



Leaks, Condensation, Damp and Mould Policy

Introduction

In line with the Housing Ombudsman's October 2021 report¹ and recommendations, this policy sets out Clarion Housing Association's approach to working with residents to prevent, diagnose, treat and remedy leaks, condensation, damp and mould within the home.

Clarion Housing Association (Clarion) is adopting a targeted approach to dealing with leaks, condensation, damp and mould. We are doing this by improving communication with residents and embedding a culture that does not seek to dismiss the problem as residents' behaviour.

This policy has been developed to sit alongside and complement our Repairs and Maintenance Policy and our Leaks, Condensation, Damp and Mould processes.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To support the safety and wellbeing of our residents in their homes. Living with leaks, condensation, damp and mould can have serious health implications for residents and can cause damage to homes.
- 1.2. To ensure the fabric of our homes is protected from deterioration and damage caused by leaks, condensation, damp and mould.
- 1.3. To foster a joined up approach to resolve issues sensitively, providing our residents with appropriate practical advice and guidance.
- 1.4. To demonstrate how all reasonable steps will be taken to manage and remedy leaks, condensation, damp and mould, and to record the actions taken to do this.
- 1.5. To comply with relevant legislative, regulatory and contractual obligations.

¹ <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf>

2. Objectives

- 2.1. Provide well-maintained homes, free from hazard for our residents.
- 2.2. Empower Clarion staff and residents to resolve issues in partnership. To communicate with our residents clearly and regularly regarding any actions we plan to take, and any actions our residents are advised to take.
- 2.3. Diagnose and resolve damp and mould in a timely and effective manner. To carry out appropriate works where necessary to minimise damage to the structure, fixtures and fittings of the property.
- 2.4. Reduce the number of preventable condensation related jobs by managing initial repairs and ensuring access is gained to remedy reported repairs, in line with relevant access polices and tenancy or lease obligations.
- 2.5. Clarion will proactively support residents to manage their homes where they are known to be susceptible to leaks, condensation, damp and mould for any reason. We will plan our resources to allow us to respond to higher demand periods, for example, increased demand during the winter months.
- 2.6. Improve and promote residents' understanding of how to access our complaints process to enable Clarion to learn from complaints made to prevent future similar occurrences.
- 2.7. Train and equip staff to diagnose potential causes of damp, mould and condensation and leak tracing so they can advise residents and provide solutions.
- 2.8. Gain an in-depth knowledge of our stock and the type of properties and components susceptible to leaks, condensation, damp and mould.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy is applicable to all residents living in Clarion properties and for all Clarion staff to jointly help manage leaks and prevent condensation, damp and mould.
- 3.2. For leaseholders and shared owners, we will meet our responsibilities as set out in terms of the resident's lease².

4. The policy

- 4.1. All Clarion staff will be responsible for raising issues identified with leaks, condensation, damp and mould and seek resolution, escalating where necessary. Clarion is taking steps to equip our staff and contractors with the skills and knowledge to identify signs of leaks, damp and mould, and discuss with residents how to manage the problem. Staff are encouraged to look out for signs of damp and mould whenever they visit a resident's home and will undergo additional training to support this.

² Leaseholders and shared owners may contact Clarion for copies and information about their lease

- 4.2. Clarion will take action to identify homes that have, or may be at risk of developing, problems with condensation, damp and mould. We will use appropriate technology in our properties, alongside related data about our households and homes to help us understand the risk profile in relation to these issues and proactively seek to mitigate any increased risks.
- 4.3. When a property becomes void or is subject to a Mutual Exchange, prior to re-letting Clarion will identify and remedy any leaks or other issues likely to cause condensation, damp and mould. This may include maintaining doors and windows to effectively ventilate the property, ensuring extractor fans are clean and working effectively, and/or applying mould treatments where necessary. Relevant certificates will be provided in line with specific policies.
- 4.4. Clarion will provide clear and accessible information on our website, and via other channels, to raise awareness about the causes of condensation, damp and mould. This will include guidance describing how and when residents should contact us, what residents can do to help prevent and/or manage issues through ventilation, adequate heating and controlling the build-up of moisture. Where there is mould growth, we will provide advice on how this should be treated and how Clarion can help.
- 4.5. Where damp and mould is caused by condensation (where there are no issues with the property itself causing the condensation), Clarion will work with residents to take appropriate measures to resolve the issues. This may include: providing self-help advice about how to control moisture levels; increase ventilation or heating, so that damp levels are kept low, or providing financial guidance or support for those in fuel poverty. Where we provide such advice, it is important that it is communicated sensitively. Equally, residents will be advised what not to do, for example, turning off ventilation systems or sealing over air vents may exacerbate issues.
- 4.6. Clarion has a dedicated working group focused on leaks, condensation, damp and mould. This group will facilitate engagement with residents and, where relevant, setup Task & Finish/Focus Groups allowing a two-way conversation to give residents a voice and participate in discussions.
- 4.7. Residents are required to report any unresolved issues of concern to Clarion as soon as possible. We will ask some questions to identify what the problem is. We may offer initial advice to residents on what immediate action can be taken to reduce condensation, followed by a property inspection to identify the cause of the issues. In cases where the issues are not straightforward and may be due to a combination of factors, we may need to carry out further investigations to diagnose the problem. We will carry out any repairs that are required in accordance with our Repairs and Maintenance Policy, which includes timescales and escalation routes. Cases relating to leaks condensation, damp and mould will be specifically tracked and managed.
- 4.8. Where particularly severe or recurring damp or mould issues are identified, Clarion will undertake a comprehensive risk assessment which may result in a range of actions to support the resident depending on their circumstances. Actions may include providing and funding dehumidifiers, installing ventilation systems, dry lining walls or applying mould resistant coverings, as appropriate, on a case by case basis.

- 4.9. Clarion will keep residents informed of any property inspections, diagnosis of issues and the timetabling of works, where these are required. This includes explaining what work might be needed and why. If any changes to the programme of works are needed, we will keep residents informed. Where work is not required, residents will be advised and we will explain the reason why and any steps they should take.
- 4.10. For very complex cases, especially where more intrusive building work is required and/or there is a health risk to the resident or a member of their household, we may require residents to move out of their home, either on a temporary or permanent basis. Clarion will consider the individual circumstances of the resident and will act in accordance with our Decant Policy. Once the works are complete and before the resident returns, all appropriate checks will be carried out at the property.
- 4.11. Our tenancy and lease agreements require residents to allow Clarion and our contractors access to their home to carry out inspections and/or works at the agreed appointment time. If we are unable to gain access, we may need to take action. For example, if the integrity of the property, its fabric and/or the safety of residents or those in the vicinity of the property is compromised, and access is refused, we may seek an injunction in the County Court, in line with our Access for Contractors Policy and associated procedures.
- 4.12. Clarion will give residents advice on how to prevent condensation and what they should do to remove mould. We recognise that not every resident will be able to resolve issues themselves. Where required, we will provide appropriate support depending on the specific circumstances and the resident's needs.
- 4.13. Where homes are overcrowded, humidity will tend to be higher and this increases the likelihood of condensation. We will work with residents to explore solutions which may include moving to a more suitable home if this is available and appropriate. We know that some residents cannot afford to heat their homes adequately due to income levels and rising costs of living. We will work with residents in line with our Vulnerable Residents Policy to see that they are receiving the income and support they are entitled to.
- 4.14. Clarion aims to resolve complaints as quickly as possible to avoid residents resorting to disrepair claims and legal action. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the appropriate pre-action protocols and will aim to resolve the dispute as quickly as possible. We will continue to learn lessons from damp and mould cases, and will update our approach and communication with residents to improve future responses.
- 4.15. Where appropriate Clarion will pay compensation in line with our Compensation Policy as a result of any failure to deliver the service we have committed to. Each case will be considered on its own merits, taking into account the individual circumstances of the resident and their household.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Clarion will:

- Promote and provide general advice and guidance on how to manage leaks, condensation, damp and mould.
- Diagnose the cause of leaks, condensation, damp and mould and deliver effective solutions based on dealing with the cause of the problem, not just the symptoms.
- Inform the resident of the findings of investigations following inspections. This will include identifying the possible causes of the issue, recommending effective solutions, details of all necessary remedial works and the estimated timescales to complete the works.
- Where necessary, carry out any repairs, remedial works or improvements to rectify any problems.
- To undertake remedial work for the treatment of leaks, damp, condensation and mould on void properties before being let to new residents.
- Employ skilled contractors to carry out any works associated with leaks, condensation, damp and mould.
- Supply residents with access to our complaints procedures and ensure that complaints are progressed in line with our complaints policy.

Resident responsibilities include:

- Managing conditions that could lead to condensation, damp and mould.
- Timely reporting of issues and faulty equipment that may hamper the management and control of condensation, damp and mould. For example, reporting a faulty extract fan, unable to open windows or lack of heating.
- Compliance with tenancy or leasehold obligations which include allowing Clarion staff, consultants and contractors access for inspections and works.
- Leaseholders and shared owners will manage and maintain their properties including issues with condensation, damp and mould in accordance with obligations in their lease agreement.

The scope of this policy is covered by legislation including the following:

- Housing Act 1985.
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018.
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 – (section 11).
- Housing Act 2004 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- Decent Homes Standard.

6. Glossary

- Condensation: Moisture in the air that becomes cooler and tiny water droplets appear on surfaces.
- Damp: Excess of moisture that can't escape from a structure, which can also go on to cause significant damage to a building.
- Mould: A type of fungus that spreads through spores and are invisible to the naked eye but are in the air around us all of the time. It can quickly grow on surfaces where dampness persists or water has formed into a visible covering.
- Legal Proceedings: A claim form or an application filed with the Court.

7. Associated documents

- Access for Contractors Policy
- Compensation Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Decant Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Planned Investment Policy
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Vulnerable Residents Policy.

Policy Control Information

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Large print and translations available upon request