



Glasgow City Council

Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration  
City Policy Committee

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**Item 3**

26th September 2023

## Dampness, Condensation and Mould and its Impact on the Housing Stock

### Purpose of Report:

To provide an overview on how Glasgow City Council responds to reports of dampness, condensation and mould within housing.

### Recommendations:

Committee is asked to:-

1. consider the contents of this report.

Ward No(s):

Citywide:

Local member(s) advised: Yes  No

consulted: Yes  No

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 This report outlines the Council's current approach to tackling complaints of dampness, condensation and mould.
- 1.2 There have been a number of high profile cases of dampness/condensation in housing over recent times, with one particular dreadful case in England leading the Coroner in England to link the condition of a property to the death of a child, Awaab Ishak in 2020.
- 1.3 Dampness and condensation are known to adversely affect the health of vulnerable people, such as babies and immunocompromised individuals. Inhaling or touching mould spores may cause an allergic reaction, such as sneezing, a runny nose, red eyes and skin rash and moulds can also cause asthma attacks and other pulmonary conditions.
- 1.4 Dampness affecting a property is normally referred to as rising or penetrating dampness. Rising damp is the vertical movement of moisture from the ground into the fabric of a building. This can affect any part of the building in contact with the ground, the most obvious being walls and floors. Rising damp will not normally rise higher than around 1.0 to 1.5m above ground level. Penetrating damp is moisture which enters a house from outside because of a defect in part of its structure. There may be defects in the roof, the exterior walls, rainwater gutters and down-pipes or missing flashings. The source of persistent penetrating damp can be difficult to identify because there may be no consistent pattern to the signs.
- 1.5 Condensation dampness is more problematic and is often confused with rising or penetrating dampness. Condensation dampness can be caused by a fabric defect, however, it is also significantly impacted by the prevailing atmospheric conditions in the property which can be influenced by heating (or lack thereof), ventilation, etc. Overcrowding can be a further contributing factor.
- 1.6 Condensation is directly associated with mould growth, which is usually found on decorative surfaces, especially wallpapers, where it can cause severe and permanent spoiling. The mould and its spores cause the 'musty' odour often associated with a damp house. Condensation is caused by high levels of moisture in the air, condensing on the coldest surfaces in the dwelling, most often on cold walls, windows and floors, but sometimes it occurs in roof spaces and in sub floor areas where there is a suspended floor.

## 2. Reporting of Cases

2.1 The majority of dampness complaints are received and investigated by NRS Environmental Health (Public Health), however, NRS Housing Services Private Sector team and the Private Rented Sector Hub do receive similar enquiries.

2.2 Data in relation to dampness complaints is held by NRS Environmental Health on the Uniform Data Management system which allows the Council to monitor the reported incidences. The current recording of data in relation to dampness complaints reflects reported incidences and therefore, may not represent an accurate overview of the full extent of the issue.

2.3 The number of service requests received by Environmental Health (Public Health) in relation to condensation dampness and water penetration complaints are shown in Table 1 below.

Year	Number of Condensation Dampness complaints received	Percentage of Condensation Dampness complaints vs the total number of complaints received	Number of Water Penetration complaints received	Percentage of Water penetration complaints vs the total number of complaints received	Total number of service requests received for <u>all</u> complaint types by Public Health
2020	141	3.1%	724	16.1%	<b>4486</b>
2021	176	3.2%	762	13.8%	<b>5507</b>
2022	181	3 %	886	14.4%	<b>6133</b>
2023 (Jan to Aug)	142	3.4%	556	13.2%	<b>4204</b>

**Table 1- Service requests received by Environmental Health (Public Health) in relation to dampness and water penetration complaints. The data is not recorded by housing tenure.**

2.4 Table 2 below notes a 25% increase in complaints received for condensation dampness in 2021 compared to 2020. This is likely to have resulted from the spillover from the pandemic when incidents were not being reported and inspections were not being carried out. Another contributing factor could have been the lower than average temperatures in early 2021.

- 2.5 The 3% increase in complaints from 2021 to 2022 may be as a result of the energy price increase in April 2022 which has seen more individuals struggling to heat their homes efficiently.
- 2.6 By comparing the data for 2022 and information to date for 2023 there has been a 22% decrease in complaints. However, the number of complaints is likely to increase in the winter months.

<b>Condensation Dampness complaints received</b>	<b>Water Penetration complaints received</b>
Increase of <b>25%</b> between 2020 and 2021	Increase of <b>5%</b> between 2020 and 2021
Increase of <b>3%</b> between 2021 and 2022	Increase of <b>16%</b> between 2021 and 2022
Decrease of <b>22%</b> between 2022 and 2023	Decrease of <b>37%</b> between 2022 and 2023

**Table 2 – The percentage difference annually between the service request types**

- 2.7 Where complaints require more detailed investigation, NRS Scientific Services can provide further support both in terms of environmental monitoring and more detailed “mould in air” assessment.

### **3. Glasgow City Council – Responsibilities and Enforcement Powers**

- 3.1 Where dampness is being caused by water penetration and a ‘statutory nuisance’ defined as ‘any premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance’, exists or is likely to occur/recur then NRS Environmental Health can serve an Abatement Notice under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This requires the owner(s) to rectify the problem within a certain timescale. If the owner(s) do not comply with the requirements of the statutory notice, the Council have the powers to either carry out the remedial works in default of the notice; serve a Fixed Penalty Notice on the owner(s); send a report to the Procurator Fiscal or take no action where the cost for remediation would be considerable.
- 3.2 Remedial measures can range from re-pointing sections of a wall, to the repair/replacement of roof tiles, gutters, downpipes or repairs to flashings. Other remedial measures can include treating the area of dampness with appropriate products and/or installing additional natural or mechanical ventilation.

- 3.3 If a house is not substantially free from rising or penetrating damp and where remedial action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 would not be a possibility, the property would likely fail the Tolerable Standard as defined by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended).
- 3.4 The Tolerable Standard has been the principal measure of housing quality for all tenures in Scotland since 1969. The Tolerable Standard is a 'condemnatory' standard and a house that falls below it is not acceptable as living accommodation. To meet the tolerable standard a house must be 'substantially free from rising or penetrating damp'. This does not extend to condensation.
- 3.5 A house will normally be considered below tolerable standard if an assessor, normally with the use of a protimeter moisture meter, finds persistent visible penetrating damp which covers an area greater than approximately:
- 10% of the overall wall space-in one apartment in the house;
  - 10% of the ceiling in one apartment in the house; or
  - 20% of overall wall space or ceiling in one or more other spaces in the house
- 3.6 As defined under Section 85 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 it is 'the duty of the local authority to secure that all houses in their district which do not meet the tolerable standard are closed, demolished or brought up to the tolerable standard.'
- 3.7 The local authority has the power to serve a Work notice under Section 30 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 where an owner's house is deemed to be sub-standard and it does not meet the tolerable standard. This would require the owner of the house to carry out the work to bring the property up to the required standard.
- 3.8 Where an officer observes evidence of condensation dampness within a property, attention should be paid to the heating arrangements, ventilation and insulation within the home. Where condensation dampness is not due to structural defects and is the result of a lack of heating and ventilation; advice will be provided to residents to try and help them alleviate the problem. However, some individuals are living in properties that are hard to heat with high energy costs and these are significant barriers that may ultimately prevent some residents from properly heating and ventilating their home.
- 3.9 Officers from NRS Environmental Health and Housing teams have a close working relationship and will work with owners to tackle dampness problems and to ensure that the property is habitable. Taking enforcement action should be a last resort but where the only option is to close a property then officers will support residents in finding suitable alternative accommodation.

#### **4. Response to Complaints - Assistance for Residents**

- 4.1 Complaints of condensation dampness accounts for approximately 3% of all reactive service requests received by NRS Environmental Health (Public Health) on an annual basis. NRS Environmental Health only hold data on dampness/condensation which are reported to the Service. A new referral process has been drawn up and distributed to relevant groups, organisations, and other council services to signpost complaints/enquiries direct to NRS Environmental Health which will enable more accurate recording of the extent of the issues and enable for appropriate responses and support to be provided to residents.
- 4.2 It is recognised that in some instances more general advice on heating and ventilating a property will not always be enough to assist residents and, in some cases, more bespoke advice on help with fuel poverty would be more appropriate. Following discussions with Glasgow's Financial Inclusion team and the Glasgow Home Energy Advice Team (G-HEAT) a dedicated home energy advice mentor has been identified to assist vulnerable citizens within the private rented sector who are affected by damp and mould within the home. Tenants can now be referred for help and advice with fuel poverty. This will be administered via NRS Housing Private Sector Hub who will be able to extract data in relation to dampness complaints which are received and signpost affected residents to colleagues in Environmental Health. Residents can also receive 'Fuel support' through 'Glasgow Helps'.
- 4.3 In December 2022, the Social Housing Regulator wrote to all Scottish Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to ask that they consider the systems they have in place to ensure their tenants' homes are not affected by mould and dampness and that they have appropriate, systems in place to identify and deal with reported cases, timeously and effectively. Social housing tenants are able to access support services such as Welfare Rights Officers, Fuel Advisors and Tenancy Sustainment services.
- 4.4 An approach to retrofitting homes is currently being developed for housing in Glasgow which will inform the long-term strategy for the insulation and heating of existing homes. The objective is that a Whole House Retrofit (WHR) approach will deliver a design specification of measures which have been successfully tested, to improve performance, maintenance and reduce fuel bills for residents. It is expected that a range of approaches will be proposed through the WHR depending on specific building archetypes. This will likely include installation of new technologies such as ventilation

systems, and advanced/smart heating controls. Advice and information on the correct use of new technologies will be essential to ensure that owners and residents gain the maximum benefits from any new systems. It is acknowledged that the WHR approach will be a long-term programme, with the need for investment and legislation to take approaches forward within the private housing sector.

- 4.5 RSLs in the city are taking forward a range of initiatives to prevent and better respond to house condition issues. A pilot project is currently in development as part of the Council's Digital Housing Strategy where the Council is working in partnership with RSLs to trial new smart home technology to help combat dampness within their housing stock. Property environment sensors have been installed in a number of RSL homes to monitor the levels of humidity and temperature in the property which can be used to determine the likely risk of dampness within a dwelling. This technology will trigger an alert when thresholds are breached to enable an early intervention. Data will be collected on the impact of these digital interventions which will contribute to the further development and roll out of measures across the wider housing sector.

## **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 Officers will feedback on the progress of the new referral process which has been put in place and Members will be notified of any changes that require to be made.
- 5.2 Officers will report back on the number of dampness/condensation cases dealt with by the dedicated home energy advice mentor and outcomes which have been achieved.
- 5.3 Further information will provided on the systems which have been put in place by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to identify and deal with reported cases, of dampness and mould.
- 5.4 An update will be provided on the progress of the development of the Whole House Retrofit (WHR) approach. As noted this will be a long-term programme and there will be a need for significant investment and new legislation in order to effect changes in the private housing stock.
- 5.5 Officers will report back on the progress of and outcomes from the pilot project where the Council is working in partnership with RSLs to trial new smart home technology to help combat dampness within their housing stock.

- 5.6 A report will be brought back to the Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration City Policy Committee in 12 months' time with the necessary updates.

## 6 Policy and Resource Implications

### Resource Implications:

<i>Financial:</i>	Any funding required will be met from existing budgets.
<i>Legal:</i>	None
<i>Personnel:</i>	Staff input will be met from existing resources.
<i>Procurement:</i>	Works and services would be met from existing frameworks.

### Council Strategic Plan

The measures outlined in the report will contribute towards the following all 4 Grand Challenges:-

Grand Challenge 1 – Mission 3-Improve the health and wellbeing of our local communities.

Grand Challenge 2 – Mission 2 -Support the growth of an innovative, resilient & net zero carbon economy.

Grand Challenge 3 – Mission 2 – Become a net zero carbon city by 2030

Grand Challenge 4 – Mission 1 – Create safe, clean and thriving neighbourhoods

### Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

<i>Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-25? Please specify.</i>	Yes – This initiative will help deliver key strategic outcomes of Glasgow's Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028, which has been subject to an <a href="#">EQIA</a> .
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<i>What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?</i>	The Council's approach to improving the housing stock will improve living standards and bring associated benefits to many residents.
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*Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio-economic disadvantage.*

Yes. Council intervention where required will improve the standard of accommodation for all residents in the city.

### **Climate Impacts:**

*Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:*

Encouraging retrofit of existing housing to higher EPC rating (Action No.39)  
Upgrade insulation and heating of all building stock in the city (Action 41)

*What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?*

Reduced climate impact by maintaining the current housing stock for longer, leading to less need for demolition and newbuild.

*Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?*

Yes. Improving the insulation and heating in existing housing stock will contribute to carbon savings.

### **Privacy and Data Protection Impacts:**

This report has no impact upon privacy and data protection.

## **6 Recommendations**

Committee is asked to:-

1. consider the contents of this report.