

Tenant Scrutiny and Improvement Panel



Scrutiny:

How effective and customer centred is CBH's support to tenants with damp, mould and condensation?

January 2024- March 2024



Cheltenham
Borough
Homes



Tenant
Scrutiny
Improvement
Panel

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Introduction

At Cheltenham Borough Homes we are fully committed to embedding customer voice across every team and everything we do.

CBH requested The Tenant Scrutiny and Improvement Panel (TSIP) conduct a full scrutiny review on CBH's approach to tackling damp, mould and condensation, learning from the experiences of CBH customers and ensure they have a voice in shaping our procedures.

To inform the scrutiny, TSIP reviewed the following documents:

The Housing Ombudsman report "Spotlight On: Damp and Mould" (2021)

This report was a call for action for landlords to move away:

- from reactive to proactive approach
- from inferring blame to taking responsibility
- from disrepair claims to resolution
- from complaints to a learning culture

The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

Announced in February 2023 that new measures on damp and mould would be introduced. This will be known as 'Awaab's law' and will be introduced through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act

This received royal assent on the 20 July 2023. This Act is intended to be the catalyst for a new proactive approach to regulating social housing, ensuring standards are met and taking action against failing landlords. Awaab's law' will require landlords to fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes and become an implied term in social housing tenancy agreements. These measures, along with other provisions from the Act, are expected to come into force in 2024.

Cheltenham Borough Homes Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy (2023)

TSIP was involved in reviewing the policy which is written in line with housing regulation. This policy outlines CBH's commitment to developing its approach to DMC.

Aim and key areas of interest.

Aim and Objectives

TSIP will put forward recommendations relating to the following question

“How effective and customer centred is CBH’s approach to supporting tenants experiencing damp, mould and condensation?”

Key Areas of Interest

Through initial discussions with TSIP, we have identified the following areas of interest for this scrutiny review



Is CBH adopting a caring and customer centred approach in it’s practices, in line with the recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman



Is CBH doing enough to encourage people to report their issues with Damp, Mould and Condensation?



What are the processes for tackling damp, mould and condensation in CBH properties and are tenants empowered by the process?



What are the key challenges faced by the Damp, Mould, and CondensationTeam?

Predicted Benefits

For Customers:

- Increased satisfaction with our response to tackling damp, mould and condensation in our properties
- Customers’ views are listened to and acted upon
- Customers are educated in how best to manage issues of DMC in their homes

For CBH

- Confidence we are working to the new regulations.
- Suggestions to improve efficiency or services as well as validation of what is working well within the service.
- Improved tenant satisfaction measures over time

Who has been involved?

Customers:

The CBH Tenant Scrutiny and Improvement Panel (CBH) consists of 12 members who are representative of our wider tenant group. A special thank you to our scrutineers for their time, passion, and dedication to this scrutiny.

We would also like to extend a special thank you to the tenants who took part in our tenant survey.

Colleagues:

Mike Scourfield- Repairs Manager
Natasha Dhillon- Complaints Officer
Andy Barrel- Business Analyst
Nick Williams- Data Analyst
Rebecca Robins- Logistics Assistant



Methods and Timeline

Desktop review

Review of complaints and compliments (appendix 2), acuity data and DMC report, as well as The Housing Ombudsman Spotlight on Damp, Mould and Condensation report to develop questions for the service lead.

Surveys

TSIP developed a tenant survey which was promoted sent via text messages to anyone who has had a DMC flag on QL (Appendix 5)

January 2024



Scrutiny Scoping

TSIP completed a scrutiny scoping exercise to identify their aims, objectives and methodology



Interview Service Lead

Interview with Mike Scourfield to ask questions about current service delivery. (Appendix 1)



Recommendations

TSIP reviewed all data and developed recommendations to take to CBH Board

March 2024

Summary and Recommendations.

Research Method	Key findings/ Best Practice identified	Recommendations to CBH	Agreed by CBH Y/N	Responsibility
<p>Interview with service lead</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using AI for predicting future cases and resources needed. Specialist equipment, data, and dashboard is used to be more proactive in identifying and supporting cases increasing staff during busy periods Checks for voids and mutual exchanges Proactive approach to raising awareness and encouraging reporting Exceeding recommendations for contacting previous cases multiple routes for reporting DMC Visit properties within 5 days for reporting. If the tenant is vulnerable, they may get priority Three attempts to contact the tenant before closing a case Mindful of cost of living crisis impact and working closely with CBH Benefit and Money Advice team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy looks good, but further steps need to be taken to ensure work is completed in accordance with the policy. More specific questions relating to the policy should be asked to tenants are part of follow up When testing the fans, check the noise levels and draft levels Tenants to be offered a choice of fans, not a one size fits all Promote DMC Information on the back of rent statements Better communication to tenants around their options with chemical products. Tenants should have the risks etc explained to them The team to check for vulnerabilities due to chemicals. Provide a simple work plan to the tenants which should be agreed and signed off to demonstrate they understand and agree to the process 	<p>Work needed to ensure tenants know what the policy is and what to expect from a visit. New webpage to be developed to include this information and follow up questions will refer to these outlined standards</p> <p>There is no way to check the noise levels from a fan. it depends on the humidity levels. Fans are suited to the size of the property as per building regs, they are also the best fans available to us, therefore we cannot give tenants a choice.</p> <p>Work plans cannot be developed as it is often a process of trial and error. Further consideration is given at the sign off of the works.</p> <p>Agreed: Rent statements and checking vulnerabilities</p>	<p>Damp, Mould and Condensation Team</p>

Research Method	Key findings/ Best Practice identified	Recommendations to CBH	Agreed by CBH Y/N	Responsibility
acuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The acuity data suggests that 35% of CBH homes could have DMC, but of those 35%. only 39% report the issues to CBH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shorter time slots for visits- TSIP believes people don't report as they cant afford to take the time off work to be home. Tenants worry about judgement when people come into their homes- can the team do some promotion about having a zero judgement approach? Tenants are put off by their previous experience of services- can we promote this is a new approach to DMC and a clean slate TMO house visits- direct reporting of what they find in terms of DMC 	<p>It is not currently possible to offer shorter timeframes but this will go on a long term work plan for the team and is something we would like to offer in the future</p> <p>The new webpage will include information about our "zero Judgement" approach</p> <p>Agree: all points</p>	<p>Damp, Mould and Condensation Team</p> <p>TSIP would like to do a larger piece of work around the issue of non reporting, linking in with the equality and diversity lead.</p>
Letter to Tenants and tenants information sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tone of voice in communication is good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make available in other languages include BMA information on all correspondence to support with COL include a QR code linking to webpage information 	<p>Agree: all points</p>	

Research Method	Key findings/ Best Practice identified	Recommendations to CBH	Agreed by CBH Y/N	Responsibility
Tenant Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 out of the 32 people who responded listed English as an additional language • 25% of tenants were asked questions about their lifestyle, however, some of these cases may have been before the new policy was in place • 40% of tenants said the fabric of their home was not checked in relation to their DMC • Communication is a strong area for DMC, with over half the tenants rating it as a 4 or 5. • The findings suggest there is room for improvement in terms of a sympathetic approach, with 21% of people stating CBH was not sympathetic towards the issue • a vast majority of people asked said their case is still open and ongoing • a vast majority of those asked stated they have a vulnerability that is made worse by DMC • 45% of tenants were not offered ongoing guidance and support for managing DMC • A common theme in the free text is that tenants would like the roof space to be looked at. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DMC advice sheets, correspondence, and webpage should be available in different languages • There is room for improvement in terms of having a sympathetic approach. Does this need further training or standards outlined? • As a vast majority of those who answered the survey have a vulnerability, more work should be done by the team to establish this at first point of contact and adapt work plan accordingly • Ensure tenants are given advice, ongoing support, and know to refer back into the service if problems persist • a more thorough check of the fabric of the building, including the loft space to reassure tenants that this has been investigated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice cards will be developed to be distributed by cleaners when it is a "clean only" job. <p>Agreed: all points</p>	Damp, Mould and condensation team.

Research Method	Key findings/ Best Practice identified	Recommendations to CBH	Agreed by CBH Y/N	Responsibility
Complaints and compliments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the complaints information tells us very little about the key issues compliments show some great practice in terms of staff attitude. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	n/a
Webpages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some great and useful information online, including a video which is accessible. information can be found under repairs section 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> information on DMC should be easier to find and not listed under repairs. It should have a tile on the landing page 	Agreed: All points	DMC team and comms

Have we answered our questions?



Is CBH adopting a caring and customer centred approach in it's practices, in line with the recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman

TSIP asked questions to the service lead relating to all four recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman. CBH was able to highlight good practice in all areas but TSIP have made recommendations for improvements.

Feedback suggests there is a need for more consistency in terms of having a sympathetic approach



What are the processes for tackling damp, mould and condensation in CBH properties and are tenants empowered by the process?

TSIP have made recommendations to further empower tenants in the processes, such as choosing fans and chemicals, and signing off proposed work plans to demonstrate they are fully on board with the process.



Is CBH doing enough to encourage people to report their issues with Damp, Mould and Condensation?

Data shows there is an issue of non reporting of DMC. Whilst CBH can demonstrate a very proactive approach. TSIP has made some recommendations for improvements in this area and have proposed further work is needed to understand the reasoning for non-reporting.



What are the key challenges faced by the Damp, Mould, and Condensation Team?

TSIP's research has shown the key challenges to be

- non reporting of the issue
- volume of work during winter months
- the need to educate our tenants
- managing tenant's expectations.