

## **WHY WE CHOSE THE SERVICE**

The Independent Housing Ombudsman (IHO) Report on Damp and Mould was published in October 2021 and made 26 recommendations for landlords to consider. In November 2022 a Coroner's inquest concluded that the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak was a result of prolonged exposure to mould in his family's social housing property. These events have led to landlords reviewing their damp, mould and condensation policies and procedures.

Community Gateway Association (CGA) put in place a new policy and procedure in December 2022 and updated its information for tenants. After six months, the Tenant Scrutiny Group wanted to review how effective their service is in responding to reports of damp, mould, and condensation from customers.

## **SCOPE OF THE REVIEW**

The Tenant Scrutiny Group chose the following areas for review:

- Is the information available to customers on damp, mould and condensation clear, useful and informative?
- How effective is CGA in responding to reports of damp, mould and condensation?
- How do customers know when a case is resolved?
- How is customer satisfaction information obtained and used to improve the service?

## **OUR APPROACH**

The group used a variety of methods to gather a range of information and evidence about the service.

- Review of the DMC policy and procedure, CGA website, DMC leaflet, letters to tenants and Gateway News publications.
- A survey of customers who have had a case of DMC resolved within the last six months.
- One real-time mystery shopping report.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **HOW EASY IT TO REPORT DMC?**

We have found that customers can easily report issues relating to damp, mould, and condensation by phone, in person or online. Information on the website and in Gateway news encourages customers to report issues and our survey indicates that customers receive a timely response for an inspection or for repairs to be undertaken.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

- Improvements are required regarding communication processes with customers whilst actions are undertaken.
- Responses to our survey indicate that customers are not always clear that their issue has been classed as resolved.
- There is no process in place that informs customers when work is complete.

### **IS THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO CUSTOMERS ON DAMP, MOULD, AND CONDENSATION CLEAR, USEFUL, AND INFORMATIVE?**

We examined information on the website, the DMC leaflet, and Gateway News to assess the information provided to tenants.

### **STRENGTHS**

- Clear, informative information has been provided in Gateway News on DMC.
- The information on DMC on the website is useful, easy to read and has been developed in conjunction with tenants. It makes it clear to tenants on what to expect if they make a report of DMC and encourages tenants to report issues.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- Tenants are not able to access hard copies of the DMC Leaflets; they are not available in reception, and it does not say on the website that you can request one.
- Tenants may not know to look on the 'Your Home' page to find information on DMC. There is no button on the home page that provides a quick link to report DMC or find out further information.

- No timeframe is given on the DMC webpages on when you can expect to receive a response if you report DMC via the web form or email. This may result in tenants not using the online service as they are unclear on how and when they will get a response.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Consider making the DMC leaflet available in reception. Make it clear on the website that a hard copy of the leaflet can be requested.
- Place a button on the homepage that links directly to the DMC pages.
- Ensure a time frame is provided on the webpage of when and how a customer will receive a response if they report a DMC issue online.

### **HOW EFFECTIVE IS CGA IN RESPONDING TO REPORTS OF DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION?**

We examined the customer journey when reporting a DMC issue and we undertook a survey with tenants who had a closed case of DMC that was reported in the last six months.

### **STRENGTHS**

- It is easy to report issues of DMC by telephone, email, or web form. Our survey shows that 93% of customers telephoned to report their issues. If using the web form or email, tenants are able to send photos of their issues which makes it easier to show what the problem is.
- CGA are effective in responding to reports of DMC. Our survey showed that 93% of tenants received an inspection or repair following their report of DMC and following an inspection, 82% of tenants were clear about what action would be taken.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- Service Co-ordinators do not have a script or a set of questions to determine how they respond to a tenant's report of DMC. This may mean there are inconsistencies in whether tenants receive an inspection or a repair when they report their issue.
- Customers need to be clear whether an inspector or a trained operative will be carrying out an inspection. Our mystery shopper was informed and expected an inspector to attend their property, however

## TENANT SCRUTINY REVIEW DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION (DMC)

---

a trained operative carried out the inspection. This caused confusion for the customer in CGA's approach to tackling DMC.

- CGA does not routinely take photos of damp and mould during inspections or repairs. This means there is no photographic evidence of the condition of the property before and after work has taken place.
- Our survey shows that 7% of tenants reported DMC issues via the web form and none reported using email. Tenants may not be aware that they can report issues online
- CGA does not analyse the data it has on reports of DMC to see if any are repeat reports of issues and therefore require a different approach to investigate and manage. A check up call is undertaken three months after completion of a DMC issue to check there are no further issues, however due to seasonal variations this may not identify all re-occurring issues. Our survey indicates that some tenants feel their issue is resolved due to the warmer months but will return during the colder months.
- There are fixed timeslots for property inspections 8am-12pm and 12pm-4pm Monday to Friday. The lack of flexibility outside of these times may make it difficult for some tenants to be home for an inspection to take place.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Have an agreed set of questions that Co-ordinators used when assessing what response is required regarding a DMC report.
- Inform customers whether an inspector or trained operative will carry out an inspection, so customers know what to expect.
- Consider taking photographs before and after DMC work has taken place to enhance record keeping for CGA and the customer.
- Promote online services and provide timescales.
- Regularly analyse DMC data to identify any trends and repeat issues so that a proactive approach can be taken on DMC. We would like to see this information reported to Gateway Central on a quarterly basis.
- Consider if some inspections can take place outside the current time slots if customers require it.

### **HOW DO CUSTOMERS KNOW WHEN A CASE IS RESOLVED?**

We examined the DMC procedure to assess how customers are communicated with when their report has been actioned and completed.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

CGA does not confirm with the tenant that their DMC report is classed as resolved. From the 42 responses we received to our survey, from tenants with closed cases, 25 (59%) tenants felt that their issues were not resolved. Tenants may not be aware that from CGA's perspective their issue is classed as resolved, and no further action will be taken.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Devise a system so tenants know their case is closed; this may involve use of written confirmation and photo evidence. We would like you to present your ideas to Gateway Central.

### **HOW IS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION INFORMATION OBTAINED AND USED TO IMPROVE THE SERVICE?**

We were not able to access satisfaction information on DMC specifically as it is not currently collected.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The service does not collect feedback information specifically on how cases of DMC have been dealt with. Customers, if selected, complete a repairs satisfaction survey if work is undertaken, but the repairs satisfaction survey results do not identify if it relates to DMC issues. As a result, the service has no feedback on the effectiveness of the service it provides in relation to DMC.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Establish a process to seek tenant feedback on the DMC service and report this information to Gateway Central. (You may wish to consider telephone surveys as we received a positive response when contacting tenants by phone).

Consider the findings of our customer survey in-conjunction with this report to inform how the service can be improved.

**NEXT STEPS**

The recommendations have been accepted by management. The Audit and Risk Committee will monitor implementation of the recommendations.

A monitoring report will be presented at future meetings to enable the Committee to track the implementation of the Scrutiny Group's recommendations.

**MANAGEMENT RESPONSES**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Target for completion</b>
Consider making the DMC leaflet available in reception. Make it clear on the website that a hard copy of the leaflet can be requested.	A hard copy of the fact sheet will be made available in reception, also the option to request this will be added to the website.	Oct 2023
Place a button on the homepage that links directly to the DMC pages.	The website has been reviewed and the prominence and visibility of DMC will be improved. Short videos about "Your Home" will also be available.	April 2024
Ensure a time frame is provided on the webpage of when and how a customer will receive a response if they report a DMC issue online.	Information will be added to the DMC section and "Report a Repair" section on the website.	Oct 2023
Have an agreed set of questions that Co-ordinators use when assessing what response is required regarding a DMC report.	Crib sheets to be produced for Service Co-ordinators to establish our response and/or action. A risk matrix will be created for all colleagues to use in diagnosing the classification of DMC.	Nov 2023
Inform customers whether an inspector or trained operative will carry out an inspection.	Service Coordinators will be briefed on clarifying who will be attending a tenant's home and why.	Oct 2023

**TENANT SCRUTINY REVIEW  
DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION (DMC)**

Consider taking photographs before and after DMC work has taken place.	Before and after pictures will be taken and stored within the Contractor Management System.	Oct 2023
Promote online services and provide timescales.	Social media communications will promote the use of our online services for the reporting of repairs.	Oct 2023
Regularly analyse DMC data to identify any trends and repeat issues so that a proactive approach can be taken on DMC.	DMC data will be included as part of the existing quarterly repairs data report. Once the KPIs are established, this information will be presented to Gateway Central.	Dec 2024
Consider if some inspections can take place outside the current time slots.	Options will be considered as part of the new working hours (operatives) that came into effect in September 2023.	Nov 2023
Devise a system so tenants know their case is closed; this may involve use of written confirmation and photo evidence.	Tenants will be informed upon completion of the works and next steps will be communicated. A letter has also been produced following a satisfactory three-month call to check an issue is resolved.	Oct 2023
Establish a process to seek tenant feedback on the DMC service and report this information to Gateway Central.	As part of the three-month follow up calls, we will include a set of feedback questions that will be documented. We will also look to introduce a DMC satisfaction survey to be undertaken within one month of completion of the job.	Jan 2024
Consider the findings of our customer survey in conjunction with this report to inform how the service can be improved	Head of Asset Management to consider and document where improvements have been made as a result of this report.	Nov 2023

**The Tenant Scrutiny Group expresses its thanks to those who supported and assisted with this review.**