



Damp and Mould Policy

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	This Damp and Mould Policy covers all properties owned and managed by Torus including domestic rented accommodation.		
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1. Introduction

In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman issued a “Spotlight Report on Damp and Mould”, highlighting the approach they expect social landlords to take when dealing with tenants who complain about damp to them. The Housing Ombudsman has been adopting a more proactive approach to dealing with tenant complaints and in line with Government direction is working much more closely with the Regulator for Social Housing in preparation for new legislation being brought by the Government based on the Social Housing White Paper. The approach has been taken following the Grenfell Tower tragedy and strengthened more recently following the poor housing conditions identified by the media within some social housing properties. The Ombudsman reviewed the cases highlighted in the media and discovered none of those had been reported to them.

Following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak on 21st December 2020 and the coroner’s findings that Awaab Ishak’s death was as a direct cause of the conditions in which he was living, there has been a renewed focus on damp and mould both within Registered Providers of social housing and Private Rented Sector.

Since the publication of the coroner’s findings there has been significant involvement from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Rt Hon Michael Gove MP), The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and the Housing Ombudsman. There has also been a large media interest with the events leading up to Awaab’s death making national news.

This policy was originally developed in response to the Housing Ombudsman’s Spotlight Report on Damp & Mould and has been reviewed and updated again in December 2022 following Awaab Ishak case at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing sits alongside and complements our Responsive Repairs and Voids Policies.

2. Scope

The purpose of this policy is to ensure all properties owned and managed by Torus, including domestic rented accommodation, are free from damp and mould.

Damp and Mould related health outcomes may affect people regardless of age or current health; older people and children are most at risk. Poor housing conditions result in frequent absence from school for children due to ill-health, in educational under-achievement and less earning power. Based on GCSE results alone it is calculated that the cost to children living in poor housing conditions amounts to a total of £14.8 billion in lost potential earnings

3. Key Principles

Alongside major physical investment, Torus has adopted a number of strategies as part of our approach to prevent damp & mould:

3.1 Asset Management approach to Void Properties

Torus is aware that to further reduce tenancy turnover and create sustainable tenancies and communities, work to Void (empty) properties to ensure they are comfortable and safe which includes works to mitigate the risk of occurrence of damp and mould rather than a quick assessment of minor void works.

The Voids Team also works closely with the Asset Management Team to identify asset improvements to the empty property, which includes the delivery of the decent homes work and replacement of components like kitchens and bathrooms.

3.2 Data Based Approach

A data led priority model has been created which uses a variety of factors to give leading indicators around the number of properties with the potential to be at risk of damp and mould issues.

3.3 Complaints

A self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code was completed and considered by the Torus (Group) Board at its meeting held on 22 September 2022. This will be revisited with a view to strengthening any areas that may be appropriate.

3.4 Delivering for Customers

To keep homes free of damp and mould while keeping customers safe

Torus has:

Trained surveyors and HMS operatives to:

- Spot signs of condensation, damp and mould and understand the causes and remedies of these
- Conduct maintenance to prevent the occurrence of damp and mould
- Understand stock and the archetypes of properties that are likely to suffer from damp and mould.
- Understand the components in our properties which may cause damp.
- Invest in both preventative and reactive measures.
- Plan resources i.e., to respond to higher demands in winter.
- Make sure that appropriate budget levels are assigned to reducing the causes of damp and mould.
- Provide officers with the correct equipment to assess damp in properties and find resolutions to these issues.
- Complying with all statutory and regulatory requirements and with best practice relating to the provision of this service.

3.5 Getting Behind the Door

It is critical to increase the presence of Torus in neighbourhoods and for colleagues to understand our customers and the challenges they face. Torus uses data models to gain visibility of where the priority properties are and where resources need to be targeted.

Neighbourhood Officers are conducting property inspections as part of day-to-day tenancy visits. If the officer identifies any concerns of disrepair, mould, damp, or condensation a referral to the Assets Surveyors will be made. Depending on the severity of the issues identified the officer will escalate the inspection.

Colleagues in tenancy sustainment and the Torus Foundation accept referrals where there is no leak, structural issue, or ventilation issue to assist and support the customer and signpost to external agencies or internal funds to support with rent payments.

The process used for reporting safeguarding (ABC Respond) has been extended to include a separate and distinct category for damp and mould.

4. Regulatory Standards, Legislation and Codes of Practice

4.1 Legislative requirements

There are legislative requirements setting out what is a decent home. The Decent Homes Standard was updated in 2006 to take account of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). According to the Standard, for a home to be considered 'decent' it must:

- Meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- Be in a reasonable state of repair
- Have reasonably modern facilities and services, and
- Provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 amended the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, with the aim of

ensuring that all rented accommodation is fit for human habitation. While it did not create new obligations for landlords, it required landlords to ensure their properties are fit for human habitation at the beginning of, and throughout, the tenancy. The Landlord and Tenant Act does not define “fit for human habitation”, but consideration should be given to repair, stability, freedom from damp, internal arrangement, natural lighting, ventilation, water supply, drainage and sanitary conveniences, facilities for preparation and cooking of food, the disposal of wastewater and any prescribed hazard. The act also strengthened tenants’ means of redress where landlords do not fulfil their obligations, with the expectation that if tenants are empowered to take action against their landlord, standards will improve.

4.2 Other evidence

The Housing Ombudsman is aware that while there are issues around damp and mould within social Housing. While the last English Housing Survey 2019-20 highlighted that the greatest proportion of non-decent properties are within the private rented sector, 23% of private rented properties as opposed to 12% of social housing properties. However, the same survey also identified that condensation and mould problems were evident in at least 3% of social housing properties with 5% lacking thermal comfort, which is huge challenge for the sector.

4.3 The Housing Ombudsman’s Approach

The Ombudsman has made it clear that social housing providers must listen to tenants and take seriously their complaints, including using the organisation’s complaints processes to mitigate against any potential future legal action or costly disrepair cases. The Ombudsman require social housing providers like Torus to not to dismiss reports of dampness stating, ‘It’s not Lifestyle’.

5. Best Practice

Torus seeks best practice from organisations who deliver damp, mould services, and adopts any good practices which will help us to tackle this issue.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CUSTOMERS

The process undertaken by Torus in the event of a report of damp and mould, will be as follows:

- Checking for any undiagnosed leaks
- Considering whether there is an issue with the fabric of the property that is causing the damp and mould issues.
- Determine whether there is a sufficient means of ventilation in the property and, if not, take steps to create appropriate arrangements.
- If no resolution has been identified through this process, then a discussion with the tenant and agreeing what support can be provided will be the last step

6. Training

Torus will ensure that all staff and contractors have training to raise awareness and create a good understanding of this policy.

Torus ensures all our surveyors and other relevant Torus staff (Housing Officers) and HMS and other contractors have training to raise awareness of and create a good understanding of damp and mould issues, related issues (i.e., health), causes and measures to combat these.

7. Preventative Work

To reduce the occurrence of condensation, damp, and mould in homes Torus will:

- Identify a list of components most likely to cause damp

- Liaise with contractors to monitor these items and when surveyors carry out repairs visits and arrange to replace any components where the condition has deteriorated and may result in damp.
- Highlight any areas of concern at the time of each stock condition survey.
- Carry out work to fix any problems that are found
- Tackle fuel poverty
- Carry out a stock condition survey for each property every 5 years and would like to work towards a property MOT system within the next 5 years.
- Review each damp and mould works order raised after 6 months to see if the proposed solution has been effective.
- Follow damp and mould policy to prevent the occurrence of these issues when undertaking works to the property.

8. Health and Wellbeing

Tenants and other occupiers living in homes with damp and mould may be more likely to have respiratory problems, allergies, asthma, and other conditions that impact on their immune system. There are also other broader impacts on the mental health, education, and career prospects of residents living with damp and mould.

9. Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

In fostering a culture of 'never turning a blind eye' as part of the commitment to safeguard residents, Torus and its appointed contractors will use agreed procedures to record and refer any tenancy concerns to a specialist officer for follow-up.

10. Diversity & Inclusion

A key aim of the Torus approach to diversity and inclusion is to ensure that it is embedded in service delivery policies and procedures.

In recognition of this Torus aims to deliver services that are.

- Relevant and fully accessible to all
- Tailored to meet both the specific needs of the individual, including those with additional support needs, and the diverse needs of the wider community
- Compliant with all aspects of Equality and Diversity legislation

11. Monitoring and Review

Torus Repair and Maintenance Team is responsible for reviewing this policy as a minimum on an bi-annual basis, or prior to this where legislative change or amended work practices are introduced, or to comply with best practice.

Damp and Mould will also be a regular agenda item for team meetings as appropriate to that team.