

CHESHIRE EAST HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Reports Cover Sheet

Title of Report:	Housing and Health
Report Reference Number	HWB50
Date of meeting:	19 th November 2024
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Health & Wellbeing Board Lead:	Guy Kilminster

Executive Summary

Is this report for:	Information <input type="checkbox"/>	Discussion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X	Decision <input type="checkbox"/>
Why is the report being brought to the board?	Board Members highlighted the issues of poor housing conditions on health and wished to ascertain the approaches taken by both the Council and Registered Housing Providers in response to this.		
Please detail which, if any, of the Health & Wellbeing Strategic Outcomes this report relates to?	1. Cheshire East is a place that supports good health and wellbeing for everyone <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Our children and young people experience good physical and emotional health and wellbeing <input type="checkbox"/> 3. The mental health and wellbeing of people living and working in Cheshire East is improved <input type="checkbox"/> 4. That more people live and age well, remaining independent; and that their lives end with peace and dignity in their chosen place <input type="checkbox"/> All of the above <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X		
Please detail which, if any, of the Health & Wellbeing Principles this report relates to?	Equality and Fairness <input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility <input type="checkbox"/> Integration <input type="checkbox"/> Quality <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainability <input type="checkbox"/> Safeguarding <input type="checkbox"/> All of the above <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X		

Key Actions for the Health & Wellbeing Board to address. Please state recommendations for action.	To note the actions been taken by both the Council and Registered Housing Providers.
Has the report been considered at any other committee meeting of the Council/meeting of the CCG board/stakeholders?	No
Has public, service user, patient feedback/consultation informed the recommendations of this report?	No
If recommendations are adopted, how will residents benefit? Detail benefits and reasons why they will benefit.	The quality of a person's housing has an impact on their health and wellbeing. Improved housing can benefit the quality of life and the health and wellbeing of the individual / family living with in it.

1 Report Summary

- 1.1 There are clear links between poor housing conditions and Health, this report outlines the evidence and findings of a number of reports and sets out how Government are responding and also the measures which Cheshire East Council and Registered Housing Providers have put in place.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the report and current work being undertaken by both Cheshire East Council and Registered Housing Providers and discuss how the Board might support work to further improve housing conditions in Cheshire East.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 Members of the Health and Well Board outlined their concerns in relation to the impact that poor housing conditions could have on health conditions and wished to understand the actions that both the Council and Registered Housing Providers are taking to tackle this.

4 Impact on Health and Wellbeing Strategic Outcomes

- 4.1 Good quality, affordable housing is an essential contributor to good health and wellbeing. There will be positive impacts on all four of the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Outcomes if people are living in decent accommodation.

5 Background and Options

- 5.1 There has been extensive research conducted on the effects of exposure to poor housing conditions, e.g. cold, damp and mould etc, and the significant impact it has on poor health, both physical and mental, particularly for households living on the lowest incomes or in the least energy efficient homes.
- 5.2 In 2022, 21.1% (970,000) people in the private rented sector in England and 10.4% (416,000) of people in the social rented sector still lived in non-decent housing **(1. English Housing Survey 2022-2023)**.
- 5.3 One of the biggest housing condition problems facing the UK is excess cold (properties that are below the NHS recommended room temperature of between 18°C and 21°C) which can then lead to damp and mould issues within the property **(2. Public Health England: Minimum home temperature thresholds for health in winter Oct 2014)**.
- 5.4 A significant contributing factor to this issue is the rate of fuel poverty due to the current cost of energy. In 2022 on average 11.2%, (20,163 residents) in the Cheshire East area were in fuel poverty **(3. Cheshire East Council open data portal: Fuel Poverty)**. Many of the worst hit groups, were the elderly, vulnerable adults, households with dependent children and poorer families, whose heating needs are generally higher, as they spend more time in their homes and require heating all day rather than for short periods of time but are more likely to be unable to pay the costs of heating their properties or carrying out energy efficiency improvements. This leads to many people facing the option of whether to heat their homes or eat.
- 5.5 Children exposed to poor housing environments, are also more likely to experience long term health issues and disabilities, slower physical growth, delayed cognitive development, and mental health issues, e.g. anxiety and depression.

All these health issues can have potential ripple effects as a child exposed to environments that affect their health, are more likely to take days off sick from school, than those in comfortable living environments. Since these children spend more time away from the school environment, they also become more likely to experience other issues relating to social interaction and lack of employment opportunities later in life.

- 5.6 Damp is also a major contributing factor to ill health causing various respiratory problems, infections, and allergies. The English Housing Survey found that 9% of privately rented and 5.4% of social rented homes had problems with damp in 2022/23, with older properties more likely to be at greater risk of damp **(4. English Housing Survey 2022-2023)**. The effects of damp on people were highlighted by the tragic death of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak in 2020 who died, because of a respiratory infection caused by exposure to mould in his home.
- 5.7 There is also evidence to show the relationship between higher mortality rates in winter and cold temperatures **(5 & 6 Institute of Health Equity: Health Equity in England and Public Health England: Local Action on health inequalities report)**. A study in 2011 by the Marmot review team estimated that 21.5% of excess winter deaths could be prevented **(7. Institute of Health Equity: The Health Impacts of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty)**, an estimated 2,881 of the 13,400 excess winter deaths (December 2021 to March 2022), if adequate heating had been provided in properties during the winter months, as many of the preventable deaths were related to respiratory or circulatory diseases, illnesses that are made worse in cold conditions **(8. Office of National Statistics: Winter mortality in England)**. Each year, the National Health Service spends an estimated £1.4 billion treating people living in cold,

damp, or unsafe housing (**9. Gov.uk – Building Research Establishment briefing paper – The cost of poor housing to the NHS**).

- 5.8 This emphasises the need to improve the quality of accommodation within both social rented and the private rented sectors to ensure that all tenants, irrespective of the tenure of their homes, are guaranteed access to safe and comfortable living environments.

In recent years, previous Governments have introduced several new policies and initiatives to help improve the quality of housing in England, these included:

- A Decent Homes Standard which was first introduced in 2000 to help regulate and improve homes in the social housing sector. The standard was last reviewed in Autumn 2021 and requires that social housing meets the legal minimum standards, are in a reasonable state of repair, have modern facilities, e.g. bathrooms and kitchens and provide safe and secure homes for residents (**10. Gov.uk – A decent home standard: definition and guidance for implementation**).
- The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 also received Royal Assent in July 2023. The legislation aims to improve the standards, safety, and operation of social housing in the UK. Key changes introduced by the Act include:
 - strengthening the Regulator of Social Housing.
 - granting additional powers to the Housing Ombudsman.

and it also enforces 'Awaab's Law' and requires landlords to respond to reported health and safety hazards, e.g. damp and mould within strict time limits (**11. Gov.uk – guidance: update on the Governments work to improve the quality of social housing**).

- In June 2022, the previous Government also published 'A Fairer Private Rented Sector' white paper, which highlighted the need to improve the quality of housing within the Private Rented Sector (**12. Department for Levelling Up Housing & Communities: A Fairer Private Rented Sector white paper**).

- 5.9 The new Labour Government also set out their plans in the Kings Speech (July 2024) to overhaul the private rented sector in England and introduce the Renter's Rights Bill to give renters much greater security and stability, including:

- Abolishing Section 21 'no fault' evictions.
- Introducing new clear and expanded possession grounds, so landlords can reclaim their properties when they need to.
- Strengthening tenants' rights and protections, for example empowering tenants to challenge rent increases designed to force them out of their properties and introducing new laws to end the practice of rental bidding wars by landlords and letting agents.
- Introducing a Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector to ensure homes are safe, secure and hazard free.
- Applying 'Awaab's Law' to the sector, setting clear legal expectations about the time frames within which landlords in the private rented sector must make homes safe where they contain serious hazards.
- Creating a new online private rented sector digital database to bring together key information for landlords, tenants, and councils. Councils will be able to use the database to target enforcement where it is needed.

- Introducing a new ombudsman service for the private rented sector that will provide fair, impartial, and binding resolution, to both landlords and tenants, thereby reducing the need to go to court.
- Making it illegal for landlords to discriminate against tenants in receipt of benefits or with children when choosing to let their property.
- Strengthening local councils' enforcement powers to make it easier for council to identify poor quality properties and fine unscrupulous landlords (**13 Gov.uk The Kings speech 2024**).

5.10 **Cheshire East Council has introduced some key measures to improve housing standards in the Cheshire East area, including:**

- Employing a team of Housing Standards Officers to inspect and regulate housing in the private rented sector, including taking enforcement action. The team respond to complaints from tenants and acts on intelligence from other agencies, including the Home Office immigration enforcement team, Police, and the Fire Service.
- Delivering £6.21 million of Government Home Upgrade Grant programme funding which offers free energy saving improvements, e.g. wall, loft and underfloor insulation, air source heat pumps or electric radiators to eligible residents in the private sector (homeowners and private rented) to help them make energy efficiency upgrades to their homes and improve thermal comfort.
- Developed advice guides relating to damp, mould, and condensation in 2022. The Housing Standards team give these to residents at every first contact; provides face to face advice on preventing/treating damp and mould and takes enforcement action, if required.
- Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (where they are occupied by five or more people). The licence conditions and HMO management regulations inherently drive-up housing standards in HMOs.
- The introduction of Planning Article 4 Directions in parts of Crewe requiring that any property being converted to a HMO must have planning permission. This regulation will bring the property onto the Council's radar and result in a housing condition and HMO management regulation inspection which improves housing conditions.

5.11 **Housing Provider perspective**

The Housing Ombudsman produced a "spotlight" report on damp and mould in 2021 (**14 Housing Ombudsman: Spotlight on Damp and mould, October 2021**) highlighting the impact to health, and to which most housing providers self-assessed and produced internal action plans. In consultation with tenants, policies and procedures were updated, with an emphasis put on the importance of treating residents with empathy and respect, alongside a commitment to dealing with the causes and symptoms of damp and mould, promptly and effectively.

Housing Providers carried out significant analysis of damp related repairs history data, based on property types or locations, to identify any patterns or trends at property level. This then led to proactive campaigns, contacting customers in those homes to identify any previously unreported, recurring since previous repairs, or still unresolved damp issues.

Depending upon the size of the Housing Provider this proactive work ran into thousands of outbound calls, followed up by home visits. Damp and mould repairs were prioritised for visits and rectification, given the associated health risks. In some cases where serious damp and mould was identified, customers were offered alternative accommodation on a temporary basis whilst work was carried out in their homes. As an example, at Guinness in 2023-24 we completed 188,415 responsive repairs – of which 10,569 (nationally) related to damp and mould (5.6%).

Extensive additional training has been given to staff within housing providers both at a technical level for repairs teams to identify the root cause of damp and mould and also front line housing teams on risk management and the importance of recording and reporting all incidences of damp and/or mould. All housing providers have also reviewed and updated the information available to customers about damp and mould in the home (example leaflet at (15)).

Alongside reporting and repairing damp and mould and ensuring all teams understand what to look for in customer homes, Housing Providers remain concerned and continue to support customers in the cost of living crisis where high energy costs have a significant impact. Each organisation take a slightly different approach, but in relation to heating and energy these include:

- Energy advice to give support on both tariffs and consumption
- Financial support to those experiencing hardship relating to fuel
- Advice and support around income maximisation

Reports of damp and mould do continue to happen, but the procedures and processes within Housing Providers are now swift and responsive to these reports.

Like both doctors and schools – Housing Providers are often the one constant in a customer's life, as it is a long term relationship and it gives us the opportunity to build those valuable relationships. The challenge we all face currently, is particularly around mental health and support for those with mental health conditions (diagnosed or undiagnosed) and ensuring that they are both signposted to, and receive support, in order to successfully maintain their tenancies.

Good quality housing, which we as Housing Providers all seek to provide, is a big part of health and wellbeing, but it is also only a part of the wider picture for residents that links to education, public health, access to services and transport.

6 Access to Information

6.1 The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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