



INSIGHT

Customer Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny Review Summary Report

Customer Communications & Information

Damp, Mould, and Condensation

August 2023

Purpose & Background of Review

The purpose of our review was to scrutinise communications and information relating to damp, mould, and condensation. During our investigations we heard a communications campaign was launched in Autumn 2021, because of an increase in disrepair cases of damp and mould. Since this time media headlines hit in November 2022, which received national interest of a tragic death in a Rochdale Borough Housing home. The coroner's inquest verdict concluded death as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in the home environment. We agreed this service area would be under close examination for several years, so were keen to review Great Places communications with customers.

We aimed to review service from a customer point of view, we agreed to:

- research information communicated to customers and the work undertaken in this area
- explore customers' knowledge, needs and their engagement with information
- examined Great Places' and other social landlord websites for good practice, and
- reviewed data to identify recommendations

We collected detail to help us understand the service, as follows:

- agreed our scope and identified data to help inform our review
- examined customer feedback, including homes inspected from Oct 22 to Mar 23
- met with the Director of Repairs, Head of Customer Contact & Comms teams and the Living Conditions Project Manager

Service Background

The communications campaign launched in Autumn 21 to promote the inspection service and encourage reporting of issues relating to damp and mould. Proactive advice and tips including preventative measures were contained within the campaign. Information was offered on multiple platforms; digitally and in hardcopies, which included links to signpost to other websites; colleagues were briefed to support conversation with customers.



Analytics show outcomes resulting between Sept 21-22 from the campaign;

- 2,370 visits to damp and mould sections on Great Places website
- 225 views of the 'Detective Damp' video, and
- 709 requests from customers for damp and mould inspections

Communications at Great Places had long been reviewed and reinforced with colleagues at the time media interest switched to this service area, which was also receiving significant focus from the Housing Ombudsman Service and Regulator for Social Housing.

Our key findings

- the Living Conditions project includes damp, mould and condensation in its remit, which aims to make improvements taking a more proactive approach to addressing issues
- the Responsive Repairs policy service offer confirms that any approach taken in relation to damp, mould and condensation may require repairs or major work. It advises guidance and support can be provided and that a statement can be found on the website
- investment has been made to meet an increase in demand - The Hub saw a 78% increase in contacts and demand for inspection rose from 41 logged in October 22, with a further 1357 logged over successive months up to March 23
- training was delivered to the repairs and neighbourhood teams and The Hub, which is on-going
- internal comms were publicised to raise awareness and embed importance that colleagues are well-informed and proactive - The Hub received 218 colleagues inspection requests (Jan to May)
- statistics show there were approx. 1000 visits to the various damp and mould intranet pages
- customer comms were reviewed, including platforms and messaging, web pages using recent Insights' previous comms related review findings and other materials such as fold-out z-cards
- analytics show messages continue to reach a wide audience with 1,662 intranet page views since November 2022; data shows a spike in website visits following delivery of monthly e-News, 25% of customers went to contact The Hub direct from web pages
- an internal audit conducted by PWC of Damp & Disrepair May 2023 detailed reviewing evidence to confirm Great Places is proactively informing customers how to identify disrepair, damp and mould via the website, email and the customer newsletter
- 80 complaints relating to damp and mould were logged from April to March 23 - numbers started to increase from October with 17 complaints logged in December, this has since decreased to 8 on average April / May
- support for customers - referrals to National Energy Action, fuel vouchers, £21,700 financial gain in fuel poverty, 296 referrals of debt advice / £35k access to other income



What customers said:

Our survey intended to find out about customers' knowledge of damp, mould and condensation; we emailed 398 customers, whose home had been inspected, we received 62 responses. We also collected feedback using Our Voice, by phone from customers not online and surveyed 8 Oldham customers in-person;

- 82% (51/62) of customers said they were confident of recognising repairs relating to damp, mould or condensation, whilst 79% (49/62) knew how to report to Great Places
- customers were less confident, 67% (42/62) of causes of these issues, whilst 61% (38/62) know what to do about damp, mould or condensation
- 32 / 61 (52%) responses confirmed they hadn't seen any information
- website, customer newsletter and social media were cited as main information sources
- we noted satisfaction decreased when customers were asked if they felt information informed about causes of issues and what to do about damp, mould or condensation, which reflects feedback gathered about customer confidence
- customers scored satisfaction that information was: i) communicated effectively ii) accessible iii) clear and concise iv) presented to suit different needs v) it's helpful and gives guidance, and vi) reassuring what can be done
- the customers who accessed information on the website only were more satisfied with the criteria outlined in the previous point and 11 / 20 responses scored 8-10 for 'ease to find detail'
- 5 customers who'd not seen information agreed, after viewing information, it was useful and they'd of felt more informed had they seen it
- other feedback comments show there are customers, who would like to receive regular notifications / updates via text, leaflets or in-person at visits / in the community – the sample of 8 customers consulted in Oldham said, they don't use or access the internet
- several customer comments outlined service related issues, investment and condition of their homes, which sits outside scope; detail was passed onto the repairs service for follow-up, most of these customers gave feedback that Winter would be a more suitable time to confirm, if work has been successful, this is in line Board recommendations
- from October, customers who have received work relating to damp or mould will be contacted to check-back. Follow-up calls were carried out previously in March 2022, following the Detective Damp campaign which showed reasonably positive feedback
- customer feedback collected can be categorised as follows:
 - an equal spread of age groups from 25-65+ and 61% identified gender as female
 - 67% chose white British / other, 22% BAME as ethnic group and 11% chose not to give detail
- We didn't observe any further significant findings that relate specifically to any one group.



We have summarised below some reasons given to support lower customer satisfaction scores:

information advising how to prevent damp, mould or condensation is fine, what's also important is to target property work to solve root cause and underlying issues	I'm confident I know about issues, but not confident of Great Places responsibilities to deal with issues	I've nothing installed in my home to prevent issues or knowledge to avoid damp, mould, or condensation	you say not to dry clothes inside, although there isn't enough clothes lines outside so how can we stop issues, if not space outside you can provide information but you need to tackle this issue, too
my bathroom hasn't any windows, the fan is expensive to run, it ran 24 / 7, so cost a lot	offer tips in context not just rules without alternatives so customers can relate better to information	keep regular contacts through inspection	proactive campaigning with frequent posts
post snap-shot videos / links on website, offer leaflets to help customers to identify issues and take action	write to customers rather than expect them to search for information	I was told the cause of problem, I get that but it's of no use to me if problems do not get resolved	update information and check communication is received and understood by customers

Overall Summary;

We saw evidence to demonstrate a great deal of work has been undertaken taking note of HOS report findings. We have been impressed by the extent of work and we feel reassured of the inclusion of this area of work within the Living Conditions Project. Among feedback customers commented positively when surveyed about information, whilst making useful suggestions.

We'd like to propose recommendations, which focus on improving accessibility to information, revealing some more real-life outcomes, being proactive using an intelligence-led approach and working in real partnership with customers to beat problems relating to damp, mould and condensation.

We feel our recommendations will help to provide an inclusive customer perspective, which can help to support improvement in the service area.

Insight would like to thank the following Great Places colleagues the Director of Repairs, Heads of Customer Contact and the Communications team and the Living Conditions Project Manager for their support providing information, which enabled us to review this service area.