

# L&Q's response to the Regulator of Social Housing's letter on damp and mould

- 1. Please detail your approach to assessing the extent of damp and mould issues affecting your properties, including how you assess the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards**

In April 2020 L&Q introduced an initiative called the Healthy Homes programme. This sees us tackle the root cause of damp and mould in homes and identify any repairs needed to prevent damp and mould from returning. We work with Zap Carbon, a specialist damp and mould contractor, and provide a comprehensive response to these cases including the completion of a Healthy Homes Performance Certificate (HHPC) assessment during home visits. In the North West, we work with a range of specialist contractors, including QUEST Ltd, Trafford Damp Services Ltd, Mould Specialist UK Ltd and Envirovent Ltd.

During 2021/2022, we brought in an external consultant to survey a representative sample of 7,000 homes (10% of our overall housing stock). This included checking for any health and safety hazards (using the government's Housing Health and Safety Rating System, known as HHSRS), and assessing whether homes comply with the Decent Homes Standard (the standard which social homes are required to meet).

After this, we started a programme of rolling surveys covering 20% of our homes every year. Over 2022/2023, these will be carried out using a combination of external consultants and L&Q staff, but from 2023/2024 onwards we'll use a fully internal team of L&Q stock condition surveyors.

The HHSRS classifies hazards into two categories. If a hazard is an urgent and serious risk to someone's health and safety, this is called a "category one" hazard. These are immediately escalated to either our repairs or healthy homes team for a rapid response. "Category two" hazards are deemed less serious or less urgent and are reported and planned in for works.

- 2. In the context of the approach detailed in Q3, please provide details of your most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards in your homes, including the prevalence of category 1 and 2 damp and mould hazards**

Since we started our new stock condition surveys in May 2021, we've identified and processed 73 category one and 104 category two hazards relating to damp and mould. We monitor the repairs carried out by our contractor Zap Carbon after they visit the homes and use a combination of existing contractors and new contractors (through the Plentific platform) to carry out works. We are currently working on 3,959 Healthy Homes repairs covering 2,323 homes across our stock.

- 3. Given the findings of the assessment outlined in Q4, please outline the actions you are taking to remedy any issues and hazards, and ensure that your homes meet the Decent Homes Standard**

We have developed a 15-year investment plan in order to meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard, which includes £985 million set aside to cover works. This will ensure we continue to meet the standard. We have also developed an Artificial Intelligence model which allows us to use data to make predictions with 80% accuracy about whether a home is at risk of disrepair or damp and mould. We used this data to inform our 2023/2024 Major Works Investment programme.

As part of their home visits, Zap Carbon speak with residents about the installation and use of a Humidity and Temperature sensor. They fit these in the homes and use them to monitor humidity levels remotely. If these rise, the resident is notified and provided with more advice about reducing humidity. If the home is deemed to be at risk of mould returning, another visit is arranged. Zap Carbon have installed over 11,000 sensors since April 2020.

In the North West, to maintain the Decent Home Standard, we use stock condition data within our database to produce reports that predict likely decent homes failures. Where we uncover issues in particular blocks or structural issues that promote damp and mould, we continue to carry out mitigation work. These are carried out by specialist contractors, including QUEST Ltd, Trafford Damp Services Ltd, Mould Specialist UK Ltd and Envirovent Ltd. Results in the North West have been positive in our last round of follow ups in September/October 2022:

- No reoccurrence in 97% of cases
- No reoccurrence in 100% of our Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) fans

#### **4. Please tell us how you ensure that individual damp and mould cases are identified and dealt with promptly and effectively when raised by tenants and residents**

We have expanded our dedicated internal team which manages damp and mould from two to 10 colleagues since August 2021. This includes specialist surveyors. We have a clear process in place for addressing damp and mould reports from residents:

- When we receive the first report of damp and mould, we respond to the resident within five working days and carry out an HHPC assessment within 20 working days.
- During the HHPC assessment, Zap Carbon visit the home and carry out a “clean and shield”, treating the damp and mould, and making recommendations on follow up work when needed.
- Follow up jobs are then passed onto our contractors, and may include improving ventilation, insulation and windows, alongside making improvements to the roof of the building.
- During their visits, Zap Carbon provide verbal advice to residents on managing damp and mould, alongside an advice sheet which is signed by the resident. We also offer our translation service to Zap Carbon for cases where the resident does not have English as their first language.

In the North West, we have four area-based surveyors. Two managers are Certified Surveyors of Timber and Dampness in Buildings (CSTDB) accredited qualification. Operatives are formally trained in removal and treatment prior to redecoration. External training is also commissioned to train additional operatives in removal and treatment prior to redecoration, and another Manager and a Team Leader taking the CSTDB accredited qualification. In the North West, we have a clear process in place for addressing damp and mould reports from residents:

- All reports of damp and mould are inspected by our in-house surveyor for assessment
- A typical response would be for an inspection same day or within 48hrs
- We carry out in-house “mould wash treatments” and redecoration as well as provide advice and support as appropriate
- We commission specialist support for Category 1 and 2 cases.