



## POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2014

**SUBJECT: HANDLING OF DAMP AND CONDENSATION COMPLAINTS**

**REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the handling of housing related damp complaints including those raised by tenants and Councillors. Additionally it provides information on the number and type of reports of dampness in the Council's housing stock and how these are dealt with operationally.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report considers the incidence of damp and condensation in the Council's housing stock and is based on data for the last six years. Additionally the report outlines how such repair requests are handled by Housing Repair Operations and also considers Members enquiries on such matters.
- 2.2 Although a stock condition survey was commissioned by the Council, the external consultants report submitted in 2008 was based on a 15% survey of the housing stock. The main purpose of the survey was to identify the improvements required to achieve the delivery of the WHQS programme, which included the replacement of key components. The survey did not identify specific damp related problems.
- 2.3 The BRE Report *Tackling Condensation 1991* defines damp as "*Water where it is unwanted, in quantities that are unsightly or cause deterioration.*" In this way it encompasses damp in all its forms. Tenants when they report dampness seldom differentiate between penetrating damp and condensation, unless there is an obvious leak and so tenant reports also encompass damp in all its forms.
- 2.4 Following complaints of dampness, the report also explains how the complaints are investigated and the measures taken by the Council to date aimed at reducing the incidences of dampness/condensation.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The response Repair Policy will assist the council in meeting the aims and priorities detailed in the following strategies:
- 3.2 **National Housing Strategy:** The Welsh Assembly Government's National Housing Strategy 'Better Homes for People in Wales' (2001) has key themes of quality and choice. The WAG vision for housing "*wants everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing*".

- 3.3 **Single Integrated Plan** (Prosperous Caerphilly – P2) “Improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough”
- 3.4 **Local Housing Strategy:** Property Theme: “Providing the opportunity for everyone to live in affordable, sustainable, good quality housing, regardless of tenure.”

And links specifically to Strategic Aim 6: Housing Management, “To provide good quality, well-managed homes in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations.”

#### 4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Since 2008 the Council’s housing Surveyors have visited 3,568 individual properties carrying out 6,759 inspections. For 1,971 (55%) of these properties it has been a once only visit.
- 4.2 Of the remaining 1,597 properties Table 1 sets out how many visits have been made to properties over the time period being considered in this report whilst Table 2 provides a breakdown of the total number and type of calls related to dampness which have been received.

Table 1:

Visits	Properties	%ge
2	815	51.03%
3	375	23.48%
4>	407	25.48%

Table 2:

	Damp report
Chimney	99
Damp/Condensation	6079
CWI	7
Door/window	371
Rising damp	65
Roof Leak	138
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6759</b>

- 4.3 Resolving damp and condensation issues can be a difficult process; however in the majority (78%) of cases we are able to resolve issues by the second visit.
- 4.4 It will be noted from Table 2 that damp/condensation issues are reported most frequently. Damp calls encompass chimney leaks and roof leaks and these are also reported separately. The same holds true for rising damp calls, which, following investigation may be determined as condensation related. Damp related to leaks from the plumbing in the property or other types of leak e.g. gas leaks have been removed from the data in order to provide as clear a picture as is possible. Table 3 provides a breakdown of complaints based on ward.

Table 3:

Count of Repair Number Ward	Year							Grand Total
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
ST JAMES	79	92	34	61	88	99	63	516
BEDWAS TRETDOM								
MACHN	62	50	25	75	104	99	73	488
PENYRHEOL	81	57	19	70	72	63	63	425
TWYN CARNO	50	52	22	57	88	81	61	411
BARGOED	61	63	26	58	77	54	50	389
ST CATTWG	47	35	25	65	60	70	53	355
NEW TREDEGAR	40	46	25	46	75	72	49	353
MORIAH	60	48	14	58	63	56	36	335
PONTLLANFRAITH	34	43	16	52	62	59	68	334
CEFN FFOREST	41	42	18	40	40	39	35	255
NEWBRIDGE	28	24	11	40	50	47	26	226
BLACKWOOD	30	37	21	28	35	44	29	224
MORGAN JONES	37	24	9	43	35	42	28	218
HENGOED	28	16	12	27	43	37	40	203
ABERBARGOED	36	32	14	27	28	26	23	186
ABERCARN	18	16	14	25	43	46	23	185
RISCA EAST	19	17	6	23	26	54	38	183
PONTLOTTYN	30	27	17	21	33	29	21	178
ABER VALLEY	27	31	5	27	36	27	12	165
CRUMLIN	23	16	6	22	38	21	22	148
DARREN VALLEY	23	23	10	31	27	10		124
ARGOED	12	14	10	16	25	13	12	102
RISCA WEST	2	4	5	14	26	26	24	101
PENGAM	15	9	5	13	19	15	16	92
NELSON	15	12	6	17	16	14	9	89
MAESYCWMMER	14	13	3	9	17	17	7	80
ST MARTINS	9	8	3	10	18	11	13	72
GILFACH	13	8	7	11	16	8	7	70
CROSSKEYS	8	8	4	8	17	12	12	69
YNYSDDU	14	5	2	14	11	14	7	67
PENMAEN	4	6	1	5	8	13	6	43
LLANBRADACH	8	9	1	9	5	4	5	41
YSTRAD MYNACH	2	1	1	8	6	5	8	31
TONYFELIN				1				1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>970</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>1030</b>	<b>1307</b>	<b>1227</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>6759</b>

## 4.5 Data Analysis

4.5.1 Appendix 1 provides a further breakdown of data based on street and area level. This assists in further analysing the information to establish if there are particular problems being highlighted within certain streets or estates.

- 4.5.2 The data needs to be treated with caution however, as whilst the percentage of repairs undertaken against properties may seem high in some cases, a low number of properties within an individual street will inflate this percentage.
- 4.5.3 When the data has been analysed on a street basis, it is clear that damp associated problems affect a range of construction types including traditional and non-traditional, and are not restricted to certain areas, they occur across the borough.
- 4.5.4 From the data it has not been possible to determine common causes of dampness, other than those identified within Table 2. This has identified an area for improvement within the service area and is a matter that will be addressed.
- 4.5.5 Further analysis has identified a problem on a number of our estates, although some streets within these estates appear to have been affected more than others – examples of estates include Gelligaer, Gilfach (Phase I & II), Lansbury Park, Panside and Phillipstown.
- 4.5.6 Parts of Gelligaer, Gilfach Phase I and Panside have recently benefitted from an external wall insulation and render system which will alleviate the majority of problems in those properties that were previously affected by damp.
- 4.5.7 Lansbury Park has been identified as requiring an overclad system and this has already been allowed for within the WHQS external works programme.
- 4.5.8 We have also recently submitted a bid to the Welsh Government for grant funding which includes Phillipstown, to carry out energy efficiency works, which again will include overcladding. We are however, currently awaiting a decision on this.
- 4.5.9 The remainder of the properties in Gelligaer are also included for an overclad system as part of the WHQS external works programme.
- 4.5.10 In relation to Gilfach Phase II, these are all traditionally constructed properties and there are no plans to overclad these. Where the cause of the problem has been identified as a defect, the remedial works have been undertaken. If more major works are required, then where possible an interim repair would have been carried out and the issue identified for inclusion in a future WHQS programme of work.

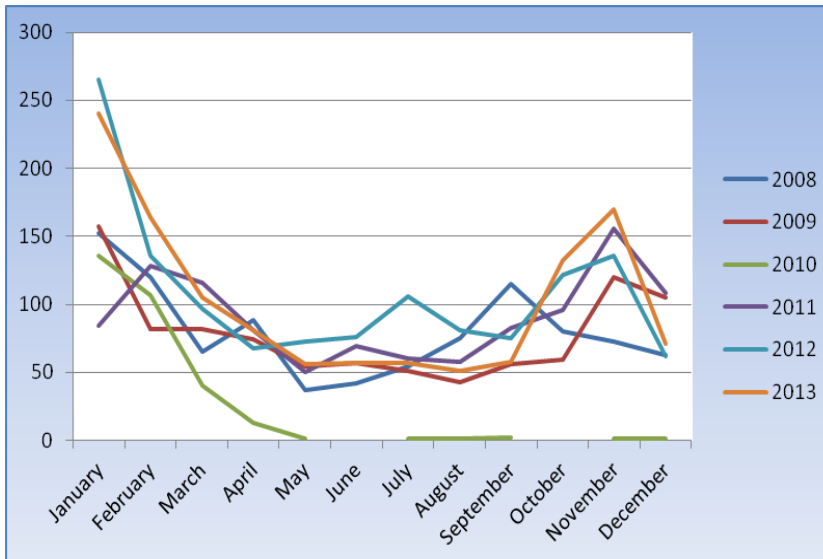
#### **4.6 Reporting process**

- 4.6.1 Initial repair requests are handled by the Area and Neighbourhood offices or the Central Repairs Team and passed to the area surveyor to visit. The Surveyor will investigate the complaint, determine the cause of the problem and where appropriate arrange for the necessary remedial works.
- 4.6.2 Where the problem is determined as one of condensation due to the life style of the household, then appropriate advice will be provided to the tenant, together with an information leaflet on damp and condensation (See Appendix 2). If deemed necessary assistance will be provided in cleaning off severe mould growth to put the property back into a manageable condition for the tenant.
- 4.6.3 If the Surveyor requires technical support or further advice, or the tenant challenges the area surveyor's diagnosis, the repair request is then passed to the Senior Surveyor. The Senior Surveyor will visit and conduct a more detailed investigation and produce a report. The report may identify a number of jobs to be completed or a note of advice given to the tenant in how to control condensation issues. Should the tenant not accept the Senior Surveyor's opinion then the matter is referred to an external damp consultant or an Environmental Health Officer.
- 4.6.4 Where the tenant feels they have not had a satisfactory resolution to the problem they may contact their local ward member. These repair requests are often sent to the Chief Housing Officer who passes them either to the area office or the Housing Repairs Team or they may

be pursued directly with the Area/Neighbourhood Housing Manager. In either case they are then dealt with, by the Senior Surveyor, but the resulting report is forwarded to the Chief Housing Officer who passes the information to the relevant ward member. If a Member requests that he/she accompanies the Senior Surveyor on the visit, then a copy of the report sent to the Chief Housing Officer is also sent direct to the Member if requested.

- 4.6.5 Repairs identified are then entered on Capita as a works order and prioritised accordingly. They are undertaken either by the in-house workforce or by a contractor.

### Condensation Damp is seasonal



- 4.6.6 The chart shows the “damp/condensation season” September when damp calls start to rise to March when numbers have almost levelled out. In order to diagnose damp problems the surveyor has a variety of instruments, which can be used to confirm what can be seen and felt.

### 4.7 The equipment

All Surveyors are equipped with a Protimeter Moisture meter and have received training in the correct use of the instrument. The Senior Surveyor carries a Protimeter Survey Master Moisture meter, a Flir B60 thermal imager, and an Extech Psychrometer/thermometer. These instruments enable the likely cause of the dampness to be determined in more difficult cases.

- 4.7.1 The Senior Surveyor has been on an external training course in the use of the thermal imager. This instrument will reveal heat loss/gain indicating where cavity wall or loft insulation may not be adequate. By pre-arrangement with the tenant, the thermal imager can also be used to conduct a thermal survey of a property, which will reveal deficiencies in the cavity insulation providing there is a 10° difference in external and internal temperature to give meaningful results. In addition, by entering the relative humidity and temperature from the Psychrometer the thermal imager can also be used to detect condensation risks.

### 4.8 The causes of damp and condensation in homes.

#### 4.8.1 Causes of Damp

- Leaking pipes, wastes or overflows.
- Rain seeping through the roof where a tile or slate is missing, defective roofing felt, spilling from a blocked gutter, penetrating around window frames, or leaking through a cracked pipe.
- Rising damp due to a defective damp course or because there is no damp course or because the damp course has been bridged.

- Existence of wet CWI.
- Leaking chimneys.
- Builder's debris in the cavity.

#### 4.8.2 **Causes of Condensation**

- Cooking.
- Washing and drying clothes especially on radiators.
- Incorrectly installed tumble dryers.
- Other clothes drying apparatus.
- Showering and bathing.
- Calor gas heaters.
- Lack of adequate heating and ventilation.

4.8.3 Whilst it is easy to list the main causes, there are other factors, which can lead to complaints of damp in the Council's housing stock.

4.8.4 A common problem is cold bridging which highlights damp conditions. This occurs when part of the structure is directly linked to cold external components and warm internal ones with no insulation between. This provides a ready area for mould growth. Typical of this situation is the concrete lintels over the windows of many of the Council's properties these often pass right through the wall.

4.8.5 Other problems encountered are cavities which are blocked with builder's rubble, often bridging the DPC. Dirty wall ties allowing moisture to cross the cavity often exacerbated by the presence of cavity wall insulation. Inadequate cavity insulation leading to voids which in turn create cold spots on the wall.

#### 4.9 **Insulation Issues**

Typical of the problems faced in some of our properties is damp Cavity Wall Insulation which has to be extracted, additionally problems with loft insulation which has become dislodged or missing and other uninsulated areas causing black mould to appear. Common areas in this category include sloping soffits in bedrooms where there is insufficient space for fibre insulation and so they are left empty when the loft insulation is upgraded. Additionally cavity wall insulation has been found to have voids in it, which produce similar patches of mould as missing loft insulation.

#### 4.10 **The cost of heating the home**

With the introduction of Welfare Reform and rising energy bills, many of our tenants are in financial hardship and struggling to meet day to day living costs. Tenants often cannot afford to leave the heating on low to warm up the fabric of the building and only boosting it when needed. Failure to adequately heat a property will result in the internal temperature dropping to such a level that any moisture laden air within the property, will condense. This can then show itself as moisture on windows, walls, ceilings, furnishings and clothes, with resultant mould growth.

#### 4.11 **Modernisation**

Modernisation programmes have involved replacing old draughty windows and doors with weather-stripped windows and doors. The replacement of the coal fire, with a modern combi boiler with the resultant loss of the fire place and flue, arguably the best natural ventilator we have had in our homes, have meant that homes have become more and more airtight. Unless the tenant regularly ventilates the home, then with no means of escape the moisture in the air condenses on the walls, windows and soft furnishings and produces mould. This is further exacerbated if the heating system is not utilised as explained above.

#### 4.12 **Government initiatives**

- 4.12.1 Over the years various Government initiatives have been implemented; all aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of the UK and Caerphilly as a local government area has played its part. The first of these initiatives was the injection of cavity wall insulation, whilst beneficial in the majority of homes this has in a minority of cases been detrimental to the property and the lives of the occupants. Of over 6,000 properties with cavity insulation in the borough some 480 have been subject to extraction and where deemed suitable, re-insulation with alternative means.
- 4.12.2 Since then there have been a number of other government funding schemes such as ARBED, ECO, CESP, etc., which have all attempted to improve the insulation and energy efficiency of homes. With this insulation has come other problems relating to the way in which insulation is installed in an attic or cavity, which have been covered previously in this report.
- 4.12.3 Similarly cavity wall insulation installers also face problems ensuring the cavity is full. They will rely on experience and calculation based on wall areas to know how much fill a cavity should take before it is truly full. Checks with thermal imagers are not carried out due to the limitations of these instruments, which are especially apparent in the summer. Experience has shown that voids in the cavity are a common cause of mould in the house.
- 4.12.4 Insulated render schemes have also been carried out on hard to insulate properties. This has had some success because where properties have received an insulated render system the incidence of damp calls has dropped off significantly. Estates such as Gelligaer, Panside and Graig Y Rhacca have been so treated to great effect and this has also significantly reduced our tenants' energy costs.

#### 4.13 **WHQS and other Council improvement programmes**

- 4.13.1 The WHQS Programme is based on the Savills stock condition survey undertaken during 2008. The survey was primarily concerned with component renewal e.g. roofs, windows, doors, kitchens, bathrooms etc., required to achieve the standard. At the time of the survey the main areas of failure related to the lack of internal modernisation to the properties and issues concerning the environment around the properties.
- 4.13.2 The stock includes around 3000 properties of non traditional construction. Half of these are the Laing Easyform and Wimpey No Fines properties. These properties were noted as being prone to suffer dampness. Other than this specific reference the Savills survey provides no quantification of the extent of damp problems. Therefore it is not possible to provide any correlation between the survey data and the number of damp related requests/complaints received by Housing Repair Operations.
- 4.13.3 The Savills survey was a 15% sample to identify the investment requirements for WHQS. In order to develop a detailed works schedule every property has to be individually surveyed for both internal and external works. It is a primary requirement of WHQS that all homes must be structurally stable, free from damp and disrepair. The location, extent, and duration of any dampness are therefore key factors to be identified during the property survey and appropriate remedial works scheduled. Dampness not only affects the physical fabric of the property but can be a threat to mental health and social well being which may be caused by living with the presence of damp, damp staining and/or mould growth. Members will be aware of the damp problems identified at Rowan Place which will be addressed as part of the WHQS Programme and it is possible that other estates may have similar problems.
- 4.13.4 During previous re-wiring programmes and as part of the WHQS works the ventilation in homes is being improved through the installation of fans. There has been some tenant resistance and a recent survey has revealed a number of units are turned off as they are considered by tenants too expensive to run, noisy or cold

- 4.13.5 The standard fan in use with the WHQS programme is the Nuaire Cyfan. Running costs for two units, one in the bathroom and one in the kitchen, according to the Nuaire information leaflet, is less than £6 per annum, that amounts to around 50p per month to control condensation related dampness – much less than the cost of redecorating an affected room.
- 4.13.6 Housing Repair Operations have a number of options to tackle condensation problems ranging from simply providing advice to fitting specialised ventilation equipment such as the Cyfan fans and Drimaster positive input ventilation units. This latter is subject to tenant resistance to the use of electrical devices due to a perception that the running costs are excessive. As noted above the fans are cheap to run and the Drimaster units equally so, typically costing 1p per day to run according to the manufacturers data.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not needed because the issues covered are for information purposes only, therefore the Council's full EIA process does not need to be applied.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The response repair budget over the last 3 years has been set £7.8m. Over the past 10 years it has fluctuated to address demands on various priorities, but overall has increased by 5% since 2004/5 to 2014/15.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no direct personnel implications.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 Consultation has taken place with relevant officers, Cabinet Member for Housing, Chair and Vice Chair of P&R Scrutiny and the Repairs and Improvement Group, all views and opinions have been included in the report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 This report is for information purposes only and advises Members of the Policy and Resources Committee on the progress being made to tackle damp and condensation issues to the Council's housing stock.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the handling of housing related damp complaints including those raised by tenants and Councillors.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Section 80 – Environmental Protection Act 1990, Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

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Nicole Scammell – Interim Director of Corporate Services & Section 151 Officer  
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Cllr Sean Morgan – Vice-Chair of Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee  
Phil Davy – Head of Programmes  
Graham North - Public Sector Housing Manager  
Paul Smythe – Housing Repair Operations Manager  
Kenyon Williams – Private Sector Housing Manager.  
Andrew Jeffries – Senior Surveyor  
Repairs & Improvement Group Tenant Representatives

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Data Analysis based on Street and Area level

Appendix 2: Keeping your Home Free from Damp & Condensation leaflet