have a thermostat. There was a yearly gas safety check with a piece of paper confirming it had been done, plus a carbon monoxide monitor. The Chair said gas safety checks should be done within 13 months maximum. Officers said the team could talk through options and ensure access to Switched On Portsmouth, which the tenants had not heard of.

The rent is £880 per month. The property was not their forever home but the rent is a worry for moving somewhere else so they feel they have to stick it out. They had heard that they could not rent privately unless they were earning at least £32k pa. Some properties are now over £1k per month rent. They had to pay £5k upfront (five months' rent) for their current property which they could not afford even though they work. Extra Universal Credit money goes on rent and food; they are constantly having to manage money.

The landlord told them to move out, deal with it or he would end the tenancy. They had nowhere else to go so they have to put up with it. They were scared of reprisals (risking "making the landlord mad") and eviction and were just "sucking it up." They had three months' notice with a month's roll-over. They had lived with a parent but after their child was born it was overcrowded and they do not have any other relatives here. They were not on the housing register as the last time they asked they were told it would be eight years.

The tenants had not been in touch with the Private Sector Housing (PSH) Team as they did not know about it so they thought they would come to the meeting to share what it was like living with damp and mould. They did not know they could get any help with it and were not sure if PCC could help them. It was very hard to find information online. They were between a rock and a hard place and constantly chasing up to investigate long-winded options. It was a very difficult road ahead for their little family.

#### Communication

The tenants had never met the landlord; all contact was by text message, WhatsApp or phone. They have records of emails with him on WhatsApp. He was not local and had other properties in Portsmouth. The letting agent was local but all they say is that "it's a seaside problem" which everyone has, told them to open the windows and were rude. They were shocked at how they were treated.

#### Processes

Officers explained the PSH Team could look at properties to check they are safe to live in; they deal with landlords informally but can also enforce them to act. They can help if the heating was not working properly. The landlord should be doing something to address the damp and mould. Officers understood people were afraid of retaliation evictions. It was a common concern but landlords gained nothing by

that taking approach. The Team can serve notices that the landlord cannot evict during a certain period. There is also a mediation service.

With regard to assessing the property without the landlord's knowledge, officers explained the Team can informally assess a property and if there are issues they have to give the landlord 24 hours' notice of an inspection so they tend to give 24 hours' in the first place. If the Team inspects without telling the landlord and then serves a notice they have to inspect and assess again so it doubles the work and drags out the process. As with the process outlined in the meeting with HA tenants, Housing use the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to inspect a number of criteria but it does not cover factors the landlord is not influenced by. Housing also assess the severity of the issue and risk. If it is really severe (category 1), Housing has a legal duty to deal with it but most damp and mould scores less than severe because of the way the HHSRS works. It was very rare to find a problem where the landlord does not take action with a severe problem. A hazard awareness notice is issued to all parties. However, even if a hazard is identified as not an issue Housing can advise and monitor.

### Legislation

Officers explained the process was driven by legislation and Housing had to assess in line with the HHSRS. The idea behind the legislation was that there must be a relationship between the landlord and tenant and the expectation is that they communicate. Housing have to give notice as there is an assumption that the landlord knows there is an issue and has a reasonable opportunity to address it. Repairs are entirely the landlord's responsibility and all obligation for repairs is theirs. A key element of the Renters' Reform Bill is the end of no-fault evictions for any and every reason but the devil is in the detail. A panel member thought the focus of legislation should be on residents as the system seems to think it is an equal balance. Tenants should be put first, not the landlord.

### Eviction and re-housing

Officers confirmed that if the landlord gave notice the council did not necessarily have to re-house them as the landlord's responsibility ends when the tenancy ends. The tenants could talk to the Housing Needs, Advice & Supply (HNAS) team. People often do not meet criteria when they are evicted but HNAS could help find something in the private sector. The landlord should provide alternative accommodation if they had to be decanted because the property was unfit. If appropriate, while an assessment took place the council may provide temporary accommodation whilst assessing any duty to re-house.

The panel said it was a really depressing and sad situation and people are being encouraged to stay in unsuitable accommodation. The legal frameworks were so weak they did not allow the council to take action. The bureaucracy was problematic. It was an appalling situation where people were afraid to say anything. The panel and officers advised the tenants to go on the housing register and get all the advice they could, particularly if they were worried about repercussions. Officers urged them to contact Housing for advice, to engage with the Team, provide photos, talk to HNAS about costs and the financial situation; there may be schemes to help find a deposit. They could ask Advice Portsmouth or Citizens Advice about making a claim as the property does not meet the fitness for habitation standards; they might be able to make landlords take action and / or pay compensation. The tenants said they would go on the housing register even if it meant they were waiting years.

### **Meeting with private rented sector landlords**

Twelve landlords and a representative from a letting agency attended the meeting. It was a welcome forum and useful to share information with others as in the words of the letting agent, damp and mould was "the bane of our lives" and probably was for all agents and landlords. It is difficult to deal with even with the latest legislation and if it can be proved whose fault it is. The situation can vary between tenants. One landlord has had a property since 2004 but when new tenants moved in within a month the bedroom suffered damp and mould. The landlord tried different measures and then new tenants moved in and there were no problems. Sometimes there are no problems for years if the property is heated and ventilated correctly. The letting agent agreed that there are sometimes situations where problems are not entirely related to the property and some issues that they cannot do much about it. Lifestyle issues happen a lot.

With regard to identifying damp and mould, one landlord said that with student lets it was him rather than tenants who spotted it as he could spot discoloration on capping and flashing on walls.

### **Causes of damp and mould**

- Drying laundry inside was a common problem. One landlord provided washer/dryers but some tenants still dried clothes inside. The letting agency can see signs of laundry being dried inside even when tenants deny it. They had a visual of how much moisture was produced when drying clothes and never ceased to be amazed at how much moisture was removed from dehumidifiers.
- However, some thought it was unreasonable to stop tenants from drying clothes inside when other people probably did it.
- Air flow and the directions rooms face could be a problem, particularly if they face north.
- Keeping too much furniture and other possessions rammed next to walls and closing trickle vents causes problems.
- Bathrooms are often a cause of problems. One landlord had problems with them as when the windows were open all the time they got very cold and developed condensation.

### **Possible solutions**

Those present discussed possible solutions.

- Anti-mould paint - this has had been around for a few years and lasts for about three to four years though it is expensive. The letting agency has only recently started using it. One landlord said it made no difference. Another has used "damp and seal" but not anti-mould paint as he would rather minimise its use and find the causes of damp and mould earlier.
- Humidifiers - one landlord has tried them but the students stopped using them as they were expensive to run. Some models are cheaper to run but the bigger problem is getting students to empty the wells of collected water. Another landlord has used humidifiers with limited success. Moisture absorbers with some sort of granular tray seem to work OK. There are devices that measure moisture.
- Ventilation and temperature - asking tenants to open windows occasionally is helpful. Having the heating on for two hours in the morning and between 12 to 4 pm made a huge difference but the students have to be convinced to open the windows. The secret is to ventilate each room for 10 to 15 minutes twice a day.

Trickle vents and a high vent near the ceiling are helpful. The panel noted that in Scandinavian countries the Scandinavian climate was different and houses had mechanical ventilation so it was difficult to compare them with the UK. In Germany, which has a similar climate, the secret was ventilating each room twice a day.

- Furniture placement - for example, keeping large wardrobes away from exterior walls.
- Cleaning products - using bleach based products can help.
- Structure and maintenance - Lightweight coving in bedrooms, especially when high up, helped air flow and meant less mould near the ceiling. Eaves trays under gutters are good and inexpensive. Clearing guttering annually helps.

With regard to keeping the heating on, especially when a property was unoccupied during the day, members noted that the cost of energy bills could be a deterrent. Officers mentioned Switched On Portsmouth as they can do more than just help tenants get assistance with energy bills or see if they are on the right tariff.

### Information

The letting agent said education was the first step and gave out leaflets. However, one landlord asks tenants if they have read the guidance then it turns out later that they have not. It would be nice to have downloadable leaflets from PCC's website that could be put in tenancy packs. Good information, for example on condensation, was getting harder to find on the web. Landlords try to disseminate as much as information as possible and in the best possible way and tenants are grateful for information but currently the landlord has to compile it. Officers said a video giving information on damp and mould would be ready quite soon. Videos were helpful in showing how much moisture was produced from different activities. The version for PCC tenants was almost identical to the one for landlords. Officers use leaflets but also attend student housing events.

### Complaints and relationship with PCC

The letting agent said sometimes they dealt with them complaints and highlighted them to landlords. They had a very positive experience of PCC. One landlord was not worried about PCC visiting. Another said PCC was reasonable and fair and any matters came to a satisfactory outcome. One landlord had problems resolving problems as being a leaseholder he was caught in the middle between the freeholder and the tenants.

### Meeting with housing association

Carl Dewey, Director of Repair & Estate Transformation, outlined the background to the Southern Housing Group's approach to damp and mould. Southern had merged with Optivo in December 2022. Altogether it has about 78,000 properties, mainly in the south of England but some in Birmingham and other locations. Mr Dewey is in charge of the dedicated damp and mould team which was created just after the merger.

### Damp and mould team

The damp and mould team is in its infancy as before the merger with Optivo there was not a dedicated team. Having zero tolerance towards building safety was identified as part of the merger, which was a catalyst to create the team. It currently has four case handlers, seven specialist surveyors and a senior surveyor. More surveyors have recently been recruited to populate across the stock profile.

Southern wants to take a proactive not reactive stance and stop damp and mould in the first place. It would be easy to do a mould wash but staff would end up having to do it again. Southern want to focus on long-term solutions. Most other housing associations, including the rest of the G15 members (a group of the UK's largest housing associations), have gone down the route of having dedicated D & M teams. It can be more complex where contractors are involved as they are a third party.

#### Process for dealing with damp and mould

The framework is that a resident phones and mentions damp and mould or it is noticed as part of an inspection or stock condition survey. Southern works out what it needs to do and then visits the property within five working days. Staff install data loggers which record humidity, temperature and ambient dew point every six hours (6 am, noon, 6 pm, midnight). Two weeks later staff download the data together with the resident to look at the results and see what the cause might be. For example, if there was high humidity at night it could be that the several occupants were having showers at the same time. Staff can see if moisture is affecting the whole property so could consider measures like extractors. Actions are discussed and agreed with the resident. Communications are maintained with residents. There is a six-week intervention period so after six weeks unresolved issues are escalated to CD as director.

Conversations with residents can be confrontational, for example, telling them drying washing inside is a problem, whereas the data loggers are more impartial and everyone can see where the problems are. They enable easier and more meaningful conversations. If residents say, for example, that extractor fans are too expensive Southern can work with them to find a solution that suits them.

Southern has four categories for damp and mould:

- Category 1 - staff act as fourth emergency service and drop everything to deal with it and mitigate risks.
- Category 2 - not significant issue, element of mould perhaps in bathrooms but not in rooms used more frequently like bedrooms or living rooms; aim to deal with in 20 working days.
- Category 3 - might be signs of damp and mould around window seals.
- Category 4 - no sign of damp and mould.

For a Category 1 hazard the resident is visited within five days; for Category 2 within ten days. The response times also depend on any vulnerabilities that residents have but generally the team aims to visit within five days.

Southern does not want to lose sight of properties where there has been damp and mould before. A classic example is if there is moisture in a property where the heating is kept at 16° so Southern could work with the residents and refer them to their financial inclusion team so they can have the heating on higher.

Sometimes there is no easy fix; it is very difficult where there is overcrowding. 100% of Southern's nominations are with the local authority. Where families have outgrown their property Southern works with them to keep them safe while looking for alternative accommodation.



Older properties are less thermally efficient and sometimes have building defects but newer properties can have problems. Some of the older properties are lived in differently than they were 10 to 15 years ago.

#### Information and training

Southern gives new tenants useful tips on dealing with damp and mould. It has just been audited by Mazars and by its own scrutiny panel as the new team is a new concept. Residents need to clean damp and mould as soon as they see it but that approach does not take into account vulnerabilities. If residents tell Southern about any difficulties they can deal with it. Southern is still in limbo with two different systems for dealing with repairs but they want to deliver a consistent service.

With regard to staff training, a repairs app has been rolled out to all colleagues. An e-learning module has just been developed by learning and development for all colleagues so if they are out and about they can identify damp and mould and know what to do about it. Call handling staff have had Property Care Association training and it will be rolled out to other parts of Southern including surveyors so they can diagnose issues.

Officers noted other providers have similar systems though sometimes damp and mould data is not always identified as an individual data set. It is often linked into asset management. Some providers have damp and mould groups. PCC has a similar approach to Southern and other providers in that it installs data sensors in certain properties. Surveyors carry out the initial inspections, however mild the case is to see what is right for the property. The key is following up actions.

#### Conclusions

Based on the evidence and views it received during the review process the panel has come to the following conclusions:

1. Noted with concern that housing association and private sector tenants are afraid to speak out about problems.
2. Noted that damp and mould should not automatically be assumed to be the tenants' fault.
3. Noted that having a telephone menu option where callers can speak directly to repairs is good practice as it removes unnecessary stages in communication and reduces fragmentation.
4. Noted there is help and support available from PCC for tenants from all sectors but they are not always aware of it.
5. Noted that PCC produces information that is useful for landlords.
6. Noted that the cost of heating properties at a certain level can be a deterrent because of the cost of energy bills.
7. Noted that it is pleasing that all sectors are taking the approach of trying to prevent damp and mould in the first place and making prevention and treatment everyone's responsibility.

## **Recommendations**

The panel made the following recommendations:

1. To request the Leader and the Chief Executive to thank James Hill, Jo Bennett, Martyn Collins, Michael Conway, Antonia Craze, Mark Fitch, Steve Groves, Adam Hardwick, Clare Hardwick, Meredydd Hughes, Gemma Moreau and Sally Scattergood for their work in supporting the review.
2. To continue promoting the approach of damp and mould being everyone's responsibility and check energy performance data to target and prevent possible damp and mould problems.
3. To put copies of House Talk in all councillors' pigeonholes so they are aware of the advice PCC gives tenants and leaseholders on damp and mould.
4. To put information and advice on damp and mould in stairwells of PCC properties.
5. To give leaflets on damp and mould to councillors in areas with more social housing so they can give them to tenants who might need or benefit from them and to community leaders so they can disseminate information to residents who might be hard to reach, ensuring that leaflets and communications are accessible to residents who do not have English as a first language or have visual impairments.
6. To raise awareness of what PCC can do to help housing association and private sector tenants, for example, Switched On Portsmouth, LEAP, HNAS.
7. To put information on PCC's website that landlords can use in tenancy packs.
8. To raise or suggest at the regular forum with RSL providers some sort of standing agreement on getting consent to share information from tenants to help speed up dealing with complaints.
9. To suggest providers have a dedicated phone line to deal with complaints rather than contact centres.
10. To lobby for damp and mould to score more highly on the Housing Health & Safety Rating System and for more protection for private tenants, for example, an end to no-fault evictions.

## **Integrated Impact Assessment**

An integrated impact assessment would be carried out when the Cabinet makes its decisions based on the recommendations set out in this report.

## Budget and policy implications of the recommendations

The following table highlights the budgetary and policy implications of the recommendations being presented by the panel:

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
1	To request the Leader and the Chief Executive to thank James Hill, Jo Bennett, Martyn Collins, Michael Conway, Antonia Craze, Mark Fitch, Steve Groves, Adam Hardwick, Clare Hardwick, Meredydd Hughes, Gemma Moreau and Sally Scattergood, the Residents' Consortium and Southern Housing for their work in supporting the review.	Councillor Raymond Dent	Within existing framework	None
2	To continue promoting the approach of damp and mould being everyone's responsibility and check energy performance data to target and prevent possible damp and mould problems.	Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services (HNBS)	Within existing framework	None
3	To put copies of House Talk in all councillors' pigeonholes so they are aware of the advice PCC gives tenants and leaseholders on damp and mould.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None
4	To put information and advice on damp and mould in stairwells of PCC properties.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None
5	To give leaflets on damp and mould to councillors in areas with more social housing so they can give them to tenants who might need or benefit from them and to community leaders so they can disseminate information to residents who might be hard to reach, ensuring that leaflets and communications are accessible to residents who do not have English as a first language or have visual impairments.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
6	To raise awareness of what PCC can do to help housing association and private sector tenants, for example, Switched On Portsmouth, LEAP, HNAS.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None
7	To put information on PCC's website that landlords can use in tenancy packs.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None
8	To raise or suggest at the regular forum with RSL providers some sort of standing agreement on getting consent to share information from tenants to help speed up dealing with complaints.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None
9	To suggest providers have a dedicated phone line to deal with complaints rather than contact centres.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None
10	To lobby for damp and mould to score more highly on the Housing Health & Safety Rating System and for more protection for private tenants, for example, an end to no-fault evictions.	Director of HNBS	Within existing framework	None



## Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
*Secretary of State for Levelling up Housing &  
Communities*  
*Minister for Intergovernmental Relations*

**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and  
Communities**  
4th Floor, Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

19 November 2022

Dear Local Authority Chief Executive and council leaders,

### **HOUSING STANDARDS IN RENTED PROPERTIES IN ENGLAND**

The tragedy of Awaab Ishak, who died at two years old as a direct result of mould in his family home, has highlighted the urgent need to ensure a decent standard of properties for tenants in all sectors.

I know you will join me in mourning this avoidable loss. I also know, from previous experience, that councils and authorities across the country are already determined to improve housing standards. That is why I am confident you will all be as focussed as my department is on ensuring that no family ever has to experience such a tragedy again. In 21st century Britain, this should not be a high aspiration.

I have today written to social housing providers on this crucial matter. All of us – including my department – need to deliver our responsibility to people living in poor quality housing. That is why I am writing to you to request you do everything in your power to prioritise the improvement of housing conditions for the millions of private and social tenants, in line with existing duties in the Housing Act 2004. This becomes ever more urgent as we go into winter with a cost of living and energy crisis, which may exacerbate damp and mould conditions in some homes.

As you will be aware, local housing authorities have a duty under the Housing Act 2004 (“the Act”) to keep housing conditions in their area under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them under the Act (section 3(1)).

#### **Treating damp and mould seriously**

Having considered it necessary and urgent to ensure that, as we go into a challenging winter, damp and mould issues are being addressed, I now direct, under section 3(3) of the Act, that all local housing authorities in carrying out their duty to review housing conditions in their area must:

- have particular regard to high scoring (bands D and E) category 2 damp and mould hazards, as outlined in the guidance ‘Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) enforcement guidance: housing conditions<sup>1</sup>
- supply the department with an assessment of damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties in your area, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards; and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-health-and-safety-rating-system-enforcement-guidance-housing-conditions>

- supply the department with an assessment of action you have identified that may need to be taken in relation to damp and mould issues affecting privately rented properties in your area.

In addition, pursuant to your duties under section 3(3) of the Act, I would like you to provide the following data covering your last three 12 monthly reporting periods for privately rented properties in your area:

- how many damp and mould hazards you have remediated, compared to your assessment of the prevalence of these hazards;
- how many times you have taken enforcement action to remedy damp and mould hazards and the form this has taken;
- how many civil penalty notices have been issued in relation to non-compliance with enforcement action over damp and mould hazards; and
- how many prosecutions have been successfully pursued in relation to damp and mould hazards.

If you have not collected this information, please explain why.

Finally, I would also like you to set out how you are prioritising enforcement of housing standards more generally in your authority, across all tenures, including what plans you have to ensure adequate enforcement capacity to drive up standards in the private rented sector.

Alongside this, I have asked social housing providers to make an assessment of their properties and the Regulator of Social Housing will also be writing to them shortly on this matter.

I would like an initial response by the end of the month – this should set out how you are prioritising this work and any other initial information you can provide. I would then like the full response by 27 January at the latest. My officials will work with the Local Government Association and local authorities to agree the process and format for these responses in the coming days. Any questions in the meantime can be directed to [housingstandards@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:housingstandards@levellingup.gov.uk). My department will review these returns and may ask for further information. We may also periodically publish the responses, or a summary, to improve transparency on this important issue. I have focussed here largely on damp and mould to make quick progress on this important area during the winter months, but reserve the right to make further directions and requests in relation to wider standards in the near future as the department deems necessary.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the important work that you do in your local areas to improve housing standards for tenants. It is vital that we all learn from the events that led to the tragic death of Awaab, and my officials and I look forward to working collaboratively with you to improve standards for renters across the country and across all tenures.

With every good wish,



**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
**Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**  
**Minister for Intergovernmental Relations**



22 November 2022

Dear Chief Executive

## Assurance on addressing risks relating to damp and mould in tenants' homes

The tragic case of Awaab Ishak, who died of a respiratory condition caused by mould in his home, has rightly focused attention on the responsibility of all registered providers – private and local authority – to ensure that the homes they provide are well-maintained and of a decent standard. It demonstrates the serious effects that having damp and mould in their homes can have on people's health and it has highlighted once again the importance of providers listening to their tenants' concerns, understanding their diverse needs, removing barriers to accessing services and responding promptly.

Damp and mould are potential hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System; failing to address them could lead to failure of the Decent Homes Standard and our Home Standard. All providers should have systems in place to ensure that their homes are free from hazardous levels of damp and mould, and to identify and deal with cases promptly and effectively.

As we move into winter, cases of damp and mould are likely to increase. We are therefore seeking assurance from all providers that they have a clear understanding and strong grip on damp and mould issues in their homes and are addressing risks to tenants' and residents' health. Where we consider providers are not meeting the standards, including the Decent Homes Standard, we will take appropriate action.

To inform this work, please provide:

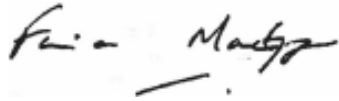
- Firstly, your approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould issues affecting your properties, including how you assess the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards
- Secondly, and in the context of that approach, your most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards in your homes, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards
- Thirdly, given those findings, the action you are taking to remedy any issues and hazards, and ensure that your homes meet the Decent Homes Standard
- Lastly, tell us how you ensure that individual damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents

Explanations should be supported with recent data. If data are not available, this should be noted.

Submission of this information should be made through this MSForms survey <https://forms.office.com/r/ravGxEizWR> by 19 December 2022. We will review all the information provided and may request further information if necessary. Should you identify that your homes do not meet the relevant standards, you should self-refer immediately.

I look forward to receiving your data and working with you to improve conditions for tenants and residents – ensuring they are treated equitably and with respect, there are no barriers to reporting problems, and that their concerns are appropriately addressed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fiona MacGregor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Fiona MacGregor  
Chief Executive



**For and on behalf of Portsmouth City Council**

The following provides our initial response in relation to our duty as a local housing authority to your letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022, and your subsequent letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

We have also received a letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022 from the Regulator for Social Housing which we will respond to in our capacity as a social housing landlord by 19<sup>th</sup> December as requested.

**Confirmation you have received and will pick up the request as outlined in the letter**

We can confirm that we have received the request and are compiling the required information.

**Set out how you are intending to prioritise addressing the issues of mould and damp for privately rented properties in your area, with specific reference to how you intend to meet the request set out above**

Portsmouth City Councils Housing Regulations team inspect properties in the Private Rented Sector both reactively and proactively. Where higher scoring hazards (Typically Bands A-E) are identified this is prioritised and appropriate action taken to ensure they are addressed in line with our enforcement policy.

Reactive cases are typically received directly from tenants themselves. Where the landlord has failed to resolve the matter informally, the tenant can seek support via the local authority to inspect the property and where appropriate take steps to ensure hazards are remediated.

All inspections of properties are recorded on our case management system (IDOX Uniform), from which we are able to extract data on the hazards identified and other measures of enforcement activity. We intend to use this data to populate our response to you for the deadline of 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

Portsmouth City Council regulates Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) through its mandatory licensing scheme. There are currently approximately 1,200 licensable HMO properties in Portsmouth which are required to hold a licence under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004, Part 2. The Council inspects these properties through the use of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) risk assessment, with each property receiving at least one assessment during the term of its licence which can be granted for up to 5 years. In addition to this assessment, Portsmouth City Council also publish a set of standards to be applied to all licensable HMOs to ensure the space and amenities of HMOs are safe for occupants.

Portsmouth City Council recently announced plans to extend licensing for HMOs in the city. A designation has now been made for the introduction of an additional licensing scheme to include all HMOs city wide (estimated to be up to 6,000 in total), which will come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. The scheme will also include

converted blocks of flats that are of poor building standard where Building Regulations 1991 are not met, as defined through section 257 Housing Act 2004. The reason for the decision to introduce additional licensing is based on evidence which indicates that 32% of HMOs in the city have one or more Category 1 hazards under the HHSRS (compared with the EHS findings of 13% of privately rented properties having Category 1 hazards nationally). The introduction of this scheme will allow the Council to proactively assess a higher proportion of its private rented sector housing stock, with a view to addressing hazards and improving overall standards and management of these properties.

Portsmouth City Council's Private Rented Sector Strategy 2021-2026 [Private Rental Sector Strategy for Portsmouth 2021- 2026](#) provides detail on how the Council aims to both regulate and work with the sector to achieve positive outcomes for tenants and landlords. The strategy outlines the approach towards compliance in the sector, with the council supporting good landlords whilst taking decisive action against those bad landlords who flout or dismiss their responsibilities and put tenants at harm.

Another objective of the strategy is to provide Officers with the training needed to effectively regulate non-compliance in the sector. Between September 2022 and September 2024 all officers working in the Council's Housing Regulations team will be given the opportunity to complete a Level 5 Private Sector Housing qualification with the University of Middlesex. This training program will allow the Council to increase its enforcement activity within the sector against bad landlords. The team also undertake CPD, with a specific seminar on assessing and understanding Damp and Mould undertaken by the team earlier this year.

A number of non-enforcement activities also contribute toward the Council's approach to support both tenants and landlords. The Council employs a dedicated landlord and tenant support Officer who delivers workshops, produces educational materials, a quarterly landlord newsletter, operates a tenant group and updates our council's website with a view to assisting tenants and landlords. Many of these activities have been aimed at damp and mould within the home, with specific workshops and material being provided for tenants, especially where these issues are linked to fuel poverty, lifestyle, and cost of living. Through the Council's "Switched on Portsmouth" program tenants and landlords are able to seek out grants and other assistance to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes or provide assistance with the costs of heating. [Switched On Portsmouth - Save Energy. Save Money. Save Carbon.](#) In addition to these measures, Portsmouth City Council has also launched a mediation service aimed at helping landlords and tenants to maintain and improve tenancies. We also work alongside and signpost to partnership agencies, such as local tenancy advice service (Advice Portsmouth) and the local landlord association.

The Council's Private Sector Housing enforcement policy has recently been updated. [Additional Licensing of HMOs - Appendix 3 - Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy.pdf \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](#) This policy sets out the Council's aim to offers an opportunity to work informally with landlords, agents, owners, and service users, by

providing a range of information and guidance. In cases where there has been a complaint about a private rented property, and where it is the first contact about property standards, the service will normally notify responsible parties and/or will provide an inspection report outlining breaches in legal requirements. The purpose of an informal approach is to enable responsible landlords, agents, and owners to comply with regulatory requirements and agree to undertake the works required by the authority in a short timescale. The underlying aim of these communications is to establish good management practices from the outset that ensure compliance with regulatory requirements for property standards and that this approach continues through each subsequent tenancy.

All powers available to the private sector housing service are used when appropriate to do so as outlined in the Councils enforcement policy.

Enforcement action can be separated into 3 stages. Where there is non-compliance with legal requirements, after an informal approach has been made (stage one), formal action will be taken such as serving formal notices (Stage 2 enforcement) and punitive action for non-compliance such as prosecution or Civil Penalty Notices (Stage 3 enforcement).

However, where there are serious breaches in legal requirements, the authority will take a formal approach in the first instance and will move immediately to stages two and three. Formal action will also be considered in the first instance, where the landlord or owner has previous history of non-compliance with legal requirements or has previously been made aware of their legal responsibilities through letters and reports for other properties.

For category 1 hazards identified through the HSSRS, Officers have a duty to ensure these are remediated within a reasonable time period, using the approach outlined in the Councils enforcement policy. In cases of less serious hazards, known as category 2 hazards, the Council has a discretionary power to act. In some cases of high scoring or progressive category 2 hazards, Officers will insist on works being completed similarly to those category 1 hazards. Where hazards are deemed low scoring, or for example damp and mould is identified due to condensation rather than a property defect, advice and support will be given to the tenant. This may also include signposting to other services, such as the councils Energy services team, Housing Needs, Advice and Support team, or free tenant workshops run by the Landlord and tenant support officer on how to manage damp and mould.

**Any issues you envisage with completing the full response for 27 January and/or where further clarity from the department would be helpful.**

We currently do not envisage issues with providing this information for the deadline. We understand from your letter of 25<sup>th</sup> November that a response form will be circulated. Once we receive this, we will seek clarity, if we require this.

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# Local authority returns form: damp and mould in private rented properties

## Overview

### Why your views matter

We are requesting information on damp and mould in privately rented homes. Thank you for taking the time to respond.

### Introduction

This form is to collect information on damp and mould in privately rented homes from local authorities. It follows a [letter](#)

<[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1118877/SoS\\_letter\\_to\\_local\\_authority\\_chief\\_executive\\_and\\_council\\_le](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1118877/SoS_letter_to_local_authority_chief_executive_and_council_le) from the Secretary of State dated 19 November 2022.

Local authorities play a vital role in enforcing standards in the private rented sector, supporting tenants and tackling rogue landlords. The tragic death of Awaab Ishak has highlighted the importance of ensuring that tenants do not have to live with unsafe damp and mould in their homes.

The information provided through this form will enable us to better understand the issues surrounding damp and mould and will inform future on policy in this space, including how we support local authorities. We will also share this data with the LGA to inform their work. In collecting this data, we are aware that the figures over the pandemic period may not be representative of usual times, and this will be taken into account.

We also recognise that data collection systems and practices will vary from council to council, and that precise data may not be available for all of the questions listed below. Some questions have been marked as optional: however, where there is enough information available to allow a relatively robust estimate, we would welcome your support in providing as detailed a picture as possible.

We thank you very much in advance for your help to address this important issue.

If you have any queries, please email us at [housingstandards@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:housingstandards@levellingup.gov.uk)

### Details:

#### 1 Please provide the full name of your local authority:

Answer *(Required)*

**Portsmouth City Council**

#### 2 Please provide an email address of a named person we can contact with any further queries:

Answer *(Required)*

[Samuel.rickeard@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:Samuel.rickeard@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

[Clare.hardwick@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:Clare.hardwick@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

[Sally.Scattergood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:Sally.Scattergood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

#### 3 Approximately how many private rented sector properties are in your area currently?

Answer. Please provide a number. If you cannot answer, please write 'NA' *(Required)*

**24,000**

#### 4 What data sources do you normally use to inform your knowledge of the quality and condition of the privately rented stock in your area?

*(Required)*

Please select all that apply

- a) Stock condition survey
- b) Stock modelling
- c) Estimate based on contact with landlords/tenants
- d) Estimate based on general knowledge of local housing stock
- e) Housing census
- f) Other: e.g. licensing schemes(s), council tax, please provide details (below)

Answer (option - f)

**We have a number of sources of information regarding the PRS. This includes our current Mandatory HMO Licensing Scheme, our reactive property inspection findings, as well as working with stakeholders. We have a PRS governance board, we engage with the local university and students union, the local landlord association, and have set up a local tenant group consisting of over 80 local tenants to hear their views and experiences. We have also conducted several surveys with residents and landlords of the city to better understand the PRS, the property conditions, and the challenges stakeholders face. We also use other sources of local data such as Council Tax, Land Registry, Planning and building control, information from the local fire and rescue service, and deposit protection schemes. In 2020 we also commissioned some stock modelling with the BRE. We also use national data such as the ONS.**

5 Approximately what number of full-time equivalent (FTE) do you have in your housing enforcement team? In answering, please provide the number of all staff working on private rented sector standards, enforcement and licensing, including how many FTE Environmental Health Officers are carrying out enforcement, plus those that work in administrative and managerial roles, but not including legal resource. Also please do not include staff who only work on MEES. Where a staff member works on MEES alongside other housing enforcement, please include them in your FTE numbers.

Optional

11 FTE (1 Manager, 2 team leaders, 5.8 Housing Regulations officers, 1 landlord and tenant support officer, 1.2 Admin officers)

6 Do you run any Selective and/or Additional Licensing schemes in your area?

*(Required)*

Please select all that apply

- Selective  
 Additional  
 Neither

Portsmouth City Council have made an Additional Licensing Scheme designation which will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.

7 If you do run any licensing schemes, approximately how many properties are covered by your scheme(s)? Please break down by each individual Selective/Additional licensing scheme

Optional

Portsmouth City Council currently operates a Mandatory Licensing Scheme, which covers 1200 HMO properties. A designation for a city wide Additional Licensing scheme has been made and will commence from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. This scheme is estimated to cover 4800 HMO properties.

### Prevalence of damp and mould

The following questions relate to your assessment of damp and mould issues in your local authority area. If you are not able to provide a response to any of the following questions, please respond with 'n/a'.

8 Based on your assessment of damp and mould issues affecting private rented sector properties in your area, approximately what proportion do you currently estimate to have category 1 damp and mould hazards?

% *(Required)*

1%

9 What data sources do you normally use to come to the assessment provided in question 8?

*(Required)*

Please select all that apply

- a) Stock condition survey  
 b) Stock modelling  
 c) Estimate based on contact with landlords/tenants  
 d) Estimate based on general knowledge of local housing stock  
 e) Other e.g. licensing schemes(s), council tax etc.: (please specify below)

Other please specify

An estimate based on HHSRS assessment data carried out between 2019 - 2022 by the Housing Regulations team, where an average of 4% of the reactive HHSRS inspections, and 0.56% of the proactive HMO Licensing inspections identified Category 1 Damp & Mould hazards, and taking into account that this is a minority of the overall PRS in the city and comparing it to previous stock modelling undertaken by the BRE.

Comparing this to the English housing survey 2020-21 where it is estimated that 6.4% of PRS properties in the South East of England have damp present (either Cat 1 or Cat 2), that nationally 10% of pre-1919 properties or 9% of converted flats have damp present (which represent a large proportion of the PRS in Portsmouth), then an estimate of 1% Category 1 hazards appears a reasonable estimate.

10 Based on your assessment of damp and mould issues affecting private rented sector properties in your area, approximately what proportion do you currently estimate to have category 2 damp and mould hazards?

% (Required)

20%

11 What data sources do you normally use to come to the assessment provided in question 10?

(Required)

Please select only one item

- a) Stock condition survey
- b) Stock modelling
- c) Estimate based on contact with landlords/tenants
- d) Estimate based on general knowledge of local housing stock
- e) Other e.g. licensing schemes(s), council tax etc.: (please specify below)

Other please specify

An estimate based on HHSRS assessment data carried out between 2019 - 2022 by the Housing Regulations team, where an average of 57% of the reactive HHSRS inspections, and 38% of the proactive HMO Licensing inspections identified Category 2 Damp & Mould hazards, and taking into account that this is not true sample of the overall PRS in the city (it is made up predominantly of properties where the tenant has contact us to complain about their living conditions, or licensed HMOs) and comparing it to previous stock modelling undertaken by the BRE.

Comparing this to the English housing survey 2020-21 where it is estimated that 6.4% of PRS properties in the South East of England have damp present (either Cat 1 or Cat 2), that nationally 10% of pre-1919 properties or 9% of converted flats have damp present (which represent a large proportion of the PRS in Portsmouth), then an estimate of 1% Category 1 hazards appears a reasonable estimate.

12 If you have not collected the information requested or are not able to provide information in this way, please can you tell us why? Please put n/a if you have provided the above data.

Answer (Required)

N/A

#### Enforcement Questions: complaints

The following questions relate to damp and mould complaints and inspections in your local authority area. If you are not able to provide a response to any of the following questions, please respond with 'n/a'.

13 Please tell us what steps you take when you receive a complaint about damp and mould from a private rented sector tenant. Where relevant, please refer to or provide links to any enforcement policies you have in place (e.g. on enforcing category 2 hazards) and any guidance you might provide for tenants experiencing damp and mould issues.

Officers assessing properties in the Private Rented Sector do so through two approaches; a reactive approach responding to a complaint (service request) received concerning hazards in the home, and a proactive approach through mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMO) which is due to be expanded to a city wide additional licensing scheme from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.

Reactive complaints are often received directly from the tenant themselves, where the landlord has failed to resolve the matter the tenant can seek support via the local authority to inspect the property and where appropriate take steps to ensure hazards are remediated.

Officers will carry out inspections following a request for service from a tenant or referral from a partner or enforcement agency concerning unsatisfactory housing or overcrowded conditions. Tenants making requests for service will be asked to confirm that they have informed their Landlord of the disrepair and they have failed to act in a reasonable timescale. Inspections will take place where initial communications between this service and the landlord, agent or owner have not successfully resolved the issues for the customer.

There will be circumstances where an inspection may be undertaken in the first instance, for example where:

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- there appears to be significant risks to the health and safety of occupiers and/or visitors

- the tenant or prospective occupier is vulnerable
- the issues are complex or involve neighbouring properties
- there is a poor history of compliance with legal requirements for housing conditions and/or management practices
- the property is empty

Where an inspection is undertaken, officers will assess compliance with all enforceable legal requirements, including a risk assessment under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and also licence conditions if applicable. This may involve referrals to other agencies or local authority service areas.

It is the council's aim to action requests for service promptly. Requests for service are typically received from:

- tenants/occupiers
- the general public
- property letting and managing agents
- referrals from other council services
- referrals from agencies

Details of the source of the service request will not be divulged when dealing with Landlords or agents.

The Housing Regulations team have a housing regulations officer "on duty" taking phone calls and emails regarding new complaints each day, who will speak to the complainant or referrer at the point of contact. They will book in an inspection appointment during this initial contact where it is identified as necessary, and will usually notify the relevant parties (tenant and landlord) of the inspection date, time and purpose (in accordance with section 239 of the Housing Act 2004). The inspection is undertaken as a HHSRS assessment, and any hazards identified are dealt with in accordance with the Private Sector Housing enforcement policy. This policy outlines that we will try to work with landlords or agents in our first interactions with them to educate them on their obligations, and deal with hazards informally through work schedules with clear timescales for compliance (which will be escalated to formal enforcement if not complied with). For landlords or agents that we have a history of interaction with regarding poor property conditions or management practices; or in situations where the property conditions are extremely poor, we will consider formal enforcement action in the first instance. The Council will take action where Category 1 hazards are identified, or higher scoring Category 2 hazards.

The Council's Private Sector Housing enforcement policy was recently updated, to include updates in legislation and give a clear view on the Council's approach regarding enforcement. The updated policy explains what steps Officers will take towards effective regulation and enforcement of the Private Rented Sector, including the use of Civil Penalty Notices and Prosecutions, and gives clarity on when a punitive approach will be taken by the team. [Appendix-3-Private-Sector-Housing-Enforcement-Policy-2022.pdf \(portsmouth.gov.uk\)](#)

Portsmouth City Council's Private Rented Sector Strategy 2021-2026 provides detail on how the Council aims to both regulate and work with the sector to achieve positive outcomes for tenants and landlords. The strategy outlines the approach towards compliance in the sector, with the council supporting good landlords whilst taking enforcement action against those bad landlords who flout or dismiss their responsibilities and put tenants at risk. [Private Rental Sector Strategy for Portsmouth 2021- 2026](#)

Several non-enforcement activities also contribute toward the Council's approach to support both tenants and landlords. The Council employs a dedicated landlord and tenant support Officer who, as part of their role, deliver workshops, produce educational materials, and operate a tenant group. We also provide information, advise and support through the council's website with a view to assisting tenants and landlords, and are in the process of reviewing and developing this further.

Many of these activities have been aimed at damp and mould within the home, with specific workshops and material being provided for tenants, especially where these issues are linked to fuel poverty, lifestyle and/ or cost of living. Through the Council's "Switched on Portsmouth" program, tenants and landlords are able to seek out grants and other financial incentives to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes or find assistance with the costs of heating.

All staff at the council are encouraged to make every contact count with members of the community, and recently launched an online tool to support people struggling with cost of living, which often contributes to the prevalence of damp and mould due to fuel poverty. This was recently recognized by the Local Government Association (LGA) who have published the format as an example of good practice [Portsmouth City Council: New cost of living tool for frontline staff and residents | Local Government Association](#)

- 14 Overall, how many complaints relating to housing standards have you received in the last three financial years that reference or relate to damp and mould issues in the private rented sector?



system, where keywords "damp" and "mould" have been found within the correspondence information or Officer notes. As a result, this can only be used as an indicator of complaints relating to damp and mould.

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**191**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**110**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**135**

**15** Of the complaints you received that reference damp and mould in the last three financial years, approximately how many resulted in inspections?

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**96**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**17**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**61**

**16** If you have not collected the information requested or are not able to provide information in this way, please can you tell us why? Please put n/a if you have provided the above data.

answer *(Required)*

**N/A**

#### Enforcement Questions: category 1 damp and mould hazards

The following questions ask for the number of category 1 damp and mould hazards identified broken down by inspections resulting from complaints, licensing, stock modelling and other reasons. If you are not able to provide a response to any of the following questions, please respond with 'n/a'.

**17** Approximately how many inspections have you undertaken overall in the last three financial years?

The below data is a combined figure of HHSRS assessments carried out on both licensed HMO properties and in response to complaints received of hazards present in the home. This includes inspections to check that required works have been completed, and inspections under Part 2 Housing Act 2004 to verify if a property is suitable to be used as a licensable HMO, and if any special conditions of the licence are required.

Portsmouth currently licenses 1200 HMOs through its mandatory licensing scheme, with approximately 80 per year of these requiring a visit prior to licence due to concerns of suitability, such as size of the property or availability of amenities, based on the requirement set out in our local HMO space and amenity standards document.

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**706**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**254**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**504**

**18** Thinking now ONLY about all of the inspections that you undertook as a result of complaints, approximately how many have identified a category 1 damp and mould hazard?

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**3**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**1**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**7**

**19** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook as a result of licensing, approximately how many have identified a category 1 damp and mould hazard?

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**2**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**0**

**20** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook as a result of stock modelling, approximately how many have identified a category 1 damp and mould hazard? **N/A**

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**21** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook for reasons other than complaints, licensing or stock modelling, approximately how many have identified a category 1 damp and mould hazard? **N/A**

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**22** If you have not collected the information requested above or are not able to provide information in this way, please can you tell us why? Please put n/a if you have provided the above data.

answer *(Required)*

**Portsmouth City Council carry out property inspections either in response to complaints received, or proactively through its mandatory licensing scheme (Additional licensing will be introduced on 01/09/2023. Inspections were not undertaken for the stock modelling exercise undertaken by the BRE for the city council in 2020, nor did that stock modelling specifically identify the prevalence of damp and mould hazards in properties (it looked at the prevalence of HHSRS hazards generically, as well as specifically excess cold).**

#### Enforcement Questions: category 2 damp and mould hazards

The following questions ask for the number of category 2 damp and mould hazards identified broken down by inspections resulting from complaints, licensing, stock modelling and other reasons. If you are not able to provide a response to any of the following questions, please respond with 'n/a'.

**23** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook as a result of complaints, approximately how many have identified a category 2 damp and mould hazard?

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**91**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**17**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**60**

**24** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook as a result of licensing, approximately how many have identified a category 2 damp and mould hazard?

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**98**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**35**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**66**

**25** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook as a result of stock modelling, approximately how many have identified a category 2 damp and mould hazard? **N/A**

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**26** Thinking now ONLY about all the inspections that you undertook for reasons other than complaints, licensing or stock modelling, approximately how many have identified a category 2 damp and mould hazard? **N/A**

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**27** If you have not collected the information requested above or are not able to provide information in this way, please can you tell us why? Please put n/a if you have provided the above data.

answer *(Required)*

**Portsmouth City Council carry out property inspection either in response to complaints received, or proactively through its mandatory licensing scheme. Inspections are not completed as a result of stock modelling or any other means.**

## Enforcement action

The following questions ask for figures on enforcement action taken in relation damp and mould hazards, including the number of improvement notices and civil penalty notices issued and the number of prosecutions. If you are not able to provide a response to any of the following questions, please respond with 'n/a'.

**28** Please provide the figures for all formal and informal enforcement action taken on damp and mould hazards:

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**2 Formal enforcement / 192 informal enforcement**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**3 Formal enforcement / 50 informal enforcement**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**7 Formal enforcement / 126 informal enforcement**

**29** Please provide the figures for improvement notices issued in relation to damp and mould hazards:

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**2**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**3**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**7**

**30** Please provide the figures for civil penalty notices issued in relation to damp and mould hazards:

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**0**

**31** Please provide the figures for prosecutions pursued in relation to damp and mould hazards:

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**0**

**32** Please provide the figures for successful prosecutions in relation to damp and mould hazards:

Answer - 2019/2020 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2020/2021 *(Required)*

**0**

Answer - 2021/2022 *(Required)*

**0**

Wider context

**33** Please rank in priority order (1 - the highest impact / 6 - the least impact) how the following have had an impact on enforcement action relating to damp and mould in your area

	1	2	3	4	5	6
a) Capacity of your local authority. i.e. resource and funding hindering capacity to take enforcement action relating to damp and mould. <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) Experience and expertise in the local authority. i.e. a lack of officers with experience, for example, experience pursuing prosecutions or expertise within the team including, for example, legal expertise. <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) Strategic prioritisation of private rented sector enforcement. i.e. competing priorities leading to relatively lower prioritisation of enforcement action or proactively enforce. <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
d) The regulatory/ legal framework for enforcement activity. i.e. too much complexity in legislation. <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) Issues with gathering or providing evidence. i.e. tenants reluctant to provide statements or difficulties gathering the requisite evidence for issuing a fine or prosecuting. <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) Limited data on the private rented stock. i.e. difficulties identifying private rented properties or insufficient resource to map out private rented stock. <i>Please select only one item</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**34** Please say why you have ranked the items on question 31 in this orderIM

The current HHSRS framework results in damp and mould hazards typically scoring as low Category 2 hazards. Very few damp and mould hazards are scored as Category 1, or even high scoring category 2, and therefore often difficult to justify formal enforcement action.

We have limited data on the prevalence of damp and mould in the local PRS. Stock modelling and stock condition surveys are costly, have limitations on their accuracy, and as the PRS is a rapidly changing become outdated quickly. It would help to have visibility of where all of the PRS properties are in the city, as well as the landlords. Landlord registration would be helpful with this.

The majority of our inspections are reactive to service requests, or where we become alerted to a potential issue through other agencies, or on proactive inspection as a result of identifying issues with a specific landlord or building. There are many tenants who do not wish to access the support of the Housing regulations service because of fear of repercussions (eviction, increased rents etc).

There has been a high turnover of staff in recent years in the Housing Regulations team, who are relatively inexperienced regarding enforcement activity, which impacts the capacity to progress enforcement action at pace, without the need for

management support. However, the team are receiving Level 5 training through the University of Middlesex intended to improve this issue and in time Officers will have stronger knowledge and experience to confidently take enforcement action.

Less impact is felt locally regarding the prioritization of enforcement, with clear local policies outlining how formal enforcement action will take place. Whilst there are some complexities within the legal framework of Officers work, the team are supported by the internal Legal Services department who can provide support and advice. Generally, customers are willing to engage in the enforcement process to support their housing circumstances and make those responsible accountable, however there are situations where customers may fear retaliation from their landlord which can impact on enforcement activity.

- 35** Does the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) allow for an effective assessment of how serious and dangerous damp and mould is in people's homes?

*Please select only one item*

- Yes  
 No  
 Not sure

- 36** If not, what changes should be made to the HHSRS, to the system for categorising hazards or to enforcement powers under the Housing Act 2004?

The current HHSRS operating guidance is reflective of health data obtained before February 2006, and provides guidance towards the vulnerable age group based on statistical averages at the time. However, more recent data may suggest that further consideration should be given towards the spread of harm outcomes with the vulnerable age group (Class 1 - Class IV) which generally scores very low on average. In its current form, likelihood would need to be significantly increased to establish a category 1 or high category 2 hazard and thus become "actionable" in terms of enforcement.

Data obtained through the introduction of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards could be incorporated into the guidance as a consideration to increase likelihood of harm where a property fails to meet the standard, as poor thermal efficiency is known to contribute towards the prevalence of category 1 hazards regarding damp and mould and excess cold.

- 37** What other measures would help you to better prioritise addressing housing enforcement issues such as damp and mould?

The introduction of a landlord register, as currently being considered under government consultation through the Renters Reform Bill, would give further information to support proactive enforcement, which would over time effectively reduce demand on local services by focusing enforcement on the most non-compliant landlords. This visibility would also support tenants know who they are renting from and trusting to follow the law.

Portsmouth City Council regulates HMO's through its mandatory licensing scheme, which applies to all shared houses with 5 or more tenants forming 2 or more households. Council Officers will assess properties utilizing the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) risk assessment tool. In addition to this assessment, Portsmouth City Council also publish a set of standards to be applied to all licensable HMOs to ensure the space and amenity standards are appropriate and safe for occupants. These standards were recently updated to provide additional detail and clarity regarding the standards expected within HMOs, and how these will be applied.

The Council plans to extend its licensing scheme for HMOs, with

a recent designation being made for the introduction of a city wide additional licensing scheme. The scheme will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. HMOs in the Portsmouth area are estimated to make up nearly 25% of local PRS so this scheme will ensure that a much higher proportion of the local PRS are being proactively inspected.



## **RSH - Assurance on addressing risks relating to damp and mould in tenants' homes**

### **1. Please provide your registered provider code**

- 00MR

### **2. Please provide your registered provider name**

- Portsmouth City Council

### **3. Please detail your approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould issues affecting your properties, including how you assess the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards**

As a social housing provider, we utilise our expertise to assess the priority of repairs that are needed in our tenants' homes. Where any health and safety issues are identified these will always be treated as a priority by PCC and our contractors. All repair requests are recorded on our repairs database to enable us to track and manage repairs in partnership with our contractors. Using this database, we can complete a key word search such as "damp/mould" to inform us of how many active repairs cases we have connected to damp and mould or how many reports of damp and mould we have had over a certain period.

This allows us to be able to identify trends in particular areas and deploy surveyors to inspect and assess if further investigation and/or remedial works are required. We also utilise our frontline staff and contractors to report issues on behalf of tenants if they identify individual issues or trends during their visits to tenants' homes. As a management team we also review complaints and disrepair claims to establish if there are any aspects of our repairs and maintenance service that need to be improved, including our response to damp and mould enquiries.

We undertake reviews of repairs data where damp and mould has been identified to inform the effectiveness of the Council's response to repair demands and highlight where future planned works maybe required to address ongoing issues.

We target analysis of the repairs data to identify those properties where the residents do not contact us frequently to report repairs and so condition surveys and tenancy visits are targeted to these properties to assess if there are any issues that we should be aware of, including damp and mould issues

Remote monitoring equipment (battery sensors) has been installed to a sample of property archetypes as part of a deep retrofit feasibility to measure Temperature (°C), Carbon Dioxide (CO2 ppm), Humidity (Relative Humidity %) and Volatile Organic Compounds (ppm) and to work with residents to better understand home

environments and how our residents and buildings interact. This monitoring will help the Council understand the work required to address issues raised and post completion monitoring will be undertaken to measure the effectiveness of the interventions undertaken.

**4. In the context of the approach detailed in Q3, please provide details of your most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards in your homes, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards**

- During the past 12 months there have been 371 surveyor visits to assess damp and mould issues as part of a repair request. Each case identified has been assessed by a surveyor and appropriate actions or repairs have been commenced or completed to rectify the situation for the residents concerned.
- Since 2021 there have been 10 stage one complaints received related to condensation and none have been escalated to stage two or escalated to the Ombudsman. There have been no disrepair claims and no record of paying out to any Council tenants regarding claims related to damp and/or mould or related to respiratory issues/ ill health.
- Our targeted stock condition surveys to pre-war acquired properties (dwellings purchased by the Council) has resulted in planned maintenance programmes being established to undertake a range of work to address defects including damp.
- The remote monitoring equipment work and data analysis to a targeted set of property types is ongoing over several heating seasons and no results are available at this time.
- Since September 2022 Council surveyors have referred 75+ residents to Leap and Switched On Portsmouth so that an Energy Advisor can advise on ways to maximise income and save energy, or provide assistance with the costs of heating
- Post occupation surveys and monitoring was undertaken at the Wilmcote House retrofit project. The project was the largest EnerPhit project in the UK to address poor heating levels, condensation, and mould issues. It demonstrated that the work undertaken has eliminated the original condensation and mould issues identified as well as creating a better affordable living environment requiring less heating demands.

**5. Given the findings of the assessment outlined in Q4, please outline the actions you are taking to remedy any issues and hazards, and ensure that your homes meet the Decent Homes Standard**

- Each case of damp and mould identified has been assessed by a surveyor and appropriate actions or repairs have been commenced or completed to rectify the situation for the tenant concerned.
- Planned maintenance programmes have been established to undertake a range of work to address defects including damp to pre-war acquired properties

- A damp and mould policy together with guidance for the teams is currently being refreshed and is planned to be published in the next six months to ensure that the Council are consistent regarding their approach and residents have visibility of what service to expect regarding damp and mould enquiries.
- Refresher training of all staff who undertake property visits is ongoing to ensure that they can correctly identify damp and mould issues and take the appropriate action.
- A retrofit feasibility is currently being undertaken to assess the viability of retrofitting properties technically and financially to achieve decarbonisation of the housing stock. A total of 29 sites have been chosen that include a mix of houses and blocks of flats as well as traditional and non-traditional construction representing a third of the housing stock type
- Staff and contractor core group briefings have been undertaken to refocus knowledge and understanding of damp and mould response to issues identified
- The Council asset management strategy and business plan is being reviewed by external consultants to identify strengths and weaknesses of the strategy and refresh the plans to address sector challenges

## **6. Please tell us how you ensure that individual damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents**

### Damp and Mould enquiries from Residents

Typically, damp and mould demands are reported by residents themselves to the Council via the Repairs Support Team RST, although damp and mould may also be identified by Housing Management staff, surveyors, or contractors' staff during a property inspection, as part of the void process or during the course of another arranged property visit such as an unrelated repair or servicing appointment.

- Where a resident has reported damp or mould issues an appointment will be arranged for a Council surveyor to visit and inspect the property to assess and diagnose the cause of the issue.
- A repair request will be recorded on the Council repairs and maintenance database for all damp and mould enquiries raised, from which we are able to extract data to review damp and mould measures.
- The Council surveyor will inspect the property with the resident to investigate and assesses the damp and mould issue highlighted; they will diagnose the cause that may include taking relative humidity readings, temperature readings, check the effectiveness of the heating and ventilation as well as inspect for any other building defects that may contribute to the damp and mould issue highlighted.
- The Council does not differentiate category 1 and 2 hazards, the council surveyor will arrange for any further follow-on repair work to be undertaken by

contractors or specialists to address any building and /or heating issues identified and prevent further occurrences of damp and mould regardless of the category.

- The Council surveyor will use the opportunity to also provide advice to the resident to manage their property to prevent damp and mould, as well as take the opportunity to discuss Leap and the city council's Switched-on Portsmouth options for referral if required so that an Energy Advisor can advise on ways to maximise income and save energy, or provide assistance with the costs of heating

A follow-on appointment will be arranged with the resident by a Council surveyor to monitor the effectiveness of the repair/s undertaken and/or advice/guidance and appropriate further actions will be taken where necessary.

### Referrals from staff and contractors

We make every tenant contact count, whether this is in person, by telephone, or in writing. All staff and contractors will observe and report any issues with the property during visits - this holistic approach includes safeguarding issues, hoarding, and any repair issues including damp and mould.

When properties are void or during the mutual exchange process, we check the condition of the property including the presence of mould, or the likelihood of it occurring.

When undertaking any planned maintenance project internal surveys will be undertaken to a sample of properties as part of the evaluation of the scheme, if damp and mould issues are identified then options will be assessed to incorporate measures to address the issues identified, this may include for example replacement windows or external wall insulation

### **Additional Information that can be added**

As a local authority landlord, we work to ensure that all our tenants' homes are maintained to a good standard and that we respond appropriately to all repairs and concerns raised by our tenants. We aim to tailor repairs around the individuals needs and requests where possible. In doing this we are confident that we have a good understanding of where there may be any issues with damp and mould and have actions in place to rectify the situation.

We review information that we provide to residents and are currently updating a damp and mould advice leaflet that is provided to residents and the information will also be updated on the Council website.

We publish via social media and the switched-on Portsmouth website updates on how residents can deal with damp, mould, and condensation and where they can seek help and advice.

The manager of the surveying team assesses the surveying response to damp and mould enquiries and the surveying team meet regularly to discuss and feedback

Our approach is to make every visit and resident contact count, this means every team or contractor visiting a property having a view of both the household and the property to identify any damp and mould issue and forwarding any issues to the Repairs Support team so that a surveyor can visit.

**7. Please provide the name of the person in your organisation that we can contact with further queries:**

- Meredydd Hughes
- Sally Scattergood

**8. Please provide the job title of the person provided in Q7.**

- Assistant Director of Buildings
- Assistant Director of Housing

**9. Please provide the email of the person provided in Q7.**

- [Meredydd.Hughes@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:Meredydd.Hughes@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)
- [Sally.Scattergood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:Sally.Scattergood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

**10. Please provide the phone number of the person provided in Q7.**

- 07837 235329
- 07306 029237

**11. Please confirm if you have uploaded additional document(s) to NROSH+**

- I have NOT uploaded any additional documents to NROSH+



# Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services

DIRECTORATE UPDATE

From Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services, James Hill

09 December 2022  
10 min read

## Damp and mould social housing: Staff updates

### Awaab Ishak

Many of you will have read the findings of the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak, who sadly died in a social housing property in Rochdale in 2020.

The inquest examined the circumstances and concluded that Awaab's death was a result of prolonged mould exposure in the home, and that the provider, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, had not addressed the issues of damp and mould.

[Read the full report](#)

### Ombudsman's report

In October 2021 the [Housing Ombudsman](#) issued a written report, *Spotlight on: Damp and Mould - it's not lifestyle*, with a clear message that simply pointing to tenants' lifestyle choices isn't a sufficient response to the issues of damp and mould.

## **Read the full report**

### **Our response**

You may have seen [this article](#) from the Chartered Institute of Housing which captures very well the response of many to the situation and highlights the resources available to us from professional bodies like the CIH - please have a read through if you haven't done so already.

**We would encourage you to share useful information from your own networks and professional bodies which can help us all improve our knowledge and systems as we reflect on the circumstances leading to this tragic loss of life.**

Though we're confident in our ability to respond well to issues in the private sector and in our landlord function, we are not complacent. We will reflect on the lessons this case brings and we will engage fully with the government's review of this area of work.

The secretary of state has contacted all housing authorities asking urgently for a response as to how we regulate and support issues like this in the private rented sector. The social housing regulator has asked for similar assurance in respect of social housing landlords.

Overseeing our response is Sally Scattergood, assistant director of housing, and Meredydd Hughes, assistant director of building services.

**The initial response regarding private sector housing was provided on 30 November. A response for the social housing function is to be provided by 19 December.**

### **How we move forward**

We will keep you all updated. Please talk to your managers if you have identified any damp and mould that you're concerned about as you complete your property visits.

You will be aware that our approach is to make every visit and tenant contact count. This means keeping a full 360° view of both the household and the property to make sure that you are:

- identifying any repairs or issues with the property
- identifying any potential safeguarding concerns
- offering any appropriate tenancy advice or signposting tenants to the information that they may need



- asking tenants if there's anything else they need support with, at every point of contact

## If you identify a damp or mould issue

If you are in one of our tenants' homes and you identify a damp and mould issue, please call the **repairs support team** from the property to explain the issue - they are practised in assessing whether a surveyor needs to visit the property or if alternative advice is needed.

Where a surveyor is required, the team are able to schedule an appointment with the customer there and then.

If you are unable to make this call for any reason, please email the repairs support team the details of the property and tenant, explaining your concerns and including any photos of the affected areas in the property. This will help to inform the team's assessment.

We are also updating our leaflets and information on the web site so that residents can access this information directly.

**If you have any questions, please email**  
**[HNBScomms@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:HNBScomms@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)**

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# CONDENSATION AND MOULD

**ADVICE FOR  
PORTSMOUTH CITY  
COUNCIL TENANTS**



**Homes in the UK can suffer from condensation and mould, especially in the winter. Daily tasks such as cooking, showering and drying clothes result in moisture being released into the air, which can lead to condensation and black mould growth. Mould toxicity can negatively impact both your physical and mental wellbeing.**

## **DAMP**

There are two types of damp that can lead to the growth of black mould within a home. Rising damp is caused by ground water moving up through the wall or floor. This can be caused by a lack of effective damp proof course. Penetrating damp is caused by leaking water. This is usually caused by a structural problem in the building such as faulty guttering, or it can be caused by internal leaks, like pipes under the sink. This type of damp may expand across walls or a ceiling horizontally.



## BLACK MOULD

Black mould is caused by a build-up of moisture. Left untreated this can spread from walls onto furniture, curtains and clothing. Black mould produces allergens, irritants, and sometimes toxic substances. Inhaling or touching mould spores may cause an allergic reaction such as sneezing, a runny nose, red eyes and a skin rash.



## CONDENSATION

Condensation is caused by moist air coming into contact with cold surfaces such as walls, windows and mirrors. It can also build up in places where there is little air movement, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards. Condensation can cause dampness and mould within your home which can create a distinctive musty smell.



# HOW TO REDUCE CONDE BLACK MOULD GROWTH

## MAINTAIN PROPER VENTILATION



Use extractor fans and trickle vents in your windows. These don't lose much heat so keep them uncovered.



Open windows for short periods in the morning to release moisture from your home.



If you're drying clothes indoors, make sure there are open windows to allow moisture to escape.



Allow soft furnishings, such as sofas, room to breathe by pulling them away from the wall and not overfilling your wardrobe.

# CONDENSATION AND PREVENT IT IN YOUR HOME

## HEAT YOUR HOME



Condensation is less likely to form if the temperature of your home is above 15°C.



However, it's recommended that rooms are kept at between 18-21°C to keep you warm and healthy.



Don't turn thermostatic radiator valves off, always keep them on a minimum frost setting.

### SWITCHED ON

PORTSMOUTH

If you're struggling to afford your heating, help is available. Visit our website at: [switchedonportsmouth.co.uk](http://switchedonportsmouth.co.uk) for energy saving advice or call our freephone number **0800 260 5907** to receive free energy and financial advice, as well as onward referrals into larger schemes.

# TRY TO KEEP YOUR MOISTURE LEVELS DOWN

**Most daily tasks will release moisture into the air.**

Activity	Litres of water vapour
Breathing – active adult	0.85 litres per day per person
Breathing – sleeping adult	0.3 litres per day per person
Cooking	Up to 3 litres per day
Washing clothes	0.5 litres per load
Drying clothes	5 litres per load
Showers and baths	1.5 litres per person
Washing dishes	Up to 1 litre per day
Un-flued gas heater	Up to 1 litre per hour of use

**Try the below tips to reduce moisture levels in your home to prevent condensation:**

**Dry clothes outside or in a vented tumble dryer where possible**

**Take shorter showers**

**Add cold water first when running a bath – this reduces steam by up to 90%**

**Keep a lid on pots and pans when cooking**

**Wipe windows daily with a squeegee**



## KEEP KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS CLEAN

Kitchens and bathrooms are hotspots for condensation and therefore, mould as well. Keep on top of your cleaning routine to prevent the build-up of black mould in these rooms.



## CONTACTING US ABOUT DAMP AND MOULD IN YOUR HOME

Reporting damp and mould to the council is the right thing to do, and the earliest this can be done, the easier it will be to resolve. Any signs of damp should be reported to the Housing repairs support team as soon as possible. This can be done by calling or emailing using the below details, or online on the Portsmouth City Council website via the 'maintaining and repairing your council property' web page.

If you notice black mould spots starting to appear, do not leave it. To remove the mould, first try buying a domestic mould and mildew remover from your local supermarket and cleaning the affected areas by carefully following the manufacturer's instructions.

If you have **extreme** black mould or the initial treatment is not effective, please contact the Housing repairs support team as this may be an indication of an underlying repair issue with your home and will need to be cleaned off and treated with fungicidal treatment. Do not try to remove with a brush or Hoover as this can lead to the mould spreading further round your home.

### HOUSING REPAIRS SUPPORT TEAM CONTACT DETAILS

 023 9284 1311

 [repairssupportteam@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:repairssupportteam@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)



FOR ADVICE AND SUPPORT WITH  
YOUR ENERGY USE AND BILLS VISIT  
**SWITCHEDONPORTSMOUTH.COM**  
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