

Review of the new damp and mould service from January 2023: Summary

Background and scope

Social landlords across the country have been reviewing their approaches to damp and mould following the tragic death in 2020 of Awaab Ishak. Two-year-old Awaab died as a result of the black mould in his Rochdale home, prompting changes to the way landlords must deal with damp and mould in the properties they own.

Cottsway introduced a formal damp and mould procedure in December 2022 and wrote to all customers to inform them about the potential dangers and what they are doing to tackle the issue. We felt that this would be a good time to review Cottsway's performance under the new procedure and follow the customer journey of tenants reporting damp and mould in January and February 2023 to understand their experience of the service, what is being done well and where improvements can be made. Our review covers:

- Initial reporting of a case of damp and mould under the new procedure
- What information is gathered by Cottsway
- Home inspections
- The actions proposed to remedy the problem
- Repairs and/or cleaning
- Whether the problem was successfully dealt with
- Whether there was an effective follow-up with customers in the six months following their case being raised
- Information for and communication with customers who have reported damp and mould.

We have also looked at what information is provided by other social landlords on their websites and Cottsway's communication about damp and mould overall.

This document is a summary of our full report and sets out our process and recommendations.

What we did

1. Listened to calls



















We listened to a random selection of calls from customers reporting damp and mould in their home to better understand how Cottsway's Customer Services team respond and the questions they ask.

2. Surveyed customers with current cases








We surveyed 97 households who reported damp and mould in January and February 2023. We received 24 responses and used them to map customer satisfaction against the various 'touchpoints' in the Damp and Mould Procedure.

We then followed that up with a shorter survey six months after the initial report of damp and mould to see how satisfied customers were with the response they had received from Cottsway, though only five customers completed this survey.

Survey one: Results

Satisfaction measures		  
Ease of reporting case to Cottsway	83%	
Concerns taken seriously	58%	
Cottsway sympathetic	43%	
First contact with Cottsway: overall satisfaction	63%	
Easy to provide photos to Cottsway	75%	
Cottsway's response: overall satisfaction	55%	
Home assessment visit took place within time limits	78%	
Home inspection thorough	50%	
Surveyor attended on time	83%	
Surveyor showed ID	83%	
Surveyor introduced themselves	94%	
Assessment visit: overall satisfaction	62%	
Letter confirming action plan received within time limits	61%	
Communication from Cottsway: overall satisfaction	55%	
Net Promoter Score (-35)	25% promoters 60% detractors	

Survey two: Results

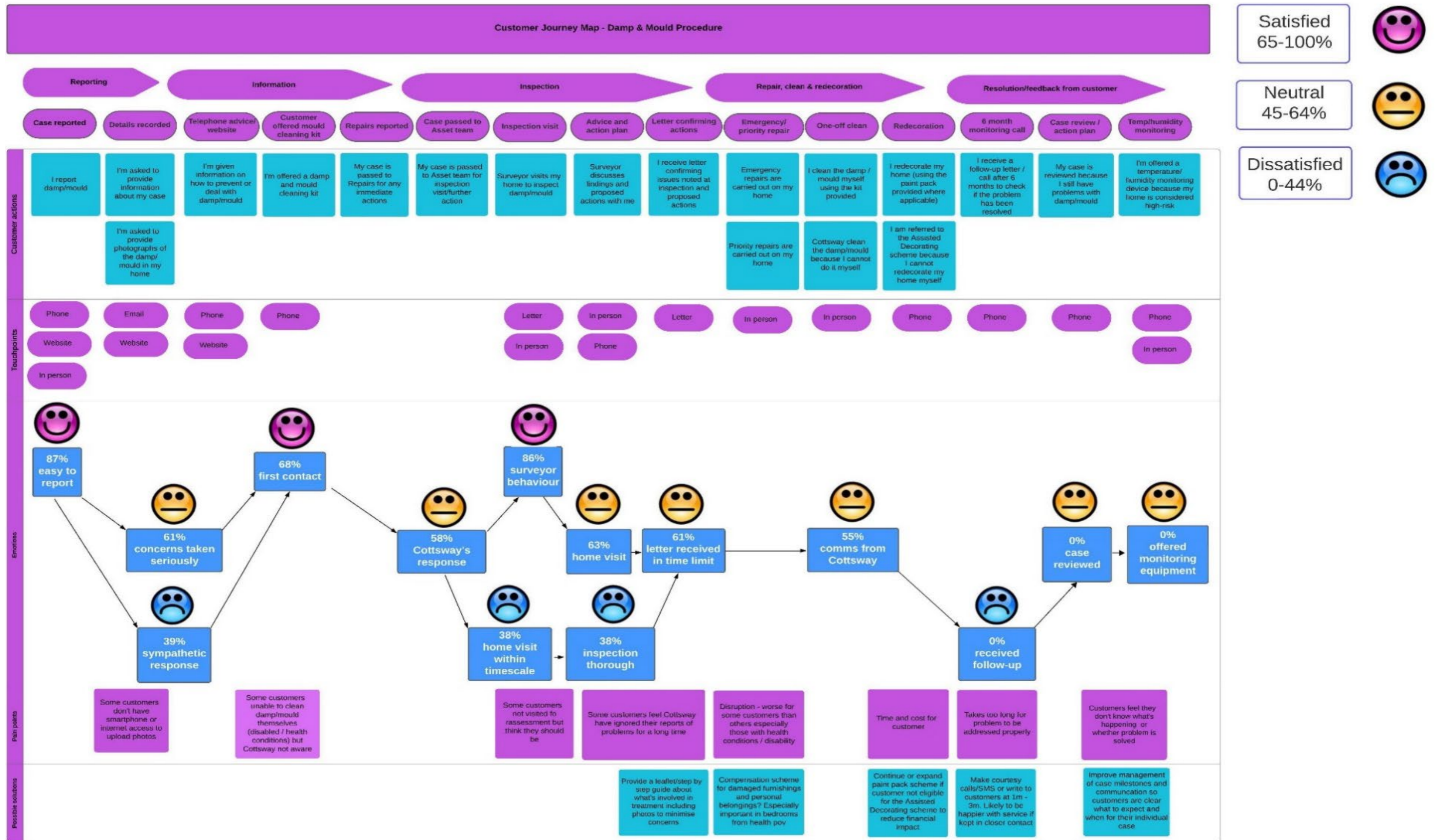
Question	  
Has Cottsway contacted you about your case since the home visit?	 (60% no, 40% unsure)
Has your damp and mould issue been resolved?	 (60% no, 40% unsure)
Has Cottsway assessed your home as being at risk of ongoing damp and mould problems?	 (60% no, 40% unsure)
Has Cottsway offered to install a temperature/humidity monitoring device in your home?	 0% (100% no)

3. Carried out interviews

We then carried out a series of interviews with six customers and two staff members, both managers, to better understand the issues involved in damp and mould cases.

Customer Journey Map

This shows the results of both surveys mapped against the Damp and Mould Procedure 'touchpoints' where the customer has contact with Cottsway.



Recommendations

We used the information gathered to make a series of recommendations for service improvements. These are:

1. Ensure the Customer Services team check who is living in the property as Cottsway's records may not be up to date.
2. Ensure customer services check whether any members of the household have a disability or long-term health condition (asthma, COPD etc) that could be worsened by exposure to damp and mould.
3. Provide more information on what's involved in the cleaning and repairs process, perhaps in a leaflet with photos.
4. The Procedure says Cottsway will follow-up the case with the customer after six months. We think this should take place sooner, perhaps at three months.
5. More detail needs to be provided around what action is likely to be taken if the initial cleaning or treatment does not produce a lasting improvement.
6. Include damp and mould information in the new tenancy starter pack as not currently included.
7. Customers with certain conditions or vulnerabilities may not be able to carry out the cleaning of the damp and mould in their home themselves. Cottsway need to develop a more structured and consistent response to ensure that they take such vulnerabilities into account in every case.
8. These customers would benefit from information about what alternatives are available e.g, Cottsway providing the cleaning service and temporary accommodation elsewhere if appropriate. Easy Read leaflets about these and other common procedures should be considered.
9. Cottsway could usefully look at the damp and mould policies of other social landlords to see whether there is any learning to be identified and whether a formal policy is required.
10. Introduce a damp and mould transactional customer satisfaction survey.
11. Create a damp and mould performance dashboard to share with staff and customers.
12. Training for frontline staff on damp and mould and the customer experience to help foster empathy and understanding as well as technical knowledge.
13. Cottsway currently manage damp and mould cases using an Excel spreadsheet. A better system that could help manage milestones and contact would help both staff and customers.

For more information about Cottsway's Scrutiny Group:

Cottsway House
Heynes Place
Avenue Two
Witney OX28 4YG

www.cottsway.co.uk/scrutinygroup

E: scrutinygroup@cottsway.co.uk
T: 01993 890000

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