



SOS

North Edinburgh's Housing Emergency

The stories, the statistics and the science

Report by
North Edinburgh Parents Action Group

April 2024



HOUSING AND HEALTH

Poor-quality housing harms health and evidence shows that **exposure to poor housing conditions** (including damp, cold, mould, noise) **is strongly associated with poor health, both physical and mental.**

The longer the exposure to poor conditions, including cold, the greater the impact on mental and physical health. Specific physical effects are morbidity including respiratory conditions, cardiovascular disease and communicable disease transmission, and increased mortality. In terms of mental health impacts, living in non-decent, cold or overcrowded housing and in unaffordable housing **has been associated with increased stress and a reduction in a sense of empowerment and control over one's life and with depression and anxiety.** Children living in overcrowded homes are **more likely to be stressed, anxious and depressed, have poorer physical health, attain less well at school and have a greater risk of behavioural problems** than those in uncrowded homes.

The Marmot Review: 10 Years On. Institute of Health Equity. 2020.

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

The right to adequate housing is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25). The 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11.1) guarantees the right to housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. This should not be interpreted narrowly and includes having the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.

The elements of adequate housing include security of tenure, availability of services (such as safe drinking water, proper sanitation, energy for heating and cooking, lighting etc), affordability, habitability (protection against cold, damp, heat, rain etc), accessibility, location (access to schools and social facilities) and also takes into account cultural identity.

Extract from City of Edinburgh Council Housing Service Improvement Plan.

October 2023



Contents

- p. 3 Forward
- p. 4 Introduction by North Edinburgh Parents Action Group
- p. 5 Some statistics about Edinburgh's Housing Emergency
- p. 6 to 25 The stories behind the statistics
 - p. 26 The perfect home
 - p. 27 The Science
 - p. 28 A summary of issues faced by local residents
- p. 29 to 30 Our demands
- Back cover Acknowledgements



Forward

Homes are much more than just physical structures. Strong scientific evidence has shown that poor housing can affect someone's physical and mental health throughout their life. The longer people are exposed to poor housing, the greater the impact. Young children and the elderly who spend a lot of time at home are particularly at risk.

Many of Scotland's homes are old or hard to heat. About 1 in 5 homes in Scotland are underheated and the cost-of-living crisis has led half of households to reduce energy use further. Across the UK, almost 5000 deaths over winter are thought to be due to cold homes. Cold, damp and mouldy homes increase the risk of chest infections, asthma and heart problems as well as anxiety and depression. Overcrowding increases the spread of infections reduces privacy, and can be a source of stress and anxiety.

These health problems are avoidable, not inevitable. Adequate housing is a human right and the potential health benefits are great. As Sir Michael Marmot said, "Our homes provide the living environment that dictates our future health." In order to improve physical and mental health across Scotland and tackle the huge inequalities in health across our country, we must make sure everyone has access to a warm, dry, safe, affordable home.

Dr Olivia Swann

MBChB, PhD, MRes, MRCPCH
Clinical Lecturer in Paediatric Infectious Disease
University of Edinburgh

"Our homes provide the living environment that dictates our future health."

Introduction

We are North Edinburgh Parents Action Group. We got together in September 2023 to discuss and take action on issues affecting our families. Housing is a major issue for most of our members regardless of where they live in North Edinburgh, whether they live in temporary or permanent accommodation or who their landlord is.

Since we started to discuss these issues in our group, we have discovered how widespread poor housing conditions are across North Edinburgh. Some of the issues we have identified include: dampness and mould; overcrowding; repairs not being carried out properly or not at all; anti-social behaviour; inappropriate housing which does not meet the needs of large families and people with disabilities and a lack of empathy and respect by many staff towards tenants. These issues are not confined to the private rented sector, they are commonly experienced in housing association properties as well as council housing.

We hope by sharing our stories in this publication that decision makers and service providers will gain a better understanding of the extent of the problem in North Edinburgh and the devastating effect poor housing conditions have on the physical and mental health of people in our community.

More importantly, we want things to change, not just for ourselves and our families but for people across North Edinburgh and across the city. We understand that there are no simple solutions or easy fixes to Edinburgh's housing crisis, however, ensuring that everyone has access to a warm, dry, safe home should be an achievable goal in 2024. Edinburgh is one of the richest cities in the country and it is time that all levels of government - Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Government and the UK government prioritise spending on improving housing conditions. The benefits of good housing have been identified in academic journals and government reports for decades. Good housing is good for our physical and mental health. It saves the NHS money. It reduces the number of days lost in the workplace due to illness. And crucially, it helps to reduce the attainment gap as children are less likely to miss out on their education due to recurrent illnesses caused by cold, damp homes.

We would prefer to be spending our time in our group doing other things, however, we have been forced to act as we can no longer tolerate this situation knowing the impact that our housing situation is having on our children.

We are serious about our demands and we are prepared to do whatever it takes to secure a decent place to live.



Edinburgh's Housing Emergency: Some Statistics

In November 2023, Scotland's capital city declared a housing emergency. The following statistics demonstrate the seriousness of the current situation:

- 6,373 live homeless applications on 31 March 2023. A 17% increase compared with the previous year.
- 420 reported instances of a household entitled to temporary accommodation not being offered it (there were a total of 445 instances of this happening nationally and so the majority were in Edinburgh)
- 1,490 instances of a household being kept in temporary accommodation which was deemed by law to be unsuitable to their needs (in breach of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order).
- 25% of Temporary Accommodation placements on 31 March 2023 were classed as unsuitable under the UAO
- 3,560 households living in temporary accommodation as of 31 March 2023, a 7% increase compared to 2022
- 2,755 children living in temporary accommodation as of 31 March 2023, a 9% increase compared to the year before
- For cases closed in 2022/23 households spent on average 429 days in temporary accommodation
- 48% of households still living in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh have been living there for over a year
- 21% of households still living in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh have been in TA for over 2 years
- 6% of households still living in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh have been in TA for over 3 years
- Only 451 social homes were delivered by Edinburgh Council between April 2022 and March 2023
- There were 1,416 void properties in the city in November 2023
- The average turn around time of a void property in Edinburgh is 474 days
- There are 197 bids for every home that becomes available on Edindex
- The average rent for a 2 bedroom property in Edinburgh has increased by 78.5 % over the last decade
- At the start of the pandemic, it was estimated that nearly 14,000 properties were available for short-term let on Airbnb

Shelter Briefing Paper November 2023

The stories behind the statistics

B.O.

B.O. rents a 3 bedroom flat from a local Housing Association. She has been in her flat since January 2020. She lives there with her husband and 4 children who are aged 5, 7, 9 and 12 years. Prior to that, she lived in Almond House Lodge for 8 months.

There is dampness and mould in all 3 bedrooms of her flat, in an ensuite toilet off the main bedroom and in the main bathroom where there is considerable condensation. B.O. dries her washing in here to try to keep the moisture away from the children's bedrooms downstairs. She constantly wipes down the condensation, leaves the window open to ventilate the bathroom and tries to keep the door shut to stop the moisture from escaping.

According to B.O., "the smell of dampness is very strong throughout the house. As soon as the kids leave for school, I open the windows to ventilate the house and to try and get rid of the smell of dampness. I keep the windows open all day until I pick the kids up at 2.45." She struggles to heat the house properly as she has electric heaters which are very expensive to run. "I have an electric heater in my bedroom but it doesn't

work. I bought a small fan heater to try and dry out the dampness but it is too expensive to use".

Last April (2023) a workman sprayed the mould in her home with chemicals, however, it has come back again. "I clean the mould off myself now using strong chemicals that I get from the shops as it's the only way to get rid of it. I feel really ill after I do it though. I get a blocked nose and sore throat and it makes me feel sick".

There is also dampness in the wardrobe in the children's bedrooms which makes their clothes smell of damp which they hate. B points out that all 4 children suffer from blocked noses and sinus problems. Her 5 year old suffers constant headaches and has been referred to hospital for a scan.

After reporting the damp and mould again, a workman sprayed chemicals on the mould throughout the flat. Shortly afterwards, two of her children had a severe reaction on their skin which resulted in a hospital visit. B.O. was told that the rash was likely to be linked to the chemicals.





A.B.

A.B.'s family have been living in temporary accommodation owned by the Council for 5 years. Prior to moving here, the family spent 2 months living in Almond House Lodge. There is dampness and mould in most of the house. A.B.'s bedroom is very bad with mould. There is also dampness in a second bedroom which her 8 year old and her 16 year old share. She has a 3rd bedroom which is shared by her 2 older children who are 18 years old and 22 years old. The dampness in this room disappeared after the Council insulated the outside wall of the property in 2019.

A.B. tries to clean the mould regularly but it makes her feel sick and breathless afterwards. She wears a scarf over her face when cleaning as she was told the mould spores are very dangerous. A.B. and her husband also paint over the mould every few months as it looks unsightly.

After repeatedly reporting the dampness to her housing officer, a workman came to her house in May 2023 with a computer and took some readings. "He told me that our house was very

dangerous to live in and that he was going to send a copy of his report to the Council and I would hear from them within 2 weeks. I don't know what happened to the report - nobody seems to know".

A.B. is very worried about the effect that the damp and mould are having on her families' health. A.B. has a constant cold and problems with her sinuses. She was ill for almost 3 weeks at the beginning of this year. Her husband also has a lot of medical problems. He is diabetic, has cholesterol issues, high blood pressure and now he has asthma. A.B.'s main worry though is what these conditions are doing to her children. Last year, her youngest child took chickenpox which was followed by a serious skin infection. The child was seriously ill and had to spend one month in hospital. He was in a special unit for 3 days and the doctors were unable to explain what had caused the infection. "I get really worried whenever I look at the pictures of my son in hospital in case it happens again".

A has reported these issues to the Council, to Shelter and to her local councillor.



W.E.

W.E. and her family spent one month in Almond House Lodge before moving to temporary accommodation in West Pilton.

W.E. and her family moved into their current home about 1½ years ago. It is temporary accommodation which is owned by a local housing association. The family were rehoused here due to the extent of the dampness in the previous temporary accommodation. They lived in the house in West Pilton for over 2 ½ years. It was really bad with dampness and mould and two of the children developed asthma when they were there. A number of organisations helped them to get moved out of the house.

When the family first moved to their current house there was no visible signs of dampness or mould. They were there for about 5 - 6 months when the dampness first appeared. It started with small patches in the bathroom which they reported. There was no follow up after 2 months so they bought anti-mould spray to try and get rid of it. About 2 hours after the mould has been sprayed it disappears and it is usually about 2 months before it reappears. At

the end of January this year, a workman fitted an extractor fan in the toilet and it appears to have solved the dampness issue in that room.

They still have dampness on the walls of their 18 year old daughter's bedroom and mould has spread onto the blinds on the window. This room was previously used by W.E.'s 2 younger children but they were moved to another room after their youngest daughter was admitted to hospital for 1 week due to an asthma attack.

W.E. describes how her housing conditions are affecting her health. "The chemicals they (the workmen) use to clean the mould really aggravate my asthma so I have to leave the house as it makes me feel really ill. I've had asthma since I was a child but it became severe when we were living in the house at West Pilton. I often get quite breathless and my GP has had to prescribe extra inhalers and steroids for me. I've also been admitted to hospital because of my asthma."

The family do what they can to try and reduce the risk of mould. The household is ventilated





every day and they constantly wipe the condensation off the French windows which lead to the back garden.

The problems the family are experiencing are aggravated by the anti-social behaviour of their neighbours upstairs. For a while they were putting all their waste bins directly under their daughter's bedroom window which meant she couldn't open her window to ventilate the room due to the smell and the flies which came from the bins. The family reported the problem to the Council and the neighbours were forced to move the bins but have replaced the bins with rubbish such as old bikes, boxes and rubbish bags which are attracting vermin. When we visited W.E., there were numerous black bin bags outside the neighbour's front door and lots of rubbish lying at the side of the house.

Another issue which causes great distress is that the neighbours deliberately start making a noise every night roughly from 1 - 2am which makes it impossible for W.E. and her husband to sleep. They have to leave their bed and move to another part of the house to try to get away from the noise. They reported these issues to the police who told them to speak to the neighbours to try and sort it out. On one occasion the neighbour waved a hammer in front of W.E.'s husband's face. He phoned the police who advised him to go inside and close their door. The police visited the following day and advised the family to report the issue to the Council. They were told that in their experience it can make matters worse if they were to get involved.

All these issues combined are having a serious impact on W.E.'s physical and mental health. She has been prescribed anti-depressants to try and cope with all these issues. Her husband is very concerned about his wife and has given up his job in order to support her.

H.M.

H.M. and her family have been in this property for approximately 8 years. It is permanent accommodation owned by the Council.

They have mould on their kitchen ceiling as a result of a leak from the toilet upstairs. The leak was fixed but the crack in the ceiling hasn't been repaired. There is also mould on the ceiling in the toilet, in H.M.'s bedroom and in one of the children's bedrooms. H.M. cleans the mould every week with strong chemicals but it keeps coming back. H.M. and her 14 year old son are affected by the dampness and mould and continually have blocked sinuses and sore throats. H.M. also gets bad headaches which she has been told is caused by sinusitis.

H.M. has also been having problems with the neighbours who live below her which is causing

her stress. They continually complain about the noise made by her youngest child who is autistic. H.M. received a visit from a housing officer after her neighbour complained to the Council about the noise. H.M. explained to the housing officer that her 6 year old has autism and runs around continually and jumps off furniture. She tries hard to stop him making a noise but it is difficult. The Housing Officer advised H.M. to replace her laminate flooring with a carpet. She said she understood it was difficult for both families but that it wasn't easy to get another house and that unfortunately there was nothing else that could be done.

"This all feels like a big pressure. I have already a lot of stress coping with my son because of his learning disability and this is another pressure on me. It's not a good feeling at all."



V.

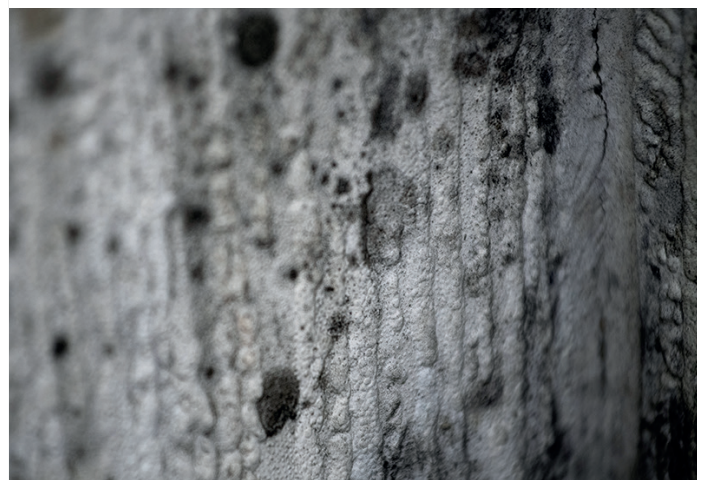
V has been living in a 2 bedroom flat for 5 years with her husband and 4 children. Her eldest daughter is 22 and is studying at university. Her 3 younger children are 8, 5 and 3 ½ years. The problem with overcrowding has been made worse due to the fact that one of the flat's 2 bedrooms is out of use due to the extent of the damp and mould in this room. This bedroom can only be used for storage. Most of the family's belongings are stored in plastic boxes to protect them from damp and mould. Only one bedroom is in operation so the living room is used as a sleeping area. V continually cleans the mould and clothes but it just comes back again.

These issues have been reported to the Council by phone and by email by V's husband but there has been no response or visits in 5 years.

Living in overcrowded accommodation is having a serious impact on the physical and mental health of the family. V explains "It is very difficult for everyone to sleep. We are all living on top of each other. We are sleeping on the floor in the living room with no beds. It's very cold. There is nowhere for the children to play and my oldest daughter has nowhere to study. I want a better house with beds to sleep on and more bedrooms and no damp."



"It is very difficult for everyone to sleep. We are all living on top of each other. We are sleeping on the floor in the living room with no beds. It's very cold."



A.

A lives in a newbuild flat opposite Craigroyston High School with her 4 children who all have long term health conditions (autism, learning disabilities, asthma and epilepsy). The building is only around 8 years old. A has numerous housing issues which she has repeatedly reported to the council and to a local councillor.

According to A, cheap materials have been used when constructing these flats which are causing problems. Her windows are wooden instead of PVC and the wood swells which makes it impossible to open and close them to ventilate her home. The windows also let the rain in which causes dampness and mould. When she spoke to the workman about this, he told her it would be about 20 years before she would get new windows as the Council has no money.

A lives on the first floor with her family. Her eldest son has severe autism and learning disabilities. A used to store her son's wheelchair and the younger children's bikes and scooters at the bottom of the stairs however they were stolen so she now has to carry the wheelchair up a flight of stairs which she struggles with. The lock on the main door is regularly broken by young people who meet at the bottom of the stair. The lock is usually replaced quite quickly by the Council but it is no sooner fixed then it gets smashed again. The kids also regularly set off the fire alarm in the stair when they get in. These issues have also been reported to the police but nothing is ever done.

The flat is severely overcrowded and she has neighbours below and above her and at both sides. She is always conscious of the noise and does her best to keep the children quiet. A stressed that she is very lucky as her neighbours are very supportive. Her eldest son is really difficult to control as he has severe autism. He regularly shouts, makes loud noises and breaks cups, plates and furniture and tries to

escape from the house which is a short distance from Pennywell Road. She was given an alarm for her front door after her son left the house at midnight. Her son enjoys outdoors and finds this calming. A explained "I wish I could get a ground floor flat with a garden which would make it easier to look after my son. I would be able to take him outside and he would have some space to play." She has been told by the support services who have been working with her son that there is nothing else they can do. "The house is basically inappropriate for my son's needs."

A's cousin lived in Almond House for 10 months and experienced similar issues to other people.



D.W.

DW lives in the top floor of a 6 in a block tenement in Granton. Her flat has 2 bedrooms and is owned by Edinburgh Council. She has lived there since 2017. She lives there with her 2 children - a boy aged 1 years and a girl aged 3 years. The boy is a cared for child which means that social work are involved in his care. When she first viewed the flat in 2017 DW said it looked okay. It had been painted and was done up and she thought it was perfect. She started having issues with dampness the following year.

DW has mould on the walls of the bathroom and around the window. There is an extractor fan in the toilet but it doesn't work properly. The children's bedroom also has dampness on the walls and on the ceiling. When there is heavy rain the damp patch spreads along the ceiling. DW also has water damage on the ceiling in the living room after a leak. DW is unable to ventilate the flat as most of the handles on the windows don't work properly. A workman came to fix them, however, when she tries to open the windows

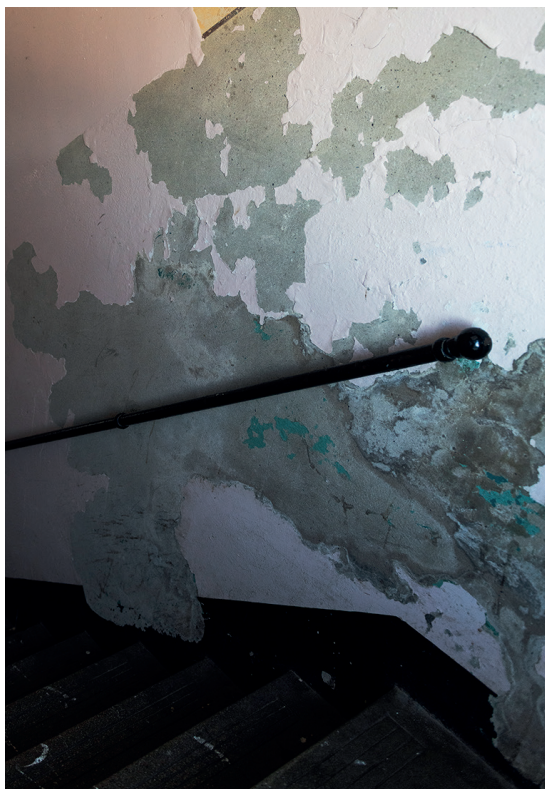
now they jam and she has to use physical force to try and close them.

DW has reported these issues to her housing officer and has been told repeatedly that someone will come out to look at what needs to be done. However, whenever she sees him in the street he tries to avoid her. "The last time I spoke to him in the street I asked what was happening about the dampness. I reminded him that he was going to send someone out to look at it. He told me someone was definitely coming but he didn't have his diary with him to check when it was but he would find out and get back to me when he got back to the office. He didn't get back to me and they still haven't showed up". When she tries to call the housing officer she is unable to get through.

Social work have also reported these issues to the housing officer but nothing has been done.

DW and one of the children have asthma and she is concerned about the effect that the damp conditions are having on their health as they have constant colds and coughs.

DW feels that Granton is the forgotten part of Edinburgh. "We never get any money spent down here. Every so often they (The council) feel sorry for us and we get something like a new community bin but that's about it!



A.M.

A.M. has dampness and is overcrowded. She lives in a 2 bedroom flat on the second floor. Her two sons are disabled, one is autistic with ADHD and the other is also autistic so they are unable to share a bedroom. One son needs to sleep in A.M.'s bedroom. One of her son's has to use a disabled buggy.

She has been in the same house for 9 years. She has asthma which she was born with it and has a constant cough. Her two children have asthma which she thinks is due to the conditions in the house. She has been told to treat the dampness herself. She is unable to do it as the mould cleaner makes her ill.

M.

M and her son live in temporary accommodation in West Pilton which is too big for her. She has 3 bedrooms and only requires two. Before moving here, she was moved to 3 different houses which meant constant disruption for her son. Her son has begged her not to move again as he is settled at school and has made some friends. She has been told by the Council that she isn't entitled to bid for a house on Edindex as she already has a home. She has had many problems with this accommodation including an infestation of mice which she thinks has been caused due to the number of empty properties in her stair.

S.R.

SR lives with her husband and 5 children in the Salveson area of North Edinburgh. She has lived there since her husband came out of the army. Their home became more and more overcrowded as their family grew up. Her eldest son wanted to get a place of his own as he needed his own space as he has additional support needs. The Council told him that he would have to make himself homeless if he wanted his own place which he did in 2017. He was sent to Almond House initially but SR said that the family had to make him come home due to the terrible conditions and the effect it was having on his mental health. SR explained that her son was covered in bites from bed bugs and that he was unable to prepare food for himself as the cooking facilities were terrible. SR was shocked to discover that the landlord of this 'facility' charges £200 per week for a bedroom. After her son left Almond Lodge, he had to sleep on the couch in the family living room for 18 months until he got his own flat in Muirhouse in 2019.



L.

L lives in a ground floor flat in Granton. She has lived there for over 20 years. L has black mould in her kitchen and bathroom which was caused by flooding and leaks from the flat above her. The leaks were repaired in the flat above but the dampness in her flat has never been treated properly. Another issue which has contributed to the dampness in her home is that the rhone pipes and gutters are missing from a whole corner of the building. This was reported repeatedly to the council over the years but no repairs have been carried out to date.

L was very ill at the beginning of the year (2024) and was in hospital for over a month. She was unable to return to her flat after leaving hospital as the dampness and mould had got much

worse. L said she was afraid to use her kitchen and bathroom because of the danger from the mould spores. Her son took her to her flat recently to pick up some of her belongings and the smell of the mould was overpowering. She also noticed that there were mushrooms growing on the ceiling. L explained that she had to cover her nose and mouth to avoid breathing in the mould spores. All these issues have been affecting L for at least 18 years and she believes they have contributed to her poor health. She is desperate to get a much smaller flat as her current flat is too big for her to cope with especially trying to keep on top of the recurring mould problems. "I'm exhausted with it. It's affecting my mental and physical health."



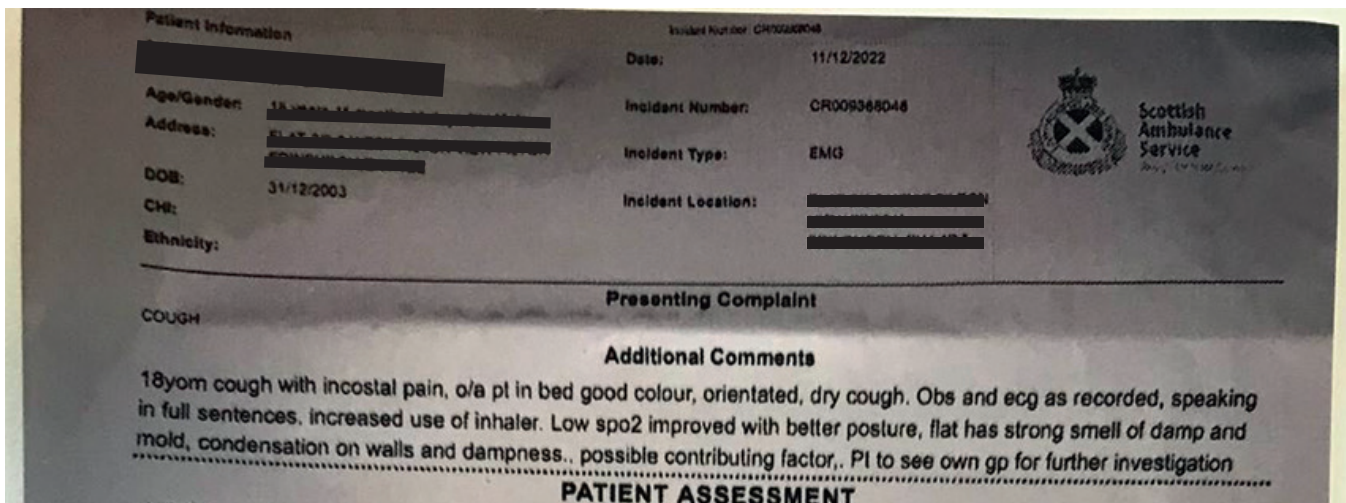
S.

S lived in a 3 bedroomed council house in West Pilton with her family from 2013 until 2018. During that time dampness became widespread throughout the house. "In the end, the only area in that house that didn't have dampness in the house was the hall".

In 2018, the family of 6 (including a baby) were decanted to a 2 bedroom house in West Pilton while their house was treated for dampness. They were told that they would be in this house for 4 weeks but ended up being there for 16 weeks. When they eventually moved back to their house they were told that it had been fully treated for dampness and mould. Within 6 weeks, the black mould had returned. Her eldest son became very ill due to the dampness

and had to be hospitalised due to breathing issues. "The paramedics who treated my son told me that they could smell and taste the dampness and mould as soon as they entered our house. I've got a copy of their report which says that the house contributed to his medical condition".

The family were eventually moved to another house in January 2023. The new house seemed okay when they moved in but she could smell the dampness within a couple of months and it started appearing a few months later. The mould and dampness eventually spread throughout the house. S reported the damp to the council and asked them to send a damp surveyor to her home. He eventually turned up



on 10 January 2024 and brought equipment to monitor the dampness on the walls. "The light on the monitor went from green to amber, then orange and then eventually bright red. The surveyor explained to me that if the light turns red that means that the walls are soaking wet". The surveyor was surprised when S told him that this house was an improvement on her last house which had been covered in black mould. He told her that his report would go to the Council and she would hear from them within 2 weeks. She heard nothing after 4 weeks so went to the media in desperation to try and get something done.

According to S, the Council were forced to act after she appeared on the STV news in January 2024. "They sent Clark Maintenance to



my house and they treated the mould and decorated 3 bedrooms and refloored the bathroom. Unfortunately, they left us with a hole in the living room which is where we sleep with our youngest. We can actually see outside through the hole. We still have black mould on the floorboards in the kitchen. The workmen put boards and linoleum on top of them before we moved in. We're afraid to lift them as this would expose the mould and make it more dangerous."

S is convinced that the damp and mould have affected the family's health. She is particularly concerned about the health of her children as the research says that babies and children are more likely to be affected. "My children have spent at least half of their lives in damp housing. R, who is 6 years old, has lived in a damp house all her life - it's all she knows. My oldest daughter is now on the strongest inhaler for her age and another daughter is waiting for a diagnosis for what we believe is asthma".

S's health has been compromised by living in damp housing. She had acute pneumonia in July 2022 in her old house. She then got mild pneumonia in November 2023. She has just been diagnosed with pneumonia yet again (March 24). This time she is finding it hard to breathe. She has been prescribed steroids and antibiotics again. "What I really need though is a warm, dry, damp and mould free home".

N.

N has lived in her 2 bedroom flat with her partner and son for 5 years. The main problem she has is trying to get the Council to carry out repairs. In the beginning she reported all the work that needed to be done but according to N, it takes them for ever to follow it up. "The window frames in the bathroom and bedroom are in poor condition and need replaced and the shower is broken but I haven't even bothered to report it. I don't phone any more, there's no point. They don't do anything. They tell you they'll send someone out and then they don't".

N has dampness in 2 bedrooms so the family sleep in the living room as her son and partner have asthma. She also has dampness around the windows. She has bought tubs with balls in them which are supposed to help absorb moisture.

N has a large hole (approx. 1 m wide) on the ceiling in a cupboard in her living room where the water tank is. The hole was caused by a leak in the attic. All their stuff in the cupboard was ruined by water damage including Christmas presents. She reported it to the Council and workmen eventually turned up and fixed the leak, however, they covered the hole with a bin bag as a temporary measure and haven't come back since.

She also has problems with the main front door as it doesn't shut properly which allows people to come into their stair who shouldn't be there. In the beginning bits of brick around the door frame fell off every time the door was opened or shut. It was reported to the Council and they eventually came out and fixed a plastic frame around the door as a temporary measure. The problem now is that it is difficult to shut the door so you have to slam it to get it to shut and this causes conflict with a neighbour on the ground floor. N was recently assaulted by this neighbour in front of her child when he was going to school. The neighbour accused her of slamming the door deliberately.

"Living like this affects the family's health and my mental health. It's frustrating not being listened to. The hole in the ceiling, the dampness, the electricity costs and the problems with the neighbour all cause a lot of anxiety. I think it's going to be too late before anything gets done, I'm scared."

"My 8 year old son is now scared to stay where he is. He should be living his life and not feeling scared in his own home. What counts as unsafe? Who decides? Is it me or the Police? I want out of here and into a home that me and my family can feel safe in."



D.

D has been living in her home, a two bedroom flat, for over 13 years. She has been looking for a new home since she was expecting her 3rd child 11 years ago. She now has 4 daughters. The two bedrooms are shared between the children. D and her husband sleep on the sofa and the floor in the living room.

D's daughters have really struggled with the overcrowding situation and the lack of privacy and space to do school work. The girls fight night and day and the house is very tense. One of the girls has particularly struggled with the situation and this led to a suicide attempt.

The strain has also affected D's husband. "M had a heart attack a few years back, the pressure was just too much for him."

The overcrowding situation has put particular emotional pressure on D making her feel "angry at everything" and causing a lack of motivation for day-to-day activities like washing, leaving the house, making appointments etc. D takes

medication for high blood pressure and an inhaler for breathing problems, both of which are being exacerbated by the stress of the family's overcrowding. She finds that she has more difficulty breathing when she is stressed or angry and was admitted to intensive care in June 2022. D had to give up work in September 2022 when her mental health deteriorated.

"Why can't they move us to a 4 bedroom house and move a family who need a 2 bedroom house into here. I was promised we would get a house when my daughter was 14, then corona virus came, then we were told there's no 4 bedroom houses. I've had silver priority for 5-6 years. It's all excuses."

Anti social behaviour and racism is also an ongoing issue for the family. D fears that one of their neighbours may harm the family. She is scared but nobody seems to care. "It's like our lives don't matter to the police or the Council. They say they can't do anything unless there is a threat to life."



A.E.

AE and her 2 children were eventually moved from her damp house in Granton Medway to a new build, 2 bedroom flat in West Pilton in April 2023. In December 2024, she had a leak from her upstairs neighbour's flat which came through into the children's bedroom. Her daughter hasn't been able to use the bedroom since then. The workmen thought the leak was from the boiler at first. It leaked for 2 weeks before they discovered it was coming from the toilet upstairs as the pan hadn't been fitted properly. The water left a smell as it was leaking from the toilet. AE was concerned about this and the fact that water was coming through the electrics in case it would blow. An electrician came to her house in the first week in January at 9.30pm at night. "He said he had been to 12 other folks houses that day before me and that he would come back and do the job in 2 days time. I eventually got the work done in April."



AE spoke to her housing officer about the electrics and the dampness and he told her to email him the photos which she did but he didn't respond. She then reported the matter to one of Shelter's housing advisers at an outreach session in the community centre. The housing adviser emailed the housing department which resulted in her housing officer visiting her. AE asked the housing officer if she would get compensation for the damage caused to the bedroom as it wasn't her fault and he told her that she should have taken out house insurance. "I got the feeling that he was angry that I had raised the issue with Shelter. He was quite aggressive. He told me if I wasn't happy I should go back to Shelter so I did!"



O.

O is living in temporary accomodation in Muirhouse with her 2 young children. O and her children initially lived with a host family in Balerno when they first arrived in Scotland. They were then moved to a ship in Leith.

She has lots of housing problems but her main concern is that she has had death threats posted in envelopes which were left on her doorstep. She has taken the envelopes to the police station. They took DNA samples but there has been no further action. She is very afraid for herself and her young children as she has no idea who is responsible. She panics when she gets mail in case it is another death threat.

O calls her children all the time to make sure they are okay as she is worried incase something happens to them. She is afraid to take them out to local activities incase something happens when she is out. The children are very unhappy and constantly ask why they have to live in this flat.



H.

H has been living in temporary accommodation for 5 years. H lives with her husband and 3 children (aged 17 - 22). The family lived in another flat for 1 year before moving to their current home 4 years ago. This property is owned by a housing association.

The house has damp and black mould in the bathroom and one of the bedrooms. H regularly cleans the mould with bleach but it comes back. This has been reported to the housing association.

The house is unsuitable for H as she has mobility issues and finds the stairs in her first floor flat challenging. She has had back and knee problems for 10 years and they have been getting worse over time. H has medical reports from the GP and the hospital about her condition.

H and her husband are afraid that if they live in this house for too long it will affect their bidding for a more suitable home. They are also worried that if they complain they might lose their home.

M.O.

M.O. lives in a council house with her 2 children in West Pilton. She has black mould in one bedroom and the toilet. In the second bedroom the clothes in the wardrobe and the bed clothes smell of damp and feel wet. She has to spray perfume on their clothes to try and hide the smell. She has recently had to replace the mattress as it had damp patches on it. There is also black mould behind the pictures she has up on the wall in the living room. M.O. uses bleach to remove the mould and to wash the shower curtain every week. "Whenever I do it, it makes me breathless and I have to get out of the house for at least 20 minutes until I can breath properly".

The house is extremely cold and the condensation continually runs down the walls. M.O. opens the windows for about 3 hours every day to ventilate the house and then has to put on the gas heating to try and warm the house up.

She is very concerned about the impact these housing conditions are having on her family's health. "I'm scared because the kids keep getting sick. They have blocked noses all the time and cough at night as soon as they go to bed. My 7 year old keeps asking me mummy





when are we moving out this mouldy house”.

Another issue which causes concern to M.O. and her family is that there is no lock on the main door of their building which means people are able to get into the stair who shouldn't be there. Some people seem to think that their stair is a public toilet and it stinks of urine all the time.

H.R.

HR lives with her husband and 2 daughters who are 13 and 6 years old. They have lived in temporary accommodation for 10 years. Their flat has 2 bedrooms and is overcrowded. The girls' bedroom is very small and the girls are unable to share so her 6 year old daughter sleeps with her mum and dad.

HR's bedroom has dampness in the corner of the bedroom next to the bed.

HR often has colds, a runny nose and a cough and is sometimes breathless. This situation is stressful for the whole family. Every day her oldest daughter asks her "when are we getting a new house so I can have a room with space for a table and chair to study? There's not enough room here, its too small."





HOME

By members of North Edinburgh Parents Action Group

The perfect home is
dry and warm
and doesn't have
mould on furniture or clothes.
It doesn't
smell of dampness or chemicals or bleach
and there's even
a drying area to dry your wet stuff.
It's comfortable and safe and
doesn't make you ill.
It isn't overcrowded and
there's plenty of room
for the kids to study and play
or just be alone.
In the perfect home
we've all got a bedroom
and there's even
a separate living room.
The perfect home doesn't
need lots of repairs
everything has been fixed and
is shiny and new.
But the best thing about it
and this we agree
our home is permanent
and is perfect for
you and me.



Damp and Mould: The Science

Mark J. Mendell, Anna G. Mirer, Kerry Cheung, My Tong, and Jeroen Douwes. *Respiratory and Allergic Health Effects of Dampness, Mould, and Dampness Related Agents: A Review of the Epidemiology. Environmental Health Perspectives. June 2011.*

“Evidence from epidemiologic studies and meta-analyses showed indoor dampness or mould to be associated consistently with increased asthma development and exacerbation, current and ever diagnosis of asthma, dyspnea, wheeze, cough, respiratory infections, bronchitis, allergic rhinitis, eczema, and upper respiratory tract symptoms. Associations were found in allergic and nonallergic individuals. Evidence strongly suggested causation of asthma exacerbation in children.

“Thus, prevention and remediation of indoor dampness and mould are likely to reduce health risks”

The World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines for indoor air quality: dampness and mould 2009.

“Sufficient epidemiological evidence is available from studies conducted in different countries and under different climatic conditions to show that the occupants of damp or mouldy buildings, both houses and public buildings, are at increased risk of respiratory symptoms, respiratory infections and exacerbation of asthma.

“Although few intervention studies were available, their results show that remediation of dampness can reduce adverse health outcomes.”

“While groups such as atopic and allergic people are particularly susceptible to biological and chemical agents in damp indoor environments, adverse health effects have also been found in nonatopic populations.” (Nonatopic= healthy)

“Dampness and mould may be particularly prevalent in poorly maintained housing for low income people. Remediation of the conditions that lead to adverse exposure should be given priority to prevent an additional contribution to poor health in populations who are already living with an increased burden of disease.”

WHO also state that:

“The presence of many biological agents in the indoor environment is due to dampness and inadequate ventilation. Excess moisture on almost all indoor materials leads to growth of microbes, such as mould, fungi and bacteria, which subsequently emit spores, cells, fragments and volatile organic compounds into indoor air.”

“Dampness has therefore been suggested to be a strong, consistent indicator of risk of asthma and respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough and wheeze).

Summary of housing issues

- There is widespread dampness and mould across social housing in North Edinburgh (sometimes due to repairs not being done)
- Tenants are blamed for causing condensation and dampness (we are told it is due to drying clothes inside, not putting the heating on or not opening windows)
- The repairs service is terrible. Repairs aren't done properly or they're not done at all.
- There is no co-ordination between different contractors.
- It is difficult to get landlords to listen and take action on complaints
- Tenants are not told about the complaints system or given a form to complain.
- Trying to make an appointment with a housing officer is often impossible
- The waiting times to get a permanent house is unacceptable (some people have been in temporary accommodation for more than 5 years)
- Overcrowding is very common as there are very few 4 apartment houses
- The bidding system doesn't work. People are told they have to bid every week or they will get taken off Edindex but 4 - 5 apartment houses never come up. If you bid for a 3 apartment house they say it's not adequate for your needs and that your bid will not be considered.
- The transfer system doesn't work (the Council need to look at 3 way swaps)
- The system doesn't recognise people's needs who are neurodiverse
- Anti-social behaviour is not being taken seriously or dealt with properly
- Cheap materials have been used in new housing which result in problems a few years after they have been built. Also, new builds are unsuitable for chairlifts as the walls aren't strong enough.
- There is not enough social housing
- People are told they have to make themselves homeless in order to downsize from a private let to get a council house - this is crazy
- There are still too many empty houses in NE (many of them have been condemned)
- Many houses are let to new tenants when they are unfit for human habitation
- People are being accommodated in inappropriate housing. Some people were told to accept a house as it was only temporary even though it didn't meet their needs. They end up stuck in this accommodation for a long time.
- There is no joined up thinking between services (especially health and housing)
- Rents are too high
- Almond House is not acceptable accommodation especially for families
- Temporary accommodation disrupts children's education and adds to disadvantage
- There is a lot of single bed student accommodation being built in North Edinburgh but that's not what is needed
- The infrastructure is not in place to cope with new housing developments - this is putting pressure on local services ie GP's, dentists, schools

DEMANDS

Housing Structures

- All housing damp-proofed and adequately insulated
- Damp proofing done properly and taken back to brick and dried out properly
- New builds properly inspected before being let to tenants

Repairs

- Repairs done as quickly as possible (especially leaks)
- Repairs checked by an inspector once completed
- Repairs to doors and windows carried out immediately to prevent draughts, to retain heat and to ensure the safety and security of the tenants
- Houses fixed properly before people get keys and move in
- Repairs Direct brought back 'in house' and private contractors should no longer be used.
- Repairs Direct to provide an in person service as well as an online service

Housing Shortage

- Empty houses to be properly repaired and brought back into use
- Options such as the army village at Kirkliston to be considered
- More social housing to be built which meets the needs of larger families
- New bidding system introduced which allows transfers

Legal Issues

- Extractor fans fitted in all bathrooms and kitchens
- Awaab's law to be introduced in Scotland
- Construction rules changed to prevent use of cheap/unsafe materials and companies fined if they do not comply
- Restrictions on second homes
- Rents controls re-introduced
- New criteria introduced which recognizes the needs of children and families with additional support needs

Funding

- New funding to be found to insulate houses
- Tenants compensated for damage caused by leaks, mould and damp
- Scottish Government to reinstate the £200 m allocated for its affordable housebuilding programme for 2024-25
- Levelling Up money to be provided by UK Government to help deal with the housing crisis in Edinburgh.

Training

- All staff to be trained on the causes of dampness and mould and made aware of the Ombudsman's report which highlights that tenants should not be blamed.
- Staff training to include information about human rights and the importance of treating people with dignity and respect.

Anti Social Behaviour

- Anti-social behaviour to be dealt with as quickly as possible within a certain timescale
- The process should be publicised and should include information about who is responsible.
- There should be a separate phone line for ASB

Complaints System

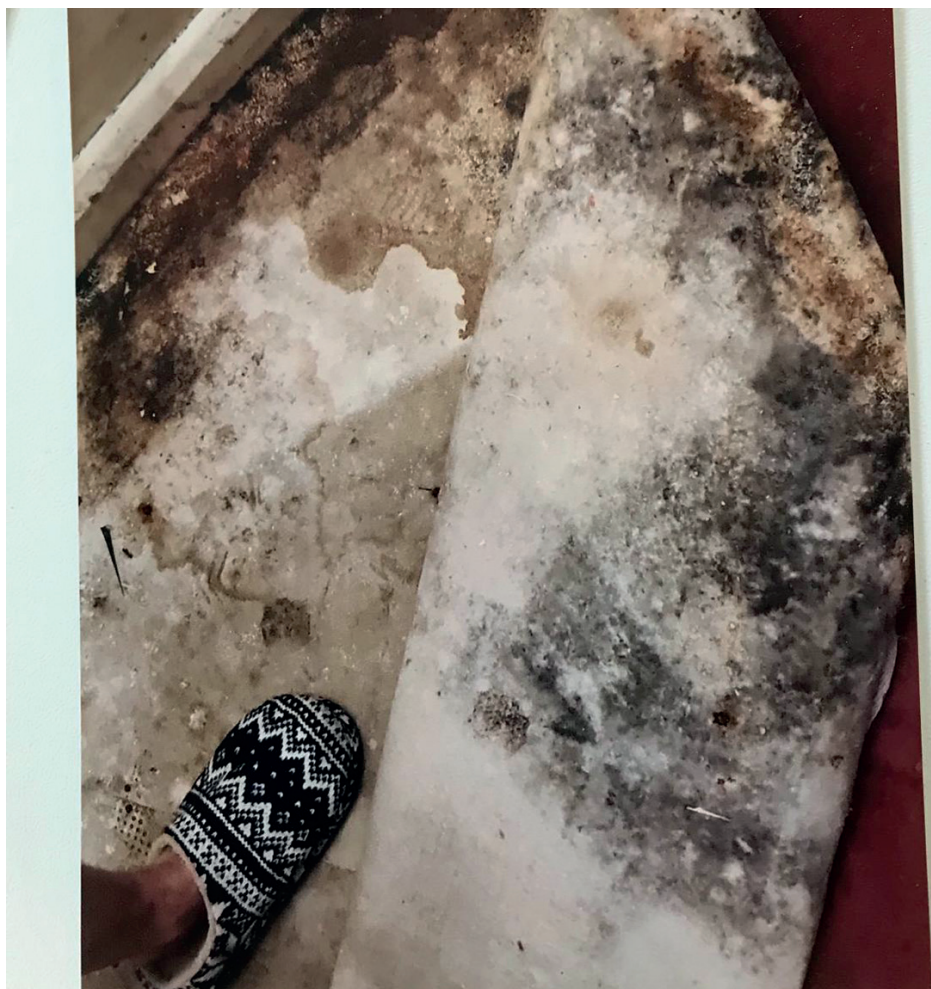
- The complaints system needs to be publicised properly and housing officers should encourage tenants to complain if they are unhappy about a service they have received. Complaints forms should be available in community venues

Almond House Lodge

- People should not be housed in inappropriate accommodation such as Almond House Lodge or Muirhouse Mansion until this accommodation is brought up to standard and proper facilities are installed

“ Tackling the problem of damp, mould and condensation in council homes is an absolute priority. The tragic death of Awaab Ishak in December 2020 has brought greater awareness than ever before of the serious impact the presence of damp and mould can have on the health of the resident in their home. It is imperative that the Council continues to put the health and wellbeing of tenants at the heart of everything it does and that preventative approaches are prioritised to achieve this. ”

*City of Edinburgh Council
Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee
9 May 2023*



Acknowledgements

Royston Wardieburn Community Centre Management Committee
Carol Lyons, Housing Advisor, Shelter
Dr Olivia Stone, Edinburgh University
Dr James Scales, Queen Mary University of London
All the people who shared their stories
Edinburgh TUC
Dawn Anderson, Pilton Community Health Project

Councillor Stuart Dobbin
Lynn McCabe and Lorraine Borwick, CLD workers, CEC
UNITE Edinburgh Not For Profit branch
Martha Schofield, Publication Design
Louise Houghey, student Napier College
Julia Hoq, student Moray House
Maja Munivrana, student Moray House
J&B Print Ltd., Newton Stewart