

DRAFT Hillingdon Damp, Mould and Condensation Operational Practice Note

April 2026

Version Control:

Version	Date	Updated by	Authorised by	Date of Next Review
1.0	February 2023	LB GR	G Penticost	February 2024
2.0	June 2023	SP	DW	June 2024
3.0	April 2026	SP DW		April 2027



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1. Introduction

This Damp, Mould and Condensation (DMC) Operational Practice Note provides further explanation of how we will apply our DMC Policy. A diagram showing the key process elements for dealing with DMC is included at Appendix 1. It should also be read in alongside our Emergency and Urgent Works Policy and Operational Practice Note.

While the Practice Note applies primarily to Hillingdon Council tenants, it also applies to our leaseholders where it concerns the building fabric and/or shared areas in leasehold dwellings/buildings in council ownership. This will be a standard DMC response but the requirements of Awaab's Law will not apply.

Leaseholders in Hillingdon have different obligations and should refer to their lease. The council's website also offers further advice for leaseholders, including information on buildings insurance and alterations, as well as a leaseholder's information booklet. The council remains responsible for structural repairs, including rising or penetrating damp. Leaseholders who sublet take on additional responsibilities as landlords.

Under Awaab's Law:

- Emergency hazards must be investigated and made safe within 24 hours. This applies to all emergency hazards not just those relating to damp and mould.
- Significant damp and mould hazards within your council home must be investigated within 10 working days of being reported and must be made safe within 5 working days of the investigation finishing.
- The council must provide a written summary of what they found and how they will make your council home safe within 3 working days after the investigation is finished.
- If more work is needed to stop the hazard coming back, the council must commence the work or make plans for the work to begin within 5 working days of the investigation finishing. All work must begin within 12 weeks at the latest.
- If your council home cannot be made safe in time, somewhere else to stay for free must be provided while the works are done to make the home safe to return to.
- Council tenants must be kept up to date throughout the process and given advice on how to stay safe while repairs are being made.

We will take practical steps in identifying and resolving Damp, Mould and Condensation (DMC) issues. This will include checking DMC issues at any reasonable opportunity e.g. when we know that a council home is about to become vacant and

during any repairs at this time. A check for DMC will be made at new council tenant sign up and at following tenant visits.

Where a mutual exchange is taking place and we are already aware of DMC issues, we will be open and transparent with the incoming tenant at an early stage to make them aware and to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

If there is evidence of DMC we will look to undertake work to solve the problem. If the DMC is considered an emergency or significant hazard, the relevant timescales for Awaab's Law will apply. If there is not an immediate health and safety risk, these works will be carried out during the incoming tenancy. Advice will be given to the incoming council tenant to assist in preventing reoccurring issues.

When we become aware of DMC our staff will ask questions to try to identify possible causes, understand household circumstances and vulnerabilities and make an initial assessment of the risk of harm. Awaab's Law¹ requires that significant risks of harm, especially those caused by prolonged exposure to mould, are addressed promptly. The legal requirements for investigating and fixing emergency and significant hazards will be complied with in line Awaab's Law and our Emergency and Urgent Works Policy and the associated Operational Practice Note. Emergency hazards will be investigated and made safe within 24 hours.

A triage calculator providing a risk based scoring for both the extent of DMC and the vulnerability of residents is included at appendix 2. Staff will use this to assist in the case by case assessment of whether it is within the scope of Awaab's Law and if it is to be treated as an Emergency or a Significant Hazard.

Some causes of DMC may be obvious – such as leaking gutters or overflows. In these cases, remedial repairs will be ordered. In other instances, further investigations may be necessary.

If we can offer an appointment to carry out an inspection when a council tenant first reports the issue, we will do so. This is not however always possible. If there might be a significant hazard we will make the inspection appointment and visit within the Awaab's Law timescale of 10 working days. We will do our best to offer and agree to a mutually convenient appointment, subject to availability. The resident(s) will need to give access to their home for this appointment/inspection.

The purpose of the inspection is to identify whether the issue is damp related (water penetration due to a building defect), or condensation related (normally linked to the thermal comfort and the way the occupants use their home).

If the issue is identified as condensation-based, the Council will provide information and guidance to the council tenant. This information will include a discussion on the possible causes of condensation and some solutions that may help. In most cases,

¹ Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023

once these measures have been in place for a few weeks, the issue is reduced or eliminated.

If the issue is identified as building related, the remedial works will be identified and scheduled appropriately based on the survey recommendations.

For cases where there are repeated reports of DMC and/or where there is no obvious cause, we may use specialist contractors to identify the cause.

Where there are several reports of DMC in a particular building or geographical area, a survey may be needed from other properties in the building or from a sample of properties in the locality to proactively establish if the problems are arising from the property design.

2. Complex Case Panel

A Complex Case Panel has been created to bring together the 'relevant teams to agree to the most appropriate courses of action where there are cross-cutting issues and wider risks that need to be effectively managed. Attendees will include representatives from Repairs, Voids, Tenancy Management, Rent Collection & Arrears Recovery, Welfare Reform & Tenancy Support, Legal and Planned Maintenance.

The Panel will focus on a small number of complex cases. Referral to the panel would be via the repairs lead and panel considerations will include the potential need for decanting the council tenant(s). This shared management of risk and casework management to secure more sustainable solutions can promote improved communication, breakdown silo working, address vulnerabilities and provide a more holistic approach to what are seldomly 'single issue' cases.

Outcomes from complex case panel meetings and decisions taken will be recorded and shared to ensure that case worker management records at team level are up to date and relevant and support a 'whole service approach'.

3. Record Keeping

The Council has a robust system in place to maintain accurate records. This includes records of inspections, property and tenancy information, and complaint handling. A historical record of remedial works will be kept so that an ongoing evidence base is created and maintained.

All identified hazards will be documented in a written investigation report, detailing the nature of the issue, risk assessment, and recommended remedial actions. This report will be shared with the residents within 3 working days of inspection.

4. Preventative Actions

We will take action to identify homes that have, or may be at risk of developing, problems with DMC. We will use data on our households and homes to help us understand the risk profile in relation to DMC.

We will seek to reduce any increased risks of DMC arising as a result our work to decarbonise our homes.

When a property becomes vacant, and prior to re-letting, we will seek to identify and fix any issues which may cause damp. This may include ensuring doors and windows are serviceable and can effectively ventilate the property, ensuring extractor fans are working well, as well as applying mould treatments where necessary.

We will provide information on our website, and through other channels, to raise awareness about the causes of DMC. This will include details about how everyday activities in the home can generate condensation and what tenants and leaseholders can do to help prevent damp through, for instance, ventilation, controlling the build-up of moisture and adequate heating. Where there is mould growth, we will provide advice on how this could be treated.

Our staff and contractors will have the skills and knowledge to identify where there may be signs of DMC and discuss with residents how to manage the problem. Staff will be encouraged to look for signs whenever they visit a resident's home.

5. Dealing with DMC

Council tenants are required to report all repair issues to the council as soon as they become aware of them. In some cases, the cause may not be straightforward and/or could be due to a combination of factors. The inspecting officer may need to use additional resources to further diagnose the problem and determine whether it is due to a repair issue for which we are responsible. Any repairs that are required to be carried out will be dealt with in accordance with our Responsive Repairs Policy.

Where the mould and damp is found to be caused solely by condensation, we will work with our tenant(s) to take appropriate measures to prevent this from reoccurring. This might include improved ventilation measures, mould treatment and advice about how to control moisture levels or increase ventilation or heating, so that moisture levels are kept low. Where we provide such advice, it is important that our tenant(s) follow it and do not take actions that could increase it further e.g., by turning off ventilation systems or sealing over air vents.

A particularly severe or recurring damp or mould issue is identified might result in a range of actions to support our tenant(s) depending on their circumstances and our risk assessment. This may include providing temporary dehumidifiers, the installation

of positive pressure, mechanical or passive ventilation systems, dry lining walls or applying mould resistant coverings, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis.

Our approach to DMC is focused around our tenant(s) and going beyond the minimum requirements of the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 and the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

- Hazards do not need to be Category 1 under HHSRS for action to be taken. We will consider all hazards that may impact the health and wellbeing of residents, regardless of their HHSRS category.
- Assessment is based on tenant vulnerabilities, such as age, health conditions, pregnancy, disability, or other relevant factors. This ensures that our response is tailored to the specific needs and risks faced by each household.
- All available information is used in assessments, including tenant reports, third-party input (such as from health professionals or support workers), and observations from staff or contractors.
- Hazards will not be dismissed as “lifestyle-related” (for example, condensation from cooking or drying clothes indoors). Instead, we will seek to understand the underlying causes and provide support or interventions as appropriate.

This person-centred approach ensures that our response to DMC is holistic, fair, and responsive to the needs of our most vulnerable residents, in line with the Housing Ombudsman’s recommendations and the requirements of Awaab’s Law.

We will keep residents informed of any property inspections, diagnosis of issues and the timetabling of works, where these are required. This includes explaining to them why work might be needed and what work might be done. If any changes to the program of work are needed, we will keep them informed. Where work is not required, residents will be informed, and we will explain the reason why no further work is needed and the steps they should take.

For more complex cases, and especially where more intrusive building work is required and/or there is a serious health risk to the residents or a member of their household, we may require them to move out of their home either on a temporary or permanent basis. We will consider the individual circumstances of the resident. We will ensure that appropriate checks are carried out at the property to ensure it is suitable for the resident to return to.

Our tenancy and leasehold agreements require customers to allow us (including appointed contractors) access to their home to carry out work at the agreed appointment time. If we are unable to gain access and the integrity of the property, its fabric and/or the safety of the customer or those in the vicinity of the property is compromised, we will take appropriate action. For example, this may include but is not limited to obtaining an injunction for access. In any instance where access is denied, this will be referred to the Tenancy Management Team for further action. Failure to

provide access is an express breach of tenancy obligations and will put the tenants home 'at risk.

6. Aftercare

Aftercare will be tailored to the individual case. Follow-up actions will be dependent on the severity, causes and treatment of the DMC. Post-repair inspections will be conducted to verify the effectiveness of remedial actions in some instances. Monitoring tools (e.g. moisture sensors or tenant feedback) may be used to ensure long-term resolution. We aim to ensure that recurrences are identified swiftly and dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Each active DMC case will remain open until it has been satisfactorily resolved with the resident. This will be confirmed by a follow-up phone call and if there is not a satisfactory resolution at this point, follow-up actions will continue until there is such resolution.

7. Supporting our Residents

We will give residents advice on how to prevent damp and what they should do to remove mould. However, we recognise that not every resident will be able to resolve DMC themselves. We will provide appropriate support in such cases in relation to the specific circumstances and the individual customer's needs.

Everyone is vulnerable to the health impacts of damp and mould, but we recognise that people with certain health conditions, children and older people are at greater risk of more severe health impacts. We will ensure that staff and external contractors understand the importance of being sensitive to tenants' circumstances and vulnerabilities. Our response will take account of risk and recognise that it is particularly important that DMC is addressed with urgency for the groups below as they may be more vulnerable to significant health impacts:

- people with a pre-existing health condition (for example allergies, asthma, COPD, cystic fibrosis, other lung diseases and cardiovascular disease) who are at risk of their condition worsening and have a higher risk of developing fungal infections and/or additional allergies
- people of all ages who have a weakened immune system, such as people who have cancer or are undergoing chemotherapy, people who have had a transplant, or other people who are taking medications that suppress their immune system
- people living with a mental health condition

- pregnant women, their unborn babies and women who have recently given birth, who may have weakened immune systems
- children and young people whose organs are still developing and are therefore more likely to suffer from physical conditions such as respiratory problems
- children and young people who are at risk of worsening mental health
- older people
- people who are bedbound, housebound or have mobility problems making it more difficult for them to get out of a home with damp and mould and into fresh air

People who fall into more than one of these categories may be likely to be particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of damp and mould. Initial action will not be delayed to wait for medical evidence and risk will be assessed on an individual basis.

We know that some residents cannot afford to heat their homes adequately due to their income levels. We will work with residents to ensure that they are receiving the income to which they are entitled.

Where homes are overcrowded, humidity will tend to be higher, and this increases the likelihood of condensation. We will work with the tenant and explore solutions which may include the tenant moving to a more suitable home if this is available and appropriate.

8. Staff Training

All relevant staff will be required to have an understanding of DMC policy and practice. Training will take place at induction and there will be periodic training refreshers/updates. Training will include use of diagnostic tools and live-stream inspections where possible and appropriate. We will ensure that our staff (whether in-house or our contractors) have the required skills to diagnose and remedy DMC. We will raise awareness amongst other staff, such as those in social care, who may also enter tenants' homes, regarding DMC. This will include what to look out for and how to make referrals.

9. Responding to complaints and learning lessons

We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible without residents needing to resort to disrepair claims and legal action. Where legal action is taken, we will follow the [Pre-Action Protocol for Housing Conditions Claims](#) so that we may resolve the dispute outside of court to help ensure issues are resolved quicker for customers.

We will learn lessons from DMC cases, update our technical approach and how we communicate with residents, to improve future responses. Learning will include improving our understanding of which properties are most at risk of DMC.

Complaints associated with DMC will be formally reviewed on a quarterly basis in the context of 'lessons learnt'.

10. Moving towards a planned preventative approach

Improved use of data and of learning from DMC cases will be used to take a more planned approach to treating issues in groups of dwellings, where possible before DMC issues arise. To do this, we will review the data systems and reporting processes used to ensure that they provide the relevant information for a planned approach to be implemented.

11. Behaviours, Competencies and Professional Standards

It is important that our staff and contractors should respond proactively to issues that fall outside their area of expertise. We want staff to respond to DMC in a similar way they would a safeguarding response i.e., everyone has a responsibility to highlight potential concerns.

We will ensure that there is training to equip staff with knowledge regarding the signs of DMC and how to respond appropriately.

The response of staff is as much about culture as it is about specific knowledge areas. In addition to staff competencies that form part of employment and appraisal procedures across the local authority, the council's housing services have adopted the Chartered Institute of Housing's Professional Standards to maintain a focus on the professional development of our staff. These standards build on seven characteristics contributing towards the professionalism of housing services:

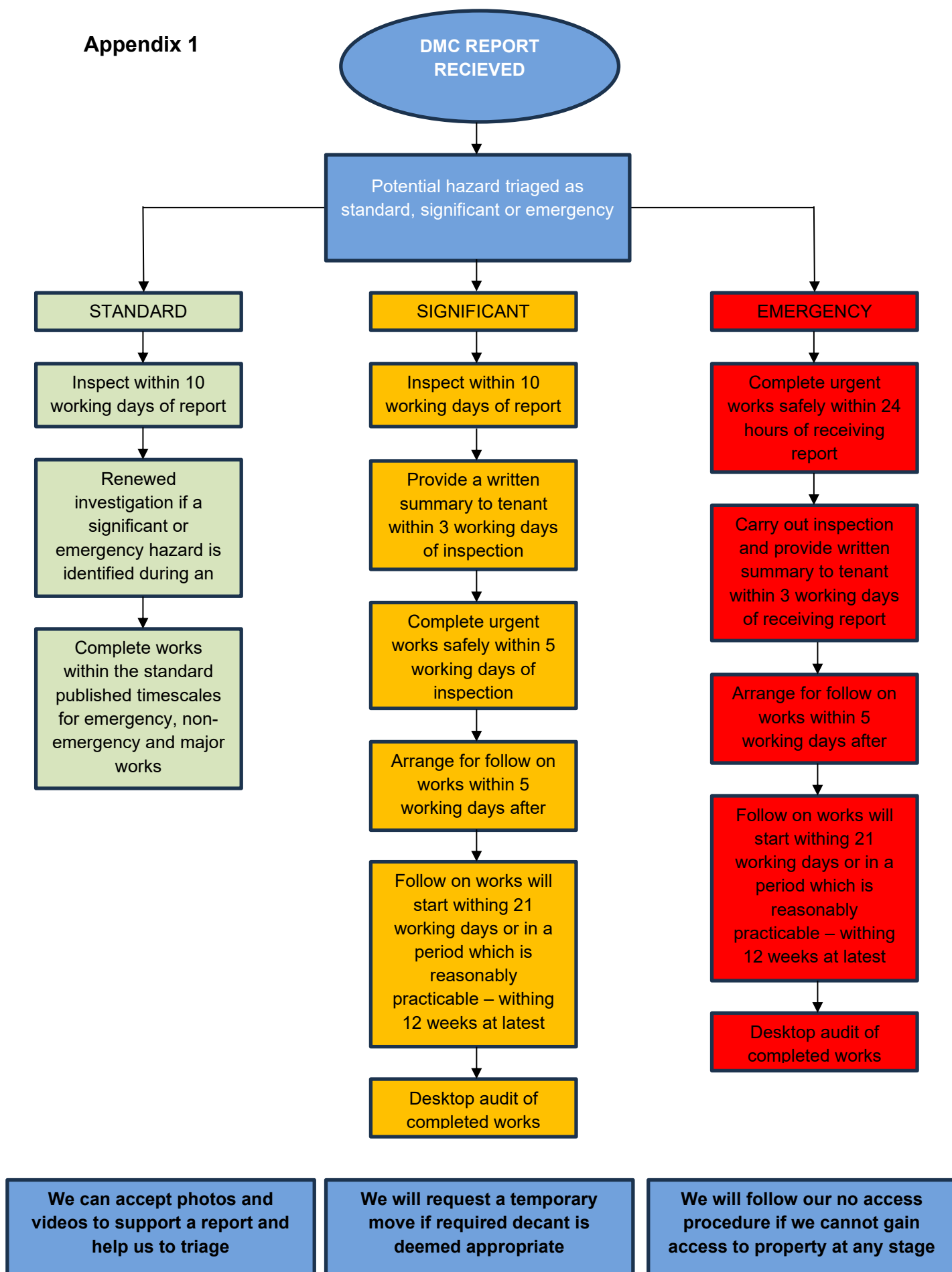
Integrity	A housing professional has a clear understanding of their values and acts in accordance with them – they will do the right thing, for the right reasons, based on the best evidence and without partiality.
Inclusive	A housing professional acts transparently and fairly; builds good relationships; and works collaboratively with partners, customers, and communities to achieve better outcomes.
Ethical	A housing professional acts fairly and makes choices and decisions by applying principles and values consistently. They understand the impact that poor decisions can have both on people's lives and the reputation of their organisation and they challenge unethical practice in a fair and considered way.

Knowledgeable	A housing professional has relevant and up-to-date practical and specialist knowledge as required by their job role, understands the bigger picture, and has a passion for continuous learning.
Skilled	A housing professional equips themselves with the relevant skills to deliver effective services to tenants, customers, colleagues, and partners.
Advocate	A housing professional acts as an ambassador for the wider housing sector and an advocate for the housing profession.
Leadership	Housing professionals at all levels should demonstrate leadership, be forward thinking and create opportunities. They find solutions to improve outcomes for their organisation, tenants and communities and demonstrate their ability to adapt to the latest ideas, situations, and change.

12. Associated Documents and Links to Further Information

- [English Housing Survey 2023 to 2024: Headline findings \(GOV.UK\)](#)
- [Housing Ombudsman resources for DMC](#)
- [Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 \(Section 11\)](#)
- [Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\) Guidance](#)
- [Decent Homes Standard – June 2006 update](#)
- [Homes \(Fitness for Human Habitation\) Act 2018](#)
- [Regulator of Social Housing Regulatory Standards](#)
- [Public Sector Equality Duty \(Section 149 of Equality Duty 2010\)](#)
- [Building Regulations 2010 Approved Document F](#)
- [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023](#)
- [Awaab's Law: Guidance for social landlords – Timeframes for repairs in the social rented sector](#)
- Hillingdon DMC Policy

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Hazard Description & Criteria - Section 1		TICK ONE ONLY
		Score
Widespread/Severe Damp & Mould (e.g., mould covering a bedroom wall; mould affecting more than one room, or a critical area like a bedroom or kitchen; or any mould report involving direct reference to severe respiratory distress.)		4
Moderate/Localised Damp & Mould (e.g., mould covering a significant patch in a non-critical room like a bathroom, or damp patches that are actively spreading.)		3
Minor Damp/Mould or Secondary Hazard (e.g., persistent condensation causing minor mould in a bathroom; a non-structural cold issue; a non-critical broken handrail.)		2
Low-Level Property Issue (e.g., non-spreading mould on a window frame, an unresolved history of minor damp, a report of poor ventilation only.)		1
Vulnerability Status of Any Resident in the Home - Section 2		TICK ONE ONLY
		Score
Critical Health Impact (Tenant reporting direct, recent, or immediate medical symptoms linked to the hazard e.g., "My child is struggling to breathe at night because of the mould.")		5
Vulnerable Group with High-Risk Health Condition (Any resident who is pregnant or any resident with asthma, COPD, severe allergies, compromised immunity; resident is on dialysis or using oxygen/life support equipment in the home.)		4
Very Young Child or Elderly/Frail Resident (Any resident is under 3 years old OR over 75 years old OR has severe mobility issues making swift exit difficult.)		3
High-Risk Medical Condition (A chronic condition not directly respiratory (e.g., diabetes); or has a non-severe physical/learning disability.)		2
Standard Tenancy (No explicitly stated or known health or age vulnerabilities.)		1
Criteria		Score
Hazard Description & Criteria Score		1 to 4
Vulnerability Status of Any Resident in the Home		1 to 5
Total combined score		
Outside Awaab's Law Scope – Treat as a standard DMC issue		Up to 4
Significant hazard – investigate within 10 working days		5 to 7
Emergency hazard – investigate and make safe within 24 hours		8 or above