

# HOUSING

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## MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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November 2015



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Bathroom Refurbishment  
Fire & Smoke Protection  
Floors & Flooring  
Heating & Renewable Energy  
Water & Air Quality

### News headlines

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Record student numbers all need to be housed

### Latest news, events and products

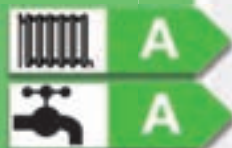


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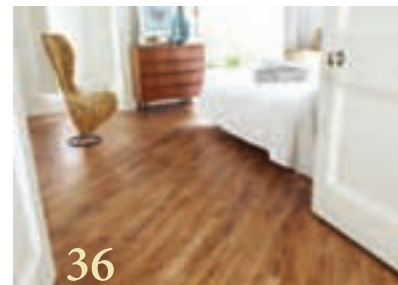
### Improving indoor air quality – a breath of fresh air

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### Landlords and Legionella – complying with the law

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# HOUSING

## MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

### Editor's comment

Welcome to the first issue of our new magazine Housing Management and Maintenance, which brings together news and features on all forms of rented housing.

With property ownership proving to be unaffordable for many since the financial crash of 2008, the rental sector has been the fastest growing part of the housing market in recent years. And despite changes in the last budget, which will hit both private and social landlords in the pocket, renting is still the preferred housing option for millions of Britons.

This issue has a special focus on safety and the measures we can take to protect ourselves from dangers in and around the home. Whether it's from carbon monoxide, smoke, fire or asbestos – or the legal action which can flow from these. It's a topic we don't always pay sufficient attention to, but the consequences can be both dramatic and costly.

#### Avoiding court

No one wants to end up in a hospital bed or on the wrong end of a court case, with a hefty fine to pay and their good reputation in tatters, as a result of something going wrong.

It makes sense to take precautions and to know what your responsibilities are. Remember, ignorance is not a defence which usually cuts much ice in court, and we have seen both private and social landlords being prosecuted recently.

This is a bumper time for the private rented sector – more of us are choosing this option every year, it has easily out-stripped the social housing sector and record numbers of students enrolling at university are swelling the ranks of tenants. Further growth is widely expected, but with that will come further challenges.

The government recently consulted on proposals for dealing with 'rogue landlords' while acknowledging these form only a small minority of the sector. It has set out a package of measures in the new Housing and Planning Bill and we will keep you posted on developments as it makes its

way through Parliament, with expert opinion and interpretation.

#### What price regulation?

The housing bill was published in mid October and has had its first reading. It will now be subject to scrutiny and debate. Its focus is on delivering measures outlined in the Queen's Speech, with much of its 119 pages devoted to ways of increasing housebuilding and home ownership. It also introduces various measures to improve standards of accommodation and service in the private rented sector. The Bill stops short of introducing full-blown regulation and instead puts a heavy onus on local authorities to maintain a national database of rogue landlords and lettings agents, and to apply for banning orders to prevent particular landlords or agents from operating.

Landlords will be expected to monitor themselves against good practice and to self-regulate, with intervention restricted to a handful of cases, where examples are set.

But how do we strike a happy balance between encouraging good housing standards and practices without stifling innovation? And how do we enforce compliance without increasing the financial resources of local councils for them to employ more environmental health inspectors and enforcement staff?

It will be interesting to see how Ministers and local councils try to pull this one off – it's not an easy thing to deliver on a shoestring. We can probably be certain that councils will not receive a single extra penny for undertaking new duties, with the possible exception of being able to charge landlord registration fees and to recycle any penalties imposed on breaches of standards.

I hope you enjoy this first issue of Housing Management and Maintenance. Please feel free to give me feedback and any suggestions you may have for future content.

Patrick Mooney  
News Editor



#### On the cover...

The November issue of Housing Management & Maintenance features the Hemans Estate © Sika.

Sika has helped to bring a series of housing blocks up to latest performance and aesthetic standards with a concrete repair and protection package and anti-slip flooring system, as part of the £450 million Lambeth Housing Standard (LHS) scheme to improve accommodation and quality of life for social housing residents.

For more information, go to page 35.

# Growth in private renting – but it's not all good news



A huge growth in private renting is the most significant feature of England's housing market – with no immediate change in sight as new build activity fails to keep pace with population growth. But are we also experiencing growing pains similar to those which teenagers suffer in their adolescence?

Home ownership has fallen from 70 per cent to below 65 per cent while the number of households renting privately (4.4 million) has overtaken the affordable housing sector (3.9 million households), who rent from councils and housing associations.

The number of households living in the private rental sector has doubled in the past ten years. At the same time, over a million families are raising children in a privately rented home – treble the number of a decade ago.

In part the changes are a result of tougher rules in the mortgage market following the financial crash, and a growing affordability gap between property prices and income levels. But the number of Buy to Let investors has increased dramatically and extra demand for private rentals has come from record increases in students at university and 'Generation Rent'.

The majority of private tenants report high levels of customer satisfaction (84 per cent are happy with their accommodation), but we also appear to be witnessing certain tensions in the sector – possibly the result of increases in the number of rogue landlords, or inexperienced amateur landlords who simply lack the knowledge to provide a decent service.

## Unsafe houses

Analysis of the English Housing Survey by Citizens Advice and the New Policy Institute (NPI), an independent think tank, has shown that 16 per cent of privately rented properties – or 740,000 homes – contain a 'category 1 hazard' that presents 'a severe threat to health or safety'. This compares to 6 per cent in the social rented sector.

Under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System, a category 1 hazard, which can include severe damp, excessive cold or risk of falls, means the property fails the legal minimum standard for housing.

According to the report, A Nation of Renters, these properties contain 510,000 children and 180,000 include a person with a disability.

The Citizens Advice and NPI research also found the average rent paid for unsafe private rented homes was £157 a week, with the properties' landlords receiving a total of £5.6 billion a year in rent. Of this, £1.3 billion was paid for by housing benefit.

These sub-standard and unsafe properties and their landlords are damaging the reputation of the entire private rented sector.

## Better protection

The report forms part of a campaign for better protections for private tenants, called 'Settled and safe'. The campaign recommends that:

- Tenants should be entitled to rent refunds where properties are dangerous or not fit to live in;
  - A national landlord register should be set up. This could help ensure landlords operating illegally cannot move to different areas to avoid legal action;
  - Councils should consider setting up local licensing schemes to ensure landlords are providing the quality of housing and service the area needs and help to ensure tenants know what they can expect from a good landlord.
- Gillian Guy, chief executive of Citizens Advice, said: "Rogue landlords are putting profits before safety... The government has rightly said it wants to tackle the country's housing crisis – it must make targeting dodgy landlords, giving tenants better rights and driving up standards a major part of that effort."

## Who are private renters?

The private rented sector is no longer dominated by young or single households in the way it once was. The report shows that half of privately rented households are headed by someone aged 35 and over and couples with children are now the most common family type in the sector.

Of the 4.4 million private rented households in England, a large majority, some 3.2 million, are headed by someone in work. Among those not in

work, there are now more private rented households headed by someone who is retired (320,000) than by full-time students (240,000)

In terms of income and economic activity, the private renting population is more mainstream than either the social or owner occupying sectors. Private renters are evenly distributed across the income distribution, while social renters and owner-occupiers are skewed towards low and high income groups respectively.

**16 per cent of privately rented properties – or 740,000 homes – contain a 'category 1 hazard' that presents 'a severe threat to health or safety'**

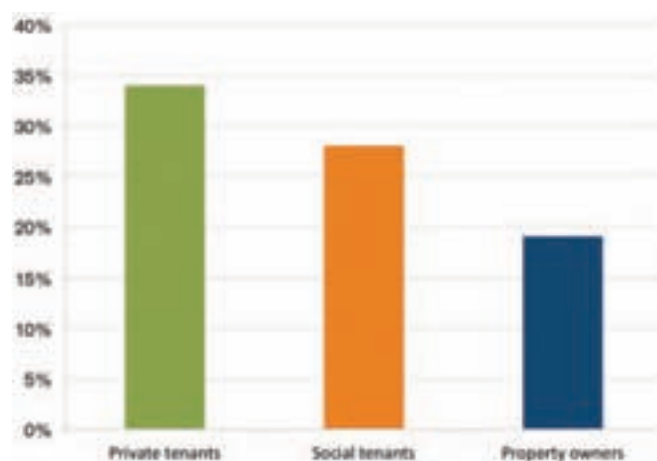
## Savings

Despite their broad range of incomes, 65 per cent of private renting households have less than £1,500 in savings. This means the average private tenant is less than one twentieth of their way towards saving an average first home deposit, with only 7 per cent of private rented households having savings of over £30,000 – enough for an average deposit. Yet 61 per cent of private tenants still say they expect to buy a home in future.

Overall, private rented households spend a higher proportion of their income on housing. The average private tenant spends 34 per cent of their gross household income (including state benefits) on rent. This compares to 28 per cent for social

*Continued overleaf...*

## Percentage of income spent on housing



tenants while property owners spend an average of 19 per cent of their income on mortgage payments.

The number of private rented households receiving housing benefit has more than doubled in the last decade from 410,000 to 1.1 million. Since the recession this growth has been exclusively among working households. In 2004, 20 per cent of private sector housing benefit claimants were in work, but by 2013/14 this figure had almost doubled to 39 per cent.

## High rates of tenancy turnover

There is a continuing high level of churn in the private rental sector compared to other parts of the housing market. A third (34 per cent) of private renters have lived in their current home for less than a year and two thirds for less than three years (66 per cent). Despite the rise of families living in the tenure, the private rental sector remains a relatively insecure place to be.

These figures vary significantly from those in other tenures. In 2012/13, 1.5 million households in the private rented sector had moved to their current home in the previous year. This is more than the number for owner-occupiers and social renters combined (at 680,000 and 360,000 respectively). So while the private rented sector contains a fifth of all households, the sector contains three fifths of households that moved within the last year.

The high levels of churn in the sector has fed through into shorter average tenure lengths. The average duration of residence of people living in the private rental sector is 3.5 years, a fraction of the average for social renters at 11.5 years and owner-occupiers at 17.1 years.

The report, 'A Nation of Renters', was produced by Citizens Advice and the New Policy Institute. Their analysis was based on data from the English Housing Survey published by the DCLG.

## HMM Stats

Private renters had the highest weekly housing costs, paying on average £176 per week in rent in 2014.

Mortgagors paid an average of £153 per week in mortgage payments while weekly rents in the social housing sector were £98 for housing association tenants and £89 for local authority tenants

# Social housing re-lets lose millions in uncollected rent



**S**ocial landlords have been celebrating a small improvement in average void times, despite the fact this masks millions of pounds in uncollected rent and results in thousands of properties left empty for weeks on end.

Of course any improvement in performance is worth celebrating, but let's not get carried away with ourselves and pop the champagne corks just yet.

Figures released by the benchmarking group Housemark show that the average time between tenancies fell by two days to 25.7 weekdays in 2014/15. This covers stock owned by housing associations and councils. In some respects this is impressive as it shows any negative impact from the bedroom tax has been cancelled out.

But when we dig a little we see that this equates to 5 weeks, or one tenth of the year when a property is sitting empty and no rent can be collected on it. If the average rent of a property is £90 a week, that's £450 literally thrown away and that is before you add the cost of repairs, any advertising costs and the staff time in processing the end of one tenancy and the start of another. Often the true cost runs into several thousand pounds, although people tend to only count the lost rent and the repairs bill.

It's true that some out-going tenants do cause damage which needs to be repaired, that certain health & safety checks (like gas and electrical) need to be made before the property can be re-let and in some parts of the country there is a shortage of demand for certain types of property. This is reflected in the statistics which show the average void time varies from 22.3 days in the South to 29 days in the North.

## Is size important?

Interestingly, smaller landlords (those with less than 5,000 properties) do better and they outperform their larger competitors and as a general rule HAs perform better than local authorities.

Many social landlords find that small flats or bedsits in sheltered housing are difficult to find new tenants for (I've seen plenty that I wouldn't have been happy for my mother to stay in) and in

some cases properties are being kept for a particular family, or the property might get lots of refusals because the rent is too high, it's in the wrong place, etc, etc – you get the idea.

So how many landlords seek to actively minimise the time their properties (and the main source of their income!) are empty for? How many think they do, but in fact all they are really doing is gathering groups of staff together every fortnight or four weeks to review their key performance indicators? And what does this achieve?

## Greater commercialisation

There are many things that can be done to reduce the void time. These include such things as ensuring the property is left in a good condition by the outgoing tenant; focussing property inspections on high risk tenancies; restricting repairs to H&S items and deferring other cosmetic improvements until after the new tenancy has started; rewarding good behaviour by tenants and good performance by contractors. Is it really necessary for contractors to spend 3 – 4 weeks on undertaking repairs?

Housing officers need to be much more commercial in their approach and ensure that new incoming tenants fully understand their obligations as well as understanding the extent of works still to be completed (if appropriate). There needs to be a sharper focus on reducing timescales and seeing what actions can be completed at the same time rather than in sequence.

Some landlords do much better than others and this is generally where there is a greater attention on getting properties re-let, usually by having a specialist team taking responsibility for every part of the process, and rewarding both outgoing and incoming tenants for acting quickly and responsibly.

The sums involved in lost rent and completing repairs, which are the outgoing tenants' responsibility, make this a no brainer. But how many private landlords would allow the in-built inefficiency of the re-letting process go unchallenged?

# Record student numbers all need to be housed

As the cap on university places is lifted and a record number of students start degree courses this autumn, worries are being raised about the availability of accommodation and its cost.

The National Union of Students has warned of 'rent strikes' and is calling for both rent controls and better regulation of housing conditions. They claim too much new purpose-built student housing is 'high end' and costly, taking up all of the maintenance loan – leaving students reliant on their parents, or jobs, or overdrafts, to survive.

Their protest has been picked up by the national media, with The Observer newspaper giving over most of its front page one weekend to highlight the housing crisis caused by more students getting university places than ever before.

So have we turned a success story into a nightmare? The answer is not a simple yes or no and probably lies somewhere in between, but parents of recent undergraduate students will quickly tell you tales of the pressures in finding somewhere to live, its cost, the harsh realities of paying deposits and utility bills, and problems caused by fellow residents or neighbours.

## Welcome to the real world!

When the A level results were published, some 426,070 students had found places at university – a 4 per cent increase on last year – lifting the number of students at university to over 2.3 million, including those undertaking Masters and PhD courses.

According to the NUS, half of Britain's students are already struggling to pay their rent. They claim the university accommodation system has reached breaking point and describe the cost of student housing as at an absolute crisis point.

"Students are facing a housing crisis with an ever-narrowing gap between their incomes and what they are expected to pay in rent," said Shelly Asquith, the NUS vice-president of welfare. "There needs to be enforced rent controls to put an end to this."

Between 2010 and 2013, rents rose 25 per cent, according to the student housing charity Unipol. This compared with rises in the wider rental market over the same period of 13 per cent, according to Homelet. The latest Unipol data, to be published in November, is expected to show further rises of around 7 per cent.

The Observer featured stories of recently built plush pads costing up to £800 a week and while these may only be for a select few, they also highlighted the more common problem of rents between £150 to £250 a week which leaves very little from the maintenance loan for other living expenses. Affordable but basic rooms in halls of residence are apparently being replaced with designer built, privately financed up-market developments where all flats come with en-suite facilities and flat screen TVs.

This is a far cry from the student housing in private digs which the parents of many of today's students lived in and remember with a mixture of nostalgia and horror.

Property experts from Savills and Jones Lang LaSalle were featured in The Observer talking about changes in the student housing market and in particular the huge interest from overseas investors.

The majority of the new accommodation needed will be provided by private companies, which in 2013 provided 80 per cent of new bed spaces, according to Unipol. Already this year private investment in student digs has reached record levels with billions poured into the market by Russian, Middle Eastern and Canadian investors.

**Between 2010 and 2013, rents rose 25 per cent, according to the student housing charity Unipol. This compared with rises in the wider rental market over the same period of 13 per cent, according to Homelet. The latest Unipol data, to be published this month, is expected to show further rises of around 7 per cent**

Private sector accommodation is typically more expensive than university-owned accommodation, but the latter is in decline – with halls of residence sold off, or under private sector management. At the same time, the lower-cost rooms available from education institutions have got much more expensive, rising 23 per cent in price since the academic year 2009-10, according to Unipol. This means some institutions no longer have any low-cost rooms for their poorer students.

The high-end accommodation started to take off around the turn of the century when a handful of UK-based private companies started letting to students. Since then the sector has exploded, claimed The Observer.

Purpose-built student accommodation accounts for 517,000 student bed spaces in the UK, according to high-end property experts Savills, and it is a rapidly growing sector.

Global institutional investment means that the first half of 2015 has seen a record £5 billion poured into the sector. "There is a lot of north American money, Canadian pension fund investment and, more recently, Russian money coming into the sector. People like the income return," explains James Hanmer, a director in the student investment and property development team at Savills.

# Thousands of landlords affected by property damage

An estimated 400,000 landlords have had their property damaged by tenants in the last 12 months, according to research by a leading landlords group.

The research, from the National Landlords Association (NLA), also shows that approximately 120,000 landlords have had to make an insurance claim of some kind in the last 12 months, and are spending on average 5 per cent of their rental income on landlord insurance premiums.

However, half of landlords say they haven't spent any money on insurance premiums in the last year, while 46 per cent spent up to 10 per cent. Four per cent of landlords have spent more than 10 per cent on landlord premiums over the past year.

The news came shortly after the Chancellor announced that insurance premium tax will rise this November from 6 per cent to 9.5 per cent. The new rate, which includes landlord insurance premiums, is expected to generate up to £1.75 billion a year for the Treasury.

The NLA's Chairman, Carolyn Uphill, has reminded landlords to protect their rental investments by covering them for all eventualities and to insure against the unexpected.

Mrs Uphill said: "Property damage can be a costly issue for landlords, especially if the level of damage exceeds the value of the tenancy deposit. We hear time and again from landlords who have suffered because they failed to properly vet their tenants before granting a tenancy, and it's alarming just how many landlords find out the hard way that their basic home insurance policy doesn't provide the cover they need.

"It's vital to have the right policies and protections in place and landlords should ensure they carry out crucial tenant checks prior to letting their properties. The NLA offers the most comprehensive range of support, advice and services to help landlords and property owners of all types and sizes to run profitable, sustainable and successful lettings businesses.

"Landlords who are unsure about what cover they need should get in touch about our bespoke property insurance offering, which includes some of the widest cover for landlords and buy to let owners in the market."

For more information about NLA Property Insurance, landlords should visit [www.nlatpropertyinsurance.org.uk](http://www.nlatpropertyinsurance.org.uk) For information about the policy features and benefits of NLA Tenant Check, see [www.nlatenantcheck.org.uk](http://www.nlatenantcheck.org.uk)

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# What students want – and it's not free wi-fi and flat screen TVs

The government and universities are being urged to improve the housing of students and to take a real interest in changing standards and conditions for them in the private rented sector.

'Homes fit for study – the state of student housing in the UK', has been produced by the National Union of Students, based on the experience of almost 7,000 students. And it seems that it's ordinary tenancy issues that are interesting most students rather than the electronic gizmos which the national media have focussed on.

"It is time for decision-makers to stand up and take notice of the unacceptable practices that are making students' lives a misery: sky-high letting fees, spiralling rents and energy bills, health and safety hazards, and unresponsive landlords and letting agents. Too often, students feel there is nowhere to turn and nothing is in place to protect them," said Colum McGuire, NUS vice president.

Overall, less than a third (31 per cent) of students think there is enough support for private renters and less than half (47 per cent) said they knew their rights as a tenant. Only 28 per cent felt they had enough rights in the private rented sector.

Their top three improvements for the sector are:

- a minimum condition standard (66 per cent),
- a ban on letting agent fees (52 per cent)
- more services to ensure landlord and agents fulfil their responsibilities (51 per cent).

The report includes an interesting series of recommendations for improvements with student housing. Much of it overlaps with statements made by government ministers about their ambitions for private rented sector, so it will be interesting to see what progress can be made on delivering changes for this year's intake of new undergraduates.

## Looking for a roof

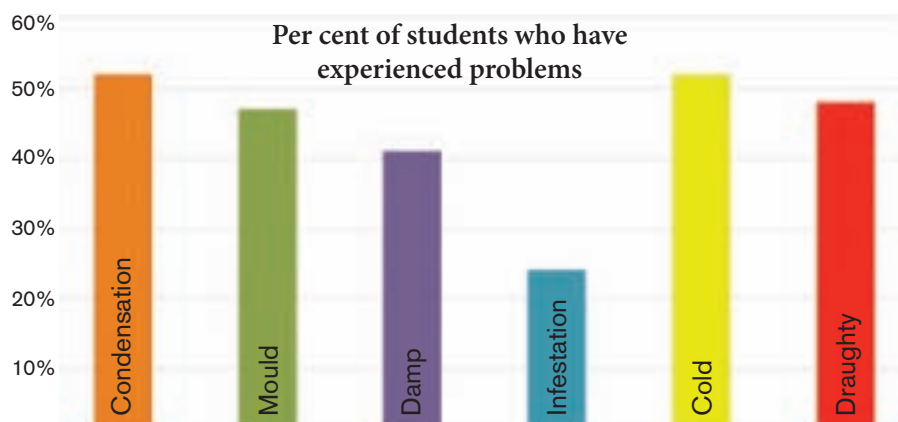
The most important criteria when house-hunting is the cost of rent, location and convenience, and property condition. More than half (58 per cent) of students had used an online property search portal or external letting agent to find their accommodation.

A fifth of respondents (21 per cent) had signed for their properties seven or more months in advance of their move-in date, with some signs of panic. The most common reasons cited for beginning house-hunting was thinking they would be left with no house (40 per cent) or the best houses would be taken (35 per cent).

A fifth (20 per cent) of students had experienced pressure to sign a contract and almost a quarter (23 per cent) had been asked to pay a holding deposit without having seen a copy of the proposed contract. This was much more common among those who had used letting agents.

## Money worries

Only just over half of students (53 per cent) were sure that their deposit had been protected.



Meanwhile, more than half of respondents (58 per cent) reported having to pay one or more fees to secure their property and often they were not aware of these at the time of viewing the property. For example, just 43 per cent of those who had to pay for a credit check knew about this in advance.

A majority of students (51 per cent) had paid £500 or more to secure their property, and more than a fifth (21 per cent) had paid £1,000 or more. Overall, 37 per cent of students reported getting into debt to meet their tenancy set-up costs, and this was even higher for those who were required to pay larger amounts.

Respondents reported paying a wide variety of rent levels, with the mean being £360 per month with a live-in landlord and £366 in the broader sector, and more than half (54 per cent) paying between £200 and £400 per month. Just over half (53 per cent) felt that their accommodation represented good value for money.

## Living conditions

Some mixed messages were given on property conditions. Provision of smoke alarms was not universal but they were reported as being present

in 87 per cent of properties. On a more worrying note, carbon monoxide detectors were provided to only 32 per cent of students' properties.

More than three-quarters (76 per cent) of students had experienced at least one problem with the condition of their rented home – most commonly this was:

- condensation (52 per cent)
- mould (47 per cent)
- damp (41 per cent)

Almost a quarter of students (24 per cent) reported having slugs, mice or another infestation in their home. Half of the students (52 per cent) reported they had felt uncomfortably cold in their home and, related to this, 48 per cent felt that their accommodation was poorly insulated and/or draughty.

More than half of the students (53 per cent) had experienced delays in getting repairs carried out and more than a third (34 per cent) had difficulty getting in touch with their landlord or agent. A quarter (26 per cent) reported that their landlord or agent had entered their home without reasonable notice or permission.



## Good news on repossessions and evictions

**I**t's not something we can normally celebrate but the numbers of people losing their home because of mortgage arrears or rent arrears, are at their lowest level since 2008.

Historically low interest rates have clearly helped the situation. But this positive news has surprisingly come at a time of cuts in welfare benefits to low income families, a continuation of the bedroom tax and fears about a sluggish economic recovery. All of these factors could realistically lead us to an opposite expectation.

Figures published by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for the period from April to June this year, show historically low levels of court action.

With financial forecasters predicting an imminent increase in interest rates – affecting both mortgage costs and loans for private landlords and housing associations, it will be a serious challenge to maintain the good news.

Housing charity Shelter is already casting a critical view on the MoJ figures, saying the "human cost" of the housing crisis is reflected in the thousands of people who have lost their homes with dire predictions of worse to come if benefit cuts continue and new build numbers fail to satisfy demand.

### Mortgage possession cases down

In the quarter, 4,849 mortgage possession claims by lenders (mainly banks and building societies) were recorded. This was down 55 per cent on the number of mortgage possession claims issued in the same quarter last year and the lowest quarterly figure since records began in 1999. This follows the overall downward trend seen since 2008.

There were 3,429 orders for possession, 5,644 warrants of possession and 1,358 repossessions by county court bailiffs in April to June 2015; down 57 per cent, 49 per cent and 55 per cent respectively compared to the same quarter last year.

These figures represent the lowest quarterly number of mortgage possession orders, warrants and repossessions since records began (in their current form) in 1999 for orders and 2000 for warrants and repossessions – these also follow the overall downward trend seen since 2008.

**36,212 possession claims made by landlords in county courts – a 6 per cent decrease on 2014**

### Landlord possession cases down

During April to June 2015, landlords made 36,212 possession claims in county courts, down 6 per cent from the same quarter in 2014. This is the lowest number of claims in a quarter since April to June 2012.

The profile of types of landlord making possession claims (e.g. social landlord, private landlord and accelerated claims) has changed over time.

In April to June 2015, the majority of landlord possession claims (58 per cent) were from social landlords although this proportion has fallen significantly from 83 per cent in 1999 to 64 per cent in 2014.

There were 29,390 orders for possession and 18,267 warrants of possession in April to June 2015; down 9 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. There were 10,361 repossessions by county court bailiffs in the same period, up 4 per cent on the same quarter last year.

Ministry of Justice figures published earlier in the year showed social landlords issued 97,924 claims in the whole of 2014, a 9 per cent decrease on the 107,893 issued in 2013.

Sector figures have said the decrease in claims is due to social landlords' putting in place measures to manage arrears better due to welfare reform.

### Over 8,000 at risk of eviction every week

Homelessness charity Shelter published its own analysis of the Ministry Of Justice data, calculating that 8,300 people were put at risk of losing their home every week last year. The charity used possession claim data and average household size to show 50 people an hour were last year put at risk of eviction.

Shelter said the number of renting households in England who have been evicted by bailiffs from their home has increased by 47 per cent since housing benefit cuts were introduced in 2011. A total of 10,086 renting households lost their home between April and June 2015, it said.

"These figures are a stark warning that relentless rent rises and welfare cuts have contributed to thousands of hard-pressed families losing their home," Shelter chief executive Campbell Robb said.

"Every day at Shelter we see the human cost of the country's unfolding affordability crisis with growing numbers of families finding themselves on the verge of homelessness, and petrified that any small drop in income could leave them with the bailiffs knocking at the door.

More cuts to housing benefit, while doing nothing to tackle the ridiculous cost of housing, is short-sighted at best. If the government really wants to fix the housing crisis and bring down rents so people can afford them without needing support, the only answer is to invest in building genuinely affordable homes."

Alison Mohammed, director of services at Shelter, said: "We're doing everything we can to give advice and support to anyone who faces losing the roof over their heads, but the government must also play its part by putting a stop to further cuts to the safety net which helps ordinary families stay in their homes."

## Fundamental importance of health & safety highlighted by regulator

**H**ealth and safety breaches by social landlords will result in action being taken by the regulator, with board members reminded of their responsibilities.

The Homes & Communities Agency has published its annual review of regulatory activity (Consumer Regulation Review 2014/15) and warned landlords that more cases of them putting tenants' lives and welfare at risk, are being found.

"Boards and councillors who govern registered providers' service delivery must make sure that they have proper oversight of all health and safety issues, including gas servicing, fire safety and other issues such as asbestos. Meeting health and safety requirements in respect of tenants is a fundamental responsibility," was one of the key messages emerging from the review.

**The HCA has published its annual review of regulatory activity and warned landlords that more cases of them putting tenants' lives and welfare at risk, are being found**

### Serious detriment

In previous years, a failure to meet statutory obligations on gas servicing was the basis of all of the breaches of the HCA's regulatory code. But in 2014/15 the range of cases, judged to be "a serious detriment" was extended to include a structural failure of a building, and a widespread, persistent failure of an emergency repairs service.

With more cases of poor practice and dangerous behaviour being reported by tenants, staff and board members, the regulator is putting social landlords on notice that they risk action being taken against them if they do not clean up their act and improve their performance. In several cases, the landlord escaped regulatory action because it acted quickly to correct a problem and reported themselves to the HCA.

Some of the breaches reported by the HCA are covered in other articles in this edition, but in summary they included:

- Systemic failure of the repairs and

maintenance service by Circle to 13,000 of its homes, where a large number of tenants, including vulnerable tenants, were affected by the failure to complete emergency and urgent repairs on time for a prolonged period;

- Regulatory notices relating to gas safety were issued against four registered providers (Yorkshire Housing Group, First Wessex Housing Group, Merlin Housing Society and Severn Vale Housing Society). In each case there were a significant number of properties without a valid certificate, and properties that had been without a gas safety certificate for a long period of time (over a year). This had been caused by poor processes and/or poor data and record management;
- A regulatory notice was given to Blackpool Council, the first concerning a local authority, after the HSE took legal action following the collapse of a second floor balcony in a block of

flats managed by Blackpool Coastal Housing on behalf of Blackpool Council. As a local authority, Blackpool Council is required to comply with the consumer standards. The court concluded the structural flaws in the balconies were present for a significant period of time and the registered provider failed to heed multiple warnings.

During the year, the HCA considered several cases of potential asbestos exposure and although no regulatory action was eventually taken, in two cases the landlords were prosecuted by the Health & Safety Executive.

### Growth in regulatory activity

During 2014/15, 589 consumer referrals were received by the regulator, up from 509 in the previous year, representing a 16 per cent increase. Cases arose from a range of sources including:

- self-reporting;
- whistleblowing or similar from employees;

- tenants;
- representatives (MPs, councillors, tenant panels);
- friends, relatives and other concerned individuals; and
- awareness through media reports

Of these, 238 (up from 102 in 2013/14) were judged to have sufficient potential for a finding of breach/serious detriment that they were then considered by the Consumer Regulation Panel.

Of these 238 cases, the panel sought further information on 89 cases. Following that, 6 were found to meet the test for serious detriment arising from a breach of the consumer standards. This is a doubling of the 3 proven cases in 2013/14.

The cases where a finding of serious detriment was made are summarised in the regulatory notices available on the HCA's website. Further information about the nature and volume of cases is set out in the annual report, along with several instances where the HCA decided against taking action, but where lessons need to be learned.

## Lowlights of the Chancellor's anti-housing budget

**T**his summer's budget shocked many housing experts and commentators – not just because of the number of surprises which he sprung, but because of its likely negative impact on the building of new homes by housing associations and withdrawing some of the financial rewards for private landlords.

Perhaps the Chancellor's biggest surprise was his complete U-turn on social housing rents. He announced annual cuts of 1 per cent for the next four years, which he estimated will save the Treasury £1.45 billion in housing benefit payments.

This reversed an earlier agreement to allow social housing rents to rise by 1 per cent more than inflation. The rent reductions will start in April 2016 and will apply to tenants in both "social rent" and "affordable rent" homes.

Housing associations reacted in disbelief with the National Housing Federation warning the change would result in 27,000 planned new homes NOT being built.

Other changes which will have an adverse impact on incomes and budgets, include:

The maximum amount a family can receive in benefits in a year has been reduced from £26,000 to £20,000 (£23,000 in London). Social landlords have warned of increased rent arrears and say much of the South East will be unaffordable for families. The government says it will allocate £800 million of discretionary housing payments for councils to help affected tenants.

The automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18 to 21 year-olds is being scrapped for new claimants from April 2017. Exceptions will be made for certain vulnerable groups.

Social housing tenants earning more than £30,000 (or £40,000 in London) will see their rents increased to close to full market rates, if they want to stay in the property. Housing associations will have to find out how much their tenants earn, in order to enforce this.

Private landlords were also hit by a number of

changes – all of which could hit their income streams and result in them pushing up rents to compensate for any cuts, or to cut and run by putting their properties up for sale.

Buy-to-let mortgage breaks have been significantly reduced. No longer can private landlords claim tax relief worth up to 45 per cent on interest payments on their buy-to-let mortgages. Instead, all mortgage relief will be limited to the basic rate of income tax of 20 per cent, although the change will be introduced over a four-year period.

Wear and tear allowances have also been tightened. From April 2016 landlords will have to prove they have improved or maintained their rental property before they can deduct the costs from their taxed profits. Currently, landlords can deduct 10 per cent of the rent from their profits, whether they have improved the property or not.

Working-age benefits are being frozen for four years. The freeze means local housing allowance (housing benefit for people renting from private landlords) will fall further behind inflation as the Chancellor seeks to stop the housing benefit bill soaring with increasing rents.

**Private landlords were also hit by a number of changes – all of which could hit their income streams and result in them pushing up rents to compensate for any cuts, or to cut and run by putting their properties up for sale**

In moves to counter some of the 'bad news', George Osborne raised the inheritance tax threshold to £1 million as well as announcing an increased tax break for people who let a room in their own home to a lodger. Homeowners will be able to receive £7,500 from lodgers without having to pay tax, up from the current limit of £4,250.



## Rent controls for Scotland – but unlikely to head south

**T**he Scottish government has proposed to bring in rent controls, in order to limit the increasing costs of housing north of the border.

Details of the draft legislation are not yet known but one of the proposals is for a points-based system of rent controls. This would see rents set at an affordable level, based on the quality of the accommodation, its size, location and the amenities or facilities provided. Future increases would also be limited to ensure tenants can afford the rent.

Although the chancellor of the exchequer has ruled that social housing rents in England will have to reduce by 1 per cent per annum until 2020, there is no suggestion or likelihood of this policy (or rent controls) being extended to the private rented sector.

Ministers have been pressed on the possibility of introducing rent controls in England, in an effort to cut the housing benefit bill, but have repeatedly answered that their focus is on improving standards in the private rented sector and weeding out rogue landlords.

## Hundreds of Salford families benefit from newly-refurbished homes

**T**he first phase of major improvement work to thousands of homes across Salford has been completed.

Work began in April to revamp almost 400 properties in Ordsall and Weaste, following the transfer of more than 8,300 homes from Salford Council to Salix Homes earlier this year.

**The project marked the start of an ambitious two year investment programme, which will see 2,200 homes undergo £22 million of much needed improvements including new kitchens, bathrooms, windows and doors**

The project marked the start of an ambitious two year investment programme, which will see 2,200 homes undergo £22 million of much needed improvements including new kitchens, bathrooms, windows and doors.

Contractor Emanuel Whittaker has just added



the finishing touches to 230 homes on the Tootal Estate in Weaste, while building specialist A Connolly has completed improvements to 166 homes in South Ordsall.

South Ordsall tenant and mum-of-six Jolene Knight has had a new kitchen fitted in her home and is thrilled with the work.

She said: "I absolutely love my new kitchen and it's made a big difference for me and my family. I just love spending time in the kitchen, I practically live in there now."

The second phase of improvement work has now begun, which will see essential improvements carried out to a further 250 homes at the Meadowgate estate in Seedley and the Gerald

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Road estate in Charlestown.

Mark Foster, head of investment at Salix Homes, said: "The first phase of our significant investment programme to social housing in Salford has now drawn to a close and we are incredibly proud of the fact that almost 400 families are now enjoying their new and improved homes.

"As we continue with our ambitious investment plans for our communities, we are confident that we can create a modern, sustainable and fit-for purpose homes of which we can all be proud."

Over the next five years, Salix Homes will invest £75 million in improving homes and communities across Salford to ensure that every property meets the Government's Decent Homes standard by 2020.

**Over the next five years, Salix Homes will invest £75 million in improving homes and communities across Salford to ensure that every property meets the government's Decent Homes standard by 2020**

John Gallagher, contracts director at Emanuel Whittaker said: "It's testament to the dedication and hard work of our site team, and that of Salix Homes, that the first phase of the work on the Tootal Estate has been successfully completed, on time and on budget.

"Replacing kitchens and bathrooms is quite disruptive for tenants, however, we are delighted to have achieved 100 per cent satisfaction and we are looking forward to replicating that success in phase two."

Simon Harrison, managing director at A Connolly, added: "We're delighted to have had such a positive impact on the refurbishment of homes on the South Ordsall estate. We will apply the same focus on quality, skills development and service levels for Gerald Road residents that has enabled us to add value and bring enhanced standards of living to the resident of Salix Homes."

## HMM Stats

From 1996 to 2013, the total number of dwellings in England increased steadily from 20.3 million in 1996 to 23.3 million in 2013. Much of this was due to growth in the private rented sector which more than doubled in size from 2.0 million to 4.5 million (19 per cent of the stock) over this period

# Brickbats and bouquets from Housing Minister



**B**randon Lewis has promised a crackdown on rogue landlords and to drive them out of business as part of a campaign to improve standards of rented accommodation.

But to the relief of many, the Housing Minister also said he would not be imposing rent controls, red tape or 'unnecessary regulation' on the private rented sector. The Minister said such steps would undo the work of the previous five years.

Speaking at the RESI 2015 conference in front of more than 1,000 delegates, Mr Lewis said he wanted to promote further growth in the sector, with more investment targeted at the fastest growing part of the housing market. The government is committed to spending £1 billion on the building of 10,000 new rented properties and to measures, but is coupling this with a service improvement drive.

He congratulated the majority of landlords who have been improving the quality of their service and the standard of accommodation, which he said had produced high levels of customer satisfaction.

## Tackling rogue landlords

The Minister said there was still room for improvement and he vowed to tackle "the small minority of landlords that continue to offer a poor service and give the whole industry a bad name."

He outlined the range of punitive measures being considered which includes:

- a blacklist of rogue landlords and letting agents;
  - banning orders for the worst offenders;
  - extending Rent Repayment Orders to cover poor property conditions and illegal eviction; and
  - the introduction of civil penalties.
- The Minister said he wanted to encourage more investment in the building of new homes for private rent, but the money would only be forthcoming if the sector could improve its reputation for good management.

## £1 billion of new investment

"Our plans for devolution will give cities, towns and counties across the country the power to galvanise their local economies, deliver more homes, and provide a better business environment," promised Mr Lewis.

"The government will continue to provide capital through Build to Rent, and cheap finance through our guarantees schemes. We will release our land for development and encourage councils to do the same, while continuing to ensure the planning system is more efficient and productive."

"The government will also continue to play its part in creating a bigger, and better private rented sector, working through local partners. Increasing supply is the best way of improving quality and choice for tenants.

"That's why we introduced the £1 billion Build to Rent fund, to build 10,000 homes specifically for private rent.

## Momentum

"It has taken time to build momentum - and it is encouraging to see the amount of attention that you are giving to the subject of PRS delivery over this two days here in Celtic Manor: you all know we need to address this with renewed vigour now there is more certainty in the market - but real progress has been made in Build to Rent since the last RESI conference. 15 schemes will create over 4,000 new homes; and there are more deals in the pipeline.

"Some of these schemes have reached completion."

Industry experts think the Department of Communities and Local Government has been told to increase its focus on delivering new housing and to build on changes in the planning system, possibly at the expense of other duties.



This enhanced focus will be seen in new legislation which could see housing the subject of its own new act, as well as enabling measures in other pieces of legislation, including the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. Devolving power to Manchester, has been followed by similar agreements with Cornwall, Sheffield City Region, Leeds, West Yorkshire and its partner authorities, and the Liverpool City Region.

"This government is committed to encouraging homeownership, building homes people can afford to buy, and investing in all areas of the housing market - including the private rented sector," said Mr Lewis. In addition to capital funding, the government is offering housing guarantees to finance new rented homes.

The Affordable Housing Guarantee Scheme has already committed to guarantee over £1.5 billion of debt for more than 13,000 new affordable homes, across 41 borrowers. The Guarantee Scheme for the private rented sector is being operated by Venn Partners with more than 150 investors in the private rented sector already registering their interest.

## Events

### 2015

#### Homes

18 - 19 November, London  
[www.homesevent.co.uk](http://www.homesevent.co.uk)

#### Landlord Investment Show

19 November, London  
[www.landlordzone.co.uk](http://www.landlordzone.co.uk)

#### RLA Property Repairs Course

24 November, Birmingham  
[www.rla.org.uk](http://www.rla.org.uk)

#### RLA Legionella Course

24 November, Newcastle  
[www.rla.org.uk](http://www.rla.org.uk)

#### Landlord & Letting Show

25 - 26 November 2015, Coventry  
 9 - 10 March 2016, London  
 20 April 2016, Liverpool  
 8 June 2016, Manchester  
 13 July 2016, Leeds  
[www.landlordshow.info](http://www.landlordshow.info)

#### NLA Safer Homes Course

1 December, Manchester  
[www.landlords.org.uk](http://www.landlords.org.uk)

#### Student Accommodation Conference

3 December, London  
[www.landlordzone.co.uk](http://www.landlordzone.co.uk)

#### NLA Landlord Foundation Course

3 December, Crawley  
[www.landlords.org.uk](http://www.landlords.org.uk)

### 2016

#### Landlord & Letting Awards

12 February, Manchester  
[www.landlordawards.co.uk](http://www.landlordawards.co.uk)

#### The Leadership Summit

24 February, London  
[www.housing.org.uk](http://www.housing.org.uk)

#### CIH Scotland Annual Conference & Exhibition

1 - 2 March, Edinburgh  
[www.cih.org/events](http://www.cih.org/events)

#### Ecobuild

8 - 10 March, London  
[www.ecobuild.co.uk](http://www.ecobuild.co.uk)

#### RESI Awards

11 May, London  
[www.resiawards.com](http://www.resiawards.com)

#### CIH Housing Conference & Exhibition

28 - 30 June, Manchester  
[www.cihhousing.com](http://www.cihhousing.com)

#### NHF Annual Conference & Housing Exhibition

21 - 23 September, Birmingham  
[annual.housing.org.uk](http://annual.housing.org.uk)

## Homes, 18 - 19 November

The Homes Event will take place at London's Olympia on 18-19 November 2015.

Homes is the UK's only dedicated national trade event for asset management, repairs and maintenance, retrofit and sustainability. Following on from the election of the new government in May, the show's organisers expect Homes 2015 to be the most exciting since its inception.

Eight key themes will run throughout Homes 2015, from the free seminar programme, exhibiting organisations, event features and networking. These themes are:

- Skills and Apprenticeships
- Placemaking & Neighbourhood Renewal
- Innovation & Technology
- Building & Adapting for Future Generations
- Energy Efficiency & Fuel Poverty
- Offsite Construction
- Procurement & Value for Money
- Finance, grant, governance and risk

Following their successful launches at Housing 2015, the sister event to Homes, the show welcomes two new features to the show floor, the Construction Skills Zone, sponsored by Keepmoat and #thetreehouse15 in partnership with the Wheatley Group. The Construction Skills Zone will showcase the brightest and best projects and initiatives of the industry, while #thetreehouse will feature innovative sessions delivered through the art of drama, music, debate and networking. Visit the website for more information on The Construction Skills Zone and #thetreehouse15.

100 speakers will be presenting, debating and discussing the housing sector in Homes'

three seminar theatres.

The programme is available to view at [www.homesevent.co.uk](http://www.homesevent.co.uk).

Notable speakers include:

- Baron Adonis, a reformer, writer and Labour peer who was Minister for Schools and Transport Secretary under Tony Blair.
- Polly Toynbee, Guardian columnist
- A2Dominion, Midland Heart, Incommunities, Orbit, Spectrum Housing, Energy Saving Trust, LB Haringey, Notting Hill, LB Lewisham, Trafford Housing Trust, LB Hammersmith & Fulham all have speaking representation.

Over 3000 housing professionals are expected at Homes 2015 from Housing Associations, Local Authorities, ALMOs and TMOs as well as architects, specifiers, funders and consultants.

Seminars will be topical and revolve around current issues the housing industry is facing. On Wednesday 18 November, Mathew Bishop of Mitie and Rebecca Rees of Trowers and Hamlins will look at partnering solutions to the rent reduction challenge. On Thursday 19 November, Mathew, Shane Hughes of Savills and Chirs Pedder of Trowers and Hamlins will discuss the current pressures that the repairs and maintenance market faces in the housing sector.

[www.homesevent.co.uk](http://www.homesevent.co.uk)



## Private sector tenants more likely to be victims of crime

Neighbourhoods with higher levels of privately rented homes suffer more burglaries and violence 'behind closed doors', according to an independent think-tank report.

Research by the Police Foundation found that areas of Luton with a higher percentage of private rented homes had higher burglary rates. In parts of Slough the research found that 40 per cent of violent incidents that did not involve spouses / partners or family members took place inside private dwellings and that these offences occurred disproportionately in Houses in Multiple Occupation - shared properties where tenants rent rooms or beds, but share facilities like kitchens and toilets.

To tackle the problem, the researchers have made a number of recommendations, including the establishment of a national register of landlords with all private landlords required to obtain a licence to operate.

Other recommendations include:

- Local authorities should be empowered to develop their own PRS licensing schemes so that they can raise security standards in their area; and
- Any income collected from local licensing schemes should be invested directly in housing enforcement and associated crime reduction initiatives.

### Licensing schemes

Several councils including Liverpool and Newham, Barking & Dagenham and Waltham Forest (all in London) have already introduced licensing schemes for private sector landlords, but the government has now limited such schemes to applying to just 20 per cent of PRS homes in their area, unless the council has specific consent for a bigger number from the Communities Secretary of State.

Typically licensing schemes require private landlords to pay several hundred pounds a year per property, but approved or accredited landlords benefit from a discounted licence fee.

The Police Foundation report, 'Safe as Houses? Crime and changing tenure patterns' identifies a link between crime and the conditions in some parts of the private rented housing sector. The report argues that higher burglary rates in areas with more privately rented homes are likely to be explained by 'a lack of community resilience among transient populations' and landlords not investing sufficiently in good locks on windows and doors.

### Low quality housing attracts crime

While the private rented sector has almost doubled in size in the last 10 years and now accounts for about 20 per cent of housing nationally, in the Luton and Slough wards where the research work was focussed it accounts for 40 per cent of all housing.

The research in Luton found that while crime in general tends to be higher in deprived neighbourhoods, it is the level of private renting that best predicts burglary rates, whereas the level of social renting does not.

In Slough the researchers found that Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) suffered from disproportionately high levels of non-domestic violence, which the report argues is linked to the stresses of living in low quality crowded accommodation, with shared facilities and no choice of co-habitees.

### Research by the Police Foundation found that areas of Luton with a higher percentage of private rented homes had higher burglary rates

In one ward in Slough, 18 per cent of non-domestic violence in dwellings occurred in just 164 HMOs, which is disproportionately high.

Rick Muir, Director of the Police Foundation said: "Too much of the private rented sector is of poor quality, with insecure doors and windows, and tenants living in overcrowded shared housing which can be stressful and lead to violent crime. There is a need for greater regulation of the private rented sector so that landlords must be registered with local councils and must meet decent home security standards."

The Police Foundation is running a major, four-year project on police effectiveness in a rapidly changing world. This project, which is being conducted in partnership with the police, local authorities and others in Luton and Slough, aims to identify and deliver better approaches to reducing crime.

### HMM Stats

There are 4.4 million households in the private rented sector and 3.9 million households in the social rented sector, of whom 2.3 million households (10 per cent) are renting from a housing association and 1.6 million (7 per cent) rent from a local authority

## £13 million investment to help hundreds of homes in Glasgow

314 difficult to heat high rise homes in Glasgow will soon benefit from major internal and external improvements thanks to a £13 million investment from Queens Cross Housing Association and their appointed contractor, Keepmoat.

Award-winning community regeneration and housebuilding specialist, Keepmoat, will undertake work at the iconic Cedar Court multi-storey flats, which will include insulated external cladding, new energy efficient windows, balcony enclosures and, a renewable heating and ventilation system.



Attractive and colourful aesthetic enhancements, new lift carriages, low energy lighting, a structural design of the foyer and environmental improvements all combine to provide fresh, modern homes benefitting from reduced energy use and increased fuel affordability.

Eamonn McGarvey, Regional Managing Director at Keepmoat said: "Fuel affordability is a major consideration for this scheme and the delivery of these considerable home energy improvements will provide warmer homes and reduce resident's energy and fuel bills.

"It's an honour to be working in partnership with Queens Cross Housing Association and delivering a project that will have such a positive and lasting legacy at Cedar Court. A number of jobs will also be created via our supply chain which we hope will have wider community and economic benefits."

Shona Stephen, Chief Executive at Queens Cross Housing Association said: "We made a promise to invest in these flats after the Second Stage Transfer in 2011. In 2012 we undertook an Options Appraisal for the whole of Woodside that provided us with a vision for the area.

"I'm delighted that we can start to implement the proposals contained within that appraisal."

Keepmoat and Queens Cross Housing Association have said they will work in collaboration with the local community and Cedar residents to ensure the smooth delivery of what is a major project.

# Pay to Stay rules could force thousands of tenants to leave their 'unaffordable' homes

**U**p to 50,000 existing social housing tenants in London and the south and east of England will struggle to pay market rents on their homes and could be forced to move under new rules.

**This will require tenants earning above £40,000 in London and £30,000 elsewhere, to pay rents at up to market rent levels – if they want to stay in their current home**

The new housing bill published in October confirmed details of the surprise measure first announced in the budget. This will require tenants earning above £40,000 in London and £30,000 elsewhere, to pay rents at up to market rent levels – if they want to stay in their current home. The new rules are likely to apply from 2017 and they could see rents double or even triple.

Bodies like the National Housing Federation

appear to have successfully lobbied for the changes to be phased in, with the increases tapered in line with people's incomes.

Chartered Institute of Housing's chief executive Terrie Alafat, said: "We're concerned that this could prove to be complex and expensive for social landlords to administer, so it will be important to get the detail right.

"There is also a risk that it could make social housing too expensive for people on relatively low incomes – for example, a couple who both earn £15,000 a year would be subject to this policy outside London. The policy will need to be designed very carefully to make sure it is not discouraging people from either finding work or securing a better paid job."

Research undertaken by the consultancy Savills and first reported in Inside Housing has calculated the potential impact of the policy, with an estimated 52,000 existing tenants (on the higher incomes) unable to afford an equivalent private market rent, or to purchase their home in the London, East and South East Regions.

## Little impact in the north

There are nearly another 6,000 similarly affected tenants in the South West, but in contrast Savills

estimate that no tenants in the North East, North West or Yorkshire and Humber Regions will be unable to afford the private market rents for their property. So they will be able to stay in the home provided they are willing to pay a higher rent or to purchase the property. Relatively modest numbers are affected in the Midlands, although some individual cases could still be a worry.

The National Housing Federation have said that a sliding scale would be fairer but could lead to "administrative costs outweighing the benefit from the increased rental income".

A Department for Communities and Local Government spokesman said: "We're introducing Pay to Stay to ensure high-income social tenants pay a fair rent that better reflects their ability to pay. This will put an end to the situation where the high-income social tenants benefit from taxpayer-funded subsidies of up to £3,500 per year on average."

The government have said they will require local authorities to pay the additional rent income back to the Treasury, so the money can be used to fund other housing measures, such as Help to Buy. It is understood housing associations will be allowed to keep the extra income, but they are expected to use it to subsidise new housebuilding.



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Typical  
Air-tight installation

## Safeguarding against asbestos

**A**sbestos is present in many homes built before the year 2000, but how many of us know what we should do to safeguard ourselves, our tenants, our staff and contractors, from this potentially lethal material?

Its use in building homes is now banned but it was commonly used right up until the late 1990s. It will most often be found in boiler cupboards, bathrooms and loft spaces as an insulation material, but it can be found throughout a property even in such products as floor and ceiling tiles and bath panels.

Despite its fearsome reputation, the vast majority of us have nothing to fear from it but we should not become complacent and ignore it. If the asbestos is in a good condition and undisturbed, it is probably best left alone. But we should know where it is and identify this so we don't accidentally damage it and expose ourselves and others to unnecessary risks and harm.

### Must do surveys

Landlords should have an asbestos survey completed for every property they own (which was built before the year 2000), which identifies the location of all asbestos based materials and products in the property and has these expertly inspected to see if the asbestos is safe or not. The surveys should be kept in a register, which is shown to any contractors who work on the property, so they can take preventative measures.

All asbestos based products should be clearly identified so no-one tampers with them. Only specialist contractors should be employed to remove and dispose of asbestos.

While it is not often that cases of asbestosis or mesothelioma are linked to our homes, an estimated 5,000 people a year die as a result of asbestos related diseases linked to their employment. It was widely used in the construction, power supply and ship building

industries, but industry sources claim that the majority of residential flats built between the mid 1960s and the mid 1980s contain asbestos.

**One HA was fined £10,000 in February 2014 after exposing residents to asbestos and another HA was fined £1,000 after workers were exposed**

### Prosecutions

Although prosecutions of landlords by the Health & Safety Executive are relatively rare, two housing associations were found guilty of offences in recent years. One HA was fined £10,000 in February 2014 after exposing residents to asbestos when it replaced a lift at a sheltered housing scheme, while in a separate case, another HA was fined £1,000 after workers were exposed to asbestos when carrying out boiler renovation works.

In residential properties, a landlord's responsibilities for the safety of any asbestos materials is mainly limited to the common or shared parts, such as the hall, stairwell, lift shaft or roof space. However, good practice would extend this responsibility to the entire property.

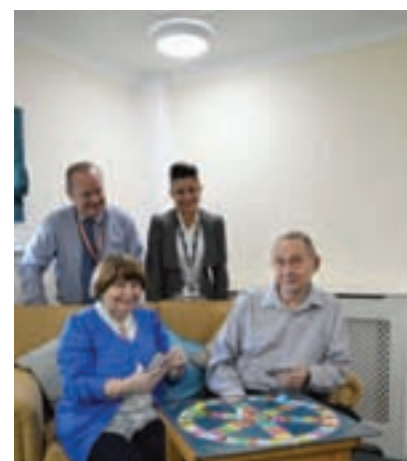
Based on a property's asbestos survey and register, it would be sensible to advise occupants of the location of any asbestos materials, while also clearly instructing them not to interfere with or to damage it, such as when undertaking any DIY jobs.

No one wants to be taken to Court for failing to carry out simple checks and to ensure properties are safe to live and work in. The repercussions could be significant and long lasting.

## Hanover's innovative programme improves lighting levels for residents

**W**ith the clocks going back and darker evenings shortly upon us Hanover Housing Association has embarked on an estate improvements programme set to improve residents' health and well-being by improving communal lighting and reducing carbon emissions at 322 properties in Hanover's South region.

The planned works programme, which was rolled out across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, involved replacing all of the light fittings with LED motion sensor lighting and installing attractive and contemporary wall lighting in the communal corridors, meeting rooms and residents' lounges.



Most light fittings have a five-year warranty and a ten-year life expectancy, which means that the organisation will also have significantly reduced maintenance costs over the next few years.

Adrian Green, Technical Manager South Region at Hanover, said: "The benefits of the new lighting are twofold. Firstly, the new lighting will improve lux levels which means that residents will have clearer and softer lighting which will enable them to read books, eat meals or use laptops. Secondly, the energy efficiency aspect enables Hanover to reduce its carbon footprint and help reduce up to 15 per cent of the electricity element of residents service charges.

"One of the first estates to benefit from new lighting was The Pines Extra Care estate in Slough. 70-year-old Ann Jenkins said: "I am really pleased with the new lighting, the corridors and on-site restaurant are a lot brighter."

## Coastline Housing's £1.3 million Central Heating Fund win

**A** partnership including Coastline Housing is delighted to have secured £1.3 million from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) Central Heating Fund.

The £1.3 million will be added to the £1 million already pledged by the partnership – led by Cornwall Council's Public Health service – to install or upgrade central heating in hundreds of homes in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly are in the top 3 for homes without central heating with both above the England average for fuel poverty. Coastline Housing will use this funding to help tackle those most at risk of fuel poverty by installing innovative ground source heat pumps and replacing electric heating with gas for those homes that are on the edge of a town.

The partnership will be concentrating on installing central heating systems in the 376

households which have been identified as part of the work carried out by the successful Winter Wellness project as being fuel poor and which don't - or are unable to use - mains gas as their main source of heating.

Mark England, Head of Technical Services at Coastline Housing, said: "This is fantastic news for our customers who will benefit greatly from this initiative. These funds will provide significant assistance to meeting our corporate commitment to reduce Fuel Poverty and financial hardship. The team have worked hard to jointly secure this much needed funding to improve heating systems at Coastline Housing and our Partner organisations."

The successful bid winning partnership also included the Council of Isles of Scilly, Community Energy Plus, Cornwall Housing, Devon and Cornwall Housing Group, Guinness Trust, Inclusion Cornwall and SSE.

## Gas - a potential killer in our homes

Every year about 14 people die from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gas appliances and flues in their homes which have not been properly installed or maintained. Many others suffer ill health, which can have serious consequences, for themselves AND their landlord.

The problem for many is that carbon monoxide is difficult to trace – you can't see it, you can't smell it or taste it, and usually you're not aware there is a problem. But it can build up in your bloodstream causing dizziness, headaches and eventually a loss of consciousness, until fatal levels are reached.

The legal obligations on landlords are set out in the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. These deal with the installation, maintenance and use of gas appliances, fittings and flues in domestic premises. They place duties on landlords to ensure that gas appliances, fittings and flues are safe, serviced regularly and accurate records are kept.

### Stiff penalties

Prosecutions for suspected breaches of the regulations are becoming more frequent, with heavy fines (running into thousands of pounds) and long-term damage to a landlord's reputation among the penalties – even where injuries and deaths are avoided. Repeated offences can result in imprisonment and unlimited fines.

Claiming that your tenant has not allowed a service engineer into the property is not an accept-



able excuse for the Health & Safety Executive or the Courts – who expect landlords to take legal action if necessary, to obtain access, to complete the necessary work. However, forced entry to the property should be avoided.

### Prosecutions

A housing association in the West Country was recently fined £6,000 for health and safety breaches, after a tenant reported problems at her

home. An investigation discovered that HA employees had removed a chimney from the roof and tiled over the space, in an attempt to fix a problem with damp at the property. But the chimney was being used to vent a gas fire and gas boiler. The works resulted in carbon monoxide building up in the loft space.

A private landlord in Torquay was fined £12,000 earlier this year after he carried out his own gas safety checks on boilers in six properties and then

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fraudulently completed the gas safety documents using a fake Gas Safe Register number.

Other prosecutions usually take place as a result of unregistered plumbers or engineers being used to install, service or repair gas boilers and fires, in an effort to save money.

## Types of property covered

The duties apply to appliances and flues provided for tenants' use in 'relevant premises', that is those occupied for residential purposes under a licence, a tenancy agreement, or a lease for up to seven years is covered.

The duties do not just apply to houses and flats. They also cover rooms let in bed-sit accommodation, private households, bed & breakfast accommodation and hotels, as well as rented holiday accommodation such as chalets, cottages, flats, caravans and even to narrow boats on inland waterways.

The regulations also apply to student accommodation and properties provided to members of staff – even if they are not paying you a rent.

Even if a property is only rented for a short period of time, perhaps only a week or a fortnight as a holiday home, you are still a landlord and have specific duties for gas safety.

## Your main duties as a landlord

Landlords are required to comply with the following:

- ensure gas fittings and flues are maintained in a safe condition. Gas appliances should be

serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If these are not available they should be serviced annually unless advised otherwise by a Gas Safe registered engineer;

- ensure an annual safety check is carried out on each gas appliance / flue. Before any new lease or tenancy starts, you must make sure that these checks have been carried out within one year before the start of the lease / tenancy start date, unless the appliances in the property have been installed for less than 12 months, in which case they should be checked within 12 months of their installation date;
- have all installation, maintenance and safety checks carried out by a Gas Safe registered engineer;
- keep a record of each safety check for at least two years;
- issue a copy of the latest safety check record to the existing tenants within 28 days of the check being completed, or to any new tenant before they move in (in certain cases there is an option to display the record). Do not assume that an annual service inspection meets all of the safety check requirements, or that a safety check on its own, is sufficient to provide effective maintenance. Ask the advice of a Gas Safe registered engineer where necessary.

## What if an appliance fails the safety check?

The safety check record will contain details of any defect identified and remedial action taken. You must ensure that any safety defect is rectified (by

a Gas Safe registered engineer) before the equipment is used again. It is recommended that you keep copies of work done to rectify defects identified by the safety check.

It is an offence to use, or allow the use of, a gas appliance you know to be unsafe. In no circumstances should you reconnect an appliance that you have been told is unsafe, which has either been isolated or disconnected for safety reasons, until the fault has been rectified.

**A housing association in the West Country was recently fined £6,000 for health and safety breaches, after a tenant reported problems at her home**

## Final words

If a tenant has their own gas appliance that you have not provided (such as a cooker or a gas fire), then you are responsible for the maintenance of the gas pipework, but NOT for the actual appliance. However, you should make sure your tenants know where to turn off the gas and what to do in the event of a gas emergency.

More information can be obtained from the Health & Safety Executive and the Gas Safe Register websites.

# Stafford Homes given a facelift by Novus

**T**he projects division of Novus Property Solutions have recently completed a large-scale and comprehensive internal and external refurbishment for Stafford and Rural Homes.

Stafford and Rural Homes owns and manages more than 6,000 properties, making it the largest social landlord in Stafford, and has now completed its 'Total Place' project to upgrade properties on six streets, including Exeter Street where Novus has recently completed the £3 million refurbishment project.

The project to improve the appearance of the Exeter Street flats, which was co-ordinated by staff from Novus' Stoke-on-Trent office, took place over an intensive 50-week programme. The overriding aim was to make a difference to residents' quality of life by refreshing the whole environment in and around the flats.

The comprehensive programme involved external facade works, including new gable brick walls, Trespa cladding, and insulated render. The team also completed roofing and electrical works, installed new communal staircase balustrades, and landscaped the grounds of the properties.

The refurbishment and alteration works to the Exeter Street flats not only enhanced the appearance of the properties from street level, but

also improved the thermal performance of the building, helping reduce fuel costs for residents and lower the building's overall environmental impact.

Before the works began, Novus' customer liaison officer visited all residents to discuss the process and timescale of the works, and how the project would affect them. The Novus team employed an open door policy throughout the project to ensure residents could contact a

member of the site team at all times, with the liaison officer on site throughout and for a period after the works had been completed. This was key to the smooth running of the project.

Andrea Panayi, project manager at Stafford and Rural Homes, said: "This is a flagship project for Stafford & Rural Homes, with the Exeter Street flats being the largest refurbishment we have ever carried out.

"Carrying out work on this scale without any of the customers moving out of their home is no small achievement. The customers have really benefited from the improvements but most importantly they didn't feel too much disruption throughout the journey."

An official opening day was held for Novus staff and Exeter Street residents to celebrate the completion of the works.



## Refurbished apartments are just what the doctor ordered



**A** former NHS clinic in Northumberland has been given a new lease of life after being converted into six high quality apartments by the county's largest private residential landlord.

Arch Homes has invested almost £600,000 in refurbishing Nomis House, located in the town of Prudhoe just over 10 miles from Newcastle city centre. The refurbishment has created four apartments in the existing 18th century stone building as well as two new ones built on what was previously the clinic's car park.

**To transform the building from a clinic into high quality apartments, Arch Homes undertook rewiring and plumbing before decorating and carpeting throughout.**

In making the refurbishment, Arch Homes retained many of the building's original features including the distinctive exterior stonework, staircases and sloped ceilings on the upper floor. To transform the building from a clinic into high quality apartments, Arch Homes undertook rewiring and plumbing before decorating and carpeting throughout. To the exterior, a new car park and patio area have been added. And with stunning views over the Tyne Valley, the one three bedroom and five two bedroom apartments weren't on the rental market for long.

Arch Group chief executive Peter McIntyre explains why his organisation made the investment in Nomis House: "Arch's housing business continues to grow at a significant rate and we are committed to making good quality, affordable accommodation available across our portfolio. Demand for exclusive accommodation remains ahead of supply in the Tyne Valley so when

Nomis House came onto the market we felt it had very obvious potential to fit perfectly into our overall property strategy albeit after significant investment.

"By upgrading our existing housing stock and building new homes in priority regeneration areas, Arch is helping families and people of all ages to live more comfortably and where necessary escape from fuel poverty by providing better insulation, efficient heating systems and rental deals that have energy costs included."

Today, Arch Homes manages more than 900 bought, built or previously owned properties in North East England with a combined value of around £50 million. By the end of 2016, the company is aiming to bolster its property portfolio with at least 120 new homes for sale or rent.

Arch Group is wholly owned by Northumberland County Council but operates uniquely at arm's length from the local authority. It generates commercial income from investment, development and estate management. Supplemented by other funding streams, profits are recycled into regeneration activity, inward investment and business support creating a 'profit for purpose' business model which delivers sustainable benefits to communities across Northumberland.

### HMM Stats

The proportion of income spent on housing costs is 18 per cent for mortgagors, 29 per cent for social renters, and 34 per cent for private renters

## BCHA selects Capita for asset and development management partnership

**B**ournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) has created an asset and development management partnership with Capita's property and infrastructure business that will see the two work together to improve and strengthen the asset base through targeted investment and increased efficiency over the next five years. The deal is worth £4 million, with an additional gain share element related to realised efficiencies.

BCHA – which owns and manages over 2,000 homes across the South West – will use Capita as a one-stop-shop for their asset and development management. From site finding, development consultancy, strategic asset management, investment programmes and statutory compliance to project management, architecture, cost management, planning and engineering services, Capita will deliver targeted, measured efficiency gains across the entire development and management portfolio until 2020.

Martin Hancock, BCHA's chief executive, said: "This contract will allow BCHA to improve services to its customers, to focus on its core competencies and means that we'll be able to take a much more strategic approach to asset management and development. As part of the partnership, there are clear value for money procurement and efficiency targets – and Capita will be investing in IT infrastructure and other services with no upfront cost to us."

Jules Bickers, director of housing for Capita's property and infrastructure business, said: "This partnership will give BCHA access to Capita's unparalleled breadth of expertise and economies of scale, driving down costs and transforming service delivery. For BCHA residents, this partnership means that homes and communities will get the right investment, more homes will be built for local people and their rent money will be spent effectively and carefully."

Jules added: "The contract is similar in scope to Capita's innovative partnership with Genesis, announced in 2013, one of the UK's largest housing associations. This latest agreement shows that the partnership model we have developed works for organisations of very different sizes and geographies – and we look forward to expanding this concept across the housing provider market."

# Are your properties ready for electric vehicles?



**A**re your properties prepared for Electric Vehicle (EV) drivers? With domestic sales of EVs and Plug-in Hybrids (PHEVs) experiencing a huge increase now is the time to install EV charging points on your homes.

Rolec EV issued the alert after the number of UK motorists who bought an EV between January and September this year was shown to be up 139 per cent on the same period last year - with these latest statistics placing the nation second in Europe for sales.

Rolec's PR & Marketing Manager Nathan Black commented: "As almost every leading vehicle manufacturer has launched, or is set to launch,



new EV and PHEV models over the coming months and years, increasing numbers of property owners across the UK are installing EV charging points.

Nathan continued: "Owners of properties may be under the wrong impression that installing an EV

charging point at a home is complicated, costly, and disruptive, however this could not be further from the truth. EV charging units can be low cost, simple to operate and easy to install - involving just a dedicated live, neutral and earth circuit which any electrician can handle."



## LEVATO MONO porcelain paver system

The Levato Mono porcelain paver system is the pinnacle of external raised flooring technology; enabling the specification of lightweight, slip resistant and attractive raised flooring solutions, combining incredible technical properties with uncompromising aesthetics; making them the ideal choice for commercial and domestic use alike.



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# Editor's Product Focus

## Airflow

The iCONstant extract fan from Airflow provides quiet, continuous ventilation to help eliminate condensation and mould. It costs just over one pound per year to run on trickle speed, and at just 10db(A) it is supremely quiet. Two versions are available (Timer and Humidity Timer), both with automatic flow sensor technology which ensures that the fan extracts at a constant speed, even on a windy day. With a choice of three trickle speeds and a boost up to 20 l/sec, it is perfect for social housing upgrades and new build dwellings.

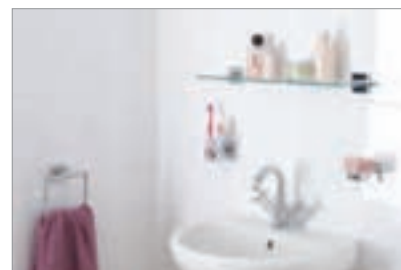


## CRL

CRL has launched its new COMPACT-X Sliding Door System. COMPACT-X is a brand new compact sliding solution from CRL for frameless glass panels, combining the latest technology with an attractive minimalist design. The system is extremely quick and easy to install with double soft close, and is suitable for ceiling, glass, and wall-mounted applications. COMPACT-X has the added advantage of being suitable for narrow door widths - a minimum of 635mm.

## Croydex

Flexi-Fix from bathroom accessories specialist, Croydex, is a no mess, no fuss method of securing accessories to walls without damaging the existing decor. Thanks to this unique fixing bracket, most existing fittings can be replaced easily using existing fixing holes, regardless of any differences in spacing or alignment. The patent pending system can also be used to glue accessories securely to uneven walls or shiny tiles. The Flexi-Fix collection comes in 10 styles and products, including glass shelves, mirrors and toilet roll holders.



## Electric Boilers Company

Electric Boilers Company has introduced a new range of 'true' wall-hung electric combination boilers. These boilers work exactly like gas combi boilers. By eliminating gas, they remove carbon monoxide and condensate production. Yearly Service and Gas Safe certificates are also no longer needed. Many of the components (such as exhaust fans, gas valves, pressure switches, electrodes and burners) are made redundant, and as a result true savings and safety for homeowners are achieved.

## Ice Energy

Ice Energy has extensive experience of identifying renewable solutions which can improve the value, quality and energy efficiency ratings of housing stock while actively tackling fuel poverty. Our heat pumps not only provide a low-cost total heating and hot water solution, but they also qualify for generous government grants which provide an ongoing revenue stream. If you're considering renewables there's only one company to choose - Ice Energy, your total renewables partner.



## Lecico

Lecico has been manufacturing ceramics since 1959 and offers a versatile range of sanitaryware suitable for any type of commercial and domestic bathroom. Their ATLAS range includes a raft of cloakroom, semi-recessed, vanity and medical basins. It has an equally impressive range of WC's, bidets and urinals, including rimless options, comfort height models and school pans. The company has a comprehensive range of domestic bathroom suites too, complemented with furniture, baths and brassware in its new LOOK brochure.

# Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to be mandatory

**L**andlords will be required by law to install working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in their properties, under measures introduced by Housing Minister Brandon Lewis.

The move is expected to prevent some of the 36 deaths and 1,375 injuries a year caused by fires, smoke and gas. The measure is expected to take effect from October 2015, and comes with strong support after a consultation on property condition in the private rented sector.

England's 46 fire and rescue authorities are expected to support private landlords in their own areas to meet their new responsibilities with the provision of free alarms, with grant funding from the government.

This is part of wider government moves to ensure there are sufficient measures in place to protect public safety, while at the same time avoiding regulation which would push up rents and restrict the supply of homes, limiting choice for tenants.

## A safer private rented sector

Housing Minister Brandon Lewis said: "In 1988 just 8 per cent of homes had a smoke alarm installed – now it's over 90 per cent. The vast majority of landlords offer a good service and have installed smoke alarms in their homes, but I'm changing the law to ensure every tenant can be given this important protection.

"With working smoke alarms providing the vital seconds needed to escape a fire, I urge all tenants to make sure they regularly test their alarms to ensure they work when it counts. Testing regularly remains the tenant's responsibility."

The government says its measures will help to

create a bigger, better and safer private rented sector and a key part of that is to ensure the safety of tenants with improvements in fire prevention and carbon monoxide warning.

People are at least four times more likely to die

**Those who fail to install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms face a variety of sanctions including a £5,000 fine. This would bring private rented properties into line with existing building regulations**

in a fire in the home if there is no working smoke alarm. Changes to the law will require landlords to install working smoke alarms in their properties so tenants can give their families and those they care about a better chance of escaping a fire.

## Ensuring the safety of tenants

Other measures to support the private rented sector include investing £1 billion in building newly-built homes specifically for private rent, giving tenants support against rogue landlords and publishing a 'How to rent' guide (available on the DCLG website) so tenants and landlords alike are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

The proposed changes require landlords to install smoke alarms on every floor of their property, and test them at the start of every tenancy.

Landlords will also need to install carbon monoxide alarms in high-risk rooms – such as those where a solid fuel heating system (such as a coal fire or a log burner) is installed. Those who fail to install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms face a variety of sanctions including a £5,000 fine.

This would bring private rented properties into line with existing building regulations that already require newly-built homes to have hard-wired smoke alarms installed.

## New regulations

And it's in line with other measures the government has taken to improve standards in the private rented sector. New regulations laid in Parliament before the general election require landlords to install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in their properties. They are expected to come into force in October 2015.

An announcement on the allocation of funding to fire and rescue authorities to offer free smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to local landlords is expected shortly. Earlier this year the government's Fire Kills campaign encouraged people to test their smoke alarms when changing their clocks to British Summer Time.

## HMM Stats

Private renters (82 per cent) are less likely than other tenures to have a working smoke alarm, whereas housing association households (94 per cent) are most likely to have one

# NCH creates community garden with St Ann's tenants

**N**ottingham City Homes (NCH) has this week been working alongside a team of St Ann's tenants to begin planting up a brand new community garden, created for them as part of NCH's Decent Neighbourhoods programme.

The team at NCH has been working with Nottingham-based garden experts, Hosta Consulting, who designed the garden and Broxtowe-based social enterprise, BestBuild, which has carried out landscaping work on the site at the end of Westminster Close, St Ann's. The area of wasteland at the end of the road had become neglected and in recent years experienced anti-social behaviour.

Now the landscaping work is complete, NCH will be working alongside Hosta Consulting to complete the garden. Work will include planting a herb border and some fruit trees. The fencing will be used as a trellis for vertical planting of evergreen flowering climbers, and the raised beds for vegetable growing will be left empty for tenants to start using when they are ready. Hosta is also hoping to deliver some training in allotments in the future.

Nick Murphy, Chief Executive of Nottingham City Homes, said: "Over the past ten years the council has invested millions into creating warmer, more secure, modern homes. As part of the Building a Better Nottingham programme, we're also building brand new homes for families and individuals across the city.

"But we want to do more, and we don't believe we should stop at the bricks and mortar. We're always looking for ways to transform the neighbourhoods we work in, joining forces with local residents and helping to create places where people want to live.

"Our Decent Neighbourhoods programme has already seen a number of landscaping improvements in areas where change was most



needed. We hope this community garden and schemes like it and it will make a difference to the way people feel about the place they live. We may even inspire some future garden designers."

The Decent Neighbourhoods programme has already completed a number of projects across the city which improve the local environment and enhance the street scene.

Throughout the Westminster Close project, NCH has been consulting with local tenants on their hopes for the community garden, as well as enlisting budding gardeners to take part.



## Working together to provide energy efficiency

**F**uel poverty has long been a key government focus, particularly with increasing energy costs over recent years resulting in more people falling into the band of fuel poor households. A fuel poor household is defined as one which needs to spend more than 10 per cent of its income on all fuel used to heat its home to an adequate standard. Fuel poverty in England is measured by the Low Income High Costs definition, which considers a household to be in fuel poverty if:

- they have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level) and
- were they to spend that amount, they would have a residual income below the official poverty line.

It is encouraging to see how authorities like Dudley Council have fully embraced the government's drive to eradicate fuel poverty and the work they have been doing in this area.

Dudley Council has been at the forefront of many initiatives, both within its own and also

privately owned properties, to help improve energy efficiency and get people out of fuel poverty. The energy efficiency of a property (and therefore, the energy required to heat and power the home) is a key driver behind fuel poverty where Dudley Council can have, and is having, an impact in reducing fuel poverty. Fuel poverty, by definition, affects some of the most vulnerable people in society and has other effects on those people and resources. Living in a cold home can be very damaging to physical and mental health. Older people are at particular risk of health problems, but children and people with disabilities or illnesses are also vulnerable.

Dudley Council has worked successfully with Plastal, and its fellow Epwin Group business, Wrekin Windows, over a number of years to help improve energy efficiency in their existing housing stock. They are providing 'A' rated PVC-U windows to Council properties and have already supplied more than 35,000 windows since the contract started on 1 December 2012.

Dudley Council recognises that continued investment in their housing stock is essential to maximise the impact on fuel poverty and poor health, since tenants are more likely to be on lower incomes and vulnerable to fuel poverty. Part of their approach has been to let people know what help is available to them – research in 2005 identified that 75 per cent of people were unaware of the assistance available – and this has helped provide essential help to many residents who may



not otherwise have received it. From a practical point of view, their focus has been on replacing old, inefficient windows with new, energy-efficient PVC-U windows that retain more heat in the property, thereby reducing the amount of energy required to generate that heat. Improving thermal efficiency of existing homes helps reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and household expenditure on fuel costs.

**Tackling fuel poverty is an integral part of the Dudley Council Housing Strategy 2013-2016. The Council invests around £35 million per year to improve and maintain its housing stock and has created the accredited Dudley Home Improvement Service to assist older and more vulnerable people to improve their living conditions**

Tackling fuel poverty is an integral part of the Dudley Council Housing Strategy 2013-2016. The Council invests around £35 million per year to improve and maintain its housing stock and has created the accredited Dudley Home Improvement Service to assist older and more vulnerable people to improve their living conditions.

Around 23 per cent of the heat lost from an average home occurs through the windows, so energy-efficient windows can help make significant savings. The efficiency of windows is measured by the Window Energy Rating (WER), with 'C' being the lowest and 'A++' the highest. Wrekin Windows has played a key role by supplying high energy efficiency windows in the highest band, with an 'A' rating.

An important part of this kind of project is working closely together to get the best results and, having specialised in supplying windows for social and affordable housing for over three decades, Wrekin has been able to bring valuable experience to the contract. With the ability to offer full contract management, supply only or supply and fit service, they will work in the way that best suits the contractor. On this project, Dudley Council carried out its own significant engagement with residents to ensure their needs were taken into account, and the contract was for supply only. This was important to fit Dudley Council's investment strategy and procurement processes, which encourage the use of local labour, thereby also contributing significantly to the local economy. Importantly, Plastal is a member of the LHC, a leading not-for-profit purchasing consortium that provides best value public sector procurement solutions for the construction, refurbishment and maintenance of social housing and public buildings.

Dudley Council's initiative to help reduce fuel poverty and improve the well-being of its residents is one that is making a real difference to people and, by working closely with them, Wrekin is pleased to be making a contribution.





## Saniflo shower pumps

Installing a shower in almost any space without gravity drainage is now possible thanks to a range of pumping solutions from **Saniflo**. Whether it is an en-suite in the loft or a shower room in the basement, there are endless possibilities to create a personal showering haven. The proven Sanishower is capable of pumping a standard electric or gravity mixer shower and can be installed next to or underneath a shower tray – as long as there is maintenance access. It has an additional inlet which means it can also take the waste water from a wash basin too. With the ability to pump up 4m and along up to 40m, this powerful pump can be successfully installed just about anywhere within this reaching distance of a mains drainage point. A new 'Flat' version of the Sanishower was launched recently to suit low-level shower trays of 80 mm and over. This compact unit is a two-part kit with pump, plus gully and waste and can discharge up 3m and along 20m. Both units have a working waste water temperature of 35°C with the waste expelled through 32mm discharge pipework.

020 8842 003 [www.saniflo.co.uk](http://www.saniflo.co.uk)

## Animated video for the Dixie micro-pile

Helifix has created a new animation which shows step-by-step installation procedures for its versatile Dixie micro-pile. The animation clearly demonstrates how these high performance micro-piles can be used either to stabilise existing buildings that are suffering from subsidence or to help form secure and level foundations for new constructions. The well proven and technically advanced Dixie micro-pile is backed by International Code Council (ICC) certification and conforms to AC308, the International Standard for helical foundation underpinning systems. It combines with the Helibeam masonry stabilisation system to provide a complete structural repair solution.

[info@helifix.co.uk](mailto:info@helifix.co.uk)



## A true 'one stop shop' for shower products

Over the past few years, **MX** has taken significant strides towards becoming a true 'one stop shop' for everything shower-related. Now the UK's leading shower tray manufacturer, the company offers a wide range of electric QI (Quick Installation) showers. It offers an impressive variety of thermostatic mixer showers and valves, a selection of shower enclosures, the widest range of shower accessories (from showerheads to riser rails, hoses to the most recent addition of brassware ranges), taps and mixers. For more information and to get your own copy of the MX Collection catalogue, please visit the company website.

01684293311 [www.mx-group.com](http://www.mx-group.com)





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## Hoisting compliance with lifetime homes

Clos-o-Mat, Britain's leader in the provision of disabled and elderly toilet solutions, has produced a new white paper to help architects and builders fit lifetime home-friendly bathrooms. 'Design Guidance & Considerations for a Domestic Accessible Toilet/Wetroom' covers everything from space to manoeuvre a wheelchair to structural considerations for accommodating personal care assistive technology. Complementing its range of accessible bathroom technology, Clos-o-Mat's ceiling track (X/Y) hoists can carry up to 200kg (31 stone), and enable a person to be lifted and moved to where the carer requires. The white paper is available to download now.

0161 969 1199 [www.clos-o-mat.com](http://www.clos-o-mat.com)



## Low maintenance, high quality panels

If you are looking to reduce grout and mould in your properties' bathrooms, then Multipanel is the product for you. Multipanel is the market leader in waterproof wall panels, with a high quality product that provides a beautiful and easily maintained finish. The company's new White Brick Tile Range is a particular favourite for refurbs, where its 3mm thickness offers the ability to be bonded over existing tiling without encroaching onto baths or basins, and delivers significant cost savings in labour. The Tile Range provides the classic tile effect, while offering a completely waterproof space.



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## Modern and stylish adaptive bathrooms

When it comes to refurbishing housing stock with fully adaptive bathrooms, many landlords, housing associations and local authorities think high-end aesthetics are simply not cost-effective. An evolving market is now challenging that view more than ever. Peter Melia, UK business development manager at neaco, explains

There is still a pervasive negative perception that bathroom products which aid mobility and independence are aesthetically incompatible modern concepts in bathroom design. In the past, manufacturers have developed their products based purely on the essential functionality without heed to the non-essential visual appeal. Invariably the results are rather clinical or institutional in appearance. The rare examples of contemporary style in inclusive bathroom design have tended to come at significant extra cost.

Thankfully, this rule of thumb no longer applies if you know where to look. Led by companies prepared to invest in product development, the market is belatedly getting up to speed. A combination of increased sophistication in design, improved manufacturing techniques and value engineering have produced more options in an affordable price range, so a stylish and modern inclusive bathroom needn't come with a price tag which is anything but inclusive.

One of the most notable improvements is the quality and diversity of the finishes available. Contemporary metallic styles in particular have

become more affordable. If you want a grab rail in a chrome finish, you no longer have to buy one manufactured from chrome – with advances in powder coating, you can choose an aluminium grab rail finished with the appearance of chrome. As well as being more affordable, a powder coated finish is warmer to the touch. It is also less slippery to hold than chrome, especially when hands are wet.

It helps users with impaired vision to have support fittings in a colour that contrasts with the wall. With the right choice, this functional requirement also has the potential to serve an

aesthetic need: for example, a vibrant blue or deep yellow can add a burst of colour to complement the monochrome style of many contemporary schemes. If you prefer the traditional country-style look, then alternatives are out there – some companies offer some rich and rustic colours to furnish bathrooms with the classic look.

With a general increase in the popularity of wet-room facilities, the similarly unobtrusive design of level-access adaptive showers now represent an appealingly minimalist bathroom feature. As a result the distinction between adaptive and non-adaptive bathing has become less obvious. There is a clear distinction to be made in terms of safety: unlike wet rooms, which allow water to spread across the floor, level-access trays and grilles keep water within a designated area. As well as being more hygienic, this reduces the risk of users slipping in other areas of the bathroom. It is also worth bearing in mind that the gradient of a conventional wet-room floor makes the facility less user-friendly for wheelchair users. It is more practical to have a showering area which is gradient-free with

**“A combination of increased sophistication in design, improved manufacturing techniques and value engineering have produced more options in an affordable price range”**

*Continued overleaf...*



minimal perimeter ridges or lips for wheels to overcome; ideally there should be none at all.

Although market choice has improved, you should beware of suppliers who have invested in aesthetics but have compromised or overlooked performance. Shortfalls in quality can be difficult to discern initially. Hinged support arms are designed to fold back against the wall and save space when not in use, but they can be especially problematic if they are not properly engineered – after time, a lower quality hinge mechanism can warp, wear and eventually cease to function properly. Showering surfaces should meet the strict loadbearing parameters laid down in BS459 part 1: 1995. Any showering surface should also have anti-slip qualities – perhaps a ribbed finish or similar detail.

Certain features will tell you that a manufacturer has designed its products with care and attention

to the users' needs. It could be a routed surface on the inside of a grab rail to provide a more secure grip. It could be a locking mechanism to prevent a hinged support arm from dropping down. It could be a magnetised closer strip to provide a secure seal between two half-height shower doors, or a sliding lock to prevent accidental opening and ease of use for less dexterous hands. When choosing adaptive bathroom products, it's a good idea to request a full specification list of features from various suppliers and make a direct comparison between like-for-like items.

Part M of the Building Regulations is a very useful resource when designing or refurbishing a bathroom – it's an excellent generic guide when the bathroom users and their specific needs are unknown. Doc M recommends folding armrests or safety rails attached either side of the shower seat to help prevent somebody from sliding off a wet slippery seat. A wall-fixed rail should be located to the side of the shower seat, approximately 20 cm above the seat's height. This provides help in standing and can assist in transferring a person from a wheelchair to shower seat. In certain cubicles it can be useful to fix a horizontal rail on the wall opposite the shower seat at a height of 1 m from the floor, but only if it can be easily reached from the seat. A vertical rail at least 50 cm long can be fixed at the entrance to the shower cubicle for use when getting in and out.

Doc M also provides advice on suitable measurements and positions for support arms and grab rails in WC facilities; illustrated drawings and plans providing general guidance are easily available to download online. Many manufacturers supply fully-compliant Doc M packs comprising all

**“Landlords, local authorities and housing association managers should never lose sight of the primary purpose of adaptive bathing: safety, comfort and ease of access are all boxes that must be ticked in addition to aesthetic appeal”**

the necessary fittings to fix within the WC and basin areas. New washrooms are typically expected to include all the items in a fully compliant pack while refurbished washrooms may only require the more basic items.

Landlords, local authorities and housing association managers should never lose sight of the primary purpose of adaptive bathing: safety, comfort and ease of access are all boxes that must be ticked in addition to aesthetic appeal. We would suggest a three-step process to specification. Firstly, determine the choice and position of your primary facility, whether it's a bath, shower or a WC. Secondly, work out what support items are required to meet your specific space and layout with reference to Part M guidance. Thirdly, seek out a supplier that can provide all of these items in a style and finish which meet your aesthetic preferences. If you address each need in that order, you can achieve a facility which can be used by everyone, as well as admired by everyone. We all deserve to enjoy style and comfort in equal measure.



## Clos-o-Mat help people be independent

East Sussex County Council and partner Saxon Weald have designed and built 508 Seaside, a new affordable supported living project in Eastbourne. The Clos-o-Mat Palma Vita, Britain's top-selling wash and dry toilet, has been installed in the wetrooms of four of the fully wheel-chair accessible ground floor flats. Looking like, and capable of being used as, a conventional WC, the Palma Vita has in-built washing and drying. Users achieve improved hygiene, as the douching and drying is automatic and set to specific levels. They also gain dignity and independence, while saving funds, as they do not need a carer to wipe them clean.

0161 969 1199 [www.clos-o-mat.com](http://www.clos-o-mat.com)



## All's well in Sandwell, thanks to Trespa

High quality and low waste were key factors in the use of Trespa® exterior cladding panels for a West Midlands high-rise refurbishment scheme. Charlemont Farm Estate in West Bromwich was constructed in the early 1960s as a mix of low- and high-rise dwellings. Four nine-storey blocks, of concrete frame structure with facing brickwork and blockwork cavity wall infill panels were built in 1961. With the work on the blocks now complete, the most noticeable transformation is in the external appearance thanks to the use of Trespa® Meteon® Wood Decors exterior wood tone cladding. "The Trespa® cladding has made a huge impact on the blocks and we have received a number of compliments from tenants and the local community about their modern appearance," says Tony Davies, lead architect on the project for Sandwell Council. A competitor product had also been considered but was rejected because of the quality of the Trespa® material and the cost-reducing lack of wastage. A mix of Trespa® Meteon® panels covering 2,300 square metres was used on each block.


0808 234 0268 [www.trespa.com](http://www.trespa.com)

## New RIBA-approved CPD seminars

Specifiers are set to benefit from two new CPD seminars from tile adhesive and self levelling manufacturer Norcros Adhesives. The seminars cover the subjects of Reinforced Polymer Technology for Tiling and Avoiding Common Failures when Specifying Wall and Floor Tiling. The new seminars provide important information for customers in these sectors, who need to keep their CPD qualifications up to date. They can be delivered in a variety of different ways. As well as traditional seminars, the CPDs can also be viewed online via YouTube or the internet. For more information, please visit the company website.

01782 524 140 [www.norcros-adhesives.com](http://www.norcros-adhesives.com)





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# Plumis Automist provides fire protection in student accommodation

An innovative fire protection system was used at three new build flats in Leicester at the end of last year. Sheila Grief, West Manor Student Living's Property Manager advised that the flats were going to be used for student accommodation. Open plan living is becoming increasingly popular, increasing room sizes by incorporating circulation areas and letting in more light. In this case, all three flats were open plan and two of the flats had escape routes through a common room. BCK Contracting Ltd, accredited, approved installers of Plumis Automist systems in the Midlands were asked to provide a quotation. Charlene Johnson, BCK's Company Secretary, explained, "Leicester City Building control had initially recommended the installation of fire sprinkler systems. However, the flats were completed before the sprinklers were fitted. As a result, BCK recommended three Automist systems which enabled the retrofit of fire protection without additional construction works."

Automist uses a high pressure pump to generate a fine water mist from nozzles mounted under a standard tap and provides residential fire life protection. The innovative system can also be mounted stand alone on a work top or even a wall. Building control was very happy with this alternative and the quotation was very acceptable to the client. The whole project was much more affordable and less disruptive than fitting sprinklers which would have entailed construction costs and consequent time delays. Additional considerations were that Automist uses significantly less water than traditional sprinklers minimising runoff and consequential water damage and sprinklers would drench the property disturbing the lives of the students.

Automist is ideal for student accommodation, as it makes open plan living possible and, as in this case, for use where a bedroom escape route is

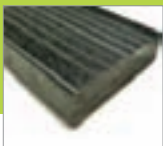


through a kitchen or high hazard area. In addition, the client was able to benefit from the quicker installation compared to sprinklers and was able to save valuable space, as sprinklers usually require water storage tanks or the upgrading of water mains.

Automist was installed in September 2014 and the client was very happy with it as an alternative option. Sheila would have no hesitation in using Automist in Westmanor's other accommodation blocks where an open plan design is desirable.

020 7871 3899 [www.plumis.co.uk](http://www.plumis.co.uk)

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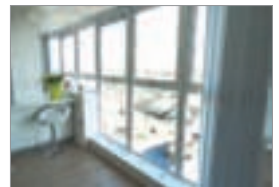
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## Cater House Refurbishment, Chelmsford

Comar Architectural Aluminium Systems, with their approved fabricator Anglia Fixing Ltd, recently completed a change of use refurbishment at Cater House in Chelmsford, Essex. The project was completed using Comar 5P.i Top Hung Casement Windows for the communal stairways. Comar 5P.i ECO Casement, Top & Side Hung windows and Comar 7P.i ECO Rebated Doors were specified for the apartments. Comar 7 Doors are a natural choice for a busy residential building and were selected for the main entrance doors and external staircases. Comar 7 Doors are available in swing, pivot, sliding, auto sliding and sliding folding.

020 8685 9685 [www.comar-alu.co.uk](http://www.comar-alu.co.uk)



## New MD for Mila Maintenance

Social housing repairs and maintenance specialists Mila Window and Door Maintenance is delighted to announce the appointment of Tristan Cooke as Managing Director. The company, which has carried out over 1 million repairs in its 28 years of trading and operates at over 97 per cent resident satisfaction levels, has recently introduced a new measure into its business which records First Time Fix performance levels. It is another measure designed to monitor business efficiency and to keep resident disruption to the absolute minimum. The company is already recording figures over 95 per cent.



[sales@milamaintenance.co.uk](mailto:sales@milamaintenance.co.uk)

# New rules for smoke alarms

New government regulations demand smoke alarms and, in some instances, carbon monoxide alarms in privately rented homes add to a confusing mix of requirements, as leading alarm manufacturer Kidde explains

**W**ith occupants at least four times more likely to die in a house fire where there is no working smoke alarm, new measures – announced in March – aim to help prevent up to 26 deaths and 670 injuries a year. The new Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 apply to all private rented premises in England occupied on or after 1 October.

## Essential working alarms

They will not apply to licensed HMOs, social housing, or where accommodation is shared with the landlord. Although landlords in both public and private sectors may be exempt or may have installed smoke alarms already, these measures are a timely reminder that smoke/heat alarms are essential in every home – and that they must continue to work.

“The new Regulations call for a smoke alarm on each floor where there is accommodation and a carbon monoxide alarm in any habitable room with a solid fuel appliance. The landlord, managing agent or other representative must check that alarms work at the start of each tenancy and replace any that do not”

In essence, the new Regulations call for a smoke alarm on each floor where there is accommodation and a carbon monoxide alarm in any habitable room with a solid fuel appliance. The landlord, managing agent or other representative must check that alarms work at the start of each tenancy and replace any that do not, although regular testing will be the tenant's responsibility.

## Code of Practice

In terms of fire and smoke safety, the new Regulations do not specify the type, location or power-source of the alarms. However, these aspects are covered in the Code of Practice BS 5839-6:2013. British Standards take the form of guidance and recommendations, and are not in

themselves mandatory, although they can form the basis of Building Regulations, are referred to in specifications and used as a benchmark in housing standards (including HHSRS and Repairing Standards), legal or insurance claims and other situations.

The latest 2013 edition of BS 5839 Part 6 – Code of practice for the design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems in domestic premises – covers both new and existing homes, whether for single families or HMOs consisting of self-contained units. It lists the minimum categories – effectively, in which areas smoke/heat alarms are required – recommended for different types of housing. The new Regulation requirements generally match Category LD3, in line with the current Building Regulations Approved Document B (AD B – applying to new housing, extensions and some alterations in England and Wales).

## Conflicting recommendations

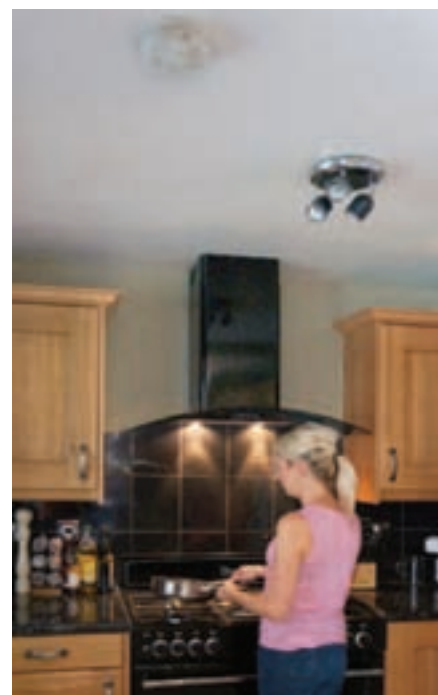
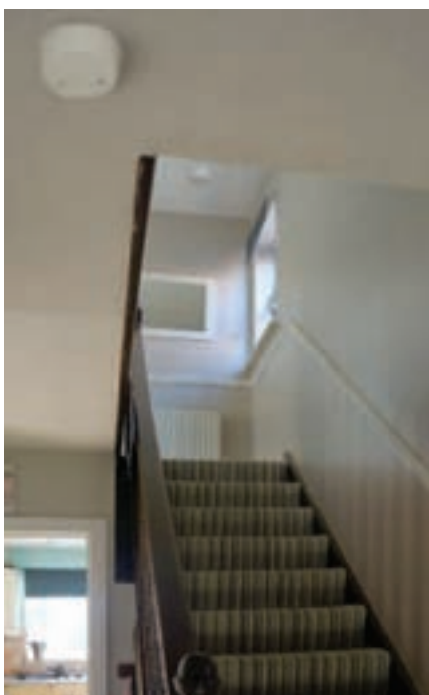
AD B requires Category LD3 protection with smoke alarms in escape routes only. But as the Code points out, with LD3 the evacuation time once fire is detected in the circulation area might be quite short and: “might not prevent death or serious injury of occupants of the room where fire



originates” such as living rooms. In contrast, for all new and most existing houses up to 3 storeys and individual flats, the Code recommends a minimum Category LD2. That means smoke alarms in any areas where fires might start, such as living rooms, plus heat alarms in all kitchens and also smoke alarms in all escape routes. Interestingly, current Building Regulations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are all in-line with the Code.

One area where all the Building Regulations and the Code are agreed is grades – effectively the reliability of a system in terms of its power

*Continued overleaf...*





sources. They all call for Grade D hard-wired, interconnected smoke and heat alarms with back-up power. Battery-only smoke alarms are not permitted where Building Regulations apply and the Code says that Grade F battery-powered alarms can only be considered in existing, owner-occupied, one or two storey dwellings –

“Increasingly, responsible landlords – whether private or social housing providers – are choosing interconnected, hard-wired mains smoke alarms with back-up”

and then only where there is a ‘reasonable certainty’ that batteries will be replaced: sealed-in battery alarms can help resolve this issue.

### Hard-wired smoke alarms

In a change to the latest edition of the Code, Grade F battery-only alarms are effectively excluded from all rented homes. Despite this, the 2015 private rental regulations in England do not distinguish between battery and mains alarms, leaving the decision up to each landlord. Increasingly, responsible landlords – whether private or social housing providers – are choosing interconnected, hard-wired mains smoke alarms with back-up power, meeting the recommendations of the BS 5839, Part 6: 2103. They are already a legal requirement in all Scottish rented properties.

Here, there is a growing interest in energy



saving products and lower running costs for homeowners and tenants.

### 10-year guarantee

There may still be situations where battery smoke alarms can provide quick, simple protection – particularly where no alarms are present at all. With this in mind, the latest generation of 10-year guarantee battery alarms can help landlords meet their obligations to test at the start of each tenancy under the new private rental regulations, over the longer term – and cost-effectively.

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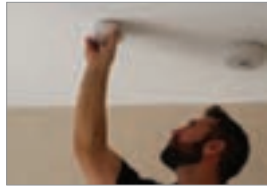


@fireangelsafety

\*Subject to Parliamentary approval of Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015

## Aico Audiolink technology helps Adactus

Adactus Housing, which owns and manages over 13,000 properties across the North West of England, has announced that it will be fitting Aico Ei208 Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms featuring new AudioLINK™ data retrieval technology. Adactus Housing has been protecting tenants with Aico smoke and CO alarms for eight years and was keen to take advantage of the new AudioLINK technology to help them with their investigations into CO alarm activation. AudioLINK allows for invaluable real time data to be extracted via the alarm's sounder - all you need is an AudioLINK enabled CO alarm, a tablet or smart phone and the free AudioLINK App.



[enquiries@aico.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@aico.co.uk)

## Sika comes to rescue at Hemans Estate

At the 1930s Hemans Estate in Lambeth, a concrete repair and protection package and anti-slip flooring system from Sika has helped to bring a series of housing blocks up to latest performance and aesthetic standards – as part of the £450 million Lambeth Housing Standard (LHS) scheme to improve accommodation and quality of life for social housing residents. Following the application of a repair system comprising a steel primer, bonding agent and repair mortar, two decorative and anti-carbonation coatings were applied. These can be applied over existing coatings or directly onto the concrete to offer protection and aesthetic enhancement.



0800 1123863 [www.sikaconstruction.co.uk](http://www.sikaconstruction.co.uk)

## Book BM TRADA fire safety seminar now

BM TRADA, part of the Exova Group, has added an additional date to its series of free half-day fire safety seminars. The new event, the fourth to be held this year, will take place at the University of Leeds on 3 December. With every seminar to date a sell out, BM TRADA recommends early booking to assure a place. 'Fire Protection Measures – Understanding Your Responsibilities' aims to explain the duties of the Responsible Person under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRFSO) and raise awareness of passive fire protection. For further information or to book a place at one of these events please call BM TRADA or visit their website.



01494 569750 [www.bmtrada.com](http://www.bmtrada.com)

## Worktops stay new with Osmo

Eco-friendly wood and finishes expert, Osmo UK, offers TopOil, an interior wood finishing treatment, designed to keep wooden kitchen worktops as beautiful as the day they were installed.



Made with natural plant oils and waxes, TopOil accentuates the wood's natural beauty and leaves a flawless water-repellent and resistant finish. Suitable for all wooden worktops and general internal joinery, Osmo TopOil is easy to use. Two to three coats of the oil (depending on the wood species) will allow the homeowner to enjoy glorious wooden worktops for years to come.

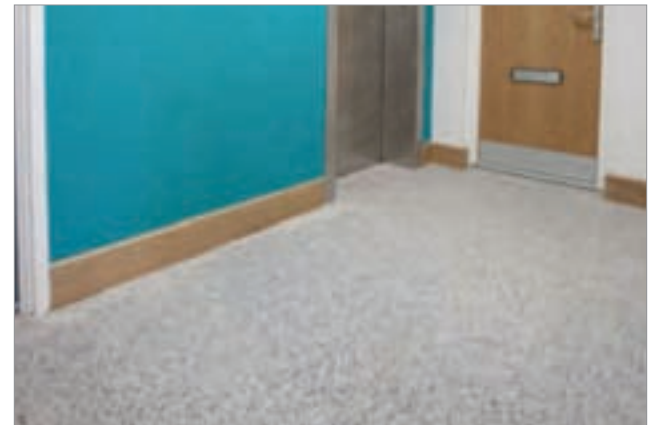
[info@osmouk.com](mailto:info@osmouk.com)



## Rewarding CO Initiatives with Kidde

Wheatley Group, Scotland's leading housing, community regeneration and care group, has realised substantial cost savings and a reduced carbon footprint with the help of Kidde. Since installing Kidde's 10LLCO carbon monoxide alarms in all of its 29,055 gas properties, the group has seen its commitment to gas and CO safety recognised by a series of recent awards. The 10LLCO alarm and its digital equivalent 10LLDCO are small in size with a slim profile and can be wall-mounted or used free-standing. They are simply activated by the slide-on back plate, so preserving battery freshness until needed, and a tamper resisting self-locking installation system avoids battery theft. Allowing tighter quality controls to be applied, Kidde manufactures its own CO sensors - the key component - based on environmentally friendly de-ionised water. The sensors are tested throughout a 10-year period or longer, allowing Kidde to offer a full 10-year guarantee which covers both alarm and sealed-in lithium battery. An event activity data log for each alarm is also available upon request.

01753 766392 [www.smoke-alarms.co.uk](http://www.smoke-alarms.co.uk)



## Flowcrete focus on social housing floors

Homes 2015, taking place at London's Olympia on 18-19 November, is the perfect opportunity for social housing industry professionals to discuss the sector's latest trends, technologies, concerns and opportunities. On stand H214, Flowcrete UK will be demonstrating how its high performance resin flooring solutions are ideally suited to the refurbishment demands of large-scale social housing projects. The resin flooring specialists have taken into account the aesthetics, sustainability, longevity, application practicalities and budgetary concerns typical of the social housing market. Seamless resin flooring is highly advantageous in sizeable residential buildings, as it is easy to clean and has an impermeable finish that won't absorb unpleasant odours. The robust, long lasting nature of these systems minimises the need for refurbishments or repairs, avoiding these unwanted costs for the building's operators. The impervious, waterproof nature of Flowcrete UK's resin flooring range was an important factor for Tower Hamlets when it revitalised its main circulation areas.

01270 753 000 [www.flowcrete.co.uk](http://www.flowcrete.co.uk)



## Selecting the right flooring for your housing

Designer Contracts MD, Peter Kelsey offers his expert opinion on how to select the right contractor and the right flooring products for any social or private rented property

**T**he nature of social and private rental properties should be researched and the specific needs of the occupants should be thought out ahead of selecting a suitable floorcovering. Also, 'who' to use is as important as 'what' to use.

It goes without saying that using a reliable contractor is vital to the success of an installation along with a swift service. The ability to supply a variety of floorcoverings within budget and that are technically appropriate to ensure a safe and inclusive environment are vital to any property, whether it be social care or private rented housing.

So, in selecting a contractor, opt for a company able to offer a wide selection of affordable – yet durable – floorcoverings to suit the nature of the property. There are a number of specialist manufacturers of flooring solutions on the market which will last the test of time.

Careful planning and consideration should be taken before any flooring selection is made. Flooring that can be easily cleaned is essential for a busy care home, for example. Practical options and slip resistant vinyls should be considered for

any wet areas. Where appropriate, the product should be slip resistant and suitable for occupants with bare feet and in the case of social care, where their carer is likely to wear shoes when assisting in and around wet areas.

Flooring has changed in the last couple of years but carpet is still an ever-popular choice of floorcovering with 'greige' – a mixture of cooler beiges and greys – being a common choice for new build

**“Careful planning and consideration should be taken before any flooring selection is made. Flooring that can be easily cleaned is essential for a busy care home for example. Practical options and slip resistant vinyls should be considered for any wet areas”**

rented properties, where it sits comfortably with modern interiors.

The advanced manufacturing techniques used for vinyl tiles and laminates mean it's difficult to tell the difference between these and the real thing, yet they're much easier to maintain. Their hardwearing nature makes them a popular choice for the rental market, catering for families with young children and pets.

So, in high traffic areas, such as hallways and kitchens, luxury vinyl tiles and fashionable laminates continue to grow in popularity as a practical alternative to real wood, stone or ceramic tiles.

Having access to the most up-to-date products and being aware of new and innovative products, often in advance of them being introduced to the industry, is important for any contractor working with those managing or maintaining social and rented properties.

One ground-breaking product is a new waterproof laminate, which could be ideal for rented properties. The joints are fitted with a protective, waterproof coat (Hydroseal). This coat stops water from penetrating into the joints, so



that it sparkles on the floor instead.

The joints are pressed into the surface structure right from the first production step. This not only makes the laminate floor waterproof, but it also ensures that the design, colour, and structure of the planks blend subtly into the joint. This is perfect where previously those renting out properties were reluctant to use laminate floors in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas susceptible to moisture.

Individual rooms and apartments should be approached in a completely different way. Noise disturbance in some properties can be a real problem if the room above has not had suitable flooring fitted. Softer flooring – and underlay options should be considered – it could save a great deal of hassle in the long run. High traffic entrance areas will require a thicker wear layer

“Individual rooms and apartments should be approached in a completely different way. Noise disturbance in some properties can be a real problem if the room above has not had suitable flooring fitted”

and surface protection to increase the longevity of the product.

There are regulations and requirements that should be considered when selecting flooring products. R10 is the German DIN Standard slip resistant test (ramp test), which is the accepted test method for Europe, however in the UK HSE guidelines prefer the Pendulum Test, providing a classification of 36+ when dry, wet and contaminated, so if a floor is going to be prone to product spillage – shampoo, shower gel or general bathroom related products it will need a low potential for slip (>36) with a surface roughness of >20 microns as outlined in BS7976-2.

Ease of installation is incredibly important. Time is money so contractors should be able to replace and install flooring to tight deadlines. As well as new properties, some older care homes and rental properties have to be upgraded to comply with modern needs and changes in regulations.

It's important to build a trusted relationship with any properties, so picking up the keys and completing the work as soon as possible means a swift and efficient turnaround and fewer disturbances for residents.





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# Buying into biomass

As a sustainable low-carbon technology, biomass has become an increasingly popular option for housing associations. What's more, registered landlords who have installed biomass have seen a reduction in fuel bills for their tenants, making it even more attractive – particularly those operating in rural areas. But for those who have yet to specify a biomass system, how would it work in practice? Jon Cockburn, head of marketing at Heatrae Sadia, tells us more

**L**ast year housing associations built 50,000 homes. This amounts to 40 per cent of all new homes across the country, so it's crucial for housing associations to consider sustainability.

When maintaining buildings in rural areas, or any location which doesn't have access to mains gas, housing associations must balance the need for reliable power with environmental concerns, and the potential fuel costs to future tenants.

An increasingly popular solution is biomass fuel. Although biomass is often used as a by-word for plant derived energy, it actually applies to any biological material gained from vegetables and animals, and in Europe is most likely to mean wood and energy crops.

A recent report estimates that UK-grown biomass could cut the cost of meeting the UK's 2050 carbon targets by over one per cent of GDP – an important consideration when choosing an environmentally responsible fuel source.

Additionally, housing associations which already run biomass heating systems have reported fuel savings of as much as 40 per cent compared to traditional fuel sources. For tenants who are on strict budgets to ensure they can balance their rent and outgoings, a reduction in energy costs on that scale can make a huge difference.

But what's the best way to build a biomass system into a multi-occupancy residence?

One option is Heat Interface Units (HIUs), which are increasingly viewed as a sustainable solution that combines maximum safety with easy maintenance. They can be used to provide central

heating, and sometimes domestic hot water, to individual properties within a multi-dwelling development (such as a block of flats or apartments, or a larger district heating scheme) served by centralised heating plant.

drainage systems, reducing the capital installation and whole life costs as a result. If there are no other gas appliances in the affected properties, centralised plant could even negate the need for individual gas checks.

**“One option is Heat Interface Units (HIUs), which are increasingly viewed as a sustainable solution that combines maximum safety with easy maintenance. They can be used to provide central heating, and sometimes domestic hot water, to individual properties within a multi-dwelling development”**

Centralised plant significantly reduces the time and costs involved with boiler servicing and maintenance, and the problems associated with supplying gas to multi-dwelling buildings, decreasing the risks linked to gas distribution pipework and costs. It also eliminates the need to fit numerous flue terminals or condensate

The incorporation of low-carbon or renewable technologies – such as biomass – can become simpler and more cost-effective when paired with this kind of system. The diverse thermal loads offered by multi-occupancy accommodation presents an attractive demand profile, against which biomass technologies can be operated to

*Continued overleaf...*





maximise the benefits, helping designers and specifiers to meet zero carbon targets.

Serving multiple dwellings with centralised heating plant requires a way to manage temperature control and monitor each household's energy use to ensure correct billing. In the case of HIUs, the amount consumed by an individual household is recorded by a meter.

Meter readings can be carried out remotely, making HIUs a very attractive option for housing associations, who can then bill their tenants. Metering can also be a positive incentive for occupants trying to lower their energy consumption, and can help to reduce fuel poverty among vulnerable groups.

**“HIUs can be installed within each individual dwelling, or in the dividing wall between each dwelling and the ‘landlord’ space for easy access for inspection and maintenance. As a matter of course, housing associations should ensure that HIU installations are electrically, as well as hydraulically, safe”**

A controller monitors and regulates the heating and hot water system in order to optimise performance, working with a room thermostat. Units come complete with a factory set of 55°C for domestic hot water and 60°C for the heating circuit, standardising usage for tenants. A two speed pressure independent controller output prevents overshoot of the temperature set point, ensuring more stable control of temperature, and an integral pulsed bypass function kicks in during periods of no heating to ensure that the HIU is quick to respond when it is eventually used.

HIUs can be installed within each individual dwelling, or in the dividing wall between each dwelling and the 'landlord' space for easy access



for inspection and maintenance.

As a matter of course, housing associations should ensure that HIU installations are electrically, as well as hydraulically, safe.

Currently, fixed wiring installations in new build properties are required to comply with Part P Building Regulations, and management regulations for multi-occupancy properties require landlords to arrange for a qualified electrician to inspect and test fixed electrical installations every five years. However, while this would cover the ring main from the fuse box – up to and including the sockets and fused spurs – it does not cover the HIU itself.

Meanwhile, there is no legal obligation to carry out a portable appliance test (PAT) in residential rented accommodation. While the Electrical Safety Council recommends PAT testing to ensure that landlord supplied appliances are safe at the point of letting, the HIU wouldn't be

included as it doesn't fall under the definition of a portable appliance.

Therefore, to ensure electrical safety, landlords should look to independent third party approvals of the HIU in order to be sure that they comply with electrical industry standards and regulations. For example, the NEMKO mark demonstrates that the product has been assessed for conformity to electrical safety legislation by a competent body.

Equally, independent testing for water fittings ensures that products are suitable for potable water use, guaranteeing that they are safe to use and will guard against contaminating potable water supplies. Here, the industry standard third party certification is provided by WRAS or KIWA.

Ultimately HIUs offer housing associations a convenient and effective route to designing low carbon and sustainable technologies like biomass into their portfolios.

## Wilo ErP compliant small circulators

Increasingly, housing associations and private developers are seeing the high efficiency ErP compliant small circulators from Wilo as the answer to their small pump needs in new build homes and in heating system refurbishment projects.



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## Wealden residents gain from Panasonic

Ecosphere Renewables has just been awarded a top prize in Panasonic's PRO Awards for its ambitious project with Wealden District Council. This project has already seen 110 Panasonic Aquarea air source heat pumps and tanks successfully installed, delivering significant benefits to both the council and the tenants. Panasonic's Aquarea air source heat pumps have a COP of 5.08, meaning for every one unit of heat the pump consumes, a further 5.08 units of heat is created. This will reduce the Wealden District's carbon footprint by an impressive 5000 tonnes over the next seven years and, on average, will save tenants £500 a year on heating bills.



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## Spirotech makes lasting impression

Eighteen months ago Wolverhampton Homes chose to switch to Spirotech and the SpiroTrap MB3 magnetic dirt separator. The SpiroTrap MB3 features a detachable, external magnet that contains unique field booster technology helping to quickly separate and remove even the smallest dirt particles, both magnetic and non magnetic, from a heating system. Offering advanced specification in a compact and easy to install unit, the SpiroTrap MB3 has been designed to ensure heating systems operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. For more information, please visit the company website.



[info@spirotech.co.uk](mailto:info@spirotech.co.uk)

## Vent-Axia offers heating solutions

Sussex-based Vent-Axia now offers a range of electric heating options that are proving ideal for those living off the mains gas grid. Recent figures show that 17 per cent of UK households do not have mains gas heating, with over half of these homes heated by electricity. Many homes with electric heating use manual storage heaters, which can be inefficient and impractical to use. But now there is a new breed of modern electric heating systems that are cost effective to install, easy to use and cheaper to run. Vent-Axia offers a range of electric heating solutions for every room in the house, with radiators, towel rails and underfloor heating.



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## New LPG QuanTec HR28C boiler

Following the massive success of Johnson & Starley's QuanTec HR28C boiler with Integral Passive Flue Gas Heat Recovery (PFGHR), an LPG version has now been introduced. This now means that 'off mains gas' areas can enjoy the fuel savings that the QuanTec HR28CP delivers in their fuel bills, while also reducing their carbon footprint. Unlike other boilers that feature PFGHR, Johnson & Starley have incorporated theirs into a standard sized boiler, so no 'ugly' add on or addition in height making the QuanTec HR28C range the smallest boilers on the market. Now with a free manufacturer's 5-year parts and labour guarantee.



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\*In a Danish database of independent tests of heat pumps. Please note this data is correct as at 1st August 2014 and is subject to change.



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# A++ for Ecodan renewable heating range

**M**itsubishi Electric has announced that its entire range of Ecodan air source heat pumps has achieved A++ rating under the first Energy Related Products (ErP) Directive ruling for heating products across Europe.

ErP means that all space and water heaters will need to display an energy label which will help both residential and commercial customers identify the most energy-efficient products on the market and brings heating products into line with other energy consuming goods such as fridges and washing machines.

From the 26th September, ErP applies to domestic and commercial heating and hot water products, including electrical powered heating, gas and oil boilers, water heaters and cylinders, as well as renewable technologies such as solar thermal and heat pumps.

To highlight the requirements under ErP Mitsubishi Electric has also released a short video which explains how the Directive is designed to help phase out lower performing products whilst having a positive impact on the emissions levels across Europe and increase the share of renewable energies by 20 per cent.

"There are two parts to the ErP strategy which affect both manufacturers and installers

and everyone involved needs to understand how this will change the heating market", explains James Timbs-Harrison, on behalf of the company.

## Direct comparison

"Firstly, under what is called the EcoDesign regulations, manufacturers will need to produce energy-using products that meet stringent energy performance standards. Secondly, under Energy Labelling regulations, these products must be clearly labelled using a standard method so that consumers can make a direct comparison between individual products and different technologies".

These labels will show the efficiency ranging from the most efficient A++ to the least efficient G and will be clearly marked with coloured bars; from green (the most efficient) all the way down to red (least efficient).

The details on the label will identify the efficiency band for heating, and where relevant, hot water production and where relevant, noise, emissions and power consumption.

"For heat pumps they will also indicate the three different climate zones within Europe which is important here because the UK is split between all three of these zones", adds

Timbs-Harrison.

"We feel that this is now levelling the playing field for heating products which will allow consumers to see exactly how energy efficient the types of heating they choose are".

ErP is a significant piece of legislation that will have a major impact on the sale and use of heating systems in the UK. As such, the requirements of ErP is already being embedded into legislation on the energy efficiency of buildings and as incentive schemes for renewable technologies.



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## The heating revolution: Zero net carbon technology tackles rental income cuts and fuel poverty

*"We chose Minus7 due to its 24 hour high efficiency capabilities and minimal requirements," says Mike Harrison, Director of Technical Services for Poole Housing Partnership (PHP).*

From April 2016 social housing associations will be required to reduce rent by 1 per cent each year over a period of four years – a 12 per cent cut in real terms. The Minus7 system allows landlords to address fuel poverty by charging a reduced price for heat and use that income to offset the government 1 per cent cut over four years.

The innovative Minus7 heating system was recently installed to develop a pair of energy-efficient three-bedroom homes for Poole Housing Partnership (PHP), built by C G Fry & Son Ltd. Responding to the demand for more affordable housing in Poole, Borough of Poole, Poole Housing Partnership and C.G. Fry & Son worked together to develop a former car parking site at Old Farm Road in Poole, creating a much-enhanced street scene for local residents.

The Minus 7 system installed at Old Farm Road has been performing at an average of 400 per cent efficiency, with 1kW of energy providing 5kW of heat. The efficiency of the system has been so impressive that PHP have just signed a new contract for 4 new flats being built in October with greater plans for the future.

Winner of the Energy Awards 2014, Minus 7 is a hybrid system combining a solar endothermic roof, water to water heat pump and thermal stores to provide all heating and

hot water needs. Revolutionising the heating sector with a zero net carbon output and very low running costs, the Minus 7 system is the most efficient and cost effective renewable technology system available – "It is absolutely critical that we have social housing with the lowest energy running costs available," says Mike Harrison.

Hamish Wilson, CEO of Minus7 explains further: "For social landlords the affordability of housing in both energy and rental is an essential element in their business model. The income generated from rent maintains the property through planned programmes of investment and allows development to continue, so any risk to that income is bad news for landlords. Our low cost heating

solution allows landlords to secure rental income through increasing tenants disposable income and allows a revenue contribution for energy sales. Thus offsetting the reduction imposed as part of the welfare reform savings that the government wants to make."

The change in rent formula is set to raise serious questions over cash flow in housing associations. It is understood that the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) will be writing to all registered providers to ask for assurance about how the cut in rent risk will be absorbed by their businesses – using the Minus 7 system for new developments makes these assurances easier to give.

01922 419405  
[www.minus7.co.uk](http://www.minus7.co.uk)



## Heat pumps help reduce fuel bills

When Shropshire Housing Group was looking to tackle fuel poverty throughout its housing stock, the choice of Mitsubishi Electric's Ecodan renewable heat pumps helped ensure a smooth transition for tenants. Tenants have had experience of the heat pumps throughout two winters now and Bernard Quinn, investment manager for Shropshire Housing Group explained that the company went with the Ecodan system because it was one of the best systems on the market with simple controls for tenants. "Most tenants have told us they'd made between a 25 and 50 per cent saving on their previous electricity bills," he says.



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## Energy Saving Remmers iQ Therm System

The listed 19th Century former Schoolhouse overlooking the Dublin mountains was renovated and extended to create a new energy efficient residential family home. Due to the build up of condensation behind conventional insulation when applied to single leaf construction, it became apparent that a "breathable insulation system" would be required. Remmers IQ Therm was chosen as it has the highest level of insulation for given thickness of breathable systems. Remmers IQ Therm is a complete system of fixing/insulation and finishing available in 3 board thicknesses. The renovation was followed on RTE's "Room to Improve" show.



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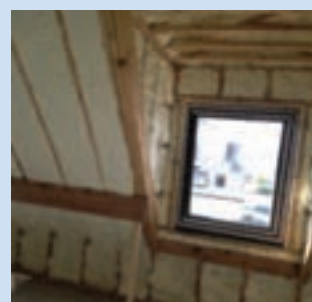
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The Icynene Insulation System is a series of soft, flexible spray foam insulation products that delivers up to 50% greater energy savings when compared to other insulation products. Icynene is perfect for loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, drylining insulation, sound insulation and more.

Icynene has been successfully tested and certified for applications directly to the underside of breathable and non breathable roof membranes and felts and recently received BBA certification for this application. Icynene absorbs the lowest amount of moisture and has the highest level of vapour resistivity of any soft foam on the market.



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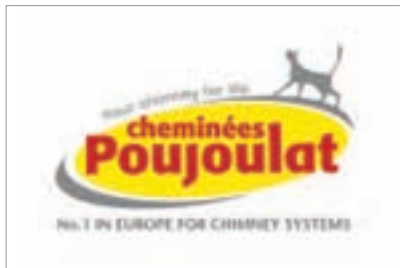
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# Editor's Product Focus

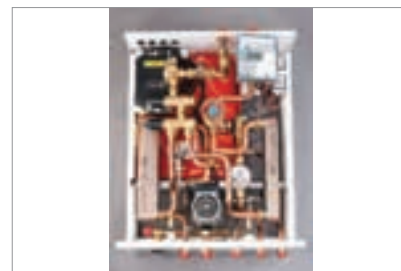


## Poujoulat

Poujoulat UK's Therminox TI and ZI chimney system is "the only HETAS listed metal twin wall chimney that is soot fire tested using a solid fire stop in the room of the appliance in domestic houses" which, the company says, makes it an "ideal internal metal chimney solution for houses built post 2008 (Airtight)". During testing, the soot fire test took the cooling air for the enclosure shaft down from the roof space and avoided taking air flow from the living room and this was sufficient to achieve a distance to combustible materials of 50mm.

## Stokvis

Stokvis Energy Systems is launching its new H-Series Econoplate interface units. There is a choice of single and twin plate units to provide heating and hot water services within dwellings such as apartments, student flats or around sheltered housing schemes. These in turn might be fed from a central plantroom – incorporating perhaps Stokvis Econoflame Boilers, a Stokvis Solar Thermal System, combined heat and power (CHP) unit, biomass boilers, heat pumps or some wider district heating source.

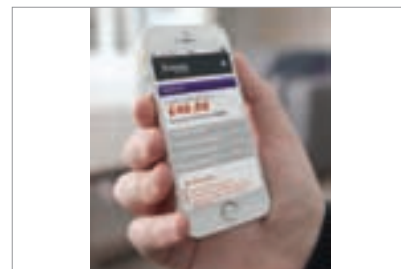


## ESS

Suppliers of domestic ventilation products for London and the South East, ESS offers a full range of ventilation systems that will prevent condensation and mould growth in a home. It has successfully assisted Housing Associations to beat condensation and mould issues saving Landlords thousands in legal disputes arising from Tenant's complaints. What ever your ventilation requirements are, with over 15 years in ventilation it will be able to help you provide a healthy environment for your resident by filtering fresh air throughout the home.

## Evinox

Evinox Energy offer a simple solution to meet the regulations with their PaySmart® pre-payment technology, which is inbuilt in every ModuSat® Heat interface unit. Not only is the technology integrated, it can also be activated remotely at any time, providing a flexible billing approach. The PaySmart® system enables residents to be in control of their own energy bills by paying in advance and therefore removing any burden of building up unpaid bills or debt.



## Floodcheck

Floodcheck protects your property from floods by automatically turning off your water:- Time out leaks: if there is a burst pipe or a forgotten tap is letting water run continuously. Freeze protection frozen pipes: if the air temperature where the Floodcheck is installed goes below 3° celsius. Excess flow major rupture: if there is a sudden unusual or abnormal demand on the water supply. Non-use vacant property: if no water is used for 24 hours, the Floodcheck will turn off your water safely.

## Kedel

Whitefriars Housing Association in the Midlands, and Your Housing Group in South Manchester completely eliminated the cost of maintenance and replacement of fencing on their Housing Estates. They used their annual maintenance budgets to replace wood with Recycled Plastic Fencing from Kedel Limited, based in Colne, Lancashire. These fences look like wood, but never rot or need painting, and can't be kicked through by local drunks and scallywags.



## Levato Mono Porcelain paver system

Levato Mono Porcelain paver system from The DeckTile Co. is designed for fast, cost-effective installation over most surfaces, including single ply membranes, roofing felt and other delicate waterproofing systems. The 20mm thick porcelain pavers are also available in larger formats, are highly abrasion and stain resistant, fire and frost proof, and achieve R11 slip resistance for outdoor use. With all its features, such as height adjustable and slope correcting supports, high load bearing and 45kg per m<sup>2</sup>, over 40 available finishes plus co-ordinating internal tiles, Levato Mono is ideal for balconies, roof terraces and piazzas – residential and commercial alike.



[info@thedecktileco.co.uk](mailto:info@thedecktileco.co.uk)

## Positive input ventilation leads the way

EnviroVent is one of the pioneers of Positive Input Ventilation (PIV), which works by drawing in fresh, filtered clean air from outside, usually via the loft, and gently ventilating the home from a central position on a landing or hallway in a flat or bungalow. The company offers a range of PIV products which are designed to meet specific requirements. EnviroVent's PIV products are renowned for controlling humidity and moisture levels, so that mould and condensation problems are significantly reduced. The result is much improved indoor air quality, which has multiple health benefits for occupants.



[info@envirovent.com](mailto:info@envirovent.com)

## Medite adds life to balcony screens & gates

Medite Tricoya Extreme and Accoya® wood has been used in the full-scale refurbishment of Woodward Place social housing scheme in Manchester. Using Accsys Technologies proprietary acetylation technology, which increases the amount of 'acetyl' molecules in the wood elements to change the physical properties, both Medite Tricoya Extreme and Accoya wood offer exceptional resistance to the effects of moisture, are dimensionally stable and are virtually rot-proof. Ideal for use as a facade, cladding or exterior applications, Medite Tricoya Extreme panels are also designed to withstand humidity and weather conditions.



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## The first name in spray foam insulation

The Icynene Insulation System is a series of soft and flexible vapour open spray foam insulation products. When sprayed in place, Icynene expands to completely fill all cavities and voids, creating a sealed building envelope eliminating air leakage. Unlike other foams, Icynene is 100 per cent water blown and therefore contains no harmful blowing agents, volatile organic compounds, HCFCs, HFAs, HFCs or formaldehyde. Icynene has been successfully tested and certified for application directly to the underside of breathable and non-breathable roof membranes and recently received BBA certification for this application.



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# Improving indoor air quality – a breath of fresh air...

There's increasing awareness that as we design our homes to be more airtight and energy and heat efficient, we are risking the quality of air indoors and the health of people who live inside them. Ventilation is taking on a new level of importance as we look to improve the quality of life for people and look to reduce the problems that go with sealing our homes to the outside world, as Andy Murie, marketing director at Nuaire explains

**S**adly, many people take indoor air quality for granted. It's obvious that people would never drink brown water from a tap in the kitchen as it is visibly dirty, yet what is the condition of the air that they are breathing right now?

Energy efficiency, reduced energy usage and as a result, reduced emissions are all well and good of course, but making buildings ever more air tight without adequate ventilation, can create problems for the future. And the not too distant future at that.

There is a common misconception that insulating and heating a home will prevent condensation. It's part of a wide ranging lack of understanding of the principles of ventilation that's at the heart of the problem of poor indoor air quality.

On average, 12-13 air changes per day are required to keep moisture levels low. Without adequate ventilation, humid conditions encourage mould spores to germinate and dust mites to breed, aggravating asthma and allergic symptoms. For residential properties individual

extract fans are aimed at lowering humidity, but if they don't meet the current building regulations or only run intermittently, then condensation can still occur.

So what is the solution to poor indoor air quality in our homes and the miseries that go with it – condensation, mould growth and pollutants?

We have recently seen the campaign called 'My Health, My Home' which highlights the issues around indoor air quality at home. Take a look at [www.myhealthmyhome.com](http://www.myhealthmyhome.com) and then sign the healthy air petition. It's a serious issue that needs planning and awareness raising. Especially as it's such an obvious one when you think about it in the clear light of day.

What is clear, and makes huge sense, is that we need to make sure there is sufficient ventilation to ensure we all remain healthy. In built up or industrial areas, this may even mean we treat the air coming into our homes before it circulates, to remove pollutants.

Rather than address these issues head on, due to a lack of understanding about adequate ventilation, there is a tendency to do so



retrospectively and address the problems when they arise.

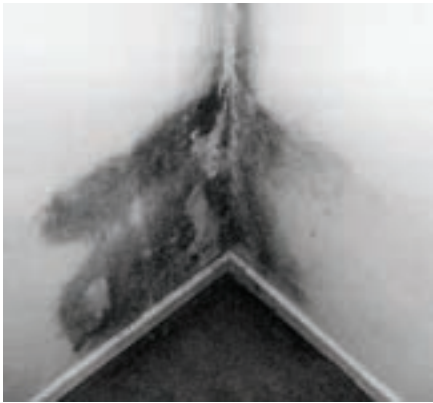
People may wait for mould to grow and condensation to affect newly insulated homes and then seek a solution, rather than planning for the likely outcome of the work we've had done to our houses.

**“What is clear, and makes huge sense, is that we need to make sure there is sufficient ventilation to ensure we all remain healthy. In built up or industrial areas, this may even mean we treat the air coming into our homes before it circulates, to remove pollutants”**



At this time of year we are heading into the 'condensation season' which tends to run from September to February each year. At the first cold snap across the UK, condensation issues begin to raise their ugly heads.

It's really essential to get ventilation right in all types of buildings. Not just our homes but buildings like schools and healthcare developments, as well as offices and other commercial buildings. The problems with indoor air quality are pretty simple to see when you look for them.



So what should we be looking for? For new homes, it could be about providing carbon filtration on its MVHR ventilation systems at the entry level to a property – which would filter the incoming air from the outside of the building. Particularly in urban areas, the levels of toxins – in particular nitrogen dioxide and particulates from heavy traffic – can cause havoc, so need to be addressed.

For existing properties, it's often about having a retrofit solution that does not require massive renovation to the walls and ceilings. In our homes the option of positive input ventilation (PIV) works well here.

PIV sees air pushed into the building at a constant rate, forcing air circulation around the interior. A properly installed unit will ensure that old, contaminated and moisture-laden air in the



**“For existing properties, it's often about having a retrofit solution that does not require massive renovation to the walls and ceilings”**

property is continuously diluted, displaced and replaced with good quality, fresh air. The result is an environment in which condensation dampness cannot exist, and where allergens and pollutants

are kept to a minimum. More importantly this solution is easy and quick to fit, so minimal disruption is required to get good indoor air quality.

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# Landlords and Legionella – complying with the law



In April 2014 the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidelines for prevention of Legionella were brought into law, requiring every landlord to undertake regular risk assessments for each of their tenanted properties, whether managed by themselves or an agent. Failure to comply is a criminal offence with the potential for punitive fines or even a prison sentence. At the recent Landlord and Letting Show held at London's Barbican Centre, *Housing Management & Maintenance* discussed the compliance issues with James Homard, technical director at Compliance For Landlords Limited

## What exactly is Legionella?

**JH:** Legionella, or Legionnaires' disease, is a potentially fatal form of pneumonia caused by inhalation of minute droplets of contaminated water containing Legionella bacteria. All man-made hot and cold water systems are likely at some point to provide a favourable environment where Legionella can grow. The organism can colonise large and small water systems so both must be managed effectively to prevent risk of contraction by humans.

## Define a Landlord

**JH:** Simply put, anyone who rents out a property they own under a lease or a licence is

deemed to be a landlord and therefore has a duty of care to their tenants. Landlords' duties apply to a wide range of accommodation, including local authorities, housing associations, hostels and, just as importantly, private-sector landlords.

## What does the law say?

**JH:** The law is clear: if you are a landlord and rent out your property or even a room within your own home, then you have a legal responsibility to ensure the health and safety of your tenant. This means keeping the property safe and free from health hazards, including those arising from water borne sources. The HSE L8 Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) was revised in November 2013 in relation to the control of Legionella bacteria

and applies to premises controlled in connection with a trade, business or other undertaking where water is used or stored and there is a reasonably foreseeable risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria.

## What must landlords do to comply?

**JH:** The rule of thumb on this is competency; a simple assessment must be carried out by a competent person who is experienced in identifying the risks for Legionella contamination. It may show that there are no real risks and that water flow is being properly managed with no further action needed, however it is important to

review the assessment in case anything changes in the water system. For most domestic hot and cold water systems, temperature is the most reliable way of ensuring the risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria is minimised, by keeping the hot water hot, cold water cold and keeping it moving.

### What other measures can I take to reduce risk?

**JH:** Other simple control measures include flushing the system prior to letting the property, avoiding debris entering the system, setting temperature controls for the hot water cylinder (calorifier) to ensure water is stored at a suitable temperature (e.g. 60°C), and ensuring that any redundant pipe work that might harbour stagnant water is removed. Risk is further lowered where instantaneous water heaters such as combi boilers and electric showers are installed because there is no water storage.

### If I follow the HSE Code of Practice, do I still require a risk assessment?

**JH:** Yes, you do. You must be able to provide documented evidence of a competent risk assessment having been undertaken on your property at least once every two years. The document takes the form of a detailed written report on the conditions at the time of inspection together with a schematic drawing of the water system and any remedial actions that are needed to reduce the risk of Legionella presence.

### What does my tenant need to know?

**JH:** Tenants should be advised of any control measures put in place that should be maintained, for example, not to adjust the temperature setting of the calorifier and to clean showerheads regularly. They also need to inform the landlord if the hot water is not heating properly or if there are any other problems with the system so that appropriate action can be taken.

### What if my property is left vacant?

**JH:** It is important that water is not allowed to stagnate within the water system and, as a general principle, outlets on hot and cold water systems should be flushed for 15 minutes at least once a week to maintain a degree of water flow and minimise the chances of stagnation.

### Do I need to test my water for Legionella?

**JH:** No. Testing or sampling for Legionella is not usually required for domestic hot and cold water systems, but only in very specific circumstances where a risk assessment has indicated the need. Testing for Legionella should not be confused with temperature monitoring, which is a reliable method for confirming the water system is safe. Health and safety law does NOT require landlords to obtain or produce – nor does HSE recognise – a 'Legionella test certificate'.



### Do I need to keep a record of the assessment findings?

**JH:** Landlords are not necessarily required to record the findings of the assessment but they may find it prudent to keep a record of what has been done for their own purposes.

### How often do I need to review the assessment?

**JH:** The HSE guidelines recommend an assessment should be carried out at least once every two years in order to maintain up-to-date records. We would also advise reviewing the assessment if any relevant changes are made to the property which affect the water system.

### Will my property be inspected?

**JH:** HSE and Local Authority inspectors do not proactively inspect domestic premises or ask for evidence that landlords have undertaken a risk assessment. However, if a tenant were to contract Legionnaires' disease from the water system at the property, the landlord may be liable to prosecution under the Health & Safety at Work Act (HSWA), and would have to demonstrate to a court that they had fulfilled their legal duty.

### So what should I do?

**JH:** To ensure you are fully compliant with the law and your tenants are safe, book a professional Legionella Control Association (LCA) registered provider to carry out a water risk assessment.

## Vent-Axia improves indoor air quality

Vent-Axia, a leader in low carbon ventilation, has supplied large numbers of its Lo-Carbon™ PoziDry PIV Compact ventilation units and Lo-Carbon™ Quadra fans for a ventilation upgrade as part of a major refurbishment of three high-rise blocks of flats in Smethwick, West Midlands.

The Lo-Carbon PoziDry PIV unit is ideal for controlling condensation in homes, particularly in the refurbishment sector. A loft mounted positive input fan draws fresh air from the atmosphere, filters it and gently introduces it into the dwelling via a ceiling mounted diffuser. The Carbon Quadra is a domestic fan suited to through-the-wall or ducted applications.

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## Is your waterproofing design robust?

Are your structural waterproofing designs based on a waterproofing risk assessment that has been produced by a suitably qualified specialist? Have you appointed a waterproofing specialist at an early stage of the system design? Is your waterproofing expert qualified to CSSW standard? If the answer is no to any of these questions then a building insurance company is unlikely to issue you with a warranty. BS 8102: 2009 and NHBC waterproofing standards both now include recommendations that any waterproofing system designs are based upon a risk assessment that is appropriate for the property and its intended use, and produced by someone who is suitably qualified. INK Technical Services is an established company that helps housebuilders meet the standards' requirements so insurance companies are satisfied that a robust waterproofing system is in place. The INK team represents nearly 100 years of structural waterproofing experience and includes CSSW qualified structural waterproofing surveyors.

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