

9 November 2021		ITEM: 7
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Damp and Mould in Council Housing Properties		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Susan Cardozo, Strategic Lead Assets, Repairs and Compliance		
Accountable Assistant Director: Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director for Housing		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report is being presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide an update following meeting held in June 2021.

This report provides further information on how Thurrock manage damp and mould within the housing stock it is supplementing the June 2021 report and the background information included in the June report has not been repeated here.

In this report data held from our responsive repairs contract from 2015 onwards has been reviewed to provide a comprehensive oversight to reported numbers of damp and mould over that period.

The report also provided a detailed explanation of the improvements being made to processes for managing cases of damp and mould, future plans and the planned capital investment which will assist in the reduction of damp and mould cases.

Key themes from the analysis are:

- Damp and mould is not a systematic issue affecting our entire stock
- A relatively small proportion of stock is affected
- The number of affected properties has been generally falling over the years
- The causes of damp are not recorded historically but changes have been introduced to the repair process to enable future reporting
- Improvements have been made to ensure sensitive communication with residents
- In most cases the problem is being dealt with effectively when reported, with a smaller number of cases leading to reoccurrences

- Changes to service delivery have been made which aim to further reduce the rate of re-occurrence

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are invited to comment on the Council's approach and performance in relation to the management of damp and mould within the housing portfolio.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 The housing service acknowledge that mould and damp is a persistent problem in a percentage the housing stock. However, the numbers demonstrate that on balance this is not a systemic issue, nor is it caused by any specific building defects.
- 2.2 This report is seeking to further inform members on the specifics within the Thurrock council housing stock and what measures the service are currently taking, and plan to take in the future, to remediate this and to further support our residents.
- 2.3 The housing service are entirely committed to the management and investment required to tackle and minimise cases of damp and mould within our residents homes. However, it is recognised that it is not possible to fully eradicate the presence of damp and mould due to the multitude of factors that cause this. The service seeks to develop and deliver a proportionate approach to the issue.

3. Identifying the causes and remediation of damp and mould

- 3.1 Damp and mould in social housing is an issue across the UK. It is widely recognised as one of the most challenging aspects for landlords and residents to prevent and manage. It is for this reason that the Housing Ombudsman is currently undertaking a 'thematic investigation' on the subject with the aim of identifying recommendations to assist social landlords with the management of the issue.
- 3.2 Identifying the causes of damp and or mould is relatively straight forward because, as identified in the June 2021 report to this committee, each of the causes have common visual characteristics which will identify the underlying cause. This combined with the use of surveying technology and the surveyor's knowledge in building pathology, means that the Council is able to quickly identify causes of specific damp and mould in most instances.
- 3.3 Officers of the Council's in-house technical team have the qualification and the experience in building surveying and this allows them to work with our partnering contractors to ensure that everyone is up to date with applicable technical literature and guidance notes in regard to the subject matter of this report. This is combined with the skills and resources from our contractors to

ensure that we develop and deliver the best advice, repairs and home improvements for our residents

- 3.4 It is currently not possible to identify the underlying causes of damp and mould for individual properties from the responsive repair data due to the way in which the data is captured. This is because the level of detailed information is not currently recorded as part of a works order.
- 3.5 We are currently working with our partnering repairs contractors to enhance their damp and mould data provision to the Council to include a greater level of information. This will include the identification of the cause of damp and mould and the room locations. This will enable us to better understand damp and mould occurrences on an individual property basis through data analysis and make the most appropriate interventions where required through better business intelligence. This new method of data capture has taken effect from 1 October 2021.
- 3.6 A number of other improvements have been made in recent months. In addition to improved recording and reporting with our responsive repairs contractors, we are also making improvements to the integrated working practices with our in-house technical team. This will assist in identifying early interventions so better first time fix rates for damp and mould cases can be achieved providing a better experience for residents.
- 3.7 Since reporting in June 2021 the time frames for attendance, when a report of damp and mould is received from a resident, have been reduced. Our responsive repairs contractor will now attend on the initial inspection within 5 working days with required works completed within a 15 working day time frame. This is to ensure that the length of time a resident is living with damp and or mould within their property is reduced.
- 3.8 All Thurrock's housing repair contractors have been requested to check for and report any issues with damp and mould whenever they visit a property for whatever reason. This may include asking the residents if they are experiencing any problems. This is then reported back to Thurrock to ensure that these properties are surveyed and the necessary remedial works undertaken. This additional intelligence is being undertaken with the aim of capturing any properties that have not previously reported instances with damp and mould.
- 3.9 Reporting of any repairs or damp and mould issues is also part of the tenancy audits. A tenancy audit involves a home visit by a Tenancy Management Officer, during the visit the officer will also check the condition of the property including any issues with damp and mould. Any incidences are then reported to the repairs service, surveyed and remedial works undertaken.
- 3.10 The most challenging aspect of managing and preventing damp and mould in the housing stock is due to the most common cause which is condensation. Thurrock Council are not unique in identifying condensation as the predominant cause of mould in their housing stock. There are a number of

key publications on this subject including the World Health Organisation which identify measures in controlling environments in the home to prevent the formation of condensation and the associated mould that can grow if left unmanaged. ¹

- 3.11 There has been some misconception that social landlords seek to avoid accountability where condensation related mould is identified. The Council is fully aware that condensation related mould is not solely caused by resident's behaviour and in most cases where condensation related mould has been identified there are other factors. These other factors include: building age, age and condition of building elements, build type and location, fuel poverty and household makeup. However, the advice that both the Council and partners give to residents is factually based and is delivered in a manner aimed to inform and support our residents because addressing damp and mould in the home has to be a joint effort between the Council and the resident. Ensuring the resident is sufficiently informed in relation to how to manage the environment in their home and maintaining this alongside general household practices is the only way of preventing condensation related mould in the first instance.
- 3.12 In June 2021 members of this committee raised the matter of how advice was delivered to residents. We are seeking to assure members that the messages and advice that we give to residents is not given in a manner that is seeking to appoint accountability, but in a supportive manner that will help them in preventing condensation related mould where applicable. Consideration is given to the cost of heating a home. It is recognised that a significant number of residents experience fuel poverty and resident liaison officers are now trained in fuel poverty assessments and have been talking to residents about how to manage their energy bills.
- 3.13 The Housing department is always looking to ensure that resources are used effectively to benefit as many residents as possible in its programme delivery. Members will be aware of the significant market factors that are currently affecting the construction industry and this is adding to the challenges of programme delivery. Where possible we are seeking support from different external funding grants for scheme delivery and we are hopeful to obtaining some significant funding through ECO and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This will enable the further the expansion of improvement measures across the assets.
- 3.14 The Council will continue to undertake any necessary repairs when damp and mould is found to be caused by building fabric failure and this will continue to be done at the earliest opportunity. We actively encourage residents to report any case of mould that they find in their home to allow an early assessment and early intervention. This ensures we are able to undertake any necessary works at an early stage alongside the provision of specific advice to our residents.

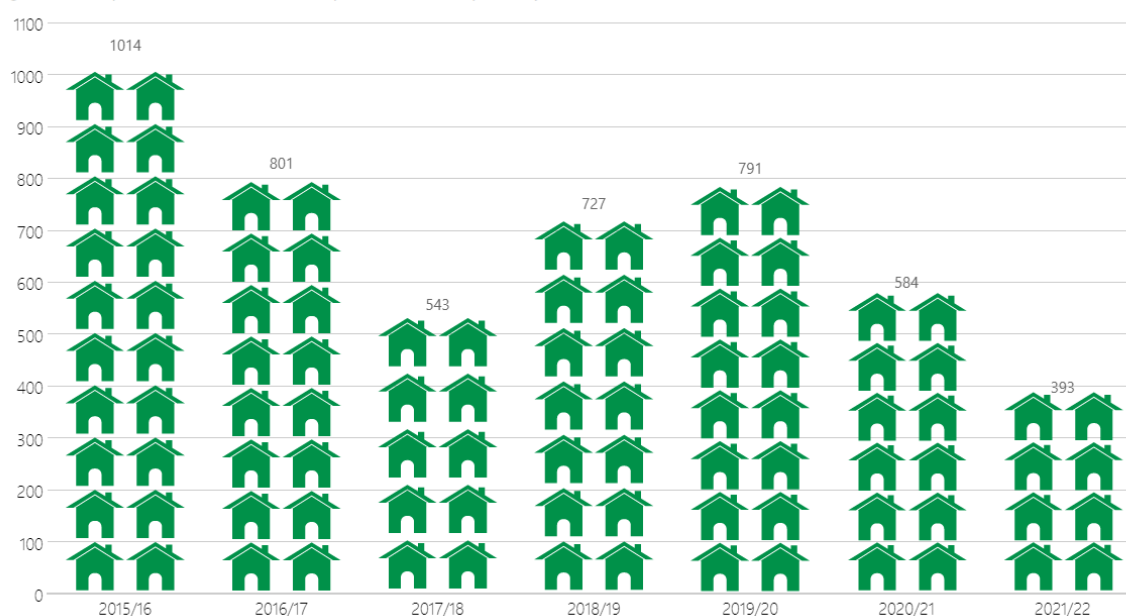
¹ The WHO Guide for Indoor Air Quality: World Health Organisation 2009

4. Reported cases of damp and mould

4.1 This section of the report provides an analysis of damp and mould repairs data run directly from our housing management system to give an overview of reported cases of damp and mould within the housing stock since the 2015-2016 financial year to early September 2021.

4.2 Figure 1 visualises the number of unique addresses with damp and mould repairs completed by year with each unique address counted once each year irrespective of the number of works orders completed. This provides a true reflection of the number of properties affected by damp and mould within each year.

Figure 1: Unique Addresses With Damp and Mould Repairs by Year



**2021/22 represents the year to date position as of September 2021*

4.3 The number of properties affected by damp and mould each year has reduced since 2015/16. In 2020/21 584 individual properties were affected by damp and mould which represents a 42.4% reduction in comparison with 2015/16 and a 26.2% reduction in comparison with 2019/20. 584 properties equates to around 5.9% of current stock levels and demonstrates that approximately 94.1% of the current housing stock did not report damp and mould in 2020/21.

4.4 Figure 2 visualises the percentage of the current housing stock with zero or one occurrence of damp and mould since the beginning of the 2015/16 financial year to date. This provides a true reflection of the proportion of the housing stock which have not reported multiple occurrences of damp and mould since April 2015.

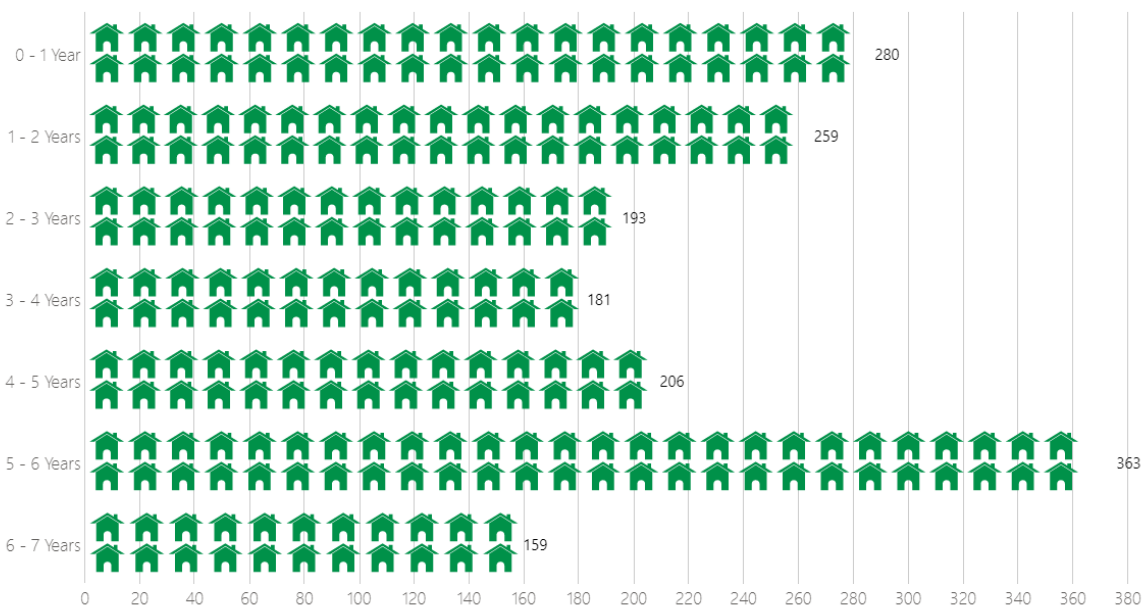
Figure 2: % of Current Stock With 0 or 1 Occurrence(s) of Damp and Mould Since 2015/16 (88.9%)



4.5 Over a period of more than 6 years, 88.9% (almost 9 in 10) of the current housing stock has not had more than 1 occurrence of damp and mould. Of this cohort of properties, 7,113 (72.2% of stock) have not reported damp and mould at all and 1,641 (16.7% of stock) have only reported damp and mould once. This demonstrates that the vast majority of the current housing stock does not have ongoing or systemic issues with damp and mould which is clearly evidenced by the number of occurrences.

4.6 Figure 3 visualises the number of the properties which have reported one occurrence of damp and mould broken down by the time which has elapsed since the last damp and mould repair. This demonstrates the effective management of damp and mould where properties have reported damp and mould once during the reporting period and have not needed to report subsequent repairs.

Figure 3: Properties With 1 Occurrence of Damp and Mould by Years Since Last Repair

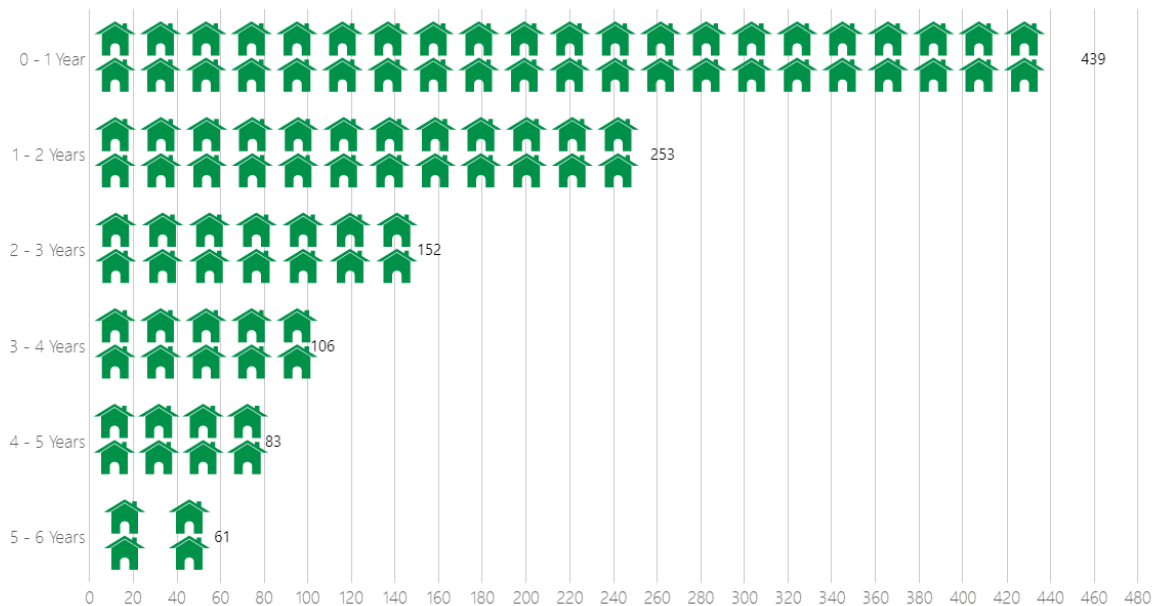


*Year bands shown in figure 3 straddle financial years and as a result are not directly comparable to the numbers in figure 1

4.7 Of the 1,641 properties that have reported damp and mould once, 1361 (82.9%) had their last damp and mould repair completed more than one year ago, which suggests that the works undertaken has resolved the issue and demonstrates effective management of damp and mould. 280 (17.1%) properties have reported damp and mould within the last year; these properties have not previously reported damp and mould during the reporting period, which demonstrates these properties have not previously experienced issues with damp and mould.

4.8 Figure 4 visualises the number of the properties that have reported two or more occurrences of damp and mould broken down by the time that has elapsed since the last damp and mould repair. This provides an indication of the number of properties that have had multiple occurrences of damp and mould since April 2015 and could have ongoing issues. Conversely, this also demonstrates the proportion of properties that have had multiple occurrences of damp and mould where the last repair was completed more than a year ago suggesting the issue has been effectively remedied through repairs.

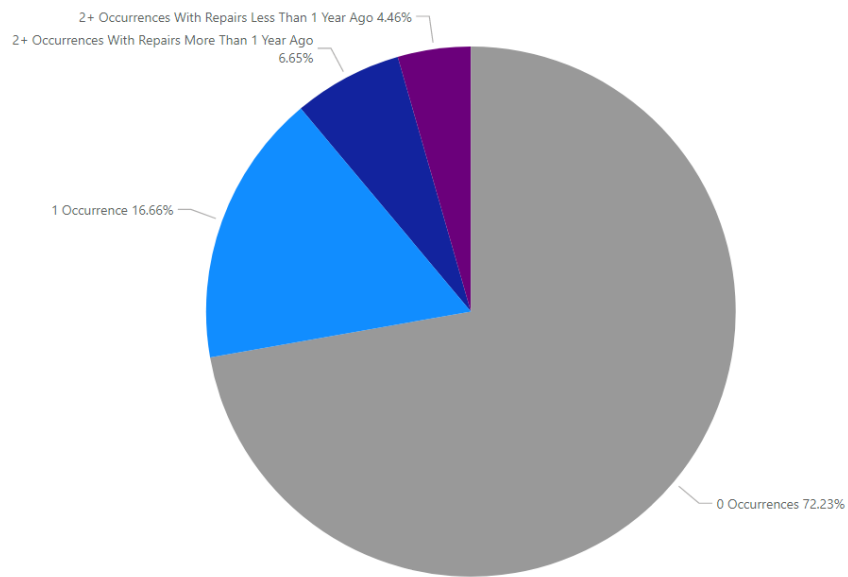
Figure 4: Properties With 2 or More Occurrences of Damp and Mould by Years Since Last Repair



**Year bands shown in figure 4 straddle financial years and as a result are not directly comparable to the numbers in figure 1*

4.9 Overall 1,094 properties (11.1% of the current housing stock) have reported more than one occurrence of damp and mould during the period of more than six years since April 2015. Of these properties, 655 (6.65% of the current housing stock) had their last damp and mould repair completed more than a year ago, which suggests the issue has been effectively resolved and the resident has not needed to report the issue subsequently. The remaining 439 (4.46% of the current housing stock) properties have reported multiple occurrences of damp and mould and have had a damp and mould repair completed in the last year, suggesting a potentially ongoing issue with damp and mould. However, as seen in preceding year bands, it is likely that a proportion of the repairs for this cohort of properties which have been completed in the last year have resolved the issue. These cohorts are shown visually in figure 5 as a proportion of the housing stock as a whole and demonstrates that there are not systemic issues with damp and mould throughout the Council's housing stock.

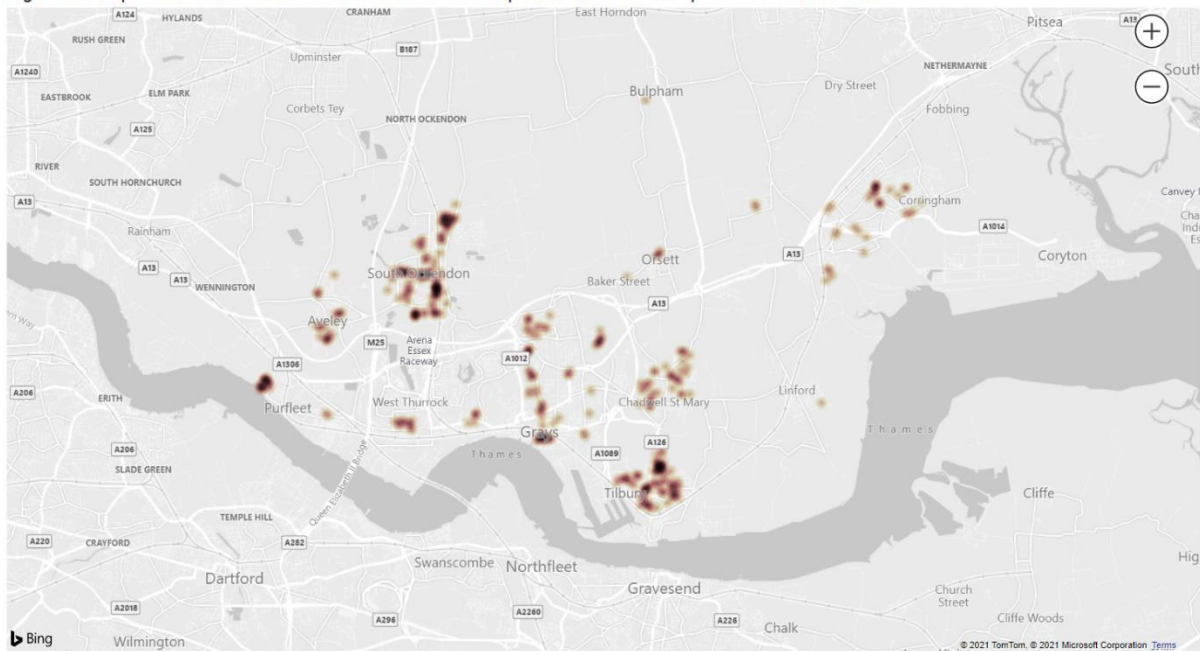
Figure 5: Proportion of Stock by Number of Occurrences of Damp and Mould Since April 2015 and Time Since Last Repair



Cohort ● 0 Occurrences ● 1 Occurrence ● 2+ Occurrences With Repairs More Than 1 Year Ago ● 2+ Occurrences With Repairs Less Than 1 Year Ago

4.10 The following graphic demonstrates the geographic location of the 439 properties (4.46% of stock) with two or more occurrences of damp and mould and repairs in the last year in the form of a heat map. This demonstrates that these properties are spread throughout the borough with the more significant clusters located in South Ockendon, Purfleet, Grays and Tilbury.

Figure 6: Properties With 2 or More Occurrences of Damp and Mould With Repairs In The Last Year



5. Reducing Damp and Mould through Planned Investment

- 5.1 The report in June 2021 identified the significant capital investment that the Council has delivered in recent years to improve the performance and energy efficiency of the buildings. These planned interventions included replacement heating: window and door replacements, roof renewals, improved insulation, replacement of rainwater goods as well as specific remediation of structural defects that have caused damp problems.
- 5.2 In 2015/16, the programme outlined plans to address single glazing. Over recent years this programme has successfully completed the replacement of all the remaining single glazed windows and this has seen significant improvements to the thermal efficiency of homes across the borough and supports residents in the control of the environment within their homes with regards to managing condensation.
- 5.3 Since 2015, under the Transforming Homes programme, all property surveys for internal improvements have included investigation for damp and mould occurrences. Any problems found have been subsequently addressed alongside the improvement works undertaken.
- 5.4 The remediation works subsequently undertaken range from significant structural works such as tanking, external wall insulation, brickwork and render refurbishment and the overhaul of drainage systems, through to localised mould treatments depending on the causes identified.
- 5.5 Figure 7 below shows the percentage of properties that had internal improvements through the Transforming Homes Programme since 2015/16 that also required some level of damp and mould remediation.

Figure 7: % of Transforming Homes Completions Which Required Damp and Mould Works Since 2015/16 (11.8%)



- 5.6 The housing capital programme continues to invest in improvements to the housing stock that will ultimately have a positive impact on their thermal performance and thus reduce the occurrence of problems with damp and mould.
- 5.7 The Transforming Homes programme has recently commenced a new five year programme that will continue to deliver improvements to both internal and external aspects of the properties.
- 5.8 A number of other significant projects are underway including the improvements to the tower blocks in Grays. The works to these blocks includes removal of the existing wall covering and installation of a modernised external wall insulation system, refurbishment of roof surface areas and renewal of windows, all of which will enhance heat retention and thermal

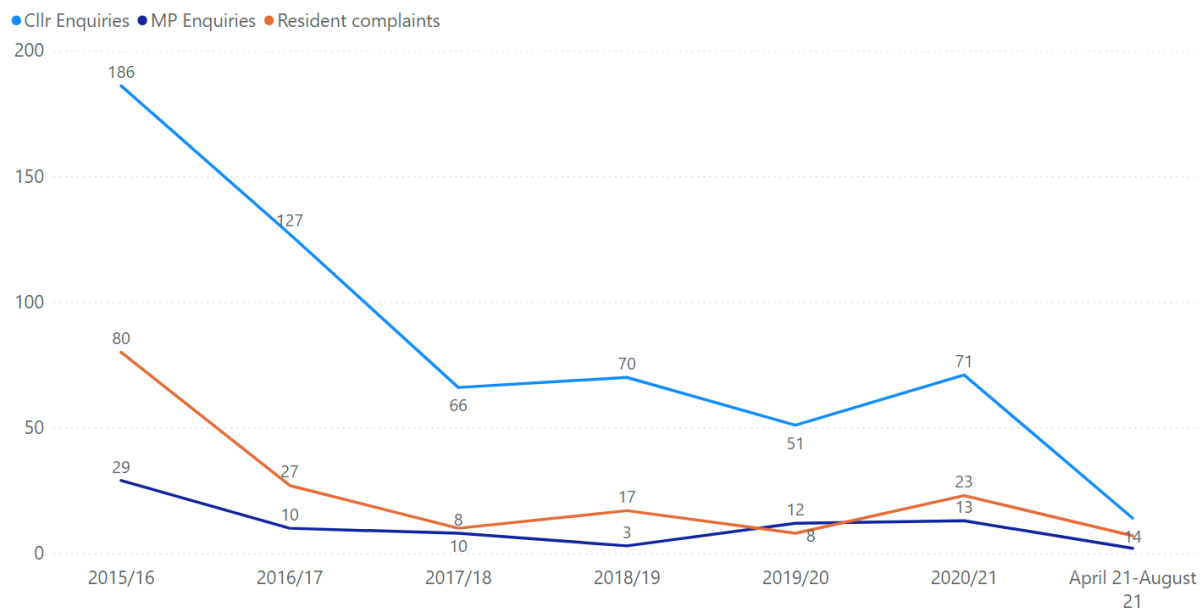
effectiveness of the structures and for the 348 individual households residing there.

- 5.9 The project to carry out significant improvement works to a number of non-traditional construction properties in our housing stock has begun to mobilise in September. The programme consists of 76 properties that will benefit from extensive internal and external refurbishment. The works include removal of the existing cladding and encapsulation with an external wall insulation system or insulated cavity brickwork. This will increase the surface temperature of the external walls to alleviate cold bridging and greatly reduce the risk of condensation occurring on the internal surfaces within these properties.
- 5.10 We are currently in the process of procuring a contractor to deliver the first ground source heat pump system to three high rise blocks in Chadwell St Mary. This type of system makes use of the energy stored in the ground and is free from carbon emissions. It will be a more cost effective and energy efficient way for residents to heat their homes. It will deliver heating and hot water in the same way as a conventional heating system via radiators and hot water tanks which are controlled using a simple time clock and central thermostat and will bring significant savings to the cost of heating these homes.

6. Resident and Member Enquiries

- 6.1 In order to understand the volumes of concerns raised by residents relating to issues with damp and mould, the total numbers of all MP, councillor enquiries and resident complaints since April 2015/16 have been reviewed.
- 6.2 It should be noted that the number of enquiries below are not in addition to the overall reported figures, all these cases are within the recorded data and have been completed with our responsive repairs contractor.
- 6.3 We also ask members to note that the figures from 2020/2021 have included all the complaints and enquiries that were received as a result of the press enquiries, Facebook posts seen and referred by councillors along with national news coverage which was seen earlier this year which indicates why there is an increase from the previous year.
- 6.4 Figure 6 below shows the number of complaints received from the different cohorts.

Figure 7: Cllr Enquiries, MP Enquiries and Resident complaints by Year



7. Improved resident communications

- 7.1 We are working with our responsive repairs contractor to improve the way we engage with our residents when they make contact to report damp and mould. We have updated all staff training for call handlers to ensure that they understand what the various causes of damp and mould are and how that impacts on people's lives. We have also updated the call script information to ensure we capture what is relevant without our residents feeling as though we are blaming them and assuming the damp and mould is always caused by condensation.
- 7.2 During and after any works are completed our resident liaison officers (RLO) have been trained by the NEA (National Fuel Poverty Charity) so as well as advising on how to best manage the home environment, they are able to help residents to understand how to manage their financial resources and their heating systems.
- 7.3 Where necessary the RLO can help residents claim fuel poverty grants and liaise with our financial inclusion officers to ensure they are accessing all the financial support they are entitled to.
- 7.4 The information on the Council's website about damp and mould has been fully reviewed and updated to provide our residents with as much detailed information as possible. It also gives advice on what to expect from us when they report damp and mould, alongside tips and videos to help them maintain their homes.
- 7.5 A new more informative leaflet has been developed to help residents understand damp and mould and give advice on how to report any repairs to us the leaflet will be given at the start of all new tenancies and at any attended repairs relating to damp and mould.

8. Future planning

- 8.1 The Council is currently in the process of procuring a survey of the overall condition of the housing stock to supplement the data which was captured in the previous 2017 survey.
- 8.2 This stock condition survey will have a specific focus on the identification on any mould that is witnessed and any property that has reported damp and mould on more than three occasions within the last 18 months is to be included. The stock condition survey is purposely being undertaken across the winter months as this is when reported damp and mould cases are more prevalent the findings of these surveys will be fundamental in future asset investment planning.

9. Reasons for Recommendation

- 9.1 This report is being presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide an update on the management of reported damp and mould cases within the Council's housing portfolio.
- 9.2 The Committee is invited to comment on the Council's approach and performance.

10. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 10.1 Housing carry out customer satisfaction surveys on individual repairs; and hold a bi-annual STAR survey. The performance data for these are reported to Housing Overview and Scrutiny.
- 10.2 The Resident Excellence Panel have regularly review the detailed performance on our repairs and maintenance contractor through participation in monthly contract governance.

11. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

The ongoing maintenance and improvement of the Council's housing assets supports the Council's key priorities through the provision of quality housing and estates people are proud to live on.

12. Implications

12.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan makes provision for the ongoing investment in the existing housing stock. These works will be financed from the funding which has been set to facilitate ongoing maintenance and improvements.

12.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Corporate Governance Lawyer

The Council's obligations as landlord to repair and maintain Council properties are set out in the tenancy agreement. In addition section 11 of the Landlord Tenant Act 1985 sets out statutory obligations to ensure that the structure of homes are repaired and the repairs are carried out within a reasonable time. Given this is an update report and the nature of the recommendation to the Committee, there are no legal implications directly arising from the recommendation.

12.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

A full community equality impact assessment has been undertaken of the implementation of the Housing delivery of the investment programmes.

Many residents are experiencing high levels of fuel poverty. Fuel poverty has many negative impacts on physical and mental health. Fuel poverty creates a harsh choice for our residents to choose between a warm home or food. The provision of tailored advice and the introduction of further energy efficiency measures and heating systems are designed to address this financial exclusion.

12.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, Impact on Looked After Children

None

13. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Housing Overview and Scrutiny June 2021 report 'Damp and Mould in Council Properties'

14. Appendices to the report

None

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