

INWARD FOCUS SELECT COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 20th July, 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Oliver Hay in the Chair;

Councillors Ian Briggs, Jodine Cronshaw,
Sarah Madigan, Cathy Mason and David Walters.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Chris Clipstone, Mike Joy and
Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor John Wilmott.

IF.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

IF.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 19 January 2023, be received and approved as a correct record.

IF.3 Select Review: Damp and Mould

The Scrutiny Research Officer welcomed all present to the meeting and introduced Chris Clipstone, the Council's Assistant Director for Housing Operations, who was in attendance to give Members some background and insight into the Council's current position regarding the management of incidences of damp and mould within the Council's housing stock.

The Damp and Mould topic had been added to the Select Work Programme following a request from the Assistant Director, for Members to become involved in the development of a new Policy to reflect the recent amendment to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill and the new requirements for social landlords.

The Assistant Director for Housing Operations took the opportunity to give some background into the topic and advised that issues surrounding damp and mould in private and social housing had been in the news for some time due to the sad passing of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. The coroner's report had identified that mould present in his home was a contributing factor in his death and that he died from prolonged exposure to mould.

As a result of this awful and unnecessary loss of life, the Government tabled amendments to the Social Housing Regulation Bill and introduced 'Awaab's Law', which would now require landlords to fix reported health hazards in homes within specified timeframes. Following consultation later in the year, new timeframes are due to be set to ensure the timely removal of any damp and mould issues in properties owned by social landlords, whilst also enabling them to be held to account by tenants through the courts should they fail to provide a decent home.

As a result of the national reporting of the case, the Council had seen a significant increase in contact from residents reporting damp and mould issues and requesting repairs. Current procedures allowed for officers to inspect any problems within 14 days and then programme in any necessary repairs within a suitable timeframe. However, anticipated new timeframes were going to be far stricter with a resulting impact on current employees and workloads.

Members were then advised as to different types of mould and their causes including preventative mould (i.e. leaking roof) and condensation damp.

As part of the Government's initial consultation, local authorities nationally had been required to submit a response to 10 questions by December 2022 to provide assurance that they had a clear understanding of damp and mould issues within their properties and could address the risks as required.

The Council however, had been assessing its position for some time and had been trying to find additional resources to support the enhanced level of service and response. To that end, a new officer had recently been recruited with a dedicated role of assessing and prioritising incidences of damp and mould in Council owned properties District-wide.

A detailed debate ensued and Members discussed the following:

- damp and mould issues arising due to heating being turned down/off as a result of ongoing financial difficulties being faced by tenants in the current climate
- an acknowledgement that some Council owned properties were not fully insulated resulting in inevitable pockets of damp on external walls
- recognition that the Council maintained their properties to a good standard and damp and mould issues were individual in nature with no systemic problems being identified
- the importance of the Council continuing to map incidences of damp and mould within their housing stock to enable analysis of any emerging patterns or locations
- thanks given to the Housing Team for being on top of the issue and proactively looking for solutions to improve the response/repair service
- the worrying rise in solicitors jumping on the bandwagon and soliciting tenants to commence disrepair cases against Councils nationally

- acknowledgement that the Council's housing stock was ageing and that some maintenance programmes were currently behind schedule (plastering and painting) and how the new tighter deadlines for damp and mould repair could further impact the position
- the ongoing responsibility for tenants to ensure houses are well-ventilated and de-cluttered to reduce any growth of damp and mould and a realisation that some tenants continually refuse to engage or assist the Council with any preventative measures
- recognition that the Council is currently developing the new Policy with a draft version being submitted to tenancy gateway groups for consideration
- the importance of having preventative guidelines/instructions in any tenants' handbook to help them deal with any new incidences of damp and mould and a request for Committee Members to view the new Damp and Mould guidance leaflet currently being developed
- the potential use of various data logging devices for gathering data in respect of home ventilation, smoke alarms etc. which would enable the Council to build up a more accurate picture of ongoing problems with damp and mould in properties
- acknowledgement that 'Awaab's Law' would also have an impact on the Council's Environmental Health (Residential) Team (in relation to private sector enforcement) as the rules/timelines will also apply to private landlords.

To conclude, the Chairman thanked the Assistant Director for Housing Operations for his attendance at the meeting and for giving Members a valuable insight into the Council's current arrangements for addressing damp and mould within its housing stock and its ongoing preparations for compliance with imminent changes to the law.

RESOLVED

that the Scrutiny Research Officer be requested to undertake the following in readiness for the next meeting of the Committee:

- a) to circulate a copy of the draft 'Damp and Mould Guidance' leaflet to Committee Members for consideration, as soon as it becomes available;
- b) to extend an invite to Stacy White, the Council's Environmental Health (Residential) Team Manager, to the next meeting of the Committee to gain some insight into the potential impact of 'Awaab's Law' on the Council's current private sector enforcement procedures and resources;
- c) to present a draft copy of the new Damp and Mould Policy to the October meeting of the Committee, for consideration.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chairman.