

1. We want to do everything we reasonably can to make sure our residents stay safe, healthy and well in their homes. Damp and mould are issues which can have a serious impact on the health and well-being of our residents, and cause damage to homes.
2. This policy sets out our approach to dealing with damp and mould in our homes and communal areas. It covers the services we provided to customers who rent their home under a tenancy agreement and those who occupy under a licence. Different properties, often of different ages, need to be looked after differently by Guinness and by residents. For leaseholders, we will meet the responsibilities as set out in terms of the lease.

## The Guinness Policy

3. Our policy is that we will:
  - Provide dry, warm, healthy and safe homes for our residents which are free from any hazards
  - Comply with legislative, regulatory and contractual (including tenancy and lease) obligations
  - Ensure the fabric of our homes is protected from deterioration and damage resulting from damp
  - Treat residents reporting damp and mould with empathy and respect and will not prejudge the reason for any issue
  - Take responsibility for diagnosing and resolving damp and mould in a timely and effective way where they result from issues that require repair
  - Support residents in resolving damp and mould where they result from the use of the home, and provide our residents with appropriate, clear, sensitive, practical and accessible advice
  - Communicate with our residents clearly and regularly regarding any actions we plan to take and any actions our residents are advised to take
  - Ensure staff are trained to enable them to spot potential causes of damp, mould and condensation so they can advise residents, diagnose problems and provide solutions
  - When applying this policy, make reasonable adjustments for people who have a disability and will take into account the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.
4. Our staff and contractors will work together with our residents to deliver this policy.
5. The policy supports the delivery of the following strategic objectives:
  - To be a customer service organisation
  - To provide high quality and safe homes
  - To meet our legal and regulatory requirements.

## Causes

6. Mould is a type of fungus. It spreads through spores, which are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air around us all of the time and can quickly grow on surfaces where dampness persists or water has formed into a visible covering.
7. Dampness is an excess of moisture that can't escape from a structure, which can also go on to cause significant damage to the building such as collapsed ceilings and rotten timber elements such as windows and doors.
8. There are four main causes of dampness in homes in England. It is important to understand the difference between them because they each need different solutions:

- **Water leaks** from defective supply and waste pipework (especially in bathrooms and kitchens) can affect both external and internal walls and ceilings. The affected area looks and feels damp to the touch and stays damp regardless of the prevailing weather conditions. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair. Who is responsible for the repair depends on where and why the leak happens.
- **Rising damp** is caused by water rising from the ground into the home. Water gets through or around a defective damp proof course (DPC) or passes through the masonry that was built without a DPC. Rising damp will only affect basements and ground floor rooms it will be present all year round but can be more noticeable in winter. It is extremely uncommon but is generally the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires repair. This will usually be Guinness's responsibility.
- **Penetrating damp** appears because of a defect in the structure of the home, such as damaged brickwork, missing roof tiles, loose flashing or leaking rainwater goods. These defects allow water to pass from the outside to the floors, walls or ceilings. Penetrating damp is far more noticeable following a period of rainfall and will normally appear as a well-defined 'damp-patch' which looks and feels damp to the touch. It is the result of a problem or fault with the home, which requires a repair. Who is responsible for the repair depends on what the fault is and where it happens.
- **Condensation** is the most prevalent type of dampness and is caused by moisture in the air (water vapour) inside the dwelling coming into contact with a colder surface, such as a window or wall. The drop in temperature causes liquid water to form on the surface and then soak in. It is usually found in kitchens, bathrooms, the corners of rooms, on north facing walls and on or near windows – all places that either tend to have a lot of moisture in the air, or to be cold generally. It is also found in areas of low air circulation such as behind wardrobes and beds, especially when they are pushed up against external walls.

All homes in England can be affected by condensation because the climate is often cool and wet. Normal household activities also constantly release moisture into the air. Good practice in the home minimises and alleviates condensation, and in many cases will prevent it causing dampness and persistent mould. However on occasion the root cause can be a problem that requires a Guinness repair or an improvement to the home. In others, a different solution may be needed (for example, in cases of severe overcrowding).

## Further detail

### *Preventative action*

9. We will take action to identify homes that have, or may be at risk of developing, problems with damp and mould. We will use data on our households and homes to help us understand the risk profile in relation to damp and mould.
10. We will seek to mitigate any increased risks of damp and mould arising as a result our work to decarbonise our homes.
11. When a property becomes vacant, and prior to re-letting, we will seek to identify and remedy any issues which may cause damp. This may include ensuring doors and windows are serviceable and can effectively ventilate the property, ensuring extractor fans are working well, as well as applying mould treatments where necessary.

12. We will provide information on our website, and through other channels, to raise awareness about the causes of damp and mould. This will include details about how everyday activities in the home can generate condensation and what residents can do to help prevent damp through, for instance, ventilation, controlling the build up of moisture and adequate heating. Where there is mould growth, we will provide advice on how this could be treated.
13. Our staff and contractors will have the skills and knowledge to identify signs of damp and mould and discuss with residents how to manage the problem. Staff will be encouraged to look out for signs whenever they visit a resident's home.

#### *Dealing with damp and mould*

14. Residents are required to report any problems to us as soon as possible after noticing a problem. When we receive a report, an operative will attend the property to determine the cause and seek to resolve the immediate issue. In some cases, they may need to further diagnose the problem to determine whether it is due to a repair issue for which we are responsible. Sometimes finding out what's causing damp and mould isn't always straightforward and could be due to a combination of factors. Any repairs that are required to be carried out will be dealt with in accordance with our Responsive Repairs Policy.
15. Where damp is as a result of condensation, we will work with our residents to take appropriate measures to prevent the damp and mould occurring. This might include advice about how to control moisture levels or increase ventilation or heating, so that damp levels are kept low. Where we provide such advice, it is important that residents adhere to it and do not take actions that could accentuate any problems e.g. by turning off ventilation systems or sealing over air vents.
16. When a particularly severe or recurring damp or mould issue is identified we will undertake a comprehensive risk assessment which might result in a range of actions to support the resident depending on their circumstances, including providing and funding dehumidifiers, the installation of positive pressure, mechanical or passive ventilation systems, dry lining walls or applying mould resistant coverings, as appropriate, on a case by case basis.
17. We will keep residents informed of any property inspections, diagnosis of issues and the timetabling of works, where these are required. This includes explaining to them why work might be needed and what work might be done. If any changes to the programme of works are needed, we will keep them informed. Where work is not required, residents will be informed and we will explain the reason why no further work is needed and the steps they should take.
18. For more complex cases, and especially where more intrusive building work is required and/or there is a serious health risk to the resident or a member of their household, we will consider moving them to alternative accommodation as set out in our Decants Policy. We will consider the individual circumstances of the resident. We will ensure that appropriate checks are carried out at the property to ensure it is suitable for the resident to return to.
19. Our tenancy (and leasehold) agreements require customers to allow us (including appointed contractors) access to their home to carry out works at the agreed appointment time. If we are unable to gain access and the integrity of the property, its fabric and/or the safety of the customer or those in the vicinity of the property is compromised, we will take appropriate action. For example, this may include but is not limited to obtaining an injunction for access.

20. In line with our Compensation Policy, we will pay compensation as a result of our failure to deliver the service we have committed to. This includes where furniture or belongings have been damaged and/or distress and inconvenience has been caused. Each case will be considered on its own merits, taking into account the individual circumstances of the resident and their household.

#### *Supporting our residents*

21. We will give residents advice on how to prevent damp and what they should do to remove mould. However, we recognise that not every resident will be in a position to resolve damp and mould themselves. We will provide appropriate support in such cases in relation to the specific circumstances and the individual customer's needs.
22. We know that some residents cannot afford to heat their homes adequately due to their income levels. We will work with residents to ensure that they are receiving the income to which they are entitled.
23. Where homes are overcrowded humidity will tend to be higher and this increases the likelihood of condensation. We will work with the tenant and explore solutions which may include the tenant moving to a more suitable home if this is available and appropriate.

#### *Staff training*

24. We will ensure that our staff (whether in house or our contractors) will have the required skills to diagnose and remedy damp and mould.

#### *Responding to complaints and learning lessons*

25. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible without residents needing to resort to disrepair claims and legal action. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims so that we may resolve the dispute outside of court to help ensure issues are resolved quicker for customers.
26. We will learn lessons from damp and mould cases, update our technical approach and how we communicate with residents, in order to improve future responses.

#### **Period of review**

27. Our review programme is driven by service improvement initiatives, changes to legislation, regulation, evolving good practice or feedback from customers and other key stakeholders. We will review this policy every three years.

#### **Key legal and regulatory references**

- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (Section 11)
- Housing Act 2004
- Decent Homes Standard 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Home Standard, Regulator of Social Housing, 2015

- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims (England), 2021

**Related policies**

- Compensation Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Decants Policy
- Disrepair Policy
- Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Responsive Repairs Policy

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1.0	This is the first version of the policy	5 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	This is the first version of the policy
1.1	Review of the Decants Policy	Amendments made by Darren Collings, Head of Policy & Training, on 20 <sup>th</sup> September 2023	Amendment to paragraph 18 to refer to the Decants Policy, following its review.  "Lead Director" updated.  Removal of reference to "Maintenance of Empty Homes Policy" following its withdrawal.