



Insight Report 2024

Mould, Damp and Condensation in the Private Rented Sector



The Property
Ombudsman

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Introduction

An estimated 12.2m people live in the UK private rented sector. Between 6% and 13% of properties are affected by damp.¹

The death of toddler Awaab Ishak in the social housing sector showed the devastating impact it can have on our health and safety.

Excessive damp and mould poses a serious and immediate risk.² This is why we have developed this report which brings together a wide breadth of perspectives across the private rented sector (PRS) alongside our own insight from the enquiries and casework we receive.

We conducted two surveys on condensation, damp and mould, to enable our member businesses to better understand the challenges tenants, landlords and agents face when dealing with damp and mould issues.

Our insight (set out in Section 3) has led us to create guidance for tenants, landlords and letting agents to help them better deal with condensation, mould and damp issues when they arise.

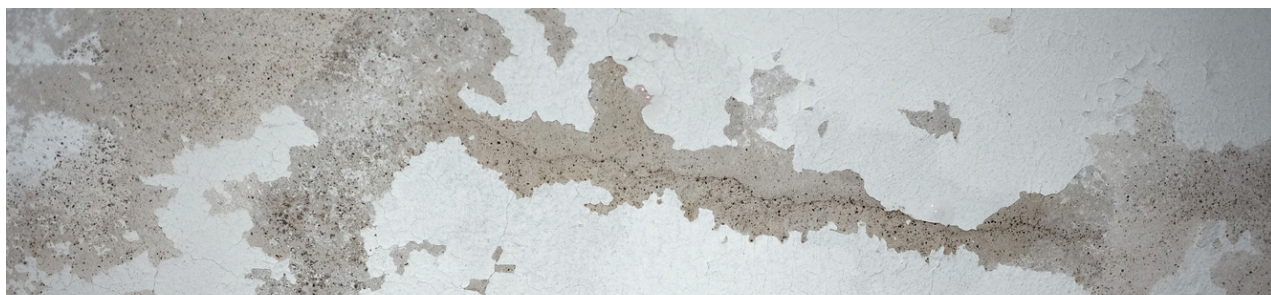
We would like to thank all the agents that took the time to complete our surveys and hope the guidance and the information in this report helps generate a better understanding of damp and mould issues and how they should be dealt with.



Rebecca Marsh
Property Ombudsman



Damp and Mould: Research, Legislation and Guidance



More than 700,000 households are living with damp and mould across United Kingdom.

The English Housing Survey showed that **9% were reported to have a problem with damp in 2022**.³ This indicates that more than **414,000** households were affected. The Welsh Housing Conditions Survey showed **13%** of privately rented dwellings had damp issues which is approximately **22,984** households.^{4,5} Scottish Government statistics reported that **10%** of all properties had damp and mould which equates to **270,000** dwellings.⁶ The private rented sector (PRS) represents 13% of all residential properties in Scotland. In Northern Ireland, **7,900** cases of damp and mould were reported to the Housing Executive.⁸ Across Northern Ireland there are approximately 132,400 households in the Private Rented Sector.⁹

In 2023 the Building Research Establishment (BRE) group calculated that **one dwelling with a category 1 HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System) damp problem causes a cost of £9,500 to the NHS and society per annum**.¹⁰ The BRE's research shows the financial cost to taxpayers of health issues impacting tenants in homes with mould and damp issues. If this cost applied to the 700,000 households across the UK living with damp and mould this would equate to a **cost of £6.65 bn to the NHS and society**.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act ("Awaab's Law") will set out timescales for social housing landlords to investigate and resolve damp and mould issues. While there are not yet the same requirements for properties in the PRS, the Government has committed to extending this obligation to the private rented sector. It is likely **once Awaab's Law is implemented in the private sector, landlords and letting agents will be required to address hazards** set out by the HHSRS within a certain timeframe. Under the previous Government,¹¹ the suggested timescales were to:

- 1) require social landlords to investigate the causes of damp and mould within 14 days of complaints being made and provide residents with a report on the findings
- 2) give social landlords 7 days to begin work to repair a property if a medical professional decides there is a risk to a residents' health

While the Government has not yet finalised the timescales or the timeframe to extend Awaab's Law to the private rented sector, we would encourage all property professionals to prepare ahead to ensure they are able to effectively and efficiently address mould and damp issues when they arise.

Current official guidance spans both the social and private rented sector. It includes robust advice on how mould and damp issues should be communicated, identified and rectified.

Delivered in conjunction with Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the UK Health Security Agency, this guidance also provides insight into the health effects of damp and mould.

Building on Government guidance, this report includes practical guidance for tenants, letting agents and landlords to help them proactively address condensation, mould and damp issues, ahead of Awaab's Law being implemented in the PRS.

Guidance on how to deal with damp and mould issues can be found on a number of different platforms:

[Current Official Guidance](#)

[Shelter England](#)

[Shelter Scotland](#)

[Citizens Advice](#)

[Tenancy Deposit Scheme](#)

[TDS Northern Ireland](#)

[Property Checklists](#)



Our work in the sector



As an Ombudsman scheme, we provide an enquiries service to consumers which provides vital advice, signposting and guidance.

This service seeks to resolve issues before they become disputes and helps to educate consumers and businesses alike.

In 2023 we received a total of **57,635** consumer enquiries of which **52,001** were provided with advice, signposting and guidance where the issues raised fell outside our remit or could be resolved without our formal intervention.

58% of private rented sector enquiries were received from tenants. Repair and maintenance issues (which included damp and mould problems) were the main reason for seeking our help. 16% of tenant enquiries about this issue involved an agent, but this rose to **24%** where there was no letting agent involved. The second most common reason tenants contacted us was to seek advice and guidance. These statistics mirror wider concerns relating to the standard of private rented housing stock and the low level of knowledge about the responsibilities of the parties involved.

In 2023 we formally resolved **2,223** lettings disputes where the top cause of complaint related to management issues which included repairs and maintenance. In line with enquiries, this was an area complained about most by tenants, further strengthening the need for raising awareness around the causes of condensation, damp and mould.

Damp and mould casework

Following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, we changed the way we recorded our data to gain a deeper insight into mould and damp issues in the private rented sector.

In 2023, we received over 1,000 enquiries relating solely to damp and mould leading to over 200 damp and mould specific disputes being accepted for investigation.

In considering these disputes, the complexity (the number of issues raised) was lower than we see compared to other disputes. This indicated that mould and damp issues were considered severe enough to be raised immediately and, unlike other letting disputes, were not often bundled with other issues.

In 2023, **£36,629.30 was awarded in relation to mould and damp disputes**. These awards were slightly higher than the 2023 average and, noting they were often single-issue disputes, underlined how significant an impact it can have on tenants' health and wellbeing as well as financially on landlords.



Property sector insight

To gain insight into condensation, damp and mould issues and to understand the perspective of property professionals, we conducted two surveys with letting agents.

Mould and Damp in Rental Properties - Survey 1

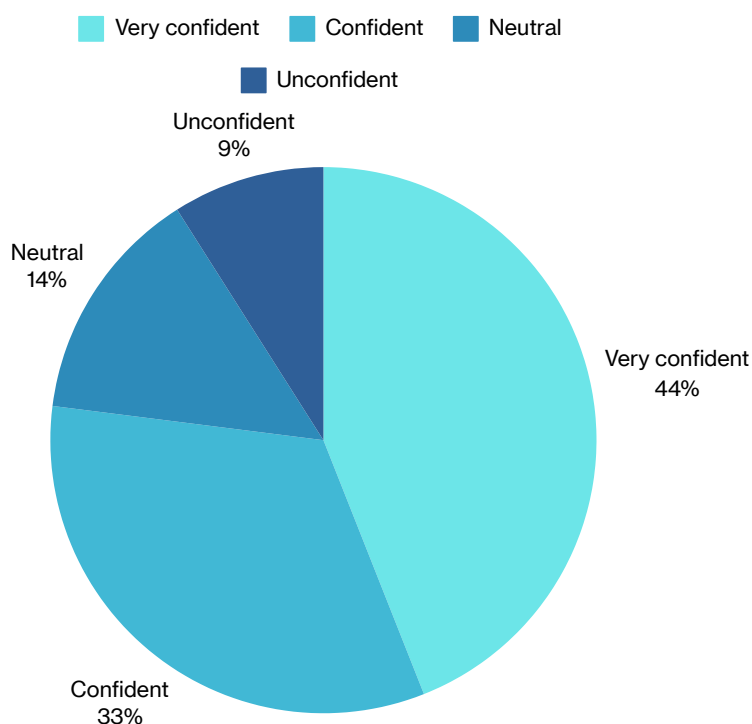
This survey sought to gain an overview of the prevalence and severity of damp and mould issues under their management with insight into the number of unresolved issues in unmanaged properties.

Responses showed that **8,103** properties had damp and mould issues in the past that had been resolved, with a further **1,456** currently being resolved at the time of the survey. Alarming, a further **3,280** properties with damp and mould issues were not being resolved. Of these properties where damp and mould issues were not being resolved, **624** were managed by letting agents and **2,656** properties were stated as being managed directly by landlords. This indicated that 81% of properties with damp and mould issues not being resolved were managed directly by landlords

Reassuringly the responses showed a positive trend with **77%** of letting agents feeling confident that landlords recognise that damp and mould issues can have serious consequences and only **9%** of letting agents being unconfident about landlords' understanding of this issue.

The serious nature of damp and mould means issues should be resolved in a timely manner. This was understood by **72%** of letting agents who also felt landlords resolved complaints quickly, with only **8%** not being resolved in an appropriate timeframe.

Figure 1: How confident are you that your Landlords recognised that damp and/or mould issues can have serious consequences?



Letting agent responses showed that where an agent was confident the landlord recognised the serious consequences of damp and mould, they were also more likely to resolve issues quickly.

However, responses also showed that landlords were generally likely to resolve damp and mould issues slowly regardless of their confidence in identifying them.

Of **330** confident / very confident agents, **277** said the landlords were likely to resolve the issues quickly / very quickly. Conversely, of the **36** unconfident agents, **21** said the landlords were likely to resolve issues more slowly.



Condensation, Damp and Mould in Rental Properties - Survey 2

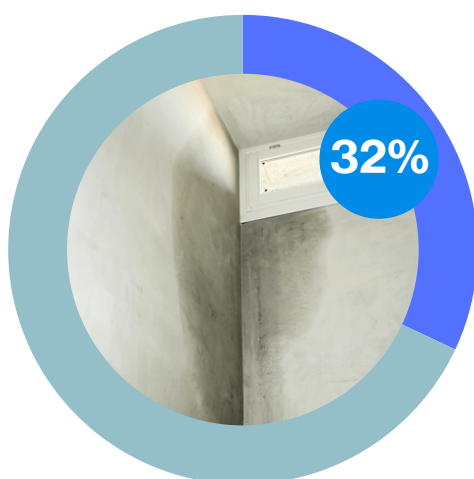
After considering the results of the first survey, the open comment responses showed that agency businesses had a breadth of knowledge that went beyond the initial questions asked, with many agents highlighting the links between condensation, property use and the appearance of mould. The second survey therefore sought to tap into our agents' deeper knowledge to better understand their perspective of what is happening at ground level.

We asked letting agents what they felt were the main causes of damp and mould in properties they had let or managed.

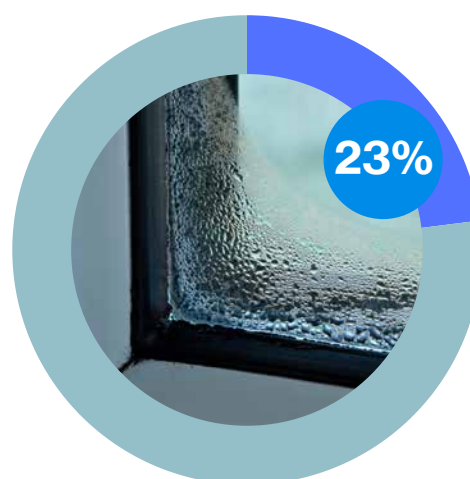
83% placed condensation due to tenant household activity as the top cause. We asked letting agents what tenant lifestyle activities were causing damp and mould; with **51%** placing drying clothes indoors as the main activity and **30%** placing heating choices as the main contributor.

Within this survey, we asked how and when letting agents think issues of condensation, damp and mould should be communicated where it was a result of previous tenant activities. Where a property had been susceptible to condensation only, the top choice was 'information should be provided at check-in' and where a property was susceptible to damp and mould the top choice was to provide information at the point of offer.

In both questions, whether the property was susceptible to condensation only or damp and mould, the 3rd most popular response was to consider discussing restrictions on certain household activities with the prospective tenant. The 5th and least popular choice was to provide the information in the property listing.



32% of agents placed providing information at the point of offer by the landlord/agent as their first choice in scenarios where previous tenant household activity has caused mould and damp issues.



23% of agents placed providing information at check-in as their first choice, in scenarios where previous tenant household activity has caused condensation issues.

Where damp and mould issues were caused by construction issues or property defects, letting agents changed their choice of action. Where construction issues were the cause of the problem, 71% of agents stated that the property should not be made available to rent until the issues causing the damp and mould were resolved.

Similarly, where property defects caused damp and mould 85% of letting agents again agreed that the property should not be made available to rent the issue was resolved.

Both scenarios placed providing information at the point of offer as the second choice and providing information in the property listing as the 3rd choice.



71% of agents said the property should not be made available to rent until the construction issues causing condensation are resolved as their first choice.



85% of agents said the property should not be made available to rent until the construction defects causing the damp and mould issue are resolved as the first choice.

To help consumers and agents tackle condensation, damp and mould issues we asked letting agents what the Ombudsman could do to help. Letting agents' top responses showed a strong desire for tenant, landlord, and letting agent guidance.

Figure 2: We asked agents to rank suggested Ombudsman support where condensation, damp and mould issues arise

- Provide tenant 'lifestyle' guidance (56.8% first choice)
- Provide landlord 'responsibility' guidance (41.2% second choice)
- Provide agent 'diagnosis' guidance (46.6% third choice)
- Update the Ombudsman's Lettings Code to oblige agents not to market and let properties where there were unresolved construction issues causing condensation, damp and mould (48.3% fourth choice)
- Update the Ombudsman's Lettings Code to oblige agents to divulge known condensation, damp and mould issues resulting from previous tenant's household activities to prospective tenants (68.7% fifth choice)

Following this feedback, we've published a series of guides for tenants, landlords and agents, see pages 18-23.



Case studies

Mould and damp enquiry

A tenant raised maintenance issues which had caused damp and mould to arise. The tenant was seeking advice as they had received none from their letting agent or landlord.

Our initial enquiries team provided guidance on the roles and responsibilities of both the landlord and the letting agent. The tenant was advised that whilst the responsibility for rectifying the issue fell to the landlord, under the Ombudsman's Code of Practice the letting agent had a responsibility to promptly pass all concerns to the landlord.

Our initial enquiries advisor explained to the tenant what they could do if the agent and, ultimately, the landlord was not addressing the mould and damp issues that had been raised.

The tenant was signposted to their local council's Environmental Health team, given guidance about the role of the agent as well as how to escalate their issues to the Ombudsman if they remained unresolved.



Early resolution

This dispute concerned a landlord raising concerns after discovering prevalent damp and mould within their property. Within the agreed terms of business, the landlord and agent had agreed that the agent would undertake a property inspection every 3 months and report back any important issues.

In July 2021 the agent contacted the landlord to confirm they were happy to resume conducting inspections after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, which the landlord advised they were. However, the landlord did not receive any confirmation of the inspections and after chasing the agent, found that it was not until March 2022 that the agent scheduled and conducted an inspection.

Upon receiving the inspection report, the agent did not highlight the significant damp and mould issues in multiple rooms, and it fell to the landlord to identify the problem from the pictures in the report. Due to the widespread damage, there were significant costs to the landlord rectify the issues of damp and mould in the property.

Acknowledging that the agent's communication shortcomings had delayed a resolution to the problem and were not in line with the Ombudsman's Code of Practice, the agent was advised to increase their goodwill offer from £150 to £300. The agent agreed to increase the goodwill offer and the landlord accepted.



Formal Investigation

This dispute concerned tenants raising issues about the condition of the property when they moved in, specifically the presence of damp and mould which later caused them to develop health conditions including ringworm and chest infections.

The tenants were students, and the tenancy was agreed 10 months in advance of occupation. On the day the tenants moved in they raised maintenance issues including the presence of damp in the living room. Two months later they discovered and reported more damp in the property.

The tenants were understandably frustrated as the issues they raised were all issues the agent had agreed to resolve before moving in, which then delayed the tenancy start by a month due to the necessary works. Upon raising the damp and mould issue a second time a contractor arrived three days later to clean the mould from the walls and apply anti-mould paint to the affected areas. However, the black mould returned within a month causing the tenants to raise the issue a third time.

The agent arranged for a second contractor to rectify the issues. Upon conducting the further works the contractor stated that the issues reported were due to tenants not ventilating the property properly and as such the landlord instructed for the purchased dehumidifier to be returned to storage rather than being installed at the property. The damp and mould issue persisted within the property and the landlord hired a third contractor to identify the underlying issue. The contractor repaired an air brick but advised that this issue would not have caused the level of damp alone and that poor ventilation by the tenants was a contributing factor.

In response, the tenants advised that they had followed all advice provided by the agent to manage the damp levels in the property including ensuring adequate ventilation and airflow, leaving the heating running and not drying clothes on the radiators.

The neighbouring property had an adjoining wall which had also been experiencing similar damp and mould issues for some time. The neighbours had previously hired an independent contractor who had identified holes in the brickwork and broken air vents as the primary factor causing damp. It transpired that this information had been provided to the agent some six months before the tenancy started.

Our adjudicator highlighted under paragraph 7a of the Ombudsman's Code, the agent should have disclosed this information to the tenants prior to the tenancy. Moreover, the adjudicator was provided with no evidence that the agent had passed on any of this information to the landlord to enable them to resolve the issue.

Our adjudicator supported the complaint and found that the shortcomings of the agent in not communicating vital information at the appropriate time had caused avoidable aggravation, distress and inconvenience as well as health issues. An award of £750 in compensation was made to the tenants which covered the agent's communication shortcomings, acknowledging that the responsibility to rectify the problem rested with the landlord.

Formal Investigation

This case concerned prevalent damp and mould which the landlord refused to rectify. Over the course of three years, the tenants consistently raised damp and mould issues to the letting agent managing the property. Throughout this time the tenants did the best they could to manage the problem. Initially, the agent advised the tenants to install dehumidifiers in the property, which the tenants did and paid for themselves; however, the dehumidifiers did not resolve the issue.

The tenants continued to raise the problem to the agent who arranged for a contractor to attend the property. Following the contractor's visit a report of solutions to fix the problem was provided, however the landlord refused to take any of the recommended actions.

Our adjudicator sympathised with the tenants' situation and explained that the tenancy agreement placed the responsibility on the landlord to ensure the property was in good order and repairs were undertaken. The agent's responsibility under the the Ombudsman's Code of Practice was to ensure that they acted in accordance with their landlord client's instructions, whilst treating the tenants fairly. The expectation of the agent was therefore to promptly report the issue to the landlord and action the landlord's instructions - both of which they did.

Unfortunately, the landlord refused to have the required work conducted and therefore the adjudicator concluded that it was the shortcomings of the landlord, rather than the agent, that had led to the situation remaining unresolved. As we currently cannot impose directions and awards on landlords, the tenants were provided with advice on how to pursue their dispute through the courts.



Case study: in the news

Private Landlord fails to address mould problem and is fined £2,500

Olaseni George, a private landlord in Peterborough, was convicted for failing to comply with an improvement notice under Section 30 of the Housing Act 2004.¹²

In January 2024, a complaint was received by Peterborough City Council's Housing Standards team regarding the poor state of the landlords rental property.

The property housing two adults and two children was found to have damp and mould in the bedrooms, with no hot water in the first floor bathroom.

George was instructed to remedy the issues but after an inspection, it was found no work had been completed.

At his court hearing in July 2024, George was convicted and fined £2,500, ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £1,000 and the council's costs of £500.

Councillor Alison Jones, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, said: "I'm confident that this prosecution will serve as a warning to the small minority of landlords who put their tenants at risk and flout the law. Landlords play an essential role in providing safe, warm and healthy homes to the residents of Peterborough.

"Whenever we are made aware of landlords breaching the law we will look to take enforcement action under the range of powers available to us. We would also point out to landlords who are unsure of their responsibilities to please contact our housing team who are always happy to advise."



Tenant guidance for dealing with condensation, damp and mould problems

Tenant guidance

Help with condensation, damp and mould

Too much moisture and condensation in a property can cause damp and mould, which can negatively affect your health and wellbeing if not fixed. Here are three steps you can take to deal with these issues.

Step 1: The first step in addressing damp and mould is to alert your landlord or letting agent so they can take necessary action. Landlords and agents are obliged to treat the matter seriously and must approach the problem both quickly and with empathy.

The fundamental cause of damp and mould will be due to building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation, inadequate heating and/or poor energy efficiency, not tenants' normal domestic activities. Whilst not a substitute for landlord or agent tackling the root causes of the issue, they may also look to work with you to help make small, reasonable adjustments to reduce issues of condensation and the risk of damp and mould to your health.

Until your landlord remedies the cause of the condensation, you may want to consider:

- **Wiping down windows** and surfaces in the morning where condensation has built up overnight.
- **Opening windows** throughout the day and night (unless this makes it harder to keep your home warm and only where it is safe and appropriate to do so).
- If you have the outside space and are able to do so, **drying laundry outside** where possible or in the bathroom with a window slightly open and/or the extractor fan on.
- **Not using radiators to dry laundry, if there is an alternative**, as this can cause excess moisture to be released leading to condensation.
- If one is fitted, **using an extractor fan while cooking**, using a kettle and taking baths and showers.
- If you have the space and if possible, **keeping a gap between furniture** and external walls, and where possible placing furniture against internal walls.
- Maintaining a medium/low level of heat throughout the property, where possible.

Where it is established that mould is related to a property defect (e.g. damp proofing, guttering, brickwork or roof), your landlord or agent should keep you informed about the action they are taking to remedy the matter.



Step 2: If the problem persists after remedial work is completed, you should alert the landlord or letting agent as soon as possible

Step 3: Where a landlord or their agent does not address the issue appropriately, there are a number of formal routes available to you to resolve the problem and seek redress:

Report the issue to your local authority: Local authorities can help tenants in private rented accommodation and will have an environmental health team who can assess the problem and contact the landlord on your behalf. They may also inspect the property to decide if a formal environmental health inspection under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System is required. The local authority can deal with poor housing conditions in several different ways ranging from serving a hazard awareness notice to imposing emergency measures on the landlord.

Seek redress against landlords:

- Tenants in social housing can refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, provided they have raised their complaint with their social landlord in the first instance.
- Tenants in the private rented sector in England and Wales can seek compensation from their landlord through the courts.
- Tenants in Scotland can refer their claim to the First Tier Tribunal.

Seeking redress against letting or managing agents

You can refer your complaint to The Property Ombudsman where the business is a member of the scheme, provided you have raised the complaint with the agent in the first instance. We will consider the agent and the landlord's responsibilities and actions in reaching our decision.

Landlords and agent guidance for dealing with condensation, damp and mould problems

Landlord and agent guidance

Guidance for dealing with condensation, damp and mould problems

Damp and mould can often occur as a result of excess moisture and condensation in a property. **If left unattended these issues can have a significant negative impact on the occupiers' health and wellbeing.**

This guidance sets out actions and steps letting agents and landlords can take to address this important issue.

Step 1: Once the damp and mould issue has been raised or identified

When a potential issue of damp and mould is raised, this should be taken seriously and actioned as a matter of urgency. Identifying the root cause and the severity of the issue should happen as soon as possible and particular urgency taken when health concerns have been raised or the occupants of the property have known vulnerabilities and are at a greater health risk from the harms of damp and mould.

Communicating with the occupants during this time is crucial. Living with mould and damp can be extremely distressing so it is important to keep occupants up to date so they are assured you are taking the issue seriously and are being proactive in your actions.

Step 2: Identifying the works required

In order to identify an appropriate resolution, you should consider hiring specialists to fully identify the root cause of the problem. Once the cause and severity of the issue has been found, works to rectify the problem should be undertaken as soon as possible.

Where there are known vulnerabilities or health impacts, you should consider if it is appropriate or viable to offer alternative accommodation whilst the works are undertaken. It is important to ensure communication is consistent, clear and compassionate throughout this process.

Step 3: Addressing the issue

Once the issue has been identified, you should work to address and resolve the problem as soon as reasonably possible. Where professionals are required to remove mould or correct construction defects this should be communicated and arranged with the occupants of the property.

Where the problem is to be addressed directly, it is recommended safety precautions are taken when using strong chemicals and the correct protective clothing is used.

Step 4: Reducing the risk or occurrence or re-occurrence

Some practical steps can be taken to tackle mould and damp occurring. You should discuss these with the occupants in the first instance or once an underlying issue has been rectified.

This can include:

- Discussing potential causes and solutions with occupants that could reduce excess moisture, for example using an air dryer instead of drying clothing on warm radiators. Making small, reasonable adjustments to the occupants' behaviour can help to reduce the mould and damp risk
- Checking with tenants that they are using ventilation systems within the property such as extractor fans in the bathroom or trickle vents in the windows. It is also useful to ask if these are in good working order when asking these questions and check during inspections.
- Providing occupants with dehumidifiers to help reduce the build-up of moisture
- Advising or supplying relevant mould and damp preventative or cleaning products
- Providing the guidance provided in this report
- Signposting to relevant guidance on condensation damp and mould such as GOV.UK



Summary

This report brings together perspectives of letting agents and our casework insight. What is clear from the surveys is that whilst mould and damp is not a lifestyle choice, agents see the behaviour of tenants as a significant factor in contributing to the problem.

As an Ombudsman, our remit is wider than resolving disputes as we have a role to play in improving standards and the wider private property sector. We have listened to our agents and have developed guidance for tenants, landlords and agents to prevent and resolve mould and damp issues.

We will continue to listen to agents and tenants who come to us looking for advice, guidance and signposting. Our front-end enquiries service and advice work helps to resolve issues before they turn into disputes and provides unique insight and data enabling us help to educate consumers and businesses.

Finally, it is common knowledge that the Government has made commitments to address prevalent mould and damp in dwellings across both the privately rented and social rented sectors. The introduction of a Decent Homes Standard in the private sector may help ensure serious cases are fast-tracked to local authorities. Minor issues relating to property standards that fall within the responsibility of landlords are likely to be dealt with through the proposed redress service for landlord complaints.

References

1. England 4,595,000 households x 2.3 avg occupancy = 10,568,500 ([English Housing Survey 2022/23](#), Figure 1.2: Trends in tenure)
Scotland 349,564 x 2.3 = 803,997 ([Scotland Landlord Register](#), July 2024)
Northern Ireland 307,300 in 132,400 households ([2021 Census](#), p5)
Wales 228k x 2.3 = 524,400 ([The onward march of Wales' private rental sector - Bevan Foundation](#), 2023)

UK total = 12,204,107
2. <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#legal-standards-on-damp-and-mould-in-rented-homes>
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/chapters-for-english-housing-survey-2022-to-2023-headline-report/chapter-4-dwelling-condition#damp>
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