

Appendix 1 - Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy 2024/25

Introduction

This policy sets out the approach Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) takes to ensure that damp, mould, and condensation within IBC properties are treated seriously and dealt with swiftly and effectively.

IBC want all tenants to enjoy living in homes that are safe and well maintained. This is why IBC developed the Ipswich Standard, an enhancement on the Government's Decent Homes Standard.

IBC recognises that the presence of damp and mould in homes has potential physical and mental health implications to our tenants.

This policy sets out the scope and context, explains what damp and mould is and the common causes. It explains how IBC will deal with a report of damp and mould by a tenant and/or leaseholder and explains how IBC is working on other identification measures and how this policy will be monitored going forward.

Objectives

This policy has several aims:

- To take a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould.
- To raise awareness of landlord and tenant responsibilities on damp and mould .
- To provide and maintain dry, warm, and healthy homes for all tenants and reduce the number of homes with damp and mould.
- To ensure repairs to alleviate damp are carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible to minimise damage to the structure, fixtures, and fittings of the property.
- To consider other tenancy management related actions that may assist in the resolution of damp and mould, such as providing advice or support on positive behaviors, cluttered homes and fuel poverty and considering severe cases of over occupation.
- To ensure the fabric of properties are protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp and mould.
- To work in partnership with tenants to resolve the issues of damp and mould in their homes. This will include providing tenants with information, materials, and support to prevent and help them reduce condensation in their homes.
- To reduce the number of complaints and disrepair claims regarding damp and mould.
- To ensure the service provided is accessible to all so everyone can easily report damp and mould.
- To ensure all tenants are treated in a fair, respectful, empathetic, and consistent way.

Scope

This policy relates to:

- All IBC housing staff
- IBC instructed Contractors
- IBC tenants
- IBC leaseholder

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In developing this policy, regard has been given to:

IBC Corporate Plan
Ipswich Standard for IBC Homes
IBC Asset Management Strategy
IBC Tenancy Agreement
IBC Leaseholder Agreement
IBC Complaints Policy
Social Housing Regulation Act 2023
Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
Housing Act 1985
Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
Housing Act 2004 (Housing Health and Safety Rating)
Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 S11 Repairs and Maintenance Consultation on Awaabs Law - (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/awaabs-law-consultation-on-timescales-for-repairs-in-the-social-rented-sector/awaabs-law-consultation-on-timescales-for-repairs-in-the-social-rented-sector>)

What is damp, mould and condensation?

Condensation occurs when the moisture in the air gets cooler and tiny water droplets appear on surfaces. If left untreated, mould will begin to grow.

Causes of condensation, that can lead to damp and mould, can include:

- Excess humidity – for example, pans do not have lids on when cooking and drying washing inside the property without adequate ventilation
- Ventilation – for example, windows are not opened, trickle vents are closed, extractor fans are not used, furniture is placed too close to external walls
- Inadequate heating
- Defective insulation – for example, dislodged insulation in lofts
- Overcrowding
- Cluttered homes
- Fuel poverty

Mould is a natural organic compound that develops in damp conditions and will grow on damp surfaces. This is often noticeable and present where condensation is present.

Damp occurs when a fault in the building's basic structure lets in water from outside, penetrating damp or due to the inadequacy of construction methods that may lead to rising damp.

Living in damp and mouldy conditions can affect both the physical and mental health of the entire household. IBC understands this and the aim of this policy is to mitigate the risk of tenants having to suffer distress caused by living in a damp and mouldy property.

Contributory factors to damp and mould

Over occupation of property can contribute to condensation issues leading to damp and mould, due to the excess moisture that may be generated in a small space.

IBC allocates housing using Gateway to Home choice where property is allocated appropriately using a priority system based on housing need. IBC will make every reasonable endeavour, wherever practically possible, to ensure that tenants are adequately housed. In extreme circumstances, changes to a tenant housing needs priority may be considered or a tenant may be re-housed into more appropriate accommodation.

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IBC will also support tenants wherever possible, and this may include assistance with fuel poverty or tackling cluttered homes, both of which may contribute to poor housing conditions, leading to damp and mould. Furthermore, by promoting awareness of damp and mould and of positive behaviours to manage damp and mould in the home environment.

In extreme cases, IBC may act, where a tenant persistently refuses or disregards reasonable advice that is provided to assist with tackling damp and mould.

IBCs approach to damp and mould

- Tenants should report damp & mould through the Customer Contact Centre, via the online reporting system or with an agent (or by any other means, such as via their Local Ward Councillor)
- The Customer Contact Centre advisors will make a direct customer appointment with the tenant for a surveyor to attend their property.
- The caretaking team will be dispatched (if required) to remove any mould normally within 72 hours. This removes the immediate hazard.
- A surveyor receives his appointments through a handheld device and will attend the property and complete a mould/housing defect report. If needed, damp probes will be left in the property to measure humidity levels.
- Following the inspection, the surveyor will discuss with the tenant the following:
 - If IBC can make improvements to the property to assist in the resolution of the damp and mould
 - Provide detailed information to assist tenants to understand how damp and mould arises.
 - Discuss what steps the tenant can take to stop damp and mould from re-appearing.
- Resolving damp and mould is not just a matter of cleaning it off, redecorating and carrying out some work in a property. It is also about assessing the condition of the property, where a tenant may need more support from their landlord, such as hoarding (cluttered homes) or over-occupation and for these contributory factors to also be considered.

Repairs

Possible repairs to mitigate damp and mould may include:

- Improving the insulation, e.g., increasing the loft insulation to the IBC standard
- Identifying “cold bridging” and insulating appropriately
- Ensuring trickle vents and extractor fans are fully operational
- Renewing extractor fans when appropriate
- Installing Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) systems
- Cleaning, treating mould followed by redecoration
- Fixing any water ingress from blocked downpipes or gutters
- Treating any rising damp
- In extreme cases, installing new damp proof courses
- Ensuring there are no leaks caused by the plumbing of the property
- Ensuring the heating system is fit for purpose
- Removing any inappropriate DIY improvements that contribute negatively
- Glazing repairs

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Awaabs Law

Ipswich Borough Council recognises the importance of maintaining safe environments for its tenants and are closely monitoring and have responded to the Government consultation on Awaabs Law.

Awaabs Law related to a tragedy on 21 December 2020, where Awaab Ishak died as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home.

On 20 July 2023, Awaab's Law entered the statute book as Section 42 of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Awaab's Law effectively inserts into social housing tenancy agreements a term (called an implied term) that will require landlords to comply with new requirements, to be set in detail through secondary legislation. This means all registered providers of social housing (also referred to as 'social landlords') will have to meet these requirements and, if they fail to do so, tenants will be able to hold their landlords to account by taking legal action through the courts for a breach of contract.

This consultation sought views on the specific requirements to be set and how these obligations will impact on residents and landlords. In particular, proposals for:

- a. timescales for initial investigations of potential hazards;
- b. requirements to be placed upon landlords to provide written summaries of investigation findings;
- c. timescales for beginning repair works;
- d. timescales for completing repair works;
- e. timescales for emergency repairs;
- f. the circumstances under which properties should be temporarily decanted to protect residents' health and safety; and
- g. requirements to be placed upon landlords to maintain adequate record keeping throughout repair works.

The Government has indicated that it will bring forward secondary legislation to bring Awaab's Law into force as soon as practicable and Ipswich Borough Council is fully committed to implementing any proposals that come forward with the secondary legislation.

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Examples of damp, mould, and condensation



Water vapour in the air will condense on cold surfaces.

Condensation can form on the glass in windows during cold weather, as it is one of the coldest surfaces in the house.

If this occurs, it is important to wipe the condensation off with a cloth otherwise it will lead to mould forming on the frames.

You may need to do this every day, sometimes more than once, during the colder weather.

If the condensation is not wiped off, then it will lead to mould forming on the window frames, as seen in this picture.

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Condensation forms on cold surfaces, such as on reveals around windows. This is often the case in houses with solid walls.

Heating the house to a constant temperature will keep the walls warm and will help to stop condensation.

Background ventilation by keeping trickle vents open or rapid ventilation by opening windows will help to remove the humid air.

Other causes may be a failure to the vertical DPC.

Radiators would normally be installed below windows because it helps to circulate air in a room. As warm air rises in front of the windows, it cools and the air moves downwards. This movement is called convection.

A Surveyor will look to see if a radiator can be fitted in situations like this.

To maintain the air movement, it is important to keep large items of furniture away from the walls.

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This is an example of an isolated patch of mould. This is very typically of where furniture is stored close to a wall and prevents air circulation.

Keep furniture and other belongings away from walls, particularly in and around corners.

Other causes may relate to dampness in a wall for example from a leaking pipe buried in a wall or a leaking downpipe, which will need further investigation.



Rising Damp: The tenant must contact IBC as soon as possible.

Rising damp is different to dampness caused by condensation. The woodwork will swell and the paintwork will peel or flake.

This indicates a problem with the damp-proof course (DPC). In some cases, it may be due to the ground level outside being too high.

A DPC would typically be 150mm above the outside ground level. If it is less, then the damp can breach the DPC and cause rising damp.

Complex cases

Some cases of damp or mould will be more complex. This may be because the cause of the damp or mould is more difficult to diagnose, that the treatment to remedy and prevent is more complicated or that the household circumstances (e.g., overcrowding, fuel poverty) creates a need for more ongoing treatment. IBC will identify a complex case at the earliest opportunity.

Staff from relevant IBC teams and other organisations (as required) will work together to prepare a plan, with a clear focus upon communication with the tenant by appointing a named liaison officer.

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The tenant has a right to complain if the tenant feels that any aspect of the service they receive is lacking. Tenants can complain to IBC by completing the online complaints form or in writing. Tenants also have the right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman.

What happens when a leaseholder reports damp and/or mould?

Leaseholders have a duty to report damp and mould issues to IBC (where they identify damp and mould is visible).

As a landlord of leaseholders, IBC has a duty to deal with issues that are caused by and affect the fabric of the building. The Leasehold Agreement sets out when issues are the responsibility of IBC and when issues are the responsibility of the leaseholder.

Reports of damp and mould made by leaseholders will be managed in the same way as described above for tenants. Leaseholders can engage with the various tenant engagement groups, tenant reps etc., should they wish to become involved in shaping services.

Other ways IBC can identify potential damp and mould

IBC will ensure that all housing staff whose role include property visits receive specific damp and mould training so that early signs of damp and mould can be identified.

IBC will build upon existing record keeping procedures so that those properties that may have a higher likelihood of experiencing damp and mould have the potential to be identified and inspected, if deemed appropriate. A property may be more prone to developing damp and mould due to its age or geographical location, for example.

IBC will seek to ensure ICT systems are linked so that property factors and household circumstances (such as overcrowding) are known.

IBC has developed mould and damp leaflets which act as a visual guide for all tenants and staff to aid with the identification of damp and mould and to also aid with understanding the severity of the damp and mould. In addition, IBC when deemed appropriate, will show tenants a video explaining about how damp and mould can occur. This will assist with initial reporting of damp and mould and triaging reports.

IBC will review the current information supplied to tenants regarding damp and mould identification and treatment to ensure it is understandable and available easily. The Tenants Times (published on a regular basis) may be used as a platform to highlight damp and mould. This may include a 'what to do if you have damp, mould or condensation' reminder or with a specialised focused damp, mould, and condensation issue.

IBC will hold regular learning sessions with relevant staff in which IBC case studies and national case studies will be used to further enhance staff knowledge and best practice.

IBC will inspect for damp and mould when a property is void before it is re-let to a new tenant.

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Monitoring

IBC will monitor this policy on an ongoing basis to ensure the aims and objectives are met. The policy will be underpinned by an Action Plan which will be regularly monitored to ensure progress is made. Regular staff learning sessions will take place to embed education and best practice. Repair reports and formal complaints made using IBC complaints procedures will be analysed to provide learning opportunities and to develop a robust data set concerning damp and mould specifically. Tenant Engagement groups will be involved in the further development and monitoring of the policy.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Council and tenant groups, unless legislation states otherwise.

Document Review			
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