

## Damp & Mould Policy

### 1 Our approach to damp and mould

- 1.1 We recognise the impact that damp and mould can have on the health and wellbeing of our customers and members of our households and have adopted a zero-tolerance approach. This policy reflects our commitment to identifying and remediating cases of damp and mould, and preventing its impact on our customers and our properties. We understand that damp and mould can be caused by a variety of factors, and we will work in partnership with you to mitigate and resolve these issues in your home, whatever the cause may be. Our approach includes proactive steps to identify cases and emphasises effective communication and aftercare to ensure these are thoroughly resolved.
- 1.2 Our approach described in this policy aims to:
- Support our customers by providing a timely response to reports of damp and mould and communicating clearly throughout the process of resolving cases
  - Ensure we are being proactive in identifying damp and mould and do not always rely on customers to report cases to us
  - Identify and remediate cases of damp and mould as early as possible
  - Provide clarity and consistency in our response to damp and mould issues
  - Ensure our staff are trained to identify signs of damp and mould, and to take the necessary follow up action
  - Ensure appropriate aftercare for residents who experience damp and mould. We will liaise with other social housing landlords and other organisations and services to adopt best practice
  - Comply with relevant legislative and regulatory requirements
- 1.3 The policy covers all rented and shared ownership properties owned by Octavia. If there is any variance between the repairs policy and individual lease or tenancy agreements, the lease or tenancy agreement will take precedence.
- 1.4 We comply with relevant legislation and regulation related to this policy, including:
- Housing Act 2004 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System
  - The Decant Homes Standard
  - Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance
  - Environmental Protection Act 1990
  - The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

### 2 The causes of damp and mould

- 2.1 Several different factors can cause excess moisture in homes, which in turn can cause damp and mould. These factors can work alone, or together to increase moisture, and can include:

- New or ongoing leaks
- Lack of effective ventilation
- Penetrating damp
- Rising damp
- Structural issues
- Condensation

2.2 Water penetrating the external structure of the building or internal leaks causing damp, rot and damage to internal surfaces and structure. The cause can be the result of, for example:

- Water ingress due to defective or poor original design / workmanship of the structure.
- Defective components for example roof coverings, external wall doors and windows.
- Defective or blocked rainwater gutters and pipes.
- Defective or leaking internal waste pipes, hot and cold water and heating systems.

2.3 Rising damp is the movement of moisture from the ground rising up through the structure of the building and can usually be identified by a 'tide mark' at the edge of the area of damp, often towards the bottom of the inside of an exterior wall.

2.4 Condensation is caused by warm air, such as from cooking or people breathing, coming into contact with cold surfaces and turning into droplets of water. Inside homes, these surfaces can include windows, metal framed windows or the inside surface of external walls. The amount of condensation produced in a home depends on three factors; how much water vapour is created, how cold or warm the home is, and how much ventilation there is. Damp caused by condensation occurs in areas of the home which are coolest and have the least air movement around them (to keep them dry).

2.5 According to survey responses to the Housing Ombudsman the top three causes of damp and mould cases are ventilation (30%), leaks (23%), structure (20%) and condensation (18%).

2.6 For more information on the causes of damp and mould, please see the [damp and mould section](#) of our website. Residents can request a printed copy of the information on our website by telephone (020 8354 5500) or writing (info@octavia.org.uk). A printed copy of this will also be provided to residents at sign up of their tenancy.

### 3 What we mean by

#### **Structural factors**

3.1 Where we refer to structural factors contributing to damp and mould, this may be factors such as property age, design, and modifications. For this reason, we recognise that some of our properties will be more prone to experiencing mould than others, for example our converted street properties.

#### **Occupational factors**

3.2 Where we refer to occupational factors contributing to damp and mould, these may factors such as overcrowding, the availability and use of heating and ventilation systems, individual circumstances such as disability, financial hardship, and health conditions. We recognise that occupancy factors do not mean that we have no responsibility to assist our residents. Where occupancy factors are identified, we will work in partnership with residents and consider appropriate measures to put in place.

## 4 Reporting damp and mould

4.1 We will ensure that we have a range of methods for reporting damp and mould, making it easy and accessible for customers to raise concerns. These methods include:

- By telephone
- By email
- Via our website
- In person at an Octavia office (an appointment is advised to guarantee someone will be available to see you)
- Face to face with any member of staff when we visit your home.

4.2 You can report cases of damp and mould to use by emailing [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk) or calling 0208 354 5500 between 8:30am – 5pm Monday to Friday. We operate an emergency repairs service outside of office hours. By calling 0208 354 5500, you will be directed to our out of hours call handling service who will allocate your case to one of our contractors on call.

4.3 We will respond to initial reports of damp and mould within 5 working days by carrying out an inspection of your home. We will assess the current impact of any damp and mould present, and aim to identify the cause, and current risks. Depending on the outcome of this initial assessment, we will take appropriate remedial actions.

4.4 Where we attend an agreed home visit, but you are not home, we will attempt to make contact with you by telephone. If we are still unable to contact you, we will leave a calling card with details on how to contact us. We will also contact you to arrange a new appointment within 3 working days. It is important that are able to gain access to assess the severity of damp and mould within your home, and to carry out remedial works. Where we are unable to gain access, we may have to take more formal action, and will assess this on a case-by-case basis.

## 5 How we proactively address damp and mould

5.1 Where we have identified damp and mould cases, we will analyse data on an ongoing basis to help us identify properties with a higher risk of damp and mould, enabling us to target resources and provide early intervention where possible.

- 5.2 The presence of damp and mould is assessed as part of our cyclical stock condition surveys, which we aim to complete every 5 years.
- 5.3 We will use the opportunity to address damp and mould, or take action to prevent future cases during periods where a property may be void (unoccupied). This includes replacing extractor fans with humidistat extractor fans as a preventative measure.
- 5.4 We will take other steps to identify unreported cases of damp, such as, surveying residents and approaching underrepresented groups who are not approaching us with issues in their homes.

## 6 How we manage damp and mould cases

- 6.1 We will always look to work jointly with our customers to find a solution, and not apportion blame. This will be whether the cause is structural or occupational.
- 6.2 Where the cause of damp and mould is occupational and not related to the structure or fabric of the building, we will take reasonable steps in partnership with you to help resolve cases.
- 6.3 We will keep thorough records of issues relating to damp and mould in our properties, supporting a risk-based approach.
- 6.4 Damp and mould is the responsibility of all Octavia staff. We will ensure that our staff and contractors have appropriate training to understand and identify signs of damp and mould and report cases promptly where they are identified, regardless of the purpose of our visit or interaction.
- 6.5 Where our staff or contractors are responding to damp and mould cases, we will ensure that they have the appropriate qualifications, training and tools to thoroughly diagnose and remediate cases.
- 6.6 We will clearly communicate with you the cause of damp and mould, what follow up actions are required through reports. Where we are unable to carry out these actions in one visit, or the level of works required are significant, we will communicate this to you, and agree an appropriate timetable. Where a timeframe for works changes, we will inform you and explain the reason for the change.
- 6.7 We will ensure we have effective communication channels between teams and that information on damp and mould cases is available to all relevant staff, so we do not have unnecessary delays due to, for example, staff absence.
- 6.8 Our approach to resolving damp and mould cases will centre around our customer's health and wellbeing and will aim to carry out agreed actions as soon as possible improve the customer's living environment. Where extensive works are required we will aim to carry out any necessary smaller remedial works at an earlier stage. Where customers are vulnerable, the damp and mould presents

significant health risks, or major works are required, we will consider decanting customers early in our processes.

- 6.9 We will ensure that our strategy for delivering net zero carbon homes considers and plans for how it can identify and respond to potential unintended consequences around damp and mould.
- 6.10 Where properties are identified for future disposal or are within an area marked for regeneration, we will take all necessary steps to maintain homes in acceptable condition and ensure residents do not receive a poorer standard of service or lower living conditions.
- 6.11 Where there have been reports of damp and mould, residents who have accepted a property through a mutual exchange can expect transparency from us and for our process will be treated in the same way as residents who have been allocated a home through the usual allocation process.
- 6.12 After damp and mould cases have been completed, we will contact you to ensure all issues have been addressed. We will contact you again within 1 year of carrying out damp and mould work taking place to check if the issue has resolved and whether any further work is needed.

## 7 Training

- 7.1 We will ensure that all of our staff and contractors have training to:
- Follow, raise awareness and create a good understanding of this policy in order to tackle the issue of damp and mould;
  - Spot signs and understand the causes and remedies of damp and mould;
  - Carry out maintenance/works to reduce the occurrence of damp and mould;
  - Ensure residents are supported and that they are treated in a fair and non-discriminatory way;
  - Demonstrate empathy towards residents where necessary when responding to complaints of damp and mould;
  - Ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to support staff, where necessary, dealing with complaints of damp and mould;
  - Ensure accurate record keeping of damp and mould complaints;
  - Ensure effective operation of communication channels between different teams, such as the complaints and repairs team;
  - Promote the benefits of our complaints process and your rights to approach the Housing Ombudsman where the complaints process has been exhausted.

## 8 Complaints and dispute claims

- 8.1 If you are dissatisfied with our response to dealing with damp and mould, you can escalate this through our complaints process. Our [Complaints Policy](#) details our approach.
- 8.2 We promote the use of our complaints process, and encourage residents to engage with this process as opposed to resorting to a legal disrepair claim. The benefits of using our complaints service are:

- More timely resolution of the issues
- More straight-forward and flexible approach to redress
- Free to the resident and
- Not limited in scope, unlike a disrepair claim

8.3 If you are not satisfied with the outcome of our complaints process you have the right to use the Housing Ombudsman’s alternative dispute resolution service, which has the following benefits:

- Free and simple to use
- Impartial
- Independent of the landlord
- Non-adversarial
- Faster and
- Broader in scope than a legal disrepair claim

## 8 How we will manage your personal data

8.1 Indicate how we will manage the customer’s personal data. This must ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, and Octavia’s internal Privacy Notice and retention guidelines.

## 9 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

9.1 We will apply this policy fairly and consistently. We will deliver all services and activities within the spirit and context of current Equality legislation including the Equality Act (2010).

9.2 We will not discriminate against any person or group of persons on the grounds of: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnership; pregnancy or maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

## 10 Contact for further information

10.1 The [Damp and Mould section](#) of our website provides further information on our service. Contact us on 020 8354 5500 or email us at [info@octavia.org.uk](mailto:info@octavia.org.uk) to report damp and mould to a member of our Customer Contact Team.

### Revision History

Date	Reviser	Revision Detail
01/02/2023	Andy Carlisle Head of Estates & Responsive Repairs	New policy endorsed by Resident’s Panel on 1 February 2023

Title: Damp and Mould Policy | Policy Owner: Head of Estates & Responsive Repairs | Approved by: Executive Team | Approval date: 07/02/2023 | Effective from: 27/02/2023