

# **Residents in high rises feel ignored by council over action on damp**

**People living in high-rise flats in south-east Edinburgh say excessive damp and mould is damaging their physical and mental wellbeing – as concerns were raised some would have to pay up to £8,000 to have repairs carried out.**

Speaking on behalf of hundreds of people living in multi storey flats in Moredun and Craigour, residents association chair Robyn Kane told councillors that tenants are “still feeling ignored by the council,” after she made a plea for them to take action last year.

She added: “We are still suffering from leaks caused by old pipes which is causing immense damage from the dampness and the mould.

“We are still worried about asbestos in our floors and ceilings, we still have windows and doors that are not wind and water tight, forcing us into fuel poverty.

“We still have old immersion heaters that break down constantly and cost a fortune to run and there is a constant fear that one of our most vital assets, the Moredunvale green space, will be built on.

“The overwhelming number of tenants that I represent are in fuel poverty, having to choose between food and heat. What makes this even worse is because the windows are not air tight, the cost of keeping a home warm goes up as the hot air escapes.”

Ms Kane was addressing the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on Thursday when members heard that more than 500 complaints regarding damp, mould and condensation were made to the council between August and November last year, including 95 in the south-east.

“Even though this is the second highest figure in the city I can assure you there are far more cases than this. I am aware of several households in the Moreduns high-rises where people are scared or unwilling to come forward in fear of being treated poorly by the repair staff or because previous repairs were not being carried out to the tenants’ standards, so they’ve given up on reporting altogether,” she said.



Earlier this month the council wrote to residents saying they

would take action by replacing the buildings' Automatic Opening Vents (AOVs), which help to prevent the build-up of heat and smoke in corridors and stairwells.

Ms Kane said that although this is "welcome news" for council tenants, those who own their property could be forced to shell out "upwards of £8,000" to pay for the work.

"Because AOVs are in the landings, it's classed as a communal area, so home owners that do live in the high-rises and bought their homes, have paid off their mortgages and have never been in debt are now being asked to pay for the first phase of an ongoing thing which could cost estimated £8000," she added, "and that's just the first phase."

"But homeowners weren't expected to pay for the lifts, the new lights, so the fact they're expected to pay for the AOVs is shocking."

Also in attendance at the meeting was Mike Wingall from Gilmerton Inch Community Council, who said the letter sent to residents from the local authority has created "high levels of stress and anxiety".

He added: "Many of the owner occupiers are elderly and retired or nearing retirement. One owner I spoke to was advised that the estimated cost of the first phase of the work was over £8,000. She had planned to retire next year and is now very anxious about her future finances and how long she may have to postpone her retirement."

Mr Wingall also pointed out the letter implied the £8,000 figure is "only an estimate", and could be higher, with further phases of work requiring additional payments.

Cllr Kate Campbell, Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Convener for the City of Edinburgh Council said: "The automated opening vents in the blocks need replacing to disperse smoke in stairwell and corridors if there is a fire.

“We plan to take this essential work forward very soon. We appreciate that it may be difficult for private owners to meet their share of the costs – we understand that owning a home and it’s upkeep can be expensive – and so we we’re looking at every way possible that we can to help the private owners cover these costs including a scheme of assistance and a dedicated support case worker.

“And everyone will benefit. Once the works are complete homes will feel safer with no households impacted if there is an accidental fire or smoke issue in any other part of the building, helping all residents to feel secure in their homes.

“We know that there are more improvements needed to blocks and we’ll continue to speak to and work with residents on planning those improvements that will take a bit longer to deliver.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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