

12 March 2013		ITEM: 7
Health & Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
DAMP AND MOULD IN HOUSING STOCK		
Report of: Dr John Licorish, Deputy Director of Public Health		
Wards and communities affected: All wards		Key Decision: No decision
Accountable Head of Service: Dr John Licorish, Deputy Director of Public Health		
Accountable Director: Jo Olsson, Director of People Services		
This report is public		
Purpose of Report: To report on the progress of the joint public health and housing project group response to damp and mould in council dwellings		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the progress that has been made on the project to coordinate and deliver the council's response to the problem of damp and mould in council dwellings.

It describes the work that has been completed to date and further steps to be taken by the housing and public health project team working together with the community.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 The Health & Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to note the report.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1 Introduction

This paper follows a report on black mould that was tabled at the Health & Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3rd November 2011. Since then concerns have been raised with regard to damp and mould in council dwellings and the functioning of heat exchange systems. There have also been concerns about the levels of awareness of health professionals about the health effects of mould and ensuring that residents that may have been experiencing health problems due to mould related conditions have access to appropriate care.

A project group was set up to coordinate and lead on the council's response to the problems of damp and mould in council dwellings. This work started with a

pilot study within the Flowers Estate and surrounding Belhus ward in Ockendon. The aim of the project was to achieve a greater understanding of the causes of dampness and condensation in dwellings and to address all the issues including developing technical housing, housing management, public health and householder interventions.

Actions that have taken place as part of the project included:

- Ensuring damp and mould awareness is an integral part of the winter planning agenda for 2012/13
- Engagement with residents and community leaders
- Engagement with local GPs and raising the issue with NHS Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group
- Educating other community health providers
- A technical service visit to all properties to service heat recovery units
- A questionnaire to residents on health and well-being related to mould
- A campaign to raise awareness amongst tenants and private occupiers about the health effects of damp and mould
- Three drop-in events in South Ockendon attended by public health, housing and private housing staff to address concerns and provide information
- A capital programme to address the issue of damp and mould

2.2 Background

Damp and mould can have a profound effect on the health and well-being of residents by affecting indoor air quality. The major cause of ill-health in Thurrock residents due to poor indoor air quality is however smoking. The prevalence of adult smoking in Thurrock is 23.2 % which is higher than the national average and the smoking rate in Ockendon and Belhus wards is higher than the Thurrock average.

Mould is found both indoors and outdoors. It can enter homes through open doorways, windows, vents, heating and air conditioning systems. Mould can also be carried inside on clothing, shoes and bags, and by pets. As it is impossible to remove all mould spores the emphasis has to be on removing the moisture and conditions which will cause mould to grow.

Mould will grow in places with moisture, such as around leaks in roofs, windows, or pipes, or where there has been flooding. Mould grows well on a variety of products including paper products, cardboard, ceiling tiles, and wood products. Mould can also grow in dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation, drywall, carpet, fabric, and upholstery.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

3.1 Health Effects of Mould

Exposure to damp and mouldy environments may cause a variety of health effects, or none at all. Some people are more sensitive to mould than others, and some groups are especially vulnerable. Additional effort should be made to keep away from damp and mould, babies, children, and elderly people, those with existing skin problems, such as eczema, or respiratory conditions such as allergies or asthma, and individuals who have weaknesses in their immune system.

The most important effects are increased prevalence of respiratory illnesses, allergies and asthma as well as alteration of the immunological system.

Indoor exposure to damp and mould has been linked with upper respiratory tract symptoms, cough, and wheeze in otherwise healthy people, and with asthma symptoms in people with asthma. Recent studies have suggested a potential link of early mould exposure to development of asthma in some children, particularly among children who may be genetically susceptible to asthma development. There is sufficient evidence to show an association with asthma exacerbation.

Evidence suggests that people living in well-insulated and adequately ventilated accommodation are less likely to visit their doctor or be admitted to hospital due to respiratory conditions than those living in damp homes.

As the health effects of mould are largely mediated by allergic mechanisms it is not necessary to identify the type of mould in a property but arrange for its removal.

3.2 Update on Housing and Public Health pilot

The total number of properties where heat recovery units have been serviced now total 329 out of a possible 430. Early evaluation shows that where heat recovery units are utilised appropriately, they are an effective way of eradicating damp and mould. Housing is now looking at the potential of building in a heat recovery service at the same time as a gas service where applicable.

The damp and mould found on the Flowers Estate is caused by a particular construction type and the above pilot evaluated the effectiveness of one solution. In order to ensure that the Council is able to effectively address other potential causes of damp and mould a comprehensive survey has been commissioned on a range of different properties across Thurrock that currently have significant damp or mould issues. The outcome of this will be to highlight

the whole range of causes for damp and mould within Thurrock properties. This information will be used to inform the capital programme and immediately address properties that have a series damp and mould issue.

Thurrock Housing have budgeted £2 million over 5 years to be specifically spent on treating the causes of damp and mould. This money was originally part of the overall £68m, 5 year Capital Programme; however at the request of residents this has been given its own priority which will run alongside the new Thurrock Standard for homes.

Further to the technical surveys that have taken place. Thurrock Estate Officers have been visiting the pilot properties to carry out health questionnaires to gather up to date health and well-being data on residents. Housing intends to have a focus on this area as there have been very few returns from residents. We are finding that once the Heat Exchangers have been serviced residents are not engaging with a Health Survey.

Training has taken place for Surveyor and Estate Officers on Damp and Mould. The training was undertaken by HQN and over twenty officers attended the training. The training focussed on ensuring that officers were capable of effectively diagnosing damp and mould. All feedback has been very positive regarding this training.

Thurrock Council launched a grant of up to £1000 to accredited private landlords to help tackle damp and mould in their properties. This was launched at a local landlord forum in October 2012 in partnership with a heat recovery system provider. Currently no landlords have accepted this offer and we only have 5 active enquiries.

3.3 Future Deliverables

Moving forward Thurrock intends to highlight the importance of this issue and how it affects our tenants. We will be creating a Fact Sheet on damp and mould in partnership with colleagues from Housing and Public Health which will be provided to all residents at sign up. We will also be completing an advertising campaign, in conjunction with a key residents using some good news stories to highlight how Housing can help residents to effectively tackle damp and mould.

4. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- 4.1 Housing and indoor air-quality are key determinants of the health of the residents of Thurrock. Supporting this measure will improve health and well-being.

5. **CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

N/a

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 This report is relevant to the Community Strategy and the Health and Well-Being Strategy

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk

Provision has been made within the planned works for 2013/14 to address the works identified within the report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart- Principal Solicitor**
Telephone and email: **01375 652 040**
alison.stuart@bdtlegal.org.uk

This report is for noting and there are no legal implications.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

There are no diversity and equality implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

East of England Lifestyle Survey 2008
Thurrock JSNA
Centers for Disease Prevention and Control: CDC Mold
Health Protection Agency
WHO Guidelines for Indoor Air Quality: Dampness and Mould 2009
WHO Europe: Damp and Mold, Health Risks, Prevention and Mediation 2009

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Nil

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