



Chartered  
Institute of  
Housing  
Northern Ireland



# Maintaining healthy homes: A guide to preventing and resolving damp and mould





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# 1. Introduction

Damp and mould can be problematic in housing across Northern Ireland, posing health risks to people and damaging homes. Exposure to damp and mould can cause a range of respiratory problems, exacerbate existing health conditions, and contribute to a poor quality of life.

This guide provides practical guidance on preventing and resolving damp and mould issues for people in the Northern Ireland social and private housing sector. It is intended for use by housing providers, and it will be of interest to tenants and other relevant stakeholders.

Leadership and accountability are crucial in addressing this issue. Organisations providing housing should all have a policy on damp and mould. Providers should take a proactive approach, ensuring that staff are adequately trained and empowered to identify and address damp and mould issues promptly, with clear lines of responsibility.

In Northern Ireland, the fitness standard requires homes to be fit for human habitation, including being free from dampness prejudicial to the health of occupants. As regulatory focus intensifies, it is essential for housing providers to stay informed about the latest standards and regulations related to damp and mould management.

The key principles underpinning this guide are:

- A holistic approach: Recognising the interplay between property condition, heating, ventilation and occupant behaviour to identify the root cause of damp and mould problems.
- Tenant empowerment and avoiding blame: This guide recognises the vital role tenants play in maintaining healthy homes. It avoids attributing blame to tenants for damp and mould issues and focuses instead on collaborative problem-solving to achieve sustainable solutions.
- Data-driven decision-making: Utilising technology and data collection to identify trends, monitor progress and continually improve damp and mould management strategies.

By drawing on these principles, housing providers can foster healthy living environments for people and ensure their homes remain well-maintained.

This guide will explore the following key areas:

- Understanding damp and mould, including the different types and health impacts
- Identifying and assessing damp and mould issues, using a risk-based approach and leveraging technology
- Implementing effective prevention and remediation strategies, tailored to the specific type of damp and mould found
- Building capacity through training and education programmes for both staff and tenants
- Establishing a system for monitoring and evaluation to ensure interventions are successful and to continuously improve practices.

By working together, we can create a damp and mould-free housing sector in Northern Ireland, ensuring safe and healthy homes for all residents.



## 2. Understanding damp and mould

Damp and mould are common problems in housing, but they are not inevitable. This section provides an overview of the different types of damp and mould, their potential health impacts, and the importance of early identification and intervention.

### 2.1 Types of damp and mould

Damp refers to excess moisture in a building structure. This moisture can create a favourable environment for mould growth. Here are the main types of damp that can occur in housing:

- **Rising damp:** This occurs when moisture from the ground travels up through walls and floors. It is typically associated with older properties and can be caused by defective foundations, blocked drains or a lack of a damp-proof course.
- **Penetrating damp:** This happens when water enters the building from outside, through leaks in roofs, walls or windows. Broken pipes, faulty gutters and external condensation can all contribute to penetrating damp.
- **Construction damp:** This type of damp occurs during or shortly after the construction process. It can be caused by factors such as:
  - o Design defects, like poor ventilation or inadequate insulation
  - o Cold bridging, where heat is lost through areas of poor insulation
  - o Failure of damp-proof courses or other waterproofing measures
  - o Incomplete drying of plaster, where moisture is retained.
- **Traumatic damp:** This results from sudden and significant water ingress, such as leaking pipes, overflowing baths/sinks or flooding.
- **Condensation damp:** This is caused by moisture in the air inside a home, condensing on colder surfaces, such as walls, windows and ceilings. Excess moisture, poor ventilation and inadequate heating are common reasons for condensation damp, including in newer, more airtight buildings.

It is important to note that multiple types of damp may be present in a property simultaneously, and that the root cause may not always be immediately apparent. A thorough investigation may be required to accurately diagnose the problem.

### 2.2 Health impacts of damp and mould

Exposure to damp and mould can have a negative impact on the health of tenants, especially vulnerable people like young children, elderly individuals and those with pre-existing respiratory problems. Potential health risks associated with damp and mould include:

- **Respiratory problems:** Damp and mould can irritate the airways, leading to coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, and difficulty breathing. In severe cases, it can trigger asthma attacks and worsen existing respiratory conditions, and in extreme cases can lead to death.
- **Allergic reactions:** Mould spores can trigger allergic reactions, causing symptoms like sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes and skin rashes.
- **Hypersensitivity pneumonitis (HP):** an immune system disorder which can seem like the flu or pneumonia, but hypersensitivity pneumonitis does not get better with antibiotics for infection. HP can be aggravated by exposure to damp and mould. Symptoms include shortness of breath, cough, muscle aches, chills, fever, night sweats, extreme fatigue and weight loss.
- **Mental health problems:** A home that has mould or damp staining, along with the associated smells, can lead to depression and anxiety. Residents can experience feelings of shame and embarrassment because of the condition of their home, which may cause social isolation.
- **Other health issues:** Damp and mould exposure has also been linked to a range of other health problems, including fatigue, headaches and joint pain.

The NHS has reported that the people who are more sensitive to damp and mould issues than others include:

- Babies and children
- Older people
- Those with existing skin problems, such as atopic eczema
- Those with respiratory problems, such as allergies and asthma
- Those with a weakened immune system, such as those who are immunosuppressed (e.g. people suffering from certain diseases or conditions like AIDS, cancer, diabetes, malnutrition and certain genetic disorders).

Where damp and mould are present in a home and a tenant develops symptoms or health issues have worsened, tenants should be encouraged to contact their GP to seek appropriate medical care.

### 2.3 Importance of early identification and intervention

Identifying and addressing damp and mould problems early is crucial for protecting residents' health and preventing further damage to the property. Left unchecked, damp and mould can cause significant structural damage, leading to costly repairs and serious health hazards.

By understanding the different types of damp and mould and being vigilant for signs of their presence, tenants and housing providers can work together to address these issues promptly and effectively.

#### Case study: Identification and oversight at Arbour Housing

Arbour Housing recognises the critical importance of maintaining healthy and safe living environments for its tenants. Following the coroner's report into the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, the organisation strengthened its approach to damp, mould and condensation management. This included incorporating damp and mould reporting into board meetings and updating its quality assurance (QA) inspection form, steps to proactively identify and monitor potential issues.

##### Enhanced reporting and oversight

To ensure strategic oversight, Arbour Housing incorporated damp, mould and condensation reporting as a standing agenda item at every board meeting. This addition provides a regular platform for detailed reports alongside other crucial compliance areas, including:

- Incident/accident reporting
- Health and safety training
- Electrical testing
- Gas servicing
- Fire risk
- Lift servicing
- Water hygiene/legionella.

#### Proactive identification through quality assurance

In parallel, Arbour Housing updated its QA inspection form to include specific commentary on mould and condensation. This adjustment aimed to identify 'hidden' cases that might go unreported by tenants. The updated QA form is used during audits of:

- 100 per cent of invoices over £500 (response maintenance)
- 10 per cent of invoices under £500 (response maintenance)
- 100 per cent of planned works.

A key addition to the form is a question asking "Do you require an inspection of your property in relation to condensation mould or damp?" This question prompts tenants to request inspections, ensuring that potential issues are identified and addressed promptly.

For a holistic approach to safety, the QA inspection form also includes a range of additional health and safety checks, covering smoke alarms, fire doors, carbon monoxide alarms and external lighting.

#### Tenant engagement

The QA process involves direct tenant engagement, with tenant signatures required on the completed form. The aim is to enhance transparency and collaboration between Arbour Housing and its tenants, reinforcing a shared commitment to maintaining safe and healthy homes.



## Case study: Addressing a damp and mould case at Apex Housing Association

Apex Housing Association (Apex) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides and maintains over 6,000 high-quality homes, offering support to more than 16,000 tenants and residents across Northern Ireland. Apex is committed to providing quality, affordable homes and support services to build sustainable communities.

This case study illustrates Apex's process for addressing damp and mould in its homes, focusing on a specific instance and the steps taken to resolve the issue.

### The situation

A report of damp and mould was made at a two-bedroom home with a tiled pitched roof. The property is a two-story home with uPVC windows that include trickle vents. The heating in the property is gas, and the boiler was serviced within the last six months.

The tenant reported mould on the bathroom ceiling and window. Upon inspection, black mould was visible on the bathroom ceiling area.

### Apex's response

Apex has a clear process in place to address reports of damp and mould.

- **Initial steps:** Immediately after a report is made, Apex logs two standard jobs. The first is an urgent job to treat the mould within four days. A contractor attends the home to take photos of the affected areas, treat the mould with mould spray, and take photos after treatment. The second standard job is a pre-inspection by an officer within ten days to examine the issue. The officer investigates the root cause of the damp and mould, logs any remedial activities required, and completes a damp and mould checklist. These standard jobs facilitate easy reporting on the number of damp and mould issues reported and ensure committed timescales are met.
- **Pre-inspection:** In this case, the pre-inspection was conducted on 4 February 2025. During the inspection, the bathroom ceiling area was assessed with a damp meter, and it was found to be dry with no high readings. However, the bathroom fan was found to be non-operational. The roof insulation was 300mm, but some areas over the bathroom ceiling needed to be relayed.

- **Remedial actions and further works:** The contractor's operative treated the ceiling area with a self-acting anti-fungal solution mould cleaner on the day of the inspection. A new fan was recommended to be installed, and the bathroom ceiling stained blocked and painted after the fan was repaired. Further condensation treatment was indicated as potentially necessary before painting.

### Findings and contributing factors

The inspection revealed that the dampness in the walls was exacerbated by high vapour levels due to inadequate ventilation. The lack of ventilation in the bathroom, caused by a defective fan, was the root cause. Displaced insulation also contributed by creating cold spots on the bathroom ceiling.

Further investigation revealed condensation on inner window panes and displaced roof insulation. Despite trickle vents being open, condensation was still forming, and vapour levels were high. Condensation was occurring due to high humidity in the room and the surface temperature being cooler than the air, leading to vapour forming on the surface.

### Outcome

Apex addressed the issues by treating affected areas with an anti-fungal solution, replacing the bathroom fan, relaying insulation to remove cold spots, and replacing any missing or topped-up insulation. The home was also scheduled for remedial repairs, including stain blocking and painting the ceiling after the fan repair and a second treatment of any further mould found before painting.

Apex's approach to identifying and addressing the issues, from initial reporting to inspection and remedial actions, demonstrates its commitment to maintaining quality homes and ensuring tenant wellbeing.

## 3. Identifying and assessing damp and mould issues

Taking a proactive approach to identifying and assessing damp and mould issues is essential for effective management in housing. This section explores various strategies and emphasises the importance of collaboration between tenants and housing providers.

### 3.1 Risk-based approach

A risk-based approach prioritises identifying properties and households most susceptible to damp and mould problems. This involves considering:

- **Building characteristics:** Age, construction materials, ventilation systems, presence of a damp-proof course, history of damp issues
- **Household characteristics:** Number of occupants, vulnerabilities, ventilation and heating practices.

By combining this information, housing providers can target routine inspections and preventative measures towards higher-risk properties and households. In all cases, building defects should be assumed until the inspection verifies otherwise.

### 3.2 Empowering tenants through communication

Tenants play a vital role in identifying damp and mould issues early. Housing providers should encourage tenants to report any concerns promptly, regardless of the severity. Prioritising open and transparent communication empowers tenants to report issues without fear of blame. Identify anyone in the home who is more vulnerable to damp and mould issues and consider this as a higher risk. Establishing clear, accessible reporting systems – such as online portals, dedicated hotlines or tenant liaisons – encourages tenants to share concerns early. This proactive approach ensures problems are addressed promptly and collaboratively, strengthening the trust between tenants and providers.

Housing providers should make good practice guidance available to tenants through various means, including leaflets, newsletters, websites, letters and social media.

### 3.3 Visual inspections

Regular visual inspections are key to identifying damp and mould. Both tenants and housing staff should be aware of signs that might indicate a problem, such as:

- Visible mould growth on walls, ceilings or furniture
- Damp patches or discolouration on walls or ceilings
- A musty or damp smell
- Condensation on windows or walls
- Flaking paint or peeling wallpaper.

Early signs of damp and mould can be subtle. If tenants notice any concerns, they should report them promptly to their housing provider, allowing for a professional assessment.

### 3.4 Professional assessments and technology

In some situations, a more detailed professional assessment may be necessary to identify the root cause of the damp and mould problem. Housing providers may utilise qualified surveyors or specialists with expertise in damp and mould diagnosis. Technology can also play a valuable role in assessment:

- **Thermometers and hygrometers for temperature and humidity tracking:** These devices can monitor environmental conditions over time, providing valuable insights into patterns and trends
- **Moisture meters:** Measure moisture content in building materials
- **Borescopes:** Allow inspection of hard-to-reach areas behind walls or ceilings
- **Thermal imaging cameras:** Identify areas of cold bridging and potential condensation risks.

All specialist equipment should be calibrated and only used by suitably qualified and trained staff. By combining visual inspections with professional assessments and relevant technology, housing providers can accurately diagnose the type of damp and mould present and determine the most appropriate course of action.

## Case study: Investigating and resolving a mould case by Ark Housing Association

Ark Housing Association (Ark) prides itself on our corporate values of being **Progressive** and achieving **Excellence** in delivering the highest standards of quality and customer care. In line with two of our strategic themes, **Better Homes** and **Service Excellence**, we developed and implemented our damp, mould & condensation policy in 2023 to address the emerging risk to our tenants. This policy is under regular review and is currently being updated following our work with CIH Northern Ireland & NIFHA in developing this damp and mould good practice guide, as well as lessons learnt from other parts of the UK.

### Identification

Following a tenant report of suspected mould, the details were reviewed jointly by an assets and compliance officer and the assets and maintenance manager. In reviewing the building and tenant details, they initially concluded that housing officer involvement wasn't necessary at first contact, but the housing officer was informed of the suspected case. A home visit was agreed with the tenant by the assets and compliance officer.

### Verification

As with each report of suspected mould, an in-person visit was made and, in this instance, mould was apparent. This was initially categorised by Ark staff in line with our guidance. Although the cause(s) were suspected, a specialist was appointed for confirmation and to rule out underlying issues.

### Engagement and investigation

We engaged with the tenant, and the mould was given an initial non-toxic treatment to prevent its spread. We discussed small adjustments with the tenant to reduce the risk of mould, such as the importance of extractor fans and trickle vents in how the home was designed to function. Ark also checked for issues in similar, adjacent properties.

In parallel, the investigation was carried out by a damp and mould specialist to identify the root cause and rule out defects that could return later.

This included checking the walls, cavities, roof space and waterproofing, as well as taking various moisture readings throughout.

The inspection found several factors had likely contributed to the mould:

- Disturbed roof space insulation creating a cold spot
- An underperforming extractor fan with excessive use of flexible ducting
- Lack of fresh air into the property, particularly the wet rooms, with trickle vents being closed
- Wallpaper applied in the bathroom by the tenant without Ark's knowledge
- High humidity levels in areas used for internal clothes drying.

### Remediation

In addressing the investigation outcomes, we worked with our specialist contractors to:

- Reinstate the disturbed/compacted roof space insulation
- Install a new, upgraded extractor fan in the bathroom with replaced, improved ducting
- Remove the wallpaper in the bathroom and assist the tenant with the application of mould-resistant paint
- Install external washing lines for the tenants in the development, a block of apartments.

Additionally, we engaged with the tenant regarding:

- The use of their modern home, recently built to a high standard, including air tightness and the benefit of ventilation
- Internal drying of clothes to be done in the bathroom with the extractor fan on.

### Inspection and monitoring

Following the remediation and education, and in line with policy, we inspected the works after their completion and again three months later.

Due to the nature of the works, we also used this scheme as a pilot for a sensor that provided real-time information on high humidity and/or low temperatures to enable investigation and intervention to try and prevent regrowth proactively.

## Report and lessons learnt

As a result of the investigation, remediation works and three-month post-inspection where no regrowth was found, a report was prepared and the following lessons learnt applied:

- To ensure ducting, particularly the use of flexible ducting, is monitored during construction, and limitation of use is included in the next revision of Ark's design guide
- To update our tenant packs to advise that wallpaper is not suitable in bathrooms and that suitable paints are used in wet areas such as bathrooms and kitchens
- To engage with tenants when taking a property to make them aware that internal clothes drying should be done in the bathroom with proper ventilation with the door closed and demonstrate the use of over-bath drying racks if installed
- To include within the next revision of the design guide, as far as practical, external drying areas for clothes for tenants.

## Outcome

The property is on our live mould monitor and remains under review until inspected at 12 months following the completion of the works and confirmation of no mould present. At the three-month post-works inspection, there was no indications of mould regrowth or new instances.

This property was identified as a pilot scheme and, with the tenant's agreement, a remote temperature and humidity sensor was installed. This sensor is a useful tool to engage with the tenant on a data-driven basis. If the environment is conducive to mould growth, we will be alerted and can re-engage with the tenant proactively and preventatively.

## 4. Prevention and remediation strategies

Preventing damp and mould problems is far more cost-effective and beneficial for tenants and housing providers than dealing with established issues. This section outlines various strategies for preventing and remediating different types of damp and mould.

### 4.1 Empowering tenants through collaboration

Effective damp and mould management begins with a collaborative relationship between housing providers and tenants. Housing providers recognise that the causes of damp and mould are often multifaceted, involving property conditions, environmental factors and usage patterns. While occupant behaviour and/or use can play a role, structural or systemic issues – such as poor ventilation, inadequate insulation or delayed repairs – are also key contributors. Housing providers should embed a culture that is empathetic to tenants and seeks to avoid blame.

To avoid blame and promote positive action:

- **Investigate thoroughly:** Ensure that assessments focus on identifying the root cause of the problem without making assumptions about tenant behaviour
  - **Use respectful language:** Communication with tenants should avoid assigning fault and instead focus on shared solutions
  - **Empower with knowledge:** Provide tenants with clear guidance and easy-to-use tools to help them address issues they can control, such as using extractor fans effectively.
- By fostering transparency, openness, trust and mutual respect, housing providers can encourage tenants to report issues early and participate actively in maintaining their homes. This approach leads to better outcomes for both tenants and housing providers.

### 4.2 Prevention – good practice principles

Several general principles are essential for preventing damp and mould:

- **Robust responsive maintenance:** Implement a robust responsive maintenance programme to ensure timely responses to tenant requests, including those that could lead to damp and mould. Addressing leaks promptly prevents moisture ingress and potential damp problems. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to identify issues with mechanical ventilation systems, such as extractor fans or Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems.
- **Planned maintenance:** A well-structured planned maintenance programme can help identify and address potential issues before they escalate into more serious problems. This includes properties at risk of rising damp, to identify early signs and take preventative measures. Planned maintenance provides an opportunity to understand the thermal performance and energy efficiency of the property, identifying potential areas for improvement to make homes warmer, while reducing energy consumption and improving indoor air quality.
- **Maintaining good ventilation:** This ensures adequate airflow throughout the property, preventing moisture build-up. Encourage tenants to use the passive and/or mechanical ventilation methods available that is appropriate to the property. This may include:
  - using suitable extractor fans in kitchens, bathrooms and utility spaces
  - ensuring trickle vents and air bricks are open and unobstructed
  - opening windows regularly, especially in warmer weather or after prolonged use of a wet area such as a bathroom or kitchen
  - ensuring mechanical ventilation systems (including MVHR system) are switched on and in a good state of repair.
- **Heating:** Maintaining a consistent and comfortable indoor temperature throughout the home reduces the risk of condensation. However, it is important to balance this with energy efficiency and affordability, particularly for tenants facing fuel poverty. Housing providers can offer advice on efficient heating practices and explore options for improving insulation to reduce heat loss and maintain comfortable living conditions. Providers can also signpost tenants for help with heating costs.
- **Reducing moisture build-up:** While daily activities like cooking, bathing and drying clothes generate moisture, excess moisture build-up can be prevented through simple practices, such as using lids on pots and pans, and drying clothes outdoors in dry weather or in well-ventilated areas.
- **Reducing moisture:** By removing excess water from walls and glass surfaces, the amount of moisture in the bathroom can be significantly reduced, which helps prevent mould and mildew growth. Using a squeegee to wipe down water after a shower is good practice.

### Additional considerations:

- **Understand tenant circumstances:** Recognise that tenants may have limitations or constraints that impact their ability to heat and ventilate their homes effectively. These can include:
  - Financial constraints: Some tenants may struggle to afford adequate heating, which can contribute to damp and mould issues.
  - Limited outdoor drying space: Not all tenants have access to outdoor areas for drying clothes, which can increase indoor moisture levels. In such cases, it's important to advise tenants on appropriate drying methods, such as drying clothes in the bathroom with the door closed and extractor fan on. Drying clothes on radiators should generally be avoided, as this can significantly increase indoor humidity levels and reduce the efficiency of heating systems.
  - Health conditions: Tenants with respiratory issues or other health conditions may find it challenging to keep windows open for ventilation, especially in colder weather.
- **Provide clear and practical advice:** Offer advice that takes into account specific factors such as:
  - Weather conditions: While it's important to maintain good ventilation throughout the year, the approach may vary based on the season. During warmer months, opening windows can be effective. However, during colder months, it's recommended to open windows for shorter periods to facilitate adequate ventilation without significantly impacting indoor temperatures. Additionally, ensuring that trickle vents are always open, and extractor fans are used appropriately can provide continuous ventilation.
  - Property design: Consider the design and layout of the property. For instance, advise on the best times to use extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms, install fans with an overrun feature, or alternatively use humidity tracking fans that run continuously and can be an energy-efficient option. Dehumidifiers can be used for specific tasks, such as initially drying out the home or to speed up the clothes drying process, but they shouldn't be used as a permanent solution to damp. Instead, focus on improving ventilation and addressing the root causes of the damp. Provide specific advice to tenants of new build homes.

### 4.3 Addressing specific damp and mould issues

While good practice principles are fundamental, specific approaches are needed for different types of damp and mould:

#### Remediation:

- **Following diagnosis:** The specific remediation approach will depend on the type of damp and mould identified. Discuss the diagnosis and proposed remediation steps with the tenant, addressing any concerns or questions they may have.
- **Professional treatment:** Mould removal should be conducted by qualified professionals using appropriate methods to ensure safe and effective eradication. Coordinate with tenants in consideration of disruption during the remediation process, explaining the necessary steps and expected timeframe.
- **Post-remediation measures:** Following treatment, ensure adequate drying of affected areas and address any underlying causes to prevent recurrence.

#### Penetrating damp:

- **Identify and repair leaks:** Promptly address any leaks in roofs, walls or pipes
- **Maintain external drainage:** Ensure gutters and downpipes are clear and functioning properly.

#### Rising damp:

- **Specialist intervention:** Rising damp often requires specialist diagnosis and treatment. Housing providers should engage qualified contractors for these situations.

#### Construction damp:

- **Address design and construction issues:** Identify and rectify any design flaws or construction errors that may have contributed to damp and mould problems
- **Ensure adequate drying times:** Allow sufficient drying time for new construction or renovations to prevent moisture-related issues.

#### Traumatic damp:

- **Rapid response:** Address water damage promptly to prevent the growth of mould and mildew
- **Professional cleaning and drying:** Engage professionals to clean and dry affected areas thoroughly.

### Condensation damp:

Summarising the prevention methods outlined in 4.1:

- **Improve ventilation:** Encourage the use of passive and mechanical ventilation methods. Consider installing alternative ventilation systems, including positive input ventilation (PIV) systems.
- **Reduce moisture build-up:** Provide advice to tenants covering things like using lids on pots while cooking and drying laundry outdoors in dry weather or in well-ventilated areas.
- **Proper heating:** Encourage tenants to use effective heating methods and consider energy-efficient upgrades such as installing a more efficient boiler or upgrading insulation to reduce heat loss. Additionally, installing thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs) can help to optimise heating distribution and reduce energy consumption. These localised controls allow for more precise temperature regulation in different rooms, reducing the risk of overheating and condensation.

### Case study: Communication and remediation of damp and mould by Triangle Housing Association

Triangle Housing Association is widely recognised as a customer-focused organisation with an excellent reputation of providing quality housing and support services.

Our mission is to enhance lives by providing homes, supporting individuals and families, sustaining communities and promoting equality.

Driven by our vision of building better lives together, we developed and implemented our damp and mould policy in January 2023 to further address potential risks to our residents.

#### Identification

Following a report from residents of potential damp and mould in their homes and further communication with a local MLA, Triangle's property assets manager and response assets officer made arrangements to assess the reported issues with the residents.

#### Verification

For any reported issues of mould or damp, our response assets officer arranges an onsite visit with the tenant. This allows the officer to inspect the reported mould and damp issue, assess the potential root cause, and enable a full review of

the whole property for any other potential issues.

Following identification of the mould, this is registered on our database.

As this was a block of six apartments with some having similar issues, it was agreed to appoint a specialist to complete a full survey of the apartment block to help us ascertain the root cause.

#### Investigation and engagement

Following a full intrusive survey completed by our specialist, we assessed the highlighted remediation works so we could easily report this back to our residents.

The surveyor found some consistent issues across the apartments which they believed were likely contributing factors, including:

- Lack of cross ventilation
- Underperforming extractor fans
- Trickle vents being closed
- Drying of clothes
- Cold-bridging around rear window reveals.

To ensure openness and transparency, we engaged all residents of the apartments and held a consultation meeting in a local hotel.

Here, we were able to discuss the survey's findings, Triangle's proposed actions, residents' required actions, and address any resident concerns.

Following this, we also provided an update as agreed with the local MLA.

#### Remediation

To address the highlighted areas, we worked with our specialist contractors to:

- Install insulated board around rear window reveals
- Install new windows to the front elevation
- Install continuous running extractor fans in the kitchen to help with cross-ventilation issues
- Upgrade extractor fans in bathroom to continuous running fans
- Wash down any affected areas of mould.

Further engagement with our residents included discussions on:

- Drying clothes in the bathrooms and using extractor fans
- The importance of not turning off extractor fans
- The importance of keeping trickle vents open.

### Monitoring and inspection

Following the completion of works, a full post-inspection was completed. During this, we were able to again emphasise good practice on managing the home to help prevent mould or damp from forming.

Furthermore, we informed residents that we would monitor and inspect their homes on agreed timescales throughout the year to ensure remediation works had been successful.

### Lessons learnt

Following the full survey, remediation works, and the three-month post-inspection, no regrowth of mould was found. Further surveys will be carried out over the course of the coming year.

In review of this property, the following lessons learnt applied:

- Highlight to all residents on a regular basis each year, good practice ideas on helping to prevent mould and damp in their homes. This includes social media, leafleting, and during all inspections by both our maintenance and housing teams.
- Encourage residents to report and communicate with our staff on any concerns of damp and mould in their homes, so we can investigate promptly and remedy any issues quickly.
- Ensure any extractor fans in bathrooms that require upgrading are upgraded with continuous running extractor fans, and information is supplied to residents about not turning these off.
- Engage early with new residents to share good practice like drying clothes in the bathroom alongside the use of their extractor fans.

### Outcome

To date, Triangle has found no regrowth or further issues at this apartment block, and we will continue to monitor the situation over the coming year.

Based on the lessons learnt, Triangle has taken proactive steps by developing our own risk matrix. This matrix allows us to categorise properties based on the perceived risk of damp and mould being present in our homes.

With this matrix in place, our maintenance staff can schedule property inspections, starting with those deemed high risk, to ensure that any potential issues are addressed promptly.



## 5. Training and capacity building

Building the capacity of both staff and tenants is crucial for effective management of damp and mould issues in housing. This section emphasises the importance of training programs and educational initiatives.

### 5.1 Staff training

Housing providers should invest in comprehensive training programs for staff involved in identifying, assessing and resolving damp and mould issues. This training should cover various aspects, including:

- **Understanding damp and mould:** Types, causes, health impacts and risk factors
- **Identifying and assessing damp and mould:** Visual signs, professional assessments, and the use of relevant technology (moisture meters, thermal imaging cameras)
- **Remediation strategies:** Addressing different types of damp and mould, including appropriate repair techniques and safe mould removal practices
- **Using positive language and avoiding blame:** Staff should understand the harmful effects of assigning blame, and learn techniques for fostering constructive conversations through inclusive, solution-focused language
- **Tenant engagement:** Effective strategies to proactively engage tenants, such as tenant panels, feedback loops or co-designed solutions
- **Recognising vulnerabilities:** Training should include an awareness of tenant vulnerabilities, such as health conditions or financial constraints, which may impact their ability to address certain issues.
- **Data collection and reporting:** Recording data on damp and mould issues, identifying trends and generating reports for management. Detailed records of communications, inspections, remedial works and/or advice provided will also mitigate risk of personal injury claims and improve how housing providers avoid or defend legal cases.

#### Tailored training for specific roles:

- **Maintenance staff:** Should receive technical training on identifying, assessing and resolving damp and mould issues, including the use of appropriate tools and equipment
- **Housing officers and scheme co-ordinators:** Should receive training on general awareness of damp and mould, effective communication with tenants, and how to escalate issues to relevant teams and specialists

- **Contact-centre and other customer-facing staff:** Should receive training on recognising the signs of damp and mould, understanding the impact on health and property, and knowing how to escalate issues to appropriate colleagues.

#### A culture of proactive inspection:

- **'Don't walk by' mentality:** Encourage staff to be vigilant and report any potential damp and mould issues during routine property visits or tenant interactions
- **Regular inspections:** Implement regular inspections, both planned and ad-hoc, including during void periods, to identify and address issues early
- **Tenant reporting:** Empower tenants to report issues promptly and encourage open communication to facilitate early intervention.

By equipping staff with the necessary knowledge and skills and fostering a culture of proactivity, housing providers can ensure a more consistent and effective approach to managing damp and mould problems.

### 5.2 Tenant education

Educating tenants about damp and mould is essential for promoting preventative measures and encouraging early reporting of issues. Housing providers, professional bodies, trade associations, regulators and complaint-resolution bodies can develop educational initiatives such as:

- **Information leaflets and booklets:** Providing clear and accessible information on damp and mould, including causes, health risks and preventative practices
- **Tenant workshops and seminars:** Organising interactive sessions to educate tenants on identifying signs of damp and mould, proper ventilation practices, and the importance of reporting concerns
- **Online resources and information portals:** Developing dedicated online resources with information, FAQs and reporting mechanisms for tenants to access easily.

CIH Northern Ireland and NIFHA have published a tenant information flyer and educational video to accompany this good practice guide. By empowering tenants with knowledge, housing providers can foster a more proactive approach to preventing and addressing damp and mould issues within their homes.

### 5.3 Importance of continuous learning

The understanding of damp and mould can evolve over time. Both staff and tenants should have access to ongoing resources and training opportunities to stay updated on good practices and emerging technologies in damp and mould management. This ensures a continuous learning environment and strengthens the overall capacity of the housing sector to tackle these issues effectively.

#### Case study: Clanmil Housing's information campaign on condensation, damp and mould

Clanmil Housing aims to provide warm, safe and comfortable homes for its residents. Recognising the impact of environmental conditions on home comfort, Clanmil has prioritised the effective management of damp, mould and condensation. This case study highlights Clanmil's proactive information campaign designed to educate and empower residents in addressing these issues.

##### The challenge

Clanmil identified the need for a more structured approach to communicating with customers about condensation, damp and mould. Analysis of their records indicated that many instances could be resolved through cleaning and ventilation practices. This insight informed the development of a targeted information campaign.

##### The solution

Clanmil launched a comprehensive information campaign in January 2024, repeated in winter 2024, with the following objectives:

- Educate and inform customers about damp, mould and condensation
- Empower customers by providing practical advice on recognition, management and treatment
- Offer reassurance and signpost further support
- Reduce the number of unnecessary callouts to homes.

#### Implementation

Clanmil adopted a multi-channel approach to ensure broad reach and accessibility:

- **Resource creation:** A suite of resources was developed, including posters, leaflets and animations. The animations included a 2:45-minute overview and three 60-second focused videos, presented in a clear and visually appealing style with voiceovers and subtitles.
- **Digital engagement:** A social media plan was implemented with regular posts featuring graphics, animations and web links. The Clanmil webpage on condensation, damp and mould was updated with clear advice, the animations, and an information leaflet. A new signposting graphic was added to the homepage for increased visibility.
- **Traditional communication:** An article on condensation, damp and mould was included in "Together", Clanmil's customer magazine, distributed to approximately 6,000 households. Leaflets were also distributed to homes, and posters were displayed in communal areas.
- **Collaboration:** Clanmil willingly shared its animations with Apex Housing, CIH and NIFHA, demonstrating inter-organisational collaboration in addressing common housing issues.
- **Internal measures:** Clanmil commissioned training for 95 frontline staff and provided digital hydrometers to customers to monitor humidity levels. Maintenance contractors were also instructed to report any evidence of damp or mould.

## Results

The campaign achieved significant reach and engagement:

- **Social media engagement:** High engagement was observed across Facebook (391 engagements), X (139 engagements), Instagram (10 engagements) and LinkedIn (439 views, five reposts).
- **Webpage engagement:** Webpage views increased substantially from 32 views and 23 active users in the pre-campaign period to 139 views and 125 active users during the campaign launch.

The campaign also contributed to a significant reduction in repair requests related to damp, mould and condensation. Repair requests decreased from 808 in 2023 to 351 from January to mid-November 2024. This reduction suggests that the campaign effectively empowered customers to manage and treat low-level issues, leading to a decrease in unnecessary callouts.

Furthermore, an analysis of reported cases showed a positive shift towards less severe instances. In 2024, there were more Level 0 (no mould present) and Level 1 (minor) cases compared with 2023, with a notable decrease in Level 3 (serious) and Level 4 (severe) cases.

## Conclusion

Clanmil Housing's proactive and multi-faceted information campaign demonstrated excellence in communication and achieved significant positive outcomes. By informing and empowering residents, Clanmil reduced repair requests and fostered a greater ability among residents to manage condensation, damp and mould within their homes.

## Case study: "Every visit matters" campaign from Choice Housing

Choice Housing's Every Visit Matters campaign equips staff to proactively identify, report and resolve damp and mould during tenant interactions, combining technical solutions with tenant education.

Choice Housing's strategy emphasises staff training, tenant awareness and streamlined reporting mechanisms:

- **Staff training:** All staff are trained to recognise and report damp and mould, using resources like the damp and mould toolbox talk and condensation advice leaflet
- **Tenant education:** Tenants receive guidance on ventilation, moisture control and preventing condensation, fostering shared responsibility
- **Central reporting:** Issues are logged via email or an app, enabling swift escalation to property services officers for severe cases.

## Actions taken

1. **Minor issues:** Staff provide immediate advice to tenants for small-scale mould (e.g. on windows) and share educational materials
2. **Severe issues:** Recurring or significant problems are escalated for professional assessment and repair, addressing underlying defects
3. **Integrated support:** Linked issues, such as financial challenges affecting heating, are referred to specialist teams for further assistance.

## Impact

- **Healthier homes:** Prompt action reduces risks associated with damp and mould
- **Empowered staff:** Training boosts confidence and effectiveness
- **Engaged tenants:** Practical advice helps tenants prevent recurrence, promoting collaboration.

## Lessons learnt

- Training and clear reporting pathways ensure swift, effective responses
- Tenant education is critical to long-term prevention
- Coordinated efforts improve both property conditions and tenant satisfaction.

Choice Housing's approach demonstrates how proactive management of damp and mould can create healthier, safer homes and foster stronger communities.

## 6. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial aspects of a successful damp and mould management strategy. This section emphasises the importance of data collection, performance indicators and continuous improvement.

### 6.1 Data-driven approach

Effective damp and mould management relies on a data-driven approach that leverages technology. Consider data from various sources such as stock condition surveys, energy surveys and feedback from staff and contractors. Collecting and analyse data on various aspects, including:

- **Reported damp and mould issues:** Track the number, location and types of reported problems
- **Remediation actions taken:** Record the specific interventions implemented for each case
- **Tenant satisfaction:** Gauge tenant feedback on the effectiveness of response and resolution processes
- **Property condition data:** Utilise technology, such as moisture meters, thermal imaging cameras and smart sensors, to collect data on property conditions, including humidity levels, temperature and ventilation
- **Stock condition data:** Analyse existing data to risk assess the possibility of damp and mould based on property age, type and construction
- **Tenant interactions:** Document all interactions with tenants related to damp and mould issues, including instances of no access. This information forms an important part of the evidence base.

By collecting and analysing this data, housing providers can:

- **Identify trends and patterns:** Understand which types of properties or households are more susceptible to damp and mould problems
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions:** Assess the success of different remediation strategies and identify areas for improvement
- **Allocate resources efficiently:** Prioritise interventions based on risk factors and data-driven insights
- **Inform future strategies:** Use data to develop and refine future damp and mould management plans, sharing good practices, innovative solutions and emerging trends in the sector.

### Leveraging technology:

- **Smart sensors:** Utilise smart sensors to monitor key parameters like humidity, temperature and CO2 levels in real-time
- **Data analytics:** Employ data analytics tools to identify trends, correlations and potential problem areas
- **Tenant engagement:** Involve tenants in the monitoring process through smart device apps and other digital tools
- **Data privacy and security:** Ensure compliance with data protection regulations when collecting and storing tenant data.

By embracing technology and data-driven approaches, housing providers can enhance their ability to prevent, identify and resolve damp and mould issues, ultimately improving people's living conditions.

### 6.2 Performance indicators

Developing key performance indicators (KPIs) allows for a more structured evaluation of damp and mould management initiatives. These KPIs should be:

- **Specific:** Clearly measure a particular aspect of the process
- **Measurable:** Quantifiable through data collection
- **Achievable:** Set realistic and attainable goals
- **Relevant:** Align with overall objectives of damp and mould management
- **Time-bound:** Defined timeframe for achieving the target.

Examples of KPIs for damp and mould management might include:

- Investigations within a timely, defined period (for example, 14 days where mould is reported)
- Percentage reduction in reported damp and mould issues
- Monthly average number of reports of damp and mould
- Percentage of mould cases resolved in line with organisational policy
- Average time taken to resolve a damp and mould complaint, which can be broken down into key stages (for example initial assessment, diagnosis, remediation and follow-up inspection)
- Tenant satisfaction rate with the response and resolution process
- Metrics on complaint handling and timescales.

By monitoring progress against KPIs, housing providers can assess the effectiveness of their strategy and identify areas for improvement. It is important to ensure that complaint handling procedures align with organisational policies and industry good practices.

### 6.3 Continuous improvement

Damp and mould management is an ongoing process. Housing providers should embrace a culture of continuous improvement, utilising data, feedback and emerging knowledge to refine their approach:

- Implement a system for follow-up inspections to monitor the effectiveness of remediation work and identify any recurring issues
- Analyse data trends and identify areas for improvement in prevention, remediation or tenant engagement
- Review and revise policies and procedures based on new insights and best practices
- Invest in ongoing training and development for staff on the latest techniques in damp and mould management.

By adopting a continuous improvement mindset, housing providers can ensure their damp and mould management strategy remains effective and up-to-date.

#### Case study: Housing Executive's pilot projects for remedying mould and data monitoring

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is committed to addressing damp and mould issues in its homes to ensure the health and wellbeing of its tenants. This case study outlines two pilot projects undertaken by NIHE's quality improvement team to remedy severe cases of mould in properties in the south west area.

##### The challenge

Severe mould and damp were identified in a home in the south west area during a British Board of Agrément (BBA) research study on cavity wall insulation. NIHE's quality improvement team subsequently identified further properties in the south west area with severe mould issues that repeatedly returned despite ongoing response maintenance work. An assessment of the internal environment of these homes revealed poor indoor air quality due to high levels of relative humidity and inadequate ventilation.

##### The solution

To address this challenge, NIHE's quality improvement team conducted two pilot projects in autumn 2019, employing different approaches for comparison and evaluation.

###### Property 1:

- Mould sterilising solution treatment was applied to the affected surfaces
- A positive input ventilation (PIV) unit was installed
- Internal finishes were made good with a thermal insulating anti-mould and condensation paint
- Occupants were advised on the operation of the ventilation unit and provided with guidance on achieving the recommended daily heating and ventilation balance.

###### Property 2:

- Mould sterilising solution treatment was applied to affected surfaces
- Two continuous decentralised mechanical extract ventilation (dMEV) fans were installed
- Occupants were advised on the operation of the ventilation units and provided with guidance on the recommended daily heating and ventilation balance for their home.

##### Monitoring and results

Data monitoring tags were installed in the first property to monitor the effectiveness of the intervention. The data showed that the internal temperature remained at a comfortable level, and the relative humidity was within the desired range.

Unfortunately, NIHE was unable to install data monitoring tags in the second property as access could not be gained after the works concluded.

The quality improvement team received positive feedback from the occupants of both homes. Significantly, there has been no reoccurrence of condensation and mould since the completion of the works.

### Ongoing commitment

NIHE's quality improvement team continues to play a vital role in addressing damp and mould issues. The team undertakes condensation, damp and mould surveys on behalf of NIHE area management, inspecting properties, determining the root cause of issues, and providing recommendations for remedial actions to NIHE management, NIHE response maintenance, tenants and owner-occupiers.

NIHE is committed to ongoing research and development, actively exploring new and innovative methods to control condensation, damp and mould within its homes. The installation of smart monitoring equipment in a retrofit project in Newry demonstrates the organisation's commitment to leveraging technology to minimise the risk of mould occurrence and enhance property management.

This case study illustrates NIHE's proactive approach to tackling severe mould problems through targeted interventions, tenant engagement and ongoing monitoring. The positive outcomes of the pilot projects have informed NIHE's strategy for addressing damp and mould and highlight their commitment to improving the living conditions of their tenants.



## Proactive communication and a dedicated team, by Radius Housing

Radius provides housing, care and support to over 33,000 homes. We are a social enterprise employing over 1,000 people and managing 14,000 properties in 80 towns across Northern Ireland.

At Radius we aim to make a positive difference by providing homes, support and care for people, building neighbourhoods and empowering communities. A critical part of providing homes and support involves encouraging our communities to thrive and helping to support and sustain their tenancies.

### Damp, mould and condensation strategy

We developed and published our approved damp, mould and condensation strategy, policy and procedures in January 2024. This demonstrates Radius' commitment to managing all cases of damp and mould while providing support to our tenants and other stakeholders.

Our strategy sets out how Radius is tackling this issue to both immediately improve the experience of tenants and address it the future. It defines how we will strengthen our rapid response to reports of damp, mould and condensation, as well as the proactive, holistic and long-term actions we will take – in conjunction with our tenants, surveyors and contractors – to prevent its appearance and recurrence.

### The R.I.T.E. approach

Radius Housing implements the R.I.T.E. approach across our organisation: Report / Inspect / Treat / Educate.

- **REPORT:** Tenants should contact Radius to report any concerns with damp and mould in their home.
- **INSPECT:** Our assets team will contact the tenant to arrange an appointment to inspect the issue.
- **TREAT:** Our assets officer will arrange any treatments and/or works required to resolve the cause of damp or mould.
- **EDUCATE:** Our assets officer will provide advice on how tenants can help manage mould.

We have developed four education leaflets to assist in providing information and support for those suffering from damp and/or mould:

- Differences between damp and condensation
- Understanding condensation on your home
- Managing condensation in your home
- Understanding MVHR systems in your home (specifically aimed at more modern and new builds).

We will keep all tenants informed throughout the process and confirm if the cause of mould is damp or condensation.

Education, training and information are mandatory for all customer-facing staff within the organisation.

- **Interactive workshops:** We arrange in-person workshops on condensation and mould management. These workshops are interactive, incorporating real-life scenarios and practical tips for staff.
- **Learning materials:** We developed educational materials, such as videos and brochures, available to all staff on our internal staff portal.
- **Online portals:** We created a user-friendly landing page on our website where customers can access information, resources and guidelines on mould prevention and report concern regarding damp and mould.

### Creation of a dedicated damp team

Due to the ongoing focus on managing damp, mould and condensation within our properties, we created a dedicated damp team within our assets directorate.

Responsibilities of the damp team:

- **Rapid response:** This team provides a quicker and more efficient response to reported issues.
- **Holistic solutions:** Instead of just addressing the symptoms of damp, the team aims to find the root cause and implement long-term solutions.
- **Data management:** The team is responsible for collecting data on damp issues, monitoring trends, and identifying areas requiring extra attention.
- **Coordination:** The damp team works closely with other departments within the association to ensure a coordinated approach.

- Tenant education: The team also provides tenants with information on how to reduce condensation in their homes.

This specialised team provides our tenants with a better understanding of:

- Damp and mould diagnosis: Identifying the root causes of damp, whether it's condensation, rising damp, penetrating damp or leaks.
- Building pathology: Understanding building construction and where potential problems might arise.
- Remediation techniques: Knowing the most effective methods for removing mould and preventing future occurrences.
- Ventilation and heating: Advising on proper ventilation and heating to minimise condensation.
- Tenant communication and advocacy: Effectively communicating with tenants, addressing their concerns, and ensuring they understand the process.
- Welfare: Completing person-centred risk assessments and identify those who may be vulnerable and require additional welfare support and referral.
- Legal compliance: Staying up to date on relevant legislation and ensuring the housing provider complies with all requirements.

### Further commitments

We are committed to and aim to:

- Triage all reports of mould within two days
- Respond to all incidents of mould within four days
- Inspect, diagnose and confirm any further works required within 10 days.

Radius has invested £4 million over three years into homes prone to rising damp. 58 properties were fully renovated for families whose homes had serious damp/mould issues, and we are committed to further investment in our homes over the coming years.

As damp and mould is a core business focus, we have engaged with a local specialist provider to install air systems into several homes as a pilot scheme. These systems are designed to eliminate up to 99.9 per cent of surface and airborne mould spores. If proven successful, we will utilise the specialised equipment as part of our overall targeted strategy.



## 7. Conclusion

Damp and mould are significant challenges in housing, but they are not insurmountable. By adopting a holistic approach that prioritises prevention, early intervention and collaboration, housing providers can create healthy and safe living environments.

This guide has provided a comprehensive framework for addressing damp and mould issues in Northern Ireland's housing sector. By implementing the strategies outlined in this document, stakeholders can work together to achieve the following goals:

- **Reduced prevalence of damp and mould:** Through preventative measures, prompt response and effective remediation approaches
- **Improved health and wellbeing of tenants:** By minimising exposure to health risks associated with damp and mould
- **Enhanced property lifespan:** By preventing moisture damage and ensuring well-maintained homes.

A commitment to data-driven decision-making, continuous learning and collaborative partnerships between tenants and housing providers is key to achieving a damp and mould-free housing sector in Northern Ireland. It's important to recognise that addressing damp and mould often requires a collaborative effort between housing providers and tenants. While occupants can play a role in preventing and mitigating damp and mould, it's equally important to address underlying building issues.

This guide serves as a starting point, and stakeholders are encouraged to adapt and implement its recommendations within their specific contexts. Working together, we can make significant progress to ensure safe, healthy and comfortable homes for everyone.



## 8. Additional reading

Here are some additional resources for further information on damp and mould management in rented housing:

1. **Department for Communities** (2024). Appendix A damp and mould Housing Association Guide amendment. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/appendix-damp-and-mould-housing-association-guide-amendment>
2. **CIH Scotland, SFHA, Scottish Housing Regulator and Alacho** (2023). Putting safety first: A briefing note on damp and mould for social housing practitioners in Scotland. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.cih.org/media/aaukbpm/d/putting-safety-first.pdf>
3. **UK Government** (2022). Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/damp-and-mould-understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-for-rented-housing-providers/understanding-and-addressing-the-health-risks-of-damp-and-mould-in-the-home--2>
4. **Housing Ombudsman** (2021). Spotlight report: Damp and mould – It's not lifestyle. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf>





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