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**REPORT TO: HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE ON 13  
FEBRUARY 2024**

**SUBJECT: DAMPNESS/CONDENSATION IN COUNCIL HOUSES**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND  
FINANCE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report advises the Committee on the measures that the service has adopted to take a more proactive approach to deal with issues of dampness and condensation within the Council's housing stock.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III G (3) of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the maintenance of the Council's housing stock.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Committee scrutinises and notes:**

- (i) the current range of damp control measures carried out, as highlighted in Section 4 of the report;**
- (ii) the damp and mould procedure that is now in place within the service, as highlighted in Section 5 of the report;**
- (iii) future damp control measures identified to deal with property types identified 'at risk', as highlighted in Section 6 of the report; and**
- (iv) notes that this Committee will receive a further progress update later in 2024 to summarise the number of properties in each housing area where damp treatment work has been identified or carried out.**

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 An initial report was submitted to Communities Committee on 18 August 2015 (paragraph 8 of the minute refers) advising Committee of proposals to carry out a pilot project on a number of different house types to arrive at a model specification for work that will render such properties 'condensation proof'.
- 3.2 Further progress update reports were submitted to Communities Committee on 21 June 2016 (paragraph 10 of the minute refers), and 22 August 2017 (paragraph 11 of the minute refers) advising of progress. However, the Committee has received no further update since 2017.
- 3.3 An increase in the volume of damp and mould complaints and number of properties identified 'at risk' has led to a review of damp and mould procedures within the service, as well as the introduction of a number of measures to treat and alleviate the issues in these and other similar property types.

### **4. DAMP CONTROL MEASURES CARRIED OUT TO DATE**

- 4.1 Following the initial pilot in 2016/17, a more proactive approach to deal with dampness and condensation within the housing stock was adopted by applying a standard specification of works to specific houses with condensation problems and applying measures on a programmed basis as part of routine void repairs or planned maintenance works.
- 4.2 The main types of house types where damp treatment works has been carried out to date, include:
- No-Fines Concrete (solid concrete walls)
  - Cruden (steel framed)
  - Weir Multicom (timber framed)
  - Traditional Stone (solid walled)
- 4.3 These house types represent the main 'non-traditional' construction types within Moray and make up 24% of the housing stock. They also relate to properties where the most considerable number of complaints concerning dampness and condensation arise. The remaining 76% of the housing stock are standard cavity walled construction. The vast majority of these having been cavity filled and having elements such as good condition windows, doors and heating systems making them easier to heat and reducing the levels of dampness and condensation.
- 4.4 The range of measures carried out to date has included.
- External Wall Insulation (EWI)
  - Internal Wall Insulation (IWI) – Strapping and lining.
  - Internal Wall Insulation (IWI) – Freestanding insulated panels
  - Internal Wall treatment (IWI)– Thermal lining products
  - Heat Recovery Ventilation Fans (HRV)
  - Pressurised Ventilation systems (PV)

#### External Wall Insulation

- 4.5 External Wall Insulation (EWI) has previously been applied to 'non-traditional' homes in the Buckie and Forres areas as part of the Home Energy Efficiency Project Scotland: Area Based Scheme (HEEPS: ABS). The Council had also previously carried out a number of installations to No-Fines Concrete housing in Lossiemouth and Swedish Timber houses in the Cullen.
- 4.6 The installation of EWI improves the thermal efficiency of properties by up to 8 Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) points which should in practice make the properties easier to heat, retain that heat longer and improve air quality. The insulation also means that the fabric of the property will be more liable to be at a warmer temperature leading to less likelihood of moisture condensing out on these surfaces and causing dampness.

#### Internal Wall Insulation – Strapping and Lining

- 4.7 Internal wall insulation (IWI) is an acknowledged way of improving the thermal insulation of properties with the intention of reducing condensation occurring. The installation normally involves the provision of a timber frame of varying thickness with insulation placed between the framing and then a new internal surface finish consisting of either normal or insulated plasterboard. The major drawback of this type of system is that it is quite disruptive to tenants.
- 4.8 Like EWI, strapping and lining improves the thermal efficiency of properties making them easier to heat, retain that heat longer and improve air quality. The insulation also means that the fabric of the property will be warmer leading to less likelihood of moisture condensing out on these surfaces and causing dampness.

#### Internal Wall Insulation – Freestanding insulated Panels

- 4.9 Two properties in the Forres area previously had a new type of freestanding insulated panel installed whilst void. The panels consisted of a rigid foam core with a Gyproc plasterboard finish bonded to the core to provide the internal decorative face. The panels were purpose made for the properties and involved a pre-survey by the manufacturer and delivery to site as a kit. Building Services installed the system, which came with all requisite parts to complete the installation, including finishing panels for all junctions and electrical extensions to allow sockets to be relocated to the new internal face.
- 4.10 Again, the effect of this type of internal wall insulation is like those noted in 4.8 and 4.9 above, however, this method is extremely costly compared to other measures and has not been pursued further.

#### Internal Wall Treatment

- 4.11 A number of different wall treatments have been applied to houses throughout Moray including products that purport to be condensation 'cures'. The relative success of these products depends on the extent of the installation.

#### Heat Recovery Ventilation Fans

- 4.12 Heat Recovery Ventilation Fans (HRV) were previously installed as part of the specification for a kitchen contracts. The main purpose of these fans is to save energy in the home; however, they are also proposed to reduce condensation.

#### Pressurised Ventilation systems

- 4.13 The installation of pressurised ventilation systems (PV) has been used as a method of reducing condensation for a number of years by the Housing Service. As at 31 January 2024, 549 properties have PV units fitted and in most cases the fans have been successful in reducing condensation and work by pressurising the air within the house and driving moist air out through window vents and other air gaps in the fabric of the building.
- 4.14 The main concern from tenants about this form of anti-condensation measure is the cost of running the fan element which operates continually. However, the cost of running the fan on the latest units is now equivalent to £70 annually (or £0.29p per day). Some tenants have also complained about increased draughts but in most cases, this was found to be a perception rather than based on any clear evidence.

#### Damp Monitoring Devices

- 4.15 A trial of AICO/HomeLink damp monitoring devices was fitted to thirty-three properties recently acquired at Pinegrove. These monitoring devices can be remotely accessed to provide data in relation to dampness in properties, and data is regularly monitored by the Housing Asset team to monitor any further remedial works that may be required.
- 4.16 In terms of a 'model' specification for each non-traditional house type these can be split into two distinct groups.

#### Cruden, No-Fines, Weir Multicom

- 4.17 The preferred specification to make houses under this category 'condensation proof' as far as practicable is as undernoted:

Gas Available	Heating – Gas 'A' rated boiler. Windows – Double glazed as a minimum with a U value of 1.2W/M2K. External Walls – Retro-fitted with external wall insulation to achieve U vale of 0.30W/M2K. Ventilation – Pressurised Ventilation System
No Gas Supply	Heating – Air Source Heat Pump Windows – Double glazed as a minimum with a U value of 1.2W/M2K. External Walls – Retro-fitted with external wall insulation to achieve U vale of 0.30W/M2K. Ventilation – Pressurised Ventilation System

#### Solid Stone Properties

- 4.18 The preferred specification to make houses covered under this category 'condensation proof' as far as practicable is as undernoted:

Gas Available	Heating – Gas ‘A’ rated boiler. Windows – Double glazed as a minimum with a U value of 1.2W/M2K. External Walls – Retro-fitted with internal wall insulation to achieve U vale of 0.30W/M2K. Ventilation – Pressurised Ventilation System
No Gas Supply	Heating – Air Source Heat Pump Windows – Double glazed as a minimum with a U value of 1.2W/M2K. External Walls – Retro-fitted with internal wall insulation to achieve U vale of 0.30W/M2K. Ventilation – Pressurised Ventilation System

- 4.19 The effectiveness of any measures carried out are also reliant on tenants becoming more aware of the causes of condensation, how to prevent it occurring and how to treat minor incidences of associated mould growth to prevent the spread to other areas. In many cases where complaints of condensation have been received, specialist Damp Surveyors have visited and found that the tenants are exacerbating problems by not heating or ventilating the property sufficiently to prevent condensation occurring.
- 4.20 To inform tenants on how condensation will be dealt with within their homes the Housing Service have developed a suite of information sheets on condensation issues. The service also provides details to tenants to deal with fuel poverty through links with local community-based groups such as REAP.

## **5 DAMP AND MOULD PROCEDURES**

- 5.1 A working group was set up in early 2023 to look at damp and mould issues within the housing stock, which was identified using repairs and complaints data, as well as known ‘at risk’ property types.
- 5.2 The data revealed that over 400 properties have reported damp issues in 2022 and 2023, 314 of which occurred in 2023. 371 independent surveys were requested and received in 2023, with remedial works carried out to over 250 of these properties to date, with a further 61 currently in the process of having works carried out.
- 5.3 Current response times and measures carried out to deal with reports of damp and mould were also reviewed, and a detailed procedure was implemented in April 2023 to deal with all cases in relation to damp and mould.
- 5.4 The procedure sets out specific duties and timescales that Officers must deal with damp reports, with higher priority given to the vulnerability of tenants and the severity of each case reported. The key procedural steps are highlighted below:
- Contact tenant /arrange inspection by Repairs Officer (3 days vulnerable or serious report or 7 days standard).

- If only minor works are required (e.g. relay insulation and make good damage), works are instructed immediately to be completed within a maximum of 20 days.
- If a specialist damp survey is required, Repairs Officer orders a specialist report (to be carried out within 14 days of inspection, or sooner if serious).
- Damp report then shared with Housing/Asset Management, within 3 days of receipt.
- Report reviewed/remedial work instructed by Housing Asset team (within 7 days of report received).
- Copy of report issued to tenant by Repairs Officer (within 7 days of report received).
- Contact made with tenant to discuss report/recommendations (within 7 days of report received).
- Remedial works ordered and completed (within 20 days of instruction, however, serious cases prioritised).
- Follow up with tenant by Housing Officer (within 5 days of the works completed).
- Concerns to be raised by tenant (within 20 days of works completed).
- Further contact with tenant to check that remedial works are a success (within 3 months of works completed).
- Data recorded on the Housing Management system for future review/analysis.

5.5 The aim of the procedure is to ensure a visit takes place within a requisite timescale, and if required an independent specialist damp survey is carried out, with a copy provided to the tenant and remedial works identified and then carried out. Relevant Officers have received training on damp and mould inspection and have also been provided with specialist equipment that includes thermal imaging cameras and moisture meters (protimeter) to assist initial investigation of property condition.

5.6 Once a specialist report is received, the recommendations are discussed and remedial action where appropriate is carried out in agreement with the tenant in a bid to alleviate the issues and provide tenants with support and guidance on how to prevent condensation and mould, which in a number of cases does require lifestyle changes.

5.7 Procedures are regularly reviewed, and the working group continues to meet to deal with issues that arise particularly during the winter months when damp reports and complaints are at a peak.

## **6 FUTURE MEASURES TO DEAL WITH PROPERTIES 'AT RISK'**

6.1 Following detailed analysis, a number of properties 'at risk' in specific locations have been identified for further planned improvement works. These include initially over 100 properties at Bezack Street, Pinegrove and Kingsmills, Elgin which will have a range of works carried out that includes EWI, IWI, cavity insulation replaced, PV systems fitted, and damp monitoring devices installed.

6.2 This Committee will be provided with further detailed updates as part of future Housing Investment reports on progress in relation to this programme.

## **7 SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**

This proposal relates to:

- (i) Priority 4 – A growing and diverse economy.
- (ii) Service Plan priorities 3 - Improving housing quality and 4 – Improving housing service quality.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

Maintenance and Improvement works are carried out to meet statutory requirements and in accordance with current relevant policies.

### **(c) Financial implications**

All works highlighted are funded from the Housing Investment Budget.

### **(d) Risk Implications**

Budget Managers are aware of responsibilities for managing budget allocations and approval for variance will be sought from Committee in line with the Financial Regulations. Failure to deal with issues of condensation and dampness may affect the Council's ability to maintain its stock at the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

### **(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

### **(f) Property**

The improvement and maintenance of the housing stock will ensure that it remains sustainable in the longer term both physically and environmentally.

### **(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

There are no equalities or socio-economic impacts implications in this report.

### **(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts**

The investment in the Council owned housing stock identified in this report will assist the Council achieve its climate change targets by utilising a range of energy saving measures that incorporate zero or low carbon into design, construction materials and systems that also supports the Council in achieving The Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH).

### **(i) Consultations**

This report has been prepared in close consultation with the Head of Housing and Property Services, Housing Asset Manager, Housing Services Manager, the Design and Construction Manager and Lissa Rowan (Committee Services Officer), who all agree with the recommendations of this report.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The damp and condensation process and procedures identified in this report will assist the Council to improve its homes as well as living conditions for a number of tenants in properties 'at risk', which inevitably will improve tenant satisfaction and reduce complaints. Ongoing investment in the Council's housing stock enables the Council to address these issues, improve the quality of housing stock available to tenants in Moray and enables the stock to be maintained to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH).**

Author of Report: Mike Rollo, Building Services Manager  
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