

*A dossier of maintenance
issues in Dublin City Council
accommodation in the
North East Inner City
of Dublin*



IMPROVE
our
HOMES

January
2012



A DOSSIER OF MAINTENANCE ISSUES IN THE NORTH EAST INNER CITY

It is understood that maintenance issues within local authority accommodation cause problems and difficulties for Dublin City Council; but the problems they cause tenants are fundamental to the tenant's quality of life. Poor maintenance affects tenants emotional, physical and psychological well being. Tenants pay rent and are entitled to good quality accommodation.

This dossier contains a number of pieces of evidence which highlight the problems that tenants are experiencing in relation to maintenance issues in Dublin City Council (DCC) accommodation. These issues have been presented this way to try and address some of the problems experienced by the tenants. Ultimately, the aim is to improve the living conditions and so improve the lives of the tenants.

We operate from the principle that the issues raised by tenants are as valuable as the issues raised by local authorities and, as such, are entitled to a hearing.

We have included the following evidence;¹

- A summary of surveys of various DCC accommodation in the North East Inner City of Dublin
- Personal Testimonies
- Photographic evidence
- Scientific analysis of mould

Underpinning all of the work that we did is the understanding that the issue of maintenance is very complex and therefore solutions are often not straight forward. Trying to define what constitutes maintenance issues can be complex, for example what issues are as a result of poor maintenance and what are as a result of older buildings? And when do older buildings no longer provide adequate accommodation due to their age and/or poor design in a modern context? There are also complexities separating maintenance issues from problems that result from antisocial behaviour. This being understood, some solutions to maintenance issues are painfully simple, but not implemented.

All in all, we the tenants and community groups, take the position that we are not experts on all these issues, but what we can do is express the tenants' experiences of problems in their communities.

¹ Full copies of the information are available from CTA and ICON upon request. This includes copies of mould reports, photographs and full survey findings. Our contact details are at the back of this report.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

THE EVIDENCE

SURVEYS

FOCUS GROUPS

MOULD ANALYSIS

PHOTOGRAPHY

MAINTENANCE AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work could not have been completed without the ongoing work and tenacity of a range of tenants in Dublin City Council accommodation. These tenants work as community advocates, pressing for better conditions for their communities. We would like to thank them for all their work and commitment, which is voluntary, in trying to deal with these issues.

We would also like to thank Jim Berkeley for capturing some of the issues that have been raised with his vivid photography.

And, finally, thank you to Mould Busters, in particular Victor Rusakovich, who carried out their work professionally and with courtesy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF KEY MAINTENANCE ISSUES FOR TENANTS

This dossier is a summary of years of evidence gathered by tenants on maintenance issues within Dublin City Council (DCC) accommodation.

The evidence was gathered with the support of community groups. The aim is an effort to tackle one of the main issues that tenants face on a day to basis, one that affects every aspect of their lives, the maintenance and condition of their homes.

Key issues for the tenants in relation to the maintenance system centre on the maintenance problems themselves and on the quality of the service that is being provided.

85% OF TENANTS HAVE MAINTENANCE ISSUES²

Summary of key maintenance:

- Hazardous levels of mould and/or moisture in homes (Out of the ten mould reports that were conducted the visible inspection found heavy/significant levels of infection in eight out of the ten homes.)
- Problems with the drains
- Sewerage problems
- Dirty and badly maintained environment
- Poor estate lighting
- Fire safety

90% OF TENANTS WHO REPORT THEIR PROBLEMS TO THE COUNCIL ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THE OUTCOME

Summary of service issues include:

- Repairs not carried out satisfactorily, or at all.
- Work having to be constantly redone due to old buildings, underlying problems, or poor workmanship.
- A denial that an issue exists in the first place.
- How tenants are treated by the system in relation to the quality of customer service.
- Tenants who are in arrears cannot access the maintenance system.

There are also some general concerns:

The complex interaction of social problems and maintenance issues is evident with some tenants, for example older people living alone. There are often broken windows or other visible signs of poor conditions. These residents need social support to get the maintenance work done but no effort appears to be made with them.

² Figures from the surveys we conducted. See below.

There are concerns that these older and/or vulnerable tenants may not be able to carry out repairs that DCC deem are the responsibility of the tenant.

There are also particular concerns for older tenants in relation to emergency repairs and the charge of €100 that DCC will put on the rent of a tenant if a call out is not deemed an emergency.

There are questions about how group occupancy buildings are managed (flat complexes/duplexes). Tenants who live in flats/multiple dwellings are unsure of their responsibility in relation to communal areas. There are also concerns about problems that cannot be fixed in one unit as they originate in another unit (for example leaks).

There appears to be a difficulty in dealing with some maintenance issues. In these cases two particular responses are given to the tenants when they report a problem;

1. *The problem is not fixable* - In these cases it is acknowledged that there is a problem, but stated that it cannot be fixed. This is not acceptable. Problems can be fixed; it is just that the solution is more radical i.e. new sewage system/water system for the whole complex.
2. *There is no problem.* The denial that there is an issue, regularly used to deal with mould/damp/condensation. Colloquially tenants refer to wetness in their homes, which results in mould, as damp. The correct term may in fact be condensation. The issue here is that the Council state it is not damp therefore there is no problem. This is not correct, the problem may not be damp, but condensation is a problem, and often arises from structural/building problems, such as problems with ventilation and/or insulation, humidification and levels of moisture. Excessive condensation is a serious issue, which can cause mould and significant health problems.

Mould Busters conducted ten different assessments in ten different tenants' homes. Out of the ten reports that were conducted the visible inspection found heavy/significant levels of infection in eight out of the ten homes. The reports recommend strategies to deal with the mould, in all cases a number of strategies were recommended, and in nine of the ten cases these recommendations include areas that are the responsibility of DCC as well as the tenant.

SURVEYS OF VARIOUS COMPLEXES

In 2009 tenants and community groups from across the inner city were involved in door to door surveys examining maintenance issues in Dublin City Council accommodation. These surveys were carried out by the local tenants. The key focus of the work was an examination of maintenance issues in the complexes, getting the experiences and opinions of the tenants themselves.

Local tenants completed an accredited training course on social research provided by CTA prior to completing the survey. CTA also supported the research process, and analysed and wrote up the results. ICON supported and worked directly with the tenants and tenants' groups.

The original complexes/estates that were included in the surveys in 2009 in the North East Inner City (NEIC) were Ballybough House and Summerhill.³

Later in 2009, CTA and ICON went on to repeat this work in the North East Inner City with a further three local authority accommodation complexes, St Mary's Mansions, Liberty House and Matt Talbot Court.

As these surveys were conducted up to three years ago CTA and ICON meet with the local researchers and a wider group of tenants in the community to identify if the issues were still pertinent and if they applied to other complexes that were not included in the original surveys. In order to do this a focus group was held on October 4th 2011. This focus groups also raised the health implications and personal testimonies of tenants in relation to maintenance issues.

The key findings from the surveys and subsequent focus group are stark. They highlight the issues as raised by tenants.

The findings

There are five separate surveys of different local authority accommodation in the NEIC which indicate serious problems and unhappiness with the quality of the accommodation as a result of poor maintenance, including health issues arising from the poor maintenance of the homes.

The surveys in the North East Inner City had an average response rate of 50%. Therefore, half of the tenants in five inner city complexes provided information.⁴

³ The complexes from other parts of the city that were included were, O'Devaney Gardens (North West Inner City), St Teresa's Gardens (South West Inner City) and Weaver Row (South West Inner City)

⁴ In some complexes it was many more, in others it was less. 73% responded in Matt Talbot Court, 25% in St Mary's Mansions, the three others were circa 50%.

The majority of tenants have maintenance problems. Collectively, 84% of the tenants have maintenance problems, the lowest being in Summerhill at 71% and the highest in both Matt Talbot Court and St Mary's Mansions with more than nine out of ten of the tenants, or 91% having maintenance problems.

Most problems were in the bathrooms, followed closely by the kitchens. This is not surprising as these are central to a home's basic needs.⁵ The tenants stated that *damp* and *plumbing* problems are also significant issues in most of the complexes.

In relation to reporting problems to Dublin City Council, on average about a third of people are not reporting specific problems. Clearly if the problem is not reported to the Council, the Council cannot fix the difficulty. It was noted by the local researchers that many respondents gave up reporting faults as they felt that they were not being dealt with.

There was also a sense that in order to get some of the work done it takes persistence and not all of the tenants have that capacity. *You have to plague them to get things done, it takes so much energy.*⁶

The main maintenance issues that emerge from the surveys include;

- Mould/Wetness/Condensation/Damp
- Constant problems with the drains including a lack of proper drainage both within the homes and on balconies, roofs and ground floor areas
- Dirty and badly maintained environment
- Poor estate lighting
- Draughty and poorly fitting windows and doors
- Poor workmanship at times
- Serious problems with roofs
- Fire safety

Of those who have reported their problem(s), the vast majority were not happy with the outcome, between 90% and 100% depending on the issue. When it comes to dealing with maintenance issues, the primary complaint is that the problems are not fixed, complaints are not responded to or nothing happens at all. Another common issue is the reoccurrence of the problem. This last point is likely to be linked to the age and condition of many of the buildings where issues like the plumbing can only be managed and not *fixed*.

⁵ The fact is that standards for bathroom and kitchen facilities have risen dramatically since many of these buildings were built. Therefore, some of the maintenance problems result from structural issues which are fundamentally down to the design and age of buildings.

⁶ Direct comments from tenants recorded in the surveys.

There appears to be a difficulty in dealing with some maintenance issues. In these cases two particular responses are given to the tenants;

1. The problem is not fixable.
2. There is no problem.

The problem is not fixable. This response is often given when issues such as problems with drainage, water pressure or damp/condensation are raised. In these cases it is acknowledged that there is a problem, but stated that it cannot be fixed. This is not acceptable. Problems can be fixed; it is just that the solution is more radical i.e. new sewage systems/water system for the whole complex.

There is no problem. A reoccurring theme is what the residents identify as damp the Council refer to as condensation, and therefore not something that has to be fixed. In this instance there appears to be an issue about language and communication, the resulting confusion allows the local authority to state there is no problem. Colloquially tenants refer to wetness in their homes, which results in mould, as damp. The correct term may in fact be condensation. The issue here is that the Council state it is not damp therefore there is no problem. This is not correct, the problem may not be damp but condensation is a problem, and often arises from structural/building problems, such as problems with ventilation and/or insulation, humidification and levels of moisture. Excessive condensation is a serious issue, which can cause mould and significant health problems.

Therefore, resistance is often applied where problems cannot be fixed flat by flat, or piece by piece because the difficulty lies with the building; but the buildings could be made more comfortable for the residents with some remedial work, such as better ventilation/insulation.

Focus Group

In order to update and review the work of the surveys a focus group was held in October 4th 2011. This also looked at the health implications and personal testimonies of tenants in relation to maintenance issues.

The focus group participants agreed that all of the issues that were raised in the surveys remained as outlined.

Key issues were also identified for further complexes including:

- Avondale House
- Croke Villas
- Patrick Heaney House

Again the issues that were raised mirror those that were raised in the surveys, problems that centre on;

- Mould and damp/condensation
- Roof problems/balconies
- Plumbing/water issues
- Sewerage issues

Mould and Damp/Condensation

Mould and damp issues noted in Avondale House, Matt Talbot Court, Liberty House, Mary's Mansions, Croke Villas, Patrick Heaney House and Ballybough House. When these issues are raised by tenants they have been told that it is condensation and not damp.

One of the members of the focus group had her home tested by Mould Busters⁷, and the report found that the mould levels were at such a hazardous level that people should not sleep in the room.

Signs of this problem include;

- Mould of various colours, on walls furniture and clothes
- Having to sleep with windows open
- Sliver fish
- Mushrooms
- Wet walls, particularly at the gable end of the buildings

Health problems that were linked with mould/wetness including;

- Children and adults with chest problems.
- Mother and child have had pleurisy.
- Another family have issues with laryngitis (child 13)
- An older man has spent 15 weeks in the Mater Hospital after developing very severe eczema which the consultant felt was caused by the conditions of damp. It was stated by health professionals that it was unusual for an older man to develop this condition, there had to have been some external factors, (such as the housing conditions) as a result of his ill health he was offered a move.
- Children with eczema.

⁷ Mould Busters : www.moldbustersireland.com OPERATIONS : + 086-3132684 EMAIL: info@moldbustersireland.com

Roof Problems/Balconies/Blocked Shores

- Matt Talbot Court: There was a pilot project to resolve the roof problems in Matt Talbot Court. The system was applied to one block, residents feel that it has not improved the situation. The shores on the balconies and at ground level are also not draining.
- Liberty House: The roof does not drain, this problem contributes to the overall damp problem; the shores on the balconies are also not draining.
- Croke Villas: There are roof problems.
- St. Mary's Mansions: There are roof problems.

Plumbing/Water Issues

There are plumbing problems in a range of the complexes including, Avondale House, Liberty House, Matt Talbot Court, Ballybough House and St Mary's Mansions. These include problems with drainage, water pressure and leaks. In St. Mary's Mansions it was also noted that there are empty flats and people are taking out the copper pipes, causing problems for the others.

Sewerage issues

Sewerage problems were noted in a range of complexes including, Matt Talbot Court, Avondale House, St. Mary's Mansions, Ballybough House and Liberty House.

The implications of the 2009 review of the maintenance system

In 2009 there was a review of estate management made by DCC, to see how they '*can make it more efficient and responsive to our tenants within resources available.*'⁸ One of the most significant changes was the enforcement of the rule that tenants who are in arrears with their rent cannot access the maintenance system. As a result of this change there are real concerns that tenants who are in arrears may be forced to live in substandard accommodation. The current economic climate has meant that many people are now being made unemployed and may be facing into arrears for the first time.

There are also concerns about older and/or vulnerable tenants who may not be able to carry out repairs that DCC deem are the responsibility of the tenant. There are also particular concerns for older tenants in relation to emergency repairs, (the Council in their 2009 review stated that the Housing Maintenance After-Hours Service is to be restricted to emergencies only and that a charge of €100 will put on the rent of a tenant if a call out is not deemed an emergency). What an elderly tenant living alone considers an emergency late at night might not be what DCC deem an emergency the following day. €100 is a considerable sum of money for someone on a fixed income such as the non-contributory pension.

⁸ Outlined in a letter sent to all DCC tenants 16th June 2009.

There is a need to be aware in terms of maintenance that many of those who are living alone are older people who may need additional support to get maintenance jobs done. Some of the older respondents, in particular older men living alone, were identified as living in poor conditions but that they do not allow people into their home to fix problems. These residents need additional support to ensure that their environment can be maintained.

Therefore, the five separate surveys and the focus groups found that 84% of tenants have maintenance problems and that two thirds report their problems to the Council. Of those who report the problems 90% are unhappy with the outcome when they report their problems.

50% of tenants have maintenance problems that they report to the Council which are not fixed or the problem reoccurs.

A further 28% have problems but are not reporting them, either because they have given up, don't believe they will be dealt with or have some other social issues.

LIVING WITH MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS

What is often not clear from surveys or even focus groups is the reality of living with these problems and the ill health, including emotional ill health, that they can cause.

Those involved in conducting the surveys and all of those who are actively involved in tenants groups in their complexes are acutely aware that the stress caused by living with maintenance problems cannot be over stated.

It is obvious but needs to be reiterated, we are talking about people's homes, where they raise their children, and maintenance problems can affect all aspects of their lives including physical and emotional well being.

As such we have included individual cases that might help express these issues.

One of the key issues to emerge was wetness in homes, but what is less clear is how this affects families. Problems with what the residents describe as damp include; some rooms that are so mouldy that children cannot sleep in them. In one home the male and female teenage children all sleep in one bedroom, because the other bedroom is too mouldy. This upsets the children and does not give them any privacy. The room with the mould is described as a health hazard. Walls are wet to the touch. The resident was told by DCC that it is condensation and therefore not their responsibility. But the issue here is that condensation causes mould, which causes health problems and the causes of condensation are complex and include causes that are the responsibility of the Council (such as insulation, ventilation and extraction). Mould causes

significant health problems and worry. The tenant feels ashamed of the flat as a result of the smell and problems from this room. The rest of flat was described as, 'kept lovely.'

In another complex, one woman had mushrooms growing on her ceiling. The damp smell is impossible to get rid of, and the tenant is embarrassed and ashamed. This woman has no money and no way of fixing the problem, it is very frustrating for her. This flat was also flooded with dirty water and the woman was very upset, she found it very hard to cope with these problems.

In another case a tenant and her children live in a flat that has mould infestation (Mould Buster's description) on the walls and ceilings. The tenant has raised with DCC that she has damp, DCC respond that it is not damp, but condensation and therefore the tenant's own responsibility. The family live with the windows open constantly to try and vent the moisture, the result of which is they are permanently cold, but the analysis by Mould Busters states that the moisture levels are very high. Open windows are not enough. The condensation is caused by insufficient ventilation in some rooms and cold concrete walls. Lack of insulation on the outside wall is a major contribution to the condensation. (Mould Busters Report). Insulation of external walls is not the responsibility of a tenant, but it is the responsibility of the Council.

The complex interaction of social problems and maintenance issues is also evidenced with some older people living alone. There are often broken windows or other visible signs of poor conditions. These residents need social support to get the windows fixed but no effort appears to be made with them.

Some residents are trying to sort out their own problems, but some cannot, for those who cannot fix it themselves they need assistance.

SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF MOULD

Between the 29th of September and the 19th of October 2011 Mould Busters Ireland⁹, were commissioned to conduct consultation reports, testing for mould in ten local authority flats in the north inner city.

One of the main concerns that have been raised by tenants over and over again is the issue of damp. The standard response that is given back to tenants when they raise this issue with the local authority is that the problem is not damp but condensation. The response *condensation* implies a simpler solution, as well as the tenant being responsible for the situation; the implication is that damp is usually linked to more serious issue(s) which are often outside of a tenant's control, such as building structure, drainage and leaks. But the reality is much more complex, what tenants colloquially call damp, is often wetness and mould, the cause of which can be condensation and leaks, and/or a damp problem. In point of fact excessive condensation can cause damp. The real issue is that tenants are living with mould and the health consequences of ongoing moisture problems. Often tenants can not address the causes of the excessive condensation as they are linked to issues with the building's insulation and ventilation.

What is clear, is the back and forth of the argument about whether is it damp or condensation is not helping to deal with the problems for the tenants, and as an issue it has potentially very serious health consequences.

We examined how to scientifically access the damp versus condensation argument. Firstly, there is no test for damp or condensation, but what can be tested are mould and moisture levels. We contacted Mould Busters to test the mould that is clearly visible and growing in many tenant's homes.

Mould will only grow when there is sufficient moisture available. Generally, Relative Humidity must remain above 50-55% for a prolonged period for mould to thrive. If there is mould growing in your property, then there is a moisture problem. During Mould assessments, we look at the extent of the mould problem AND the underlying cause - moisture. Our recommendations for mould remediation always include methods to reduce or eliminate the moisture problem.¹⁰

⁹ HEAD OFFICE : www.moldbustersireland.com OPERATIONS : + 086-3132684 EMAIL: info@moldbustersireland.com

¹⁰ <http://www.moldbustersireland.com/Mould-Busters-moisture-testing-mould-removal-treatment-prevention-problem-damp-cleaning.html>

It should be noted that mould is a health hazard.

Health Hazards

Susceptibility of individuals to mould-related symptoms can vary, depending of the amount and type of mould and the length of exposure. People with weaker immune systems, such as infants, the elderly and the chronically ill, are most at-risk when exposed to mould. A variety of physical symptoms have been associated with mould exposures through inhalation or skin contact: including nasal or sinus congestion, asthma aggravation, dizziness, headaches, sneezing, eye irritation, sore throat, fatigue, cough, nausea, skin irritation (rash or itching) and diarrhea.

Chronic cases of mould exposure may develop pulmonary emphysema (a lung disease in which air sacs are destroyed, stretched or narrowed). Other conditions associated with specific mould types: Cladosporium – may cause mycosis (lymphoma); Penicillium – may cause hypersensitive pneumonitis and allergic alveolitis (inflammation of the lungs); Aspergillus – reported to cause ear and eye infections; some toxins considered potential human carcinogens. Stachybotrys – toxins suppress the immune system, affecting lymphoid tissue and bone marrow; toxins also reported to be liver and kidney carcinogens¹¹

Excess moisture leads – on almost all indoor materials – to growth of microbes such as moulds, fungi and bacteria, which subsequently emit spores, cells, fragments and volatile organic compounds into the indoor air. Moreover, dampness initiates chemical and/or biological degradation of materials, which also causes pollution of the indoor air. Exposure to microbial contaminants is clinically associated with respiratory symptoms, allergies, asthma and immunological reactions. Dampness has therefore been suggested to be a strong and consistent indicator of risk for asthma and respiratory symptoms such as cough and wheeze. A 2009 World Health Organisation report entitled *Children Living in Homes With Problems of Damp*¹²

Mould Busters conducted ten different assessments in ten different tenant's homes. These flats were in Croke Villas (three), Avondale House (three), Matt Talbot Court (one) and Ballybough House (three).¹³

The assessments took the form of visual inspection, moisture testing and relative humidity testing, an outline of the health implications and conclusions and recommendations, all presented in a short report on each home.

¹¹ <http://www.moldbustersireland.com/soft-protector-mold%20busters-ireland-mould-analysis.html>

¹² <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/conferences/fifth-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health/sections/news/2010/03/einer-von-2000-sauglingen-in-der-europaischen-region-stirbt-an-atemwegserkrankungen/children-living-in-homes-with-problems-of-damp>

¹³ Full copies of the information are available from CTA and ICON upon request. This includes copies of mould reports, photographs and full survey findings. Our contact details are at the back of this report.

The results of these assessments were shocking.

Out of the ten reports that were conducted the visible inspection found heavy/significant levels of infection in eight out of the ten homes. In the other two the mould was visible but not considered at significant levels. Apart from the visible signs the assessor noted odour, levels described as infestation, high levels of contamination and in one very serious case, contamination was spread all over the room, to such an extent that the assessor found the smell unbearable and had to leave the room. In this home, the assessor found that the mould colour and pattern was indicative of *Penicillium* spp¹⁴.

The World Health Organisation recommends indoor relative humidity be no more than 50-55%. If it remains above these levels for prolonged periods of time this creates ideal conditions for mould colonization.¹⁵

Seven of the homes tested by Mould Busters had relative humidity levels which measured higher than the recommended level of 55%. None had clothes drying in the homes at the time of inspection, the majority had windows and/or vents open at the time also. The levels ranged from 59% to 69% and were described as perfect for mould growth as mould will only grow where the Relative Humidity remains above 50% for prolonged periods of time.

The reports recommend strategies to deal with the mould, in all cases a number of strategies were recommended, and in nine of the ten cases these recommendations would include areas that are the responsibility of the local authorities as well as the tenant. The recommendations include;

In eight cases, out of the ten that were assessed, it was recommended that the infected rooms be fogged/fumigated using anti mould disinfectant to ensure that all airborne spores are killed. This was noted in all cases to be an immediate need. In one case, it was stated;

The apartment should be disinfected ASAP as its condition can directly affect the tenant's health¹⁶.

Provide mechanical ventilation/extraction systems (eight of the ten reports make this recommendation this would be DCC's responsibility).

¹⁴ Penicillium – reported to be a skin allergen; may cause hypersensitive pneumonitis and allergic alveolitis (inflammation of the lungs);

¹⁵ Mould reports- in order to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the tenants we have not given the address of the report.

¹⁶ Mould reports- in order to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the tenants we have not given the address of the report.

According to Building Regulations there are ventilation requirements which should be followed to reduce the risk of condensation and mould growth or other indoor air quality problems while maintaining a healthy indoor climate. Mould spores are ever present in normal background concentrations; however, they can only germinate and grow when there is sufficient moisture for a prolonged period¹⁷

Insulation of external walls (six of the ten reports make this recommendation, this would be DCC responsibility)

Regular condensation on the cold concrete walls and ceilings and insufficient levels of ventilation in the bedroom and bathroom are the underlying cause of mould growth. Lack of insulation on the wall is a major contributor to the condensation, thus mould growth.¹⁸

Fix/ check for ongoing leaks (four reports)

In all cases it was also recommended, to varying degrees that all mould affected items be cleaned using specialist anti-mould products. That redecorating, when done, should only use special mould resistant paint/products. In one case it was recommended that all mould affected material, including furniture and clothes be thrown away.

We were only able to assess a small number of homes due to cost, but what is clearly evident from these results is that tenants are living with high levels of moisture which causes mould growth, a health hazard. This mould growth as well as being dangerous to their health is a cause of embarrassment and shame, and trying to manage the problem costs the tenants' money and stress on an ongoing basis. In many cases all they can do is clean mould away but they cannot stop it returning as the underlying cause of the problem cannot be dealt with flat by flat or by individual tenants.

There also remains the question, how many tenants are out there in homes described by the assessors in this way?

Contamination spread all over the room affected furniture and clothes and shoes. The smell was absolutely unbearable- I had to leave the room...The mould contamination is critical and exposes the tenant to a high risk... the apartment should be disinfected ASAP as its condition can directly affect the tenant's health.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mould reports- in order to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the tenants we have not given the address of the report.

¹⁸ Mould reports- in order to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the tenants we have not given the address of the report.

¹⁹ Mould reports- in order to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the tenants we have not given the address of the report.

MAINTENANCE AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT

Dublin City Council maintenance and estate management of Dublin City Council accommodation is the responsibility of the Maintenance and Estate Section.

There are 750 staff and their role includes repairs to council houses / flats / older persons flats (27,000 units) and Caretaking Services in flat complexes.²⁰ Estate Management is operated through eight local depots with seven specialist services which together have over 500 staff. There are also *Area Maintenance Officers*, which include; foremen, trades people and general operatives. The repair service covers emergency, urgent and routine repairs and maintenance.

The Maintenance and Estate Section is also involved in refurbishment and other works, including;

- Roof repair
- Central heating
- Window replacement
- Precinct improvements
- Disability works
- Overcrowding extensions
- Regeneration

In 2009 the system of estate management was reviewed by DCC, to see how they 'can make it more efficient and responsive to our tenants within resources available.'²¹ And key changes were outlined, by letter to tenants in June 2009.

These key changes were from Monday 22nd June 2009

1. Repairs that are the responsibility of the tenant will not be carried out by DCC. (These have been listed in supporting material that was sent with the letter- see below).
2. Tenants who are over six weeks in arrears will no longer have routine repairs carried out.
3. The Housing Maintenance After-Hours Service is to be restricted to emergencies only. (There will be a charge of €100 put on the rent of a tenant if a call out is not deemed an emergency).

Dublin City Council state, if you are a tenant in a Dublin City Council home on which you pay rent, the following repairs are the responsibility of the council:²²

- Structural repairs
- Roof repairs, repairs to external walls and doors
- Electrical faults
- Window Repairs (excluding glass)
- Flooding
- Any other repairs due to the normal wear and tear

²⁰ As outlined in a presentation given by Vincent Healy, Senior Executive Officer Housing Maintenance Section of Dublin City Council to the participants of the training conducted in partnership with the DICP to develop the community survey into maintenance issues in Dublin City Council accommodation. December 2008.

²¹ Outlined in a letter sent to all DCC tenants 16th June 2009.

²² <http://www.dublincity.ie/Housing/MyCouncilHome/Pages/MaintenanceandRepair.aspx>

The tenant is responsible for the following maintenance and repairs:

Internal Repairs, such as

- Filling plaster cracks
- Repairing and replacing cupboards, wardrobes, kitchen units and their doors, hinges, handles, locks, catches and drawers.
- Repairing, replacing and fitting wall and floor tiles.
- Damages caused by the tenant, members of the household, or visitors.
- Carrying out repairs due to condensation.
- Floor and wall tiles and floor covering.
- All internal decoration.

Electrical Repair

- Repairing and replacing ceiling roses, lamp holders and plugs of any appliances.
- Replacing fuses, except for the mains fuse.

Doors and Windows

- Repairing window stays, catches and restrictors.
- Draught proofing doors and windows.
- Repairing and replacing external and internal locks and handles except for fair wear and tear.
- Replacing broken glass in houses.

External Repairs

- Keeping gardens and hedges tidy.
- Repairing or replacing fences, and garden boundary walls. Whether erected by the tenant or the Council.
- Cleaning silt, leaves and other deposits from gutters and down pipes.
- External painting of houses.

Cooking & Heating Appliances and Showers

- Repairing or replacing all cooking, heating and shower appliances installed by the tenant.

Plumbing Repairs

- Repairing/replacing waste pipes inside home (Houses only)
- Cleaning gully traps.
- Clearing airlocks and obstructions in water pipes.
- Repairing/replacing taps on sink units or wash hand basins, including leaking or dripping taps.
- Repairing/replacing a toilet bowl, baths, sinks and wash hand basins except cracked or leaking due to fair wear and tear.
- Repairing/replacing a toilet cistern and cover, except if it is leaking due to fair wear and tear.
- Repairing/replacing seats, chains, handles, washers and stoppers for toilets and sinks.



ICON is a forum where issues affecting the people of the North East Inner City are discussed and agreed, and joint action is planned.

The broad functions of ICON include:

- To be a source of information
- To campaign and lobby around the issues identified within the community
- Encourage Local Policy Making through debate and discussion forums
- To promote a partnership approach between community, voluntary, statutory and business sectors.
- To act as a catalyst to initiate relevant service responses to issues identified within the community.

ICON works on a basis of trust and tries to reach decisions by consensus, where possible.

ICON is an independent and non-political organisation which seeks cross-party support on the issues with which it is concerned.

ICON will establish links with groups experiencing similar problems at a regional, national and European level.

Membership

People who work or live in the North East Inner City take part in ICON on a voluntary basis.

People take part in ICON as individuals or representatives of an organisation.

Contact

22 Lower Buckingham Street,
Dublin 1,
Ireland

Tel: +353 1 8366890

Email: iconet@iol.ie

www.iconnet.ie



CTA provides technical support to local communities and projects as well as carrying out work for statutory, community and partnership organisations.

The philosophy of the Company is based on community development principles of capacity building. Staff have a longstanding interest and experience in anti-poverty actions, social inclusion and participation. The approach to the work is always interdisciplinary, maximising the experience and skills of different staff members for different tasks. CTA acts as a catalyst through which issues may be mediated, groups be facilitated and action plans produced.

Services and support offered by CTA include:

- Training
- Social research
- Urban planning
- Regeneration Projects

Community Technical Aid
Unit 1 Killarney Court, Buckingham Street, Dublin 1.

Phone (00353) 1 855 7015

Email info@cta.ie

The work of ICON and CTA is supported by



This document does not necessarily represent the views of Pobal or the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.



Croke Villas