



Report to:	STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE		
	14 February 2022		
Report of:	DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS		
Contact Officer and contact details	Chris Hannon 07800617729 chris.hannon@stockporthomes.org		
Type of Report	Assurance		
Title of Report:	DAMPNESS IN SOCIAL HOUSING		
Purpose of Report:	To provide reassurance to Members Committee that reports of dampness are being addressed and that there isn't an inherent problem of dampness in the stock.		
Recommendation(s):	That Member Committee note the contents of the report and make any further suggestions for action they would like to see		
Confidentiality	Non Confidential		
Resource Implications	Failing to appropriately deal with reports of dampness could lead to an increase in customers pursuing complaints through the housing disrepair protocol. Litigation fees would therefore increase.		
Impact on Risk Appetite and Risk Register	SHL have minimal appetite for risk for its properties to suffer from damp and condensation given the risk to customers' health and the national profile such issues have.		
	Risk Number	Risk Description	Risk Mitigation
	2	Health and safety obligations to customers aren't fulfilled, including gas safety, electrical safety, fire safety, legionella, lift safety and asbestos	Ensure SHG is meeting the requirements of the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 and amending policies /

			working practices as required
Customer Voice	In 2020/21 there were 620 reports of damp related issues which required an inspection of which nine resulted in a formal complaint. Formal complaints made to SHG about dampness are recorded and investigated in line with the organisations complaints policy.		
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion implications	The team are focused on the property and building pathology rather than the customer to establish building defects and identify if performance of construction materials are a contributory factor to any potential dampness within the property.		
Regulatory compliance	The report demonstrates that SHG are fulfilling their repairing obligations that are set out in the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985 and The Housing Act 2004 and meet the requirements of Decent Homes Standards.		
Comments of the Stockport Homes Monitoring Group	<p>The Monitoring Group discussed the report. The discussion covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers were pleased that SHG had carried out investments into the tower blocks to combat any potential damp issues. • Customers highlighted that SHG seemed to be sector leader with how it approaches damp issues. They added that they were pleased that there was a programme for supporting customers who were experiencing damp. • Customers felt that the 9-10 days waiting period for an inspection was reasonable. This gave customers confidence that SHG dealt with damp claims quickly and sufficiently. 		

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is prepared in response to the recent negative media reports relating to damp and condensation in social housing properties. It also reports on the Housing Ombudsman (HO) investigation and consultation with social housing providers across the country on how they tackle dampness, condensation and mould.
- 1.2 The report aims to provide reassurance on the effective approach of Stockport Homes Group (SHG) when responding to reports of dampness, condensation and mould, the approach that the organisation takes to deal with damp related repairs, improvements, investment and support offered to customers.
- 1.3 The report includes data on complaints made by customers, an overview of the legal claims process by way of the housing disrepair protocol and the Homes Act (Fitness). The report also provides an overview of the response to the HO by ALMO's who responded to the National Federation of ALMO's (NFA) call for evidence on the subject matter.
- 1.4 It must be noted that the report excludes elements of 'damp' related defects such as failed damp proof courses (DPC) or failed damp proof membranes (DPM). These types of defects generally do not exist and are not typical within the SHG housing stock. 'Failure' is not regarded within the construction industry to be possible unless, physical damage has been caused to the DPC or DPM through other construction type work taking place on the existing building. To put this in further context, SHG haven't had a report or needed to undertake repairs as a result of damage to either of these components within the last five years.

2 RESPONSE TO REPORTS OF DAMPNESS

- 2.1 A customer will usually make a report of dampness to the organisation's one number team (ONT), who have been trained in the distinction of identifying from a customer's description of the defect, what action they should take. This includes the ONT staff member asking specific questions to help diagnose the problem.
- 2.2 Every report of dampness is recorded on the SHG housing management database. The ONT will record the response and action taken.
- 2.3 SHG have a Dampness and Condensation policy and procedure. This sets out how the organisation will respond to the report of dampness or condensation. The policy and procedure are supplemented by officers trained in recognised damp surveying and building pathology techniques such as visual, sensory, use of specialist equipment and, intrusive testing in more extreme cases.
- 2.4 During 2020/21, SHG received 620 reports of dampness, which resulted in a property inspection. For the majority of these (85%), a surveyor reported the outcome was 'condensation' related and not linked to a building defect to the

structure of the property. For 15% of the reports of dampness inspected by a surveyor, minor repairs were needed to address the cause of dampness, these related to roofing and plumbing defects.

- 2.5 Condensation which constitutes the largest volume of customer enquiries is formed in a dwelling that is unheated, under ventilated and with high moisture presence within the air. High moisture presence in the air is often a result of the home occupancy: bathing, steam cooking or drying clothes indoors without ventilation, or as a result of over occupancy of a dwelling relative to its size (this includes larger animals such as a big dog). Occupancy of a dwelling is a factor due to the amount of moisture a person (or large animal) can produce through the process of respiration. Condensation is usually considered a lifestyle issue and best addressed by raising awareness and education programmes however, if left unaddressed can result in high levels of mould growth. Mould is typically found in areas of low air movements and/or cooler rooms such as corners, behind furniture, spare bedrooms, porches and in closets.

3 SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS

- 3.1 Support on managing dampness in the home is provided to customers by the following methods;
- 3.2 Condensation kits are provided and contain literature that explains how to manage condensation in the home. These include visual aids that show temperature and humidity and will show when a customer should heat and ventilate the home.
- 3.3 SHG have a dedicated energy advice team, money advice officers and housing support officers who can help with energy tariffs, financial matters and housing needs. This type of support can help customers financially, which in turn helps to manage general day to day living including being able to afford to heat their home or, be housed in accommodation that is 'more' suitable for their needs.
- 3.4 SHG will often install additional ventilation systems and carry out mould eradication cleaning where condensation is severe. Officers will explain in detail how a customer can minimise the amount of condensation produced in the home through 'everyday' living.
- 3.5 In Figure 1.0 below, the chart shows that following the 620 damp related inspections during 2020/21, SHG arranged support for 351 customers (in addition to providing advice) by arranging for the treatment and removal of mould and improving ventilation by installing mechanical extraction fans to help reduce the build-up of condensation.
- 3.6 In addition to the physical measure outlined above SHG are committed to the personal development of staff and recently provided training on building pathology and tangible dampness. The training was delivered by one of the UK's leading building pathologists (Mike Parrett), who's expertise is on the subject matter of dampness in buildings. The training has enhanced the knowledge of the team and the principles exchanged through this training course will ensure that

reported defects associated with dampness are dealt with accurately and professionally.

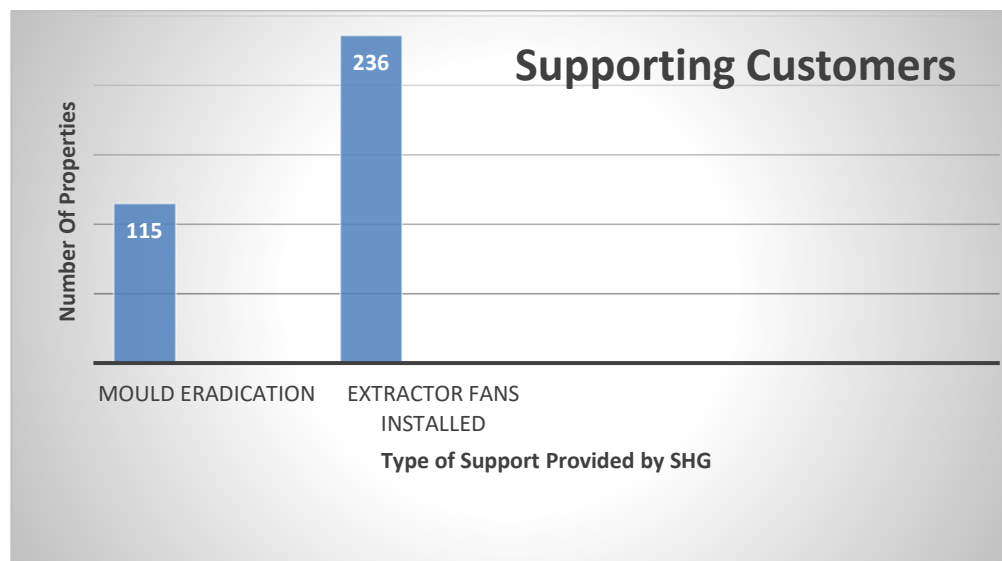


Figure 1.0

4 INVESTMENT

- 4.1 Large scale investment to the housing stock often addresses issue related to damp and condensation for example improvements to the external fabric of buildings such as roofs, insulation and internal services, i.e. plumbing and pipework.
- 4.2 Investment is targeted at providing warmer homes as part of insulation programmes to help mitigate against condensation.
- 4.3 Insulation programmes include external wall insulation (EWI), loft insulation, windows, cavity wall insulation (CWI); all these measures improve the overall energy efficiency of the building which is measured as an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). These have a value range between A (Excellent) to G (Very poor)
- 4.4 SHG are investing in approx. 500 homes over the next 3 years so that 100% of the housing stock will have a minimum energy performance rating (EPC) of 'C' or above by 2025 (national average is EPC D).
- 4.5 Grant funding for thermal efficiency improvements has been obtained in recent years. SHG will continue to explore external funding opportunities that supports this type of investment. Historic investment has included home energy efficiency, use of renewable energy and measures which are aimed to improve the thermal comfort of the home.
- 4.6 SHG have obtained funding through ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), which provides match funding for projects that include improving homes making them more affordable to heat.

- 4.7 The following table (Fig 2.0) highlights the 2020/21 capital programme which is specifically aimed at energy efficiency and making the home warmer. This total investment represents circa 26% of the total capital programme having a direct link to mitigating the effects of condensation types of dampness.

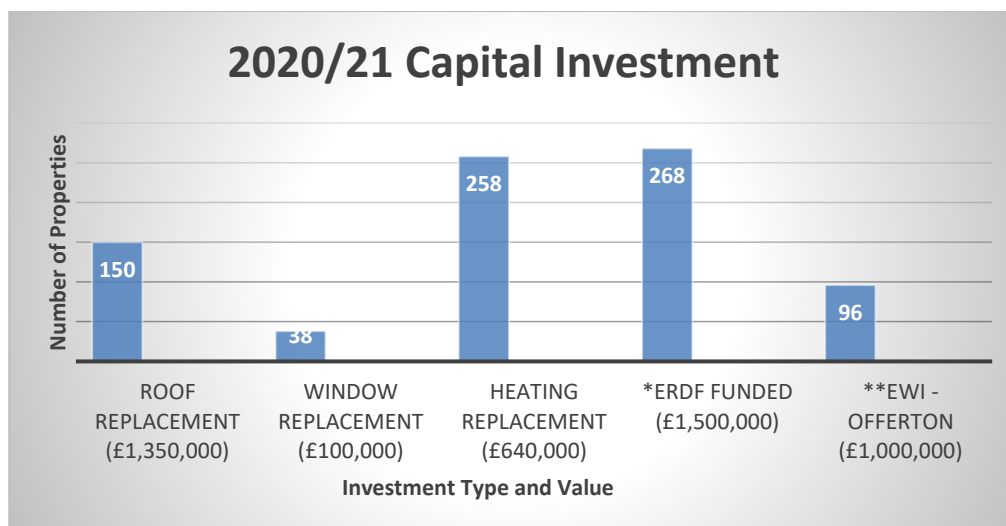


Figure 2.0

*ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) provides funding for improvements to living standards.

**EWI (External Wall Insulation) is fitted to homes that are mainly non-traditional and less thermally efficient than traditional built properties.

5 COMPLAINTS

- 5.1 In 2020/21 there were 620 reports of damp related issues which required an inspection of which nine resulted in a formal complaint.
- 5.2 Formal complaints made to SHG about dampness are recorded and investigated in line with the organisations complaints policy.
- 5.3 Of the nine formal complaints no service failure was found for seven of these and only two were partly upheld.
- 5.4 The two complaints SHG agree to a partial service failure relate to the time it took SHG to deal with the report of dampness. In both cases they were linked to the restrictions imposed by the COVID19 work from home restrictions and limitations on property inspections.
- 5.5 The percentage of complaints made about the 620 reports of dampness is relatively low; 1.45%. The justified (partly) outcome of complaints about dampness is even lower with SHG deeming only 0.3% being justified.

6 HOUSING DISREPAIR AND FITNESS CLAIMS

- 6.1 Dampness and property condition claims are increasing and becoming more frequent with customer's sometimes opting to pursue this option against making an official complaint to SHG.
- 6.2 Housing Disrepair has seen increased activity over the past decade within the social housing sector, this is mainly due to solicitor's mass canvassing estates to drum up work for disrepair claims most noticeably claims of dampness.
- 6.3 Nearly all Housing Disrepair claims allege dampness in one form or another and to a greater or less extent. Claiming a property is damp adds weighting to the claimants case as they are able to state non compliance to more than one element of housing legislation.
- 6.4 For disrepair to exist, a customer must have provided notice of a defect to their landlord and, the landlord has failed 'reasonably' to fix the defect. In the vast majority of claims SHG received, no prior notice was provided, and no official complaints had been made.
- 6.5 SHG have a dedicated team of expert surveyors who respond to and challenge claims, in particular claims arising from the mass canvassing of customers.
- 6.6 The number of claims issued to SHG during 2020/21 reduced considerably due to the Covid-19 'work from home' restrictions which prevented mass canvassing by solicitors. Analysing data during this particular year would therefore not be reflective of normal service or give a true representation of claims issued to SHG therefore this report examines the 2019/20 data which provides a more accurate picture of the typical number of claims received.
- 6.7 During 2019/20, SHG received 60 new claims for housing disrepair. Figure 3.0 highlights the success rate SHG has in defending claims. It is also a reflection on the overall good condition of the housing stock. The percentage of settled claims does not mean that those properties were in poor condition. In the main, the reason for settling claims relates to not being able to provide evidence for past repairs completed. This includes where operatives have not documented what action they had taken when completing a repair. The repairs team are continually improving processes and feedback is addressed with operatives at team meetings and toolbox talks on the importance of recording notes to mitigate against future claims.

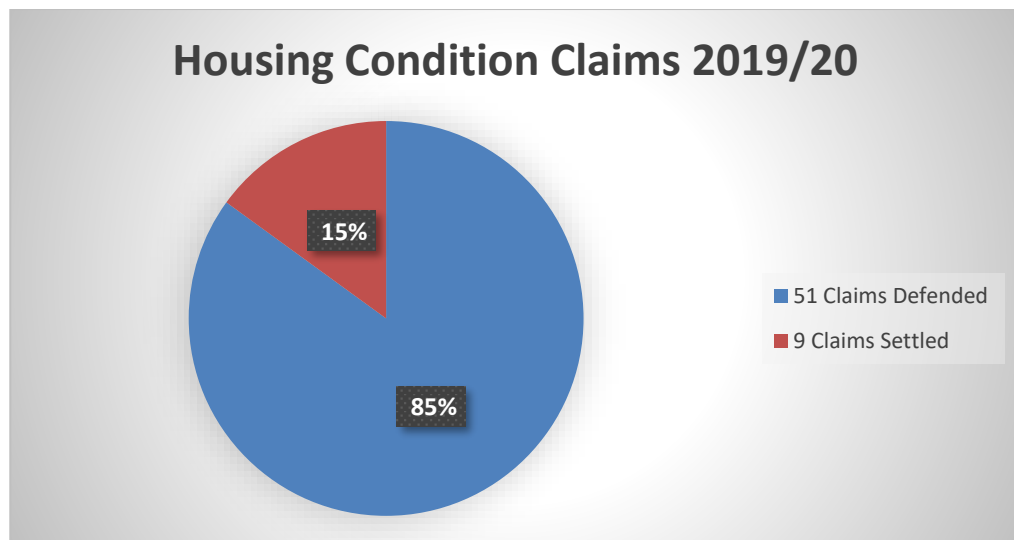


Figure 3.0

- 6.8 During 2021/22, SHG have seen an unprecedented rise in the number of Housing Disrepair claims. Between April to October, over forty claims have been received with nearly all brought about through canvassing on estates. Pro rata, the number of claims received year to date is higher than any other. The impact for SHG is a demand on surveyor resource in responding to claims and the cost of legal representation in order to defend.

7 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATION

- 7.1 In response to the HO's call for evidence, SHG provided responses through the NFA on the following;
- a. What a landlord considers to be the main cause of damp and mould?
 - b. Is it difficult to identify the root causes?
 - c. Are the root causes difficult to address?
 - d. What support is offered while a complaint is being investigated?
 - e. Has a damp or mould situation led to a significant change in the way in which a landlord operates?
- 7.2 The NFA's published their findings which concluded that damp mouldy conditions reported in the media are not representative of the sector as a whole.
- 7.3 The NFA shared the responses provided by ALMO's across the country. It was found that SHG already operate all of the best practice shared by the members; which included support measures for customer's, planned investment in assets identified as hard to treat, trained staff with the knowledge to advise, identify and action problems encountered by customer's managing condensation.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This report is aimed to provide a reassurance that SHG take reports of dampness serious along with all other building repair requests. This report highlights the effective processes adopted by the organisation to deal with reports of dampness.
- 8.2 The report also highlights the benefit of investment decisions made historically as well as forward planning which are clearly effective and aimed to support customers to mitigate environmental conditions which may result in condensation.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Member Committee note the contents of this information report and make any further suggestions for actions they would like to see.