

MAYOR AND CABINET			
Title	Responses to matters referred by Housing Select Committee – Review of Damp and Mould in Social Housing		
Wards	All wards	Item No	
Contributors	Executive Director for Customer Services & Regeneration		
Class	Open	Date	13 July 2011

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To respond to matters referred to and recommendations made to Mayor and Cabinet by the Housing Select Committee on its report, '*Short review into health impact of damp and mould in social housing*'.

2 Recommendation

It is recommended that the Mayor:

- 2.1 Agrees that the proposed response be reported to the Housing Select Committee.

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 Kiltox – an independent damp specialist.
- 4.4 The Committee agreed its recommendations in March 2011 and referred these to Mayor and Cabinet on 20th April 2011 for an officer response.

5 Responses to 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 **Response:** The Council will put this proposal forward to LewAHG (Lewisham's Affordable Housing Group) to work with them to develop and publish a public information leaflet for tenants and leaseholders regarding the impact of damp and mould, how this can be mitigated and what help residents can receive. This recommendation may have financial implications and part of this proposal will be to work through the potential costs associated and reach agreement on the sharing of costs, if any, with partners.
- 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 **Response:** The Council will liaise with the NHS about getting the appropriate web-links and will disseminate these to the providers once received.

- 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 **Response:** A distinction will need to be made between 'damp' and 'condensation' as they are different and treatments for the two are also different. LewAHG's meeting on 4th October 2011 will be used to discuss the providers temporary solutions to damp and mould.
- 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 **Response:** The Council will draft a protocol for housing providers to consider and will consult formally with LewAHG at the meeting on 4th October 2011.
- 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 **Response:** The Council feels that this recommendation could be incorporated into the protocol which will be formally discussed at LewAHG on 4th October 2011.
- 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 **Response:** The Council feels that this recommendation could be incorporated into the protocol which will be formally discussed at LewAHG on 4th October 2011.
- 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 **Response:** Housing providers inspect all void properties before any works commence. To ensure consistency amongst housing providers, this issue will be taken forward with the housing providers at LewAHG on 4th October 2011.

- 5.8 **For all housing providers:** Anti mould paint and sealant should be used in all appropriate circumstances.
- 5.8.1 **Response:** This issue will be taken forward with the housing providers at LewAHG on 4th October 2011.
- 5.9 **For all housing providers:** Ways of increasing the security of outside drying areas or drying rooms should be considered.
- 5.9.1 **Response:** This issue will be taken forward with the housing providers at LewAHG on 4th October 2011.
- 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 **Response:** Decent Homes works carried out by Lewisham Homes will provide a permanent remedy for cases as a result of disrepair, however, it will not alleviate mould/condensation that result from lifestyle issues. Damp will be addressed as part of Lewisham Homes major works 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 **Response:** Lewisham Homes will undertake an analysis of all properties with previous reports of damp and/or condensation and known defects will be passed to the major works contractors for incorporation into the programme. The technical team will check building history prior to inspections. The Council is organising a lessons learnt session with Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3 from the Brockley PFI scheme and this is planned for July.
- 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 **Response:** Lewisham Homes 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 **Response:** Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3 will ensure that works comply with leasehold legislation and as required are fully consulted on any

potential works. The leaflet to be developed will also incorporate advice for leaseholders.

- 5.14 **For the NHS:** 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.
- 5.14.1 **NHS SE London Response:** Public Health Lewisham is now part of NHS SE London. Lewisham, Public Health Directorate, NHS SE London, is currently in discussion with Lewisham Homes about signposting tenants to healthy lifestyle services via the website. There are also plans for the Lewisham Healthcare Trust Community Development for Health Team and the Stop Smoking Service to publicise their services on the Lewisham Homes website.
- 5.15 **For the NHS:** 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.
- 5.15.1 **NHS SE London Response:** GPs and Health visitors may provide advice as per a) and b) however neither action is measured as a core target and it would be impossible to monitor. Lewisham Public Health will raise this issue with Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Committee and Lewisham Healthcare NHS Trust, responsible for the health visiting service.
- 5.16 **For the NHS:** 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.
- 5.16.1 **NHS SE London Response:** Due to the current data systems that GPs use, this action is currently not possible to implement.
- 5.17 **For the NHS:** 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.
- 5.17.1 **NHS SE London Response:** The training for GPs and Health Visitors will be focused on the housing medical assessment process explaining Lewisham Council's Allocation Policy and not specifically focused on damp and condensation. The focus will be explaining how the medical assessment is completed considering the illness and how the current housing circumstance is affecting a person's illness. Asthma is not given a high priority if the damp and condensation is considered to be a lifestyle issue. Many cases would be assessed as Band 4 (No priority) although if the damp and condensation is shown to be caused by a structural defect then this would be considered a disrepair issue and it would be for the housing providers to remedy the problem. The medical priority would acknowledge that the disrepair issue is exacerbating the illness and a Band 3 (Low Priority) may be awarded if survey reports indicate the problem is structural. It would be unlikely that damp and mould would lead to re-allocation on medical grounds as there are many triggers for asthma and it is not possible to say that damp and mould is

the trigger in a specific case. It could equally be any other trigger – house dust mite, pollen, animals, smoking etc. The more usual route would be if the disrepair is classed as ‘major’ it may be more likely to lead to a move either temporary or permanent whilst the disrepair is addressed.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Constitution provides for Select Committees to refer reports to the Mayor and Cabinet, who are obliged to consider the report and the proposed response from the relevant Executive Director; and report back to the Committee within two months (not including recess).

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Progressing the recommended actions above will have a cost implication, the majority of which will be met by providers. The only potential financial commitment facing the council is in implementing section 5.1.1, the provision of information to tenants. The extent of the commitment is not yet known although potential costs will be shared with partners and the costs to the council is expected to be minimal.

- 7.2 No new funding is available for this proposal so any costs incurred will need to be met from existing resources within the Housing service.

8 Crime and Disorder implications

- 8.1 There are no specific implications.

9 Environmental Implications

- 9.1 Mitigating the impacts of damp and mould and ensuring that homes are well insulated and watertight will have a positive effect on the environment.

10 Equality Implications

- 10.1 There are no specific implications.

11 Background Documents and report author

- 11.1 Housing Select Committee’s report – ‘Short Review into Health impact of Damp and Mould in Social Housing’ (March 2011).

- 11.2 If you have any queries on this report, please contact Clare Ryan, Partnerships and Service Improvement Manager on 020 8314 3603.