



Tackling damp and mould

the here and now



A proactive and preventative approach

Investing in our existing homes is the cornerstone of our new corporate plan which will take us to 2030.

We know we have the highest proportion of older homes compared to other large providers, whilst we operate in some of the most diverse, urban, deprived and challenging neighbourhoods in the country. However, we have a clear focus on providing warm, safe and affordable homes, whilst prioritising homes which are least energy efficient, and tenants who are in fuel poverty.

That is why we are seeking to substantially increase our investment in our homes to over £300m in the five years to 2030, following a £134m investment in the past five years. This £300m commitment is by far the largest share of our future investment spend.

Additionally, we will also be targeting around 6,000 of our homes which are rated EPC band D, with all properties moving to EPC band C by 2030. This will play a key role in delivering our highest ever programme of new components and upgrades. We know these properties have a higher propensity for damp and mould. Around 75% of the 6,000 homes were built pre-war, and around 4,500 are of solid wall construction.

Whilst we aim to tackle some of the fundamentals, as well as ensure that the fabric of the building is protected from deterioration due to damp and mould over our corporate plan period, we are acutely aware of the current challenges, especially given the tragic death in 2022 of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale, who died because of prolonged exposure to mould in a social home.

Dealing with the here and now

Key numbers



Over the winter months we get on average **600** cases a month.



Our average turnaround time is **13** days for initial treatment and diagnosis



Number of sensors currently in homes **c140**



17 colleagues dedicated to damp and mould issues

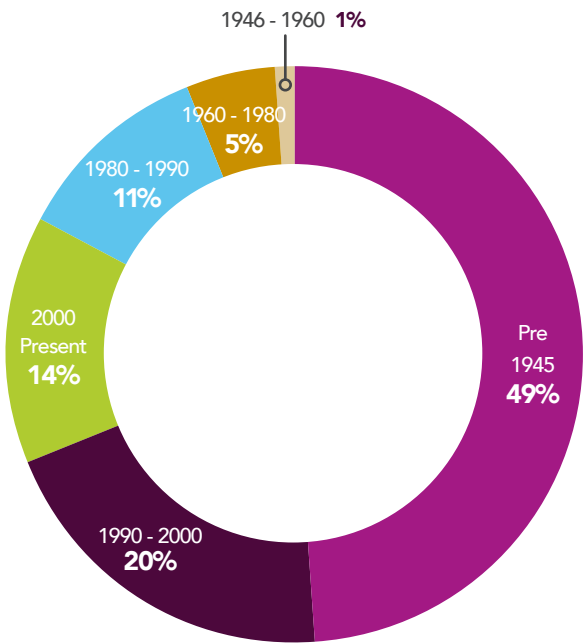
Knowing our homes



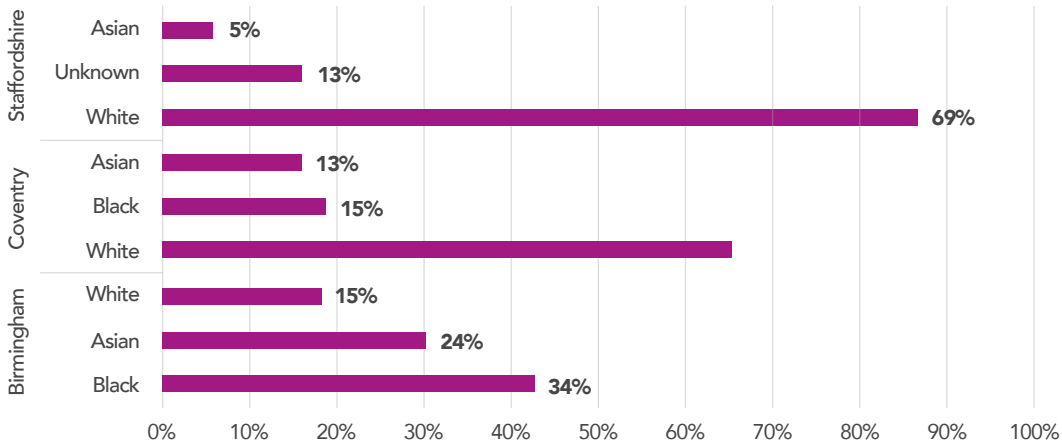
- Using HomeChecker when inspecting our homes during every officer visit, regardless of reason for attendance, with over 90,000 forms submitted.
- Stock condition surveys on 100% on current inspection regime
- All properties have a lodged EPC, with the current exception of only 4 homes.
- We have a proactive approach on silent tenants, the aim is to visit each home within 18 months.

Applying our approach in the context of 'Knowing our tenants', understanding the demographics, and protected characteristics:

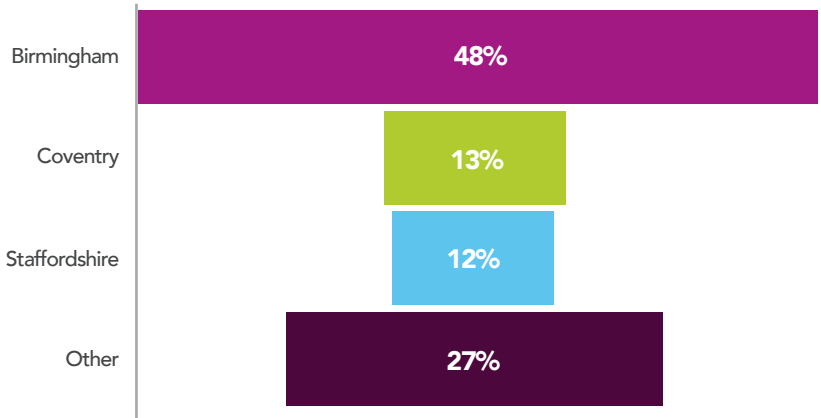
Reported D&M cases by building age



Reported D&M cases by top 3 ethnicities in our top 3 areas



Damp and mould cases (12 months)



Our approach

Our long-term approach includes:

- Engaging with tenants through our scrutiny work
- Becoming one of the first providers to establish a specialist team to deal with damp and mould
- Proactively using data and preventive measures i.e. through the use of sensors in homes and the clustering of properties
- Our Property Services team work closely with housing management teams around tackling tenancy related issues i.e. hoarding, decants and occupancy levels
- Strengthening confidence in contractors through the use of specialist providers and our new tier one partners; and;
- External assurance is provided on the effectiveness of our overall approach i.e. through Savills to help correctly diagnose and triage cases.





Engaging Tenants

Consistently engaging our tenants is a vital and constant feature of our proactive work around dealing with damp and mould issues.

- **August 2023** – A key element of this work came in August 2023, when our tenant engagement approach was presented to our Operations Committee which outlined our governance, communications and scrutiny process.
- **September 2023** – Following the August session, one month later a detailed scrutiny report was issued, reflecting tenant feedback on every step of the process. This included the “It’s Not Lifestyle” report, which provides a comprehensive breakdown of tenant feedback on damp and mould.
- **November 2023** – As we entered the mid-autumn period, the third phase saw the sharing of a focus group action plan with our tenants. This outlined the agreed actions and demonstrating our commitment to continuous improvement based on tenant input.

Alongside this timeline, an Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken on the assessment of our damp and mould policy, ensuring fair treatment for all tenants.

A key feature of our tenant engagement approach has been the collaboration between our Repairs and Maintenance and Customer Engagement teams who work closely to bring transparency and governance to our approach.

This includes through our “My Impact” group updates and tenant focus groups, where we share progress on action plans and improvements directly from tenant feedback. Regular Operations Committee updates and focus group sessions ensure that the tenant voice directly shapes our actions and policy evolution.

A dedicated, specialist team

We are proud to have formed a dedicated special repairs team of 17 professionals which focuses solely on damp and mould issues, ensuring the appropriate level of attention and resources are utilised to tackle damp and mould cases.

This dedicated team includes the following roles:

- Frontline, specialist operatives
- Technical surveyors
- Administrative support
- Customer experience / liaison officers, and;

Additionally, we use specialist teams from within our subcontractors who focus solely on specialist repairs.



Training, development and planning

We prioritise the continuous development of all staff involved in managing damp and mould to ensure they're equipped with the skills and knowledge required. Our commitment to training involves a blend of mandatory e-learning, hands-on sessions, and specialist courses to keep our team at the forefront of industry standards.

- **Core Training and E-Learning Modules:** We recently introduced a mandatory e-learning module for all relevant staff, covering essential knowledge in damp and mould management. This online training ensures that every team member understands the fundamentals of damp and mould identification, assessment, and management.
- **Specialised Courses and Certifications:** For those managing damp and mould issues daily, we offer advanced training through a combination of internal and external courses. This includes:
 - **HQN Non-Technical Course:** 143 colleagues have completed this one-day course focused on the basics of condensation, damp, and mould.
 - **HQN Technical Course:** 58 colleagues attended this technical session covering causes, cures, and legal aspects of damp and mould.
 - **Introduction to HHSRS:** 21 colleagues completed this one-day course on housing health and safety standards.
 - **CIEH Accredited Course on HHSRS:** 8 colleagues gained deeper expertise in housing standards through this accredited programme.
- **Expert-Led Training with Bailey Garner:** We collaborated with consultancy specialist Bailey Garner as part of our third party assurance agenda, where 29 staff members participated in a focused technical session.
- **Damp and Mould Toolkit:** In addition to structured training, we provide a comprehensive Damp and Mould Toolkit for our team, accessible at all times to offer guidance on effectively managing cases. This toolkit, combined with ongoing professional development, enables our staff to maintain consistently high standards in service delivery.
- **Upskilling and Talent Development:** To build long-term capability, we are upskilling surveyors within the Specialist Repairs Team to handle both damp and mould and disrepair surveys. Additionally, we are planning to recruit trainee surveyors, including developing internal talent to create a skilled workforce for the future.
- **Seasonal Resource Planning:** Our planning adapts to the seasonal demands of damp and mould management. In preparation for the busy winter period, we allocate resources and ensure that our teams are equipped to handle the increased workload utilising the resource pools of our contractors if required. During the summer months, our teams focus on post-inspections of damp and mould works already carried out to ensure we have treated the root causes.

Data and proactive measures

There is a sustained effort on ensuring data is captured and recorded properly on all damp and mould cases. This data drives our response and approach.

The key features are as follows:

- We carry out detailed assessments on repeat damp and mould cases, these are then used to produce focused action plans.
- This change is supported by our introduction of sensors within our higher risk / repeat case properties. This provides additional data to support the remedial actions and ensure the root cause is addressed.
- In addition, a proactive inspection regime has been introduced in Q3 24/25. This focuses on concentrations of damp and mould cases by geography (clusters) and where sensor data is highlighting a potential issue.

Assurance and reporting

An extensive Savills-led audit, alongside an internal BDO audit, recognised our sector leading practices and a pro-active approach to damp and mould. Recommendations raised have been fully implemented, but where appropriate, tweaked in the context of Awaab's law preparedness.

Our assurance approach is underpinned by a strict policy and a zero-tolerance approach towards damp and mould issues, and supported by a comprehensive assurance framework designed to provide transparency and accountability across all levels. This framework is supported by a reporting dashboard that is shared through weekly case number updates and monthly Executive Board through OFR performance reporting. The

dashboard offers detailed insights into damp and mould, performance metrics, and compliance with KPIs.

To maintain consistent oversight, the Senior Leadership Team receive weekly updates from the dashboard, allowing them to offer support and scrutinise performance in real time. This ongoing engagement ensures that any emerging issues are addressed, and that performance is continually monitored.

Inspections

• Ongoing and Final Inspections

We conduct inspections throughout the works, and after the completion of works, to ensure that quality standards are consistently met. This is a combination of on-site and desktop audits.

• Contractor Quality Assurance

All works completed by contractors are reviewed against initial surveys and specifications to ensure it meets our quality expectations.

• Value for Money Verification

Invoices are thoroughly checked against original survey details to confirm that costs are justified, ensuring transparency and value for money.

Proactive management and future planning

Our proactive approach to managing damp and mould is based on data, technology and resource planning.

Data-Driven Decisions

We use data from our systems, such as building age, location, and historical reports, to identify properties at higher risk of damp and mould. For properties with recurring issues, we implement damp and mould sensors to monitor humidity and temperature in real time which allows us to spot issues before they become visible.

Real-time monitoring

Our sensors continuously track humidity and temperature in identified properties, enabling us to promptly identify environmental conditions that may lead to damp and mould. This allows us to track humidity and the temperature within tenants home to spot any trends.

Early intervention

By analysing this sensor data, we provide tenants with personalised guidance on managing their indoor environments, such as improving ventilation practices, helping to reduce condensation and prevent future mould growth.





Case study

Sensors at property in Wolverhampton

Our tenant was concerned about mould growth between the kitchen and lounge in their property, and also in the bedroom. This was in addition to reports of a non-functioning heating system.

The outcome of our survey showed non-functioning heating, mould growth on multiple walls, and trickle vents closed within the property, suggesting lack of ventilation.

Our action saw heating works undertaken and rectified, treatment on mould growth in all areas, installation of mechanical ventilation, and an additional air brick in the bedroom. Sensors were also installed to monitor heating and humidity post works to highlight risk of heat loss and risk of damp and mould reoccurrence.

To date, no further damp and mould cases have been raised on this property, and sensors remained in place to monitor over this winter period.



Chartered Institute of Housing - research project

During the winter of 24/25, in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), we are undertaking a research study to explore the correlation of tenants who struggle to heat their homes, and damp and mould.

The study has identified tenants that have had recurring damp and mould over several years.

We have been contacting these tenants to discuss taking part in the study. This involves the tenants undertaking a money advice assessment to assess the gap in income and cost of regulating the heat in their home, agreeing to heat their homes to a minimum of 18 degrees across the winter months, and have temperature and humidity sensors fitted.

In return we will fund any gap in heating costs, ensure they have maximised their income and we will provide ongoing advice and support – using the sensor information to guide this. The CIH have agreed to support us with the study and the outcome will be used in three ways:

- It will help to identify issues other than property condition that contribute to damp and mould and will help to validate if affordable warmth is factor
- It will help to shape how we prioritise our energy efficiency investment programme by using tenant and property information with a view to ensure we are minimising incidents of damp and mould that tenants experience, and;
- Support the CIH with their work with Government and energy companies on the development of a social energy tariff.

Preparedness for Awaab's law

We are waiting for final details, and timelines on Awaab's law. However, three proactive actions in preparing for the introduction of the new requirements have been implemented. These are as follows:

- Increasing surveying resources around recruitment, external contractors, trainees
- Modifying the process to achieve the timescales and new reporting requirements, and;
- A sustained effort to ensure internal and external capacity and capability, undertaking work within agreed timeframes.

Case study

Reports of damp and mould in a Birmingham property

In June 2024, we received a report of damp and mould in a bathroom and loft space within one of our properties in south Birmingham. Days later, a survey was carried out and works booked for two weeks later. However, when we came to carry out the work in July, we couldn't gain access due to tenant availability.

We therefore worked with the tenant for an alternative date. The work was then carried out, seeing specialist treatment of bathroom walls and ceilings, alongside new insulation in the loft space.





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