

<b>HOUSING SELECT COMMITTEE</b>			
<b>Title</b>	Housing Select Committee's Review of Damp and Mould in Social Housing – update on recommendations		
<b>Wards</b>	All wards	Item No	7
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director Customer Services		
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date	4 April 2012

## **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To update the Housing Select Committee on the progress made regarding the recommendations arising from their review into health impact of damp and mould in social housing.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Housing Select Committee are recommended to note the progress made on the recommendations.

## **3 Policy Context**

- 3.1 The Housing Select Committee's report feeds into the priorities of 'Shaping our Future' - Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy (2008-20), specifically, 'Clean, green and liveable – where people live in high quality housing and can care for and enjoy their environment' and supports the Council's corporate priority regarding 'Decent Homes for all'.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 Councillors had noticed significant numbers of complaints from tenants in relation to damp and mould. Therefore, the Housing Select Committee (HSC) undertook an investigation into the impact of damp and mould in social housing and the actions providers were taking to address it and if more was required.
- 4.2 The review looked at the health impact of damp and mould in social housing, particularly the prevalence of asthma and respiratory illnesses. The aim of the review was to:
- identify the extent of the problem;
  - explore and understand what action is being taken by housing providers to deal with damp and mould;
  - consider the particular remedies and treatments being offered to households suffering from respiratory problems by housing providers and health partners;

- consider if more could be done by housing providers working with health partners to mitigate the effects of damp and mould and alleviate respiratory problems;
  - consider ways in which the knowledge and findings from the review can be applied to and disseminated to the private sector.
- 4.3 The review was scoped in September 2010, focus groups with residents were held in January 2011 and an evidence session was held in February 2011. The evidence session involved consideration of a comprehensive written report and the questioning of a variety of expert witnesses from L&Q, Regenter B3, Lewisham Homes, NHS Lewisham and Kilttox – an independent damp specialist.
- 4.4 The HSC agreed its recommendations in March 2011 and referred these to Mayor and Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2011 for an officer response. The officer response was presented to Mayor & Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2011 and it was agreed that the response be reported back to the Housing Select Committee. The response was presented to Housing Select Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

## **5 Update on the Recommendations of the Housing Select Committee's review into damp and mould in social housing**

- 5.1 **For the Council:** It is essential that housing providers provide standard information about damp and mould, including how to treat it and how to prevent it reoccurring. The Council could play a co-ordinating role by working with social landlords in the borough to develop a single, comprehensive, easy-to-understand public information leaflet for distribution to tenants and leaseholders. The leaflet should also contain information on the health impact of damp and mould and the options for addressing this, provided with input from NHS Lewisham. It should also inform tenants of their legal rights with reference to the Environmental Protection Act and the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme and signpost them to appropriate advice services.
- 5.1.1 **Update:** The Council held a bespoke session on damp, condensation and mould with LewAHG (Lewisham's Affordable Housing Group) on 4<sup>th</sup> October to present the recommendations to its local housing providers and to discuss ways in which they could be implemented. Prior to the meeting, the Council carried out an online search to see which of its local housing providers had existing leaflets for their residents on preventing and minimising the existence of damp, condensation and mould. This investigation showed that the majority of Lewisham's local housing providers either had in place a leaflet providing guidance to residents about how to deal with damp, mould and condensation and/or provided this information online via their website. Please see table below.
- 5.1.2 At the meeting, the Council asked the providers whether they wanted a single leaflet to be produced on behalf of all them and it was felt that perhaps providing information via the Council's website would be more appropriate and use this facility as a way to signpost residents to the providers to seek advice and assistance as well as to other advice services.

**Table 1: Results of online search for damp & mould leaflets**

<b>Housing Provider</b>	<b>Leaflet available</b>	<b>Online Information and/or web-link to leaflet</b>
Affinity Sutton	Yes although is due for an update as tendering for new contractor.	Online information: <a href="http://www.affinitysutton.com/existing_residents/i_am_renting/broomleigh/report_a_repair/further_safety_information/damp_and_mould.aspx">http://www.affinitysutton.com/existing_residents/i_am_renting/broomleigh/report_a_repair/further_safety_information/damp_and_mould.aspx</a>
A2 Dominion	Yes	Leaflet: <a href="http://www.a2dominion.co.uk/content/doclib/843.pdf">http://www.a2dominion.co.uk/content/doclib/843.pdf</a>
Amicus Horizon	No	
Family Mosaic	Yes	No online information and leaflet could not be found on web-site
Gallions	Yes	Leaflet: <a href="http://www.gallionsha.co.uk/documents/Resident%20services/Resident%20info/9%20Energy%20efficiency%20and%20condensation.pdf">http://www.gallionsha.co.uk/documents/Resident%20services/Resident%20info/9%20Energy%20efficiency%20and%20condensation.pdf</a>
Hexagon	No but part of their Tenant Handbook	<a href="http://www.hexagon.org.uk/content/373/condensation.aspx">http://www.hexagon.org.uk/content/373/condensation.aspx</a>
Hyde	Yes New tenants and available on request	
L&Q	Yes	Leaflet: <a href="http://www.lqgroup.org.uk/_assets/files/damp-leaflet-165.pdf">http://www.lqgroup.org.uk/_assets/files/damp-leaflet-165.pdf</a> Online information: <a href="http://www.lqgroup.org.uk/services-for-residents/media-centre/news/homelife/2011/10/28/keeping-your-home-dry/">http://www.lqgroup.org.uk/services-for-residents/media-centre/news/homelife/2011/10/28/keeping-your-home-dry/</a>
LHA-ASRA	Yes	Leaflet: <a href="http://www.asra.org.uk/residents/Documents/TenantHandbook10112010/7%20Damp%20and%20Mould.pdf">http://www.asra.org.uk/residents/Documents/TenantHandbook10112010/7%20Damp%20and%20Mould.pdf</a>
Moat	Yes	Online information: <a href="http://www.moat.co.uk/Residents/I_rent_a_property/Maintaining_your_home/Maintaining_your_home/Damp_and_condensation/">http://www.moat.co.uk/Residents/I_rent_a_property/Maintaining_your_home/Maintaining_your_home/Damp_and_condensation/</a> Leaflet on damp & mould: <a href="http://www.moat.co.uk/uploadedFiles/10_-_Damp_-_leaflet_CHECKED.doc">http://www.moat.co.uk/uploadedFiles/10 - Damp - leaflet CHECKED.doc</a> Condensation leaflet: <a href="http://www.moat.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Keeping%20your%20home%20free%20from%20condensation.pdf">http://www.moat.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Keeping%20your%20home%20free%20from%20condensation.pdf</a>
Phoenix	No	Online information: <a href="http://www.phoenixcommunityhousing.org/newspage.cfm?inc=repairs&amp;policyno=9666873">http://www.phoenixcommunityhousing.org/newspage.cfm?inc=repairs&amp;policyno=9666873</a>
Lewisham Homes	Yes	Leaflet: <a href="http://www.lewishamhomes.org.uk/Resources/Lewisham%20Homes/Other%20pdfs/condensation%20leaflet%20final%20no%20marks.pdf">http://www.lewishamhomes.org.uk/Resources/Lewisham%20Homes/Other%20pdfs/condensation%20leaflet%20final%20no%20marks.pdf</a>
Regenter B3	Yes	Online information: <a href="http://www.regenterbrockley.com/PropertyServices.asp">http://www.regenterbrockley.com/PropertyServices.asp</a>

- 5.1.3 The Council has therefore been working on developing an information page to display on its website informing residents how condensation and mould can be mitigated. It includes information on residents' rights under Environmental Protection Act and Section 11 of the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985.
- 5.2 **For all housing providers:** Housing providers should consider putting a link on their website to relevant pages on the NHS Lewisham website (pages which provide information about the health impact of damp and mould and the treatments available for associated illnesses). The Committee notes that Lewisham Homes and NHS Lewisham are investigating signposting each other's services on their websites and these moves are to be welcomed and should be implemented as soon as possible.
- 5.2.1 **Update:** The Council liaised with the Lewisham NHS representative shortly after the officer response was reported to HSC in October. They recognised that damp, condensation and mould can exacerbate and trigger respiratory conditions but explained that the NHS website was not currently set up in the way to provide the appropriate links as per the recommendation but would continue to look into how they could do this.
- 5.3 **For all housing providers:** The Committee accepts that permanent solutions to damp and mould are often very costly and, in the case of Lewisham Homes, cannot be achieved until sufficient Decent Homes funding has been received and deployed. The Committee would like housing providers to re-examine what temporary solutions they offer, including envirovents and airbricks, and consider whether a heat recovery ventilation device might be the most appropriate temporary solution (as it is relatively inexpensive, costs less than £10 a year to run and is designed to fully remove damp and mould from the room in which it is installed).
- 5.3.1 **Update:** At the meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> October, all the providers present were asked about the various measures and treatments they undertake to tackle the causes and symptoms of damp, condensation and mould. All providers present confirmed that whether damp, condensation or mould was reported, the property would be assessed by an operative to determine the cause. Affinity Sutton explained that if it was found to be condensation, the operative will discuss with the tenant about condensation and its contributing factors and what actions they can undertake themselves to manage the situation. A fungicidal wash is then carried out to remove any mould and a view taken on current ventilation. Existing extractor fans may be overhauled, vents checked and if it is deemed necessary to assist the tenant, new mechanical ventilation installed. Most providers at the meeting agreed that adopt a similar approach. They also stated that they would consider more permanent measures such as the installation of passive condensation vents such as those from PermaGard. In extreme cases, the property is assessed by a specialist and their recommendations followed.
- 5.3.2 At the meeting, Lewisham Homes informed the group that they had provided their tenants with hygrometers i.e. the device measures the moisture levels in the home which enables the tenant to manage condensation levels. The hygrometer indicates three levels – very dry, ideal and very moist/damp. Please see picture below. Lewisham Homes gave some of these out to the providers and explained how cheap they were to purchase, approximately £4.50 and said they had a positive response from tenants. The details of the company that supplied the

hygrometers were circulated to all LewAHG members following the meeting.



**Fig 1: Hygrometer**

- 5.3.3 Phoenix Community Housing has confirmed that they have purchased 100 hygrometers which are being given to new tenants along with their welcome pack. The Council will have some EU funding left over from a project it has been involved with about tackling fuel poverty. The project is due to complete in the coming months and the Council is considering a range of options for the surplus, which includes purchasing a batch of hygrometers.
- 5.4 **For all housing providers:** Housing Providers should have a protocol in place to deal with any incidences of damp and mould in the same property or block. A checklist should be developed to ensure that trained officers can be sure that, within their experience and knowledge, there are no other damp and mould causes present in the property at that time.
- 5.4.1 **Update:** The Council has drafted a protocol following the meeting with LewAHG and after undertaking some best practice research, anticipates this will be agreed with the providers and in place by end of April.
- 5.5 **For all housing providers:** When a resident reports damp and mould, housing providers should ask if the resident or anyone in their family suffers from any relevant illnesses, so this can be taken into consideration in prioritising the repair and if housing re-allocation becomes a possibility. The officer should check if any children or elderly people are living at the property and record their ages.
- 5.5.1 **Update:** The Council has drafted a protocol following the meeting with LewAHG and after undertaking some best practice research, anticipates that this will be agreed with the providers and in place by end of April.
- 5.6 **For all housing providers:** When a resident reports damp and mould, the information provided to them on treating and preventing it should also be provided to their neighbours in adjacent properties, in case those properties are also susceptible to, and suffering from, damp and mould.
- 5.6.1 **Update:** The Council has drafted a protocol following the meeting with LewAHG and after undertaking some best practice research, anticipates that this will be agreed with the providers and in place by end of April
- 5.7 **For all housing providers:** All void properties should be thoroughly inspected for damp and mould and appropriate action taken prior to re-letting.
- 5.7.1 **Update:** This issue was discussed at the LewAHG meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> October and the providers present confirmed that all void properties are thoroughly inspected and where damp, condensation and/or mould is found to be present, appropriate

works are carried out.

- 5.8 **For all housing providers:** Anti mould paint and sealant should be used in all appropriate circumstances.
- 5.8.1 **Update:** This issue was discussed at the LewAHG meeting and the providers confirmed that treatment is carried where it is deemed necessary.
- 5.9 **For all housing providers:** Ways of increasing the security of outside drying areas or drying rooms should be considered.
- 5.9.1 **Update:** This recommendation has been incorporated into the draft protocol.
- 5.10 **For Lewisham Homes Only:** Decent Homes work should include permanent remedies for damp and mould in properties. Where the cause of damp and mould in a property is structural in some way, and not simply attributable to the household's lifestyle, this should be addressed as part of the Decent Homes work.
- 5.10.1 **Update:** Lewisham Homes have commenced their Decent Homes programme and anticipate making 933 homes decent by end of March 2012. Any identified damp found in these properties will have been addressed as part of this programme.
- 5.11 **For Lewisham Homes Only:** In planning programmes of Decent Homes work, Lewisham Homes should (a) have regard to where the most serious problems of poor housing conditions, including damp and mould, exist; and (b) have regard to lessons learnt from the Brockley PFI scheme and other housing providers.
- 5.11.1 **Update:** Lewisham Homes continues to undertake analysis of any properties with previous reports of damp and/or condensation and known defects are passed to the major works contractors for incorporation into the programme. The technical team check the building history prior to inspections. The Council held a lessons learnt session with Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3 in October 2011 and a number of recommendations were agreed including the need to ensure robust and early consultation with leaseholders regarding the onset of a major works programme including leaseholders signing off works to say they are satisfied.
- 5.12 **For Lewisham Homes Only:** Although Decent Homes work will be carried out as part of a planned programme, this should not preclude certain works which will provide a permanent solution to damp and mould issues, being brought forward for individual properties, where circumstances justify immediate work.
- 5.12.1 **Update:** Lewisham Homes maintain they will carry out remedial works as necessary.
- 5.13 **For Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3:** Any Decent Homes or other works required to remedy condensation or damp and mould must adhere to the value for money protocols developed as part of the Public Accounts Select Committee's review into the Council's Obligations to Leaseholders. Appropriate advice should be provided to leaseholders as to the works required to remedy damp and mould.

5.13.1 **Update:** Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3 continue to ensure that works comply with leasehold legislation and when required, are fully consulted on any potential works. Currently the Council and Regenter B3 are working together to resolve ongoing condensation and mould issues at the Clare Estate. A special meeting was recently convened where it was committed that a survey would be undertaken on the estate to determine the extent of the problem on the estate and then another meeting scheduled to discuss the findings and potential solutions. It was agreed that the Clare Estate TRA will provide input into the survey and Regenter B3 will be meeting with them soon to discuss this.

## **6 Update on recommendations for NHS Lewisham**

- 6.1 The HSC's made a number of recommendations for NHS Lewisham:
- Moves being made by Lewisham Homes and NHS Lewisham to signpost each other's services on their websites are to be welcomed and should be implemented as soon as possible.
  - GPs and Health Visitors should (a) reinforce the lifestyle advice provided to residents by housing providers, to help minimise damp and mould in the home; and (b) signpost patients to relevant services such as advice on benefit maximisation to combat fuel poverty
  - It would be helpful if GPs collected more data from patients suffering from respiratory illnesses and other illnesses associated with damp, mouldy and cold conditions, so the health impact of damp and mould can be better monitored and housing providers made aware of issues with their housing stock.
  - The training provided to GPs and Health Visitors on the health impact of damp and mould should ensure that they fully understand the housing transfer medical assessment process and system of prioritisation.
- 6.2 **NHS Lewisham Update:** Lewisham Homes has publicised, via their website, the NHS's 'Stop Smoking Service'. As stated in the last report made to the HSC, the current database used by GPs is not set up to collect information that can capture illnesses associated with damp and/or mould. The Council's allocations policy is currently under review and any changes will be communicated and further training offered to GPs and Health Visitors.

## **7 Legal Implications**

6.1 There are no additional legal implications to be inserted.

## **8 Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications for the council arising from this report.

## **9 Crime and Disorder implications**

9.1 There are no specific implications.

## **10 Environmental Implications**

10.1 Mitigating the impacts of damp and mould and ensuring that homes are well

insulated and watertight will have a positive effect on the environment.

## **11 Equality Implications**

- 11.1 Health reports show that there is an association between ill health and cold, damp and mouldy conditions, which is exacerbated by over-crowding. Such conditions have effects both on physical health and mental well-being. It also appears that damp, condensation and mould affect children more than adults, in particular exacerbating asthma-type symptoms.
- 11.2 Implementing the recommendations flowing from the HSC's review into Health impact of Damp and Mould in Social Housing will improve the response that housing providers give in tackling the causes of damp, condensation and mould but also in providing effective and permanent solutions to dealing with the symptoms. This in turn should provide better health outcomes for all residents living in social housing.

## **12 Background Documents and report author**

- 12.1 Housing Select Committee's report – 'Short Review into Health impact of Damp and Mould in Social Housing' (March 2011).
- 12.2 If you have any queries on this report, please contact Clare Ryan, Partnerships and Service Improvement Manager on 020 8314 3603.