



Damp and Mould Strategy and Action Plan for Council Homes

2025 - 2028

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Foreword

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Damp and mould is a persistent problem affecting homes across the UK, which we are now addressing head-on for Swindon's council homes with the launch of a comprehensive new strategy.

The "Swindon Damp & Mould Strategy" (the Strategy) aims to improve the living conditions of tenants by tackling the root causes and providing clear guidance for tenants.

For too long, damp and mould have been tolerated as minor inconveniences, but the reality is that they can have serious consequences. Not only can they damage properties, leading to costly repairs, but they also pose significant risks to health, particularly for vulnerable individuals, children, and those with respiratory conditions.

This new Strategy recognises the multi-faceted nature of the problem, acknowledging that damp and mould are often linked to a combination of factors, including poor ventilation, inadequate insulation, structural defects, and condensation caused by everyday living.

The Council's Strategy will deliver lasting improvement in how it tackles damp and mould. It is, in part, a direct response to the increased level of scrutiny of how councils tackle damp and mould following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak.

Issues of damp and mould are not new, but the result of long-term, entrenched issues within the housing system that require innovative approaches to resolve. The Council's Strategy and Action Plan presents its commitment to tackle damp and mould and its approach, response, and guidance for tenants.

Aims of the Strategy

We have five key aims that the strategy will deliver:

- To create a new housing team dedicated to property condition.
- To develop and formalise our operational processes.
- To set out our actions to tackle damp and mould to reduce the rate of its presence and recurrence in Council homes.
- To promote assurances for tenants of the processes in place to eliminate damp and mould by addressing its root causes.
- To eradicate damp and mould in SBC Homes.

National context

Statutory duties which apply to Swindon Borough Council

Awaab's Law

Awaab's Law is a piece of legislation designed to ensure social landlords promptly address hazards like damp and mould in their properties. It mandates strict timeframes for investigations and repairs, aiming to prevent future tragedies like the one that inspired the law, the death of Awaab Ishak from respiratory issues caused by prolonged exposure to mould.

Awaab's Law will come into force for the social rented sector from 27 October 2025. Awaab's Law will be introduced through a phased approach to ensure it is applied as effectively as possible. This means that the protections it provides against damp and mould will be introduced quickly, which would not have been possible if the government applied the law to a wider group of hazards from the outset. This will also allow the government to test and learn so that the reforms benefit social tenants and secure the lasting legacy that Awaab Isaak's family have fought so hard for.

- From October 2025 social landlords will have to address damp and mould hazards that present a significant risk of harm to tenants to fixed timescales.
- From October 2025 social landlords will also have to address all emergency repairs including for damp and mould or other hazards within 24 hours.
- In 2026, requirements will expand to apply to a wider range of hazards. In addition to damp and mould, we expect Awaab's Law - in this second stage of implementation - to extend to include excess cold and excess heat; falls; structural collapse; fire, electrical and explosions; and hygiene hazards.
- Then in 2027, the requirements of Awaab's Law will expand to the remaining hazards as defined by the HHSRS (excluding overcrowding). The full list of hazards can be found in schedule 1 to [the Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(England\) Regulations 2005](#).

Other relevant legislation

Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985

Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 requires landlords to carry out basic repairs. It states that landlords must keep in repair and proper working order the structure and exterior of the building (including internal walls and plasterwork); the installations for water, gas and electricity including sinks and toilets; and the installations for space and water heating.

Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

Requires all social or privately rented houses and flats to be safe, healthy, and free from things that could cause serious harm. Landlords are required to ensure that any home they rent out including any common parts are free of serious hazards from which a risk of harm may arise to the health or safety of the tenant or another occupier of the property and are fit for human habitation at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout. It does not contain a definition of fitness for human habitation but highlights freedom from damp as a condition to consider, alongside other prescribed hazards.

Where a landlord fails to do so, the tenant has the right to take action in the Courts for breach of contract on the grounds that their home is unfit for human habitation. If the Court finds that the property is unfit for human habitation, they may make an order requiring the landlord to make improvements to the property, pay the tenant compensation or both.

The Act does not cover people who have 'licenses to occupy', instead of tenancy agreements. This may include lodgers (people who live with their landlord), some people who live in temporary accommodation, and some, but not all, property guardians.

Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004

Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which can be applied to any tenure. It requires the HHSRS to be used in the enforcement of housing standards.

The HHSRS is a risk-based evaluation tool to help local authorities identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in homes. This assessment method focuses on the hazards that are present in housing and means a higher burden can be placed upon landlords generally to minimise or avoid potential hazards and to review conditions regularly including to rectify damp and mould in properties. Category 1 hazards (serious and immediate risk) are the most serious, followed by Category 2 (less serious or less urgent).

Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 introduces a duty on the local authority to take appropriate enforcement action if it assesses that a Category 1 hazard is present in a property. It also empowers the local authority to take several other actions if a Category 2 hazard is assessed as being present and the Council decides to take action.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990

Section 79 and 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 controls some "statutory nuisances" where the conditions of a property are "...in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance". It is primarily focused on the impacts of poor housing conditions, rather than the conditions themselves. Dampness, condensation, or mould growth are examples of defects in premises which are considered to damage health.

The Act applies to private and council housing. Council tenants can request an inspection by a local authority environmental health officer (EHO). Where a statutory nuisance is identified, the EHO must serve an abatement notice requiring the nuisance to be addressed. Tenants can also take their own legal action under section 82.

Section 4 of the Defective Premises Act 1972

Under section 4 of the Defective Premises Act 1972, a landlord owes a duty of care to ensure that tenants (and their household) and visitors are reasonably safe from personal injury or damage to their property resulting from the defects. The duty is triggered if the landlord 'knows or ought to know of the relevant defect' regardless of whether the occupier had informed the landlord of it.

'Relevant defects' are items of disrepair arising or continuing on or after 1 January 1974. Where damage or injury results from a landlord's failure to meet repairing obligations, actions under the Defective Premises Act 1972 can be brought alongside actions in negligence and actions for breach of contractual rights. However, injury (whether physical or financial) must arise for a claim to be brought, and whether the landlord is liable will depend on the circumstances of each case.

Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

The Act seeks to create a more accountable, transparent, and responsive social housing sector that prioritises the safety, well-being, and rights of its residents. It aims to take a proactive approach to regulating social housing and acting against landlords who do not meet standards. Of most significance to the issue of damp and mould, it introduces new consumer standards and strengthens the enforcement powers of the Regulator of Social Housing.

Decent Homes Standard (DHS)

Decent Homes Standard (DHS) applies to the social rented sector and was introduced in 2000 to provide a minimum standard of housing conditions. It was updated in 2006 to take account of the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). It is a non-statutory standard which requires that a "decent home":

- Meets the current statutory minimum standard (being free from category 1 hazards)
- Is in a reasonable state of repair.
- Has reasonably modern facilities and services (kitchen being less than 20 years old, bathroom being less than 30 years old, adequate noise insulation and kitchen space, and an adequately located toilet).
- Has a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

Tackling damp and mould in alignment with the Council's strategic priorities

BUILD A FAIRER SWINDON

Reducing health and wellbeing inequalities by ensuring our tenants homes are free from damp and mould will assist in providing safe, quality, and affordable homes and reducing health and wellbeing inequalities.

BUILD A BETTER SWINDON

Providing safe, quality, and affordable homes as a social landlord while making the best use of all existing homes and encouraging well-managed and maintained homes across all tenures.

BUILD A GREENER SWINDON

Building resilience to climate change and reducing our carbon footprint, as many of the preventative measures being delivered by the capital works and retrofit programmes also minimise the conditions that allow damp and mould to develop.

A Step in the Right Direction

The Swindon Damp & Mould Strategy represents a step forward in tackling this pervasive problem. By taking a proactive and collaborative approach, we are demonstrating a commitment to improving the living conditions of its residents and creating a healthier and more sustainable community for all.

The success of the strategy will depend on the active participation of all stakeholders, from residents and landlords to housing providers and local authorities.

By working together, Swindon will make a real difference in the fight against damp and mould.

Our Approach

We have committed to the following key principles:

Prevention and Education

We will provide information for tenants about the causes of damp and mould, and the steps they can take to prevent it. This will include regular communication campaigns providing practical advice on ventilation, heating, and maintenance.

Early Detection and Reporting

We will encourage tenants to report damp and mould issues promptly, and streamline the reporting process to ensure it is easy to report concerns.

Effective Remediation

We will utilise best practices for tackling damp and mould, including identifying the underlying causes and implementing appropriate solutions, and providing guidance on the types of repairs that are necessary.

Investment

We will use stock condition data to inform and identify properties in need of internal and external works.

Collaboration and Partnerships

We will encourage a collaborative approach, emphasising working with tenants, community groups, and other stakeholders to address damp and mould issues effectively.

Accountability

We will develop measures to ensure that as the landlord, we are held accountable for maintaining our properties and addressing damp and mould problems promptly.

Monitoring

Where we have identified a damp problem, we will keep in touch with tenants to ensure works are carried out professionally and to monitor the situation until it is reasonable to conclude that the damp has been eliminated and should not return.

Reviewing

We will periodically review our Damp and Mould Policy, Strategy and Action Plan to ensure that its approach remains effective and to ensure it keeps pace with developments in the treatment and management of damp and mould.

Learning

We will add a lessons learned category to our complaints process to ensure we are doing more to use feedback from tenants to improve our response to damp and mould.

How we will do it

Prioritisation of damp cases and reports

We know that damp and mould can affect anybody, but it may be more harmful to some vulnerable tenants, or people with certain medical conditions.

Our processes will be sensitive to the different needs and vulnerabilities of our tenants, and we will prioritise our response accordingly to protect tenants who may be more vulnerable to the effects of damp and mould.

Effective triaging of new cases

When a report of damp or mould is made, call centre officers will triage each case and will book a repair or arrange for a surveyor to visit the tenant's home to assess the cause of the problem.

A new Housing Technical Services team

We have introduced a new Housing Technical Services team and recruited a dedicated Senior Property Condition Manager. This role is our lead on damp and mould, and disrepair. Their Property Condition team will intervene in cases of damp and mould early before they become serious disrepair cases.

Our new Property Condition Surveyors can conduct a damp survey, to assess the cause of the issue as soon as possible. In cases where leaks or disrepair is a factor, we will act to resolve the cause of the damp and mould and may also need to undertake additional general repairs. Colleagues in the Property Condition team will all be Housing Health and Rating System Practitioner trained.

We will strive to identify the underlying causes of damp and mould.

Advice and support

Where all other factors have been ruled out and condensation is determined to be the cause, the performance of or requirement for mechanical ventilation is checked, and a review of occupancy and living arrangements may be undertaken.

In such cases, the mould will be safely removed, and tenants provided with practical advice to reduce the risk of mould and damp problems persisting.

Information and advice are based on what is practicable for the tenants' home and circumstances, for example having the heating always running may not be affordable for some households, or they may be forced to dry washing indoors due to a lack of outdoor space.

Awareness-raising and campaigning

As part of the Strategy, we will ensure that tenants and stakeholders understand the issue and where they can get help. Regular campaigns will include, a revised damp and mould leaflet, attendance at community impact days, and we will aim to improve awareness, understanding, and above all, access to support. The team will produce information and guidance, including a hard-copy leaflet containing a QR code linking to the treating damp and mould page of the Council's website.

This will be regularly promoted to tenants, along with community events to raise awareness of the team and how to report damp and mould.

Stock condition surveys, investment, and use of data

We are currently inspecting all of our housing stock; the surveys will include the building fabric as well as internal issues.

As well as identifying cases which can be resolved through immediate repairs, this will enable us to better understand the rate of damp and mould in our housing stock and inform the planned works programme.

This information might include, for example, building an evidence base of building materials or typologies that are particularly vulnerable to damp and mould and prioritising these for replacement or renovation. Immediate damp and mould issues in these properties will be resolved, with long-term future work to the building fabric being rolled into our longer-term retrofit programme. External wall insulation would be one example of such an intervention.

By taking a proactive approach to inspecting properties, we will reduce the pressure on tenants to report issues to us. We know that a proactive approach will benefit the most vulnerable, as groups such as elderly people or people who do not have English as a first language tend to report issues to us less frequently.

At the time of writing this Strategy around 5,500 properties have been surveyed by consultants for the stock condition survey. This includes system and component condition, remaining lifespans, decency and HHSRS issues (such as damp) as part of the internal surveys. These are checked to see whether major works or repairs have orders raised in relation to the issues and if not, these are raised.

Behind Every Door

We have recently committed to our 'Behind Every Door' campaign that is a proactive initiative to visit every tenant, this will help in reducing issues of disrepair in our properties and can also make us aware of other issues which we can refer on to other services such as Social Care.

Information reported by the rolling Stock Condition Surveys major works surveyors, and by tenants reporting, all help to inform a cohesive, collaborative dataset. This allows us to identify where multiple cases of damp and mould in a single building may be the result of issues with ventilation, poor heating systems or building fabric. By pin-pointing the worst performing buildings, we can prioritise blocks for external works, as well as building a picture of the building types that are most likely to experience structural damp and mould.

New technologies

We have also begun to use new technology to identify cases of damp and mould. Environmental sensors have already been installed in over 200 properties that have reported damp and mould. The monitors provide both live data on the presence of damp and mould, and identify whether the issue is caused by a structural defect. The installation of monitors is being planned for additional homes.

The data emerging from these pilots is being used to inform the programmed installation of further monitors and the consideration of the use of other technologies.

Tenant data

We recognise that property data is only half of the equation. Of equal importance is the data we hold about our tenants. This data can help us to identify residents who might be at higher risk of damp and mould due to overcrowding; who might face additional challenges in engaging with the Council (for example language barriers) or who rarely contact us.

We are in the early stages of this work on intersecting risks, and our targeted visits to households headed by older people is a key example of where this work is already underway.

Targeted approach

By cross referencing data on our tenants with property-related data, such as property archetypes with high levels of damp and mould reports, we can target our proactive work where intersecting risks arise. We aim to overlay property data with the data collated through inspections already undertaken, and from our housing teams to help identify residents at high risk of experiencing the impact of damp and mould.

Online reporting

We will be developing an online reporting tool and will work with tenants to ensure it is accessible and easy to use. We will also review our IT systems, identifying improvements to the case management and data collection systems used by the team.

This will enable us to ensure that issues of damp and mould are responded to the first time they are reported, and that we have the data to enable the team to operate more efficiently.

Referrals to the Property Condition team

We will also develop our processes for referring cases to the Property Condition team. A few pathways have already been established; In some cases, issues are raised through other routes such as via Housing Officers who are trained to identify cases of damp and mould, or by tenants in person.

Our repairs and gas contractors, who service homes every year, will be trained to identify signs of disrepair including damp and mould, and report homes of concern back to the Property Condition team in weekly reports.

We will continue to deliver training across colleagues within the housing directorate and explore opportunities for training and awareness-raising with officers from other directorates. We have rolled out mandatory training on damp and mould for all officers in the housing directorate. Our colleagues entering residents' homes, such as surveyors will be required to undertake a training course focused on damp and mould.

We are continuing to develop our tenant engagement framework, which ensures that residents can raise building-wide maintenance and disrepair issues and provide feedback on our performance in resolving issues.

New tenant scrutiny arrangements will provide opportunities for improving the operation of the service and the resident experience. The aim is for the Housing Technical Services team and tenants to work together to monitor the services that we provide, ensuring the delivery of an efficient, effective, and consistent responsive repairs service whilst being mindful of value for money.

Accountability, Measuring and Review

The performance measures identified within the Action Plan will be used to quantify performance on an annual basis, but monitoring will not be limited to an annual review.

Key Performance Indicators in relation to damp and mould are already in existence and monitored and reported on monthly.

This Strategy and Action Plan will be monitored by senior officers who will also report on performance regularly to the Housing Improvement Board.

We will ensure our approach to damp and mould is effective and up to date with any changing regulation, legislation, and best practice.

Impact and Benefits

The implementation of the Swindon Damp & Mould Strategy is expected to bring numerous benefits to our tenants and communities, including:

Improved Health

By tackling the root causes of damp and mould, the strategy will help to create healthier living environments for residents, reducing the risk of respiratory problems and other health issues.

Enhanced Housing Quality

The Strategy will lead to better-quality housing overall.

Reduced Repair Costs

By addressing damp and mould problems early, the Strategy will help to prevent more significant and costly repairs in the long run.

Increased Tenant Satisfaction

Living in a damp and mould-free environment will undoubtedly improve tenant satisfaction and well-being.

Reporting

If you are a Swindon Borough Council housing tenant and you are affected by damp and mould, contact the Council on **01793 445500**, a member of the team will ask you a number of questions about the problem and take the details from you. Alternatively, you can email: **dampandmould@swindon.gov.uk**.



Action plan

Theme	Action	New or existing Initiative
Responding effectively to reports of damp and mould	Establish a Housing Technical Services Team	New
	Recruit a Senior Property Condition Manager to lead our response to Damp and Mould	New
	Publish a Damp and Mould Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2028	New
	Update the Housing Damp and Mould Policy	Existing
	Introduce a case management system for managing repairs	New
	Deliver mandatory training to all housing colleagues	New
	Set up an effective referral and reporting mechanisms with external agencies	New
Improving our collection and use of data	Carry out more Behind Every Door visits to better understand our tenants	Existing
	Use stock condition surveys to collect accurate data on our properties	New
	Use records of complaints, disrepair and decanted properties to identify trends and improve planned work programmes	New

Theme	Action	New or existing Initiative
Focus on vulnerable groups	Revise the Tenants Handbook	Existing
	Produce an up-to-date leaflet	Existing
	The Property Condition team to attend Let's Talk Housing and other tenant events	Existing
Investing in our stock to prevent damp and mould	External works to building fabric	Existing
	Kitchen and bathroom replacements	Existing
	Increase energy efficiency of our stock	Existing
	Service and clean all ventilation fans	Existing



