REPORT TO: COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE ON 18 AUGUST 2015

SUBJECT: PROPOSED PILOT TO INVESTIGATE OPTIONS TO REDUCE AND PREVENT DAMPNESS/CONDENSATION IN COUNCIL HOUSES

BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 The reason for this report is to inform Communities Committee of proposals to take a more proactive approach to dealing with issues of dampness and condensation within the Council's housing stock.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III G (3) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the maintenance of the Council's housing stock.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Communities Committee:-

(i) considers and notes the difference between condensation/ dampness in Council properties and what current measures are being taken to mitigate these issues;

(ii) agrees that a programme of works be carried out in specific house types to develop a model specification for dealing with incidences of condensation;

(iii) agrees that a further report on the success of these works be presented to this Committee mid 2016 for further consideration.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Condensation/dampness is a problem that currently affects all types of housing tenure. Property design in conjunction with improved doors, windows, heating and insulation have led to many 'modernised' properties being more energy efficient but also more airtight. These factors whilst improving the overall condition of a property do however restrict natural ventilation and in turn, can result in the build up of condensation and/or dampness if the property is not properly ventilated.

3.2 It is important to differentiate between dampness which is caused by a fabric issue and condensation, which is generally caused by factors within the home such as excess water vapour production and lack of appropriate heating and/or ventilation.

3.3 Dampness

Dampness tends to be caused either by water ingress through the external fabric of the property or faults with water and/or drainage installations. These can range from defective roof coverings, flashings and guttering, to problems with the external wall finish. In some cases small leaks from water supplies, heating installations or drains can also cause dampness if left undiscovered.

3.4 Condensation

Condensation occurs when warm moist air comes into contact with a cool surface and water droplets form. It typically appears on cold surfaces particularly on windows, mirrors and outside walls. Areas with poor ventilation are also prone to condensation. This includes surfaces behind furniture such as beds or in or behind wardrobes and cupboards, especially where they are placed against an outside wall. Condensation can happen in any room but is most likely to occur in bedrooms and hallway as these are generally cooler and also in kitchens and bathrooms where water vapour is produced. If left unchecked it can lead to damp and mould growth occurring which is often the first sign of a serious condensation problem.

3.5 There can also be a prevalence of condensation in certain house types such as those of non-traditional construction and those fitted with storage heating. In these properties it can sometimes be difficult to maintain adequate ambient temperatures within the property and provide adequate ventilation at the same time.

3.6 During 2014/15, a working group of officers drawn from the staff within Housing & Property Services discussed the issue. The main thrust of these discussions focused on what types of works could be undertaken to reduce the impact of condensation/dampness in our housing stock. Evidence of good practice was gathered from a number of local authorities as well as good practice within property design, manufacturers and the “prevention” market. Information from the Building Research Establishment (BRE) was also considered.

4. CURRENT POSITION

4.1 A lack of natural ventilation can lead to a build-up of moisture in a property and incidences of mould growth. This type of issue is particularly evident during the months from October to March when people are using their heating more and are less likely to open windows etc to prevent heat escaping. It is essential that occupants open windows and/or ventilators or use mechanical ventilation where fitted (extractor fans) to mitigate the risk.

4.2 The majority of tenants who contact the Council with a ‘dampness’ problem normally assume that it is the fabric of the building that is causing the issue. In many cases however, further investigations reveal that the problem is really

one of condensation and if proper action is taken by the occupant (i.e. proper ventilation), the matter can usually be successfully resolved. Officers do remind tenants about the need for adequate heating, ventilation and the importance of having air movement within the property.

4.3 Whilst the above advice is deemed as “standard practice” in both the pubic/private rented housing sectors, it currently fails to recognise that some tenants are living in properties that are hard to heat and that financial pressures in relation to individual heating costs are a significant issue for some that ultimately prevents them from properly ventilating their home.

4.4 At present, where dampness has been identified as the cause, remedial works are normally completed by Building Services (DLO). These measures can range from repointing sections of wall, to the repair/replacement of roof tiles, gutters, downpipes, flashings or service repairs. Other remedial measures can include treating the area of dampness with appropriate products, installing additional natural or mechanical ventilation up to the fitting of a pressurised ‘whole house’ ventilation system.

4.5 If the work is considered to be of a more specialist nature, or the fabric has suffered from an incidence of dry or wet rot due to an underlying problem then works may be surveyed, recommended and carried out by a specialist contractor.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 It is proposed that a pilot project is carried out on a number of different house types to arrive at a model specification for work that will render such properties ‘condensation proof’ provided that the measures are implemented and the tenant follows advice to reduce levels of water vapour within the property. The trial will be assessed against control properties to allow comparisons to be made on the effectiveness of the measures in each house type.

5.2 Work Types

The final specification for each house type will depend on the construction and will be developed using current good practice, experience of previous remedial works and include a range of products such as ventilation fans, positive input ventilation systems (PVI), thermal insulation as well as other remedial type ‘applications’ or condensation treatments that are known or purported to produce effective improvements.

5.3 Market Research

There are a number of different products on the market which the manufacturers claim can either prevent or reduce condensation. Many of these products have been tested independently by the Building Research Establishment (BRE), British Standards Institute (BSI), the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), British Board of Agreement (BBA) or other bodies in order for the manufacturer to promote them as ‘approved’ products. The Council has in the past used a number of these with varied success and the performance of the products used in our own stock will be compared against

any new or similar products on the market to arrive at a range of options to be tested. Wherever possible only products which have been approved or recommended by appropriate independent bodies such as those listed above will be used.

5.4 Details of Pilot Scheme
It is intended to use a standard 'control' house to compare the effectiveness of the products in each house type. The main control property will be a standard cavity walled house with full gas heating, adequate levels of insulation, double glazed windows and mechanical ventilation. It is intended that the other control and trial houses used for testing will consist of an appropriate mix of non-fines concrete construction, stone solid-walled construction and 'non-traditional' construction properties with the final choice providing a range of dwelling types that will cover the majority of the Council's stock.

5.5 This pilot will allow the service to take a more proactive approach to dealing with dampness and condensation within the housing stock by developing a suite of standard works which would be applied to specific house types on a programmed basis as well as to any individual cases where this is considered appropriate due to circumstances.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2023: A Plan for the Future/Service Plan
This proposal relates to:

(i) Service Plan priorities 3 - Improving housing quality, and 4 – Improving housing service quality

(b) Policy and Legal
Maintenance and Improvement works are carried out in order to meet statutory legal requirements and in accordance with current relevant policies.

(c) Financial implications
Trial works would be funded from the Housing Investment Budget.

(d) Risk implications
Failure to deal with issues of condensation and dampness may affect the Council's ability to maintain its stock at the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

(e) Staffing implications
There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

(f) Property
The improvement and maintenance of the housing stock will ensure that it remains sustainable in the longer term both physically and environmentally.

(g) Equalities
There are no equalities issues associated with this report as it is to inform the Committee on budget monitoring.

(h) Consultations

Consultations have taken place with the Head of Housing and Property, Property Resources Manager and the Design Manager, who agree with the recommendations of this report.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Investment in the Council's housing stock enables the Council to address identified issues, improve the quality of housing stock available to tenant's in Moray and also enables the stock to be maintained at the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

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Background Papers: With report author
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