



Scrutiny Review

Damp and Mould Processes and Procedures

Selwood Housing 2023/2024

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1. Introduction & Objectives

With the recent profile of damp and mould in homes being raised by the case of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, whose death was caused by the damp and mould in his home in Rochdale. The UK Government made amendments to the [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Bill](#), which was intended to raise standards in the social housing sector and hold landlords to account over the services they provide to their tenants.

Taking these changes on board, Selwood Housing updated their policy and procedure to improve how they manage damp and mould issues within their properties.

With this subject having a high profile, the scrutiny team decided, in agreement with Selwood Housing's customer involvement and communities team, to undertake a review of the process and procedures to manage damp and mould issues.

The scrutiny team offer recommendations, with the aim of improving Selwood Housing's damp and mould process and procedures and from a customer perspective to increase their knowledge of the subject.

The main objectives for this review were:

- To understand how Selwood Housing are working to understand, overcome and prevent damp, mould, and condensation
- What is and is not working with the new damp, mould and condensation policy and procedures
- What are customers' expectations and needs when contacting Selwood Housing about damp, mould, and condensation problems
- Does Selwood Housing meet these needs and expectations

2. Methodology

The scrutiny team, with advice from [Tpas](#) (Tenancy engagement organisation) and the customer involvement and communities team, decided on a multi-pronged approach to obtaining information for this review.

- Research: investigating what were the legal requirements, what was the current state with Selwood Housing, and what best practice looked like.
- Workshop: inviting Selwood Housing staff to present the damp and mould process and procedures and inviting tenants to participate in giving their feedback.
- Survey: telephone surveys and tenant interviews.

3. Findings

The following evidence was obtained from our research tasks as described above:

- Damp and mould policy.
- Damp and mould procedure.
- Condensation, damp, and mould leaflet (that could be accessed through the Selwood Housing website).
- Damp and mould procedure presentation
- Feedback and questions from Selwood Housing staff and tenants
- Feedback from tenants via online and telephone surveys

Below are our initial findings:

The mould and damp policy document was last updated in December 2022 and was a high-level document that stated the principles that Selwood Housing would uphold, and what their legal responsibilities are. The actual policy details are a single paragraph that says the Selwood Housing board would “ensure necessary resources are provided to permit full implementation of ongoing damp and mould management” and a bullet point stating they would comply with legal obligations and good practice guidance.

Scrutiny comment: *It was thought by the scrutiny team that this document should be easier to access from the website and that links to further information (e.g. Homes Fitness for Human Habitation Act), be added.*

Management response: *The policy has recently been updated (April 2024) and re-added to the website. I am happy we post other links to associated guidance alongside this document, - we can speak to Comms about this.*

Damp & mould procedure document was last updated in December 2022. It states that in relation to surveys, there are two options that the surveyor can take. Option one includes “When damp and mould is isolated to individual rooms with no historic reports or complaints of the same issue.”

Scrutiny comment: *The Scrutiny team would like to see process for how historic data is accessed and if it refers to building history, tenant requests history or a combination of both.*

Management response: *Historic reports are where the customer has previously called in reporting D&M in their property and had remedial works undertaken that haven't tackled the issue. We looked back over three years' worth of data to identify properties which had repeatedly called in reporting damp and mould issues to us. These properties have had a warning flag added to them, so that when a customer from one of these address's calls in, they can be assigned to the correct team for support from first call. We have also been proactively calling out to these customers to check whether they still have issues with D&M in their home, working through the list in priority order based on customer vulnerability and property age/performance.*

In the section Role of other teams, the customer support talks of logging telephone calls, but does not mention a process for tenants who fill in an on-line request.

Scrutiny comment: *The Scrutiny team would like to see a process used to capture further tenant information when repair requests are made on-line. How are the Tenancy Sustainment Team and Neighbourhood Managers informed when a damp and mould issue is raised on a property in their area?*

Management response: *It is the same process regardless of the route into the business, so whether it is a call in or the online form from the customer, this is triaged within the customer support team. Then once damp and mould are reported in a property, a specialist damp and mould surveyor will visit to conduct a thorough assessment. If necessary, they will collaborate with Tenancy Sustainment and Neighbourhood Managers. The engagement of Tenancy Sustainment and neighbourhood Manager may not occur during the initial visit but can be monitored during quarterly inspections."*

The procedure states the aim of "engaging other teams of external agencies," which is laudable, but does not inform as to how this is done or monitored. This could be a defect where tenants could be failed because adequate monitoring to see if these actions have been carried out are not in place.

Scrutiny comment: *The Scrutiny team would like to see ownership of a process to monitor what when, and where other departments, agencies or tenants are contacted.*

Management response: *Our tenancy sustainment team have responsibility for supporting customers in need of support regards affordability issues. If it were a question of capacity or physical ability to maintain the property this would sit with our housing managers or supported housing coordinators, depending on what type of property the customer lived in. All these cases would be managed within our housing management system QL, to ensure that the customer didn't get lost in the process and or failed.*

The damp and mould procedure document has no timelines for actions to be taken by the survey or repair teams.

Scrutiny comment: *The Scrutiny team feels that if timescales for each action are added to the procedure it will make the procedure more dynamic and will aid tenants in knowing what to expect and how long it may take. For example, will the tenant receive a copy of the initial survey report and when?*

Management response: *The tenant will receive a copy of the survey report within 2 working days from the specialist damp and mould team. The survey will contain repairs to be undertaken by Selwood Housing's*

repairs team, which will be scheduled by the planners. Planners have 7 days to initiate the works from the original request made by the damp and mould team. Once the repair is scheduled, the customer will receive a call within 7 days to book the appointment.

Condensation, damp, and mould leaflet is a source of tenant information that is available from the website. The first observation was that this document had no date stamp so we could not verify when it was published.

The document gives information to the tenant on what they can do to prevent mould and how to clean it away. It tells tenants to take care as it could “even affect your health.” It falls short on telling tenants to get advice on the mould from Selwood Housing or how to escalate the issue if they are unable to comply with all the recommendations. The scrutiny team felt that the tone of the leaflet was not in keeping with the view from the Housing Ombudsman that “it’s not about lifestyle,” and that it implies fault by the tenant.

With tenants reporting mould and damp issues as the only way Selwood Housing have of measuring the scale of damp within their properties, it is imperative that tenants are guided on how to do this. Selwood Housing would then be able to offer additional monitoring and remedial works to the tenant.

Scrutiny comment: *Although the advice in this leaflet is helpful in the interim, the Scrutiny team would like this leaflet to be updated. That it advises that the recommendations are a precursor to a damp and mould survey, and to provide tenants with courses of action to take if they have a damp and mould problems.*

Management response: *The damp and mould leaflet has been updated and simplified to encourage our customers to report damp and mould if small areas of mould are present in multiple rooms. We have updated this leaflet numerous times over the last few years, with scrutiny input most recently and wouldn't be looking to change this again quite yet. We have agreed we will review the leaflet policy and procedure annually though.*

Workshop: Tenants and Selwood Housing staff were invited to participate, and the workshop took place in August 2023. It was facilitated by a Tpas representative and managed by the customer involvement and communities team.

The workshop took the form of; presentations from Selwood Housing’s in-house damp and mould team; table discussion/workgroups; feedback sessions, and a question-and-answer session on several topics that had discussed. The workshop was seen as successful by all who participated, and

the feedback and information received formed the basis for our recommendations (which can be found in section 4).

Survey and tenant interviews: In December 2023, the Scrutiny team with the assistance of the customer involvement and communities team held a telephone survey to Selwood Housing customers. This was to gain feedback on how the damp and mould processes were working, and what the customer perception of how these processes were working for them.

The survey responses were not as good as we would have liked to have seen, with many customers choosing not to participate. Overall, the survey had mostly negative responses and customers took this opportunity to show some dissatisfaction with the way their requests for help had been managed.

Of those that did participate in the survey, it was useful to gain their insights into how the damp and mould issues in their homes had been overseen by Selwood Housing. It was also useful in that we were able to push some cases back to Selwood Housing for a response or action.

Scrutiny comment: *The Scrutiny team feels that the survey supported the view that communication is key when dealing with customers on this issue. Many customers indicated they did not understand what was proposed to prevent the Damp and Mould issues within their homes or what actions they could expect from Selwood. In-line with other recommendations, we feel that giving the customer information and a plan is key to them understanding what they can expect of Selwood and managing their expectations.*

Management response: *The tenant will receive a copy of the survey report within 2 working days from the specialist damp and mould team. The survey will contain repairs to be undertaken by Selwood Housing's repairs team, which will be scheduled by the planners. Planners have 7 days to initiate the works from the original request made by the damp and mould team. Once the repair is scheduled, the customer will receive a call within 7 days to book the appointment.*

4. Recommendations

The recommendations below are presented to Selwood Housing for consideration in seeking improvements to their damp and mould policies and procedures.

1. Offer tenants the repair history of their property, which should include damp and mould issues.
2. Create a customer service standard for damp and mould cases.

3. Provide customers with an action plan and flow chart process with an approximate timescale. Timescale/action plan sent to customers after reporting an issue with damp and mould. i.e. customers sent a letter of acknowledgement, rough timescale, and printed copies of the policy, procedure, and leaflet.
4. Give customers the opportunity to choose how to be contacted, and how often between actions.
5. Ensure customers are informed on what is needed to maintain the condition of their home. The sign-up pack should indicate if damp and mould has been an issue in the property before.
6. Selwood Housing to check whole building (in the case of flats, maisonettes' etc.) on surveys and ensure other properties within a building are not suffering damp and mould issues. To also make customers aware of any structural damp/mould/condensation issues.
7. Selwood Housing to inspect void properties and properties reporting and recording any damp and mould issues.
8. Ensure that any health issues and/or vulnerabilities of tenants are made known to Selwood Housing (those managing and fixing the issue) and recorded. These health issues and/or vulnerabilities MUST be considered when prioritising actions. Reassure the customer that Selwood Housing staff are aware of their situation.
9. More information on what residents can do in the interim before survey and repairs are started (i.e. customer sent information advising what to do, and what cleaning products to use).

The Scrutiny Team would like to acknowledge the moves that Selwood Housing have already taken to improve their responses to damp and mould issues in their properties. They have not waited until this report was finalised to implement some of its findings and have been pro-active in taking up our suggestions.

Selwood Housing and the scrutiny team have worked together to instigate changes that we hope will improve both the customer experience, and the service to their customers when dealing with damp and mould issues.

The scrutiny team would like to thank the customers and staff of Selwood Housing for their contribution and cooperation during our review into damp and mould processes and procedures.

The action plan on the next page relates to the above 9 recommendations ...

Recommendations and action Plan

	Initial management response	Any actions	Expected completion date
1	Review how we offer property history to ensure we are being transparent and honest with our customers.	No action required as all D&M issues are resolved at void stage, so we don't disclose historic issues as it's been resolved. If a customer was to ask the question, then we would be transparent.	N/A
2	Agreed - Look into providing a customer service standard for customers reporting damp and mould.	Service Standard to be published	2024 TBC
3	Already available to customers. We plan to investigate a generic action plan and tailored action plans. Property report shown to customers. Will investigate what needs to be added and refined in the bespoke action plans. Will ask team to look at what the surveyors are communicating with each customer.	Inherent D&M issues will go through specialist process and customers will receive report with detail of all jobs and actions planned. A new internal digital form was launched to enable surveyors to track and monitor cases. Cases are logged in different management systems depending on the requirements of the customer or issue. This form will also be used to manage flagged properties (houses who have reported multiple D&M related issues). Scrutiny team issued a customer survey, and contacted customers who have a monitoring system in their home to	Completed - findings of scrutiny customer survey in report

		hear their perspective on this.	
4	Review how surveyors communicate with customers, is there anything else we need to be doing/telling our customers	Scrutiny team issued a customer survey, and contacted customers who have a monitoring system in their home to hear their perspective on this.	Completed - findings of scrutiny customer survey in report
5	We should consider using the D&M property alert so that extra diligence can be applied at the void stage enabling the customer to start off on a positive footing with us. Additionally, the void checklist sign-off to incorporate the requirement to confirm that D&M has been appropriately dealt with at the void stage.	Scrutiny to carry out customer survey to those who reported D&M in last 12 months	Completed - findings of scrutiny customer survey in report
6	All D&M issues are resolved at void stage, so we don't disclose historic issues as it's been resolved. If a customer was to ask the question, then we would be transparent.	N/A	N/A as per recommendation 1
7	Considered reviewing tenancy pack i.e. user guides. Look into void checks for damp and mould issues.	All D&M issues are resolved at void stage, so we don't disclose historic issues as it's been resolved. If a customer was to ask the question, then we would be transparent, but no pack needed as this would suggest D&M still a problem when it's been resolved.	N/A as per recommendation 1 & 6

8	Selwood staff to ensure systems are kept up to date. EDI project linked to this recommendation.	Already in place but can improve on this once more EDI data gathered.	To be reviewed again following the Customer Conversation 2024 survey and EDI project
9	We can organise a small working group to review the leaflet - will review what is missing and needs to be included	Leaflet reviewed and felt to be comprehensive and informative too. We removed a lot of information and this leaflet had additional changes following customer engagement focus group in 2022/3. Scripting to change so that CS direct customers to website page with leaflet and info Damp and mould - Selwood Housing	Completed - Information on website & included in scripting