



Damp and mould in social housing: Initial findings

Following the coroner's November 2022 report into the death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale, we asked all larger registered providers of social housing to submit evidence to us about the extent of damp and mould in tenants' homes and their approach to tackling it. This covered local authorities and private providers such as housing associations who together own and manage over four million homes in England.

Changes to legislation will enable us to do more active regulation of the quality of homes and services. We will look in more detail at how individual landlords are performing, and we expect providers to be asking themselves how they can improve – regulation should not be the only driver for change. For now, we are able to set out some initial findings from the evidence presented.

The vast majority of people living in social housing have homes that are largely free from damp and mould. This is consistent with other data sources, such as the English Housing Survey. However, living with damp and mould can have a serious impact on tenants' health and wellbeing, and it is essential that providers identify and address these issues promptly and effectively.



Most social landlords understand the extent of damp and mould in their tenants' homes and take action to tackle it but could strengthen their approach further.

Help for social housing tenants experiencing damp and mould

Social housing tenants experiencing damp and mould should tell their landlord.

The landlord should address the damp and mould and fix any underlying issues.

Tenants can complain if this is not done effectively.

Tenants who are unhappy with their landlord's response to complaints can contact the Housing Ombudsman, who can help resolve complaints.

Most providers' responses demonstrated that they

- are taking damp and mould seriously
- identify and address cases of damp and mould in tenants' homes
- have made improvements in how they handle damp and mould cases over the last year.

We have seen strong responses from both local authority and private registered providers about tackling damp and mould successfully, which clearly explained their overall strategy and the processes they use to deal with individual cases. Common features of the best responses included:

- comprehensive and regularly refreshed data on stock condition and types, repairs performance and hazards identified
- case triaging, escalation routes and response time targets
- appropriate consideration of the needs of specific tenants including any vulnerabilities
- investigation of root causes of damp and mould as well as managing the symptoms
- the use of specialist staff or contractors
- appropriate reporting to and oversight from the Board or Councillors.



Some social landlords submitted poor quality responses. We will now engage directly with these providers, and those reporting high prevalence of damp and mould, to establish whether they are tackling damp and mould appropriately and we will take regulatory action if needed.

A minority of registered providers supplied poor quality information that lacked the detail needed for us to have confidence about whether they are tackling damp and mould appropriately. A poor quality response does not necessarily mean the provider has a poor approach but does mean that we will need to look more closely at what they are doing to tackle damp and mould effectively.

The responses suggest that most providers could strengthen their approach in some areas, especially in their knowledge of homes, frequency of surveying and understanding of individual tenant needs. Poorer responses also:

- relied more heavily on reactive approaches to identifying problems than proactively looking for evidence of damp and mould through surveys of their homes
- had less data or refreshed their data less frequently
- had weaker evidence about their assurance, oversight and understanding of the condition of homes.

Where providers either reported a high prevalence of serious damp and mould or supplied poor quality information, we will now ask them to provide further, specific assurance that they are identifying and addressing damp and mould cases. If we then identify any providers who have not met our standards, we will take regulatory action in line with our usual processes. This will include publishing regulatory notices or regulatory judgements where appropriate.



While the picture is incomplete, our best estimate is that less than 0.2% of social homes have the most serious damp and mould problems, 1-2% have serious damp and mould problems, and a further 3-4% have notable damp and mould.

Providers recorded and submitted information about the number of damp and mould cases they had in a variety of ways. These included snapshot estimates on a particular day; the numbers of cases identified over a surveying cycle; only reporting the most serious cases; and in the weakest responses, estimates based on old or incomplete data or no information at all. This makes it difficult to accurately assess the extent of damp and mould in the sector overall.

However, from the information we received we were able to extrapolate estimates that deepen our understanding of damp and mould issues in social housing. Our best estimates are that 3-4% of the four million social housing homes have at least some notable damp and mould, 1-2% have serious, HHSRS ¹category 2 damp and mould problems, and less than 0.2% have the most serious, HHSRS category 1 level, problems which would fail the Decent Homes Standard. These are not acceptable conditions for tenants to be living in, even if the proportions are relatively small. Local authorities reported proportionately more cases than private registered providers.

Providers with the best understanding of their homes are more likely to have provided accurate figures about damp and mould. Providers who have a weaker understanding may have under- or over-estimated the extent of damp and mould in tenants' homes. This makes it particularly important to follow up with the providers who supplied poor quality information.

¹ Housing Health and Safety Rating System

Next steps

- We will expect all registered providers to make improvements to how they protect tenants from the potential harm that damp and mould can cause.
- We will continue to carry out further analysis of submissions and we will engage directly with individual providers who have given us poor quality information or reported high prevalence of damp and mould, to establish whether they are tackling the issue effectively.
- We will take appropriate regulatory action against providers if we find they are not compliant with our standards, in line with our usual practice.
- We will introduce more active consumer regulation of social housing from April 2024, including inspections of providers. The quality of homes – including damp and mould – and repairs services will be a key focus and the evidence we have received will help inform our work.
- We will take the necessary action where we find poor performance to make sure tenants receive the services they deserve. [Reshaping consumer regulation: our implementation plan](#) sets out more information about our work to deliver proactive consumer regulation.

About the data

We wrote to all registered providers of social housing on 22 November 2022, asking them to provide information and evidence about the following.

- Their approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould issues affecting their properties, including how they assess the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards (as defined in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System).
- In the context of that approach, their most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards in their tenants' homes, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards.
- Given those findings, the action they are taking to remedy any issues and hazards and ensure that their tenants' homes meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- How they ensure that individual damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents.

The response rate was 99%, and the evidence submitted has been initially assessed at a high level across the following themes – assurance and oversight, surveying and records, case identification, practical response, and tracking and monitoring.