

# Damp and Mould team Business Case

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<b>Author:</b>	Mike Walsh
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## Business Case Outline

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## Executive Summary

Following the death of Awaab Ishack on 21 December 2020 as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home, Awaab's Law, which was introduced in the landmark Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, requires landlords to investigate and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes. Awaab's Law is part of the biggest government reforms affecting social housing in a decade. Since 2010, there has been a steady improvement in the quality of social housing with a reduction in the proportion of non-decent social rented homes from 20% in 2010 to 10% in 2021.

A Levelling Up White Paper has pledged to reduce non-decency in rented homes by 50% by 2030. Awaab's Law will contribute to this mission by making sure that social housing landlords are taking swift action on the assessment and remedy of the most serious hazards.

This business case proposes the employment of a dedicated mould and damp team to address the prevalent issue of mould and dampness in council homes and to ensure we meet the challenging timescales to investigate and remedy issues that have been set out in Awaab's Law. The introduction of this specialised team aims to provide timely, efficient, and high-quality repair services to improve the living conditions of residents and prolong the lifespan of council properties.

The current maintenance team is made up of 22 directly employed tradespersons. They are working to capacity undertaking a variety of repairs commensurate to their individual skillsets. The timescales that are proposed within Awaab's Law indicate that there is no current capacity within the team to be able to meet these stringent targets with the existing resource. By establishing a dedicated team, we can meet these tight deadlines, streamline the repair process, reduce turnaround times, and enhance overall customer satisfaction.

The proposed team will consist of skilled professionals trained in identifying, assessing, and remediating mould and damp problems. Their specialisation in this area will result in more effective solutions, ultimately reducing the recurrence of issues and lowering long-term maintenance costs for the council.

Investing in a mould and damp team aligns with the council's commitment to providing safe and habitable homes for residents. By proactively addressing these issues, we can contribute to improving residents' quality of life, health outcomes, and overall satisfaction with their housing arrangements.

Through this business case, we seek approval to allocate resources for the recruitment, training, and ongoing operation of the mould and damp team. The long-term benefits of this initiative include cost savings, improved property conditions, and enhanced relationships with residents, reinforcing the council's reputation as a responsible and proactive housing provider.

## **Business Problem and Opportunity**

It is indicated in Awaabs Law proposal that the following timescales to investigate and subsequently start works to remedy the cause and effect of damp and mould will be implemented.

### **Inspection/diagnosis of hazards**

The Awaab's Law campaign proposed that social landlords be given 7 days to begin work to a property if a medical professional believes there is a risk to a residents' health. Whilst it is proposed that landlords be given 7 days to begin work where there is a risk to a residents' health or safety there will be no requirement from the affected tenant to provide medical evidence to determine this risk.

The Awaab's Law campaign recommended that social landlords be required to investigate the causes of damp and mould within 14 calendar days of a complaint being made where there is no report from a medical professional.

The campaign for Awaab's Law called for landlords to be required to provide residents with a report on the findings of the investigation. It is proposed that residents be issued with a written summary of the findings of the investigation within 48 hours of the investigation concluding.

The written summary must specify, at minimum:

- How and when the investigation was conducted, and the job title of the individual who conducted the investigation.
- Any following investigations that are required, and if so when they will take place
- If a hazard was found and if so what
- Whether the hazard is likely to pose a significant risk to residents' health or safety
- If it does pose a risk:
  - [If applicable] what temporary repairs are needed to make the property safe until the problem can be permanently rectified
  - what the registered provider will do to permanently rectify the problem and the likely timescales for this
- How to contact the registered provider with any queries

Within 14 calendar days of being made aware that there is a potential hazard in a social home, the registered provider must provide a written summary of findings to the resident that includes details of any hazard identified and (if applicable) next steps, including an anticipated timeline for repair and a schedule of works.

If, within 48 hours of the investigation, the registered provider is not able to set out full details of wider repair works, and only the immediate steps they are taking (i.e. temporary repairs), they should inform the resident of when they can expect a full schedule of works.

### **Carrying Out works identified on inspection**

If the investigation indicates that a reported hazard poses a significant risk to the health or safety of the resident, the registered provider must begin repair works within 7 calendar days of the written summary being issued.

It is considered that 'beginning' repair works would entail a worker being on site physically starting to repair and rectify a hazard. It will be irrelevant whether works are carried out by in-house workers, external contractors, or a combination.

Because of the range of hazards, and varying ways they can impact individuals' health and safety, there is a significant challenge in prescribing a clear threshold for beginning works that can apply to all circumstances. It is believed that defining the hazards in scope of Awaab's Law as those that pose a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of the resident is appropriate. As noted above, if a registered provider is unable to determine whether a hazard poses a significant risk to a resident's health or safety, they should take a cautious approach and take any necessary action to mitigate health risks.

In some situations, registered providers may wish to take a phased approach to more complex remediation works, and temporary works will be required to keep the property safe before wider works are completed. For example, in cases of damp and mould this could include temporary works to remove the mould spores to mitigate the health risk, with wider repair works to follow. In such situations, registered providers must still begin works within 7 days, and details of further works must be included in the written report

The business problem in this scenario is the how we as an organisation currently deal with the presence of damp and mould issues in council properties, and how we will gear up to conforming with the proposals set out in Awaabs Law.. Without a dedicated team to address these issues, the council may struggle to effectively manage and resolve damp and mould problems in a timely manner. This would have the potential to put our tenants and the organisation at risk.

We currently have one dedicated tradesperson(decorator) that undertakes the treatment of mould and damp identified in our properties. Any building related issues that contribute to mould and damp are dealt with by our in-house R&M team. We have 2 builders that carry out a majority of building repairs in the existing team and due to demand, we currently have works booked in 20 weeks in advance. This means that if building works are identified, we would have no capacity to meet the target timescale of 21 days that is to be set out in Awaabs law.

## Proposed Project Objectives

In order to be in a position to deliver on the stipulations set out in Awaabs law I propose that we need to recruit into the following roles.

- 2 x multi trade builders – by having 2 dedicated builders we will be able to respond to any repairs or structural issues that are causing/adding to presence of damp or mould a property. They will be able to be booked in to inspect and repair issues within the specified timeframes.
- 3x multi trade decorators – by having 3 additional decorators we will be able to assess and respond to minor and major damp and mould issues within the specified timeframes. Being multi trade, they will be able to undertake minor building works and plastering which will ensure best use of resource with the 2 builders.
- 1 x scheduler/administrator – Given the focus that these works will attract and the guidelines we will have to work to in regards providing reports to the customer within 48 hrs of the inspection, we will need an administrator to book in the works for the trades and correspond to the tenants as per the guidelines within Awaabs law. They will also be tasked with the scheduling works and aftercare which will include follow up calls up to 6 months after to ascertain if there is a repeat of the damp and mould issues.
- Senior trade/supervisor – we have identified that there is capacity within the current senior trades personnel we have to provide the required supervision for this new team. The scheduler / administrator role will be managed under the BSU team Leader and by doing this will provide resilience during times of A/L and sickness.

We are currently delivering damp and mould remedial works with 1 decorator and utilising the R&M trade operatives. Over the last 12 months we have employed a contractor (QEST) to assist with inspection and delivery of the larger scale jobs or at times where we have not had the capacity within the team.

From 01/04/23 to 31/03/2024 received reports of damp and mould from 373 properties. These range from small, isolated patches to issues that affect the whole property. Although a majority of these works were attended to in house, we had to outsource 45 jobs to an external contractor. These were a range of larger and small scale works that we could not complete in house that were mould treatments only. This was at a cost of £66634.38, averaging £1480.76 per property. If we were to have outsourced all of the work to a contractor instead of delivery in house, then the cost based on the numbers of reports of damp and mould we had is estimated to have been approx. £552,343.28. This would have been for mould treatments only.

I have analysed the works we carried out in house over the last 12 months and found that the time taken for us to attend a property and carry out an inspection following a report of damp and mould issues is approximately 9 days on average. This means we are currently able to deliver on the 14-day target that is anticipated to be set. There were a few instances where it took more than 14 days, but this was over the winter months when we had a higher volume of jobs reported, which is to be expected.

It was found that the time taken for us to attend a property and start works following a report of damp and mould issues was an average of 41 days. This is where we will fail to meet the 21-day target that is anticipated to be set. This is due to currently utilising the existing workforce within R&M that are already stretched with volumes of works.

I am confident that by taking on the resource set out in this business case, we will be able to meet the targets set out.

## **Risk**

There will be a risk of not gaining access to some properties that we receive a report of damp and mould for. These are more likely to be from third party referrals, i.e tenancy officers, carers etc that have attended the property for reasons other than repairs. These tend to be properties where the tenants do not report issues and have not done so for a number of years and tend to have vulnerabilities or other issues that causes them not to or be able to report. There are some that will refuse access for reasons of instruction by solicitors in no win no fee claims of disrepair.

In this instance Awaabs Law advises the following;

### **Access**

If a registered provider is unable to access a property to conduct an investigation or make repairs despite several reasonable approaches to do so the following actions would be taken to constitute reasonable attempts for access.

Landlords must make at least 3 attempts to contact the resident (or appointed representative) and arrange a suitable time to access the property

Landlords must work with residents to arrange a suitable time to visit the property. Landlords should offer timeslots for residents to choose from and should take into consideration the residents' needs (for example their working pattern) when offering timeslots to attend to the property

If the registered provider is unable to access the property within the agreed timeslot, they should leave the resident a notice stating that an attempt was made and providing contact details. The registered provider should contact the resident and offer an alternative slot

Landlords will not be expected to make more than 3 attempts to access the property within agreed timeslots. They will be expected to keep evidence that they have made best efforts to work with the resident to identify a timeslot and the resident has either not responded or has refused access within that slot

Throughout this process, we will require landlords to keep a record of all correspondence made with residents, noting the date, time and actions attempted

If a resident is unwilling or unable to provide access to the registered provider within the timescales, landlords will not be in breach for missing the timescales. However, they will be expected to continue to work as quickly as possible to enter the property to investigate and/or remedy the

hazard. Once the registered provider has accessed the property, the proposed timescales will apply. For example, if a landlord enters the property on day 16 to investigate, they will still be expected to provide the written summary within 48 hours, and to have begun work within 7 days (i.e. by day 23) unless they are again unable to obtain access.

### **Reduction in reports of damp and mould in the summer months.**

Looking at the data for 2023-2024 there is a slight reduction in the reporting of these issues over the summer months. This could mean downtime for the trade operatives in the damp and mould team. However, it is envisaged that following ratification of this Law, we can expect an increase in reports initially due to claims from no win no fee solicitors taking advantage of this new legislation.

In the unlikely event that there is a slowdown in work, the trades team for damp and mould will be utilised on void works or repairs and maintenance works which will help in bringing wait times down. In order to facilitate this, we will be employing multi trade operatives that have more skills than just painting and decorating. This will give us greater flexibility in ensuring best use of resource and minimise any potential downtime.

## **Options**

Outlined below are the options to consider.

- **Do Nothing /continue as we are.**

If we continue as we are going with the current resource, we will ultimately fail our responsibility to meet the compliance targets set out. This could result in potential loss of life or serious illness for tenants and huge reputational damage and financial repercussions for the organisation.

- **Procure an external contractor/contractors to undertake this work.**

As previously mentioned, we have had the support of QEST, a damp and mould contractor that undertook works that we did not have the capacity for in house. As they do not currently undertake the structural element of the works this would have to go out to tender to find a contractor that would be able to complete all elements of this work. If we were to continue to utilise an external contractor then we could expect the costs for this to be in excess of £650k to complete the volumes of work we had last year.

- **Create in house damp and mould team.**

Delivering this work with an internal damp and mould team will give RBC better control of how and when this work will be done, along with better quality control and cost efficiency. Having an in house team, our customers will receive a better quality of service as our team will have better understanding of RBCs principles and goals. This will help build increased employee morale, which fosters loyalty and commitment and a stronger sense of purpose.

## **Cost implications**

The cost to bring this work in house is as follows.

**Labour (inc on costs) = £252696.00**

5 x tradespersons paid on grade 6 SCP 24 = £219080.00

1 x admin paid on grade 4 SCP 10 = £33616.00

**Materials (estimated) = £150,000.00**

**PPE, training & equipment (estimated) = £10,000.00**

**Vehicles (estimated) = £50382.00**

**Total = £ 463,078.00**

This is an estimated cost based on quotations and data for the last 12 months materials usage allowing a sum for jobs put out to external contractors.

Based on the estimated costs of going to an external contractor to undertake the works based on last years data I estimate the costs to be £650,000. This includes labour and material costs of building works carried out by our internal workforce on jobs completed by contractors that were mould treatments only.

Bringing this work in house would yield a potential saving of approx. £187,000.00

## **Summary Recommendation**

In summary, the decision to create an in-house damp and mould team will ensure we are fully able to be compliant with Awaabs Law. It will also boost the morale of the current in-house team as it will demonstrate a commitment by RBC to delivering works in house which in turn gives people job security etc. We will also have a better control of the quality and cost of the service we provide to our customers which is a positive outcome for RBC.

## **Next steps**

If this proposal is agreed we will put forward the Job Descriptions for Job Evaluation, when complete we would run a recruitment drive to fill the posts. Concurrent to this we would commence hiring vehicles and provide uniforms, PPE, stores, and work equipment.

As soon as the above is completed, the service would commence (after the new recruits undergo necessary training. Then, as, and when Awaabs law is ratified, we will already be delivering our damp and mould remedial works in line with its proposals.



## Appendices

- **Appendix A – Salary costs including on costs**
- **Appendix B – vehicle costs**

