



## WRITTEN EVIDENCE ON DAMP AND MOULD IN SOCIAL AND PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING

Shelter Scotland exists to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We work in communities to understand the problem and change the system. We run national campaigns to fight for home.

We have experienced decades of underinvestment in our Scottish housing system which has resulted in far too many households struggling to find a quality and affordable home that meets their needs.

This underinvestment has created a housing emergency, which has now been exacerbated by the pandemic, the impact of the war in Ukraine and the on-going cost-of-living crisis.

**The housing emergency is growing.** The latest [homelessness statistics](#) show that almost 14,500 households (40% increase since 2014 ) and over 9,100 children (120% increase since 2014) are trapped in Temporary Accommodation (TA) in Scotland. Households with children are being trapped in TA for longer and longer periods of time - some families who are homeless, can spend two years living in temporary accommodation.

The lives and futures of thousands of children are being damaged as they are being denied their right to a stable, secure and affordable quality home. Without enough quality social homes being delivered, people will remain trapped in homes that damage their health and wellbeing.

**The structural solutions to the housing emergency must be prioritised and urgently implemented as outlined in our Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan<sup>1</sup>:**

- Buy and build at least 38,500 social homes by 2026 to reduce housing need
- A national acquisition programme should be introduced to support local authorities to quickly procure new social housing stock where it is most needed
- Fully fund local government and local homelessness services, including carrying out a full audit of existing homelessness spend
- Create a new Homelessness Emergency Fund to direct money where it is most needed
- Guarantee the right to a home for everyone experiencing homelessness

### Damp and mould

- 54,000 homes (2.2% of housing stock) in Scotland were recorded as having rising or penetrating damp
- 192,000 homes (7.7% of the housing stock) in Scotland were recorded as having condensation
- **14% of social tenants surveyed reported having either damp or mould, or both, within their properties.** This corresponds to around 90,000 households<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Housing Conditions - Scottish house condition survey: 2019 key findings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

## Health and wellbeing

We regularly see evidence through our housing services of the impact that the lack of quality homes has on households across Scotland. The two examples below highlight the significant impact that living in damp conditions has on families:

- Client C told us of the respiratory and skin problems being developed in their young child due to the mould in their home. C identified eczema being caused by the spores from the mould, with the young child having to take seven different types of medication to treat eczema and asthma. The eczema has become infected to the point he is having to take antibiotics to prevent infection and possible sepsis.
- The situation facing Client V has become so extreme that the entire family are forced to sleep in one bedroom, due to the others being unusable due to damp.

The recent ruling in the tragic case of Awaab Ishak, the two-year old boy in Rochdale who died from a respiratory problem caused by extensive mould in his home, has focused attention on this issue. **Awaab's case is far from an isolated incident, and it shows the dire consequences of not doing enough to tackle the housing emergency and the damp and mould across our housing stock.**

It's not simply about a home being an unattractive and uncomfortable place to live – as we tragically saw with Awaab Ishak, **living with mould and damp can literally be a matter of life and death.**

## Making homes fit for living

There are clear links between energy efficiency and damp and mould issues. Homes that are cold, poorly insulated, hard to keep warm and with badly fitting or single-glazed windows are more susceptible to suffering from damp and mould<sup>3</sup> and can lead to a property being heated inadequately. **With the significant increase in price of energy over the past 18 months, the situation has become worse for many households, who have further struggled to sufficiently heat their homes.**

This issue is not about tenants' lifestyles<sup>4</sup>. For many households, unless structural changes/repairs are made to their home and relevant support is given, for example so people can afford to heat their homes appropriately, then they will continue to struggle with the impact of damp on their health.

Rising fuel poverty levels and a cost-of-living crisis have further exacerbated the issue. The Scottish Government has said that:

- "come April 2023 half of all households in the social rented sector will be in extreme fuel poverty"<sup>5</sup> and
- 63% of social rented households (and 40% of private rented households) in Scotland were estimated to be financially vulnerable over period 2018 – 2020"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library (2023), [Health Inequalities: Cold or Damp Homes](#)

<sup>4</sup> For example CIH, SFHA, Scottish Housing Regulator and ALACHO (2023), [Putting Safety First: a briefing note on damp and mould for social housing practitioners](#) and Housing Ombudsman (2021), [Spotlight on: Damp and mould - It's not lifestyle](#)

<sup>5</sup> The Cost of Living (Tenant Protection)(Scotland) Act 2022: First Report to the Scottish Parliament, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> [Cost of Living Bill - Key Statistics Scottish Government. 'Financially vulnerable' is defined as households with savings which would cover less than one month of income at the poverty line](#)

We recognise the Scottish Government has limited ability to solve the energy crisis and to reduce energy prices, but it does have the ability to ensure that for example the £1.8bn energy efficiency fund<sup>7</sup> is targeted towards those in greatest need, bringing houses up to a required standard to ensure they are easier and cheaper to heat and ensuring homes are mould and damp-free.

**Using this fund, or other specific grant funding, to fix damp and mould issues will also ensure that the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) remains fully focused on delivering the new social homes required to reduce housing need and tackle the root causes of the housing emergency.**

### **End victim blaming**

Too often, housing providers do not take responsibility or offer effective solutions to damp and mould issues, instead blaming the tenant for causing a build-up of condensation through normal day-to-day activities. Regular activities such as bathing, cooking or drying clothes do increase levels of humidity and condensation and can lead to increased risk of damp and mould.

However, as the recent 'Putting Safety First' briefing note from CIH Scotland, SFHA, ALACHO and the Scottish Housing Regulator states: "Daily living activities can increase the risk of condensation, but tenants, wherever they live and whatever type of house they live in, are entitled to live in a home free of damp and mould." Tenants should be able to complete daily activities "without being blamed for damp and mould developing."<sup>8</sup>

Regrettably, some of this victim blaming is linked to racist and discriminatory attitudes. As was noted in the ruling in the Awaab Ishak case, the local housing authority failed to act appropriately on the basis of assumed 'ritual bathing' on the part of Awaab's family.<sup>9</sup> This unfounded and prejudicial attitude, grounded in racism, ultimately contributed to Awaab's tragic death. The fact that this kind of attitude exists shows the broken and biased nature of the housing system in the UK and should be addressed.

- **Damp and mould should be tackled quickly and effectively to ensure people do not suffer the potential dire consequences of living in a home that is a health hazard**
- **Funding to assist social landlords in tackling damp and mould should be provided but must not detract from the money available to deliver new social homes: the Affordable Housing Supply Programme Budget must be fully focused on delivering new social homes to address the wider housing emergency**
- **Landlords must avoid victim-blaming when mould and damp occur. Instead, homes should be made fit for modern living<sup>10</sup> Including improvements to energy efficiency to ensure homes can be adequately heated and ventilated**

### **Social housing supply is the structural solution**

Many people facing severe issues with damp and mould remain trapped in homes that damage their health because there simply isn't anywhere else to go. **Without enough quality social homes, people will remain trapped and unable to move home.**

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<sup>7</sup> [Heat in buildings strategy](#)

<sup>8</sup> CIH, SFHA, Scottish Housing Regulator and ALACHO (2023), [Putting Safety First: a briefing note on damp and mould for social housing practitioners](#)

<sup>9</sup> Housing Ombudsman (2023) [Special Report on Rochdale Boroughwide Housing](#)

<sup>10</sup> Housing Ombudsman (2021) [Spotlight report on Damp and Mould](#)

Increasing the supply of social housing in Scotland is crucial if we are to address the housing emergency. It requires adequate funding in order to ensure enough social homes are delivered to reduce housing need and enable people to move to a home that suits their needs and doesn't damage their health. The large year-on-year cut to the social housing capital budget for 2023/24 (16.2%) poses significant problems for delivering the required number of social homes, particularly when we have seen the cost of building increase over the past year.

**Failing to deliver the new social homes Scotland needs will keep Scotland in the grip of a devastating housing emergency and increase homelessness and housing need, while also leaving people trapped in properties which are not fit for purpose.**

### **Evidence from people we have supported in our communities**

Every day, we hear from our clients about the severe impact that damp and mould are having on their lives and wellbeing.

Our clients tell us of having their lifestyles blamed for causing damp and mould, being told to dry their clothes outside even when that isn't possible, or to open their windows in the middle of winter. We hear of damp surveys being carried out, but recommendations for repair works not followed through, leaving tenants in homes that continue to damage their health even after the problem is identified.

This is the reality facing far too many people in Scotland in 2023. The photos in Appendix 1, sourced from clients across Scotland, illustrate the problem further.

**Appendix 1: images from our clients' homes**













**Note:** This client's bathroom ceiling fell down over 4 years ago, due to damp. The local authority has failed to repair this, leaving the tenant to live with this ceiling, which is now infested with insects which often fall onto the client when using the room.



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