

DAMP, MOULD & CONDENSATION POLICY

Board/ EG Approval: August 2024 **Responsible Board:** Ocean Housing Ltd

Next Review: August 2025 **Responsible Executive:** Managing Director of Ocean Housing Ltd

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Ocean Housing is committed to ensuring our tenants have an energy efficient, safe, and healthy home to live in. Maintaining high quality, secure homes can improve the lives of our tenants and achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction. We recognise that some parts of our housing stock portfolio can be harder to heat and/or are more susceptible to condensation and possible damp related issues.
- 1.2 This policy aims to engage and support our tenants to deliver a triage approach to the prevention, treatment, and remediation of instances of damp, mould and condensation, as well as proactively identifying properties that may suffer from damp, mould and condensation.
- 1.3 This policy is in line with the observations made by the Housing Ombudsman Service's, "Spotlight On: Damp & Mould – It's not lifestyle" published in October 2021. The policy also reflects recommendations laid out in the Regulator of Social Housing's report 'Damp and mould in social housing' and the Government guidance 'Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home'. The Government has launched consultation on Awaab's Law. This policy will be reviewed to ensure full compliance with the new law when enacted.
- 1.4 We aim to maximise the available budgets and ensure they are used effectively and efficiently to deal with damp and condensation problems.
- 1.5 Formal complaint reporting will separate cases relating to damp, mould, and condensation, and be reported to Ocean Housing Board and tenants.

2.0 SCOPE

- 2.1 Overall responsibility for this policy rests with the Asset Management Team within Property Services. This document sets out how we will work closely with our tenants to jointly control, manage and seek to eradicate damp, mould, and condensation (DMC).
- 2.2 The scope and responsibilities for all tenanted Ocean Housing properties include:

- Identify the types of damp: rising, penetrating and condensation, including leaks within a tenant's home by undertaking a damp and mould inspection for each home reported within 10 working days.
- For households where the tenant has any underlying relevant health conditions (e.g., lung diseases – asthma, COPD, pneumonia, tuberculosis) we will undertake a damp and mould inspection within 5 working days.
- Consider the individual circumstances of the tenant's household, including any vulnerabilities, and their knowledge of how to use heating/hot water systems and minimise condensation.
- Any Category 1 hazards identified following the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) guidance, will be responded to within 1 working day. All other incidences will be dealt with under the standard process as set in this policy.
- Produce an inspection report and communicate clearly and concisely the findings and recommendations to the tenant taking a sensitive approach and without attaching stigma.
- Identify Ocean Housing's responsibilities for dealing with damp and condensation.
- Identify tenant actions and offer guidance, advice and assistance to tenants showing respect and empathy.
- Ensure works are undertaken as quickly as possible, as a maximum in line with the timescales set within the Day to Day Repairs Policy, to offer the best service to our tenants and minimise damage to the structure, fixture and fittings of the property.
- Keeping records of survey reports and follow up actions and contact.
- Annually review historic data on reports and complaints of damp and condensation to identify property types or schemes where problems are likely to arise, which will inform pro-active intervention.
- Through stock condition surveys, inspect 20% of our properties each year and act on any damp and mould identified.
- At the time of a void inspection, each room will be checked for damp, mould, and condensation. If identified, it will be managed and rectified as part of the void works.

2.3 We will make reasonable attempts to access the property to inspect and carry out the works. All logged repairs must have evidence of at least three attempts to contact the tenant. Written communication must then be provided to the tenant informing them that a Court Injunction will be raised to allow access.

3.0 TERMINOLOGY

It is important to identify the mechanism through which damp can occur and what we shall look to resolve through the scope of this policy. These are:

1. Rising Damp

The movement of moisture from the ground, rising to heights of 1.2 metres up through the structure of the building, by capillary action.

2. Penetrating Damp (including internal leaks)

Water penetrating the external structure of the building or internal leak causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and structure. The cause can be the result of, for example:

- Water ingress due to defective or poor original design / workmanship of the structure
- Defective components for example roof coverings, external walls, doors and windows
- Defective or blocked rainwater gutters and pipes
- Defective or leaking internal waste pipes, hot and cold water and heating systems
- Flooding due to burst pipes

3. Condensation

Condensation occurs when moisture held in warm air comes into contact with a cold surface and condenses producing water droplets. This can take 2 forms:

- Surface condensation arising when the inner surface of the structure is cooler than the room air
- Condensation inside the structure (interstitial) where vapour pressure forces water vapour through porous materials (e.g., walls), which then condenses when it reaches colder conditions within the structure

The conditions that can increase the risk of condensation are:

- Inadequate ventilation e.g., natural opening windows and trickle/ background vents and mechanical extraction in bathrooms and kitchens
- Inadequate number of heaters provided or lack of use thereof
- Poor control of moisture levels e.g., Leaving doors open when cooking or washing; drying clothes inside on heaters; using plug-in electric heating.

4.0 LEGAL AND REGULATORY

4.1 Ocean must comply with relevant legislation and regulation, including:

- Housing Act 1985
- Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Landlord and Tenant Act Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance
- Housing Act 2004 – Housing Health and Safety Rating
- Decent Homes Standard (updated 2006)
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Awaab's Law (expected 2024)

4.2 Related policies and procedures:

- Asset Management & Energy Efficiency Strategy
- New Homes and Land Strategy
- Programmed Repairs & Maintenance Policy
- Tenant Alterations and Adaptations Policy
- Day to Day Repairs Policy
- Tenancy Agreement

4.3 At times, a tenant may have a legal 'Disrepair' or 'Fit for Human Habitation' claim in place against Ocean and has been provided legal advice not to allow Ocean access until the claim is resolved. Ocean will take a proactive approach to gain access to resolve any repairs following our agreed service standards. This will be recorded via our IT systems. If access is unsuccessful, Ocean reserve the right to begin an injunction process so access is gained in a timely manner.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 We will investigate the cause of damp and condensation through a three-part triage process:

- A. Tenant
- B. Property
- C. Revisit

Each stage will include the following:

A. Tenant

- 5.1 Tenants are encouraged to report issues with damp and mould by phone, email, letter, in person, on our website, live chat or through our social media pages.
- 5.2 Damp and mould issues may also be identified by any visiting Ocean Staff, in which case, this will be reported back via a Cause for Concern alert.
- 5.3 When tenants first contact Ocean, we will not apportion blame or use language inferring blame on the resident i.e. 'lifestyle'. Ocean will take responsibility and work in partnership with them to resolve any actions identified in the report which will be provided to the tenant within 48 hours of conducting the investigation.
- 5.4 We will promote and provide support and general advice and guidance on how to manage damp and condensation. This will include recommendations on how to use the heating and hot water system effectively etc. Where appropriate we will refer tenants to our Financial Inclusion Advisors or other specialist advice/support. This will include advising tenants to consult a healthcare professional if the tenant is concerned about any symptoms.
- 5.5 Where damp, mould and condensation could be exacerbated by internal conditions such as overcrowding and excessive hoarding of personal

belongings, the Neighbourhood Services Officer will provide support and assistance throughout the process.

- 5.6 Where the refusal of access would cause a serious detriment to the property and/or tenants health, a Property Services Manager will be made aware, and the injunction process started.

B. Property

- 5.7 When we receive a request to investigate damp, mould, and condensation, a member of staff will carry out a damp and mould inspection within 5 (vulnerable households) or 10 working days of the request, using an inspection template and with photographic evidence recorded for future reference.
- 5.8 We will review our existing data on the property and any previous reports of damp, mould, and condensation as part of this process.
- 5.9 Through undertaking an inspection, we will look at reducing the DMC issues by ensuring:
- The property should be free from rising and penetrating damp and condensation.
 - The property's damp proof course should be in good condition.
 - Guttering and downpipes should be correctly installed, secure and maintained to prevent build up of debris.
 - Extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms are in a good state of repair or fitted to help remove moisture.
 - Air bricks, trickle vents and roof and underfloor vents allow natural ventilation.
 - There should be adequate loft insulation, and appropriate means of space heating.
- 5.10 When the volume of survey requests is high and we are unable to inspect the property within the 5 (vulnerable households) or 10 working days (excluding Category 1), due to staff working at capacity, the process will be overridden. In these instances, we will attend the property to wash down the affected areas with a mould eradication kit within 5 (vulnerable households) or 10 working days. Photographic evidence of the affected areas will be captured and recorded prior to treatment work taking place. A damp and mould inspection will subsequently be carried out within 20 working days.
- 5.11 Once an inspection is undertaken, we will raise the required repairs on our IT repairs system which will be issued to Ocean Workforce or to External Contractors.

The standard items that we will look to install to remedy the effects of the damp and mould will be:

- Application of a mould eradication kit to affected areas and paint with mould resistant paint and leave ready for redecoration by the tenant
- Installation of thermal lining paper to interior wall surfaces of external wall areas

- Installation of either top up loft insulation or new loft insulation to meet the required standard of 300mm
- Installation of humidistat extractor fans to kitchen and bathroom
- Installation of Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) system

All work will be carried out in line with our standard repair priorities, which are set out in the Day-to-Day Repairs Policy.

- 5.12 The tenant will receive a copy of the inspection report and remedial actions to be completed via email or post. They will also be notified by phone, text, or letter of the appointment date for their repairs to be completed. Where no agreement can be reached with the tenant, on an exceptional basis, an independent surveyor will be appointed to investigate the problem.
- 5.13 In certain circumstances further investigation works may be required to determine the cause of the damp e.g., cavity wall inspections or floor slab testing, these works will be issued to a specialist contractor and will bring their own specific timescales which will be communicated to the tenant.
- 5.14 Any building defects identified will be scheduled for repair by Property Services and carried out in accordance with Ocean's repairs policy.
- 5.15 Where external contractors are employed, they will be competent to carry out the works and all tenant's possessions will be adequately protected.
- 5.16 If major work is required, Ocean will where possible carry out work whilst the tenant is at home. As a last resort tenants will be asked to stay with family or friends. If this is unsuitable, Ocean will pay for suitable alternative accommodation and moving and/or storage of possessions using a reputable insured company. A compensation payment may be made if deemed necessary as per Ocean's Compensation Policy. Temporary rehousing with family or friends, or as arranged by Ocean, will also be considered if necessitated by the impact of the damp and mould on the tenant's physical or mental health whilst the property is being treated and where the tenant is in agreement.
- 5.17 We will make good any internal surfaces following remedial work carried out, ensuring that surfaces are prepared to a condition ready for the tenant to redecorate.
- 5.18 Ocean will not be able to control damp, mould, and condensation where it is unreasonable or impractical to do so, or if any remedial action would be ineffective, for example:

Non habitable rooms

Out-buildings/ sheds/ coal stores that have been converted, including link buildings between the house and outbuilding and other add-on structures.

Unheated / uninsulated semi external storerooms.

C. Revisit

- 5.19 Post inspection telephone calls to assess successful remediation of issues identified will be carried out on a random selection of 5% of all Damp and Mould

remediation works. A Post Inspection visit will be carried out on any repair work if the tenant is dissatisfied with;

- a) the repair carried out has not rectified the problem
- b) the quality of work is not acceptable
- c) the conduct of the operative was not acceptable

All unsatisfactory follow up work required will be completed in line with Ocean's repairs policy timescales.

6.0 PERFORMANCE TARGET MONITORING

6.1 We will report the following Key Performance Indicators to Ocean Housing Board and the Together with Ocean (TWO) panel on a quarterly basis.

6.2 DMC inspections:

- number of Category 1 raised.
- number of Category 1 completed.
- percentage of Category 1 completed on time.
- number of inspections raised.
- number of inspections completed.
- Percentage of inspections completed on time.

6.3 DMC Repair Works

- number of repair orders raised.
- number of repair orders completed.
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- % completed on time.
- number of repair orders in progress.

6.4 Post Inspection/Tenant Satisfaction

- number of 5% post-inspection calls made.
- percentage of calls satisfied with the outcome.

6.5 Formal complaints and Legal Claims

- The number of live disrepair/ unfitness DMC related legal claims
- The number of formal DMC related complaints logged

7.0 ENERGY EFFICIENCY

7.1 Ocean Housing recognise that many of the remedial measures required in homes with damp, mould and condensation issues, overlap with the work that is required to improve the energy efficiency of some properties by 2030. These works are a part of the government's Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and reflected in Oceans' Asset Management & Energy Efficiency Strategy.

7.2 When larger scale measures that involve insulation, heating or structural major works are identified, the Supervisor/ Surveyor will consult the Energy Efficiency Manager, who will advise when, if at all, any energy efficiency measures will be

installed. If the opportunity exists, works may be brought forward under the programme to provide a one-time cost-effective solution.

- 7.3 New properties should be constructed to be energy efficient and prevent future problems with damp, mould and condensation. This is governed through Ocean's New Homes Strategy and Technical Specification.

8.0 TRAINING & PEOPLE

- 8.1 All Ocean Housing staff will receive training on understanding the causes and symptoms of damp and mould, the potential impact on health, and the importance of reporting concerns. Relevant Property Services staff will receive more in-depth training to aid diagnosis and ensure appropriate investigations and repairs are carried out.
- 8.2 Accepted methods of diagnosing and treating dampness are regularly being reviewed and developed by industry experts. Technical officers will continue their professional development by monitoring changes in best practice and adopting new techniques.
- 8.3 The causes of damp and mould are complex, and, in many cases, our tenants may need support to understand the causes of damp, mould and condensation, as well as how to avoid this. Ocean Housing will ensure that this education is in a range of formats including verbal, written, audio, visual and video. We will ensure that all relevant front-line staff have training and are aware of and understand the delivery of the service, that will meet the aims of this policy.
- 8.4 Any member of staff who becomes aware of a potential problem or early signs with damp and condensation should raise a Damp and Condensation alert via a Cause for Concern form which will be processed by the Customer Experience Team who will raise orders for any necessary action.

9.0 TENANT COMMUNICATION/ INFORMATION

- 9.1 Ocean will make reporting of any damp and mould cases as simple as possible for all tenants by signposting this on our website which includes self-help video information. Additional supporting advice will be available to all tenants and staff via our website, Street Talk editions, Winter campaigns and promoted to staff at regular Team Talks.

10.0 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- 10.1 Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect. This is particularly important when dealing with tenants reporting damp and mould where we want tenants to feel confident to approach Ocean and we will be tolerant, understanding, and nonjudgmental of their lifestyle choices.
- 10.2 We will ensure that this service is appropriate and delivered in an accessible and flexible way to meet the diverse and differing needs of our tenants.

- 10.3 This Policy is in line with Ocean's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. All instances and reports of damp, mould and condensation will be investigated, and appropriate action taken.
- 10.4 We will seek to identify if the tenant or members of their household are more likely to be adversely affected by Damp and Mould. Minimum timescales, type of work needed and working patterns will also be reviewed and adjusted, where appropriate and it is reasonable and practicable to do so.
- 10.5 This Policy does not unfairly or unlawfully discriminate and will be applied equally for all Protected Characteristics. Reasonable Adjustments, under the Equality Act 2010, will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 10.6 We are committed to addressing any communication or language barriers by providing translation services for face-to-face contact and written communication when needed. We will also produce information in alternative formats such as audio or large print where required.
- 10.4 The introduction of this policy strengthens Ocean's commitment to tenants and ensures that issues are dealt with quickly, without any barriers to access. The Policy will ensure that we are able to assess claims and reports of damp, mould and condensation in a way that is fair and equal for all Ocean tenants. Staff are made aware of our approach to Customer Care and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

11.0 POLICY REVIEW

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed every year, or where a change in legislation or best practice dictates.