



HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Thursday 13th March 2025

REPORT TITLE:	HOUSING & HEALTH REPORT: PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING DAMP & MOULD PROJECT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is the first of two proposed updates relating to Housing and Health, specifically Damp and Mould. This report is intended to provide insight into the work being undertaken by the Council in its role as the Strategic Housing Authority in responding to damp and mould in the borough, with an emphasis on a new pilot damp and mould project in several small areas where there is a correlation of older, damp homes and higher incidence of respiratory illness. The pilot is being delivered by the Council's Housing Services Division, is funded by both Public Health grant up to 2027 and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) pilot funding, aimed at the private rented sector, which has been running since April 2024 and is due to finish on 30th September 2025. However, the Council has a statutory responsibility to respond to 'serious hazards' in the home, of which some cases of damp and mould would meet.

It is intended a further report on the responsibilities of the Registered Provider Sector and their response provided within the borough is received at the next Board meeting.

This is not a Key Decision. The work outlined in this report affects all wards within the borough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to note and endorse the progress made to date in the implementation of the Damp and Mould pilot.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The work of the Councils Housing Services in regard to tackling poor housing conditions directly supports Priority 4 for the Health & Wellbeing strategy “Create safe and healthy places for people to live that protect health and promote a good standard of living” and has a positive impact on Fuel Poverty – one of the workstreams within this theme. The Health and Wellbeing Board is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy and this report is to update the Board on how this piece of work is contributing to the priorities identified.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 It was determined that this was the most effective way of briefing members on the work of the Housing Standards Team, This is in the context that there was a recent Housing Update report to the Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee in January 2025.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Damp and mould within the home can produce allergens, irritants, mould spores and other toxins that are harmful to health. Even if visible mould is not present, dampness alone can increase the risk of health problems. Excessive moisture can promote the growth of microorganisms such as mould and other fungi, certain species of house dust mites, bacteria, or viruses. The more serious the damp and mould problem and the longer it is left untreated, the worse the health impacts and risks are likely to be.
- 3.2 Most people encounter the substances produced by damp and mould by breathing them in. This means they predominantly affect the airways and lungs. Damp and mould can cause disease and ill health in anyone, but people with underlying health conditions, weakened immune systems, old and young people are at greater risk of ill-health from damp and mould.
- 3.3 Estimates of the number of homes in England with damp and mould range from 4% to 27% of homes, or 962,000 to 6.5 million households. The reported figure varies due to differences in how damp and mould is measured and how it is reported. People living in private or social rented housing are more likely to live in a home with damp and mould than are owner occupiers.
- 3.4 The Councils Housing Standards Team is responsible for responding to serious hazards within the home under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004. Serious hazards are known as ‘Category 1 hazards and are assessed using the national Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The action and response taken by the Council is dependent upon the seriousness of the hazard identified through the HHSRS assessment and most damp conditions in home are not classed as serious hazards as the risk of harm is not immediate. Historically, use of the HHSRS system has

placed emphasis on recording the category of hazard, i.e. how severe it is, rather than the type of hazard, such as damp and mould. This has predominately been due the Council not having a statutory duty to take action against a landlord unless there is a serious hazard, which is why Councils nationally have not prioritised action to address damp and mould in the home except those cases that have met serious thresholds.

- 3.5 The Council does however have a power to be able to take action, although the resource requirement to take discretionary enforcement action, has to date being limited by resource implications.. Therefore, the focus of the Government’s Pilot was to look at different models and approaches Councils could apply in using enforcement powers to remedy damp and mould conditions where landlords would not cooperate voluntarily with improvements. MHCLG has advised that the work of the pilot Councils will inform future policy. This project aligns with work to develop a Housing Standards Enforcement Policy that will be considered at Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee on 12th March 2025. This policy provides a more robust basis on which to serve Civil Penalty Notices when landlords fail to comply with Improvement Notices.
- 3.6 Since November 2022, officers have started to record damp and mould hazards with a view to better monitoring this problem going forward, however like most Councils, the Council does not currently have a robust estimate of the number of homes in the borough that are subject to damp and mould.
- 3.7 Arising from the tragic death of Awaab Issak and the cause of death attributed to damp and mould within his home, the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove wrote to all Councils in 2022 asking them to return an estimate of private rented homes in their areas it was considered could have damp. In the return to government in January 2023 it was estimated that Wirral could have a similar proportion of damp, privately rented homes as the national average, i.e. 2,700 privately rented properties across the borough of which it was estimated that 216 of these could have a more serious damp and mould hazard, likely to have a significant impact on health.
- 3.8 To test this hypothesis, the Council’s Public Health intelligence team compiled an intelligence report with Housing colleagues to produce a matrix to determine target areas for a damp and mould pilot. The report highlighted 8 areas of the borough where there is likely to be a high prevalence of cold damp homes, together with higher incidents of respiratory illness and increased hospital admissions as a result.

Table 1 Top Areas of cold damp homes and higher levels of respiratory illness in Wirral

LSOAs	LSOA Name	% Owned	% Social Rent	% Private Rented	Phasing
E01007130	Tranmere North	40.67	10.86	48.47	Phase 1 Winter 2024/5
E01007126	Hamilton Square	37.35	33.29	29.36	
E01007176	Rock Ferry West	51.71	13.12	35.17	
E01007175	Egerton Park	34.03	34.91	31.06	
E01007121	Bidston Moss	26.00	60.86	13.15	Phase 2 Winter 2025/6
E01007304	Woodchurch East	40.60	41.55	17.85	
E01007290	Tranmere Esplanade	24.15	38.03	37.82	

E01007179	Egerton North	37.58	20.55	41.87	
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- 3.9 Following a review of the existing Healthy Homes Service by Public Health in early 2024, additional funding to respond to damp and mould complaints was awarded. This was to enable an effective response to be developed across the whole of the borough, but with an additional focus on the 8 areas identified in Table 1 of this report where damp and mould were likely to be more prevalent. Officers were recruited in summer 2024 and following a period of training, commenced a door knocking exercise in autumn 2024 within the first 4 damp and mould target areas, with the remaining 4 areas to be programmed for door knocking Autumn 2025.
- 3.10 The Council was also selected in 2024 to participate in a national MHCLG funded pilot looking at new ways for Councils to apply enforcement tools to address damp and mould in homes. This presented an opportunity for the Council to complement and align this with existing work being undertaken as part of the additional Public Health funded Healthy Homes Programme during 2024/25.
- 3.11 The MHCLG grant provided funding for an enforcement officer, a resource to develop data intelligence and measure performance, training for landlords and staff in recognising and remedying damp and mould as well as specialist damp recording equipment. This enabled a dedicated Housing Standards Officer to be assigned to work in the Healthy Homes team to specifically look at enforcement for damp and mould cases including those considered less serious hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- 3.12 This MCHLG funding and pilot was only ever intended to be a one-off programme of works, to assist with government direction on policy and inform proposals currently being worked through Parliament as part of the Renters Reform Bill. It is not known at this stage if new burdens funding will be allocated as part of the implementation of the Bill if it receives royal assent and is enacted.

Outcomes from the Healthy Homes Damp and Mould Focussed Work

- 3.13 The team organised and facilitated Landlord training about understanding and tackling Damp and Mould in October 2024. The session, bookable via Eventbrite, was sold out within 24 hours and quickly had a waiting list of Landlords keen to undertake the training. 32 attended the session with the training being very interactive and produced valuable conversations about mould prevention, types of ventilation systems, available support services and relationships with tenants. Feedback from the event has been very positive and Landlords, on the waiting list, have contacted the department to enquire about replicating the session. The team is currently exploring additional e-learning, provided by the National Residential Landlords Association, around Damp and Mould Prevention and Best Practice.
- 3.14 Also in October 2024, partner agencies were invited to attend a Damp and Mould forum to learn about the Healthy Homes Damp and Mould Project. Partners from NHS services, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Macmillan, Primary Care Network, Public Health, Citizens Advice, local Housing Associations, Whitechapel Floating support and several local charities attended to hear about the project as well as updates from local charity Energy Projects Plus.

- 3.15 Following on from the event, the team has continued to raise awareness of the project and have attended several team meetings. In November, Healthy Homes presented to the 0-19s team meeting (Health Visitors and School Nurses, approximately 60 staff) and to the Birkenhead Adult Care and Health Team (approximately 15 staff), Wirral's Age Uk Hospital discharge team, and the POPIN service. They have attended and presented at the CVF forum and the COP meeting. Following on from these meetings work is in development with Wirral Change, the Wirral Multicultural Organisation and the Households into Work team.
- 3.16 An emerging partnership between Healthy Homes, Wirral Citizens Advice and Gladstone Medical Centre has explored engaging and supporting Gladstone patients, diagnosed with long term respiratory conditions, around their housing conditions. The Practice has overlaid data relating to respiratory conditions with the target damp and mould area postcodes to identify patients most at risk and have contacted their patients, via text message, to inform them of the project. Further work, between the Practice, Healthy Homes and Citizens Advice is being developed.
- 3.17 Since 1st April 2024 the Healthy Homes Team have made 820 contacts with households through visits, door knocking exercises and incoming reports of damp and mould via telephone or e-mail. Of these contacts 252 instances of damp and mould have been identified representing just over 30% of those contacts. 336 instances of Excess Cold have been identified and 232 of these excess cold cases have been successfully removed. 560 Category 1 and 2 hazards have been dealt with by the Healthy Homes team via formal and informal action. 41 formal notices have been served by the dedicated Housing Standards Officer and 3 cases, where the Landlord has failed to comply with the notice served, are being investigated further and may result in prosecution. Although the initial contact has been around damp and mould in the property, inspections have highlighted other serious deficiencies in the properties and the officers involved have included all hazards on formal and informal contact with the Landlord.
- 3.18 193 households have been provided with information and support around condensation damp and mould and 76 households have been referred to Energy Projects Plus for support to improve the thermal quality of their homes to tackle condensation mould growth. Engagement with residents, and the complexities of their needs has led to a total of 2172 referrals being made to wider support agencies for further assistance including referrals to Merseyside Fire and Rescue service, Citizens Advice, Adult and Children's Social Care, street scene and the Council's anti-social behaviour team.
- 3.19 Of the households that were being negatively affected by the damp conditions they were living with:
- 108 households have identified as having long term respiratory conditions; and
 - 45 households have highlighted cardiac conditions to the team
- 3.20 Of the 820 households engaged with, nearly a quarter of the households had children under the age of 5 (considered under the Housing Health and Safety Rating

System to be the most vulnerable group) and just under 20% were occupied by adults of pensionable age.

- 3.21 The team has noted that the prevalence of condensation damp and mould correlates to affordability and low income. As a result, just in the last quarter, the team assisted 82 households to access help and support around their benefits and maximising their income. 66 of those households were supported to access Social Supermarkets. 4 households have received foodbank vouchers issued by the Healthy Homes team. An additional 5 households have received financial help from another local charity, Caritas, who have provided supermarket vouchers to families in need.
- 3.22 The Council's website is being developed to offer help and advice to households and now includes more concise information around damp and mould along with a visual aid to help residents understand how humidity levels in their home, along with the household temperature can increase the likelihood of condensation mould. A new Damp and Mould Guidance booklet for residents and Landlords has been developed by the team and continues to be well received by residents. This has also been used as a template of good practice by another Council for use in their area.
- 3.23 Neglect and home conditions including home safety remain a high referral rate for families with children under 5, receiving referrals from a variety of sources such as primary schools, 0-19 services and midwifery in relation to adequate home conditions for families. Unfortunately, recent experiences of families in the borough have included house fires and very poor home conditions with a devastating effect. Research from Shelter shows 'children growing up in poor housing have up to 25 per cent higher risk of severe ill-health and disability during childhood and early adulthood - homeless children are up to four times more likely to suffer mental health problems than other children - offending behaviour may be linked to behavioural problems that emerge among children living in poor housing conditions, highlighting evidence that almost half of young offenders have experienced homelessness'.
- 3.24 Through Public Health funding for essential repairs to be undertaken when issues are uncovered by the Healthy Homes team, the Council has been able to respond to hazards in the home for low-income owner occupiers in addition to using enforcement powers for privately rented homes. Existing capacity has enabled an increase in support by Healthy Homes across Family Hubs for families to access support and advice and have essential repairs undertaken on their homes. Healthy Homes officers have been based one day a week in the Seacombe Family Hub this has now been rolled out to support across the further sites. This additional support has supported investment provided through Public Health specifically relating to damp and mould and fuel poverty. Healthy homes advice being available in the community has been invaluable to parents and carers, often not wanting to address housing concerns themselves for fear of repercussions from the landlord. Healthy Homes have offered a link between children's services the family and landlord to ensure that improvements are made to the family homes. The public health funding aligned to this project allows for repairs to be undertaken in a timely fashion and ensure housing conditions improve. From Spring 2025 this is also enabling the Healthy Homes team to be able undertake more targeted work to cover all 12 Family Hub.

Case study 1

- 3.25 Care leavers and parents of a 5-month-old daughter were referred into the Healthy Homes service by their health visitor who was concerned about conditions in their privately rented flat. A Healthy Homes officer completed a home visit and immediately escalated the property for a formal inspection due to the excessive and widespread damp and mould throughout the flat and insufficient fire protection. The family, who had only been living on the Wirral for a short time, advised they rarely left their flat and had noticed their physical health had declined since living there. They reported feeling isolated and were struggling financially.
- 3.26 The Healthy Homes officer supported the family to access the local children's centre and the various activities they were offering for babies. The Officer also engaged with the centre and other local charities to obtain bedding, clothing and toys for the family along with food vouchers and hampers. A Housing Standards Officer served a Prohibition Order on the flat due to the severity of hazards identified and Healthy Homes Officer completed and supported the family with an application for help from the Housing Options team. The family have been moved into alternative, affordable and safe accommodation and continue to access support from the children's centre. They have noted improvements to their physical health.
- 3,27 Work by the Housing Standards team, in conjunction with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, to address hazards in the communal areas and other flats in the building continues.

Case Study 2

- 3.28 The occupant of this flat self-referred into the Healthy Homes scheme for help with ongoing disrepair issues in her self-contained one bedroom, privately rented flat. The tenant reported to the Healthy Homes officer that she had not had any heating or hot water for months and, when the officer visited the tenant at home, they noted that gutters and downpipes were in a poor condition and causing penetrating damp to the flat. The tenant explained she was a volunteer at a local charity and was struggling to carry on with her volunteering after a colleague commented that she smelt unpleasant. The tenant explained that, without hot water (and no alternative means for bathing) their inability to manage their personal hygiene was causing distress and they were reluctant to leave the home. The tenant had tried to get their landlord to carry out repairs without success.
- 3.29 The Healthy Homes Officer contacted the Letting Agents directly following the visit via telephone and followed up their call with an email outlining the disrepair. The Healthy Homes officer collected, from a local partner charity, emergency portable heaters and delivered them to the tenant. Within days of their phone call, the Letting Agents had arranged a repair to the boiler re-establishing working heating in the property and had ordered the part to repair the issue with the hot water. Contractors were organised to carry out repairs to the guttering and down pipes and this work has been successfully completed.
- 3.30 The tenant was delighted with the speed at which Officer was able to deal with their concerns and how quickly repairs were carried out to make the home, safe, warm and dry again. They have been able to continue with their volunteering again which was a great source of joy.

Case Study 3

- 3.31 An owner occupier, in their mid 70s, contacted the team to ask for help with disrepair in their home. When the Healthy Homes team visited them at home, they were concerned about the condition of several rooms in the property due to historic water ingress. The occupant advised they were struggling to use their bath due to mobility issues and was having difficulty with their finances. Their boiler was old and had broken several times (which had been expensive to repair and caused financial hardship) and there was black mould in several rooms around the property. The occupant advised they struggled to keep up with the costs of using the inefficient boiler and often felt very cold in their home. The occupant reported poor physical health, and the officer felt concerned that the resident was at higher risk due to the combination of poor health and poor home conditions.
- 3.32 The Healthy Homes officer supported the occupier to apply for the Councils' Heating and Renovation Grant and completed an application, on the resident's behalf, for a Disabled Facilities Grant. The officer also assisted with financial support around council tax and fuel debt meaning the occupant was over a £100 better off each month. The Disabled Facilities grant team were able to install various handrails around the property along with a walk-in shower and improved handbasin and w.c. The Heating and Renovation Grant assisted the occupant with replacing the inefficient boiler and repairs to the roof and water damaged ceilings.
- 3.33 The occupant is feeling more confident to move around their home safely and has noticed their fuel bills decrease since having the repairs and the new boiler. They reported being able to keep the heating on for longer periods this winter due to the efficiency of the boiler and increased income following the financial help they received from Healthy Homes.

Next steps

- 3.34 The Director of Regeneration and Place intends to bring a further report to this Board relating to the issue of Damp and Mould, setting out the responsibilities and response from the Registered Provider Sector within the borough.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Staffing for 3 posts and associated works costs is being supported through approved Public Health funding, totalling £581,000 between 2024/25 for 3 years up to 31st March 2027 including for the Housing Standards Officer post up from 1st April 2025 September 2025.
- 4.2 MHCLG allocated the Council a grant of £130,000 to undertake a pilot in relation to damp and mould on xx xx 202?. This pilot was for a single year and is intended to inform government policy and although feedback from MHCLG has been highly complementary of Wirral's scheme and there is an expectation to continue to deliver damp and mould activity returns, no further funding has been identified by them for any of the participating Councils. This will mean that after September 2025, without further government or other funding being identified the council's overall response to damp and mould will continue to be taken forward through the wider work of the

healthy homes programme. However, cases for action by housing standards will be prioritised for action, in order of those assessed as HHSRS serious hazards. Those not identified as a serious hazard will be responded to by Environmental Health and Housing Standards Teams but may mean a longer wait for tenants.

- 4.3 However the Housing Team continue to explore funding and opportunities across a wide range of services to either enhance existing services/programmes or extend time limited initiatives to sustain activity.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The expansion of civil penalty notices is currently being proposed as part of the Renters Rights Bill. If enacted there may be the opportunity to explore the use of wider civil penalties which may generate additional recoverable charges and may help in providing a wider service which could include damp and mould which does not meet statutory thresholds for formal intervention. This work area will be considered following the outcome of the pilot area work and reported outcomes.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETTS

- 6.1 There are no direct implications to ICT or Assets. Additional Healthy Homes Officers have been recruited to fixed terms posts in line with the public health funding up to 2027. The Housing Standards Officer who is currently seconded to this project will return to their substantive role once funding ceases.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 This project aims to reduce the risk to those living in cold, damp homes of declining health, particularly their respiratory health. The project is aimed at reducing the risks by eliminating or reducing the risk of damp through a range of interventions, including improvements to heating systems, repairs to properties to stop penetrating damp, debt advice and benefit maximisation so that heating is affordable as well as referrals for emergency financial support for the most vulnerable households.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The pilot has been developed in consultation with Public Health Officers and MHCLG who consult with the Council monthly. There has also been consultation with frontline health, social care and voluntary sector organisations. This is a time limited pilot and therefore widespread consultation is not applicable until the pilot has been evaluated and then, only if there is an intention to roll out the scheme to more areas. Given the prevalence of mild damp issues to many properties in the borough, for the project to be effective, wide-scale consultation has been limited at this time, however updated self-help resources have been posted on the website and leaflets updated on damp and mould .
- 8.2 Front line health professionals and agencies that visit households in their home have been engaged as part of this project via a forum at the start of the scheme. This will be repeated in autumn 2025 to ensure there is good awareness of the project leading into the winter months.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATION

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in August 2024 of which Healthy Homes is a sub-project under this wider initiative to improve the quality of housing in target areas within Wirral. This document has been reviewed and is still valid for this project.

[Document EIA Selective Licensing Oct 24 | Wirral Council](#)

10.0 ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 This project will generate improvements in the quality of homes including energy efficiency improvements needed to eradicate damp and mould which will in turn reduce the carbon footprint of these properties.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 This report is for information to the Health and Well Being Board and there are no direct community wealth implications.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Damp & Mould Scheme: Supporting Evidence and Rational, Wirral Public Health Intelligence Team & Housing Services, July 2024.

[Damp and mould advice for landlords and property managers | wirral.gov.uk](#)

[Damp and mould advice for tenants and homeowners | wirral.gov.uk](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Damp and Mould Booklet

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Health & Wellbeing Board in accordance with Section 4.2(h)(iv) of its Terms of Reference.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Economy Regeneration and Housing Committee - Housing Update Report	20th January 2025