

Housing Damp and Mould Policy

1. Overview / Policy Statement

- 1.1. This joint policy outlines approach of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils (the councils) to preventing and treating damp and mould in the homes they provide.
- 1.2. Damp and Mould are emphasised by the Regulator for Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman as an area of critical importance.
- 1.3. Under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), damp and mould cases can be categorised as Category 1 (CAT1) hazards, which is the most serious form of hazard classification.
- 1.4. Damp and mould issues in homes can have a serious impact on the health of the tenants and cause long-term damage to property. The councils aim to take strong preventative and reactive measures to prevent damp and mould in their properties.
- 1.5. Awaab's Law (Hazards in Social Housing (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2025) obliges social landlords to promptly address and fix reported health hazards, such as damp and mould, within specified timeframes. Awaab's law came into force in October 2025 and will be extended in 2026 and 2027.
- 1.6. Awaab's Law is named in memory of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak who died due to black mould exposure in social housing, despite his parents' repeated complaints.
- 1.7. The councils intend to fully comply with Awaab's law, and act in accordance with best practice, to effectively prevent and treat damp and mould in their properties.

Defining Damp and Mould

- 1.8. Damp is an excess of moisture that can't escape from a structure. There are several types of damp, which have different causes. These include:
 - 1.8.1. Penetrating damp: Penetrating damp is the result of water infiltration

through the external wall into the property. It is often caused by roof, gutter, or pipe leaks. Signs of penetrating damp include damp patches appearing on walls or ceilings and wet, sometimes crumbly, plaster.

- 1.8.2. Rising damp: This mainly affects ground floor rooms and is caused by ground water soaking up into the walls and floors. This is usually because a damp-proof course or damp-proof membrane is not working, or because there is no damp proofing. A sign of rising damp is a tide mark along the affected walls at about 1 metre high with plaster damage below.
- 1.8.3. Condensation: Condensation occurs when warm, moist air cools quickly and droplets of water are released when the air contacts a cool surface. Several factors can contribute to condensation, but common causes are inadequate insulation, heating or ventilation.
- 1.9. Mould is a type of fungus. It spreads through spores, which are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air around us and can quickly grow on surfaces where dampness persists, or water has formed into a visible covering.

2. Objectives

- 2.1. The councils aim to:
 - Ensure the homes they provide are free from damp and mould through efficient and effective preventative and reactive measures.
 - Comply with regulatory requirements pertaining to damp and mould.
 - Provide tenants with support such that they are empowered to spot and report damp and mould where it occurs.
- 2.2. The key principles that underpin this policy are:
 - No blame culture: Damp and mould concerns should be taken seriously, never being reduced to a 'lifestyle issue'. Instead, instances of mould will be treated, and measures taken to address the root cause.
 - Being pro-active: We will take steps during the acquisitions and voids processes to minimise the risk of damp impacting tenants. We will also assess properties during tenancies to any catch damp and mould problems early.
 - Providing easy access to services: The councils are committed to making the process of reporting damp and mould easy and accessible to all tenants.

3. Scope

3.1. This policy applies to all housing accommodation provided by the councils.

4. Roles and Responsibilities for Delivery

4.1. The roles and responsibilities for delivery are as follows:

- The Development and Corporate Landlord Operations Manager: Overall responsibility for damp and mould policy implementation.
- The Housing Delivery Manager: Oversight of tenant liaison.
- Contractors: Compliance with training and health and safety protocols, and an obligation to report any instances of damp and mould.
- Housing Officers: Compliance with this policy, including an obligation to report any damp and mould they identify.
- All officers: An obligation to promptly pass on any reports of damp and mould, regardless of whether they were made through an official channel or informally, to the housing team.

5. Relevant Legislation

5.1. Other key legal and regulatory references are set out below:

- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
- Housing Act 2004
- Decent Homes Standard 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Home Standard, Regulator of Social Housing 2015
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims (England) 2021
- The Building Safety Act 2022
- The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Regulator of Social Housing – Safety and Quality Standard 2024
- Hazards in Social Housing (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2025

6. Relevant Policy and Procedure

6.1. The councils' relevant policies and procedures are listed below:

- Housing Repairs policy
- Housing Compliance policy
- Housing Voids policy
- Data Protection policy

6.2. The relevant health and safety policy and codes for the councils will also apply to this policy. This includes, but is not restricted to:

- First Aid
- Violence and Aggression at work
- Workplace Safety
- Working at Height
- Electrical Safety Personal Protective Equipment
- Asbestos Management
- Incident Reporting and Investigation
- Manual Handling

7. Policy and procedure

Responding to damp and mould

7.1. The councils have three damp and mould categories, these are minor, significant or an emergency.

7.2. Damp and mould can be categorised as minor when mould covers a surface area of less than 1m² and is not recurrent.

7.3. Damp and mould pose a significant hazard when tenants are at a significant risk of harm to their health or safety. For example, a home containing mould growing in multiple rooms will pose a risk to any tenant due to the potential health consequences of mould exposure. The councils will categorise any mould that covers more than 1m² of a wall as significant automatically. However, officers can judge damp and mould that does not meet that threshold as significant should they have reason to believe that it could pose a significant risk to tenant health and safety.

7.4. Mould is an emergency hazard when it poses an imminent and significant risk to tenants. This includes cases where damp and mould are having a material impact on a tenant's health, for example their ability to breathe. Damp and mould can also be classified as an emergency hazard due to specific tenant vulnerabilities, like respiratory issues or pregnancy, that can make the risk posed by mould exposure more severe.

7.5. The councils are committed to responding to all cases of damp and mould quickly and effectively. Our response timelines depend on whether the damp and mould in question is a minor, significant or emergency hazard.

7.6. The councils will investigate any potential emergency damp and mould hazards and, if the investigation confirms an emergency hazard, undertake relevant safety work as soon as reasonably practicable. The investigation

and the work will both take place within 24 hours of the councils becoming aware of the hazard.

- 7.7. If the councils are made aware of damp and mould that is a potential minor or significant hazard, we will:
 - 7.7.1. Investigate within 5 working days of becoming aware.
 - 7.7.2. Produce a written summary of investigation findings and provide this to the tenant within 3 working days of the conclusion of the investigation.
 - 7.7.3. Undertake relevant safety work within 5 working days of the investigation concluding.
- 7.8. If the councils conduct a standard investigation, having been made aware of a potential minor or significant hazard, and that investigation reveals an emergency hazard, safety works must be conducted within 24 of the councils' investigation identifying an emergency hazard.
- 7.9. If safety works cannot be completed within these timelines in response to significant or emergency hazards, the councils will provide of suitable alternative accommodation for impacted tenants.
- 7.10. The councils will begin, or take steps to begin, any supplementary work to prevent a significant or emergency hazard recurring within 5 working days of our initial investigation concluding, if the investigation identifies a significant or emergency hazard. If steps cannot be taken to begin work in 5 working days this must be done as soon as possible, and work must be physically started within 12 weeks.
- 7.11. Reasons supplementary preventative work may not begin within 5 working days might include an inability to source materials, specialist workers or sufficiently detailed surveys within 5 days. Under these circumstances, the councils will document steps taken within 5 working days to start the process of works (for example, contacting specialist contractors). The councils will complete supplementary preventative works within a reasonable time period.
- 7.12. The councils will keep impacted tenants updated throughout the investigation, safety works, and preventative works and will provide information on how to keep safe.
- 7.13. The councils' response procedure for damp and mould hazards begins when the councils are made aware of a potential hazard. Councils can be made aware of potential hazards through many avenues, including:

- Tenants reporting the hazard, or somebody reporting it on their behalf
- A member of staff, such as a housing officer, becoming aware of damp and mould during a visit or inspection
- Being notified by third parties, including contractors

7.14. Upon being notified of a potential hazard, the councils' timeframe to investigate the damp and mould will begin. A vital part of this process involves assessing whether the hazard is a potential emergency or significant hazard. This decision will be made by trained officers who will consider the extent of the damp and mould, as well as any factors that could make tenants more vulnerable, such as the presence of children or those with respiratory health conditions. Officers will also ascertain whether tenants are experiencing health complications due to mould exposure, which would result in an emergency classification.

7.15. Investigations carried out in response to potential emergency or significant hazards will take place in person and be carried out by a competent person.

7.16. The councils may carry out further investigation in order to determine what works may be required to prevent significant or emergency hazards from reoccurring. These investigations will be carried out by a competent investigator as soon as reasonably practicable (and within the specified timeframes for supplementary preventative works).

Reporting Damp and Mould

7.17. Tenants are encouraged to report any problems as soon as possible after noticing any potential damp or mould issue. They can do so by emailing tenants@southandvale.gov.uk, or by calling 01235 422422 and asking for "Housing Repairs".

7.18. In cases where we have reason to believe that tenants may have trouble reporting damp and mould, the housing delivery team will work with subject matter experts, such as our community support team, to ensure all tenants have accessible avenues to report hazards. Relevant potential reasons for additional support could include English as an additional language, illiteracy, or other additional support needs.

7.19. We aim to be aware of any translation or interpretation needs through the use of tenant profiles to ensure language does not pose a barrier to making reports.

7.20. Upon receiving a report of damp and mould from a tenant, or a tenant's representative, a member of the housing team will log the report, making contact to ask diagnostic or clarifying questions if required to ensure the

potential hazard can be appropriately classified.

- 7.21. Housing officers will be appropriately trained to spot signs of damp and mould. If officers identify signs of damp and mould in a property, regardless of the purpose of their visit, they must report the hazard.
- 7.22. The councils will ensure that any contractors visiting houses provided by the council are informed of an obligation to report any damp and mould they identify to the councils, regardless of their purpose for being at the property.

Preventing Damp and Mould

- 7.23. As well as treating cases of damp and mould quickly and effectively, the councils are committed to taking strong preventative measures to prevent damp and mould from ever becoming a problem.
- 7.24. Preventative works can occur upon acquiring a property, during the voids process between tenancies, and while homes are occupied. Where possible, the councils will aim to carry out preventative works at the point of acquisition or while homes are void. Prior to letting a property, we will investigate homes for any signs of damp and mould and undertake works to resolve potential sources of damp in line with our Housing Voids policy. All properties will also have HHSRS assessment, and a visible damp and mould assessment, undertaken by the Development and Corporate Landlord Property Operations team prior to tenant move in.
- 7.25. The councils' preventative works can include the installation of humidistat extractor fans. As part of our ongoing property upgrades, we are fitting humidistat-controlled extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms across our housing stock. These fans automatically activate when humidity levels rise above a safe threshold, helping to expel excess moisture from cooking, showering, or drying clothes.
- 7.26. The councils will prioritise improvements like better insulation, double glazing, and external repairs to roofs and gutters to tackle root causes of damp penetration in our housing stock.
- 7.27. The councils will conduct regular property surveys, including thermal imaging where needed, to identify hidden moisture sources such as leaks or poor insulation as part of our enhanced inspection and maintenance protocols.
- 7.28. The councils will work with tenants to empower them to take preventative action against damp and mould. We will provide information on our website, and through other communication channels, to raise awareness about the causes of damp and mould. This will include details about how everyday

activities in the home can generate condensation and what tenants can do to help prevent damp.

Supporting Tenants

- 7.29. The councils acknowledge that some tenants may be unable afford to heat their homes adequately due to their income levels, increasing their risk of damp and mould problems. We will work with tenants to ensure that they are receiving the income to which they are entitled and may provide other practical support to help address damp and mould.
- 7.30. The councils actively encourage tenants to report repair requests and log complaints where required.
- 7.31. We will engage with tenants to receive feedback to ensure the process for reporting damp and mould is simple and accessible.

Access to Property

- 7.32. Tenancy agreements require tenants to allow the councils (including appointed contractors) access to their home to carry out inspections and works.
- 7.33. The councils will, where possible, work with tenants to attempt to ensure that our visits occur at a time appropriate to the tenant as outlined in our Housing Repairs policy.

Responding to Complaints

- 7.34. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible without tenants needing to make disrepair claims and take legal action.
- 7.35. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims so that we may resolve the dispute outside of court.
- 7.36. Compensation will be paid in line with our complaints policy and will meet the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 7.37. The councils will ensure that any shortcomings that result in complaints will be identified and investigated by the complaints team and reported to the Housing Landlord Compliance Group. This information will be used to improve our services.

Compliance Monitoring

- 7.38. The councils will maintain accurate records of all damp and mould reports, investigations, related works, and communications. Records will be stored in the councils' housing management system (Concerto) and subject to regular internal audits to ensure compliance with Awaab's Law and other statutory requirements. All data will be stored and managed in line with statutory data protection requirements, as outlined in the councils' data protection policy.
- 7.39. Our response times following damp and mould reports, and the works we carry out in response, will be continually monitored by the Housing Landlord Compliance Group.

8. Employment Contractual Status

- 8.1. This policy does not form part of the contract of employment for South Oxfordshire District Council or the Vale of White Horse District Council.

9. Communication and Contact Information

- 9.1. For further information about this policy, please contact the Housing team on email: tenants@southandvale.gov.uk or telephone 01235 422422.

10. Alternative Formats

- 10.1. Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the Housing team if you would like this policy in an alternative format, via email: tenants@southandvale.gov.uk or telephone 01235 422422.

11. Definitions

- 11.1. Definitions are as follows:
 - HHSRS: Housing Health and Safety Rating System
 - Awaab's Law: Hazards in Social Housing (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2025

12. Change Record

Change Record	
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Author(s)	Development and Corporate Landlord Property Operations Manager/Housing Delivery Manager
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