

## **Building Maintenance Service - Dampness & Condensation Policy**

### **Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place**

#### **Report for Decision**

#### **1 Recommendation**

It is recommended that Council:

- i) Notes the Council's approach in responding to tenant enquiries or requests for inspections regarding dampness and condensation;
- ii) Notes that the Council implemented Sensor Technology in 2022 to monitor damp and condensation as outlined in section 6
- iii) Approves the new Dampness & Condensation Policy

#### **2 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to outline service activities and improvements being implemented; and to seek Council approval for a new policy to tackle dampness and condensation within our domestic properties as part of our ongoing approaches to protect the health and wellbeing of our council tenants.

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023  
**Report Contact:** Derek Oliver, Chief Officer - Place  
**Email:** [derek.oliver@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:derek.oliver@midlothian.gov.uk)

### 3 Background

- 3.1 Dampness is the presence of unwanted moisture through the air, condensed on a surface or within the solid substance of a building, typically with detrimental or unpleasant effects. Excess moisture can lead to mould growth on building surfaces.
- 3.2 There are three types of dampness that can appear in a property:
- Condensation
  - Rising dampness
  - Penetrating dampness
- 3.3 It is possible to get more than one type of dampness occurring in a property but, given their cause, each type requires to be treated in a different way. It is therefore important to know what type of dampness is affecting a particular property before undertaking reactive maintenance or property upgrades.
- 3.4 Where the source of moisture is not related to structural faults, leaks or rising damp, it is usually due to condensation, which is often found to be the main issue when surveys are carried out.
- 3.5 Condensation occurs when warm moist air comes into contact with a cool surface and water droplets form. It typically appears on cold surfaces particularly on windows, mirrors and outside walls. Areas with poor ventilation are also prone to condensation. This includes surfaces behind furniture such as beds or in or behind wardrobes and cupboards, especially where they are placed against an outside wall. If left unchecked it can lead to dampness and mould growth occurring which is often the first sign of a serious condensation problem.
- 3.6 Rising dampness is caused by ground water moving up through a wall or floor. Walls or floors will naturally soak up water from the ground, but usually it is stopped from causing damage by a barrier called a damp-proof course or damp-proof membrane. Newer properties will have a damp-proof course or a damp-proof membrane. Older buildings may not or they may be worn or damaged. If this is the case, the walls or floor may suffer from rising damp. Rising damp can also happen when there is a lack of drainage or the level of the ground outside the property is higher than the damp-proof course allowing water to get above it.
- 3.7 Penetrating dampness is caused by water leaking through walls or roofs. This type of damp may expand across walls, ceilings or work its way down, but will not travel up the walls like rising dampness. Penetrating damp is usually caused by structural problems in a building such as faulty guttering or roofing or cracks in the walls or render which means walls or roofs are regularly soaked with water.

- 3.8 Officers, and trades from the Council’s Building Maintenance Service, respond to tenant enquiries or reports relating to dampness and offer
- 4.1 In March 2003, the Scottish Government consultation paper “Modernising Scotland’s Social Housing”, established proposals for a national housing standard based on a minimum set of quality measures for all houses in the social rented sector. The national standard has since been updated and amended to produce the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).
- 4.2 The SHQS is consistent with what constitutes acceptable, modern, good quality, housing. It is however different to the Statutory Tolerable Standard, enforced by Environmental Health in private sector housing, and the Building Standards (which only apply to new buildings).
- 4.3 The SHQS is based on a number of broad quality criteria. To meet the standard a house must be:
- Compliant with the Tolerable Standard
  - Free from serious disrepair
  - Energy efficient
- advice and/or undertake required actions to remedy the situation.
- 4 Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)**
- Fitted with modern facilities and services
  - Healthy, safe and secure
- 4.4 The requirements of the SHQS are wide ranging and require assessments of various forms of dampness and ventilation issues, the presence of which would result in a failure of the SHQS.

## **5 Dampness and Condensation Reports**

- 5.1 The following table illustrates the number of reports received by the Building Maintenance Service from tenants and investigated, with regards to dampness and condensation across recent calendar years:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Reports/Investigated</b>
<b>2018</b>	13
<b>2019</b>	22
<b>2020</b>	26
<b>2021</b>	41
<b>2022</b>	129

sensor technology implemented from July 2022

## **6 Service Activities**

- 6.1 In addition to dampness inspections and surveys being undertaken, since July 2022, the Building Maintenance Service has been piloting the installation of environmental monitors in properties. This use of sensor technology has been used to inform the nature of the dampness and assist in the correct remedial action to facilitate a “right first time” ethos.

- 6.2 The sensors measure temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide, providing insights into conditions such as mould risk, draught risk, excess cold, heat loss and indoor air quality.
- 6.3 The Council remotely accesses this information via a dashboard, which assists with a better understanding of any issues and informs actions from maintenance, to campaigns, staff resource deployment and property investment in a proactive way.
- 6.4 The Council currently has 90 environmental monitors deployed in 45 houses across Midlothian. The Council holds stock of these monitors to allow rapid deployment when dampness is reported.
- 6.5 The monitors cost circa £128 (inclusive of data) per unit and are easy to install and manage, together with being discreet. With this data informed assessment, the Council can deliver a more timely, and relevant, response which results in a more efficient use of resource and provides resolution faster for the tenant.

## **7 Dampness & Condensation Policy**

- 7.1 In order to provide a uniform and consistent approach to reports of condensation and dampness for our tenants, as well as to optimise investment, identify and tackle issues timeously and improve targeted maintenance, a Policy has been devised.
- 7.2 The Policy illustrates the Council's aims and terms in responding to, and addressing, reports of dampness. It sets out the Council's responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of the tenant.

## **8 Report Implications**

### **8.1 Resource**

Minor dampness works are generally carried out as responsive repairs. The repairs service is paid for by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is funded from tenants' rents, fees and service charges for services provided to tenants and assets held on the HRA account. There are no direct financial implications arising from the revised process and Policy.

Where more significant work is necessary, capital investment is required. This is programmed and budgeted as part of housing planned works (such as windows, doors, kitchens, bathrooms) or the housing capital investment programme (energy efficiency, etc).

### **8.2 Digital**

Environmental monitors utilise dashboards accessible from current digital assets and software.

### **8.3 Risk**

The risk of not approving the Policy will have a negative impact on our tenants that experience dampness or condensation and likely lead to unnecessary costs through inefficient use of resource and materials.

#### **8.4 Ensuring Equalities**

Housing maintenance and use of the HRA are required to comply with the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and the Council's Financial Regulations.

#### **9 Additional Report Implications**

Appendix A

**Dampness & Condensation Policy**

Appendix B

## APPENDIX A – Report Implications

### A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The route map outlines the phases of service recovery and transformation which will underpin the Single Midlothian Plan.

### A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

### A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious
- None of the above

### A.4 Delivering Best Value

The report aims to deliver best value.

### A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

A targeted and focused solution to housing issues involves tenant participation and engagement.

### A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report aims to measure progress through outcomes.

### A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The report is based on the creation of a wellbeing economy which prioritises prevention, fairness for people, the economy and the environment.

### A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The improvement and enhancement of our environment.

