

ACCENT HOUSING RESPONSE TO THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN:

Spotlight on Damp and Mould



This document is Accent Housing's response to the 26 recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman in the management of reports of damp and mould in our customers' homes.

In developing this document, we have assessed our service against the recommendations, and highlighted areas where further action is required.

The icons below are used to show where we meet or do not meet the Housing Ombudsman's recommendations.



**We meet the
requirement**



**We do not meet
the requirement**

	Requirement	Comply?	Comments	Comments	Who?	When?
1	Landlords should adopt a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould interventions. Landlords should review their current strategy and consider whether their approach will achieve this.		Accent updated its damp and mould procedure in July 2024 which sets out our approach to dealing with customers' reports of damp and mould, from the initial report being raised by the customer and including all the steps to be followed through to resolution. The document is attached here: <u>Damp Mould & Condensation Procedure CST-P-2022-2 310724 v2.0.pdf</u>			
2	Landlords should consider whether they require an overall framework, or policy, to address damp and mould which would cover each area where the landlord may be required to act. This would include any proactive interventions, its approach to diagnosis, actions it considers appropriate. in different circumstances, effective communication and aftercare.		<p>The new procedure has been developed to provide a framework for dealing with reports of damp and mould. This includes diagnostic guidance at the point of initial contact from the customer, considering each customer's circumstances and any property issues in order to establish the appropriate course of action.</p> <p>At initial contact the advisor will confirm the requirements of the customer by asking about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affected rooms • Size of the issue • Any health concerns • Any vulnerabilities • Household make up <p>The customer can also share a live video link for customers to show the damp and mould issue to support a much better triage service. Photographs will be shared with the surveyor before the visit.</p> <p>The advisor will triage all calls to determine the level of severity of the issue to ensure the swiftest response to the most severe cases.</p>	<p>Communications in relation to damp and mould are being developed for customers and will be available on our website and hard copy, if required. All customer communications are approved by the Communications Forum</p> <p>Outcome of October 2025 Review.</p> <p>Leaflet and website has been updated to reflect the action from the original assessment.</p> <p>A new Damp and Mould Policy will be developed by March 2026 to meet the terms set out in Awaabs law.</p>		

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3	Landlords should review the accessibility and use of their systems for reporting repairs and making complaints to 'find their silence'		<p>Customers are offered a number of options for reporting repairs and making complaints, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In person • Telephone • E mail • In writing • MyAccount (customer portal) • Website – online complaint form <p>Customers are advised to report emergency repairs by telephone, to ensure they are dealt with effectively.</p> <p>All repairs are dealt with by a dedicated technical hub, and any repairs related complaints are directed to a dedicated customer liaison team.</p>	<p>Add to the workplan for the Scrutiny Group made up of Accent customers.</p> <p>Outcome of October 2025 review.</p> <p>We have completed a customer scrutiny exercise, and all recommendations are being implemented.</p> <p>In 2026/27 we will be developing working practices that will enhance the voice of the silent majority and this will be rolled out across different service areas.</p>		
4	Landlords should identify opportunities for extending the scope of their diagnosis within buildings, for example by examining neighbouring properties, to ensure the response early on is as effective as possible.		<p>When damp and mould is identified in a property the scope of the diagnosis will include assessing other similar/neighbouring properties where there are complaints from more than one customer or where the cause is in relation to potential systemic issues such as ventilation/extraction or structural problems. These would be treated as a wider project.</p>			

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5	Landlords should implement a data driven, risk-based approach with respect to damp and mould. This will reduce over reliance on residents to report issues, help landlords identify hidden issues and support landlords to anticipate and prioritise interventions before a complaint or disrepair claim is made.		Within our housing management system, repairs reports are categorised so that damp and mould issues can be easily identified, and any complaints in relation to damp and mould have this as a sub category, enabling us to identify and act on potentially systemic issues. In addition, all reports of damp and mould are logged and monitored by a dedicated administrator and the wider team.	Use open complaints and open repairs to identify systemic issues in buildings with multiple reports of D&M. Outcome of October 2025. This will be enhanced with the introduction of the case management solution. This is due to be implemented in 2026/27.		
6	Where properties are identified for future disposal or are within an area marked for regeneration, landlords should proactively satisfy themselves that residents do not receive a poorer standard of service or lower living conditions, that steps are taken to avoid homes degrading to an unacceptable condition and that they regularly engage and communicate with these residents.		Accent do not stop maintaining properties when identified for disposal, we continue to maintain until the day the tenancy has ended, with no compromise to the repairs undertaken.			

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7	Landlords should avoid taking actions that solely place the onus on the resident. They should evaluate what mitigations they can put in place to support residents in cases where structural interventions are not appropriate and satisfy themselves they are taking all reasonable steps.		<p>Where investigations show there are no structural issues/leaks, we work with customers to resolve the problem and improve living conditions. This includes considering the property and occupancy and advising the customer in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windows –trickle vents open? • Are all air vents free from obstructions with adequate air movement? • Is there furniture against outside walls where mould is appearing? • Does the customer use a tumble dryer or radiators to dry clothing? <p>We will consider all options available to improve living conditions, including adding additional ventilation, where necessary.</p>			
8	Together with residents, landlords should review the information, materials and support provided to residents to ensure that these strike the right tone and are effective in helping residents to avoid damp and mould in their properties.		<p>Guidance for customers includes an on-line video publicised on our website, the ability to have a video call so customers can show the extent of the issue to help triage the severity of the problem. Guidance from technical staff when visiting affected homes.</p> <p>We are developing a leaflet that can be left with customers to share the repairs outcomes we will complete</p>	<p>Add to the workplan for the Scrutiny Group</p> <p>Outcome of October 2025 Review.</p> <p>Leaflet completed</p> <p>We have introduced GRYPP a customer engagement platform that integrate video calling to help diagnose damp and mould cases.</p> <p>We have completed a customer scrutiny exercise, and all recommendations are being implemented.</p>		

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9	Landlords should be more transparent with residents involved in mutual exchanges and make the most of every opportunity to identify and address damp and mould, including visits and void periods.		Our mutual exchange process includes a property inspection, prior to the mutual exchange taking place. We complete any outstanding repairs required to the property.	<p>Introduce damp and mould advice for new customers moving into an Accent home.</p> <p>Outcome of October 2025 Review</p> <p>The Damp & Mould leaflet has been designed and we have information on our website.</p>		
10	Landlords should ensure their strategy for delivering net zero carbon homes considers and plans for how they can identify and respond to potential unintended consequences around damp and mould		Accent will always consider ventilation as part of its overall assessment of retrofit works required at a property to achieve EPC Band C, and ultimately net zero. Retrofit projects, particularly where grant funding is being utilised, will be carried out in accordance with PAS2035 and will therefore require a ventilation strategy to be produced for each individual home. These strategies determine where additional ventilation may be required to ensure suitable airflow in order to prevent damp and mould following the installation of energy efficiency measures. Monitoring will also take place upon completion of the work, and customer feedback will be sought as part of this to understand/identify any potential unintended damp and mould concerns.			

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11	Landlords should review, alongside residents, their initial response to reports of damp and mould to ensure they avoid automatically apportioning blame or using language that leaves residents feeling blamed.		<p>Our approach to customers is clearly outlined in our damp and mould process and in the advice and information offered to our customers. We are committed to supporting our customers and working with them to resolve issues.</p> <p>We are looking to include customers in a review of our procedure and how we interact with customers to ensure that we use the correct terminology to be supportive and helpful to customers</p>	<p>Add to the workplan for theScrutiny Group made up of Accent customers</p> <p>Outcome of October 2025.</p> <p>We have completed a customer scrutiny exercise, and all recommendations are being implemented.</p>		
12	Landlords should consider their current approach to record keeping and satisfy themselves it is sufficiently accurate and robust. We would encourage landlords to go further and consider whether their record keeping systems and processes support a risk-based approach to damp and mould		<p>All damp and mould reports are captured through our IT system which allows us to record and categorise reports of damp and mould (see recommendation 5, above). In addition, all cases are recorded on a damp and mould tracker which is monitored and updated weekly. This allows us to identify any trends and potentially systemic failures within our stock, and to take the appropriate action.</p> <p>We also review all cases after a period of 3 months to check that works completed have remedied the issue</p>			
13	Landlords should ensure that their responses to reports of damp and mould are timely and reflect the urgency of the issue.		<p>Each damp and mould customer request is triaged to identify the severity of each case to ensure we prioritise the most urgent. Repairs are actioned promptly within our 28 day guideline. Urgent remedial work is dealt with as quickly possible. . Repairs that may take longer due to the nature of the work will be discussed with the customer so they are fully aware of the timescale for repair.</p>			

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14	Landlords should review the number of missed appointments in relation to damp and mould cases and, depending on the outcome of any review, consider what steps may be required to reduce them.		<p>Accent try to access the property on the first appointment. Following no access, a further two calls will be made to the resident to arrange and confirm an appointment, if unsuccessful a letter will be sent to the customer this is part of the damp and mould process.</p> <p>For cases of severe damp and mould every option will be taken to ensure that we work with customers to gain access to their home to support them; our housing teams will work with other agencies to gain access but ultimately this could include tenancy enforcement action.</p>			
15	Landlords should ensure that their staff, whether in-house or contractors, have the ability to identify and report early signs of damp and mould.		<p>Our contractors' operatives complete a questionnaire when carrying our general repairs (not just related to damp and mould) and any findings/concerns are reported back to us.</p> <p>We have an on-going training programme for staff which includes webinars, on-line training and classroom training.</p> <p>We are in the process of purchasing protimeters for all surveyors to support with the identification of damp and mould in customers' homes</p>			
16	Landlords should take steps to identify and resolve any skills gaps they may have, ensuring their staff and contractors have appropriate expertise to properly diagnose and respond to reports of damp and mould.		<p>Our team of building services managers includes a damp and mould specialist who can offer advice to the wider team. The procedure has been developed to provide a framework for to support staff to deal with reports of damp and mould. This includes diagnostic guidance at the point of initial contact from the customer. Our staff training includes a damp and mould module. All surveyors will have appropriate training within the next 6 months.</p>			

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17	Landlords should ensure that they clearly and regularly communicate with their residents regarding actions taken or otherwise to resolve reports of damp and mould. Landlords should review and update any associated processes and policies accordingly.		<p>We aim to carry out weekly reviews of damp and mould repairs cases, and to keep customers informed of progress. Our complaints process requires regular contact with customers to update them on the progress of their case, regardless of the reason for the complaint. We review the damp and mould procedure in line with our findings.</p> <p>We have also developed a monthly meeting between our complaints team and the repairs team managers to ensure that progress on resolution is monitored and outcomes met. Any lessons learned are shared.</p>			
18	Landlords must ensure there is effective internal communication between their teams and departments, and ensure that one individual or team has overall responsibility for ensuring complaints or reports are resolved, including follow up or aftercare		All information is recorded on our Housing Management system and on the damp and mould tracker. All complaints in relation to repairs and maintenance are directed through the complaints resolution team, and we have colleagues with specific responsibilities for dealing with damp and mould issues within our property services team.			
19	Landlords should ensure that their complaints policy is effective and in line with the Complaint Handling Code, with clear compensation and redress guidance. Remedies should be commensurate to the distress and inconvenience caused to the resident, whilst recognising that each case is individual and should be considered on its own merits.		Our complaints policy and associated procedure is currently under review and will reflect the requirements of the Complaint Handling Code. The complaints policy cross-references our compensation policy and will provide clear guidance to customers and colleagues. The compensation policy states that all cases are considered on their own merits when agreeing the appropriate remedy.	<p>Complaints policy and compensation policy are under review.</p> <p>Outcome of October 2025.</p> <p>Complaint and Compensation Policy review was completed in 2024.</p>		

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20	Landlords need to ensure they can identify complex cases at an early stage and have a strategy for keeping residents informed and effective resolution.		All damp and mould cases, including those of a complex nature, are recorded on our Housing Management system and damp and mould tracker and reviewed weekly, to ensure required actions are delivered and that customers are kept updated of progress.			
21	Landlords should identify where an independent, mutually agreed and suitably qualified surveyor should be used, share the outcomes of all surveys and inspections with residents to help them understand the findings and be clear on next steps. Landlords should then act on accepted survey recommendations in a timely manner		We have in-house surveyors and also use independent surveyors where required. The findings of surveys undertaken are shared with customers and any work identified is managed in line with our agreed timescales.			
22	Where extensive works may be required, landlords should consider the individual circumstances of the household, including any vulnerabilities, and whether or not it is appropriate to move resident(s) out of their home at an early stage.		We will provide alternative accommodation for customers where extensive works are required to their home. We will consider, the vulnerability and family make up and have full discussion and agreement with them before any move takes place.			

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23	Landlords should promote the benefits of their complaints process and the Ombudsman to their residents as an appropriate and effective route to resolving disputes		Our complaints policy explains how customers can make a complaint, including the escalation process and access to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Information is available to customers on our website, and written communications with complainants explains the escalation route and includes the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman and Property Ombudsman.			
24	Landlords should continue to use the complaints procedure when the pre-action protocol has commenced and until legal proceedings have been issued to maximise the opportunities to resolve disputes outside of court. Landlords should ensure their approach is consistent with our jurisdiction guidance and their legal and complaint teams work together effectively where an issue is being pursued through the complaints process and protocol.		<p>We have a tracker for disrepair cases which is updated weekly. Our property services team works closely with our Legal Advisors in the management of these cases. We will keep all cases open on the disrepair register until completion and until legal proceedings are complete.</p> <p>Complaints in relation to disrepair will remain open until legal proceedings have commenced.</p>			

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25	Landlords should consider how best to share learning from complaints and the positive impact of changes made as a result within the organisation and externally. Systems should allow the landlord to analyse their complaints data effectively and identify themes, trends and learning opportunities		Our housing management system allows us to analyse complaints to identify common themes and trends. We are able to capture satisfaction feedback from customers in relation to case management, following the closure of their complaint.	Development of methodologies for learning from complaints is in progress. Roll out of the reviewed complaints process to take place once complete. Outcome of October 2025. Further enhancements are due when the new CRM & Case Management system will be launched in 26/27.		
26	Landlords should ensure they treat residents reporting damp and mould with respect and empathy. The distress and inconvenience experienced by residents in this area is some of the most profound we have seen, and this needs to be reflected in the tone and approach of the complaint handling.		Our policies and procedures are developed in line with our values, ensuring all customers are treated with respect and empathy regardless of the reason for their contact. The damp and mould procedure makes it clear that customers should not be blamed where damp and mould is reported and that there is a thorough investigation of any concerns reported by our customers. It is also clear that our customers' circumstances are considered when agreeing solutions. Our complaints policy requires staff to keep customers regularly updated in relation to their complaint and staff training includes delivering a high standard of customer service when dealing with complaints.	Updated training to be rolled out on completion of the complaints policy and procedure review. Outcome of October 2025. Training was completed in 2024/25. We are about to deliver training in 26-27.		