

HOUSING

MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

January 2016

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Doors, Windows & Glazing
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HOUSING

MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

Editor's comment

So many concerns to think about

Landlords of all sizes and shapes, in both private and social sectors are feeling the heat at the moment.

The Whitehall Government appears to be deadly serious about tackling the problem of rogue landlords, with a broad sweep of measures in the Housing and Planning Bill. Over in Wales, a new licensing scheme is being set up to monitor and control private landlords.

Buy-to-let landlords are being targeted for some financial pain, to discourage them from competing with first time buyers. The chancellor clearly wants his financial help to housebuilders to stretch a bit further and doesn't want to see this money gobbled up by gazumping.

The regulatory body HCA is also getting harder edged – taking on some of the larger social landlords in England, after serious lapses in management and their processes at several organisations left thousands of tenants at risk.

Threats

They are also stating that social landlords can expect a closer examination of how they are dealing with economic threats – some of these are the direct result of the chancellor's actions, such as annual rent cuts – but also reminding them they need to focus more on managing their assets. Of course they actually mean 'look after your housing stock'.

And then there is the extension of Right to

Buy and how it is being paid for which is putting many Housing Associations and Councils at loggerheads.

These are indeed challenging times!

And yet we need to ensure the baby is not thrown out with the bathwater. There are some unscrupulous landlords out there, but the vast majority of private sector rental properties are owned and managed by good, reputable people and organisations, who care about their tenants and properties. These people represent the landlords' future income.

Service focus

Over in the social housing sector we see many, many good people working incredibly hard to deliver the best service they can while the financial pressures on them still feel quite severe.

But out of all this, we see customer satisfaction rates are at historically high levels. Tenants in both sectors, with some notable exceptions for very specific reasons, are happier with their home and their landlords' service than at almost any point in the past.

We need to ensure that landlords and their staff are not put off and leave the sector. We need their commitment and skill set like never before. Lets hope 2016 brings good news and better trading conditions and fewer nasty surprises than the previous 12 months.

Patrick Mooney
News Editor



On the cover...

The January issue of Housing Management & Maintenance features Tredegar Place
© James Attree/AluK.

The former site of a cash and carry in Bow, East London, has been demolished to make way for the new development, Tredegar Place. Centra Living – part of Circle Housing – oversaw the creation of 87 new homes on the Tredegar Road site. AluK aluminium window and door systems were specified for the development, which comprises a mix of studios, one, two and three-bedroom flats and four-bedroom maisonettes.

For more information, go to page 34.

Is George Osborne trying to kill off buy-to-let landlords?

Even before the Autumn Statement bombshell over stamp duty, property experts Savills were predicting a significant fall in the number of private landlords.

In a wide-ranging set of housing market forecasts Savills said despite landlords falling in number, the private rented sector itself will continue to grow to 2020 and beyond.

Many small buy-to-let landlords (with up to six properties) are expected to 'cash in' and realise the value of their property portfolios, converting the proceeds into cash or pension pots.

It is less clear who will replace them, but among the favourites are existing landlords like Grainger, or maybe we are about to see a new wave of institutional investors move in? Others, who might be interested are cash rich businesses in high cost

areas, who are concerned about their employee recruitment and retention.

Since the release of the Savills research, the chancellor of the exchequer revealed a steep 3 per cent rise in stamp duty for property purchases made by buy-to-let landlords from next April in his Autumn Statement.

The table below shows the impact of the stamp duty increases based on the new rates.

These increases are likely to persuade smaller, marginal investors that property purchases are no longer an attractive proposition.

But of course in the short term, they could push property prices up as would-be purchasers look to beat the increase, scheduled for Easter 2016. We could be in for a rocky few months on house prices.

Property price £	New stamp duty payable £	Increase £
150,000	5,000	4,500
175,000	6,250	5,250
200,000	7,500	6,000
250,000	10,000	7,500
300,000	14,000	9,000
400,000	22,000	12,000

November housing bulletin statistics give cause for thought

If we look beyond the usual headlines on average house prices and the new build completion figures, there are some fascinating facts in the monthly housing bulletin published by the Homes & Communities Agency. Consider the following:

Empty homes

There are an estimated 610,123 empty homes in England, which represents 2.6 per cent of all dwellings. Of these 205,821 (0.88 per cent) had been empty for over six months.

The concentration of empty homes varies by region, from 1.6 per cent (0.6 per cent long term) in London to over 3.2 per cent (over 1.1 per cent) in each of the three Northern regions.

"There are an estimated 610,123 empty homes in England, which represents 2.6 per cent of all dwellings"

While some properties will be empty for legitimate reasons (the owner has recently died and their estate has yet to be finalised), these figures hid a lot of debateable practices – none more so than the 'buy-to-leave-empty' phenomenon where purchasers are banking on increases in property prices being a better bet than rental income.

The Coalition Government reduced the previous administration's efforts to tackle empty homes and given all of the focus, effort and money put in to building new homes, it seems odd that we allow so many properties to stand empty for so long.

Social housing sales

In 2014-15 there were 20,454 sales of social housing dwellings, a decrease of 1 per cent compared to 2013-14. Of the sales 12,489 were by local authorities and 7,965 were by private registered providers (HRAs).

If you have ever wondered why a sitting tenant buys the property on which they are paying a below market rent, then consider the size of the discounts on offer and ask yourself "Would you pass up on such a generous give away offer?"

The average discount as a percentage of market value of Right to Buy local authority

Continued overleaf...

£5 million scheme launched to tackle rogue landlords

The government has set up a 'war chest' of £5 million to help councils tackle rogue landlords and end the plight of 'beds in sheds'.

It has written to over 60 councils with the highest proportion of private rented properties and problems with poor landlords, inviting them to apply for a slice of the money. The move supports measures already outlined in the Housing and Planning Bill, to improve housing conditions, penalise bad practices in the private rented sector and offer greater protection to tenants.

Communities Secretary Greg Clarke launched the scheme, saying: "We're determined to keep the country building and increase the supply of good quality homes that families want, both to buy and for rent."

"Key to this is rooting out the minority of landlords in the private rented sector that let out poorly-maintained and unsafe properties to vulnerable tenants, making their lives a misery."

Councils will be able to use the cash to:

- Increase the number of property inspections
- Carry out more raids at houses and flats in

poor conditions

- Begin more enforcement action and prosecutions and
- Demolish sheds and buildings that are prohibited.

The cash is also available to councils wanting to tackle 'beds in sheds' – where outbuildings are rented out to vulnerable people, such as migrants and adult care leavers. This started as a phenomenon in West London and along the M4 corridor but has grown rapidly and is now reported as existing in many local authority areas – not just in high cost areas.

The Housing and Planning Bill contains measures to protect private rented sector tenants, such as penalty notices of up to £5,000 for landlords, banning orders for the most prolific offenders and a database of rogue landlords and letting agents.

More than 3,000 landlords have already faced enforcement action and prosecution since 2012 due to council-led efforts, Greg Clark added.

Councils had until the beginning of December to submit their applications for a slice of the £5 million pot of money.

dwelling sold was 46 per cent in 2014-15. This is 19 percentage points higher than in 2011-12. The average discount of Right to Buy registered provider homes sold was 52 per cent, which was 21 percentage points higher than in 2011-12.

So the properties are being knocked-out at half price! And the cost of replacing them is usually half a million quid and takes anything up to two years to build. And last year they were only being replaced on a ratio of one new home for every nine that are sold. That is not really a sustainable level and it remains to be seen if the new rules result in one for one replacements.

Construction industry output

In Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015, output in the construction industry decreased by an estimated 2.2 per cent compared with Q2. Between Q3 2014 and Q3 2015 output was estimated to have fallen by 0.1 per cent.

Downward pressure in the quarter came from both new work and repair and maintenance, which fell by 2.2 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively. All areas of work except infrastructure and private industrial reported decreases.

These are worrying figures and they add to the thinking that we are reducing the investment in our social housing stock to levels which, if they continue, could undermine the level of properties which meet the Decent Homes standard.

If we fail to continue investing in new roofs, improved insulation, energy efficient components (glazing and doors, boilers, heating systems etc.) then the housing stock is effectively going backwards.

"In Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015, output in the construction industry decreased by an estimated 2.2 per cent compared with Q2"

GDP forecasts

GDP is estimated to have increased by 0.5 per cent in Q3 2015 compared to Q2, and by 2.3 per cent compared with the same quarter a year previously.

Quarter-on quarter output in services increased by 0.7 per cent, in agriculture by 0.4 per cent and in production by 0.2 per cent. Construction output, however, decreased by 2.2 per cent.

Initially the figures look good, but the falls in the construction sector should be a cause for concern. It is proven that every pound invested in construction creates many more pounds of expenditure in the rest of the economy.

What we do not know because the bulletin does not tell us this, is how much of the slowdown in construction is due to skilled labour shortages; how much is due to the shortage of building materials (bricks etc) and how much is due to the shortage of money to fund development.

If only we could train ourselves and our politician policy-makers to look beyond the headlines on new build completions and the latest house price increase, we might end up with more practical policies and better solutions to the various problems experienced in the housing market.

A private rented licensing scheme is launched in Wales

The Welsh government has launched a new private landlord registration and licensing scheme for the principality. Meanwhile their English counterparts appear reluctant to take the same route.

The new scheme, called Rent Smart Wales, gives existing private landlords a year to register themselves and their properties with the scheme without fear of legal action. After this initial year has passed, any landlords who fail to register can be fined or prosecuted.

"In the new Housing and Planning Bill, Ministers are proposing to tackle poor practices and bad behaviour by establishing a new database of rogue landlords and letting agents who have been convicted of certain criminal offences"

Landlords can appoint a licensed agent to manage their properties. If they manage the properties themselves they must demonstrate they are 'fit and proper' to hold a licence and they have passed a training course.

The pan Wales scheme, replaces an existing voluntary scheme, and it will be administered by Cardiff Council.

Rogue landlords

Ms Lesley Griffiths, housing minister in Wales, said when launching the new scheme: "The changes will prevent rogue, and even criminal, landlords and agents from being involved in the management and letting of properties."

Campaigners have been pushing the Whitehall Government to introduce a similar scheme in England, but Ministers appear reluctant to do so, although they are promising a raft of new measures.

In the new Housing and Planning Bill, Ministers are proposing to tackle poor practices and bad behaviour by establishing a new database of rogue landlords and letting agents

who have been convicted of certain criminal offences.

Other measures, proposed in the bill include:

- Banning landlords and letting agents from renting out property where they have been convicted of particularly serious offences
- A more stringent 'fit and proper' person test for landlords letting out licensed properties, such as Houses in Multiple Occupation, to help ensure that they have the appropriate skills to manage such properties and do not pose a risk to the health and safety of their tenants
- Enabling local authorities to issue civil penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution for certain breaches of housing legislation, with revenue from penalties to be retained by the local authority and
- Extending Rent Repayment Orders to cover situations where a tenant has been illegally evicted, the landlord has breached a banning order or has failed to rectify a serious health & safety hazard in the property.

Prosecutions

Campaigners are pushing for more consistency in how councils and the courts deal with bad landlords.

The Ministry of Justice was recently ordered to release its prosecution database by an Information Tribunal, after an appeal on public interest grounds was lodged by the magazine Environmental Health News.

The data revealed that 2,006 individuals and companies were fined a total of nearly £3 million for housing offences under the Housing Act 2004 between 2006 and 2014.

The most active council in England and Wales appears to be the London Borough of Newham. Since their borough-wide licensing scheme was introduced, it has carried out 593 housing prosecutions against 482 landlords.

Private housing operations manager Russell Moffatt said: "Licensing allows us to identify rental properties, inspect them and crack down on negligent landlords, forcing them to make improvements or move on. More councils need to introduce licensing to protect their residents from landlords who are leaving Newham and are looking to make a quick buck elsewhere."

HMM Stats

Private rental prices paid by tenants in Great Britain rose by 2.7 per cent in the 12 months to September 2015.

Private rental prices grew by 2.8 per cent in England, 1.6 per cent in Scotland and 0.5 per cent in Wales in the 12 months to September 2015.

Deposit protection schemes advice for landlords

Pivate landlords are being reminded they must place their tenants' deposit payments in an approved protection scheme.

There are three approved tenancy deposit protection (TDP) schemes in England and Wales, for tenancies that started after 6 April 2007. The schemes are:

- Deposit Protection Service (Custodial and Insured)
- MyDeposits
- Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Deposits made by a third party, such as a tenant's parent, must also be held in a TDP scheme. If a landlord accepts a valuable item as a deposit instead of money (such as a car or a watch), these do not have to put it in a TDP.

- The address of the rented property
- How much deposit they have paid
- How the deposit is protected
- The name and contact details; of the tenancy deposit protection (TDP) scheme and its dispute resolution service
- The landlord's (or their letting agency's) name and contact details
- The name and contact details of any third party who paid the deposit;
- Why the landlord would keep some or all of the deposit - e.g. because the tenants damaged the property and the landlord needed to fix it;
- How to apply to get the deposit back at the end of the tenancy;
- What to do if the tenants cannot get hold of the landlord at the end of the tenancy;
- What to do if there's a dispute over the amount of deposit to be returned at the end of the tenancy.

If landlords do not protect their tenants' deposit money, then tenants can apply to a County Court to get the landlord to do what they are supposed to have done. They can do this at any time during the tenancy.

If the Court finds that landlords have not protected the deposit, it can order them to either:

- Repay it to your tenants or
- Pay it into a custodial TDP scheme's bank account within 14 days.

The Court may also order a landlord to repay the tenants up to 3 times their original deposit within 14 days of making the order.

At the end of the tenancy, the Court may also decide that the tenants do not have to leave the property when the tenancy ends if you didn't use a TDP scheme when you should have.

There is a free dispute resolution service as part of each deposit protection (TDP) scheme. The service is for those who disagree with their tenants or landlord about how much deposit should be returned.

Government proposes minimum bedroom size for rentals

A national minimum size for bedrooms is being set at 6.5 square metres in an attempt to stop landlords creating 'rabbit hutch properties' and unfairly increasing their rental income. Landlords letting bedrooms smaller than this standard size would be guilty of a criminal offence.

The government's proposal is part of a drive to improve standards in the private rented sector and stop landlords carving up houses into ever-smaller rooms to maximise rental income. Bedrooms in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) would have to be a minimum of 6.5 sq m (70 sq ft), and landlords letting rooms smaller than that would be breaking the law.

"The proposal was sparked by an outcry over 'rabbit hutch properties', many costing as much as £1,000 a month, as landlords cash in on the booming housing market"

The proposal was sparked by an outcry over 'rabbit hutch properties', many costing as much as £1,000 a month, as landlords cash in on the booming housing market, particularly in London and other major cities.

Tenants at a flat in Hendon, north London, had to crawl on hands and knees to reach their bedroom, because the entrance was just 70cm high. Elsewhere, landlords are dividing living spaces into what letting agents call 'semi-studios', or 'mezzanine sleeping areas', where a large shelf is mounted a metre or so from the ceiling with just enough space for a mattress.

Legal confusion

The 1985 Housing Act specifies minimum space standards, but a tribunal case in April this year threw local authorities into confusion. A Manchester landlord, who had already converted the cellar of a Victorian terrace into a bedroom, was taken to a tribunal for renting out a bed deck above a box-room measuring 5.8 sq m. Manchester city council argued that the room breached minimum space standards, but a tribunal ruled in favour of the landlord prompting fears of a free-for-all among landlords.

In a move to clarify the legal situation for landlords, councils and tenants, a paper issued

Continued overleaf...



There are separate tenancy deposit protection schemes in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The government-backed schemes ensure tenants will get their deposit money back if they:

- Meet the terms of their tenancy agreement;
- Do not damage the property; and
- Pay the rent and bills.

Landlords or their letting agent must put the tenants' deposit in the scheme within 30 days of receiving it. At the end of the tenancy the deposit must be returned to the tenants within 10 days of both parties agreeing how much the tenants should get back. In the case of a dispute, the deposit is protected in the TDP scheme until the issue is settled.

Within 30 days of getting their deposit, a landlord must provide their tenants with the following information:

HMM Stats

The private rented sector provides a home to 4.4 million households across the country, and surveys show that 84 per cent of private renters are satisfied with their accommodation.

Private sector tenants stay in their homes for an average of 3.5 years.

by the Department for Communities and Local Government calls for a national minimum bedroom size, set at 6.5 sq m, but with local authorities free to set higher standards if they want.

Housing Minister Brandon Lewis said: "It is simply unacceptable that people are living in cramped, unsafe accommodation provided by landlords who are more interested in a quick profit than the safety or welfare of their tenants.

"The government's proposals intend to make it easier for local authorities to raise standards in houses used as shared homes by setting a minimum size of rooms in line with existing overcrowding standards."

New homes in England are already among the smallest in Europe, with the average newly constructed property measuring 76 sq m, in contrast to Denmark (137 sq m) and Holland (115 sq m).

Social landlord possession claims fall

Possession claims issued by Housing Associations and Councils against their tenants in rent arrears have continued to fall. This should result in fewer evictions and lower write-offs of uncollectable debts.

Ministry of Justice figures show social landlords in England and Wales issued 23,528 claims for possession in July to September 2015. This is a 9 per cent fall in legal action compared to the same period in 2014 and a 21 per cent decrease on the 30,160 claims issued in the same period a year earlier.

"Ministry of Justice figures show social landlords in England and Wales issued 23,528 claims for possession in July to September 2015"

Housing management and finance staff at social landlords appear to be working hard to prevent rent arrears building up as they prepare for direct payment of benefit to tenants under Universal Credit.

Some landlords have adopted a no eviction policy for rent arrears, while others have recruited more staff to help tenants to claim all of the benefits they are eligible for and to prioritise paying their rent. Some specialist staff will work with tenants to persuade other lenders to write off at least part of the sums owed to them or to renegotiate lower payment terms.

Councils want tougher action over rogue landlords

A call to extend the legal measures proposed against rogue landlords has been made by the Local Government Association.

The government is proposing to set up a database of private landlords who have breached banning orders, saying it wants to increase standards in the private rented sector. But the LGA says the current proposals do not go far enough and need to cover all offences committed by landlords to ensure the proper safety of private tenants.

The LGA is pushing for the Housing & Planning Bill to be extended, including a tougher 'fit and

proper person' screening process and the introduction of fixed penalties for low-level offences. They say this is necessary to ensure bad landlords cannot simply move their operations to a neighbouring borough.

Peter Box, the LGA's environment spokesman said: "A national information pool of rogue landlords is urgently needed so councils can identify the serial rogue operators and target them more effectively.

"Councils are doing everything they can to tackle rogue landlords. However, they are being let down by the current system, which fails to account for the seriousness of the situation."

Future improvements in service delivery and efficiency will depend on the right IT solutions

How many times have we heard that the latest development in IT will revolutionise the way we deliver housing services and yet the promised changes fail to materialise?

Like many people working in housing, I have veered from wild enthusiasm for more use of IT to the depths of despair that another expensive investment has failed to deliver the savings in time and money.

And yet I have allowed myself to be persuaded (again!) that we are on the cusp of benefitting from a new and exciting change which could revolutionise how housing management and maintenance services are provided. With the growing financial pressure on housing services, we cannot afford any more costly failures.

Radio-frequency identification (or RFID to the IT professionals) is the wireless use of electromagnetic fields to transfer data. It is already used in the construction sector for the purposes of automatically identifying and tracking tags attached to expensive machinery. The tags contain electronically stored information, whose transmission relies on signals being picked up. The reliability of mobile and radio signals is improving all of the time and in the next 12 months is set to leap forward.

Its uses are being expanded as more staff in different occupations use smart phones and other devices as part of their routine activities. If you have travelled on a train recently, you will probably have seen passenger fares being collected on mobile devices using this technology.

Various uses

The system allows you to do simple tasks such as monitoring activities like the visits being made by staff to tenants' homes and their outcomes, to tracking the location of high value stock and equipment and ensuring the stock on operatives' vans is correct for the repair jobs booked out to



them for that day.

Within the next year we can expect to see it being rolled out and used by landlords when undertaking various tasks. For instance housing staff will be able to book repairs 'live' while they are visiting a tenant's home, checking on the availability of both the tenant and the relevant operative.

If the repair is the tenant's responsibility then the staff member can take an electronic payment from them, there and then, eliminating the need for jobs to be booked for a later date, for an invoice to be sent out and arrangements made for payment. Taking photographs and recording conversations also changes the dynamic.

Operatives will be able to monitor their own performance against targets, so they can self-manage themselves using dashboards on handheld devices which are regularly updated with the latest data using an app.

Housing managers can, in real-time, check on the status of a tenancy, the rent account, whether there are any complaints outstanding and what progress has been made with them, the situation on a transfer request and so on.

This system could also be used to provide better services to leaseholders, a group who regularly feel that landlords provide them with a second-class service.

In a controversial move, the government is forcing councils to switch their secure tenancies to five-year fixed terms.

This has been a long held ambition of the Prime Minister but the government failed to get enough support for the move while in coalition. The change is now being made through an amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill.

Currently councils can introduce time limits on their tenancies, but now they will be forced to do this and then review the circumstances of their tenants before granting them a new restricted tenancy or not.

Tenants could be forced to move home or to

Government forces through an end to lifetime tenancies

resolve their own housing needs in the private sector.

The measure is bound to be controversial and no decision has yet been taken on whether the change will also apply to housing associations. The biggest opposition could emerge from the House

of Lords.

The Government argues the change is necessary to make the best use of social housing, while the opposition claim this takes away the stability of a secure home from families in need.

Surprise rejection of London council's PRS licensing scheme

In a move which appears to contradict its 'tough crackdown' on rogue landlords, the government has rejected a scheme by Redbridge Council in London to introduce a borough-wide licensing scheme of private landlords.

Just before Christmas Communities Secretary Greg Clark turned down the council's application to bring in a borough-wide licensing scheme to tackle poor landlords and anti-social behaviour.

Redbridge's scheme would have required all private landlords in the borough to pay £500 for a five-year license. The council is now reconsidering what action it can take, including whether a smaller scale scheme would work.

Poor standards

Council leader Mr Jas Athwal said: "Without a borough-wide scheme it will be impossible for us to readily identify who is responsible for a property and deal proactively with poor standards of rented accommodation. Sadly, we will now have to go back to the drawing board and consider our options."

The minister declined the application because the council had not provided evidence of significant and persistent anti-social behaviour across the borough as a whole, as required under the Housing Act 2008.

"Redbridge's scheme would have required all private landlords in the borough to pay £500 for a five-year license"

Since April last year, councils are required to gain government approval to introduce licensing schemes affecting more than 20 per cent of private rented properties in a local authority area, or covering more than 20 per cent of the geographical area.



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Springfield remedial work – fourth time lucky

Social housing developers, private landlords and managing agents are increasingly handing their remedial work over to specialist companies. Ian Guest, Chief Operations Officer of CIPHER UK, provides an insight into the complexities of one particular site that really needed the help of a property repairs service

Multiple construction failures in a development housing hundreds of residents; a number of landlords and wide range of tenures; three previous remedial schemes failed; and an obstacle course of legal and health and safety issues to clear. Could it possibly get any worse?

It was certainly the largest and most complex project CIPHER had ever faced. The challenge was to remedy serious water leaks which had damaged a number of properties in a new development of flats in the south east of England.

The source of the problem was construction failures in several balconies to properties at different locations in the development. This led to water ingress, damaging properties below.

The client, a leading national developer building homes for sale and rent, had been trying – and failing – over eight years to find a remedy.

When CIPHER were appointed, the client had developed a programme of remedial works. The first step was to start work on just one balcony, to check that the programme of works would actually remedy all the problems.

Sure enough, demolition and strip-out of the

first balcony revealed defects that had not been previously identified, so it was time for a rethink.

A complex challenge

It was quickly identified the need for a completely new, more complicated, balcony design scheme, incorporating a Bauder waterproof system that could be guaranteed not to fail.

Design and install would be far from straightforward, though, because each affected balcony had been constructed differently and the problem touched every single property, including many with private tenants, absent landlords, managing agents and a social housing client too.

The scaffolding requirements were complex, and erecting scaffolding would involve negotiations with a separate landowner. It was soon realised the work would cause considerable disruption to hundreds of residents, and would necessitate more than 40 tradesmen and subcontractors, and 13 specialist contractors and manufacturers.

On top of all that, the job had to be done for a fixed price, with no variations, a six-year guarantee period – and to a tight deadline.

“Design and install would be far from straightforward, though, because each affected balcony had been constructed differently and the problem touched every single property including many with private tenants, absent landlords, managing agents and a social housing client”

Managing the repairs

Cipher came up with a bespoke design scheme for each balcony, which involved new cavity trays manufactured to precise specifications, requiring 30 bespoke components for the cavity trays alone. The new scheme was approved by the client at a cost £300,000.

Materials were sourced to match those existing in the development – this proved to be another challenge, as no records of materials used were available.

To keep the project on track and on budget, Cipher deployed its own construction project managers. Their main responsibilities were to work with the architects and engineers on design plans and modifications, liaising with over 50

contractors, specialist contractors, suppliers and manufacturers. They had to carry out health and safety management on site, co-ordinating weekly meetings with all parties, and reporting weekly to client and residents.

Looking after the residents

Cipher contacted every landlord, tenant and homeowner by letter, followed up with door knocks and meetings, as well as providing a 24/7 hotline for them to call with any concerns.

To allay security fears raised by the extensive scaffolding around the development, a security guard was appointed.

As the works would leave some residents without wall insulation during the winter months, measures were put in place to keep their homes warm. Materials also had to be protected from frost damage, and rigged up lighting was installed to ensure that the trades could work full days, despite the limited daylight.

A successful outcome

Like all the best stories, there was a happy ending. The project was completed on time and to budget. A significant problem hanging over the development for years had been removed, with no nasty surprises. And the residents were happy too.

This project illustrates how complex and time-consuming large-scale property remedial work can be. It needs an array of skills and constant attention to keep it on track and to



respond to issues which arise, and costs can be unpredictable.

Using property remedial specialists is often the most efficient way to tackle these big, complex projects, saving time, money and hassle. A specialist has the full range of expertise and resources needed to hand. Remedial work is, after all, the last thing a large landlord or social housing developer wants to be doing.

Government rows back from HA regulation

A series of measures designed to remove housing associations from the public sector, have been announced by the housing minister.

Brandon Lewis outlined the measures (to be included in the Housing & Planning Bill) when giving evidence to the CLG Select Committee in mid December. This is in response to the Office of National Statistics' decision to add the HA loan portfolio of £60 billion to the national debt.

The government has been trying to find ways of reversing the ONS decision since it was announced in October. The first sign of this was when the extension of the Right to Buy to HA tenants was made voluntary in a contentious deal hammered out with the National Housing Federation.

Mr Lewis said the government has: “sought to balance two key aims...to enable the ONS to return the sector entirely to private,” and the “need to maintain a proportionate regulatory system for the sector which gives tenants comfort”.

U-turn

Senior figures in the housing sector and the NHF have been lobbying the government to relax its regulatory regime, as delivered by the Homes & Communities Agency, but the latest changes exhibit a lack of a coherent policy direction and could leave the HCA oversight in a complex mess.

Mr Lewis told MPs on the CLG Committee he planned a number of changes, including:

- Removing the need to obtain consent from the regulator before legally disposing of land and properties
- Making their involvement in raising rents for better off tenants (the ‘pay to stay’ policy) voluntary
- Removing restrictions on the use of sales proceeds and
- Removing its ability to appoint managers to run failing HAs.

However, there has been no decision to change the Government's plans to cut rents by 1 per cent a year through to 2020. It is also proceeding with making pay to stay a legal requirement on councils, so they will have to charge close to market rents to tenants who earn above £30,000 a year, or £40,000 in London.

Dilemma

The government is desperate to change the ONS classification decision and does not know if its proposals will be sufficient to deliver a policy reversal. As a sign of its dilemma, Mr Lewis said the government still wanted to encourage parity between HAs and councils, in “fairness” to



all tenants.

However, in another embarrassing exchange with a national body, the UK Statistics Authority has criticised the Department for Communities and Local Government's method of publishing homelessness figures for England.

It called on the department to take “urgent actions, including presenting them with the figures in their proper context”. The UK Statistics Authority said until the DCLG does this, the figures cannot be classed as national statistics.

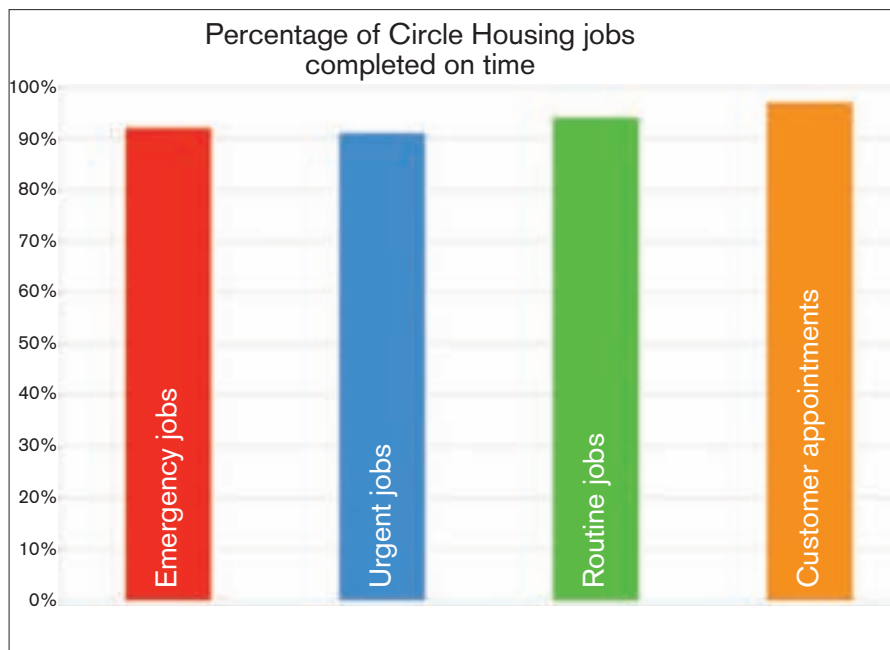
Better news for Circle Housing tenants waiting for a repair

The troubled repairs and maintenance service provided by giant landlord Circle Housing appears to have turned the corner with significantly improved performance reported.

After being lambasted for chronic failures in its repairs service, resulting in an upsurge in complaints, Circle appointed two new contractors to carry out responsive repairs in London and the West Midlands. It claims it has corrected the problems and is now out-performing most social landlords.

maintenance service for customers. They also appointed a Programme Director of Repairs and Maintenance and restructured the repairs and maintenance leadership team.

Mark Rogers, Chief Executive of Circle Housing, said: "It has been, and is, our highest priority to restore our repairs service to a good standard. This marks an important milestone for us and shows the changes we have implemented are delivering a significantly improved service for our customers.



This represents a huge turnaround from April 2015, when the 70,000 home landlord had its governance rating downgraded to G3 (the second lowest rating), putting Circle in breach of regulatory standards. Its financial viability remained at the highest level.

Back then it was completing fewer than 20 per cent of emergency repairs on time to 8,000 of its properties and less than 50 per cent in time in the rest of its stock. In its latest reported performance, Circle says it is now delivering:

- Almost 92 per cent of all emergency jobs on time
- 91 per cent of all urgent jobs completed on time
- 94 per cent of all routine jobs completed on time and
- 97 per cent of all customer appointments were kept.

This exceeds the sector benchmark of 89 per cent of urgent and emergency repairs completed on time, as reported by Housemark.

New contractors

Appointing new contractors (Wates Living Space and Mitie) was part of Circle Housing's improvement plan to restore its repairs and

"Working with our external, independent advisors and in-house repairs and maintenance team we identified areas of improvement where we can continue to strengthen our service and build on the improvements that have been delivered so far."

In its earlier judgement, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) said Circle's management of a £350 million contract with Kier for its 13,000 London homes represented 'a chronic failure... made possible or contributed to by serious and enduring failures'. The five-year contract was terminated early.

In an attempt to 'create fewer, larger contracts for responsive repairs and planned maintenance' the landlord had 'failed to control delivery of a core service and respond effectively to serious underperformance'.

'For over a year tenants, including vulnerable tenants, had experienced significant difficulties in getting essential repairs done, either on time or at all,' the judgement said.

In one of its most severe judgements ever issued, the regulator said Circle had failed to show it had 'prepared adequately for the implementation of the contract' and its management had been 'compromised by the absence of reliable performance information'.

Ageing university halls offer development opportunity

Universities could save billions of pounds in operational costs and create new campus housing to entice students, according to a major new report.

Around a third of institutions' property budgets could be saved by making better use of space, by modernising facilities and by sharing them across complementary courses.

According to Education Nation: The Graduation of Student Housing, a third of university-owned student housing is in a poor state of repair.

The report by Addleshaw Goddard said that by partnering with private developers or pension funds to redevelop this housing could generate around £5 billion of investment and provide long-term income for investors by creating new joint ventures in which universities would have a share. Types of structures that have been used by universities include on-campus demand risk transactions, nominations agreements and more informal short-term letting arrangements to facilitate the provision of better accommodation with a view to improving the student experience.

The report estimates that most universities only fully optimise a quarter of their estates. Cost savings and income generated from efficiency savings and the increased attractiveness of universities on account of having more and higher quality accommodation on campus.

Around 100,000 beds on campus are in a poor state of repair with a £5 billion backlog of maintenance investment.

Addleshaw Goddard says that despite the sharp growth in investment, with student numbers still growing, the peak of the student accommodation market is likely to still be some way off.

Many students are housed in purpose built student accommodation (PBSA). Around £6 billion was invested during 2015, the report said, higher than investment into North America's student housing sector. 83 per cent of the increase in student numbers since 2007 has been borne by the private rented sector. The fear is that without more purpose-built accommodation, the continued growth of student numbers could intensify the pressure on UK housing.

However, with many local councils opposed to granting permission for student housing many developers find it tough to build new schemes. The report also warns that investors risk being burned by developing PBSA in secondary locations where rent levels may not hold up.

Shared ownership boost

Aspiriring homeowners around the country could need a deposit of as little as £1,500 to realise their dream of homeownership under new measures announced by the government.

Thousands of people could benefit from an extension to the shared ownership scheme, which allows people to part buy and part rent their home and watch their equity grow over time.

The government is relaxing the criteria for those who can apply for the scheme from April 2016, meaning 175,000 more people will be eligible for homeownership across the country.

It is part of a national crusade to help a million more people into homeownership, including investing £4 billion to build an additional 135,000 shared ownership homes.

Communities Secretary Greg Clark said: "We're determined to ensure that hardworking people right across the country once again see home ownership as an achievable ambition.

"Shared ownership schemes have proved a real help to first-time buyers, but punitive restrictions have locked too many out of this opportunity to buy.

"These changes will open the door for thousands of people across the country to own their own home."

Housing Minister Brandon Lewis said: "We believe that anybody who works hard and aspires to own their own home should have the opportunity to realise their dream.

"Shared ownership is a great way for people to

achieve that with just a fraction of the deposit they would normally need. Now, thanks to our vision, thousands more people will be able to benefit from this scheme.

"It's all part of a national crusade to turn generation rent into generation buy, helping one million more people into homeownership."

Shared ownership has been available since the 1980s but has been restricted with local councils

dictating who should be a priority based on a wide of range of factors from salary to profession to where the buyer comes from.

Under the new measures the scheme will be opened up to people of any occupation while income caps will also be raised, meaning families earning up to £90,000 in London and £80,000 elsewhere could be eligible.

It means a family in the North East, for instance, could need a deposit of just £1,500 to buy a 25 per cent share in a typical shared ownership property in the region.

	Property type	Typical shared ownership price	25 per cent share	5 per cent deposit on 25 per cent share
North East	Three bed house	£125,000	£31,250	£1,563
North West	Three bed house	£153,000	£38,250	£1,913
Yorkshire & Humber	Two bed house	£115,000	£28,750	£1,483
East Midlands	Two bed house	£130,000	£32,500	£1,625
West Midlands	Two bed house	£135,000	£33,750	£1,688
East of England	Two bed house	£175,000	£43,750	£2,188
London	One bed flat	£275,000	£68,750	£3,438
South East	Two bed flat	£190,000	£47,500	£2,375
South West	Two bed house	£160,000	£40,000	£2,000



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Skills crisis hitting the building sector

The country's construction industry is facing its greatest skills crisis since 1998, according to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Simon Rubensohn, Chief Economist at RICS said: "The availability of construction workers is reaching crisis point. We haven't witnessed a labour shortage of its kind in nearly 20 years. Without the relevant skills, we will not be able to grow many of the government's priority construction sectors such as infrastructure."

He added that a real focus on attracting more young people into the industry is critical alongside an expansion of apprenticeship opportunities.

"The availability of construction workers is reaching crisis point"

– Simon Rubensohn,
RICS Chief Economist

Among the key points according to RICS are the following:

- Highest skills shortage on record set to limit sector growth potential
- UK construction skills shortage at highest since 1998
- Bricklayers and quantity surveyors in shortest supply
- 69 per cent of firms also report problems accessing credit and
- Despite this, sharp growth in construction reported across the UK.

Where are our brickies?

The latest RICS UK Construction Survey shows that the country's skills shortage has reached its

highest levels since the survey was launched 18 years ago, with bricklayers and quantity surveyors in shortest supply.

Over half of respondents (53 per cent) reported difficulty sourcing labour, with 71 per cent saying they had particular difficulty sourcing bricklayers and 64 per cent highlighting a shortage of quantity surveyors.

During the same period in 2011, just 1 per cent of respondents were struggling to find bricklayers and only 15 per cent noted a shortage of quantity surveyors.

In addition to labour supply, 69 per cent of firms said that financial constraints, such as access to credit, were among the biggest constraints to growth, while 60 per cent said that regulatory and planning issues were potent constraints.

Different sector messages

However, despite these challenges, the survey shows significant areas of growth, with the number of new construction projects increasing, particularly in private housing and commercial sectors.

While official figures highlighted a slight contraction in output, a substantial proportion of respondents to the RICS reported an increase in their workloads (net balance +39 per cent), with 29 per cent of firms saying that they were operating at full capacity.

The private housing and commercial sectors continue to lead the growth in workloads with net balances of 47 per cent and 46 per cent respectively reporting an increase.

However, momentum was least firm in the public sector with net balances of 12 per cent and 21 per cent reporting growth in workloads in the housing and non-housing segments respectively. Meanwhile, in the infrastructure sector, growth accelerated with a balance of 34 per cent seeing workloads rise, up from 25 per cent last quarter.

Midlands Council criticised for safety breaches

Redditch Borough Council has breached the social housing regulator's standards after failing to service all of the gas boilers in its housing stock.

The Worcestershire based council has around 6,000 tenanted homes in the district, to the south west of Birmingham. It contacted the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) after identifying that a significant number of properties had out of date gas safety certificates. In some cases the certificates had been expired for a long time.

All landlords have to adhere to the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 that require gas safety checks to be undertaken annually by a gas safe engineer.

At least seven people die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning from gas appliances and flues that have not been properly installed, maintained or are poorly ventilated.

The Council put in place a programme of actions to rectify the failure and is reporting on its progress to the regulator.

Regulations breached

The Council reported itself to the HCA when it discovered inspections were overdue in a large number of cases. This breach of the legal regulations meant a number of tenants were exposed to the potential of serious harm from carbon monoxide gases, for lengthy periods. No specific incidents or fatalities were reported at Redditch.

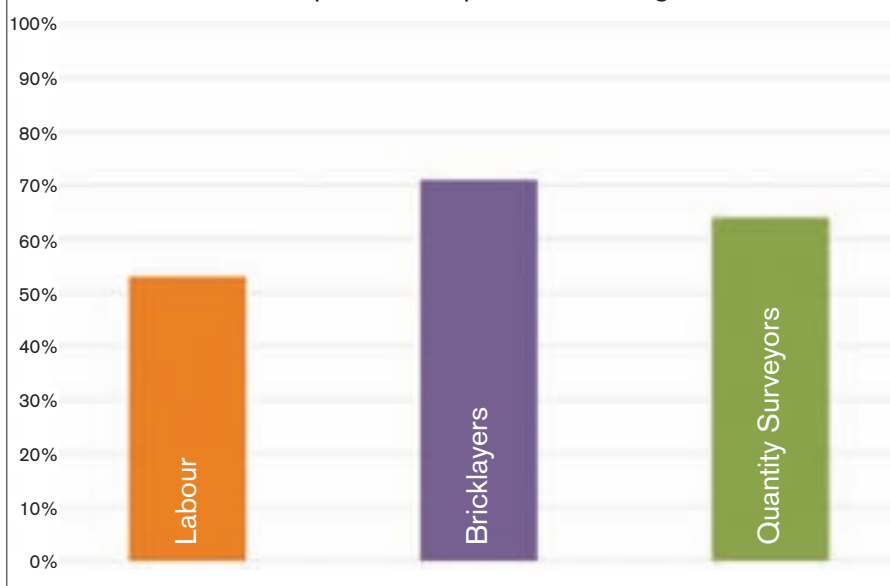
The regulator concluded that:

- a) Redditch Borough Council had failed to meet the Home standard; and
 - b) As a consequence of this breach there was the potential for serious detriment to Redditch Borough Council's tenants.
- The Council has completed the overdue gas safety inspections. It also carried out an internal audit that found the issue arose due to inadequate contract management, failures in recording and incomplete records and contractor failure. Redditch is undertaking a review of arrangements for contractors and methods of reporting.

The regulator considered the case as a potential breach of the Home Standard, and specifically the regulatory requirement to 'meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of occupants in their homes'.

The case should act as a timely reminder to all landlords of their responsibilities and the need for regular checks on such important safety concerns.

Trades respondents reported a shortage of:



Orbit downgraded over fire risk

One of England's biggest social landlords has had its governance rating downgraded after reporting itself to the sector's regulatory body.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) announced a downgrade of Orbit's governance to a G2 rating – compliant but improvement needed. This followed a decision by Orbit to self-report a Health & Safety issue to the HCA in July 2015.

After investigating the case, the regulator concluded that:

- a) Orbit failed to meet the Home standard; and
- b) As a consequence of this breach, there was the potential for serious detriment to Orbit's tenants.

Orbit is one of England's five biggest housing associations. It operates in the Midlands, East Anglia and the South East, managing about 39,000 homes and has a development programme delivering 1,500 new homes a year.

Like all social landlords (HAs and Councils with housing stock) Orbit has a statutory duty under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to identify and assess the risk of fire in properties where it has responsibility for maintenance. Having identified the hazards and people at risk, it has a duty to take precautions to prevent the risk of fire.

Decision accepted

"Although we are obviously disappointed to be in this position, we fully accept the conclusions of the HCA. The HCA decision relates to the specific area of Fire Risk remedial works and the HCA has judged that the Action Plan that we put into place to address those issues was appropriate and robust," said a spokesperson for Orbit.

They sought to reassure their tenants by adding "We take the safety and security of our customers very seriously and we will complete the outstanding works as quickly as possible."

The HCA has confirmed Orbit's financial viability remains at the highest V1 rating which means the delivery of its development programme should not be affected, unless funders and local authority partners ask for greater reassurance over internal oversight at the HA.

Several hundred properties affected

Back in the summer 2015, Orbit reported to the regulator that it believed it was in breach of the statutory duty to take precautions, through failure to implement "high risk" actions arising from Fire Risk Assessments. Following a further investigation by Orbit, it stated to the regulator that:

- There had been several hundred actions categorised by Orbit as high risk, relating to hundreds of properties, that had been outstanding for periods exceeding two years;
- It viewed this as non-compliance with its statutory duty;
- Some of these actions were exploratory in nature (for example to carry out further assessments of risk rather than to rectify known problems) while others were for physical improvements (such as repairs to fire doors and

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lighting, or removal of rubbish);

- There had been no incidents of fire in its properties related to any of the outstanding actions and that all properties which statutorily required alarm and emergency lighting systems had them; and
- Orbit's legal advice was that the nature of the overdue actions meant there was a low risk of prosecution under health and safety law.

"Like all social landlords Orbit has a statutory duty under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to identify and assess the risk of fire"

Recovery plan on track

Orbit has presented the regulator with a risk-prioritised and time-bound action plan for addressing them, as well as for assuring itself and the regulator more broadly in relation to its statutory compliance. It is currently working through this plan and reporting to the regulator.

In its regulatory judgement the HCA said: "Fire is important because of the potentially fatal consequences. In this case, the regulator has concluded that the risk of serious harm is demonstrated because a large number of tenants had been exposed via unimplemented 'high risk' actions to an increased risk of danger from fire, over a long period of time. Therefore the 'serious detriment' threshold has been met. In summary, taking all these matters into account, the regulator has concluded that there has been a breach of the Home Standard which had the potential to cause serious detriment to Orbit's tenants."

Orbit has developed and is implementing a recovery plan to remedy the failures, and is reporting on progress with this to the regulator. It has stated that it is currently on track.

Just Housing Group implements software to deliver stock condition survey

East London based housing and support services business – Just Housing Group – has successfully facilitated financial savings for one of the UK's leading housing associations by delivering a stock condition survey and a revised 30 year plan against benchmarked industry best practice.

The stock condition survey is the first of its type for Bridgwater based SHAL Housing combining a software and process driven approach to determine the housing associations repair and maintenance requirements over a prolonged period.

The software system has allowed SHAL Housing to accurately assess the levels of funding required to repair and maintain the associations stock comprising of 699 affordable homes across Somerset. The revised plan in the long run will result in savings for the organisation, which will allow SHAL to actively manage its assets as well as refresh their property portfolio with new development.

Commenting on the bespoke system, John Swinney, CEO at Just Housing Group, said: "As the sector faces challenges, it is inevitable that housing associations and social housing providers are going to need to look at ways they can make financial savings, particularly as they come to develop robust 30 year plans.

"Our unique software has the ability to accurately determine what measures need to be delivered, rather than look at what might be delivered. Typically very poor inaccurate assessments have been carried out in the industry resulting in unnecessary spending, which needs to be eliminated.

"Combining our software and extensive housing knowledge is a different approach to delivering a stock condition survey and revised plan. And, it is one approach that has been proven to deliver accurate, evidence based results that housing associations can place their full confidence in."

Moving forward JHG will work alongside SHAL in the next phase to deliver the revised plan.

Established in 2004, Just Housing provides services and support in the supply, management and maintenance of social housing. The organisation successfully leads in transforming and creating Direct Labour Organisations (DLO).

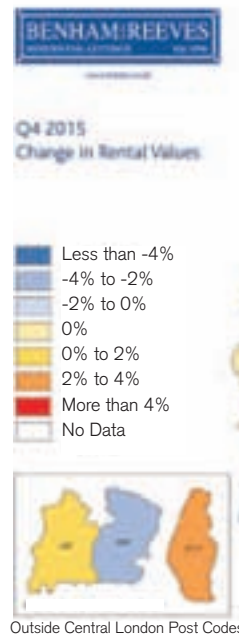
Rents plateau after two quarters of growth

After two quarters of strong growth in rental values, rents across the capital finally started to plateau. Across the capital, few areas saw substantial increases in rent as the market finally took pause from its frenzied pace. Analysts at Benham & Reeves Residential Lettings, who conducted the independent research, predict that this lull may only be temporary, however.

Most parts of central London saw rents remain at the same level or saw increases of less than two per cent. These figures echo market conditions across most of east and south London which also saw rental growth stall after a long period of growth. Notable exceptions are the Covent Garden area, which is seeing rental price growth as the area becomes a more established residential destination, and the trendier parts of Hackney which continue to attract young, affluent professionals.

Conversely, parts of north London saw price falls as seen in the previous quarter. Continuing issues on the Northern Line and the closure of the interchange at Tottenham Court Road during Crossrail works have put off many would-be commuters. With the reopening of Tottenham Court Road's interchange with the Central Line, it will be interesting to see if demand picks up in 2016.

"Successive Budget Announcements have seen many landlords' tax advantages disappear while regulations increase. With stamp duty attracting an



extra three per cent from April, we anticipate supply will fall as amateur landlords exit the market or seek out other asset classes," comments Marc von Grundherr, Lettings Director of Benham & Reeves Residential Lettings. "When supply falls,

rents will invariably go up. This will be the last chance for many tenants to move into a nice apartment while rents are plateauing and there is a choice of properties. Once Osborne's measures really start to be felt, the market will change."

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Active asset maintenance launched by CIH

Asset management is all about how landlords look after their prized assets – the properties they own and let out, which brings in the rental income and on which we spend huge amounts of money. Not all of it wisely!

It seems we have not been doing our research, planning and spending anywhere near well enough for quite some time. So, the Chartered Institute of Housing have set about improving our focus, our performance and our spending. This is, of course, for our own good and that of our tenants.

If we learn from the CIH's latest project, the sector stands to save millions of pounds each year (maybe even billions in time) and end up with a better product. The last set of HA global accounts showed some £3.2 billion was spent on reactive repairs and planned maintenance in 2014.

If we saved just 5 per cent of that large sum, the sector would have an additional £160 million a year to save or spend on new services and/or new housing. These figures are not to be sniffed at.

The government's policy to cut rents by 1 per cent a year through to 2020, has produced a raft of worrying predictions about massive cuts in services, job losses and changes in repair policies – cutting them back to the absolute minimum and charging tenants for routine and urgent repairs, and even for appointments. Preventative maintenance and servicing is becoming less regular!

Timing is everything

But asset management is not just about saving money, it is also about ensuring money gets spent at the right time and on the right things. It is about ensuring you do not waste money on doing up a property that no-one wants to live in.

My one problem is that they are marketing this work with a less than snappy 52-word definition, which they call 'fresh'. While it is certainly new, it is most certainly not fresh in the way that fresh food is fresh. Make your own mind up, the new definition is:-

Managing and maintaining the housing stock in a way that delivers value for money by optimising the return to the organisation through achieving the right balance between cost, quality and timing of works; also utilising the housing properties in a way that contributes to neighbourhood sustainability, all within the organisation's own context.



No-one will remember this apart from its ridiculous length, but all the essentials are in there. So I would urge you to suspend any cynicism and give a careful read to the publication 'Working together to redefine asset management'.

Proactive investment

Richard Medley and his team at CIH have worked for over a year with 15 landlords and two major contractors (Mears and Willmott Dixon), to produce a 30 page document which should help all landlords and decision makers to better understand the problem(s) and to devise intelligent and cost-effective solutions.

Launching the product and definition at the Homes Conference back in November at London Olympia, Richard said his ambition was to change the sector's approach from 'monitoring the assets' to one of 'managing the assets'. And he was right, we need to be pro-active and purposeful.

There has never been a more important time than now to ensure we are looking after tenants' homes and spending their rent wisely. Funding cuts and rent cuts will continue at a pace and the Government clearly has 'inefficient' Housing Associations and (to a lesser degree) Councils in their sights.

Good advice

The new guidance, which is available on the CIH website, goes through the 'new agenda' under nine easy to read short sections, that covers

everything from ensuring the data quality is correct, that property options are well evidenced and the right strategy for the neighbourhood, the stock and the organisation is chosen.

"The last set of HA global accounts showed some £3.2 billion was spent on reactive repairs and planned maintenance in 2014"

Case studies from the 15 landlords who participated in the project are included, which is helpful, and this helps to underline a hugely important message – you are not wrestling with this problem on your own and it's good to talk about these things, share your experiences and be prepared to question yourself and learn from others.

The housing provides the income to power the business (pay for services and staff salaries), assets (the homes) fund the business plan but they are also its biggest risk (the need to spend on repairs & maintenance, or they will stand empty) so effective asset management is crucial to meeting business aims and aspirations. This could also be written as – take asset management seriously or prepare to fail, sooner or later.

The country's biggest buy-to-let landlords have sold their property portfolio to an overseas buyer for a sum in excess of £250 million.

Fergus and Judith Wilson amassed a stock of several hundred properties, mainly in the Kent towns of Ashford, Folkestone and Maidstone. It is believed they have been looking to sell their houses for over a year.

In early December the Wilsons announced they had sold their entire stock to a foreign consortium of purchasers. This ends their 20 year association with the buy-to-let market.

The former teachers have often courted

The country's biggest buy-to-let landlords sell up

controversial publicity with stories about their policies and buying up batches of properties on the same estates.

Possibly their most high-profile move was to refuse taking any further tenants who were reliant on housing benefit. Mr Wilson explained at the time that he found eastern European people made

better tenants, who could be relied upon to pay their rent on time.

In announcing the sale, Mr Wilson said the transaction would not affect existing tenants and he expected the portfolio to be kept together and not to be broken up, for sale in blocks.

HA merger code launched amid predictions of difficult futures

The huge basket of changes to housing finances and policy in the past six months or so have lead many people to predict tough times ahead for social landlords.

In fact some of the predictions are so dire, that it is likely the number of housing associations will fall significantly as Boards and Executive Directors decide their organisations have no viable future as independent landlords and they need the comfort and protection of a bigger balance sheet.

This might also be the best way to enable new housebuilding schemes to proceed. After all most HA Board members feel they have a dual responsibility – improving services for existing tenants and providing new homes for people who are either homeless or living in unsuitable conditions, because of overcrowding, damp or abuse.

The best way of growing fast is usually seen as a

merger or a takeover. Sometimes it has even been known for a HA chief executive, who is nearing retirement, to put a merger case forward to their Board.

But big is not always beautiful and customer satisfaction surveys at HAs regularly show us that it is tenants of medium-sized landlords (between 5,000 and 10,000 homes) who are the happiest. They particularly value an accessible service, provided by a landlord who is sensitive to the needs of local communities.

Business case

Of course the decision on whether to merge or not should be based purely on the business case and it should be made by the Board acting in the best interest of the organisation and its tenants and customers, and no-one else.

The chancellor of the exchequer has not been

reluctant to make his views known on this front. He has said there are too many chief executives and HAs should consider sharing them, but why stop there – why not share finance directors, housing directors and other senior staff?

In fact in London where many HAs are wondering how best to sort out their repairs performance, I understand people are actively talking about setting up a single repairs contractor. This would be jointly owned by landlords, with the financial clout to buy goods and services at a big discount and able to compete with the private sector big boys like Mitie and Mears.

The problem is officers and Board members also believe that this means giving up their independence and they would have to agree common standards for the new contractor.

Perhaps the answer is for 'loose mergers' to take place, where local independence and decision-making is retained in a federal structure but with the benefits of joined up back office services, like finance, purchasing, HR and IT. Can development work be included within back office functions, leaving front line customer services like housing management and maintenance under local control?

Draft code approved

To help the debate on mergers along, the National Housing Federation's board has approved a draft merger code, which has been devised to encourage good practice, promote transparency and dispel perceptions of inefficiency of HAs.

It includes the 10 principles that should guide Boards on how they should deal with the merger process (see below). The code encourages both Boards and Executives to focus on their association's core purpose, while maintaining transparency and following a structured set of negotiations.

NHF members were due to receive the code before Christmas, with full publication expected in the New Year. The idea of a merger code was first mooted by Julian Ashby, chair of the Homes and Communities Agency's regulation committee.

The merger code's 10 key principles

- 1** The role of the Board is to act in the best interests of the organisation and its beneficiaries. There should be no presumption that a merged entity is in the best interests of the organisation but the Board will give the proposal serious consideration.
- 2** Boards should review an organisation's purpose and value statement regularly to consider if the intent is clear and specific enough to allow the Board to determine how to continue to fulfil its objects.
- 3** Where merger or partnership opportunities emerge the whole Board should be informed promptly. The parties should agree a process and timeline for the consensual development of first-stage proposals in order that the respective Boards may properly evaluate the opportunity and make an informed and timely decision.
- 4** Decisions around mergers, group structures and partnership proposals must be presented to, and decided upon, by the Board. In considering any proposal, a Board should have access to sufficient written information to reach an informed in principle decision to explore or reject merger, group structure or partnership. Information provided at the first stage should include written proposals with enough material to allow the Board to consider the over-arching suggested intent of a combined business or partnership and the strategic and practical implications for their respective organisations.
- 5** Boards should ensure they have, or have access to, specific skills and experience necessary to objectively evaluate the merits, or otherwise, of mergers or partnership proposals.
- 6** No Board member or members of the Executive should behave in a way which could frustrate due consideration of the first-stage proposal by the whole Board. This includes failure to present or discuss proposals with the board, dismissal of an offer without due consideration, or withholding information that is integral to a decision.
- 7** A Board's decision on a first-stage proposal should be documented and communicate
- 8** Once a first stage proposal has been agreed by the Board, a process and timetable for the next step should be agreed in writing by both parties.
- 9** Following approval of the first-stage proposal and intent to proceed, an outline business case should be prepared which will include disclosure of financial and non-financial undertakings and target efficiencies undertakings to be realised as part of the merger proposal.
- 10** Boards which adopt the voluntary code will declare this each year in their financial statements. Boards will seek to keep a record of any activity under the code including any proposals reviewed or submitted, along with the outcome of these.

HMM Stats

In the 12 months to September 2015, private rental prices increased in each of the English regions. The largest increases were in London (4.1 per cent) followed by the South East (2.7 per cent) and the East (2.7 per cent)

Right to rent checks: what they mean for landlords

From 1 February 2016, all private landlords in England will have to make 'right to rent' checks on their new tenants, or face prosecution for failing to do so.

The new checks are being introduced as part of the government's reforms to the immigration system. Landlords will have to check that tenants have the right to be in the UK. Failure to do so could be costly and result in fines of up to £3,000 if the tenant does not have the right to stay.

For private landlords this means they need to make checks if they:

- Have a lodger
- Are sub-letting a property and/or
- Are an agent appointed by a landlord to make right to rent checks.

The requirements on landlords are largely administrative but they will take time to complete and could cause delays in letting properties, if they are not completed efficiently and in the 28 days before the tenancy starts.

The Home Office has advised landlords to make the checks using the following four-step guide:

- 1- Check adult tenant(s) will live in the property as their only or main home;
- 2- Ask the tenant(s) for the original document(s) that show they have the right to be in the UK and the date has not expired;

- 3- Check the documents are valid with the tenant present – this includes checking the tenant(s) looks like any photographs contained in documents and that the same date of birth is consistently used; and
- 4- Make and keep copies of the documents (for up to 12 months) and record the date you made the check.

"The new checks are being introduced as part of the government's reforms to the immigration system. Landlords will have to check that tenants have the right to be in the UK. Failure to do so could be costly and result in fines of up to £3,000"

Any queries about the process or a prospective tenant's immigration status should be checked with the Home Office.

All tenants with tenancy agreements for privately rented accommodation after 1 February 2016

will be checked by a landlord or agent to make sure they have the right to rent. Tenants who sub-let their room will also need to make 'right to rent' checks.

Landlords will need to see certain documents, which prove that their tenant has the right to be in the UK. Acceptable documents include:

- UK passport
- EEA passport or identity card
- Permanent residence card or travel document showing indefinite leave to remain
- Home Office immigration status document and
- Certificate of registration or naturalisation as a British citizen.

Landlords who do not make the checks can be fined up to £1,000 for a first offence and up to £3,000 for further offences, if they rent out a property to someone who is in the UK illegally

HMM Stats

There were 27 million households in the UK in 2015, 35 per cent of all households were two person households and 7.7 million people were living alone

New Novus bungalows for Bonington Road residents

Two brand new bungalows have replaced several neglected garages on Bonington Road in Mansfield, after Novus Property Solutions delivered on a high-profile contract for Mansfield District Council.

The project involved the stripping back of vegetation and the removal of garage bases in order to build a retaining wall and two large, single-storey, two-bedroom properties in traditional brick with tiled roofs.

Novus Property Solutions worked with the council to construct the new homes and provided hard and soft landscaping to the scheme.

Both bungalows have been built according to the design criteria of the Lifetime Homes guidelines, to ensure the homes can be easily adapted for lifetime use, at minimal cost.

One of the properties is wheelchair accessible, and features adjustable height worktops, sink and hob in the kitchen, carefully placed light switches, and level access.

Valued at £350,000, the building works began in September 2014, with tight constraints on the multi-skilled operatives from Novus, who delivered the project with a minimum of disturbance to the residents of a highly populated area.

Rob Purser, strategic housing manager at Mansfield District Council, said: "It was vital that the delivery of this scheme caused the minimum of disturbance to the Bonington Road residents, and it is to the credit of the Novus team that both the quality of the work and the manner in which it was carried out were of a high standard.

"Novus' experience in delivering accessible homes made the company an obvious choice to carry out the work, and we are delighted with the outcome."



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Public consultation shows big majority back tough action against rogue landlords

Government proposals to crack down hard on rogue private sector landlords have received strong backing from the public. Over 90 per cent of respondents supported the proposal to set up a blacklist of persistent rogue landlords and letting agents. While a further 85 per cent agreed with the penalties proposed for breaching a banning order.

Similar levels of support (in the mid to high 80s) were given for proposals to establish rent repayment orders where landlords have illegally evicted a tenant or have breached a statutory notice.

Only a slightly smaller number supported the setting up of stringent 'fit and proper person' tests that would assess whether people could become landlords.

The government published a technical discussion paper *Tackling rogue landlords and improving the private rental sector* in the summer and received a healthy 615 responses from organisations and individuals across the housing sector.

"The private rented sector is an increasingly important part of the housing market, housing 4.4 million households in England, and it is going through a period of sustained growth as many potential first-time buyers struggle to afford their first home"

Media spotlight

The consultation coincided with investigations by various media and lobbying groups which also highlighted the following:

- Private landlords are receiving £5.6 billion in rent for homes that do not meet legal standards
- At least £1.3 billion of this is paid for by the state in housing benefit
- Over 2,000 landlords have been prosecuted in the last eight years for letting out homes that

pose a severe threat to tenants' health

- The CAB has said it believes that 740,000 families in the English private rent sector are living in homes that present a severe threat to the occupants' health and
- According to a report in the Times, the housing charity Shelter has put the number of people living in accommodation that is unfit for human habitation or where the landlord exploits or harasses them at more than 250,000.

The very high levels of support for tough action against the small minority of criminal landlords who rent out unsafe and overcrowded properties and who exploit their tenants, should encourage Ministers to proceed with enacting measures in the Housing and Planning Bill, currently making its way through Parliament.

"We are determined to crack down on these landlords so that they either improve the service they provide or leave the sector," said a government spokesman. The paper also invited views on how best to address the problem of abandonment, where a tenant does a moonlight flit leaving the landlord uncertain over their right to repossess.

However, the government appears to be set against the introduction of a national licensing scheme for private sector landlords in England although such a measure is being introduced in Wales.

The private rented sector is an increasingly important part of the housing market, housing 4.4 million households in England, and it is going through a period of sustained growth as many potential first-time buyers struggle to afford their first home.

While the overall quality of privately rented housing has improved in the past decade with surveys showing that 84 per cent of private renters are satisfied with their accommodation, complaints continue to be raised with certain landlords who act illegally and darken the name of the whole sector.

Tough measures

The new Bill includes the following new provisions:

- The introduction of a database of landlords and letting agents who have been convicted of certain criminal offences
- Banning landlords and letting agents from renting out property where they have been

convicted of particularly serious offences

- A more stringent 'fit and proper' person test for landlords letting out licensed properties, such as Houses in Multiple Occupation, to help ensure that they have the appropriate skills to manage such properties and do not pose a risk to the health and safety of their tenants
- Enabling local authorities to issue civil penalty notices with fines of up to £5,000 as an alternative to prosecution for certain breaches of housing legislation, with revenue from penalties to be retained by the local authority
- Extending Rent Repayment Orders of up to 12 months' rent to cover situations where a tenant has been illegally evicted, the landlord has breached a banning order or has failed to rectify a serious health and safety hazard in the property. Local authorities would be permitted to retain that money for housing purposes where the rent was paid through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit
- A data sharing power to require Tenancy Deposit Protection schemes to make available data to local authorities to help them to develop a better picture of the size and scale of the private rented sector in their area and help identify and tackle rogue landlords and
- A new process for abandoned tenancies which would enable a landlord to recover a property without the need to go to court, where the tenant is eight weeks in arrears with their rent.

The government wants to support good landlords who provide decent well maintained homes, and avoid further regulation on them. Unnecessary regulation increases costs and red tape for landlords, and can stifle investment. It also pushes up rents and can reduce the choice for tenants.

HMM Stats

An additional 186,000 new homes were provided in the year to September – the highest annual increase since 2008

Hugh growth in student housing interest

An unprecedented jump in the funding of student housing has taken place as institutional investors pile in. During the first half of the year at least £4 billion was invested in the sector.

One of the biggest student landlords in the country, the Unite Group is still rapidly growing its business. The business already manages 45,000 student bedspaces and when they announced their half year results, profits had risen by 45 per cent and its dividend payment shot up by 150 per cent.

On the new money coming into the student

accommodation sector, Unite said: "A series of large portfolios have been sold to new or relatively new entrants to the sector."

They added that the majority of new investments have been supported by international capital from institutional and private equity investors. The reported yields on these transactions ranged from 4.5 per cent for central London schemes to 5.7 per cent for provincial locations.

These returns look very attractive and are likely to encourage further interest from pension funds and other financial institutions.

Shipping containers could be a futuristic, low-cost solution for many of our housing problems

In the past pre-fabricated bungalows and houses were used (as a not-so temporary) solution to the country's post-war housing shortage. Next, we could be turning to shipping containers as part of the fix.

Although the developers are calling them modular developments, it is clear that the accommodation is based on shipping containers. But anyone who thinks these are tin boxes with inherent problems needs to suspend their belief and be prepared to think outside of the box.

One of the country's major repair and maintenance contractors, Mears, has teamed up with Snoozebox to produce a novel and versatile form of temporary housing, which is low cost, quick to assemble and with many of the on-going maintenance needs designed out from the start.

Based on a successful concept already being used for hotels, the new constructions comply with all building regulations, heating and space standards with insulation and anti-mould properties applied before the containers are brought to site.

Alternatives to B&B

The Mears – Snoozebox partnership is currently working together on two projects to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people in the London Borough of Ealing. Here they will provide an alternative to other forms of temporary accommodation, such as expensive Bed & Breakfast hotels, with occupants staying for between six and 20 weeks before they move on to more permanent housing.

They are also working on another eight proposals for different London boroughs, with the indicative rents all coming in below the Local Housing Allowance figures used for assessing housing benefit eligibility. Other developments are planned at locations as far afield as the Eden project in Cornwall and at Aberdeen in north

east Scotland.

The modular developments are currently provided in one, two and three bed units of accommodation. The containers can be stacked up to three storeys high and could be ideal for vacant, boarded up plots, awaiting development. The containers can be clad in a variety of exteriors. In Ealing they are using timber cladding, but on other sites a brick skin has been used.

Planners' requirements and our scepticism of new solutions are seen as two of the biggest obstacles to their widespread use. But there is no reason why the modular developments could not be used as housing for students, young professionals or other groups who face being priced out of traditionally high-cost locations.

Versatility

Their versatility is shown by some recent and new uses:

- As a boutique hotel at Silverstone race track, the London Olympics in 2012 and the Glastonbury music festival and
- An accommodation block for oil and gas workers in the South Atlantic.

The converted containers can be brought to site on lorries and are then lifted in by cranes. As an example of their speed and versatility, Snoozebox say they can build an 80-bed hotel in five days and at the end of their required use, they can be removed in just three days.

All that is needed is a cleared site and access to utilities and services. The current housing model that Mears and Snoozebox are working on requires a five to 10 year lease for the site. At the end of the lease, the structure is dismantled and removed from site. They are easy to manage and maintain, with day to day running costs kept to a minimum.

USAF and LSAV quarterly valuation update

The Unite Group plc, the UK's leading developer and manager of student accommodation, announced the quarterly property valuation of the Unite UK Student Accommodation Fund ('USAF') and the London Student Accommodation Joint Venture ('LSAV') as of 31 December 2015.

By 31 December 2015, USAF's property portfolio was independently valued at £2,074 million representing a like-for-like increase of 2.3 per cent during the quarter and 13.9 per cent over the full year. The portfolio comprises 26,813 beds in 75 properties across 24 university towns and cities in the UK.

LSAV's investment portfolio was independently valued at £738 million, up 2.5 per cent on a like-for-like basis in the quarter and 17.4 per cent over the full year. LSAV's investment portfolio comprises 4,636 beds across 12 properties in London and three properties in Edinburgh.

These increases in valuations have been driven primarily by rental growth and six basis points of yield compression in USAF and 10 basis points of yield compression in LSAV on a like-for-like basis in the quarter (65 and 81 basis points respectively over the full year). The overall USAF portfolio is now valued at an average yield of 5.7 per cent and LSAV's portfolio at 5.0 per cent.

Events

Landlord Investment Show
24 February, London
2 March, Colchester
16 March, Brighton
13 April, Croydon
www.landlordinvestmentshow.co.uk

BPF Residential Investment Dinner & Conference
8 - 9 February, London
www.bpf.org.uk/events

Landlord & Letting Awards
12 February, Manchester
www.landlordawards.co.uk

The Leadership Summit
24 February, London
www.housing.org.uk

CIH Scotland Annual Conference & Exhibition
1 - 2 March, Edinburgh
www.cih.org/events

Property Repairs Course
8 March, Manchester
15 March, London
12 May, Leeds
www.rla.org.uk

Ecobuild
8 - 10 March, London
www.ecobuild.co.uk

Landlord & Letting Show
9 - 10 March, London
20 April, Liverpool
8 June, Manchester
13 July, Leeds
www.landlordshow.info

National Affordable Housing Conference
10 March, London
www.affordablehousingevent.com

RESI Awards
11 May, London
www.resiawards.com

CIH Housing Conference & Exhibition
28 - 30 June, Manchester
www.cihhousing.com

RESI Conference
12 - 14 September, Newport
www.resiconf.com

NHF Annual Conference & Housing Exhibition
21 - 23 September, Birmingham
annual.housing.org.uk

Homes
16 - 17 November, London
www.homesevent.co.uk

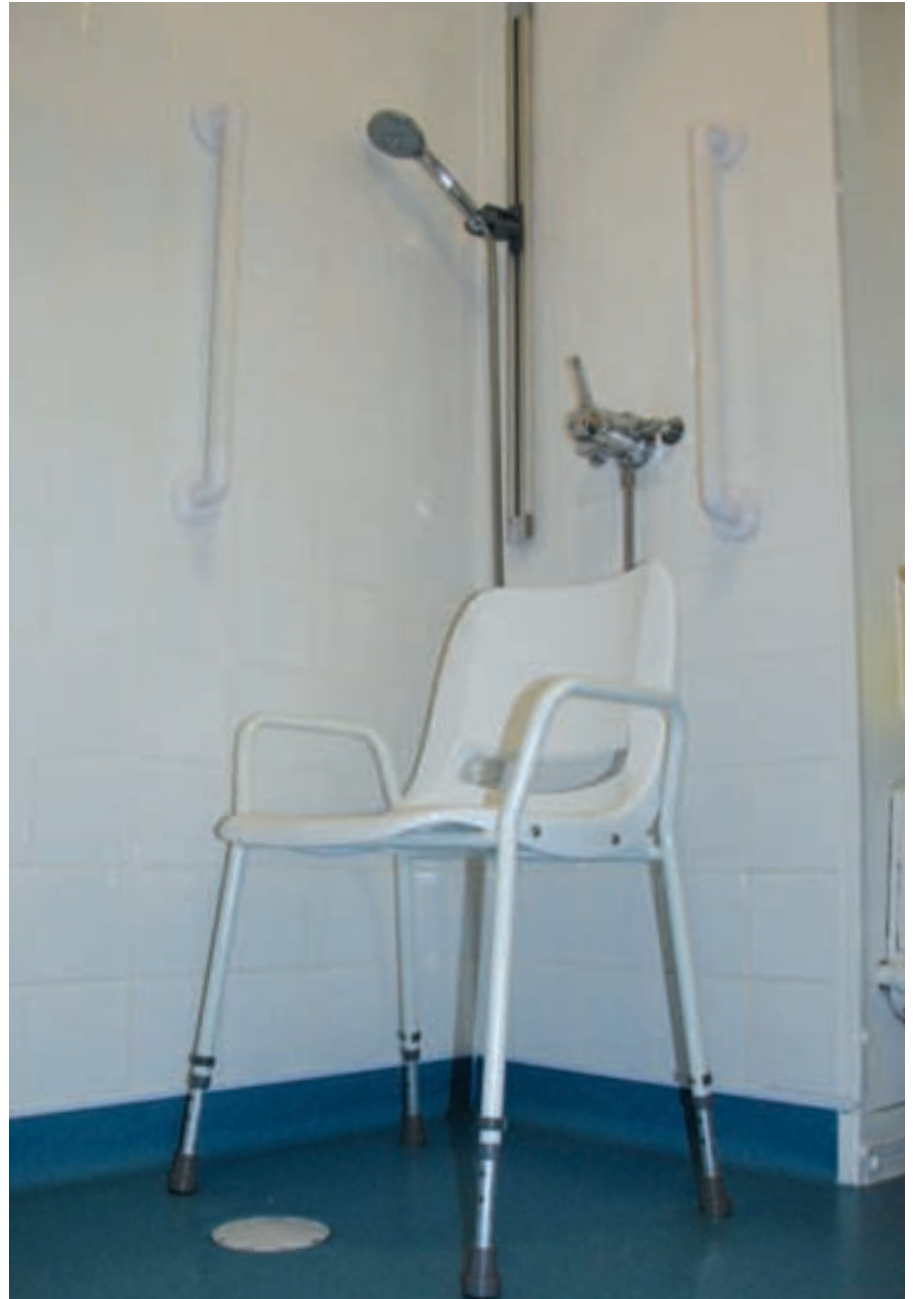
Occupational therapists: Creating accessibility in Decent Homes works

Since the inception of the Decent Homes Programme in 2000, occupational therapists (OTs) have been working alongside councils, social landlords, Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and contractors to make social housing suitable for people with disabilities, as Calido OT Services explains

The Decent Homes Programme has often relied on independent OTs, as they are not constrained by the issues of council OT teams who often have to contend with waiting lists, prioritisation of cases and eligibility for services. The Independent OT is able to provide assessments in a timely manner, which avoids delays in the programme.

Before bathrooms and kitchens are updated under the Decent Homes Programme, the residents will be visited by a resident liaison officer who will discuss all aspects of the work to be carried out. The resident or the staff member may feel at the meeting that the standard bathroom and kitchen design would not be suitable for the resident. Independent OTs are then commissioned to carry out assessments of needs relating to these two rooms. OTs will seek to identify the barriers that people face when using the amenities in their existing bathrooms and kitchens, and provide design input to create a more accessible environment. The proposed changes are called adaptations and not only benefit existing tenants, but also increase the social housing stock of accessible properties.

The bathroom and kitchen in our homes is the place where we carry out many essential daily living tasks. These rooms are often small in size and circulation space is limited. An elderly frail person who uses a walking frame to mobilise may find it difficult to manoeuvre their frame around in their bathroom and step into a bath. Instead of replacing the bath, as per the Decent Homes bathroom specifications, the OT may recommend a wet floor shower facility that increases the circulation space as well as enabling a step free entry to access a washing facility. The recommendations may also include the provision of a shower chair or a wall-mounted seat, a higher toilet, rails in the room to help with transfers and stability, and better lighting. With



“OTs will seek to identify the barriers that people face when using the amenities in their existing bathrooms and kitchens, and provide design input to create a more accessible environment”

safety in mind the OT will recommend slip resistant flooring, which is laid across the whole bathroom flooring and integrates the showering area with the rest of the room. For people with visual impairments, features such as colour

contrasting tiles and a shower unit with tactile buttons are incorporated into the design. To segment the showering area, a weighted full-length shower curtain is recommended, as this is easily moved aside to



enable better access. If a carer's assistance is needed, then the OT may recommend a half-height shower door and half-length shower curtain to enable a carer to assist without getting wet.

To prepare a meal and make full use of the kitchen, we have to physically bend, stretch to reach into cupboards and carry heavy pots from the oven onto a worktop. These movements are more challenging for people with disabilities. If food preparation is difficult, then the disabled person may end up relying on microwave ready meals, takeaways or meal deliveries. OTs will discuss the difficulties with the person and the options to resolve the problem. Recommendations for kitchen designs can include pull down baskets in wall units, more drawers rather than cupboards, carousels in corner units, built-in oven housing units, pull out ladders and window winders. If the person has not cooked for some time, but is motivated to do so, then the OT will recommend a referral to the local reablement services.

The bespoke design features of the adaptations are discussed with the resident and the OT ensures that they understand the changes to the home. Making the bathroom and kitchen an easier place for people to move around and use the facilities enables social housing residents to be more independent and safer in their homes. The adaptations funded through the Decent Homes Programme help to not only reduce care costs, as residents no longer require assistance with bathing or cooking, they also reduce the strain on the local authority adaptation budget. Adaptations enable people to remain in the homes where they may have lived for many years and are reluctant to be rehoused, which can also be a lengthy process. Adaptations can also prevent or delay costly residential placements.

Case example

Mrs Veasey lives in a housing association property in east London and has several health problems which have results in reduced mobility. She lives in a one bedroom property on the ground floor. Mr Veasey was recently assessed by an OT from Calido OT services who recommended a wet floor shower facility to replace the bath as she was not able to use the bath lift provided some time ago.



“OTs will discuss the difficulties with the person and the options to resolve the problem. Recommendations for kitchen designs can include pull down baskets in wall units, more drawers rather than cupboards, carousels in corner units, built-in oven housing units, pull out ladders and window winders”

Mrs Veasey's housing association installed a wet floor shower facility as per the OT recommendations. Mrs Veasey is now able to walk in and sit on the shower chair and access all the controls from a seated position. There are rails in the shower area to help with transfers and stability when Mrs Veasey stands up. Mrs Veasey stated she is happy with the adaptation, especially as she is now able to wash her hair in the shower.

OTs are trained to provide a therapeutic intervention that focuses on maximising

independence in activities of daily living. In keeping with the Care Act 2014, OTs give added value to their decent home assessments as they discuss alternative techniques and strategies for coping with the physical restrictions that a person with a disability may face and discuss health promotion. They also refer onto other agencies.

Independent OTs have played a small but crucial role in ensuring that the Decent Homes bathrooms and kitchens are fit for purpose for tenants who have a disability.

Editor's Product Focus



Croydex

Maximising space is high on the wish list of every consumer. Croydex offers a solution with its stylish yet practical bathroom cabinets. The range features a mix of designs and finishes. Many feature mirrored doors, ideal for inspiring customers looking to make the most of their existing space. These cabinets are easy to install using the patented Hang 'N' Lock fixing system. The strong but lightweight bracket is fixed to the wall, which means no more struggling to measure distances and mark screw holes while trying to support a heavy cabinet.

Space Savers

Based on the standard Space Savers product T10/WM mini kitchen, this recently refurbished offices on Tanner Street SE1, in the shadow of The Shard, demanded a more individual finish to sit comfortably. Space Savers worked closely with ABS Contracts on the final product specification, delivering this subtle grey powder coat finish with soft close doors, a refrigerator with four star ice box and a stainless steel finish microwave with grill to complete the designer look. Space Savers is the big name in small kitchens.

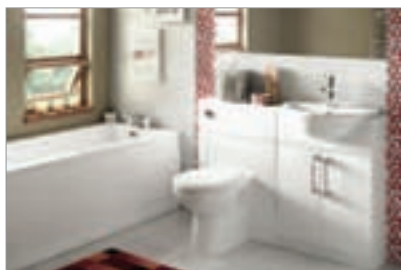


Sky Garden

Sky Garden is one of the UK's leading suppliers and installers of green roof systems. The company is an expert in the growing, installation and maintenance of any living roof. Sky Garden install and maintain thousands of square metres of green roofs every year. Its dedicated team focuses on delivering an efficient service and high quality products with biodiversity and sustainability at the core of the business. Sky Garden's highly skilled maintenance team can keep your green roof looking great throughout the year.

EnviroVent

EnviroVent will be launching its exciting new energiSava 200 heat recovery product at Ecobuild 2016. The company will also be showcasing its innovative new Aug Vent app, which uses Augmented Reality to enable an interior designer or specifier to clearly visualise what an extract fan would look like in the home. Rebecca McLean, Marketing and Product Director at EnviroVent, said: "Ecobuild is an important exhibition for us as we extend our business further into the new build sector."



Lecico

Lecico has been manufacturing ceramic since 1959 and offer a versatile range of sanitaryware suitable for any type of commercial and domestic bathroom. The company's range includes a raft of cloakroom, semi recessed and vanity basin with fitted or modular furniture to suit. It has an equally impressive range of WC's, bidets and urinals including rimless options and comfort height models too. Many of these products are in suite collections or you can mix and match individual items to tailor to a specific project.

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 roof 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.



The rental industry in 2015: 12 months of increasing rents



Stating that private renting across the UK is getting more and more expensive is an understatement. There has been a dramatic rise in demand for double bedrooms among other factors fuelling this out of control housing bubble. In fact, according to the 2015 Rental Index compiled by EasyRoommate, there is a worsening supply and demand imbalance, especially in London, where 10 room seekers are fighting for one available bedroom. If we compare 2015 with 2013 (5.8 seeker per one room), we can see that the demand increased by more than 40 per cent.

How much would you have to fork out to rent a double bedroom on average, in the UK?

To rent a double bedroom in the UK, you would have to spend £492 pm in 2015, an increase of 13 per cent (£57pm) compared to 2014 where the rent was £435 pm. The upward trend is mirrored in London, the most expensive city in the UK. Renting in London will certainly leave a burning hole in your pockets with rents on average £700 pm in 2015 representing an increase of 8 per cent (£54) from 2014. London isn't the only city affected by a spiralling increase in rent. Birmingham saw its average rent increase go from £358pm in 2014 to £381pm in 2015, a gain of more than 6 per cent. Manchester's rent also surged by 7 per cent, reaching £393 in 2015.

How much are renters willing to pay for a double bedroom in the UK?

Professionals, who represent more than 50 per cent of renters, are willing to pay £534 pm for a double bedroom in 2015 in comparison to £483 pm in 2014. In fact, they are willing to pay 9 per cent (£42pm) more than average UK rent price. Students, who are facing tough competition in the rental market from professionals, obviously have less income and are willing to pay just £479pm in 2015. Even though their budget is limited, it represents an increase from 2014 where they

were only willing to pay £420 pm. Retirees who make up 0.5 per cent of Private Renters have a greater budget compared to that of students: £476pm, a massive jump from 2014 where their budget was limited to £387 pm.

What were the top most expensive areas to rent a flat in 2015?

1. London	£700pm
2. Oxford	£578pm
3. Surrey	£562pm
4. Cambridge	£543pm
5. Reading	£511pm
6. Aberdeen	£494pm
7. Edinburgh	£450pm
8. Bournemouth	£442pm
9. York	£403pm
10. Southampton	£398pm

What were the top 10 least expensive areas to rent a flat in 2015?

1. Belfast	£283pm
2. Bradford	£322pm
3. Sunderland	£326pm
4. Swansea	£327pm
5. Bolton	£329pm
6. Stoke-on-Trent	£332pm
7. Preston	£340pm
8. Leicester	£342pm
9. Cardiff	£345pm
10. Leeds	£355pm

10 tips to keep heating costs down

Here are some top tips from the NHBC, the leading standard-setting body and warranty provider for new homes, to help you save on your winter bills:

Reduce draughts – an important job as winter approaches is to make sure that your house does not have any unintended draughts. Floorboards and skirtings usually go ignored but cold air can easily filter through, so check for gaps and fill them in. Check to see if your letterbox is draughty, which can lead to cold hallways. Remember that openings for ventilation should not be blocked.

Bleed your radiators – trapped air or gas prevents hot water from heating your radiators fully, so if you have a radiator that is warm at the bottom but cool at the top, this could mean there is air in the system, which may require bleeding to ensure maximum efficiency of the heating system.

Thick curtains – these can help to protect your home from losing heat through windows. It's important to try to get as much sunlight into your home during the day as possible. But as soon as dusk falls, remember to close curtains to reduce the need for additional heating.

Keep radiators free – a common mistake often made is to place sofas in front of the radiators which can absorb the heat.

Cavity wall insulation – around a third of all the heat lost in an uninsulated home escapes through walls. So, if you own an older property, considering thermal insulation of cavity walls could save some money.

Loft insulation – insulating your loft is a simple, inexpensive and effective way to reduce energy waste. All new houses are fitted with loft insulation to meet the latest building regs, but an older property may need a top-up.

Loft hatches – energy loss through the loft hatch is often overlooked. Insulating the hatch and ensuring that an effective draught seal is in place will help to keep heat energy in.

Windows – energy-efficient glazing keeps your home warmer, allowing less heat to be lost. Double glazing is fitted as standard to new-build homes, but if your house is older, replacing windows could be a good investment as they help to keep warmth in.

Service your heating system – all central heating boilers should be serviced and safety checked at least once a year by a Gas Safe Registered engineer. If your boiler is old, then consider an upgrade. According to the Energy Saving Trust, a new A-rated condensing boiler can save up to £340 a year on heating bills.

Room temperature controls – thermostats should typically be set between 18°C and 21°C, but by installing thermostatic radiator valves you can set different temperatures in different rooms, according to individual preference.

High rise challenges for warmer and drier social housing

The original Decent Homes deadline may be long gone, but the challenge of ensuring that social housing stock meets current building regulations is ongoing for local authorities and housing associations. What's more, the need to upgrade sits alongside the demands of maintaining properties and carrying out pre-emptive works to avoid degradation or expensive emergency repairs.

Often, the process of upgrading social housing properties is co-ordinated with planned maintenance or repairs, and this has certainly been the case for a number of social housing blocks in Halifax. A rolling programme of re-roofing works has seen more than 434 flats operated by Pennine Housing refurbished under the Efficiency North Framework, improving both thermal performance with new insulation and water-tightness using a new waterproofing system from Firestone Building Products.

Deciding the spec

While the programme of works is significant, the scheme has not involved an architect because the refurbishment for each block comprises roofing upgrades only. In order to determine the specification, therefore, a performance specification was devised for all Efficiency North Framework social housing schemes and this was prepared by Pennine Housing's in-house maintenance department.

The job of selecting a product that could conform to the performance specification fell to roofing contractor, SBS Roofing, and the

company used its experience of high rise buildings to select the right approach.

Phil Redfearn, from SBS Roofing, explains: "Roofing schemes for taller buildings not only involve working at height considerations but also need to factor in the long-term performance of the waterproofing membrane to minimise maintenance and extend replacement intervals. That calls for a robust system with good compatibility with the substrate and excellent adhesion to avoid uplift."

SBS worked with the technical team at Firestone to develop the specification and test the chosen system prior to beginning work on site.

"The need to upgrade sits alongside the demands of maintaining properties and carrying out pre-emptive works to avoid degradation or expensive emergency repairs"

Firestone developed a detailed specification to address the performance specification criteria and SBS tested it on isolated sections of each roof to ensure compatibility and anti-uplift.

John McMullan from Firestone comments: "The benefit of a performance spec is that it puts



product decision making in the hands of a roofing expert. Working with the supplier in this way ensures that the roofing contractor has all the support required to match the roofing system to the building and, in this case, complete a project with a design life of at least 40 years."

Low rise

The first blocks to be re-roofed under the scheme were in the Elland area of Halifax. Calder House, Croft House, Portland House and Coniston House are all six storey blocks on the same social housing estate, with an existing mastic asphalt roof.

While the roofs were not yet failing, the decision to install new insulation to improve the buildings' thermal performance made a warm roof overlay the most appropriate best value approach.

PIR insulation board was adhered to the prepared asphalt surface. The membrane was cut to size prior to installation and adhered directly to



“While the roofs were not yet failing, the decision to install new insulation to improve the buildings’ thermal performance made a warm roof overlay the most appropriate best value approach”

the insulation using Firestone’s solvent based contact adhesive. All joints were sealed with a 75mm overlap.

On each of the four buildings, SBS cut the membrane to form details around a large number of ventilation outlets and penetrations to ensure that all penetrations were fully sealed and completely waterproof.



High rise

The installation challenges at Ladstone Towers and Houghton Towers in Sowerby Bridge were multiplied, due to the fact that the blocks are 14 storeys and 46 metres tall.

However, the warm roof overlay methodology remained the same, with installation of the insulation onto the 650m² felt roofs and the adhered EPDM membrane.

Phil from SBS continues: “For the taller blocks,

sections of the membrane were cut at ground level and the seams were sealed on the roof.

“Installing smaller sections made it easier for our teams while working at height in windy conditions. It also made the membrane more convenient to transport to roof level using the goods hoist that was erected on the outside of the building for the duration works to prevent any disruption to tenants.”

Works were completed on all six blocks while

the homes were fully occupied and minimising disruption to tenants was another key factor in the specification.

John explains: “By choosing an EPDM membrane overlay, SBS were able to minimise disruption to tenants by avoiding the need for strip out or any hot works. The durability and proven longevity of EPDM also means that it delivers excellent whole-life costs and low maintenance benefits for Pennine Housing.”

Brochure for Helifix Dixie micro-piles

Helifix has produced a new 12 page technical brochure giving full details of its versatile, high performance, Dixie micro-piles, which are used to rapidly and cost-effectively stabilise buildings suffering from subsidence. The brochure looks at the benefits of using the innovative, simple, but extremely effective Dixie micro-pile system, with minimal disturbance to occupants and no spoil removal, and full technical specifications are provided. The main causes of subsidence are also examined and how, following detailed investigations, appropriate repairs are designed based on the damage, the weight of the individual property and the local ground conditions.



info@helifix.co.uk

Firms sales soar with Sentinel's guide

Highly regarded London-based plumbing firm, WPJ Services Ltd, has seen a significant increase in the take-up of water treatment services, boosting turnover and customer satisfaction as a result. The forward-thinking company has been utilising Sentinel's popular 'Homeowner's Guide to Water Treatment' leaflets to initiate and guide conversations with homeowners about the cost, energy and hassle-saving advantages of water treatment. WPJ Services reports that this approach has helped to convert around 70 per cent of customers to its water treatment services, with more than half going for a powerflush.



01928 704330 www.sentinelprotects.com

Dickies have 2016 covered

Dickies will be introducing a number of exciting new products and ranges for 2016, with style, functionality and quality being paramount. Dickies is focusing on its new ED24/7 trousers, which were launched late last year. Made from 245gsm fabric ensures they are tough but light enough to retain agility. Also new for this year are the Eisenhower Premium shorts which follow the popular Eisenhower premium trouser. Following on from the popular two tone range is the two-tone high visibility range, which includes a jacket, hoodie, trousers, t-shirt and waistcoat. Lastly is the Dickies Preston in black and brown, which is a steel-toe cap boot, with steel midsole.



01761 419419 www.dickiesworkwear.com

Everything showers from MX

MX Group's impressive 'one stop shop' range of shower and bathroom products continues to be welcomed by those looking for high quality, reliable products for new developments and refurbishment projects up and down the country.



The response to the new products added in the past 12 months – shower trays, electric showers, thermostatic showers, shower enclosures, taps and mixers and shower accessories – has been phenomenal. See the new 'MX Collection' catalogue, available in printed form or online by visiting the MX website.

01684 293311 www.mxgroup.com



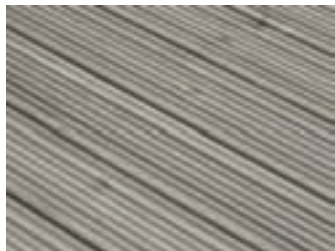
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Healthy insulation can naturally do more

SheepWool Insulation, 100 per cent Pure SheepWool Insulation and Acoustic Underlay products ideal for healthy living. The benefits of this insulation are quite unique, because not only can it insulate to a really high standard, but it can also absorb moisture and engage in air purification by way of taking in nasty chemicals like Formaldehyde and providing a healthy climate in any home/building. The insulation is easy to handle and simple to install. The acoustic range consists of a SilentJoist strip, a SilentFloor underlay (for under wooden flooring) and a SilentCarpet all ideal for noise reduction. SheepWool Insulation range 100 per cent pure, 100 per cent natural.



0871 218 5218 www.sheepwoolinsulation.com

7000 series of Digital Moisture Meters

The 7000 series of Moisture Meters, available from Electronic Temperature Instruments Ltd, are compact hand held digital moisture meters designed for building professionals and tradesmen to detect the moisture content in a variety of construction materials, timber, concrete plaster etc. The 7000 series moisture meters incorporate an easy to read 20-LED colour-coded scale which is synchronised with the units LCD to display current moisture levels; green for 'OK', amber for 'WARNING' or red for 'DAMP'. Two specific models are available, the 7000 with a remote probe, and the 7250 with an integral probe. Each unit is powered by three AAA batteries.



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The challenge of an ageing population

Examples of the 3D scanning that gives people a better idea of body shape



Dr David Usher, of InterAction of Bath, looks at the greatest challenge facing the housing, management and maintenance market for 45 years

Although three years have passed since the end of the default retirement age of 65, more than a million people in the UK over that age are in work, according to figures from the Department of Work and Pensions. The reasons people remain in the workplace will vary; from the economic necessity of doing so, to old habits that die hard, and for the simple reason that people enjoy the social activity of working. However, it also suggests a desire and determination among older citizens to remain

financially and socially independent for as long as they can.

This is something that should be encouraged. We are a rapidly ageing society, and as such we need to prepare for the inevitable and undeniable growth in our senior population. The consequences of not preparing now are dire and expensive.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recently warned that within the next 15 years, 24 countries –

including the UK – will become 'super-aged', having more than 21 per cent of the population aged 65 or over. This will put an increased strain on welfare and health services that the country as a whole is only now starting to come to terms with. The focus is now on how to afford this demographic change, with the care industry warning that it is already starting to collapse under the strain. When the care industry can truly no longer cope, the problem will be transferred to the NHS. This is not a good vision for the future.

And yet it seems society is failing to square the circle. Many older people want to remain independent, and as long as they can do so, they are not being a strain on services. Quite the opposite, they are still contributing.

So what has this to do with housing management and maintenance, beyond running care homes?

“Many older people want to remain independent, and as long as they can do so, they are not being a strain on services. Quite the opposite, they are still contributing”

Quite simply, the issue here is the inevitable expense and inconvenience of converting existing housing stock to be more 'aged-friendly', while also ensuring that new designs incorporate 'aged-friendly' features.

There is a precedent that points to how difficult, inconvenient, and expensive this transformative process can be. In 1970, the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act first required the needs of disabled people to be considered in the design of public buildings. Prior to this, the basic needs of disabled people were widely disregarded. But the introduction of the Act forced society to embark on an extensive programme of retrospective improvement work that saw essential infrastructure such as wheelchair access ramps and disabled toilets shoehorned into buildings to ensure they were compliant. Today, nobody can deny that the

Continued overleaf...





programme to make buildings suitable for disabled people was necessary and desirable.

The substantial cost of this programme was largely carried by the owners and occupiers of the buildings that needed rectification. The lucky ones were those few who, by accident or design, owned or occupied buildings that were 'future-proofed' by already being disability-friendly and therefore required minimal rectification work.

For designers, the Act and subsequent legislation informed their new and future designs. This of course is more cost-effective and helps to ensure designs are not only more cohesive and efficient, but it also means the design aesthetic is preserved. Too many architects and building owners had balked at the prospect of

“The challenge of adapting buildings and environments to enable independent living will rely on accurate information about the elderly. What size are they? How far can they stretch? What weight can they lift? How mobile are they? How well can they see?”

retrospectively adding ramps and other infrastructure to their previously precious designs.

So here we are, 45 years later, finding ourselves facing the even greater challenge of an increasingly aged population. Have we learned any lessons from the experience?

It would be foolish to assume that there will never be future legislation introduced that insists on buildings being made more suitable for older people. It is almost certainly another inevitability. The question is not 'if', but 'when'. The economic argument will be the driver behind legislation, as the more older people are enabled to remain independent, the lower the cost to society for care.

The challenge of adapting buildings and environments to enable independent living will rely on accurate information about the elderly. What size are they? How far can they stretch? What weight can they lift? How mobile are they? How well can they see? These are difficult questions to answer as there is a historic shortage of information about older people, certainly in relation to how they interact with the modern world.

Ergonomists are embracing the first step of this challenge and are now developing databases of anthropometry – the sizes and shapes of people –

using new technology such as 3D scanners. From such research a knowledge base of anthropometric data is being compiled that will be invaluable in informing the design and planning of all environments, whether new build or refurbishment.

Another technique ergonomists use is 'link analysis' – observing a task in situ and recording the physical movements it requires. For example, to make a cup of tea, a person might move from the work surface, to the cupboard, to the sink, to the fridge, and back to the work surface. The designer of the kitchen can then position these items to minimise the distance travelled. When combined, anthropometric data and link analysis provide a powerful knowledge base from which design can be informed to produce highly effective environments suitable for all, not just for older people.

And therein lies the key to ultimate efficiency. The choice is either one of adapting environments to suit the older person's abilities, or instead to develop environments that are suitable for all, regardless of age. For building owners, managers and developers, the commercial advantage should be obvious. The property that is future-proofed and 'age-ready' will be inherently more useful and valuable.



Pressalit Care PLUS range selected

Delivering the highest standards of accessibility through advanced design and technology led Blackwood Homes and Care to the Pressalit Care bathroom PLUS range for its new Concept House. The Pressalit Care PLUS track system sets new standards in accessible bathroom design.



Combining flexibility with functionality, the unique system of vertical and horizontal tracks offers new and improved height and horizontal adjustment, enabling the layout of the bathroom to be future-proofed against both the long-term changing needs of individual users, as well as the multiple needs of different users.

0117 904 0173 www.pressalit.com

Achieving value with budget constraints

Housing and care providers are being offered a practical and cost-effective solution to ensuring client care can continue to be delivered despite budget cutbacks, through a practical approach from Clos-o-Mat. The company, one of Britain's leading suppliers of disabled toileting solutions, has a unique service and maintenance package for local authorities and housing associations. For less than 50p/day, Clos-o-Mat equipment will be regularly serviced to optimise its efficiency and functioning, and, in the rare event there is a problem, the company will send one of its team of in-house, dedicated service engineers within 48 hours of notification to resolve the issue.



0161 969 1199 www.clos-o-mat.com

Fight condensation with ClimaGuard®

Water condensation on windows is a problem that inevitably affects many modern houses and apartments in autumn. Condensing water not only looks unappealing, but also can affect visibility. The choice of ClimaGuard® Dry by Guardian's Glass Group in Europe is a way to get rid of "steamy windows" while maintaining excellent insulating properties. The product's advantage lies in its innovative coating that allows it to effectively fight the phenomenon of "steamy windows". Field tests conducted by Guardian in real weather conditions show that the average duration of water condensation on ClimaGuard Dry glass is just one hour.



0800 032 6322 www.guardian.com

The Specifiers Guide from Sheerframe

An informative new Specifiers Guide has been published by Sheerframe Ltd, to provide a handy product specification reference source for use by architects and designers, residential or commercial building applications, trade fabricator partners and professional window industry installers. The new Specifiers Guide summarises the calcium organic stabilised PVC-U window and door product range with Sheerframe 8000, Sheerframe 7000 and Sheerframe 6000 options clearly presented and thermal performance detailed for the most popular profile and insulated glass configurations, which are capable of delivering U-values as low as 0.8 W/m²K.



01623 443200 www.synseal.com



Yeoman Shield launch new products

Already the manufacturer, supplier and installer of a comprehensive range of wall & door protection products, Yeoman Shield have expanded their range of Guardian Handrails. Incorporating the original and improved Guardian Handrail this new group of rails will also include the Guardian 50mm dia. Handrail, available in either a PVCu, Stainless Steel or Timber option and the Guardian Twin Handrail which has both an upper support rail coupled to a lower protection rail in one complete system. "We are aware that our standard wall and door protection packages very often go hand in hand with the requirement of a handrail system." "We want to be able to simplify things for our clients when specifying and procuring this group of materials and be in a position to offer them a complete and comprehensive package. It was for this reason that we have developed the New Guardian Handrails to complement our core market of wall and door protection products." Commented Yeoman Shield's Sales Director, Stuart Russell.

0113 279 5854 www.yeomanshield.com/new-handrails



Sika Plastix - the complete package

Sika products have been used in more than 80 of London's largest and most iconic landmarks including the Shard, the Pinnacle and the Gherkin. Everbuild – a Sika company – is pleased to be launching Sika Plastix – a new brand of silicone sealants perfect for window, door and roofline installers. Within the new brand is Sika® Plastix- 22A Premium Grade, a high quality product that is sure to be loved by installers. Providing excellent adhesion to most common substrates including plastic, glass, brick and wood, this product is ideal for glazing and roofline applications, with low-dirt pick up and anti-mould properties. CE certified for glazing, facade, cold climate and sanitary applications this really is a premium product you can rely on. Also within the range is Sika® Plastix- 48N Contractors Grade, a great alternative product. CE certified for facade, cold climate and sanitary applications this is a great lower cost alternative product you can still have confidence in. For more information on the full range of products, please visit the company website.

0113 240 2424 www.everbuild.co.uk

Achieving outstanding maintenance delivery

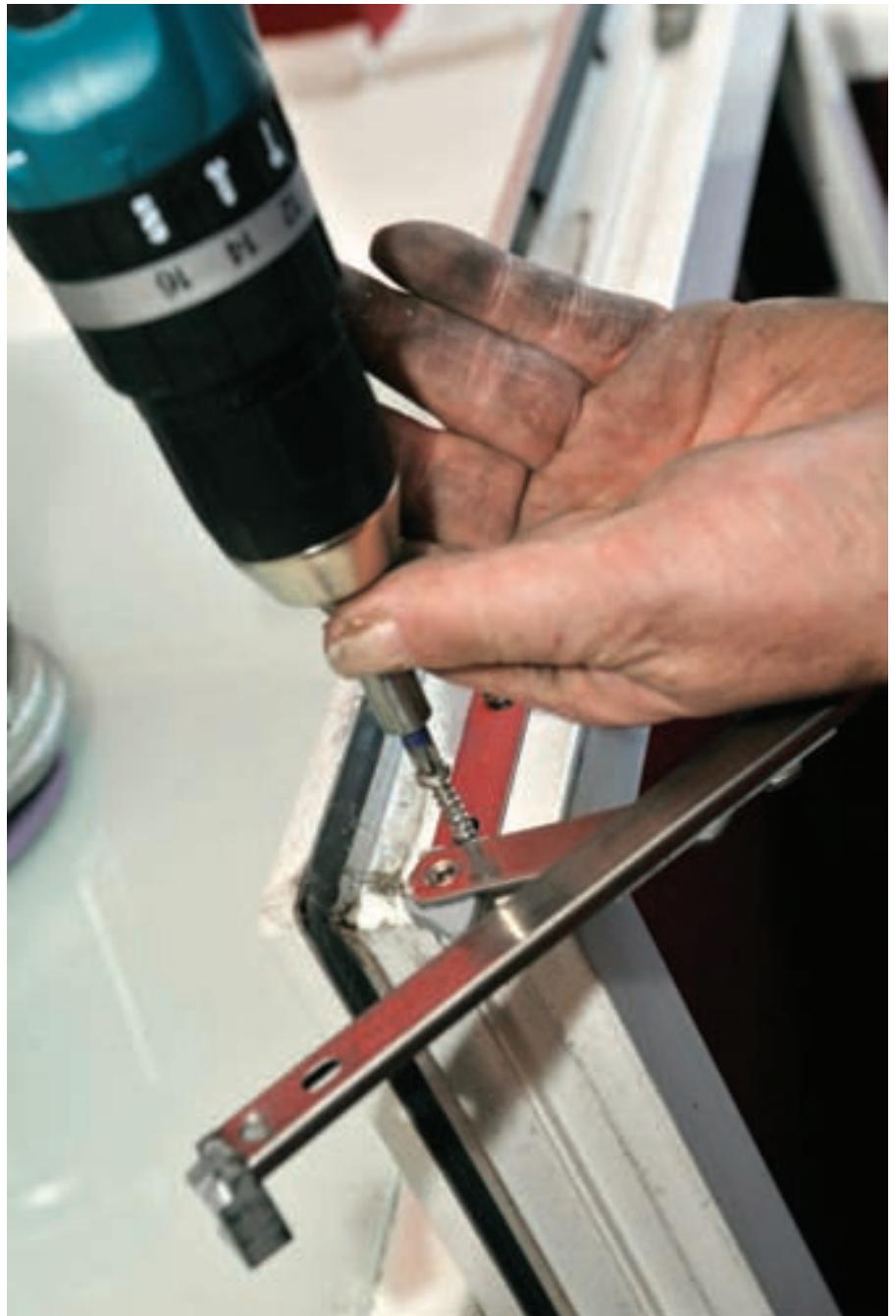
Repairs and maintenance are high on the agenda for discussion among the majority of housing association management teams. This is a consequence of the rent reduction scheme, the further threat to on-going income from the loss of properties under the latest Right to Buy scheme, and of other housing landlords being constantly under pressure to provide better and more cost-effective maintenance services to the residents whose homes they manage. Tristan Cooke – Managing Director of Mila Window and Door Maintenance – looks at how those in the sector can consistently deliver outstanding maintenance service levels

It is often the case that necessity drives a review of processes and procedures within companies in any field, who are about to see a shortfall in the revenue available to their clients, to spend on the services they provide as their business offering. This is certainly the case among those who provide maintenance services to the housing association sector with the very well documented issues it faces in terms of future revenue.

Indeed, there appears to have been an almost universal assumption that the reduction in revenue is going to fall on repairs and maintenance – perhaps this is politically expedient, an easy subject to focus on, in order to maximise the impact?

But, whether it is in the housing association sector, within local authorities, or among landlords of large scale commercial offices and other buildings, the issues remain the same. There is a desire – a need – to ensure that the delivery of repairs and maintenance services is outstanding at all times.

We must all remember the pressure that landlords always face, after all the customer is



“There is a desire – a need – to ensure that the delivery of repairs and maintenance services is outstanding at all times”

rightly king, and maintenance suppliers, whether external contractors or in-house providers, should never lose sight of this fact.

This is the start point on which all repairs and

maintenance providers should base their business processes – ‘what do we need to do to ensure that the customer experience is as perfect as it can be?’



There are on-site protocols of course which help businesses to support their 'customer care' offering – identifying oneself on arrival, working in a clean and tidy manner in the resident's home, explaining to them what work you have carried out and physically showing them what they need to do and, of course, making sure you ask for credible and meaningful feedback afterwards as a tool to monitor the performance of your business.

But, long before we get to the site, there are many processes which need to be in place in an organisation to ensure that we can perform as our 'customers' expect.

It is the responsibility of all businesses to ensure that staff, office based and on-site, are fully technically competent with the range of products and services they offer. It might sound obvious, but it isn't – staff who are involved in the ordering, supply, and delivery of products and services for repairs and maintenance must fully understand what they are dealing with. Delivering repairs and maintenance is not like taking a new product into a resident's home. For the most part, when we are asked to attend it is because the resident is already distressed or discomforted in some way. They will not be as forgiving of late or poor workmanship, delivery of the wrong parts, or any further delays, as they would be of a new installation of a product they don't currently have.

This takes us even further back into the process – the need to have procurement partners. Not suppliers, but genuine partners whose products we all fully understand and who in turn understands our business; a partner who delivers hands on and on-going training to our staff to ensure the maximum technical competency, and with whom we can work with over many years. In the case of the myriad number of window and door specifications which have been

“It is the responsibility of all businesses to ensure that staff, office based and on-site, are fully technically competent with the range of products and services they offer. It might sound obvious, but it isn't – staff who are involved in the ordering, supply, and delivery of products and services for repairs and maintenance must fully understand what they are dealing with”

installed and need repairing on a daily basis, this is especially important.

This is a requirement which allows us to understand what parts we need to order; not just because we know the part number, but because we have a genuine understanding of what is required to service a particular resident or client requirement.

The nature of these long term partnerships leads to the supply chain becoming extremely robust in practical terms, ensuring that we can deliver the correct products for the installations required of us by our customers when they need them.

These partnerships with the technical expertise they engender and the practical delivery of the correct goods they enable, then allows us to go on-site with our focus on the customer, confident that we can deliver the outstanding service they rightly demand.

The final part of the process is measurement. It's necessary to measure operational performance using a 'First Time Fix' methodology. 'First Time Fix' literally means what it says, measuring the number of repairs carried out on the first visit to the home of the resident.

Why is this important, and what does it actually tell us about how to operate a repairs and

maintenance business? Firstly, being able to complete a fix on the first visit puts an immediate end to the distress or discomfort of a resident. It means that we are not compounding their frustration – such as a door which doesn't lock or a window restrictor which has failed – by having to revisit twice or even three times – they are happy.

It confirms that staff understand the product requirements of the particular service call and that the supply chain is working to ensure the goods ready and available to attend on the appointed day to carry out the job. It confirms that all of the processes are working efficiently and it monitors performance in real time to ensure that service levels remain at their highest.

Finally, it acts as a measure of a company's operating efficiency, with the obvious financial benefits that brings to the service provider and their clients. It is an essential measure – an absolutely critical measure – which oversees the operational efficiency and suitability of the business model required for any repairs and maintenance business to be truly successful.

It is also a model which gives great confidence that if, as predicted, landlords do suffer reduced income for their repairs and maintenance budgets, it should not be an automatic given that their customers should suffer.

CMS helps deliver quality homes

CMS Window Systems has delivered an extensive housing upgrade programme which has transformed the lives of tenants and helped to reduce the risk of fuel poverty in more than 200 homes in Dunfermline.

The leading window, door and curtain walling manufacturer and installer, who also installs external wall insulation and cladding as part of comprehensive building envelope upgrade programmes, has completed the project at Broomhead Flats.

Following a tenants' consultation, residents favoured refurbishment and in May 2014 Fife Council's Housing and Communities Committee gave the go-ahead for this project to begin.

The multimillion pound improvement project has transformed 216 properties which are housed within the three 12-storey blocks. The building fabric has been brought up to a much higher thermal standard, utilising product technology which was simply not available in the 1960s. And that primarily involved the £5.1 million CMS contract for the replacement of windows, doors and curtain walling, application of external wall insulation (EWI) and replacing balconies.

CMS was able to help develop a specification

for the windows, and their appointment ensured consistent quality, trouble free interface integration and clear communication channels – all proving important to the success of this extensive refurbishment project.

Every flat now benefits from A-rated, highly insulating windows which are manufactured with Sheerframe lead-free PVCu profiles and feature thermally superior low-e softcoat double glazed sealed units. With a low U-value, the energy rating (WER) of these fully UK-made windows represents a huge improvement in thermal performance.

CMS also manufactured and installed aluminium curtain walling which spans up to eleven floors on each block, enclosing all communal walkways – equating to more than 2,000m² of curtain walling. The superior quality Metal Technology System 17 was chosen, fitted with low-e double glazed sealed units, and replaced existing steel balustrades and steel screens in communal areas to raise the quality and visual appeal of both interiors and exteriors.

A third component to the structural elements was the replacement of balcony enclosures on every property. This was also a significant undertaking completed by CMS with more than 1,700m² of enclosures across the three



blocks. More than 200 balcony enclosures were created using Windoor System 1000 balcony enclosures featuring 'Light' glazing systems.

Completing the transformation of the building fabric, CMS was also contracted to over-clad the external walls with a mix of insulated render and render only, as required. This work was carried out by CMS installers using mast climbers for safe access and to ensure speedy delivery with minimum disruption. With total wall coverage of more than 11,000m², this extensive over-cladding work has improved the insulation level of all walls to complement the performance of the windows, doors and curtain walling.

01324 841398

www.cmswindows.com

Synseal group supports BBC *DIY SOS*

Synseal group companies Masterdor Ltd and Sheerframe Ltd have helped Nick Knowles and the BBC *DIY SOS* team to transform properties in Manchester and create high quality homes suitable for British war veterans and local community residents. The *DIY SOS* team delivered its most ambitious project to date when it agreed to refurbish more than 60 houses in Manchester's New Street and Canada Street. Masterdor Ltd was delighted to supply 15 composite residential doors with Sheerframe outer frames on the project. Sheerframe Ltd provided PVC-U extrusions for energy-efficient windows in the 66 homes.



01623 443200 www.synseal.com

WarmCore video shows just how to do it

A WarmCore installation video is now available on YouTube, which details exactly how to fit a new "warm aluminium" folding sliding door. Featuring two highly experienced engineers from Synseal's Technical Services team, Gary Woods and Stuart Prescott, this informative eight-minute video shows the removal of an old inline sliding patio door and its replacement with a brand new 3-2-1 bi-fold door in popular RAL 7016 Grey finish. The production follows a step-by-step approach and handy captions are used to support the voice-over commentary and emphasize key details, such as recommended outer frame fixing points.



01623 443200 www.synseal.com

AluK systems specified for development

A site in East London has been demolished to make way for a new residential development. AluK systems were specified for the development of studios, one, two and three bedroom flats and four bedroom maisonettes. In addition, the development also contains a single three storey town house with its own private garden and street entrance. The project fabricator and installer chose AluK 58BW window system and 58BD and GT55 TB door systems for their slim sightlines and profile sizing which matched the developer's design intent. The project also followed SBD guidance to ensure that the development created a safe and accessible environment.



01633 810440 www.aluk.com

Global UPVC delivers the perfect remedy

More than 700 high quality windows and doors were supplied and installed by Global UPVC at a prestigious development on the historic Caerphilly Miners' Hospital site. All homes have Legend casement windows and French doors from long-standing local Synseal fabricator Global UPVC, whose Managing Director Jon Dowse credits much of the company's ongoing success in the commercial market to the Legend system. He said: "We use only Legend and have done for over ten years, so many of our clients keep coming back and inviting us to bid for more work that we can hardly keep up with the tenders. To me, that is the best possible commendation."



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MSO's or Specialist Contractors?



Tristan Cooke, Managing Director of Mila Window and Door Maintenance, considers the relative value of using Multi-Skilled Operatives against Specialist Contractors

In the interests of fairness I should say from the outset – our business is a specialist contracting business, and it is why I believe the use of multi-skilled operatives for repairs and maintenance programmes is not the right approach.

I do get the premise of 'Multi-Skilled Operatives' – to be able to enter a resident's home just once and complete a series of tasks is in theory at least a really good thing; anything which puts an end to the discomfort or distress of a resident is a good thing in my eyes. It is in fact one of the guiding principles of our business.

But what concerns me with MSO's is that they do not – indeed cannot – know the nuances of the products they are working on. This in turn leads to jobs not being completed to the best standard, and money being spent unwisely because it is more likely than not that there will be a repeat failure at some point.

It is not without good reason that the phrase 'jack of all trades, master of none' has been a part of the English language for over 500 years and has the negative connotations that it does.

As I mentioned at the outset, our business is a specialist business. We repair windows and doors in the social housing sector and have done so for nearly 30 years. In that time, we have completed well in excess of 1 million repairs, and we have honed our skills as a team to serve the residents of our clients to the highest standards.

At first glance it might not seem a complicated business proposition to change a handle on a window or a door, but that is actually not the case. As with everything there is a knack, but changing handles is the least of what we do. Much of our time is spent completely replacing hinges, locking mechanisms, weather seals, and glass units, and with all of these there is a requirement for technical knowledge – both in sourcing the correct specification of parts so that the window or door is fully returned to its original operating integrity – and in installing the parts.

We know from experience that there are over 300 specifications of window and door hardware in the UK social housing market, borne out of a relentless sales drive over many years by the companies who specialised in their production – and fair enough, that was the nature of the market.

But now most of those specifications are redundant and replacement parts are very much obsolete. That is where the skills of a specialist contractor come to the fore. We know when we visit a resident's home we



will be able to identify the parts that were fitted originally, and that we will be able to source and procure suitable 'fit for purpose' replacements.

We also know that we will be able to reinstall them correctly and to offer a new guarantee back to the client which extends the life of their asset, and that here is a controlled record keeping system to update the specification of the hardware which has been replaced.

Through the MSO route there is every danger that a handle is seen as just a handle, a lock as just a lock, and that the fullest extent of the job is to make a repair and keep the resident happy.

There are also potentially other more serious ramifications. Only recently we saw window restrictors in an elderly person's flat fitted wrongly which presented a genuine health and safety concern. Indeed, working in flats and

other high rise applications is the most dangerous place to get something wrong; it happens too regularly when skilled and trained operatives are not engaged and represents the most serious threat to resident safety.

Repairs and maintenance need to be about so much more than just getting the job done. It needs to be about giving genuine value for money – being able to call on robust supply chains to source 'fit for purpose' replacement products, having the skilled operatives available to install them correctly, about offering new guarantees to clients, and about helping them maintain an accurate and meaningful record of their stock.

Only specialist contractors have the processes in place and the will as the driving force of their business to deliver all this.

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Future-generation housing to come under the spotlight

Some of the most influential and outspoken names in the UK housing industry will present their visionary and powerful opinions at Ecobuild, the UK's largest show dedicated to construction and energy

The show will provide social and private rental professionals with access to the very latest, invaluable industry insights, trends and projections relating to all aspects of the profession through a mix of a high-level conference, CPD-accredited learning hubs and more than 800 exhibitors showcasing a wide range of new products, materials, solutions and services.

Day one of Ecobuild 2016 is the show's dedicated Homes day and explores the most pressing, divisive and important decisions the industry must take to deliver comfortable, efficient, resilient places and homes. Among the key questions to be addressed is 'What do new-build and retrofitted homes and communities need to deliver, and at what cost?'

Attracting more than 40,000 industry professionals from across the whole supply chain each year, Ecobuild is the leading exhibition and conference for the UK construction and energy market. The 2016 event will see an evolved proposition for the event to focus on areas of industry growth and market priorities such as housing, infrastructure, next generation innovation, technology and people.

Examining future housing needs

The backbone of Ecobuild's Homes day is provided by a provocative and controversial conference programme that covers property issues ranging from the need for high quality volume housing and commercial viability of ultra-low cost and low-energy homes, to the challenges of refurb and retrofit.

The programme embodies state-of-the-art design and construction, leaving no stone unturned to establish what our future housing



"The 2016 event will see an evolved proposition for the event to focus on areas of industry growth and market priorities such as housing, infrastructure, next generation innovation, technology and people"

needs are and what can be done to deliver them.

Chaired by broadcaster Cathy Newman, speakers include Tony Pidgley, Chairman of Berkeley Group; David Sheridan, Chief Executive of Keepmoat, and Rowan Moore, Architecture Critic for the Observer. All three will provide a unique and inspiring look at what makes good housing.

Professor Phil Jones, Chairman of Architectural Science at Cardiff University, is another of the day's dynamic speakers. Prof Jones led the team which developed SOLCER, the UK's first purpose-built, low-cost energy smart house which is capable of exporting more energy to the national electricity grid than it uses. The property

was built for a mere £100,000. Prof Jones' teaching and research activities cover a range of subjects in the field of energy use, environmental design and sustainability in the built environment.

With each session designed to give a glimpse at the future of housebuilding and home creation, Colin Usher, director of John McCall Architects, provides a presentation on "Living for Tomorrow", in which he offers common sense solutions to low-energy, cost-effective future living. In 2014, John developed a house which runs on a utilities bill of just £15 per year.

Adhering to the theme of future housing performance and how the UK industry can work together to deliver it, Timothy Wates, Director of Wates Group, offers his intriguing view on what form the next generation of housing will take as part of a talk on the challenges of refurb and retrofit.

Green challenges posed by UK-GBC

The UK Green Building Council (UK-GBC), Ecobuild's lead partner for 2016, will be addressing the future of the built environment.

Following the agreement of a new global deal

Continued on page 39...

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at the recent climate conference in Paris, UK-GBC will be explaining the role the private sector can play in helping ensure the pledges made are delivered.

UK-GBC Chief Executive, Julie Hirigoyen, will also pose five future challenges for the construction industry on each of the three conference days to a panel of industry leaders and future leaders, inviting them to respond with practical ideas on delivery.

UK-GBC will also provide more bite-sized 'SPARKS' content at the UK-GBC Lounge.

Ecobuild's essential educational offering

Ecobuild 2016 will feature six CPD-accredited learning hubs: Building Performance, Design, Energy, Build Circular, Infrastructure Revolution and Digital Building. A highly provoking seminar programme, it will provide visitors and exhibitors with the know-how to do their jobs better and the business case to help them make more informed decisions to address these challenges.

The programme will be delivered by industry leading figures and organisations including Archetype, Glenn Howells Architects, Marks & Spencer, British Land, Jones Lang LaSalle, BRE, Zero Carbon Hub and Willmott Dixon Energy Services.

Architecture and Next Generation

Ecobuild 2016 will focus on two further streams after the opening Homes day. The second day looks at Architecture, exploring the changing role of the architect, the importance of architecture

across the built environment, the need for change and some of the most interesting and inspiring architectural projects.

Day three is devoted to Next Generation and looks at how smart technology, changing demographics and wellness will drive design and construction in the future as well as how we will address the skills gap and attract young talent to the industry.

These streams are supported by a number of initiatives, including SMART @ Ecobuild, an area dedicated to exploring how smart technology is forging an ever-closer and controlled relationship between people and the environments we inhabit.

Driven by ever-increasing demand – with the global market for smart building technologies forecast to triple to £14 billion by 2019 – SMART @ Ecobuild places the latest technological advances in the hands of visitors.

The shortlist for Ecobuild's Big Innovation Pitch 2016, an initiative in partnership with Marks & Spencer to unearth innovation across the design, construction and energy sectors will be on display at the DISCOVER bar.

Each of the 15 shortlisted entries has been validated by a panel of judges and is vying for the opportunity to win a contract with M&S and roll their product/solution out in stores across the UK.

Just five finalists from this group will be invited to make a final pitch to the judges, including Chris Marney, Head of Engineering and Energy at



M&S, in a special conference session hosted by Rachel Riley from the Gadget Show and Countdown, on day three of the conference, before the overall winner is announced.

Reflecting the construction industry, Ecobuild is constantly evolving; ensuring that it continues to provide relevant, dynamic content and create opportunities to make new connections.

Housing associations and landlords will find a wealth of specialist support and solutions – and much more besides – at Ecobuild 2016.

Ecobuild 2016 is co-located with Resource, the leading resource efficiency event both taking place from 8th to 10th March at London's ExCeL. For more information please visit www.ecobuild.co.uk

Net **zero** running costs
by design



Minus7: The proven solution to rental income cuts and fuel poverty in 2016

Housing Associations have two concerns in 2016: Fuel poverty and the government's 1 per cent rent reduction starting in April. Minus7 provides renewable heating and hot water at minimal running costs, allowing landlords to charge a reduced price for heat and use that income to offset the government's 1 per cent rent reduction

Eradicating fuel poverty in Poole

UK Poole Housing Partnership's development at Old Farm Road is a great example in practice. A fuel-poor household is one that needs to spend more than 10 per cent of its income on fuel to heat the home;

The Minus7 system in this pair of three bedroom terraced houses has enabled residents to have heating and hot water for less than £200 a year.

As Mike Harrison, PHP Technical Director notes "It is absolutely critical that I have social housing with the lowest energy running costs available. We chose the Minus7 system due to

its 24-hour high efficiency capabilities. It has minimal requirements and the efficiency of the system since installation has been impressive."

'Top 60 developments awards – Inside Housing 2015'

The Old Farm Road development has also

Johnson & Starley's Quantec boiler range

With some 2.5 million households in the UK not connected to mains gas and many using liquid petroleum gas (LPG) to heat their homes, Johnson & Starley has introduced the Quantec 28kW LPG combination condensing boiler. It offers exceptional efficiency in LPG consumption with its integral Passive Flue Gas Heat Recovery (PFGHR) function, which enables the production of domestic hot water to condense as well as the heating with savings up to 26 per cent. Its ease of installation and range of vertical and horizontal flueing options will be a major attraction. The Quantec HR28CP fired boiler heats water to provide both central heating and domestic hot water (DHW).

01604 762 881 www.johnsonandstarley.co.uk



ecobuild stand no E3244

Wilo at Ecobuild

Wilo will be at stand E2230 at Ecobuild with its usual impressive display of all things pumps and pumping, while also showing a number of exhibits that have been developed to help specifiers and installers to select, specify and utilise the right pumps. BIM will feature prominently on the stand – as will its new Wilo Select 4 Online software and the Wilo Assistant app for iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad.

Plug in a visit to the Wilo stand whilst you're there, or see more in advance by visiting the company's website.

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ecobuild stand no E2230

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Setcrete High Performance floor levelling compound and wearing surface offers professional builders and tradesmen a simple, easy-to-use, cost-effective solution to problematic flooring installations. Setcrete High Performance is a high-strength floor levelling compound and wearing surface, specifically designed for use over plywood subfloors, as well as over concrete and traditional sand/cement screeds. Setcrete High Performance levelling compound and wearing surface is fibre-reinforced, meaning that it can 'flex', allowing it to accommodate the movement inherent in wooden floorcoverings.



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Synseal's innovation focus at Ecobuild

Synseal will be exhibiting for a fourth year in succession at this year's Ecobuild. Building on the success of their focussed presence at previous Ecobuild shows, Synseal's stand will seek to demonstrate the sheer diversity of Synseal group window and door product solutions with a focus on true innovation. Stand E2006 will feature the new Celsius Solid Roof, a quick fitting roofing solution for new build and retrofit projects, alongside the popular WarmCore "warm aluminium" folding sliding door. Also on display will be a Masterdor Precision "wrapped timber" residential door featuring a tough yet aesthetically pleasing vacuum-bonded Permaskin finish.



ecobuild stand no E2006

01623 443200 www.synseal.com

Zero net carbon by design



Minus7
a heating revolution

drawn attention further afield, being highlighted as one of the Top 60 most innovative developments in the UK in 2015. Minus7 was noted particularly for aligning sophisticated design options with practical solutions. Unlike many other renewable technologies, the tenant has not noticed anything different about the way the heating system works as a standard timer and thermostat control it. PHP have been so impressed that they have now signed a contract to build a further four apartments with Minus7 and C G Fry and are now looking towards much bigger projects in 2016/17.

Affordable housing

For social landlords the affordability of housing in both energy and rental is essential. The income generated from rent is usually used to maintain the property and allows development to continue. The cuts in rental income that takes effect from April will raise serious

questions for housing associations' cash flow. By increasing tenant's disposable income through cheaper fuel bills, landlords can secure rental income and allow a revenue contribution for energy sales.

The Home and Community Agency will be asking registered providers for assurances of how the risk to rental income will be managed over the next four years. Using Minus7's technology for new developments makes this assurance easier to give, particularly with the launch of Minus7's latest technological development launching in March 2016.

How does it work?

The Minus7 technology is made up of three parts: A responsive energy collecting roof, a solar energy processor (SEP) and thermal storage tanks. The energy from the roof is processed by the SEP and moved to the thermal stores. The stores work as a battery

for the heating and hot water needs of the building. A water-to-water heat pump within the SEP upgrades the heat in the thermal stores if and when required. Already designed to harvest thermal energy day and night at temperatures as low as Minus 7 degrees Celsius, the latest innovation will go even further.

Zero net carbon; zero net running costs by design

Minus7 have recently obtained funding to expand the core team to 15 employees and create the next generation of the technology. This will be demonstrated at the EcoBuild exhibition at the ExCel Centre in London from 8-10 March 2016 and offers a zero net carbon solution with zero net running costs, by design.

01922 419405 www.minus7.co.uk

ecobuild stand no E1240

Visit Mapei at Ecobuild - Stand E6030

Mapei - a world leading manufacturer of adhesives and chemical products for buildings - will be exhibiting at Ecobuild 2016 (ExCeL London, 8-10 March), stand E6030. Mapei's commitment to innovation and sustainable development will once again be the focus of the exhibition; with the entire stand from concept to build designed with a keen eye on recycling, reusing and reducing waste materials. At the end of the event, all materials not being re-used by Mapei including carpet, furniture, trees and plants will be donated to local schools/charities. Mapei will also launch its new sustainability campaign 'GREEN BY NATURE' at the show.

info@mapei.co.uk



ecobuild stand no E6030

Visit Wallbarn at Ecobuild

Wallbarn has announced it is the exclusive UK distributor of the iDecking "EasyClick" & "EasyChange" timber decking systems. Top quality hardwood and composite decking is installed in the fastest and easiest manner, giving the most luxurious finish on the market. They have also released the new design for M-Tray™, the newly developed, improved modular green roof modules for sedum green roofs, launching at Ecobuild - 8-10 March 2016. Avoid the mess and potential damage caused by roll-out green roof systems by having all the required elements contained in a plastic module. Visit the company at the show to find out more, on stands E5172 and E5174.

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ecobuild stand nos E5172 & E5174

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No more fuel poor

Phil Marris, Managing Director of Jaga Heating Products UK, discusses the use of renewable heating technologies in the social housing sector – where fuel poverty continues to burden thousands of tenants every winter

The social benefits of reducing CO₂ emissions from the UK's built environment should not be lost on housing associations. Sustainable development through the installation of renewable heating technologies across their housing estates can have a significant impact on their residents' standard of living – not only financially, but in terms of comfort and health too.



Fuel poverty is an issue in this country that has lingered for far too long. Too many families are suffering financially during winter, and have to make other sacrifices to compensate. Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) statistics from 2014 show that, of the 2.28 million fuel poor households in the UK, 365,000 are in social housing specifically.

It is an unacceptable statistic and one that should resonate with the housing associations responsible for these buildings. However, it is a statistic that we can reasonably control.

Installing heat pumps or biomass boilers across a social estate has been perceived as an expensive solution, but the long term savings – as well as government incentives such as the RHI to alleviate the initial investment – mean that there are few reasons not to.

The two most prevalent heating systems currently used across social housing are gas boilers and old-fashioned brick storage heating. Unfortunately, in the context of reducing energy costs, neither are sympathetic.

“Too many families are suffering financially during winter, and have to make other sacrifices to compensate. Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) statistics from 2014 show that of the 2.28 million fuel poor households in the UK, 365,000 are in social housing specifically”

Traditional heating systems can be expensive, with Gas Safe inspections, boiler servicing and chargeable call-outs for breakdowns needing to be factored in. Storage heaters can be more expensive to run than gas or oil-fired heating and suffer from poor controllability associated with any

“Renewable heating technologies are accessible, affordable and effective, and the benefits of their installation would ultimately be felt by the tenants. Advancements in the low temperature, high-output radiator technology compatible with these systems can help to reduce bills further still”

high-mass solution.

These systems contribute to fuel poverty, but they are arguably the most controllable variables in helping the fuel poor. We cannot manage the price of fossil fuels, but we can circumvent it by using the more efficient energy resources available to us.

Renewable heating technologies are accessible, affordable and effective, and the benefits of their installation would ultimately be felt by the tenants. Advancements in the low temperature, high-output radiator technology compatible with these systems can help to reduce bills further still. The low-mass heat emitters used ensure a high level of responsiveness and comfort, and have been proven to reduce energy bills.



Warmer homes means lower energy bills and maintenance costs for tenants, creating the potential to save thousands of pounds in installation and maintenance costs for associa-

tions, and a substantial reduction in the CO₂ emissions from social housing stocks. The time has come to end fuel poverty once and for all, we are running out of excuses not to.

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Evinox eco-efficient HIU's tested by BSRIA

Evinox shared the results of tests conducted by BSRIA Ltd on a range of its ModuSat® heat interface units (HIUs). The objective of the testing was to establish the performance of its HIUs' against best practice recommendations in the CIBSE Heat Network CP1. The results show that its ModuSat units have the ability to achieve a large Delta T of up to 65 degrees and deliver a low system return temperature. This ensures that the heat network operates at peak efficiency. These results demonstrate that in all tests the HIU's surpassed the benchmark requirements, set out in the CIBSE Heat Network Code of Practice, for both duty and return temperature performance. Testing was conducted in accordance with BS EN 1148:1999 'Heat Exchangers – Water-to-water heat exchangers for district heating- Test procedures for establishing the performance data'. Evinox chose to have testing conducted by BSRIA Ltd in accordance with British Standards to ensure integrity and reliability. The tests demonstrate its commitment to the development of quality, high efficiency products.

01372 722277 www.evinoxenergy.co.uk

Firms sales soar with Sentinel's guide

Highly regarded London-based plumbing firm, WPJ Services Ltd, has seen a significant increase in the take-up of water treatment services, boosting turnover and customer satisfaction as a result. The forward-thinking company has been utilising Sentinel's popular 'Homeowner's Guide to Water Treatment' leaflets to initiate and guide conversations with homeowners about the cost, energy and hassle-saving advantages of water treatment. WPJ Services reports that this approach has helped to convert around 70 per cent of customers to its water treatment services, with more than half going for a powerflush.



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TLX Gold makes it a double

TLX Insulation now has its entire range accredited by BBA certification with the latest addition being TLX Gold the unique 2 in 1 Insulating Breather membrane. The BBA (British Board of Agrément) is the UK's major certification body for the construction industry, and their mark of approval provides specifiers with a guarantee that the product will do what it claims. The product has to undergo a battery of tests on multiple samples and the manufacturer is audited against a quality plan, so architects and builders can be confident that the insulation build-ups they use will perform as they should. TLX Gold is fully breathable so is the ideal choice where condensation is a concern.



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Sealing your EWI system efficiently

Peter Thompson, general manager UK of ISO-Chemie, explains the best practice and products for sealing External Wall Insulation

It is an increasing trend for local authorities, housing associations, developers and landlords to improve the thermal efficiency of their buildings and properties; whether it be for new or existing domestic and commercial projects, utilising various alternative construction methods. Much of this work is being carried out using an assortment of external wall insulation (EWI) systems, which has seen an explosion in demand and has led to a number of suppliers significantly increasing their installation teams.

The minimum requirement of any EWI system is to add additional thermal insulation to the outside of the structure, then seal the insulation with a suitable weather-tight finish to protect both the extra insulation layer as well as the underlying fabric.

Different systems use different types of thermal insulation, but the one thing they all have in common is that the insulation must be kept dry. It appears to be a little known fact that most insulation layers suffer significantly due to the addition of a very small amount of moisture. It is a general rule of thumb that a 5 per cent ingress of moisture into this layer will reduce its thermal

insulation capacity by 50 per cent. This may be one of the factors behind the Zero Carbon Hub report, highlighting the difference between 'As Designed' and 'As Built' performance when EWI systems are used in new build properties. The potential factors mentioned in the report however are vast and varied.

The report tends to point the finger at both site

"It appears to be a little known fact that most insulation layers suffer significantly due to the addition of a very small amount of moisture. It is a general rule of thumb that a 5 per cent ingress of moisture into this layer will reduce its thermal insulation capacity by 50 per cent"

installation practices and the need to use products that give guaranteed on-site performance. What this highlights is the importance of reliably sealing the insulation layer of any EWI system against the weather, in both new-build and refurbishment projects.

The vast majority of any EWI system is protected by the final weatherproof layer, but the risk areas are the small junctions where the EWI system terminates against other building components. This could be abutments against windows, doors and under parapet walls etc. Different manufacturers and installers have different ways of dealing with the detail, but a well-used and increasingly favoured method is employing expanding impregnated foam sealing tape that offers larger expansion capabilities, constant movement throughout its life and guaranteed weather resistance; as well as thermally and acoustically insulating the sealed joints.

As mentioned above, different EWI manufacturers and installers finish joints and intersections in different ways. Some will simply butt joint the insulation up to the termination area,

Continued overleaf...



such as a window, then cover this with a render type finish. However, there will be movement in the area where the two materials meet, as they each have different coefficients of movement. This will cause a crack where the water moisture can creep through into the insulation layer.

Other installers recommend the EWI system is terminated using a stop bead, and the window, door or wall to be butt jointed up against it. However, the difference in surface levels between the stop bead and window, door or wall can result in small gaps for the weather to penetrate.

Using advanced impregnated foam sealing tapes in these areas will ensure a weather-tight seal. The tape will take up any construction tolerance between the materials and accommodate constant differential movement between the two components, caused by the different coefficients of expansion.

The nature and structure of foam tapes also means additional thermal and acoustic insulation

“The vast majority of any EWI system is protected by the final weatherproof layer, but the risk areas are the small junctions where the EWI system terminates against other building components. This could be abutments against windows, doors and under parapet walls etc”

is an added benefit. If used in a simple butt joint of insulation against the existing construction element, sealant tapes are best placed on the outer edge of the insulation layer, between the two materials, and rendered over in the usual way. It is then good practice to trowel the joint area to cause an induction crack that will form in a straight line, as it breaks along the area of least resistance.

When used in combination with a stop bead, assuming the render system is sealed correctly to the bead, the sealing tape is placed between the

stop bead and the window, door or wall to seal the joint. If there is potential that the render finish could break away from the stop bead, the sealing tape can be used on both sides of the bead.

The optimal size of specialist sealing tapes used for EWI systems are those designated to fit a gap of between 2mm and 6mm. It is also beneficial that tapes can be compressed further to 1mm, giving a site tolerance of 5mm+. Optimal tape performance allows an expansion beyond the stated 6mm size, but as they do so, the level of weather resistance starts to reduce accordingly.

Refurbishment with Remmers iQ Therm

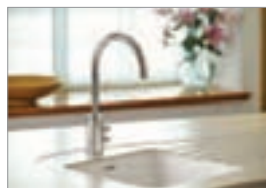
The listed 19th century former schoolhouse overlooking the Dublin mountains was renovated and extended to create a new energy efficient residential family home. Due to the build up of condensation behind conventional insulation when applied to single leaf construction, it became apparent that a "breathable 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 three board thicknesses. The renovation was followed on RTE's "Room to Improve" show.



01293 594010 www.remmers.co.uk

Fliq from Abode

Fliq is an innovative concept in mixer taps from Abode. This stylish design-led geometric monobloc tap has stunning looks and has been developed using a new ceramic disc valve. This allows precise operation of water flow through the simple forwards and backwards movement of the unique hot and cold control paddles. Available in chrome and brushed nickel finishes, the tap operates at low pressure, and the simplicity of the Fliq operation ensures it can be easily used by a flick of the wrist. To view the complete range of taps and sinks, and for more information, please visit the Abode website.



info@abode.eu

Cook it in style with BLANCO's new hob

BLANCO's new hob collection includes the very latest technology for high-speed, energy-efficient cooking at home. The new BH467831 is a 78cm-wide ceramic induction hob with six different cooking zones, 14 heat levels, six sleek sliding controls and residual heat indicators. Highlights include a flexible induction zone that accommodates pans of varying sizes and a boost option, which brings food/liquid to boiling point in seconds. Other clever touches include automatic pot localisation, an automatic bridge for different heat levels on the same pot or pan, a grill function, pause-and-recall, and three keep-warm levels.



info@blanco.co.uk

The Centurio Series from Reginox

Reginox has launched the Centurio Series, a range of high quality sinks offering simple but stylish design. Manufactured from 0.9 stainless steel, all sinks in the Centurio range feature a luxurious, highly polished finish, providing a strikingly consistent and flawless appearance. The linear-style draining board offers a contemporary look while a deep 180mm bowl ensures plenty of space for washing up. A range of accessories, incorporating stainless steel and plastic colanders, wooden cutting boards and a wire basket, is also available. For more information, please visit the company's website.



sales@reginox.co.uk



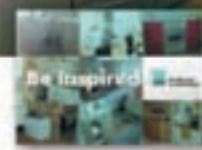
Bostik improves energy performance

An external wall insulation (EWI) system from adhesive specialist, Bostik, has been used to improve the energy performance and aesthetic appearance of 252 Liverpool Mutual Homes (LMH) owned properties on the Waldgrave Estate in Liverpool. Installation of Bostik's Climatherm system on the solid walled homes is estimated to reduce the U-value of the properties from approximately 2.1 W/m²K to 0.3 W/m²K in accordance with current UK Building Regulations, while saving tenants up to £260-a-year in fuel bills. The Climatherm system can be tailored to individual property requirements and comprises three key components – insulation, mesh reinforced base coat and finish. These can be selected from a range of products that all meet Bostik's strict performance requirements, allowing greater flexibility in both price and performance in comparison with other EWI systems. In addition, by offering an EWI system through distribution channels, Bostik provides customers with a system where the pricing is completely transparent

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Stylish and durable kitchens

A stunning, on trend, well designed kitchen can be within budget and still provide the durability required, as Lianne Butterfield of The Richmond Cabinet Company explains

Generally, the aim for any housing design should be to ensure that the internal environment is safe, comfortable, convenient, and capable of sensibly accommodating the necessary furniture and equipment associated with specific room activities and be suitable for the particular needs of the intended user groups.

Kitchens are not only the main workplace in a home, but provide the focal point for much social activity. The design of the kitchen should, therefore, recognise its use as a family room. The approaches to kitchen design are well documented and centre around meal preparation, including the following: storage and preparation of food, cooking and serving, waste disposal and washing up, washing clothes and drying.

When refurbishing a kitchen, housing associations or landlords need to consider the needs of the end user, the lifespan of the kitchen and the accessories within. With repair and maintenance budgets in mind, the carcass specification and fascia quality is critical.

Suppliers should be chosen wisely, they must show commitment to delivering a quality product on budget and show a true understanding of client requirements.

To ensure a quality product, always check the supplier's credentials. Do they adhere and conform to the highest industry standards? Is their manufacturing process approved by ISOQAR to BS EN ISO 9001:2008, which meets the exact requirements of the Furniture Industry Association (FIRA) Gold Award? FIRA Gold Award is the highest level achievable for kitchen cabinet construction, workmanship and fitness for heavy domestic use. Is the supplier part of the Furniture

Industry Sustainability Programme (FISP)? This was established in 2006 as a response to the direct challenge from the government for all industry sectors to show a strategic approach to sustainable development. FISP was created by the Furniture Industry Environment Committee (FIEC), with the backing of all the major trade associations and the wider industry.

The scheme has rapidly become established as the independent environmental and sustainability certification scheme for the furniture industry. It has developed into the industry forum on all environmental and sustainable issues relating to

all aspects of the industry's business. FISP goes further than existing standards by addressing all areas from purchasing and procurement right through to end of product life, including social, ethical and employment concerns as well as waste, energy and emissions.

Excellence is identified through a comprehensive initial audit and, as a commitment to continuous improvement is essential, thereafter through on going independent bi-annual audits. FISP accreditation demonstrates that the supplier is taking its environmental and corporate social responsibilities seriously and ensures our working



policies and practices are fully up-to-date.

Benefits of purchasing from a member of the Furniture Industry Sustainability Programme (FISP) include:

- Confidence that the organisation meets stringent environmental, Health & Safety and CSR standards through third-party certification
- Reassurance that the organisation will have a continuous improvement programme to meet on-going commitments to FISP
- Confidence they are up-to-date on sustainability and Health & Safety legislation
- A FISP member can demonstrate the full range of sustainability accreditations required within many tender documents, simplifying the process.

Delivering a durable product need not be to the detriment of style. For buyers and tenants alike the kitchen has become a style statement as

well as providing all the functional requirements. This is where the most drastic changes are being seen, style is as high on the list as price and durability.

Trends coming through are texture, mixing wood grain effects and using contrast slab fascia colours to create feature units. Gloss kitchens still feature heavily but are being mixed with wood grain effects to add the wow factor for the customer.

Utilising clever storage solutions you can make a limited floor plan work more effectively; expecting the end user to cram all their worldly kitchen goods into three cupboards is a thing of the past. Using a little imagination you can create the perfect space that can be both functional and fashionable. Wirework and corner units all provide ways to make the most of the space.

For larger developments kitchen islands are also

“Utilising clever storage solutions you can make a limited floor plan work more effectively; expecting the end user to cram all their worldly kitchen goods into three cupboards is a thing of the past”

high on the consumer wish list. Kitchen islands serve a number of purposes. In addition to being a visual anchor in the space, they also help increase the room's functionality and efficiency.

The size and shape will be determined by room's layout; allow for at least 36-48 inches between the perimeter of the island and the surrounding cabinets so there's enough room for people to move around.

Choose the finishing touches wisely, a stunning work top and splash back can completely transform the look and feel of a kitchen. On price laminate can't be beaten and with new designs, square edges and manufacturers striving for innovation it no longer needs to be a compromise product. With clever design, innovation and the right kitchen supplier your refurbishment, no matter how restrictive the budget, can still have the wow factor.



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