

Report of the Cabinet Member for Better Homes – 12 December 2022 Housing Scrutiny Committee.

I have chosen to focus the attention of this report on a topic which has been of most concern to many in recent weeks and months - **Damp and Mould**.

We were alerted to increased incidents of damp and mould during the pandemic when I and my team started noticing a spike in reported cases, particularly as homes were being used more – this adding to challenges in relation to overcrowding. It became clear that the advice given back then was no longer relevant or appropriate. So we decided to reform our whole approach and this also resonated with new advice being issued by the Housing Ombudsman.

A default position of citing the tenants' 'lifestyle factors' as the sole cause for mould was found to be wrong, creating an adversarial relationship and this had to change.

Having established the principles above we embarked upon a change in policy of dealing with this trend in cases. We identified a dedicated additional resource and created our damp and mould team, with a changed approach, focussing on underlying causation and factors that we could influence to help prevent mould growth. It was apparent that we had to prioritise damp and mould cases so we created a separate booking system for these enquiries brought to our attention. If the case was mould related it would essentially join a separate queue. This was important as we were also working through the backlog of repairs that had built up during periods of lockdown.

Our approach is for a survey appointment to be offered within 10 days to assess the property and prescribe the right treatment or repair. There is then a commitment to produce the report within a couple of weeks which would then ask the appropriate repairs team to address the issue. Urgent issues are addressed immediately, for example we may need to do an emergency mould wash, otherwise works are booked in with our repairs team or supply chain. The most common underlying repair issues are leaks or roofing problems but clearly there are other factors that can contribute such as overcrowding which is another major challenge we are determined to address.

It has come to my attention however that, despite proactive steps to encourage the reporting of mould cases, not all tenants are reporting these types of repairs. It is almost by accident that I am discovering, some tenants have resolved themselves to suffer the effects of mould in silence, and that is not acceptable. Therefore, I am hoping, by the time this report is published, we will be putting in place a range of measures to make it easier for residents to report damp and mould with a dedicated option on the phone line. We are also introducing WhatsApp calling and video calls so that tenants can show us straight away what the issues are. A further measure is to identify unreported cases of damp and mould through our commitment to visit all of our homes over the next few months.

Finally we are looking closely at the lessons learnt from the tragic death of Awaab Ishak and how we can make sure we are joining up across services to identify high risk cases and respond to concerns where identified by health visitors and other

agencies. To this end a project board sponsored at Director level has been established to review our processes and further develop our response and methods of working to tackle this most serious of issues. We cannot afford to be complacent, however I am pleased with the progress made with this work so far, and there is more we can do. Officers are committed to this work and will update the Scrutiny Committee on our progress.

Councillor Meric Apak
Report submitted as at 1 December 2022



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