



**Ongo Homes
Resident Scrutiny Panel**

Investigation into

Damp and Mould

(20th March 2024)

Contents Page

Section	Page (s)
Introduction	3
Scope	4
Background	5
Methodology	5
Findings	5
Conclusions	6
Recommendations	6

1.0 Introduction

- a. This report is a result of an investigation into how Ongo Homes manages damp and mould.
- b. The RSP (Resident Scrutiny Panel) started their investigation in October 2023
- c. Throughout the duration of the investigation, the RSP endeavored to uphold the key principles relating to its scrutiny work, namely that the group would:
 - i. Work on behalf of Ongo Homes, the company and its tenants to ensure that Ongo provides a damp and mould policy of the highest standard.
 - ii. Provide independent checking and to offer critical challenges, to drive and influence improvements to standards, processes, performance, and time management and to ensure that the damp and mould policy is fully compliant with national standards.
 - iii. Ensure that Ongo embeds the National Regulatory Framework on the delivery of both organisational and local offers by monitoring and challenging these standards.
 - iv. Form an effective but independent part of the Governance structure within Ongo Homes, together with Community Voice (CV), Ongo Homes Board and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT)
 - v. Ensure that Ongo is a well-managed, viable organisation which places tenants at the heart of its business, delivered through tenant led scrutiny and other involvement

The RSPs decision to investigate damp and mould was taken from a choice of topics and themes provided for consideration by Ongo staff and CV members. The Housing Ombudsman' review and the government's consultation on damp and mould was also a factor.

The investigation was also to ensure that Ongo is conforming to national guidelines, offering Value for Money (VFM) and customer satisfaction for tenants.

The scrutiny panel made their decision independently of any outside influence.

The following people participated in this investigation:

Scrutiny Panel Members

Tim Mills

Dawn Johnson

Supported By

Karen Cowan

Wendy Wolfe

Keith Lumbers
Stewart Pearson
Tracey Bain

2.0 Scope of the investigation

The following aspects were considered in the investigation:

- Understand the impact of damp and mould on a person's health and on the property itself
- Obtain an understanding of the different causes of damp and mould
- Obtain an understanding of how damp and mould can be rectified
- Identify requirements within RSH Homes Standard (consumer standard)
- Desktop review of damp and mould policy
- Desktop review of damp and mould procedures
- Do tenants know what damp and mould is, how it's caused, how it can be prevented in the first place and how it can be cured if present?
- How can tenants report damp and mould to Ongo?
- Is the MyHome app. fit for purpose for reporting damp and mould?
- When customers report damp and mould, are they told what to expect in relation to the next steps, are they kept informed of timescales etc.?
- Obtain an understanding of the processes followed by Ongo once a tenant has reported damp and mould (including identifying if a damp and mould issue is present or not)
- Obtain an understanding of the processes that Ongo uses to prevent damp and mould occurring
- Obtain an understanding of the processes that Ongo uses to deal with issues relating to damp and mould
- Can work to a property to rectify damp and mould issues always be carried out whilst a tenant is in situ and if not, what are the options for the tenant?
- Which teams are responsible and at what stages, what processes do they follow?
- Are performance reports in place that capture data for properties with damp and mould and how each case is dealt with? If so, how is progress tracked on each case, how is the damp and mould service tracked overall and who is the data shared with for constructive challenge?
- What is customer satisfaction, e.g. satisfaction with the way their issue has been handled, complaints received etc.
- Benchmarking – does Ongo benchmark their data and performance on damp and mould and if so, how does Ongo compare
- How do other Housing Associations deal with damp and mould
- Identify good practice and/or learning at Ongo and at other Housing Providers

The following services and departments were involved in this investigation:

- Customer Experience
- Complaints
- Property Services

The RSP would like to thank and acknowledge valuable help and support from the following team members during this investigation:

Becky Johns (Customer Experience Manager), Fran Rhodes (Tenancy Services Manager), Clint Lear (Customer Resolution), Andy Waite (Damp and mould inspector), Pauline Smith (Maintenance Area Manager), Hayley Fiteni (Contract Co-ordinator), Micheal Miller-Thacker (Customer Resolution Officer), Tracey Jones (Tenancy Sustainability Coach),

And all other members of staff from Ongo who gave support and advice.

3.0 Background

As a Housing Association, Ongo has a remit to offer a safe home in good repair and free from serious defects. Importantly including damp and mould.

Damp and mould is an extremely serious issue that can have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of tenants and can have a serious repairs impact on Ongo properties

There is a national scrutiny of damp and mould at the moment, including heavy scrutiny from the Housing Ombudsman.

A national consultation is (at the time of writing) taking place with legislation expected on damp and mould.

Ongo needs to be on top of any changes in legislation and policy to ensure it provides safe and comfortable homes for its tenants.

The RSP decided to investigate this area to see if any improvements could be made.

4.0 Methodology

The RSP used the following fact-finding methods to identify Ongo's approach to damp and mould, the implications, the variety of responses received, and the outcome of the different approaches taken:

4.1.1 Desktop consideration of:

- Housing Ombudsman's policies recommendations on damp and mould
- Ongo's damp and mould policy

4.1.2 Background presentations were given by Ongo staff:

Becky Johns (Customer Experience Manager), Fran Rhodes (Tenancy Services Manager), Clint Lear (Customer Resolution), Andy Waite (Damp and mould inspector)

4.1.3 Peer reviews took place, and the panel are grateful to the following housing providers who shared their policies on damp and mould:

- LHP Housing
- Yorkshire Housing
- Jigsaw Housing
- Calico Homes
- Salix Homes

4.1.4 Various meetings were held by the RSP, minutes taken and distributed. Information and documents were shared by email and a final meeting was held to discuss and agree the conclusions to help formulate the recommendations.

5.0 Findings

The Housing Ombudsman's expectations on damp and mould are designed to increase the quality and speed of repairs in this area. Government review and consultation will also ensure that noncompliant housing associations will need to raise their game to a standard that is compliant with a safe and comfortable home.

Interviews with members of the damp and mould team have shown the panel that whilst Ongo has a robust and clear policy in place, there is room for improvement to help us to be a leader in this field and to ensure tenants are supported during the process

The Scrutiny panel are confident that, should their recommendations be adopted, damp and mould will be dealt with in an expert and timely manner and the organisation will be ready for any new rules and laws that may be coming.

6.0 Conclusions

The RSP is confident that they have met the brief/scope for this investigation. Any relevant documentation, including policies and records of interviews with staff, are available on request.

7.0 Recommendations

	High
	Medium
	Low

No.	Recommendation	Anticipated Outcome / Comments	Priority
1	The damp and mould policy should include types of damp as per standard policies elsewhere	Raised awareness to customers	Medium
2	The damp and mould policy should include a commitment to damp and mould training for staff (as per LHP and Salix Homes good practice)	Demonstrate to customers and to the Housing Ombudsman, Ongo's commitment to tackling damp and mould	High
3	The damp and mould policy should state that we will handle all damp and mould complaints in accordance with the complaints policy	Demonstrate to customers and to the Housing Ombudsman, Ongo's commitment to tackling damp and mould	High
4	Damp and mould policy should include a section re No Access or refusal of access to a property where damp and mould is suspected or proven. Ongo to follow existing No Access procedure (as per LHP good practice)	Protect the health of the household Ensure damp and mould is rectified in the property, protecting Ongo's assets	High
5	The policy appendix 'rating document' should show a risk assessment score matrix that looks at the likelihood of risk and the vulnerability of the household. The score should then link to a specified response target timescale (as per LHP good practice)	Clear rationale provided on how damp & mould timescales are assessed, including how considerations re vulnerable customers influence timescales	High

	This recommendation to be fully explored for viability	Enhanced customer satisfaction with process	
6	The policy appendix 'rating document' should include follow up checks and timescales for jobs falling within the different risk ratings	Tenant clarity of when things will happen Clear timescales for Ongo staff to work to Enhanced customer satisfaction with process Performance monitoring can be facilitated	High
7	The policy appendix 'rating document' should include a customer journey flowchart map (as per LHP good practice customer journey map)	Clarity of process clear to customers, showing exactly what to expect Enhanced customer satisfaction with process	Medium
8	To include the following wording in the damp and mould policy: Special attention and protection to be shown to customers who experience damp and mould in their home	Demonstrate Ongo's commitment to addressing issues of damp and mould to customers and to the Housing Ombudsman	Medium
9	Clear information to be available for customers that states what their responsibilities are to prevent damp and mould and what Ongo's responsibilities are Raise awareness of customers' responsibilities using an example e.g., excessive use of fish tanks	Hard copy Handbook to be made available to new customers at sign up, provided at visits to those who are experiencing damp and mould, and promoted at events such as Ongo Action Days	High/Medium

	<p>Useful damp and mould information to be available on the website (Good practice St Ledger Homes)</p> <p>A printed and digital version of a Damp and Mould Handbook to be developed (see Yorkshire Housing leaflet for good practice)</p> <p>Different communication formats to be considered and facilitated to cater for the diverse needs of customers, e.g., people with learning disabilities, language requirements etc.</p>		
10	Once Ongo have exhausted all support and advice avenues, Ongo to consider all appropriate legal tools to ensure the household is kept safe and Ongo's assets are protected	Consequences may encourage customers to allow access and/or accept support	Medium
11	Identify ways to help overcome the stigma attached to damp and mould	<p>Customers won't feel embarrassed to report issues, resulting in more cases being reported to Ongo</p> <p>Damp and mould would be identified to Ongo and issues solved, resulting in enhanced quality of life for households and improved fabric of the building for the landlord</p>	Medium