



## **Putting things right after a Housing Ombudsman investigation, September 2025**

### **Learning from a complaint relating to damp and mould**

We always want to be open about the times we get things wrong so we can learn and improve.

This document details a complaint from January 2025 where the Housing Ombudsman found severe maladministration in our handling of damp and mould at a customer's home. The Housing Ombudsman also found that the way we handled our customer's complaint was not to the expected standards.

The customer was living in difficult conditions with two young children (both with asthma) and they reported issues from 2022 onwards.

We've looked at what went wrong, and we're sharing what we've learned and how we're improving.

### **What happened**

- Our customer moved into their home in 2021 through a mutual exchange
- From 2022, they reported damp and black mould
- Although we made some repairs and treatments, these didn't solve the root cause of the damp and mould
- Delays followed, caused by internal processes, missed appointments, and poor weather
- We didn't always take into account the customer's childcare needs when arranging visits
- Our customer raised a formal complaint in early 2024 and were understandably distressed about the delays and the impact on their family
- Despite escalating the complaint, we were too slow to act, and repairs remained incomplete months later

### **Where we went wrong**

- We didn't fix the root cause of the damp and mould in a timely manner
- When repairs were delayed, and we didn't always keep our customer informed
- We failed to properly consider the customer's health needs and the impact of the living conditions on their children
- We relied on our standard processes at the time without tailoring our approach

- Our approach at the time put too much responsibility on our customer to address the problem themselves with the use of a damp and mould kit
- We didn't follow our safeguarding policy when our customer told us about their distress
- We didn't fully resolve the issue through our complaints process, nor did we consider options like offering temporary accommodation

## **What we have learnt**

This case has shown us several important areas where we need to do better. These lessons will help shape how we deal with similar issues in future.

### **Fixing the root cause, not just the symptoms**

When repairs are needed, especially for damp and mould, it's not enough to apply a short-term fix. We need to find and resolve the underlying cause straight away.

Sometimes these cases are complex and can't be fully resolved on the first visit. When that happens, we need to stay on top of the issue, keep monitoring it, and make sure we're communicating clearly with our customers throughout.

We also need to reduce delays and need clearer repair timelines and back-up plans to help avoid delays.

### **Clear communication**

When customers are waiting for repairs, regular updates really matter. We need to explain clearly what we've found, what we plan to do, and when we're going to do it.

### **Keeping good records**

Good record keeping is essential. We need to log every inspection, repair, and conversation properly. This helps us manage the case effectively and ensures nothing is missed.

### **Understanding customer needs and risks**

We must take more care to understand how a customer's health or wellbeing might be affected by their living conditions.

In this case, we should have followed our safeguarding policy when the customer told us they were in severe distress. We also didn't fully consider the risks posed to the children and the customer's health.

### **Handling complaints thoroughly**

Our complaints process must do more than just respond to a concern. It needs to fully explore what went wrong, identify all the issues, and lead to the right resolution.

## **Moving forward and action already taken**

We're sorry that our customer had to go through this. No one should have to live in a home that makes them feel unwell or unheard.

We're committed to learning from this case and making sure no other customer has a similar experience.

We have already worked to change our approach to damp and mould and have ensured learnings from this case have featured in new ways of working:

- We've improved the way we deal with damp and mould to follow best practice
- We now use a central system to keep track of all damp and mould cases
- Surveyors keep better records, and we make sure customers know what to expect
- We contact customers three months after repairs to make sure everything is okay
- If a surveyor stops working for us, their work is picked up by a manager so there are no delays in dealing with repairs
- We now have a dedicated complaints team and a clear process to handle all complaints in the same way
- We've delivered training to all our colleagues about our culture, with a focus on making sure we are all accountable for delivering the best service for customers
- We have stopped issuing damp and Mould kits
- Our surveying team have been on HHSRS training
- We have improved how we record and share access arrangements for contractors so to better accommodate customer circumstances

## **Things we are still working on to make more improvements**

- We're introducing a new system to help us keep better track of damp and mould complaints
- We're improving our reporting for our colleagues to report and track problems, through online forms
- We are introducing a new CRM and case management system that will improve oversight and management of both damp and Mould and complaint cases
- We are increasing the number of specialist Damp and Mould surveyors