



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 20 February 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier, Housing

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director – Housing, Health & Wellbeing

Lead Officer: Caroline Wagstaff, Business Manager - Housing Maintenance & Asset Management, 07929 864367

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report, Non-Key Decision
Report Title	Surveyor - Damp & Mould – New Post
Purpose of Report	To seek budgetary approval to establish a qualified surveyor post to manage reported damp and mould cases and assist with disrepair claims.
Recommendations	That Cabinet approves the recommendation to make the necessary budgetary allowance as set out in paragraph 3.1 of the report, to increase establishment by 1x FTE to create a surveyor role with a focus on damp and mould, subject to the HRA revenue budget being approved by the Full Council on 13 February which includes the funding for this role from 2024-25.
Alternative Options Considered	To add these additional activities to existing posts which would not provide the resource needed to prioritise responses to damp and mould.
Reason for Recommendations	To ensure that the Council can respond proactively and promptly to reports of damp and mould and provide additional technical knowledge to the Assets and Repairs functions. This aligns to Community Plan Objective 1 – improving health and well-being and Objective 2 - Increasing the supply, choice, and standard of housing.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 In October 2021, the Housing Ombudsman issued a “Spotlight on Damp and Mould”, highlighting the approach they expect social landlords to take when dealing with tenants who complain about damp. This included adopting a more customer centred approach to the issue and better management of complaints.
- 1.2 On 22 November 2022 the Regulator of Social Housing sent a letter to all social housing providers seeking information and assurances on our approach to tackling damp and

mould. Whilst our response was well received the appointment of a Damp and Mould Surveyor was noted as a future improvement in our approach.

- 1.3 Awaab's Law was an amendment to the Social Housing Act that became law in July 2023. This was in response to the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in 2020 from damp and mould in his parents' home. Awaab's Law is currently in consultation which will mandate social landlords to remedy damp and mould within strict time limits although the Council await the outcome of the consultation. Also, under the Social Housing Act 2023 the Housing Ombudsman has been given new powers to investigate damp and mould cases.
- 1.4 The Social Housing Act aims to raise the bar on competence and conduct by setting standards on the competence and conduct "of all staff involved in the provision of housing management services".
- 1.5 As part of our approach we have undertaken a full review of our damp and mould policy procedures to include the 27 recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman review.
- 1.6 Our housing repairs team do not currently have a qualified surveyor to investigate, draft and manage schedule of works, to ensure full remedy of damp. There is no capacity with the Asset Team to on take this role currently or in the foreseeable future given the increase in the HRA capital investment programme.
- 1.7 Currently damp and mould cases are initially investigated by our Repairs Inspector and they refer cases on a regular basis to a surveyor in the asset team. The workload of the Repairs Inspector and that of the Asset Surveyors is extremely high and this double handling is putting more pressure on the Council's ability to respond quickly to reports of damp and mould.

2.0 Proposal/Details of Options Considered

- 2.1 To ensure we identify the causes of damp and mould correctly and commission appropriate works to remedy reported cases, these should be investigated and managed by a qualified surveyor. This will also be a requirement for any disrepair cases brought against the Council.
- 2.2 The role of the additional Surveyor will be to cover other complex repairs, with priority always being given to responding to damp and mould cases.
- 2.3 Option A – Consultants/Agency Surveyor
To appoint a consultant or agency surveyor the gross costs in the current marketplace would be 40% - 60% higher costs than a permanent appointment. Enquires with two agencies have been given indicative costs of £300 - £400 a day. This would equate to £78,000 - £104,000 annually.

This is not a sustainable medium- or long-term option nor does it evidence the Council's commitment to keeping our homes decent which is a long-term commitment.

2.4 Option B – Additional responsibility for Asset Team surveyors

Whilst the Asset Team does employ surveyors, currently there are two permanent surveyor posts filled and two vacant posts. Given the increase in capital spend now and

for the future there is not the capacity or resource to carry out this additional burden and a new post would be required whether in this team or the Repairs Team.

2.5 Option C - Appoint Damp and Mould Surveyor

The appointment of dedicated Damp and Mould Surveyor would give much greater assurance that the Council would be able to respond appropriately and within timescales to meet the forthcoming legal requirements under the Social Housing Act 2023.

2.6 A specific post would give greater assurance to our tenants that we are providing the appropriate qualified staff member to assess the possible cause correctly and be able to recommend the best approach to tackling first time.

2.7 It is planned that this role will also provide support and guidance to all colleagues working in tenants' homes to identify problems early that can lead to damp and enable us to adapt swiftly to new legislative requirements whilst not impacting our existing service performance.

2.8 The recommendation is to appoint a Damp and Mould Surveyor who is also qualified and has experience in diagnosing and remedying damp and mould in people's homes and increase resources within the service most used and valued by our tenants.

2.9 The intention would be to appoint at the Surveyor grade at NS10 and include the current market supplement paid for this grade.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Financial Implications – FIN23-24/3262

3.1 The budgeted cost for a Surveyor on NS10 would be £46,071 (including oncosts). With the £3,000 market supplement, the total annual cost for 2023/24 with the pay award is £49,071. Assuming that this post would only be filled from March 2024 onwards, the cost in the current financial year would be contained within existing budgets. For 2024/25 and future years, the funding of the post is included in the service budgets.

HR Implications

3.2 The Housing Maintenance and Asset Management Surveyor job description is a generic one. If the intention is to use the same job description but advertise stating that there will be a focus on damp and mould alongside more generic tasks, it will be appropriate to use the same job description. However, if the intention is to amend the existing job description in any way – i.e., to include specific experience or qualifications for example, then it should be evaluated as a new role, using the NSDC JE conventions. Consideration should be given as to whether the existing job description is fit for purpose for this role to ensure that the right person can be recruited.

- 3.3 The proposal is to include the current surveyor market supplement, £3000 per annum, with this role. Again, if it is the same Surveyor job description, this would be appropriate. It should be noted however that the current market supplement is due to end March 2024 and a further report will need to be brought to SLT, demonstrating that there is still a market driver for it, if the intention is for this additional payment to continue for a longer period. That the market supplement is to be reviewed will be included in any advert for the new post.
- 3.4 Reference is made in this report to the Repairs Inspector currently undertaking damp and mould investigations but now having to refer them to surveyors in the Housing Asset team. Is the issue one of capacity – i.e., these investigations could continue to sit with the Repairs Inspector if there was additional capacity in that role, or is it that it is inappropriate for it to sit here as the post does not have the appropriate qualifications? This is worth considering given the difficulties we have in recruiting qualified surveyors due to the skills shortage and we may have more success in recruiting to an additional Repairs Inspector role.
- 3.5 The Council establishment has increased by 19.11 FTE as of Q2 (including 7 temp posts) across a number of areas; ICT, Public Protection, Housing and Estates Management, Revenues and Benefits, Housing Income and Leaseholder Management, Housing Maintenance and Asset Management, and Economic Growth. This proposal seeks to increase the establishment by a further 1FTE. Consideration should be given as to whether growth in teams is in line with the objectives of our Community Plan. The proposals above are however designed to support performance in line with changes in law and best practice.
- 3.6 The proposal is to increase the establishment in line with service requirements rather than to make any changes that will impact existing staff. If the post is recruited to, this will be carried out in line with the Council’s recruitment and selection policy to ensure that it is done in a fair and transparent manner and that no candidates are disadvantaged due to holding a protected characteristic.

ICT Implications

- 3.7 The proposed restructure will result in an increase to the establishment of 1 FTE which requires additional ICT equipment and licenses - noted in financial implications.
- 3.8 The digital strategy action plan has a major inflight project replacing the Housing Management System. However, based on the coverage of roles, this system improvement is unlikely to significantly reduce this by digital transformation or process re-engineering.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.