

## **Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy**

### **1. Aim**

- 1.1. The aim of this policy is to proactively manage the potential risks which may arise from damp and mould in Onward properties, including communal areas; and provide clarity for customers and colleagues around the approach and level of service that should be expected and delivered.
- 1.2. Through this policy, Onward will establish appropriate processes, guidance, and knowledge to ensure all Onward properties are well maintained and free of damp and mould that could risk the health and safety of customers.
- 1.3. This policy also sets out how Onward will proactively support and work with our customers who may experience damp, mould and condensation in their home and ensure that Onward meets its legal, contractual, regulatory and statutory obligations including Awaab's Law.

### **2. Scope**

- 2.1. This document should be used by all employees, customers, and partners of Onward to understand the obligations placed upon Onward to maintain a safe environment for our customers and employees within the homes of each customer and within all buildings.
- 2.2. This policy applies to all buildings within Onward's portfolio where Onward has the responsibility to maintain the asset.
- 2.3. This meets the needs of Onward customers and enables us to fulfil our statutory, regulatory and contractual obligations. We will also comply with relevant industry regulatory requirements, contractual tenancy obligations; including Awaab's Law.

### **3. DMC - Causes and definition.**

- 3.1. There are different reasons why damp and mould can form in the home. Sometimes this is due to rising damp which comes through the foundations of a property, or penetration where there is a defect in the building itself such as a roof leak.
- 3.2. Damp and mould can also be caused by excess condensation. Condensation occurs when the air inside a home is humid (i.e., the air contains moisture) and the temperatures are colder outside.
- 3.3. Condensation will appear as liquid on cold surfaces such as mirrors, walls, or windows or in cold corners for example where wardrobes meet the wall. Mould can also occur if condensation is left for too long. It can build up even in warm homes but is especially common in the colder months of the year.

- 3.4. Damp caused by rising damp or leaks often leaves 'tidemarks' whereas damp from condensation does not. Damp and mould can get worse over time if not treated.

#### **4. Dealing with Damp, mould and condensation**

- 4.1. We will encourage customers to contact us and report any issue with Damp, mould and condensation. We do this through regular features on our website, in our newsletters, at sign up and by visiting customers.
- 4.2. We will work in partnership with customers to understand, reduce and resolve Damp, Mould and Condensation issues in their home.
- 4.3. Customers will be asked whether anyone in their household could be at higher risk due to their vulnerability.
- 4.4. Damp and mould can pose a risk to anyone's health, but some factors may increase risk of health impacts. This could be due to:
- Anyone who has a disability
  - Any children under the age of 15 at the property
  - Anyone elderly living at the property
  - Anyone with asthma, COPD, any other lung disease or cardiovascular disease
  - People of all ages who have a weakened immune system, for example, due to cancer treatment or chemotherapy
  - Pregnant women
  - People living with a mental health condition
  - People who are bedbound, housebound, or have mobility problems
- 4.5. We will carry out early and accurate diagnosis to identify hazards and the source of the Damp, Mould and Condensation and take all reasonable action to resolve within the timescales prescribed by Awaab's Law.
- 4.6. We will encourage our colleagues and our representatives to report any issues with Damp, mould and condensation. We do this through regular training, updates on our intranet, and discussions at team meetings.
- 4.7. We will make reasonable attempts to access the property to inspect and carry out the works.
- 4.8. We will listen to customers and make reasonable adjustments to meet individual needs and preferences when we respond to reports of damp and mould.
- 4.9. Once we have completed all remedial work and we are confident that no further property interventions are required, if the customer reports continued problems with Damp Mould and Condensation, we will refer the case to our Neighbourhood Support Team who will identify if any additional support is required.

- 4.10. We will offer customers support with financial inclusion through our Money Advice Teams and signposting to other agencies to offer further support.
- 4.11. We will make every contact count and ensure all colleagues across the business are trained and competent to identify all hazards including Damp, Mould and Condensation, so they can ensure the safety of customers and provide permanent solutions that address the root cause.
- 4.12. We will triangulate Data to identify proactive methods in mitigating risk of Damp, Mould and Condensation.
- 4.13. Ensure the fabric of our homes are protected from deterioration and damage resulting from Damp, Mould and Condensation.
- 4.14. We will keep customers informed about property inspections and the scheduling of works where required. This includes explaining why work may be necessary and what it will involve. If changes to the work programme occur, customers will be updated.
- 4.15. Our tenancy (and leasehold) agreements require customers to allow us (including appointed contractors) access to their home to carry out works at the agreed appointment time. If we are unable to gain access and the integrity of the property, its fabric and/or the safety of the customer or those in the vicinity of the property is compromised, we will take appropriate action. For example, this may include but is not limited to obtaining an injunction for access.
- 4.16. Where work carried out to treat Damp, mould and condensation results in damage to the internal decoration of a property we will make good internal surfaces, ensuring they are prepared to a condition ready for the customer to redecorate. Where there is need to decorate following remedial work carried out by Onward, we will provide a decoration voucher to cover the cost of the materials needed to make good the decoration.
- 4.17. For more complex cases, and especially where more intrusive building work is required and/or there is a serious health risk to the resident or a member of their household, we may require customers to move out of their home either on a temporary or permanent basis. We will consider the individual circumstances of the resident. We will ensure that appropriate checks are carried out at the property to ensure it is suitable for the resident to return to.
- 4.18. In some cases, it may be necessary to re-house a family on a permanent basis if a medical professional advises that re-housing is the most suitable option. This will be considered in accordance with Onward's Lettings Policy and local arrangements which apply within local authority areas.

4.19. We categorise timescales and identify hazards as mandated by Awaab's Law.

**\*The new maximum timescales to adhere to for Awaab's Law**

Timescales		
Potential Emergency hazard	24 Hours	24 hours to investigate and undertake relevant safety works or customer is placed in suitable alternative accommodation
Emergency Hazard-Summary of investigation and conclusion	3 working days	Written summary of findings provided to customer following conclusion of investigation. * Unless all works to make home safe and prevent reoccurrence are completed and customer notified as such.
Potential Significant hazard investigation and conclusion	10 working days	Investigate potential significant hazard- Written summary to customer within 3 working days. * Unless all works to make home safe and prevent reoccurrence are completed and customer notified as such.
Significant Hazard relevant safety works	5 working days	Undertake relevant safety works Within 5 working days of the investigation concluding.
Significant Hazard-Completion of supplementary works	Within 12 weeks	Where steps cannot be taken to begin work within 5 days, this must be done as soon as possible, work to physically start within 12 weeks. Complete within a reasonable time period.

4.20. Definition of Hazards

- **Emergency Hazard (Including severe damp and mould)**

An emergency hazard is one that poses an imminent and significant risk of harm to the health or safety of a customer.

- **Significant Hazard**

A significant damp and mould hazard is one that poses a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of a customer.

- **Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)**

Awaab's Law applies to the types of hazards prescribed by the HHSRS (other than overcrowding) but does not require a full HHSRS assessment.

## **5. Equality and Diversity**

- 5.1. This Policy will be applied in a way which ensures equality of treatment for all customers without discrimination, or victimisation on account of any protected characteristic as defined within the Equality Act 2010. In developing this policy Onward has considered its public sector equality duties under s149 of the Equality Act 2010, namely the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act.
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

## **6. Preventative Action and Planned Property Investment**

- 6.1. We will use feedback from customers, colleagues and data from our systems to identify properties that are more likely to suffer from Damp, mould and condensation.
- 6.2. We will use this data to identify properties that require planned investment including improving the energy efficiency of homes.
- 6.3. When any property becomes vacant, and prior to re-letting, we will seek to identify and remedy any issues which may cause Damp, mould and condensation.

This may include ensuring doors and windows are serviceable and can effectively ventilate the property, ensuring extractor fans are working well, as well as applying mould treatments where necessary.

## **7. Communication**

- 7.1. We will provide information on our website, and through other channels, to raise awareness with customers about how to report issues with Damp, mould and condensation.
- 7.2. We will also provide information on the causes of Damp, mould and condensation, along with practical advice on managing this in the home where appropriate.

## **8. Dealing with dissatisfaction and complaints**

- 8.1. Onward are committed to providing a high-quality service to the customers and communities we serve. Customers who are dissatisfied with our response to reports of damp and mould can make a complaint through the Onward Homes Complaints policy. Details of how to make a complaint are available on our website and through our Customer Service Centre.

- 8.2. We also have a Customer Resolution Forum that independently reviews our complaint handling process to ensure effective and efficient resolutions are given to customers.
- 8.3. We will identify areas where we can improve our services and customer experience, learning from complaints and any housing ombudsman spotlight reports and determination.

## **9. Disrepair and Legal Action**

- 9.1. We will endeavour to deal with Damp, mould and condensation cases as quickly as possible and in line with disrepair protocols where such claims are made. In urgent cases we will try to gain early access into properties to address the issues identified. This may require using legal redress to gain access where it is refused.

## **10. Responsibility and monitoring**

- 10.1. The Onward Board will have overall governance responsibility for ensuring the Damp Mould & Condensation policy is fully implemented within the regulatory standards, legislation and codes of practices detailed within Awaab's Law.
- 10.2. The Onward Chief Executive will act as Duty Holder for the management of Awaab's Law and will ensure that compliance is achieved and maintained. The performance of the Responsible Person duties is delegated to the Executive Director of Asset Compliance & Repairs who is responsible for ensuring that sufficient resources are in place to ensure their capability to comply with this policy.
- 10.3. The Executive Director of Asset Compliance & Repairs must ensure the policy aligns with wider organisational goals and legislative requirements of Awaab's Law, which sets out strict timeframes for responding to hazards including damp and mould issues.
- 10.4. The Director of Maintenance is responsible for the operational delivery of the policy, which includes establishing clear procedures and processes. Ensuring staff are properly trained on the policy and safe systems of work, together with rigorously monitoring performance and delivering high levels of service delivery and customer satisfaction.
- 10.5. The Director of Maintenance is responsible for fostering a proactive and empathetic culture around damp and mould issues. Ensuring customers are treated with respect and provided with clear, empathetic communication. Establishing transparent processes for customers to report issues and understand their rights.
- 10.6. The Head of Maintenance is responsible for allocating the necessary resources to manage damp and mould issues effectively. Ensuring we are compliant with Awaab's Law guidance, and proactively managing risks, such as legal disrepair claims or reputational damage.

10.7. Awaab's Law is a high-risk area, and this policy will be reviewed on a 2 yearly basis or where there is a change to current legislation. An independent audit will be undertaken on a basis related to the level of risk.

10.8. Compliance with Awaab's law will be reported through the Onward executive team and committee structure through to Board.

## 11. Documentation

Linked documents:	Vulnerability Policy Lettings and Allocations Policy Complaint Resolution Policy Housing Condition Claim Policy Repairs Policy Temporary Decant Policy Repairs Handbook Repairs Operative Handbook Chargeable Repairs procedure Tenancy Policy Contractor Code of Conduct Housing Ombudsman Code Financial Redress Procedure High Risk Procedure Disrepair Policy/Procedure
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