

Harry Catherall
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Your ref: Motion – Housing
Associations – Damp and
Mould (amended)

Our ref: AM/CHC

Tel No: 07880161491

Email: Anne.McLoughlin@fcho.co.uk

Date: 23 November 2023

Dear Harry,

RE: Holding Housing Associations Accountable for Damp and Mould Issues

Thank you for your letter dated 7 November 2023 regarding the Motion following the full Council meeting on 1 November 2023.

We would like to assure you that FCHO is taking the issue of damp and mould in our homes extremely seriously..

As the leading housing provider in Oldham we are an active member of the Oldham Strategic Housing Partnership where the issues of managing damp and mould have been debated and good practice shared across organisations. As you probably know, we have established a single point of contact for damp and mould cases that are raised with the Council to ensure that you have a clear communication path. We have also provided contact details for the OMBC website that signpost FCHO customers to contact us directly with any issues. We endeavour to respond to any queries raised by OMBC within the agreed timescales and we have excellent working relationships with teams across OMBC, particularly the Environmental Health Team.

Our comprehensive approach to managing damp and mould cases has been developed with our Customer Voice Panel and has enabled us to develop a best practice Damp and Mould Policy alongside a customer focused version of the Policy. In addition, we have:

- Reviewed and updated our Processes and Procedures which include clear timescales that are closely monitored (e.g. Inspection within 10 working days, repairs undertaken based on risk– e.g. emergency 3 hours, priority 5 days, etc.)

- Establishment of a dedicated Damp and Mould Project Team with representation from across the organisation.
- Appointed a dedicated contractor (B4Box) who not only undertake damp and mould related works but provide employment and learning opportunities for local residents.
- Improving our data quality and analysis (e.g. 91% of our homes have had a stock condition survey over last 2 years with the remainder being surveyed by 31 March 2024).
- High quality data has enabled us to identify potentially high-risk properties from a damp and mould perspective and to pro-actively survey circa 400 homes and take the resulting remedial actions.
- Increased investment in our homes relating to preventative measures and related improvements (e.g. Triple Glazing, Positive Input Ventilation systems, etc.) and accessing the GMCA Social Housing Quality Fund to expand this work.
- Installed a range of temperature and humidity monitoring devices in over 100 homes to help us to work with our customers and to understand any further action that is required.
- Providing additional surveying capacity and resource in our Customer Services team to meet customer demand over the autumn and winter periods.
- Providing clear communication to our customers around reporting damp and mould and promoting the 'Eyes wide open' campaign which encourages colleagues and contractors to notify us immediately if they come across any property or customer related concerns.
- All staff undergo mandatory training around damp and mould and we have organised role specific training including HHSRS training for our surveying team.
- Our Community Impact teamwork with customers to address issues arising from the cost-of-living crisis. This includes benefit advice, energy advice and support to access employment.

In terms of supporting other Housing Associations, we have led the review of Damp and Mould Policies and Procedures to identify good practice on behalf of the Greater Manchester Housing Partnership. This included advice on how to undertake a self-assessment against the Governments recently issued guidance and good practice in the management of Disrepair claims.

In your letter, you refer to the challenges around litigation. At FCHO we have taken a pro-active approach to Disrepair claim management. This has included undertaking a health and safety inspection as soon as a claim is


received in order to identify and address any immediate risks. We also contact the customer on receipt of a claim to discuss progressing down an alternative resolution route. This has proved particularly successful in reducing the number of Disrepair cases and addressing customers concerns quickly and effectively.

In Summary, we fully support the Councils view that no one should have to live in a damp, cold or unsafe home and we are clear on our obligations to inspect properties at risk of damp and mould and to make timely repairs.

Whilst damp and mould cases will continue to occur in our homes and we will never be complacent, we believe that we are making significant progress in terms of tackling root causes, undertaking preventative works, responding to issues when they occur and supporting our customers during a difficult time.

It is hoped that it is helpful to set out our approach, though please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any additional information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne McLoughlin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anne McLoughlin
Chief Executive (Interim)