Appendix A

Damp and Mould Policy

Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that Swansea Council meets the needs of its tenants and leaseholders by providing homes that are safe, warm, and dry by proactively managing the potential risks and promptly diagnosing and preventing issues which may arise from damp and mould in Council properties.

Damp and mould related health issues can affect people regardless of their age or current health. However, the elderly, children, those with existing health problems and the unemployed are most at risk. Increasing levels of fuel poverty due to high energy costs can prevent the adequate heating of many homes during winter, leading to an increase in condensation and indoor dampness. It is therefore a key priority of the Council to respond effectively to reports of damp and mould and to take a pro-active approach to prevent problems from arising in the first place. This policy sets out how Swansea Council aims to achieve this.

Current Legislation Regarding Damp & Mould

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard has an overriding requirement that a dwelling must be structurally stable, free from damp and from disrepair, with the key building components such as the roof/ roof coverings and walls being in good condition.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (Housing Act 2004) – The presence of damp and mould is considered a Priority Category 1 Hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System given the significant threat it poses to mental and physical health as well as social well being.

Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 - Part 4 of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 sets out the obligations placed on a landlord regarding the condition of a dwelling. These obligations apply to all occupation contracts made for a term of less than seven years. A landlord, under an occupation contract, is obliged to ensure a dwelling is both in repair and Fit for Human Habitation (FFHH).

What is damp and mould?

Damp - There are two types of damp which allows the passage of water into the inside of a property due to defects in the building structure, namely penetrating and rising damp. The third form of damp is condensation, which the consequence of high levels of humidity created within the dwelling.

Penetrating damp occurs when water ingress penetrates through the external fabric into the inside of the building. Two simple examples, ingress due to missing roof tiles

or slates and penetration through defective render of properties of solid masonry wall construction

Rising damp is less a common defect that generally occurs if there is a problem with the damp proof course in walls or membrane in solid concrete floor slabs. Should the damp barriers fail or absent at time of construction, rising damp often shows as a horizontal ‘tide mark’ usually up to a metre above ground floor level.

Condensation occurs when there is excessive humidity inside a property, which condenses into water droplets when it makes contact with cold surfaces of building fabric such as window glazing or external masonry walls, .

Condensation usually occurs in winter as the house is colder, windows opened less frequently for natural ventilation, which traps the moisture within the property. People produce significant amounts of moisture during their everyday lives through cooking, running baths and even breathing.

Mould spores grow and thrive in with damp conditions.

Causes of Structure Related Damp and Mould in the Home

There are scores of possible reasons for water penetration into a property due to component failure or building fabric defects during the life cycle of a typical property. The period of time building element will last before they fail is dependent upon the type material and the level of exposure of building and its orientation.

Repairs to eliminate damp penetration are generally easily identified and rectified and in the landlord has complete control to find an effective repair solution.

Listed below are a number of typical defects

Roof Leaks- missing or slipped tiles/slates, defective sarking membrane, water penetration through redundant masonry chimneys.

Defective Rainwater Goods – blocked and overflowing gutters, leaking gutter joints and blocked and damaged downpipes.

Damp Through External Walls – debris blockages in cavities of walls creating damp bridges, defective dpc trays over structural openings, defective seals to perimeter of windows and doors, defective render or pointing to solid masonry wall structures, defective/inappropriate cavity wall insulation

Rising Damp – failure or absence of original damp course material allowing ground waters to rise and penetrate inside property, external path floor levels breaching dpc, raised plant beds against property, above dpc level.

Causes of Condensation Related Damp and Mould in the Home

Condensation related damp repair work is relatively straight forward to diagnose and rectify but long term success of repairs are not entirely within the landlords ability to control for number of reasons set out below.

Ventilation- Insufficient ventilation within a dwelling is the main cause excessive humidity, condensation and damp. This could be due to a number of reasons such as window sashes provided for natural ventilation not being opened, trickle vents being blocked up, no mechanical extractor fans in kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry rooms, or mechanical ventilation fitted being turned off/blocked up/broken. Excessive humidity and condensation can be problematic in highly insulated properties which reduce air movement. The provision and use of whole house mechanical ventilation systems is required

Everyday activities - Drying clothes on radiators, cooking without lids on pans, running baths in unventilated rooms whether natural or mechanical, all add to the moisture level within a property.

Fuel Poverty - fuel poverty is now a major factor in the increase in damp and mould problems. Many are unable to afford to adequately heat or ventilate their homes effectively which creates the conditions for moulds to grow.

Cold Bridging - this can occur where a localised structural feature, or lack of insulation material causes the temperature to be lower in an area than other sections of the external building fabric. Cold bridges to inside of a home will attract water vapour and localised areas of black mould . Vulnerable areas of the structure that are difficult to insulate include eaves of a roof, plinths of walls, reveal returns of structural openings, raking soffits of bedrooms within roof structure, concrete mullions and lintels and damp cavity wall insulation where incorrectly installed.

Poor Thermal Performance – The building fabric of older dwellings may not have the same thermal insulation qualities of newer properties, which can lead to excessive heat loss through external walls, roof and solid ground floor slabs. Poorly insulated properties tend to have greater condensation and mould problems.

Type and location of radiators- radiators should be fitted to external walls usually under the window to maximise thermal movement of heated air. They should be of adequate size to heat the room. There are many free ‘room size to radiator’ calculators online.

The Council's Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for insulating and ventilating properties to reduce the likelihood of condensation occurring. This is achieved via planned repairs to properties to ensure all properties continue to meet Welsh Housing Quality standard requirements**.**

Contract Holder' responsibilities

Contract holders should take steps to reduce mould and condensation in their home by following the Council's advice such as covering pan lids when cooking, not using radiators to dry clothes without adequate ventilation. Full advice is available on the council's website How to deal with condensation and mould in your home - Swansea

Any issues of damp mould or condensation within homes should be reported by contract holders so that it can be properly investigated.

Contract holders are required to allow access to the property for inspection and remedial work in line with obligations contained within their occupation contracts so that damp and mould can be properly investigated and treated where necessary.

Contract holders should ensure that window trickle vents are opened and any mechanical ventilation i.e. extractor fans or PIV (positive input ventilation) provided by the Council are used as instructed to prevent the build-up of condensation and indoor dampness.

Leaseholder Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for the repair and maintenance to the structure of the building. The leaseholder is responsible for internal maintenance in accordance with the conditions of their lease unless the cause of any condensation or damp is directly linked to a structural issue such as a roof leak, rising damp etc.

Where there are reports of damp and mould in any leasehold property each case will be inspected and dealt with on an individual basis.

The Council will check the following;-

- Windows to ensure any trickle vents are functioning.
- Whether there is the correct level of insulation in the attic space.
- Confirm whether mechanical ventilation is fitted in the property. Where the Council has installed measures to improve the thermal efficiency of properties such as EWI (external wall insulation) and the programme includes a leasehold property, these properties will be fitted with mechanical ventilation. **If there is a report of damp and mould from a leaseholder and the Council has not undertaken EWI work then the leaseholder is responsible for installing their own mechanical ventilation.**
- Signs of rising damp
- Evidence of water ingress
- Evidence of penetrating damp

Advice will also be provided to a leaseholder on how to reduce condensation in their home.

Training

The Council will ensure that training is provided to relevant staff so they have a good understanding of this policy.

All inspectors will receive relevant training such as Health Housing Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and specific training related to damp and mould in order to carry out their roles effectively.

The Council will ensure that any visiting staff can offer advice on managing moisture within the home, to reduce condensation and will be able to arrange technical inspections if they suspect a property has signs of damp or mould.

The Council's Approach to preventing and addressing Damp & Mould

The Council priorities work to tackle and prevent damp and mould issues and has a dedicated team of experienced and well-trained inspectors who utilise specialist equipment. In addition, external contactors can be procured quickly via a damp and mould procurement framework to assist the Council's staff in delivering works quickly and effectively.

Preventative Work and Initiatives

The Council will aim to prevent damp and mould occurring in its properties in the first place by:

- ensuring information on how to combat damp and mould is widely communicated to all of its contract holders and leaseholders.

- arranging follow up visits to properties where damp and mould work has been undertaken to confirm that the repair has been effective.

- undertaking tenancy inspections with staff being trained to identify the signs damp and mould

- signposting relevant advice where contract-holders are struggling with the cost of living and fuel prices. The Council can provide advice on benefit entitlement and income maximisation Cost of living help - Swansea

Responsive Works

When notified of the presence of damp and mould whether directly from a tenant, or leaseholder via the Council's call centre or via a different source, the Council will undertake an inspection within **5 working days** of being informed.

The inspection will be holistic in nature and look at underlying structural repairs issues as well as the effects of humidity and condensation.

The council will aim to complete damp and mould remedial work **20 working days** after inspection where practical and to deliver different types of works required within the time frames specified within the Repairs Policy. Typical responsive repairs will include:-

- Repairs to the building fabric to eliminate penetrating and rising damp
- Increasing thermal insulation
- Installing wall extractors and positive input systems for whole house ventilation
- Treating the effects of condensation and black mould with inhibiting solution

Performance regarding damp and mould inspections and resulting work is monitored and reported to the Cabinet Member on a regular basis.

Planned Works

The Council delivers a wide range of damp and mould prevention measures under its annual capital repairs programme, these include:-

- Thermal efficiency measures such as increased insulation in attic space and eaves and installing 100mm of insulated render.
- 32mm double glazed windows with trickle vents
- Positive input ventilation installations which have low running costs and operate when relative humidity exceeds 60%
- Kitchen and bathroom extractors
- Roof ventilation including the installation of roof ventilation tiles and ventilation strips on soffits of eaves.
- Full inspecting of properties when they are void to identify penetrating damp, rising damp and the presence of mould with all damp and mould identified being treated before the property is relet.

Future Ambition

The Council is planning on further improving how it deals with damp and mould. Future initiatives include:-

- Improved insulation of properties in combination with mechanical ventilation should reduce the instances of damp and mould within the internal environment

- Rolling out the installation of environmental sensors will provide the Authority with data regarding whether a property has excessive humidity contributing to condensation damp, excessively hot or cold, has poor ventilation or whether the tenant is at risk of suffering from fuel poverty.