



Charnwood

Damp and Mould Framework

Charnwood Borough Council

1. Introduction

Residents living in homes with damp and mould may be more likely to have respiratory problems, allergies, asthma, and other conditions that affect on their immune system¹. Mental health may also be negatively affected upon.

The Council aims to provide dry, warm, and healthy homes for its tenants, and will protect the fabric of its buildings from deteriorating due to damp and mould.

The Council's approach will be sensitive, empathetic to tenants, and will recognise that homes built a long time ago may not meet the needs of modern households.

As far as is reasonably practicable the Council will take steps on both a proactive and reactive basis to remediate damp and mould and will monitor individual cases of damp and mould to conclusion.

2. Scope and Purpose of this Document

This framework applies to Council-owned homes and buildings. Its purpose is to provide a clear and transparent framework on the Council's approach to dealing with the diagnosis and remediation of damp and mould issues.

The framework sets out the Council's current approach to proactive interventions, diagnosis, actions it considers appropriate in different circumstances, how it communicates with tenants about damp and mould, and aftercare.

The framework recognises that our approach to damp and mould needs further development, and where further action is needed this is noted. Future actions are enclosed in boxes throughout this document.

3. Legislative Requirements

The Decent Homes Standard², updated in 2006, states that for a home to be considered 'decent' it must:

1. Can damp and mould affect my health? - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

2. A decent home: definition and guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

1. Meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing
2. Be in a reasonable state of repair
3. Have reasonably modern facilities and services, and
4. Provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

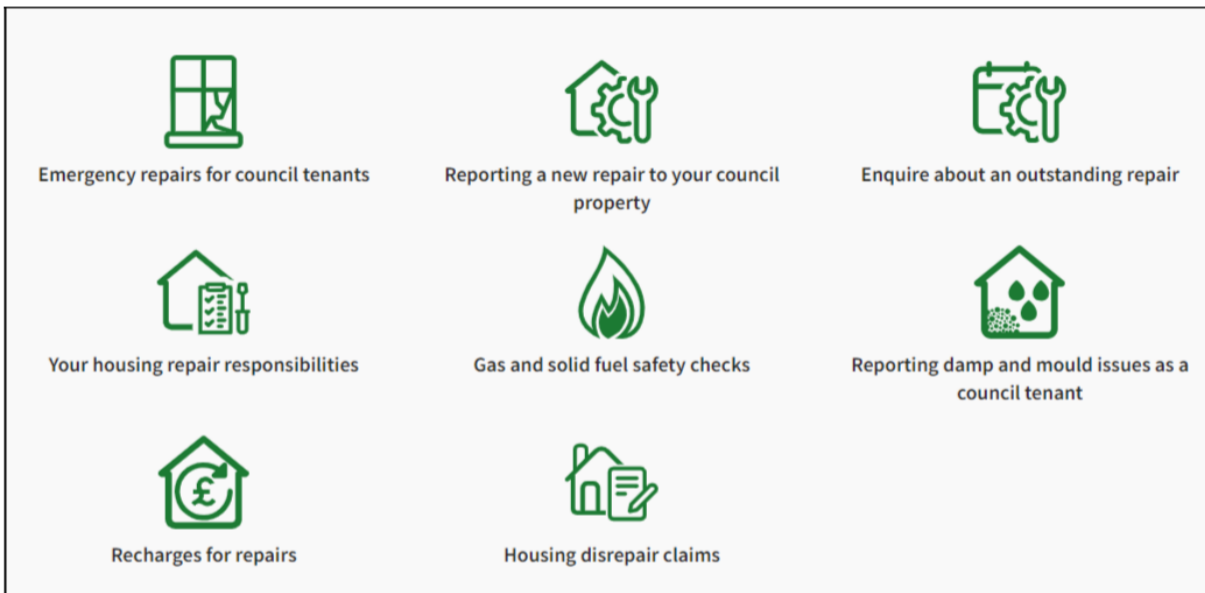
The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 amended the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, with the aim of ensuring that all rented accommodation is fit for human habitation. It requires landlords to ensure their properties are fit for human habitation at the beginning of, and throughout, the tenancy. The Landlord and Tenant Act does not define “fit for human habitation”, but consideration should be given to repair, stability, freedom from damp, internal arrangement, natural lighting, ventilation, water supply, drainage and sanitary conveniences, facilities for preparation and cooking of food, the disposal of wastewater and any prescribed hazard.

The Council’s conditions of tenancy sets out the contractual obligations of both the Council and its tenants and is available on our website.

4. The Council’s Approach to Dealing with Damp and Mould

4.1 Communication with tenants

We currently provide information about damp and mould to tenants on our website. the location of this information is clearly highlighted on the repairs front page.



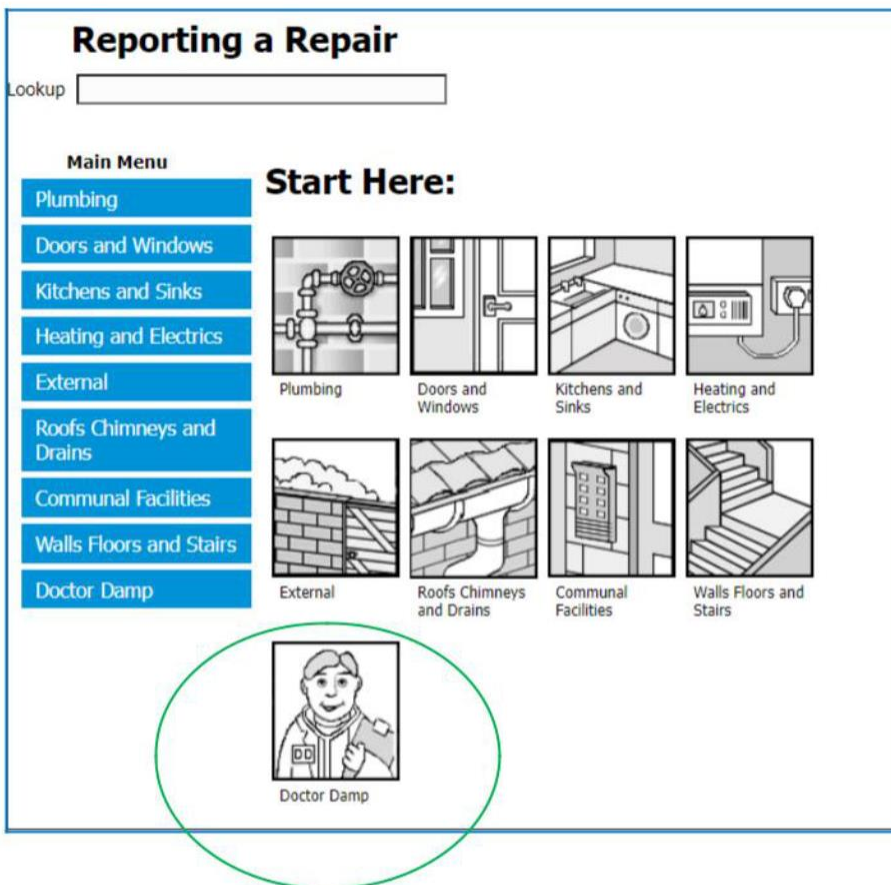
We recognise the website may not be accessible to all. We currently issue regular articles in our tenant magazine about damp and mould to raise awareness of the potential health issues, support prevention, and encourage reporting. We also have a hard copy leaflet.

We will engage with our tenants to review both our existing communication and literature, both web-based and hard copy relating to damp and mould, and develop any new documentation identified as needed, working together with them to co-design meaningful advice that shares responsibility and supports tenants at a distressing time.

We will develop and issue information at tenancy sign up about how tenants can best manage the environment within their home to help prevent damp and mould occurring. We will aim to make this unambiguous and easy to understand; for example, comparing the cost of running mechanical ventilation to the cost of running everyday appliances rather than stating “6p per hour” and clearly stating how long a window should be left open or a fan should be turned on after cooking.

4.2 Reporting

We provide a range of ways for tenants to report damp and mould to us, including by phone, via officers visiting tenants’ homes, at the Council offices by appointment, and online via our repairs reporting tool. Our online reporting tool has a distinct section for reporting damp issues, as illustrated below. This can be accessed on our website at www.charnwood.gov.uk/repairs.



We will review our reporting arrangements to support an approach which focusses on the early remediation of damp and mould issues. A relatively “minor” issue relating to condensation may be a symptom of an underlying defect, or there may be improvements, including unblocking or improving ventilation which may resolve the issue.

4.3 Proactive Interventions and Early Identification

The Council currently operates a pro-active stock condition surveying regime, inspecting over 1000 of its properties over the last 12 months. Damp and mould hazards have been and are actively sought out as part of this work.

We will prioritise those properties where tenants have reported issues relating to damp and mould for stock condition surveys.

The Council has recently updated its void (empty property) standard. In addition to checking that vents are clear, and fans are operating, we have introduced additional works between tenancies to prevent damp and mould, installing extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms where needed.

We will extend our works at void to include the installation of additional ventilation measures and topping up loft insulation as necessary, checking that it extends to all areas of loft space. Our voids resources will need to be increased to achieve this. We will also extend the scope of our mutual exchange inspections to incorporate the same checks with necessary works following on.

We will review stock condition data and reporting of damp and mould issues, with a view to developing a stock risk profile, bearing in mind the age, condition, and type of property. We will use this information to determine the measures we can take on a pro-active basis to prevent damp and mould. We will consider this information in the context of our approach to delivering energy improvements at Council homes and reducing carbon emissions.

Our repairs operatives are currently using a hazard identification electronic application to do report damp and mould issues in the course of their duties.

We will embed damp and mould hazard reporting across the wider service.

4.4 Training

Our surveying staff have been trained on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Our repairs operatives and non-technical staff have received damp and mould awareness training to spot risk factors, provide advice to tenants, and support reporting. We will maintain this level of training.

We will consider the Chartered Institute of Housing's Professional Standards for relevant officers. the 'Skilled' standard requires housing professionals to 'solve problems, be flexible, adaptable and respond to situations creatively, in the moment' and considers practical application of this standard to include 'taking pre-emptive action and proactively problem solving' and 'finding solutions, even if they lie outside "normal" activity.'

4.5 Management Information and Performance Monitoring

Damp and mould-related repairs are currently included in monthly repairs reporting data however they are not visible as a distinct category of work. Damp and mould cases are monitored and progressed operationally.

We will introduce management information specifically relating to damp and mould. Our management team will monitor, monthly, the number of damp and mould cases currently managed by the service and the timescales associated with works. Information relating to the number of damp and mould cases managed will be shared with our tenants and elected members through our Housing Management Advisory Board on a quarterly basis. Like many landlords, our systems require further development to support the more efficient tracking of cases.

Those cases that are protracted will be reviewed by a senior officer.

4.6 Escalation and Complaints

Our Complaints Policy can be found on the Council's website and is linked from our damp and mould web page.

We will promote the use of our complaints process to tenants in our hard copy damp and mould literature and communications and will highlight that tenants may approach the Ombudsman at an early stage.

We will review our repairs and complaints data both to determine whether there are patterns and trends emerging around damp and mould specifically, and whether there are any underrepresented groups that are not approaching us to report damp and mould issues.

4.7 Our Approach to Reactive Diagnosis and Remediation

Tenants, through our Housing Management Advisory Board, have been consulted on our procedure for responding to damp and mould. This process has been further refined and is summarised below.

Summary Procedure – Investigation and Diagnosis

Where the tenant reports damp and mould a case is raised to a Repairs Team Leader for review.

The Repairs Team Leader will establish whether there are any household members that are sensitive to damp and mould. For example:

- babies and children
- older people
- those with existing skin problems, such as atopic eczema
- those with respiratory problems, such as allergies and asthma
- those with a weakened immune system, such as those having chemotherapy

At periods of high demand, households with these occupants will be prioritised for inspections and works for damp and mould.

- Review the repairs history at the property, undertaking a review of system data / and where applicable will discuss the property with operatives that have attended to any recent jobs which may be related to the problem.
- Where appropriate, the Repairs Team Leader will look to extend the scope of investigation within buildings, for example by examining neighbouring properties, to support an effective response, early on.
- The target for contact (bookings are made by our customer contact centre, in consultation with tenants where possible) with the customer is **5 working days** of the initial report of damp / mould at the property. The purpose of this contact is to undertake enquiries as to the extent of damp and mould, possible causes, provide advice, and to identify appropriate initial actions, which may include advice, a visit, mould clean, a specialist damp and mould survey, and / or a roof survey.
- Record initial findings on the Council's repairs system.
- Where the Repairs Team Leader determines they will visit, the target timescale for the visit is within a further 5 working days.
- At any visit undertaken or conversation with the tenant or their representative the Repairs Team leader will record their findings on the Council's repairs management system.
- If the Repairs Team leader cannot determine the cause of the damp and mould, or if measures have already been tried and the problem remains, or if felt appropriate based on professional judgement a specialist damp and mould survey will be instructed.
- The Repairs Team Leader will advise the customer of the outcome of inspections, of plans for remediation, and of any follow up surveys.
- Where a specialist damp and mould survey has been requested, the Repairs Team Leader will inform the customer of the findings and recommendations, and if any recommended work is not to be completed, the reasons why. The results of the survey will be shared with the customer. Pricing information will not be shared. Specialist

surveys are currently filed on our repairs management system attached to the original report of a damp and mould issues, so are visible to all relevant staff.

- Any follow-up appointments relating to the remediation of damp and mould will be treated as urgent and raised, as far as is practicable, on a 5-day work order. Major works, for example a full roof replacement, or structural works / damp proofing will take longer with a target completion date of 90 days. Tenants will be provided with the details of work to be completed.
- Where a decant is required, for example, owing to the need for extensive works and the tenant is vulnerable to damp and mould, the Repairs Team Leader will make a referral to the Tenancy and Estate Management Team.

We will extend the scope of inspections to include checks around the occupation of the property and fuel poverty. Where a property is over occupied and this is thought to be a contributing factor to condensation forming, a referral will be made to the Tenancy and Estate Management Team for support with re-housing options.

Where fuel poverty is identified as a factor, a referral will be made to the Tenancy Support and Financial Inclusion Team.

4.8 Remediation

The Council has a responsibility to maintain its property in line with legislation and its conditions of tenancy. Typical works identified during damp and mould remediation, include:

- Re-pointing
- Re-sealing / replacing windows.
- Roofing works
- Damp-proofing works
- Repairing and replacing doors and windows
- Repairing existing insulation
- Topping up and replacing loft insulation
- Clearing of gutters and repairs
- Clearance of obstructed air vents.

The Council typically undertakes a range of additional measures to prevent damp and mould. These include:

- Installation of extractor fans
- Installation of additional vents
- Installation of positive input ventilation
- Installation of a loft based dehumidifier
- Internal wall insulation
- Anti-condensation paint

Occupancy factors, relating to overcrowding, the drying of laundry etc. do not mean we have no responsibility, and we recognise that some homes were not designed with modern living in mind.

We therefore take reasonable steps in partnership with residents in these circumstances, including considering improving ventilation or other appropriate measures (as set out above), seeking to modify the property for modern living as far as is practicable.

We are regularly re-imbursing tenants for the use of dehumidifiers deployed on a temporary basis (for example, following a leak).

We will develop our approach to make sure re-imburement for electricity used during temporary dehumidification is occurring on a consistent basis and that tenants are aware we will re-imburse them.

Where decorating is needed after mould cleaning or works, the Council will cover the reasonable cost of redecoration. Where tenants are unable to decorate themselves we will provide support.

4.9 Access and Aftercare

We currently set appointment times for damp and mould inspections and related repairs in consultation with customers as far as is practicable. For example, when a customer calls us to report a repair it is booked in with the customer at the time. Where an online report is made, we call the customer to do the same.

Damp and mould cases are currently monitored for access issues, with repairs re-booked where access has not been successful. Some work is outsourced, and orders are also monitored to support successful completion.

We will develop our no access process relating to damp and mould which will include the prompt follow up of cases where access has not been gained.

We will introduce a post job completion call to residents and will survey residents that have previously reported damp and mould issues to check the problem has been resolved, and to review any further action we may take.