

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

07.17



Grenfell Tower:
housing sector
facing urgent
questions over
fire safety



Spotlight on
rented and
student
housing as
demand and
pressures grow

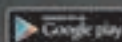
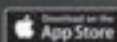
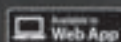
Dujardin Mews

Enfield Council's first
directly developed social
housing scheme in over 30
years sets a benchmark for
future regeneration work.
See report inside

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Editor's comment

Confusion reigns over housing policies



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

While politicians were playing games of poker during the general election campaign, outbidding each other for the amount of new houses they would commit the country to building, they paid precious little attention to just about every other aspect of housing policy. Such diverse topics as homelessness, future rent policies, regulation of the private rented sector, right to buy and many other issues barely featured in the campaign rhetoric. Which is all a bit surprising. When you do even the most basic maths, you realise that while one million new homes could house up to three million people, this figure is dwarfed by the numbers affected by poor housing conditions, benefit cuts and weak regulation across Britain today. Perhaps the people who wrote the manifestos should have looked at the election campaign run by Andy Burnham, when he became the Mayor of Greater Manchester. Instead we have no clear outcome and huge uncertainty over future government direction on housing, austerity and welfare policies.

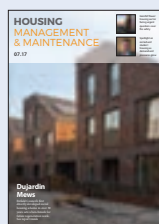
What now for PRS?

Meanwhile, councils and mayors across the UK are implementing new rules and mechanisms for improving housing in the private rented sector, while establishing on-line registers of landlords. They have tired of waiting for Westminster to come up with suitable or appropriate regulations. These are welcome developments for current and would-be renters and the many respectable landlords who want to provide a decent home in return for a reasonable rent. Former housing minister Gavin Barwell was a popular figure but appeared to lose credibility when he announced during campaigning that new social housing would be let at the so-called affordable rents, close to market rents and out of the reach of many on low incomes. Social and private landlords want greater rent setting flexibility, not less! Returning to the politicians and their games of numbers, it was noticeable they gave little thought to how the new homes would be built or who by.

Labour shortages

It's not only land that is in short supply, we face a huge shortage of skilled labour. Tens of thousands of Poles and other Eastern European workers have left these shores since the Brexit vote. Many of them worked in construction. Nearly 12 per cent of the 2.1 million construction workers in the UK come from abroad, mainly from the EU. According to RICS, a hard Brexit could see an exodus of more than 175,000 EU workers. This is on top of the estimated 60,000 already leaving the building trade each year. This is not a good starting place from which to fix a broken housing market. Increasing the supply of factory built homes could make a huge contribution, but we do not have sufficient capacity to fulfill demand. So in many respects it's surprising that our politicians are not trying harder to make better use of the country's existing housing and to fill the 200,000 long term empty homes. With Brexit talks in a precarious position, I wonder how easy any of us will find it in the coming months to get hold of a decent plumber, electrician, carpenter or bricklayer – Polish or otherwise.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

The July issue of Housing Management & Maintenance features Dujardin Mews © Mark Hadden

Dujardin Mews is the first directly-delivered social housing scheme by Enfield Council in more than three decades. It provides replacement homes to some of the residents of the nearby Alma Estate, which is due to be demolished as part of the council's estate renewal programme. Dujardin Mews has won two prestigious awards and Enfield Council was praised for "their willingness to invest in quality."

Read the report on page 25.

Response to Grenfell Tower fire dominates the headlines

The housing sector is facing urgent demands that it improves its approach to residents' safety as politicians and the public insist lessons are learned from the Grenfell Tower fire in west London.

A public inquiry has been ordered to take place, lead by a judge, but with a mandate to make an early or interim finding, so that corrective action can start within months not years. It seems that people's patience has run out amid fears that residents' safety took a back seat to finding cost savings in the project.

Ministers ordered emergency tests and inspections to be carried out on all tower blocks by social landlords, with the aim of reassuring worried residents. As there are thousands of similar blocks across the country this has not been a simple task to complete although all of them should have had fire risk assessments completed in the past year.

The Government has said funding will be provided for the checking and testing work to be undertaken. A special focus is being made on the fire retardant qualities of cladding panels.

Urgency

Checks have been prioritised on tower blocks that have undergone similar refurbishment works as Grenfell Tower. This affects dozens of tower blocks, with works undertaken partly to improve their energy efficiency, making them less costly to heat and more comfortable to live in. It would be hugely ironic if these improvement works also made the blocks less safe.

If residents need rehousing for corrective works to be carried out, there is the practical concern about where they will move to even if only for temporary periods. This will put enormous pressure on council housing departments, who are already struggling to deal with the rising numbers of homeless people in their localities.

We have already seen that Kensington & Chelsea Council has struggled with rehousing the 120 plus families made homeless by the fire. The Government and London Councils have stepped in to take over much of the planning and co-ordination of what has turned out to be a massive relief effort.

Urgent calls are being made to remove cladding from tower blocks, of a similar type to that used on Grenfell Tower. But this affects more than just residential buildings, as cladding has been used on office blocks, hospitals, schools and universities, hotels and elsewhere. There has been a lot of focus already on the qualities of the cladding panels and whether the right ones were used given the height of Grenfell Tower, but

these questions will have to wait until the inquiry commences before they can be answered.

Disbelief

However, there is a growing sense of disbelief at how fast the fire spread from the fourth floor to quickly engulf the whole 24 storeys, in the early hours of 13 June, so soon after the £10m refurbishment was completed. Grenfell Tower was home to between 400 and 600 people and had only one stairway being used by residents for their evacuation and by firefighters who were tackling the blaze and looking for survivors.

There has been an understandable outpouring of grief and anger over the mounting death toll which has risen to well over 70, with many families having lost more than one relative. The Police are warning that the final death toll will rise and the identity of all the victims may never be known, as no-one is sure who was in the tower at the time of the fire.

Greater urgency in learning lessons is being demanded than was the case following the Lakanal House fire in Southwark in 2009 when six people died. In particular there has been criticism of the delay in publishing updated safety guidance and building regulations with various housing ministers being criticised for failing to fast-track this and set higher national standards for builders and landlords to follow.

Impatience

Prosecutions could follow as the Police and Health & Safety Executive are both starting criminal investigations. This is a difficult period for all concerned but choreographing the various inquiries is essential to ensure they inform rather than interfere with each other. Public impatience has been fuelled by the apparent slow response to the tragedy by the various authorities, but particularly the local authority who own the tower block in North Kensington.

Key areas for the investigations will include:

- The use of cladding, made of different materials and their safety above certain heights (above fire service platforms);
- Retrofitting of sprinkler systems into older tower blocks;
- The alarm systems in use and the 'evacuate or stay put' advice given to residents;
- Whether the recent renovation work on the tower block damaged the building's fire safety;
- Why there has been a delay in simplifying building and safety regulations;

- Was penny pinching on the refurbishment project to blame for the fire spreading so quickly;
- Is there a conflict between the twin aims of improving property insulation qualities and improving fire safety, or can this be resolved; and
- Are the current safety testing processes and procedures robust enough to recreate real life situations?

Pictures from inside the burnt out tower block have been published in newspapers and shown on our TV screens, leaving us shocked and horrified as the destroyed flats look like they are from a war zone.

Standards

While fires in tower blocks are an inevitability, either through human error or a component fault, they do not usually lead to such catastrophic loss of life or property damage. Current safety standards are meant to contain fires to individual flats and to keep them from spreading to adjoining properties, while preventing the spread of smoke to corridors and stairways until the fire service have responded. This does not appear to have been the case at Grenfell Tower.

Perhaps stung by some of the criticism, the Department for Communities and Local Government issued a statement saying "Cladding using a composite aluminium panel with a polyethylene core would be non-compliant with current building regulations guidance. This material should not be used as cladding on buildings over 18 metres in height."

Prime Minister Theresa May said vowed that the affected families would be rehoused locally within three weeks. This is an understandable commitment, but it could be extremely difficult to deliver in a borough with a lengthy waiting list and one of the most pressing needs for additional housing.

The tower's residents group claim they raised concerns during and since the refurbishment works. This raises difficult issues for their landlord, the K&CTMO and whether they ignored these concerns.

This tragic fire at Grenfell Tower will not quickly fade from our memories and we can be sure that there will be a huge spotlight on the ensuing inquiry and investigations. Lessons will have to be learned, practices will have to change and hopefully a similar tragedy can be avoided.

The experience of Lakanal House does not fill us with confidence, which is why the housing sector needs to act quickly and deliver comprehensive solutions to the key issues.

Fire safety concerns sparked by tragic incident

The fatal fire at Grenfell Tower in west London will inevitably lead to a wide ranging review of fire safety and building regulations throughout the nation's high-rise housing.

Speculation has been rife over the cause of the fire and why it spread so quickly from the lower floors to the top of the 24-storey tower block, that had only recently completed a two-year £10 million refurbishment.

Comparisons have been drawn with the fatal fire at Lakanal House in Southwark, south east London, from eight years earlier and to incidents at other high rise tower blocks in the capital and across the world in the past 12 months.

Much attention has focused on the absence of a sprinkler system, the alarm system and advice to residents, the new insulation and external cladding, the new communal heating system and whether its installation compromised the existing fire retardant system between flats and different floors of the building.

Residents have said they were raising concerns over fire safety before, during and after the refurbishment works were completed. Those fleeing the fire had to use the same single stairwell that firefighters were using to reach residents in the upper floors, as there was no separate fire escape.

Regulations

Criticism has also been levelled at the Government over delays in publishing updated and simplified building regulations, relating to fire safety. This was being prepared in the wake of the inquest into the Lakanal House fire in 2009, when the coroner criticised the existing rules and guidance as being too complicated to understand. DCLG officials said the review of regulations was not yet complete.

Landlords have been quick in their efforts to reassure tenants about the safety of their tower blocks, but the loss of life at Grenfell Tower fire will inevitably lead to a comprehensive review of the building materials in use, building design and the safety systems adopted to safeguard residents and to prevent fire spreading.

Grenfell Tower was originally built in the 1970s and regulations over the use of sprinkler systems in new buildings do not currently apply to existing blocks of flats. The retrofitting of sprinklers has been a topic of much discussion and no doubt this will continue, but its installation in buildings constructed of concrete and steel has many issues and no easy or cheap solutions.

At the time of writing firefighters were using drones to fly up and down the building to help them extinguish pockets of fire and assist the work of forensics teams, picking through the block in a detailed search.

Councils spending millions on buying back RtB homes



Local authorities are spending millions of pounds buying back ex-council homes sold cheaply under Right to Buy legislation to combat housing shortages and rising homelessness.

An investigation by the BBC looked at council areas where waiting lists had risen for four consecutive years since 2011 and chose 10 examples at random.

Figures collected by the broadcaster showed that Islington Council in north London spent over £6.2m buying back homes it previously owned, but were sold to sitting tenants for less than £1.3m.

Among its findings from the other councils questioned, the BBC found:

- Camden bought back 29 homes for more than £2.5m, 11 of which had been sold originally for about £335,000;
- Cornwall spent nearly £438,000 on four properties;
- Oldham spent £60,000 on two flats it sold for £27,260 but also spent £100,000 refurbishing them for use as council homes;
- Wakefield spent over £2.5m on 35 homes it sold for less than £1m.

Birmingham City Council has agreed a budget to buy back 200 homes it previously sold under the Right-to-Buy.

In addition, figures obtained from the House of Commons library show that council homes are not being replaced at anything like the same rate as they were being sold at despite assurances from ministers in the last Government that this would be the case.

In the most recent four-year period, there have been roughly seven properties sold for every new council house built or acquired. The actual figures being 41,755 sales and just 6,526 replacement properties.

Kate Webb, head of policy and research at Shelter, said "If Right to Buy is to work, then it has to be accompanied by an iron-clad guarantee to replace properties sold on a like-for-like basis, otherwise councils simply won't have enough properties for all those families crying out for a home, and will be left paying the price for generations to come."

Rent deposits to be scrapped by large PRS landlord

In a bold step which could dramatically change how the private rental market operates, landlord Get Living has announced it is ending deposit-taking and plans to return deposits worth around £3m to its existing residents.

Launched in 2013, Get Living runs the country's largest single-site PRS scheme at the former athletes village, built for the 2012 Olympics in London. It is now home to more than 3,000 people in 1,400 homes, with a further 4,000 homes planned for various sites across the UK.

Get Living's chief executive Neil Young, said "We know the cost of living can be high, so as a responsible landlord with a long-term perspective, it is important for us to be able to identify and address areas where we can alleviate the burden on our residents.

"Scrapping security deposits as a pre-requirement and returning deposits to current residents is yet another step we are taking to show we are firmly on the side of renters."

Hassle free

Previously Get Living required a deposit equivalent to six weeks rent, but instead it will now rely on tenants having up-to-date references or guarantors.

Deposits will be returned first to those residents who have lived in the same property for the longest period with the whole process expected to complete by the end of the year.

Young said "We have great relationships with our residents and, given they are taking such good care of our homes, why should we hold six weeks' rent?"

"We can do this at Get Living because we have the scale and track-record to know it will work. Where we have led – with no fees and longer tenancies – others have followed. We hope deposit-free renting becomes the norm."

To reward tenants "who have taken good care of their homes", if rental payments are up to date, Get Living will also waive any damage and cleaning costs if it totals less than one week's rent.

Rogue landlords database for London

Landlords and letting agents who exploit their tenants will be 'named and shamed' on a new online database designed to protect two million private renters across London.

Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced the measure within 24 hours of a raid on a 'squalid' HMO in Harrow where 40 people were said to be sharing a three-bedroom house with just a single toilet and bathroom.

The new database is to be built in partnership with London councils and published on the mayor's website. It will contain details of criminal landlords and letting agents successfully prosecuted for housing offences and is expected to act as a deterrent to others. Landlord representatives have been quick to welcome the initiative.

People wanting to rent a property will be able to check a prospective landlord or letting agent before moving into a property. They can also report suspected criminal activity.

Councils across London will share information on landlords' criminal history and provide details of enforcement activity and investigations. The database will be developed initially with information from six councils – Newham, Brent, Camden, Southwark, Kingston and Sutton – with other councils joining after a public launch in the autumn. Their data will be available from early next year.

Raid

The mayor made the announcement as he joined a criminal landlord enforcement raid in Newham, carried out under the council's borough-wide licensing scheme for private rented properties.

In 2013, Newham Council was the first local authority to be granted borough-wide licensing and has prosecuted 1,100 criminal landlords – more than any other local authority in London – as well as banning 28 of the very worst from operating in the borough.

The mayor also announced plans for a new Homes for Londoners property portal on City Hall's website, which aims to bring together in one place details of affordable homes to buy and rent in the capital.

Mayor Khan said "I refuse to stand by as thousands of Londoners suffer sky-high rents and horrendous living conditions in a city they call home. I have seen first-hand the abysmal conditions that some of London's private renters are forced to endure as a result of rogue landlords.

"I want to be clear that the vast majority of landlords treat renters well – but a minority are exploiting their tenants and it's simply unacceptable. This must stop now.

"To help renters, I will be working in partnership with London Boroughs to launch my new 'name and shame' database of criminal landlords and letting agents to help Londoners before they rent a property, and to deter dishonest landlords and agents from operating."



The mayor made the announcement as he joined a criminal landlord enforcement raid in Newham, carried out under the council's borough-wide licensing scheme for private rented properties.

Pioneer

Sir Robin Wales, mayor of Newham, said "Newham has pioneered the fight against rogue landlords and were the first authority to introduce borough-wide licensing to protect vulnerable tenants.

"We are determined to continue to tackle the scandal of sub-standard and dangerous accommodation, illegal evictions and extortionate rent rises. We have shown that with political will, local knowledge, and robust enforcement we can safeguard residents and drive criminal landlords out of business.

"The mayor of London's new database, alongside our licensing scheme, will play a key role in helping to improve the sector. We look forward to working with him, and other London boroughs to make the capital a no-go area for criminal landlords."

Seb Klier, London campaigns manager at Generation Rent, said "For renters to get a better deal in London, it's vital that we have a London-wide approach to dealing with rogue landlords, which is why the mayor's 'name and shame' database is so important.

"At the moment, renters sign a tenancy with no information about whether their landlord has a good record in the market. This new initiative will empower renters by allowing them to check if a landlord has committed a recent housing offence, and it will put the capital's worst offenders on red alert, letting them know that if they mistreat their tenants, they will be exposed."

Stress

Support for the new measures has come from two key players who represent private landlords. Richard Lambert, chief executive officer at the National Landlords Association, said "The mayor's 'name and shame' online database brings information on criminal landlords and agents together to make it much easier for renters to find and avoid landlords anyone who has been prosecuted for housing related crimes.

"Importantly, it is also the first time renters have had a central online tool that should take some of the stress out of reporting potentially criminal housing conditions to their local authority."

David Cox, ARLA Propertymark chief executive, also welcomed the mayor's announcement. "We have campaigned for the Government's database of banned letting agents to be publicly available as, with no public access to the database, how will landlords or tenants know if they are using a banned agent?

"This online database overcomes that problem and means tenants and landlords in London can rent with the confidence of knowing their agent has not committed any offences."

The database will also be accessible to local authority enforcement teams and the GLA. This part of the database will contain more detailed history of enforcement activity taken against a landlord or agent to support joint working across London. It will also be developed to ensure the automated deletion of a landlord record on the system once a conviction has reached its expiry date.

The best way to avoid pitfalls when renting to students

Landlords face a number of pitfalls when renting property and these can be magnified when renting to students who are often taking their first steps away from home. However, recent advances in technology are helping landlords overcome the hurdles associated with renting to students.

Many students are discovering independence for the first time buy they are also digital natives – looking for convenience and accessibility in all areas of life at all times via their smartphone or tablet. The answer for landlords looking to avoid the common drawbacks with renting while appealing to the lucrative student rental market, could lie with PropTech.

Here are some of the common pitfalls that landlords come across when renting to students and how technological innovation is helping to alleviate these issues.

Communications

One of the biggest obstacles to a positive landlord-student renter relationship is poor communication. Landlords especially can spend a lot of time feeling they are being ignored or not being taken seriously by their young renters.

The rise of mobile applications dedicated for the property market has opened the possibility of a direct line of communication between property owners and students – enabling them to connect at anytime, anywhere via in-built chat features.

A rental tenancy should be a long-term relationship, rather than a one-night stand. It starts before any contract is signed and can continue after the tenancy has officially ended. There needs to be a positive and respectful relationship based on open and transparent communication to avoid any nastiness during the process.

Utilising messenger applications, which can be referred back to during the course of the relationship, helps establish a good rapport between landlord and student renter and creates a transparent environment where all concerns and issues can be raised in good faith.

A number of PropTech applications also enable both landlords and student renters to track the progress of a tenancy from start to finish using sophisticated predictive data analytics software. Again, this can greatly contribute towards creating a positive relationship between all parties.

Sorting deposits

Another huge point of contention is around rent deposits for property, when trying to secure a deposit at the start or at the end, when deciding to return it in full or use all or part of it to cover any damage costs.

As most chat features save historical messages, in effect documenting all correspondence, both parties are empowered to refer to previous conversations at any time. For example, if a

student claims they raised the issue of a broken appliance previously but the landlord has no record of this, then they can dispute the claim and have grounds to not give the entire deposit back.

With many PropTech platforms moving to provide profiles and rating systems for student renters and property owners, a much greater level of accountability is being established on all sides. In the long-run, this should lead to fewer people trying to take advantage of the system and ultimately the issues surrounding deposits will become a thing of the past.

New tenants

For many private landlords, finding new tenants can be a long and expensive process. The student housing market is very competitive due to an imbalance in high student numbers but limited property availability and a tight schedule.

Latest technological innovations in the property industry means that the process of bringing new tenants in has become more streamlined. Automation of archaic processes means that historically lengthy procedures such as validating guarantors or placing deposits in secure schemes can be done in just a few taps. Say, for example, if a student had a pre-approved guarantor, a landlord could confirm their tenancy in a property in a matter of minutes.

Sophisticated PropTech applications are also allowing landlords to manage properties across a wider geographical area than before. Previously they were tied to their immediate geographical location in order to be available to provide support for renters directly or through an agent. Now, with real-time video messaging services and 24/7 communications, landlords can expand their base and ultimately their portfolio.

A few PropTech companies are even starting to experiment with Virtual Reality, integrating it into their live platforms. In theory, a potential student renter could 'view' a property without physically being there or requiring the landlord or property manager to be there either. This means a huge number of potential tenants could view a single property at the same time, greatly increasing the landlord's chances of securing new tenants quickly as well as saving time and money.

There will always be issues that arise when renting to anyone, never mind students. However, through integrating smart, technological solutions, these hurdles can be overcome. Ultimately, technology is an enabler for positive change and from improving communication to helping landlords onboard more tenants, it will greatly help overcome the pitfalls of renting to students.

This article was written and submitted by Leon Ifayemi, CEO of SPCE

Rent cap could lock young renters out of SE market

Government plans to cap housing benefits at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels would lock 84 per cent of young people under 35 out of all housing options in London and the South East.

This grim warning has been made by researchers at Sheffield Hallam University in a report 'Capping aspiration: the millennial housing challenge' carried out for the Consortium of Associations in the South East (CASE).

Benefits are due to be capped from April 2019 and its impact is expected to be felt most by those in low-paid, insecure jobs. Jobseekers aged under 25 would then have, on average, just £2.79 a week to live on after rent. Those on low and middle incomes would also be affected.



"The report identified that 51 per cent of people aged under 35 already cannot afford the region's cheapest private rents, a proportion that rises to 76 per cent for those aged under 25"

The report identified that 51 per cent of people aged under 35 already cannot afford the region's cheapest private rents, a proportion that rises to 76 per cent for those aged under 25.

CASE members say the Government should reconsider using the shared accommodation rate as the maximum level for housing benefit for under-35s.

Instead, it should give associations and local authorities the freedoms and flexibilities to continue to meet the housing needs of this group, the report said.

Ann Santry, chief executive of Sovereign Housing Association and chair of CASE, said "The shared accommodation rate, along with the constraints placed on housing associations and local authorities, is putting even social housing, which is supposed to be there when we need it most, out of reach for this group."

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switching energy supplier

FREE

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your tenants
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STEP 1



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& 100,000
man hours
saved (that's
over 60 FTE)

NOTICE

Features
• Notice period
• 24-hour void energy support
• 24-hour SLA response

Benefits
• 24-hour void energy support
• 24-hour SLA response

STEP 2



A 'better than the Big 6' SLA
24-hour void energy support
24-hour SLA response

VOID

Features
• 24-hour void energy support
• 24-hour SLA response
• 24-hour SLA response

Benefits
• 24-hour void energy support
• 24-hour SLA response
• 24-hour SLA response

STEP 3



24-hour void energy support
24-hour SLA response
24-hour SLA response

RE-LET

Features
• 24-hour void energy support
• 24-hour SLA response
• 24-hour SLA response

Benefits
• 24-hour void energy support
• 24-hour SLA response
• 24-hour SLA response

STEP 4



**£7.5m
Saved**

TENANTED

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SE councils 'not informed' about relocating homeless Londoners

Councils in south east England say they are not being told when homeless families are relocated to accommodation in their areas by London boroughs who cannot house them in the capital. Some authorities say they are not given crucial information about child-welfare concerns unless there were already formal child protection plans in place. Many councils say they are not told how many such families are in their patch, despite this being a breach of the 1996 Housing Act.

Councils in south west Essex and north west Kent are among those most badly affected. Thurrock Council which received 272 placements in 2015/16 explained in a letter to a London MP that notifications were either not being sent or were sometimes sent to the wrong person.

Its near neighbour, Harlow Council (91 placements) said it received information "on an ad hoc basis" and that it was not provided with details of the services families might need. Meanwhile in Kent, Gravesham (142 placements) said it was not made aware either of the numbers placed or of families' requirements.

The problems stemming from the relocation of families includes people not having access to a local GP and children not getting places in schools near to where they live – both issues resulting in long journeys for everyday living. The pressures on local services are magnified as a result of many families having multiple needs.

Placements are sometimes being made at short notice, often into private accommodation, but a BBC investigation found although councils have a duty to inform the receiving authority, a number said they were often not contacted.

Threefold rise

Local government bosses say councils are working to improve liaison but progress is patchy with more than 2,000 homeless families from London placed around the Home Counties in 2015/16 – a threefold rise on the number three years earlier.

A spokesman for the Local Government Association, which speaks for local authorities in England and Wales, said: "In some cases councils have little choice but to place families outside their local area. The LGA is helping councils work together to sensitively manage this."

Kent County Council leader Paul Carter, who chairs the Kent Council Leaders and County Councils Network, said the placements put considerable demand on services. He said: "We are keen to work closely with our London borough colleagues to reach common solutions and protocols to what is a strategic regional challenge."

Other SE councils in the top ten for the most placements received in 2015/16 include: Medway with 179; Slough with 166; Luton with 165; Dartford with 133; Broxbourne with 125; Wycombe with 98 and Basildon with 88.

A Kent local authority source said to the BBC that social services were told about child welfare concerns only if formal action had been taken by the London borough. More informal concerns were not communicated, with some surfacing only when teachers in the receiving area raised them, the source added.

Buckinghamshire County Council confirmed it was one of those not being told about informal concerns. Anne Baxendale, a director of communications at Shelter, said: "It's vital councils stop cutting corners and always notify each other when families are moved like this, as per the law." The 1996 Housing Act requires councils that place families in another council area must notify that council in writing within 14 days.

A third of private sector tenants borrow money to pay rent

Hundreds of thousands of tenants are relying on high interest loans or borrowing from family and friends in order to pay their rent.

Research from the national charity Shelter has revealed that more than half a million people living in the private rented sector have had to rely on credit cards, overdrafts and personal loans to keep the roof over their heads.

Shelter says that many private renters are taking on 'desperate or dangerous debts' to keep their tenancy. They used the data to call on the new Government to build 500,000 homes for letting at a 'living rent', equivalent to no more than a third of household income.

It added that huge numbers of low-earning renters were only just managing to keep going, with 70 per cent either struggling with or falling behind on rent. In addition an estimated 800,000 tenants were unable to save as little as £10 a month.

Low earners

Anne Baxendale, director of communications for policy and campaigns at Shelter, said "No family should have to choose between relying on their credit card to keep up with the rent, or moving miles away from their jobs and schools to find a home they can afford. Right now, there's nowhere for these people to turn, but it doesn't have to be this way."

The survey by Shelter and YouGov, found that of the almost 1.6 million private tenants who fall into the low-earner category, one in three – around 511,000 – had borrowed money during the past year to pay their rent. Many tenants borrowed from more than one source. The most popular sources were:

- An estimated 299,000 had used an overdraft;
- 249,000 borrowed via a credit card;
- Almost 100,000 tenants used money from parents, while 91,000 borrowed from other family members or friends;
- Some 57,000 took a loan from a bank or building society; and
- An estimated 42,000 turned to a payday loan

The use of payday loans is a particular concern as some of their quoted interest rates are in excess of 1,500 per cent APR, despite price caps being in place.

Shelter said it believed their figures for tenants taking out loans to pay their rent were understated because some of those surveyed declined to disclose their income and were therefore excluded from this category.

Student numbers and rents on the rise

Over half a million young people will leave their family home in a few months' time and go off to university, starting a key transition to adulthood and independent living.

Some 532,300 young people started university in the last academic year with the number forecast to rise again this autumn. The building of new halls of residence is failing to keep pace with this rapid growth, while increasing numbers of students are looking to the private rented sector for their accommodation.

Students represent a key customer group for landlords, but they are also becoming increasingly demanding and selective – unlike their predecessors characterised in The Young Ones television comedy in the 1980s, that launched the careers of Rick Myall, Adrian Edmonson, Alexi Sayle and others.

This is why the report 'First Class', into the UK student housing market produced by University Cribs is a timely piece of work. With end of year exams in full swing, the report provides an insight into the changing demographics and lifestyle habits of the student population in the UK.

University Cribs is a student property search engine which enables letting agents, developers and asset managers to utilise the platform to boost sales and marketing activity. The company launched in November 2016 and operates in 25 university towns across England and Wales.

Over 120,000 rooms have been listed on the platform to date with 5.3 per cent of users going on to making an agent enquiry. To date, 156 providers have listed property on the site and the monthly reach stands at 7.4 million users. University Cribs is the only online search engine dedicated to the student housing market.

Rents

Among its many findings, it shows the cost of student accommodation continues to rise, with the highest rents not surprisingly found in London and the South East. The percentage of students paying more than £100 per week has increased from 36.6 per cent in 2014 to 51.3 per cent in 2016. The cheapest rental accommodation is found in the North East and in Wales.

The majority of students also have to pay fees in the region of £100 to £300 – the most common fees being deposit fees, administration fees and deposit protection fees.

Over a quarter of students fail to get their deposit back in full but over 50 per cent of these students felt there was no valid reason for any money to be withheld.

When searching for accommodation, students say that price is the most important factor, followed by location. Space, décor and facilities are fairly evenly chosen indicating these are down to personal preference.

Fast internet connection speeds is the main



aspect students look for when choosing a property (83%) and other important features are double beds in a bedroom (56%), bills included (63%) and good storage space (61%).

However, with the average student (in years 2 and above) sharing with 3-5 housemates, choosing your friends wisely becomes particularly important. The majority of first year students usually live in even larger groups, sharing with as many as 6-7 housemates.

Disputes

The report shows that tidiness (or more precisely, the lack of it) is the primary cause of household arguments among students. Other causes of disputes between housemates are the level of noise in the house, food ownership and trying to keep household bills down.

The demographic of today's students is changing: women are now 35 per cent more likely to go to university than men and students from the least economically advantaged backgrounds in England are 65 per cent more likely to attend university than they were ten years ago.

Student loan is the main source of income for British students, coupled with bank overdrafts or credit cards. With the majority of students' already low income having to go towards rent, many are subsidising this with part-time employment. University Cribs research shows that on average half of students work at some point throughout the year, 38 per cent during term-time and a further 19 per cent during university holidays.

Worryingly though, 27 per cent of students now report mental health problems. The primary cause of stress among students is study, with 71 per cent saying that university work is one of their main sources of stress. The next biggest concern for students is finding a job after university (39 per cent), followed by their family (35 per cent).

London's single tenants pay over half their salary on rent

Single tenants in 25 out of 32 London's boroughs are paying more than 50 per cent of their monthly salary on rent for their one bedroom property.

Tenants in Kensington and Chelsea sacrifice the highest chunk of their monthly salary at 85 per cent, while tenants in Havering and Bromley both pay the joint lowest percentage of their monthly salary at just 42 per cent.

With wage inflation stagnating below the rate of increased property prices, it has become increasingly difficult for many young adults to get onto the London property ladder. Many people have been forced into the private rental sector, with nearly one in three London household's renting privately.

Despite the tremendous growth in the number of properties for rent, the increased demand has continued to drive up rental values. In London the average rent for a one bedroom property is now a substantial £1,329 per month.

Sellhousefast.uk analysed data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), revealing that single tenants in 25 of London's 32 boroughs are sacrificing more than 50 per cent of their monthly salary (after income and council tax deductions) on rent for their one bedroom property.

Unaffordable

Kensington and Chelsea tops the 'unaffordable table' followed by Hackney – where tenants give up 81 per cent of their monthly salary in rent, while Westminster is in third place on 79 per cent.

At the other end of the table reflecting greater affordability are Bromley and Havering at 42 per cent, followed by Redbridge (49 per cent), Merton (49 per cent) Richmond upon Thames (48 per cent) and Bexley (43 per cent). These six local authorities are the only London boroughs where single tenants sacrifice less than 50 per cent of their monthly salary on a one bedroom property.

Robby Du Toit, Managing Director of Sell House Fast commented "As demand has consistently exceeded supply over the last few years, Londoners have unfortunately been caught up in a very competitive property market where prices haven't always reflected fair value. This notion is demonstrated through this research whereby private rental prices in London are certainly overstretching single tenants; to the extent they must sacrifice over half their monthly salary. For those single tenants with ambitions to climb up the property ladder –



their intentions are painfully jeopardised, as they can't set aside a sufficient amount each month to save up for a deposit or explore better alternatives. It's not only distressing for them but worrying for the property market as a whole – where the 'generation rent' notion is truly continuing to spiral further".

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Graduate hot-spots for 2017 revealed

The best and worst places for graduates to live in the UK based on housing costs and other lifestyle factors have been identified, just ahead of this year's final exams being taken at universities.

Announcing the results Nick Marr, Co-Founder of TheHouseShop.com, said "Deciding where to live after graduation is a very important step in a young person's life, and choosing where to set down roots after university can be a daunting prospect."

His company identified a set of ranking factors giving a greater influence over career prospects and lifestyle, to provide a bigger picture of the standard of living offered by each area. This went further than last year's report by including average graduate salary, average rental prices, house price affordability, cost of living, job availability and the all-important price of a pint of beer, among other factors.

The results of the top five Graduate Hot Spots in 2017 are:

1. Leeds
2. Liverpool
3. Exeter
4. Durham
5. London

At the other end of the table, the two worst areas for graduates to live are:

1. Bath
2. Canterbury

Affordability

In identifying the winner, Mr Farr said "For the second year in a row, our Graduate Hot-Spots report has shown that students shouldn't be blinded by the bright lights of London and should look further afield for the best quality of life. With its affordability, high average graduate salary, vibrant culture and active nightlife to enjoy on the weekends, Leeds is a fantastic place to live and work for soon-to-be graduates and is a deserving winner as this year's top spot."

Leeds dominated across all the housing ranking factors, scoring highly for cheapest rents and house prices making the city one of the most affordable places to make the jump from renting to buying. With a relatively high average graduate salary, graduates in Leeds could expect to take home £1,632.89 per month with a

disposable income of £1,160 left in their pockets.

It overtook its fellow Yorkshire city of Sheffield which maintained its affordable housing credentials but slipped down the chart as its average graduate salary fell, allowing Leeds to overtake it as the new northern powerhouse.

Liverpool took the number two spot largely due to its abundance of affordable housing options. With the average rent for a 2 bed home at just £589 per month, graduates would be paying less than £300 a month each and will only have to fight one other flatmate for the shower in the morning!

Incomes

Earning a respectable third place Exeter earned mid-range rankings for many categories, but outperformed the rest for cheapest travel with a weekly travel card costing just £7.00. Exeter came middle of the road for property prices, with the average rent of a two bed home costing £822 pcm, and the average rent of a four bed home costing £1,414 pcm.

Bath came in last place for having the highest cost of living out of all 25 cities, leaving graduates with a less disposable income and

"In identifying the winner, Mr Farr said "For the second year in a row, our Graduate Hot-Spots report has shown that students shouldn't be blinded by the bright lights of London and should look further afield for the best quality of life."

savings potential. Bath continued to prove an expensive city for graduates to live in, with steep property prices in both the rental and sales areas of the property market.

The famous cathedral town in Kent also performed badly with the lowest earning potential for graduates and high housing prices, with the average rental price of a two bed home costing £1,073 pcm, in 18th place overall and the four bed homes not doing much better, at £1,423 pcm, 10th.

The top 15 places are revealed in the table below:

Location	Average Grad Salary	Average Rent for a 2 Bed Property	Monthly Cost per Tenant	Average 2 Bed House Price	Annual Income After Tax	Price of a Pint
Leeds	£25,000.00	£715.00	£357.50	£140,725.00	£19,594.72	£3.20
Liverpool	£23,000.00	£589.00	£294.50	£123,597.00	£18,414.72	£2.75
Exeter	£25,000.00	£822.00	£411.00	£224,948.00	£19,594.72	£3.10
Durham	£24,669.00	£670.00	£335.00	£153,091.00	£19,399.43	£2.10
London	£29,000.00	£2,585.00	£1,292.50	£802,533.00	£21,954.72	£3.47
Birmingham	£25,000.00	£809.00	£404.50	£161,871.00	£19,594.72	£3.40
Newcastle	£24,000.00	£649.00	£324.50	£116,784.00	£19,004.72	£2.87
Gloucester	£25,000.00	£624.00	£312.00	£154,272.00	£19,594.72	£3.10
Manchester	£25,000.00	£892.00	£446.00	£171,787.00	£19,594.72	£3.55
Glasgow	£25,000.00	£685.00	£342.50	£118,474.00	£19,226.62	£3.90
Bristol	£25,000.00	£1,033.00	£516.50	£300,691.00	£19,594.72	£2.50
Nottingham	£25,000.00	£787.00	£393.50	£144,074.00	£19,594.72	£3.63
Cardiff	£23,000.00	£785.00	£392.50	£174,081.00	£18,414.72	£3.90
Edinburgh	£25,000.00	£1,276.00	£638.00	£226,009.00	£19,226.62	£2.72
Belfast	£17,000.00	£582.00	£291.00	£104,022.00	£14,506.62	£3.30

House building up but repairs down

Social housing has been the fastest growing part of the construction market in the past year official data has shown, but it's not all good news for the sector with repairs spending down. Figures released by the Office for National

Statistics showed new public housing output stood at £404m in March 2017, an increase of 11.4 per cent on a year earlier, and up 4.3 per cent in the first quarter of this year against the same period in 2016.

However, repairs and maintenance work in public housing fell sharply in the same period. It was worth £529m in March, down by 13.5 per cent against March 2016 and down by 3.6 per cent in the first quarter compared to a year earlier. This reflects a squeeze on budgets,

possibly related to the annual one per cent rent cuts policy.

New public housing followed a similar pattern to the overall construction sector between February and March this year, with new build up by 7.6 per cent but repairs and maintenance recording a fall of 1.9 per cent.

The ONS noted that new housing of all kinds grew strongly in March, while repairs and maintenance "provided the main downward pressure on construction output".

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HA merger activity hots up again



After a brief lull during which time commentators speculated that HA mergers were being replaced by property sales and stock rationalisation as the hot topic, a number of deals have hit the news headlines.

While not in the same league as the formation of Clarion or the expansion of L&Q, the recently announced mergers could change the face of social housing in the south and midlands, while at the same time increasing the sector's capacity for building new homes.

Responding to the challenge to ramp up their development programmes, associations are scaling up in size so they can deliver savings through economies of scale while also using their larger property bases to secure bigger loans to finance the building activity.

South west

Two of the south west's largest housing associations have confirmed they are well advanced in merger talks to form the region's largest social landlord, providing homes to 70,000 people.

DCH and Knightstone told their tenants the merger has been agreed in principle by the two boards, but a final decision will not take place until a consultation exercise has been completed this Autumn along with a due diligence assessment.

If formed, the new organisation will own and manage 35,000 homes across the whole peninsula, stretching from the Isles of Scilly up to Gloucestershire. Their combined turnover will be in the region of £250m and they plan to build another 15,000 homes over the next decade.

The new association could be up and running by summer 2018. No details have been provided on the structures of the boards and executive teams, nor on the new landlord's name. It will be one quarter the size of Clarion Housing Group, the largest HA in the country with 125,000 homes following the merger of Affinity Sutton and Circle Housing.

Paul Crawford, Chief Executive of DCH said "It makes every sense for DCH and Knightstone to consider the benefits of an alliance. We have a shared heritage and a uniquely complementary geography in the South West. We also share a desire both to maximise our contribution to the development of more affordable homes and to deliver even better quality and value for money services to our residents."

South east

Over in the south east, Amicus Horizon and Viridian have completed their merger, setting up Optivo, a new combined landlord with 44,000-homes, 90,000 tenants and an annual turnover of £306m.

The new HA has ambitions to build at least 1,500 homes every year from 2021. Optivo said it would raise £1.5bn of new finance to support its growth programme. The association aims to build 85 per cent affordable homes, of which 60 per cent would be below market rent and 40 per cent shared ownership.

Paul Hackett, chief executive of Optivo, said "This is the start of an exciting new journey. We're now 'one team' and will be able to build more new homes than we could have done as separate organisations."

His deputy Nick Apetroaie, said the merger was about much more than increasing its development capacity. "We're passionate about increasing people's life opportunities and showing we care about their futures. We'll do all we can to help them flourish by providing access to education and employment support, along with supporting their health and wellbeing."

Midlands

Meanwhile the Longhurst Group and Axiom have agreed a merger that will see them own just over 21,000 homes, with plans for 700 new homes a year across the Midlands and stretching into East Anglia, around Cambridge and Peterborough.

The merger is expected to complete on 3 July. It follows a strategic review by Axiom which determined they would need to merge in order to continue providing all its services over the long term.

Julie Doyle, chief executive of Longhurst Group, said "From a Longhurst point of view we have not been out actually trying to court people, but certainly are keen to go where it's helpful to both organisations and also to the customers."

Other recent deals have seen mergers completed at Paragon Asra with more than 24,000 homes in central and southern England and Vivid, formed by First Wessex and Sentinel, with 30,000 homes in 20 council areas, mainly in Hampshire.

Letting agents charging tenants up to £800 in fees

Campaigning group Generation Rent have found PRS tenants in England are charged fees of up to £813 when moving into a new home and an average of £404 every time they move.

With a proposed ban on letting fees just consulted on, the group found instances of agents abusing tenants with a series of charges. Generation Rent is calling for the Government to apply a blanket ban on fees without exemptions for "in-tenancy" services and create a system of compensation for tenants charged illegal fees.

Among the worst examples of 'unjustified fees' they found:

- Tenancy renewals at an average price of £117 every six or 12 months;
- Check-out fees at the end of a tenancy charged at £120;
- References for the next tenancy average £60 for two people;
- An extra £62 charged for moving in on a Saturday; and
- Tenants on low incomes and needing rent guarantors charged an average of £152.

Thirteen agents had charged tenants, who accidentally overpaid their rent, an average of £25, the campaign group said. The highest fee found by Generation Rent was at an agency in Wokingham, but they also found agents in Bristol and in Waltham Forest, east London, not charging tenants any fees.

Stress

Dan Wilson Crow, director of Generation Rent, said "No one moves house for fun, and letting fees make an already stressful situation worse. Landlords appoint their agents, so should pay their costs.

"As the range of fees being charged demonstrates, some letting agents are squeezing as much from tenants as they can. That's why we need a blanket ban with no loopholes."

But David Cox, chief executive of the Association of Residential Letting Agents, said that if a ban is enforced, rents would rise and tenants will end up paying more. "Research commissioned by ARLA Propertymark carried out by Capital Economics demonstrated that if a full ban comes into force, then tenants will end up paying an extra £206 per year in rent."

Generation Rent said that Government measures to force letting agents to publish their fees had not been wholly successful. They found that one agent in eight were still not publishing fees on their website two years after the law had been changed.

Company fined three quarters of a million pounds over asbestos

A construction firm converting a former nine-storey office building into residential flats has been hit with a massive fine after being found guilty of repeated asbestos safety failings.

Barroerock Construction Limited of East Finchley, London, was fined £750,000 after pleading guilty to two offences of breaching Regulation 22 (1) (a) of the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2007 at Canterbury Crown Court. They were also ordered to pay costs of £14,874.68.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) carried out two investigations of working practices at the site, which was known to contain asbestos.

The first investigation arose from a routine inspection during one of HSE's refurbishment campaigns. The Court was told a refurbishment and demolition survey had been carried out but the company failed to act upon it. This resulted in up to 40 workers being exposed to asbestos during the early demolition phase of the project.

The second investigation followed complaints being made about the health and safety practices at the site. This found that despite engaging a licensed asbestos contractor to remove the remaining asbestos materials, dangerous practices were continuing.

In addition the company was unable to provide documentation to show that asbestos materials identified in the survey had been correctly removed. When work on site was halted for the second time about 160 people were working inside the building.

It was found in both HSE investigations that the incidents could have been prevented if Barroerock ensured they had effective management controls in place to avoid the risk of exposure to asbestos.

Speaking after the hearing HSE inspector Melvyn Stancliffe said:

"The company's failings in this case put many workers at risk to the exposure of asbestos. It was clear there was an endemic failure to effectively manage the construction work on the site in a way which ensured that asbestos materials were not disturbed until removed under appropriate conditions. Failing to prevent the breathing in of asbestos fibres on the site is reckless."

More than 200,000 homes lie empty

With the crisis in housing supply and lower than needed rates of housebuilding, it is concerning that over 200,000 homes in England with an estimated value of £43bn, have been empty for at least six months.

Across London there were 19,845 homes sitting idle for over six months in 2016, which amounted to £9.4bn worth of property, based on the average price in London of £474,704. This has contributed to the increase in high profile squatting cases reported in the past year.

Birmingham was the worst affected city outside the capital with 4,397 empty homes worth an estimated £956m, followed by Bradford and Liverpool. Towns and cities in the north and Midlands filled the top 20 list of local authority areas with the highest number of empty homes.

In the north west, Blackburn shot up the rankings to ninth place after a 35 per cent jump, the biggest increase of any authority outside London, pushing neighbouring Bolton into 10th place.

Royal borough

In London the royal borough of Kensington & Chelsea was the worst performer as super-rich owners rejected renting them out or selling up in favour of leaving their properties lying idle to gain value. This saw the number of empty homes in Kensington & Chelsea rise 22.7 per cent over the 10-year period from 2006 and 8.5 per cent since 2015.

The royal borough had 1,399 empty homes worth £664m, compared with second-placed Croydon, which had 1,216 empty homes worth £577m.

Property investment firm Property Partner, which collated the report from Department for Communities & Local Government figures, said Kensington & Chelsea stood out from most London boroughs, who have recorded falls in the number of empty homes over the last 10 years.

In 2006, Newham in East London, was the worst performing borough in the capital, but dramatically cut the number of empty homes over the next 10 years from 2,070 to just 593. Similarly, Lambeth recorded a fall from 2,807 in 2006 to 756 in 2016.

Incentives

Government and councils have worked to cut the number of empty homes, primarily by reducing tax incentives which encouraged owners to leave properties unused.

In recent years most local authorities have increased council tax bills on second homes and adopted stricter rules on council tax discounts for empty homes.

Some councils have achieved less than others in their efforts to reduce the number of empty homes in their area. While Birmingham recorded a 13 per cent jump in empty properties in the last year and Liverpool suffered a 5 per cent rise to 3,449, Manchester registered the greatest fall over a decade, dropping 88 per cent to 1,365.

Homes sitting idle for over six months

Number of homes per city and their total value in 2016:

London: **£9.4bn**
 Birmingham: **£956m**
 Bradford: **£858m**
 Liverpool: **£750m**
 Leeds: **£560m**
 Sheffield: **£434m**
 Sunderland: **£382m**
 Wakefield: **£362m**
 Doncaster: **£351m**
 Blackburn: **£340m**

Property Partner said a large drop in the number of empty homes across England from 2006 stalled in 2015. The figures for 2016 showed little progress.

Rogue landlord gets first Scottish banning order

A rogue private landlord in Fife has become the first to receive a disqualification order from a Scottish court.

Kirkcaldy Sheriff Court found Mohammed Murtaza, 47, in breach of the Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 after continuing as a landlord despite being denied entry to the council's landlord register.

The landlord had a previous conviction for failing to comply with legislation and for being in breach of gas safety regulations, which resulted in six convictions and £540 in fines.

Sheriff Gilchrist said it was "a flagrant breach of legislation" and the judge ruled that Mr Murtaza should receive a £500 fine and a 12 month ban, preventing him from acting as a private landlord for the next year.

John Mills, the council's head of housing said "A significant proportion of private landlords are of good character and comply with the law – however, there are some who act unlawfully.

"The outcome of this particular case sends a clear message to private landlords in Fife that the council will continue to take all appropriate action to protect tenants and improve property standards in the private sector."



Newcastle revealed as UK's most family friendly city

Premiership football has returned to Newcastle for next season, just in time to celebrate the city's award for being chosen as the UK's best city in which to raise a family according to price comparison site MoneySuperMarket.

Over 35 of the country's biggest cities were analysed against certain key factors, including local school rankings, access to green space, house prices and average salary. Each metric was assigned a score between 1-10, and each score was included in an average weighted in favour of the metrics most directly related to raising children. The average was then used to rank the cities researched.

Home to the Geordies and a certain brand of brown ale, Newcastle took the top spot due to the volume of 'outstanding' schools and affordable housing in the area, with an average house price of £161,255 compared to the national average of £232,885.

Midlands cities Derby and Wolverhampton took second and third place respectively, surpassing urban powerhouses London and Manchester, thanks to the availability of affordable housing and career opportunities. Crucially, Newcastle rated higher than both due to the amount of green spaces – a fundamental consideration for families with young children.

Thefts

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the report found that London came 35th and bottom of the list for families due to a higher level of theft, huge competition for school places, and the nation's highest average house prices at £483,803. The other national capitals fared a little better with Edinburgh in 22nd place, Cardiff in 24th and Belfast in 25th.

The report also dispels the North-South divide as the Midlands had five out of the top ten most family friendly cities, including Coventry, Nottingham and Stoke, as well as Derby and Wolverhampton in the top five.

The top five cities

- Newcastle-Upon-Tyne - Newcastle had the most significant offering of 'Outstanding' schools (as rated by Ofsted), with 9.66 per every 100,000 capita, as well as affordable housing, at £161,255 on average for a house;
- Derby - Derby's key selling point was one of the lowest average house prices on the list, at £148,437, but it also had a reasonable level of career opportunities (8.17 per 100,000 capita) and a low level of crime, at only 17.1 burglary claims for every 1000 home insurance quotes;
- Wolverhampton - Wolverhampton scored very highly on jobs and affordable housing, with an average house price of £135,108, but dropped to third place due to a limited number of local parks - only 7 in total or 2.77 per 100,000 capita - meaning children had fewer places to play;
- Southampton - Although Southampton was low on green space, with only 5.3 parks for every 100,000 residents, house prices were comparatively low at an average of £198,835, and crime was at the lower end of the scale at 13.6 burglary claims for every 1000 home insurance quotes, and
- Bath - Bath fared well when it came to crime, with only 9.6 burglary claims in every home insurance 1000 quotes, but only made fifth position by having only 5.49 parks for every 100,000 residents, and a high average house price of £330,281.

The Family Living Index was created to guide parents – or soon to be parents – looking to futureproof their next move. Kevin Pratt, Consumer Affairs Expert at MoneySuperMarket, commented "Parents naturally want the best for their children, whether it's a good school, a nice neighbourhood or plenty of career opportunities when they grow up.



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New housing minister appointed



The relatively unknown Reading West MP, Alok Sharma has been appointed as the new housing minister. He was previously a junior minister in the Foreign Office and becomes the 13th housing minister in the last 16 years following the defeat of Gavin Barwell in the general election. An MP since 2010, Mr Sharma originally trained as a chartered accountant and worked in banking for 16 years. It is unclear what his specialist knowledge or relevant experience is for the housing brief, although it is being reported he voted in favour of the bedroom tax and in cuts to welfare spending. Housing is not listed among his interests on parliamentary websites.

Workers jailed for unsafe gas work

The serious risks taken by unqualified gas engineers has been demonstrated with prison sentences handed down by the courts, after successful prosecutions by the Health & Safety Executive.

Gareth Scott Redford, a plumber, was given a 16 months prison sentence at Cambridge Crown Court for carrying out unsafe gas work at four properties in the Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire areas.

Concerns were raised about his work in 2014 and the residents separately made complaints to Gas Safe Register. An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Cambridgeshire County Council Trading Standards (CCCTS) found Redford was not registered and his work was deemed unsafe, putting the residents at risk of harm.

Redford pleaded guilty to 14 breaches under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 and the Fraud Act 2006.

Flue

In a separate case, a self-employed gas fitter

was imprisoned for 14 months at Manchester Magistrates Court after installing a new boiler without being Gas Safe registered. Michael Trent Algar pleaded guilty after an investigation by the HSE found he left a gap between the boiler and the flue, which allowed gases to enter the property.

The resident contacted another Gas Engineer who found the flue had not been replaced properly. He deemed this as immediately dangerous and it was reported to Gas Safe Register.

The Court heard that Algar was not Gas Safe registered and has never been registered. He had received advice from HSE on previous occasions in relation to similar matters.

Algar pleaded guilty to breaching three charges under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 and received a 14-month custodial sentence. After the hearing HSE inspector Lisa Bailey said "The residents were very lucky. If they had not acted as quickly as they did, the consequences could have been devastating."

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Councils step up action against private landlords

Local authorities across the country are ramping up the pressure on rogue landlords in a concerted effort to improve property conditions and information for tenants.

Among the councils at the forefront of recent initiatives are Greenwich and Newham in east London, Leeds and Wolverhampton. In some instances, schemes are being designed with representatives of good PRS landlords.

In the capital, Greenwich has approved an extension of its licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), with increased charges and a wider coverage of properties. Meanwhile their near neighbours at Newham Council are demanding additional freedom and powers over bad landlords in its campaign to improve the standard of rented housing in the borough.

Newham already has an enviable record of tackling landlords who flout safety considerations and put tenants' lives at risk.

But the future of its boroughwide licensing scheme is at risk and the council is demanding that ministers allow local politicians and local people the powers to put rogue landlords out of business.

In the last four years Newham has prosecuted over 1,000 landlords and issued 415 cautions. It has also reclaimed nearly £2.5m in unpaid council tax.

Extended licensing

Mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales, said that Whitehall should not decide how local councils take action against bad landlords. "The Newham experiment has shown that with political will, local authorities using local knowledge, local staff and local enforcement are the best placed to police the public rented sector – and drive rogue landlords out of business."

South of the Thames, Greenwich is looking to follow suit by extending its HMO licensing scheme borough-wide and applying licensing to all HMOs, including house and flat shares occupied by three or more people who are not all related, even if they occupy the property on a single tenancy.

The scheme also includes properties referred to as 'section 257 HMOs' which are buildings converted into self-contained flats where less than two thirds of the flats are owner occupied.

An estimated 6,500 properties will need to be licensed under the additional licensing scheme which comes into force on 1 October 2017. It follows a public consultation from November 2016 to February 2017 which attracted over 300 responses but demonstrated a huge divergence in opinions. Almost 80 per cent of landlords and letting agents that responded were opposed, while the public gave it 80 per cent support.

New licensing fees have more than doubled as they rise from £144.23 for each bedroom in a HMO, to a new fee of £377 per habitable room making them the second highest fees in



London, just behind Lewisham. The council says a reduced fee of £116 per habitable room could apply if all discounts are applied.

Incentives

In the north, Leeds City Council is hoping a mixture of carrot and stick will work after launching a new 'light regulatory touch' rental standard for all private sector properties in the city – allowing it to focus its resources on tackling rogue landlords and poorly maintained properties.

The new scheme was launched in May after the council worked with several landlord bodies (including the NLA, the RLA and Unipol Student Homes) to develop a single overarching standard to sit alongside existing recognised accreditation schemes.

The council will now concentrate its regulatory resources on those landlords who showed no sign of meeting the standards voluntarily and taking action against rogue landlords through a new Rogue Landlord Unit.

By signing up to the new rental standard, landlords will benefit from lower licensing and regulatory fees, as well as access to council officers for expert advice and support.

Other benefits include access to the Leeds Homes newsletter to advertise their properties, business parking permits for landlords and free disposal of tenant generated waste at council amenity sites. It also allows landlords access to the council's Private Tenant Letting Scheme, which can help find tenants for empty homes.

Star ratings

In the west midlands, Wolverhampton City Council has launched a 'Rent with Confidence' star rating scheme to help tenants make informed choices about the quality of private landlords' accommodation and the services

they offer.

'Rent with Confidence' was piloted a year ago with the aim of encouraging greater customer choice and to raise living standards. It followed a review of private rented sector housing in the city conducted two years earlier.

Its most visual aspect is a five-star rating system, similar to schemes used by councils and the Food Standards Agency to rate restaurants and fast food takeaways. Ratings are published on the website for tenants and landlords to view, along with up-to-date information on legal notices served on landlords.

The rating system is based on five key principles: the property, its maintenance, legal compliance of the property and the landlord, continued professional development and the landlord's investment in the city. Each element is weighted and added together providing a final score and associated star rating.

The best landlords are highlighted and education and support, where required, is provided to help them maintain and improve their top star status. At the other end of the spectrum, rogue and criminal landlords are being hit by a more robust enforcement policy and further use of the council's legal powers. So far almost 650 properties and more than 200 landlords have been star-rated in the first six months of the programme since its launch.

Stars are awarded to landlords who comply with the law and who rent out property above the minimum statutory standards, with financial incentives for five-star landlords.

Three to five-star landlords are given access to a new property website portal, where only council-approved properties are advertised.

The council will be looking to work with star-rated landlords to provide a wider private rented offer in the city that residents feel confident renting from.

Welsh landlords and agents warned of law change

Landlords and agents throughout the UK with properties in Wales are being reminded they could be unwittingly breaking the law due to regulatory changes that have recently gone live.

Enforcement powers are now active for Rent Smart Wales. The legislation which came into force last year as a result of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 now requires all landlords to register themselves and their properties.

In addition, self-managing landlords and agents must obtain a licence following the completion of a relevant training course and passing a 'fit and proper' person assessment.

Despite its name, Rent Smart Wales applies to all landlords with property in Wales, not just those who live in Wales themselves. With enforcement powers now active, landlords and agents not compliant could face a variety of sanctions including prosecution, fixed penalty notices rent stopping and rent repayment orders.

Crucially landlords may not be able to secure possession of their property using a Section 21 Notice, if they are operating outside the law themselves.

Online register

A searchable register is now available on the Rent Smart Wales website allowing tenants and the wider public to check whether landlords and agents are breaking the law.

Rent Smart Wales is a service hosted by Cardiff Council but ensures compliance with the legislation in partnership with all 22 Welsh local authorities. The Welsh Ministers designated Cardiff Council as the Licensing Authority for the whole of Wales in 2015.

The process for complying is straightforward and can be completed online. Once completed, a registration and licence lasts for a period of five years.

Bethan Jones, Operational Manager of Rent Smart Wales said: "I would urge any landlords or agents with properties in Wales and who have not yet registered or become licensed, to contact us immediately to avoid legal action. We are still keen to assist those who willingly want to comply."

She added: "We've worked closely with industry experts to develop the Rent Smart Wales scheme, which we firmly believe will help make the private rental sector in Wales a better place for tenants, landlords and agents."

Further information about the scheme can be found on the website – www.rentsmart.gov.wales – or by calling the helpline on 03000 133344.

Rent Smart Wales secures first conviction

A private landlord in Newport, Gwent has been fined £4,400 for operating a dangerous, unlicensed house in multiple occupation and failing to comply with the new Rent Smart Wales scheme.

Robert Ivor Grovell of Tram Lane, Llanfrehfa, Cwmbran is the first landlord in Wales to be prosecuted for failing to become licensed with Rent Smart Wales, a Welsh Government scheme, aimed at driving up standards in the private rented sector. He was also ordered to pay £1,000 costs and victim surcharge of £170.

Rent Smart Wales requires private landlords to register and managing landlords and agents to become licensed with the scheme. Mr Grovell was prosecuted under Section 7(5) of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 at Newport Magistrates court for his non-compliance, to which he pleaded guilty.

An inspection of the property on Orchard Street, Newport in December 2016 found serious problems with the design and layout of the property and an escape route blocked with furniture and other items, which could have been fatal to tenants in the event of a fire.

In addition the property was occupied as a

house in multiple occupation but Mr Grovell failed to apply for the necessary licence from Newport City Council. Rent Smart Wales checks identified that Grovell was registered but not licensed, even though he was carrying out management activities at the property. Since the inspection, he has completed the required Rent Smart Wales training and submitted his application for a licence.

Bethan Jones, Operational Manager of Rent Smart Wales at Cardiff Council, the single licensing authority for the whole of Wales, said "This case is a real milestone by being the first prosecution of a non-compliant landlord. Other non-compliant landlords should come forward now to avoid action against them."

Councillor Ray Truman, Cabinet Member for Licensing and Regulation at Newport City Council praised officers for bringing the prosecution to court.

"This was a serious breach of regulations covering a house in multiple occupation where the residents were put at risk because of the landlord's failure to comply with essential regulations aimed at keeping people safe in their home."

Darker homes are contributing to ill-health

Damp and dark homes across the UK and Europe are having a direct impact on the levels of serious health conditions being reported, according to a new report by a leading roof window manufacturer.

The VELUX Healthy Homes Barometer highlights a clear correlation between poor housing stock and ill-health in all European countries. UK residents living in dark homes are shown to be 27 per cent more likely to report poor health including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. In addition, people living in unhealthy buildings in the UK with damp are 34 per cent more likely to be suffering from health conditions.

The findings chime with the English Housing Survey's results. The latest report from the EHS revealed that about a million homes had problems with damp - the most common damp problems being condensation and mould. The biggest problem is in the private rented sector where nine per cent of properties had some type of damp problem, compared to five per cent of social rented properties and three per cent of owner occupied houses.

Across Europe, one in six households are living in an "unhealthy" building, (meaning damp or mouldy) increasing their chances of illness by 66 per cent.

Developed in collaboration with Ecofys, a Navigant company, Fraunhofer IBP, and Copenhagen Economics, the VELUX Healthy Homes Barometer examines the effects of housing on the health of people, along with

the associated costs to society and ways to tackle the problem.

Wider costs

On the back of the findings, VELUX is calling for buildings to become more energy efficient and for the UK's housing stock to be brought up to par.

Grant Sneddon, Product Manager at VELUX-GBI said "We know instinctively that living in unhealthy surroundings is bad for us. This study reveals the extent we are suffering on account of our homes and also the staggering financial costs to society of not bringing our ageing housing up to par."

Europeans living in "unhealthy" buildings are more than 1.5 times more likely to report poor health and 40 per cent more likely to suffer from asthma, as those who do not. Meanwhile, Europeans who suffer energy poverty - they are unable to keep their homes warm in winter - are twice as likely to report poor health and nearly three times more likely to report damp in their home.

The costs of unhealthy buildings are not just felt by individuals. The overall costs to European governments and societies of just two of the many diseases associated with damp living environments - asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - reach a staggering 82bn euros a year.

Modernising our existing buildings through energy efficient and healthy renovations would lead to improved health outcomes, lower societal costs and reduced CO2 emissions, as well as providing a much-needed boost to our economies.

Using data from the European Commission's vast Eurostat Database, the analysis provides new evidence on the relationship between housing and health. The full report can be found at www.velux.com/health/healthy-homes-barometer-2017

The big business of student housing revealed

The huge sums of money being invested in the growth of student housing have been revealed by an investigation in The Guardian newspaper.

Despite concerns over the possible impact of Brexit, it appears overseas investors and wealth funds are still willing to provide billions of pounds for building new accommodation blocks – much of it on high quality flats with extras, such as cinemas, gyms, pools and concierge services. There is also an active market in refinancing, as well as buying and selling existing stock.

The paper reports that the UK's current stock of purpose-built student accommodation is estimated to be worth £46bn, while new developments completed this year are expected to add a record £4.7bn to that.

It says that in 2016 some £3.1bn worth of student halls were sold – more than double the amount traded in 2013 and 2014. All five of the biggest deals – worth a combined £1.5bn – were sold to overseas investors.

The largest transaction was the purchase by the property arm of Temasek, the Singapore state investment fund, of a portfolio of 25 student buildings in several cities including London and Manchester.

Luxury

Hiew Yoon Khong, the chief executive of Temasek's real estate arm Mapletree, is quoted as saying "Student accommodation is a big business and relatively low risk."

Research undertaken by property experts Knight Frank is reported to show that more than 20 per cent of students today are prepared to pay more than £160 per week for the right accommodation and facilities.

The Guardian's report cites the example of The Neighbourhood, a new development in Cardiff, which offers a 24-hour concierge service to help its student tenants with "anything they need." This is far removed from the college porter who provided a low-key security service and distributed the post.

Students living in the 10-storey block in central Cardiff are offered weekly room cleaning, a twice-weekly laundry service, a 32-inch smart TV, a prepared breakfast to take to lectures, a "fully loaded" gym, cinema and free bikes. The cheapest rooms cost £189 a week or £236 for an extra large studio, while traditional student halls of residence provided by Cardiff University cost £80 a week.

The developers of The Neighbourhood said "We spotted a huge hole in a very densely populated student accommodation market, so we decided to create an exciting, bespoke new brand providing experiential, high-end, high-spec, service-driven luxury urban living experiences for students."

Demand

Long gone are the days of shared kitchens and bathrooms, as today's students are being offered studio bedrooms with a bathroom, kitchenette



and living space as well as a bed and desk. Developers and designers say it is the standard and range of communal spaces that are the most important factors for attracting the highest-paying students.

James Pullan, the head of student property at property consultancy Knight Frank, said demand for investment in student accommodation was riding high despite concerns that Brexit might reduce the number of high-spending foreign students coming to the UK.

"They have seen how much others have made from student housing and want to join them," Pullan said. "More than 70 per cent of investment is coming from overseas buyers, from sovereign wealth funds and ultra high net worth individuals and private equity."

Meanwhile Andrew Mason, the organiser of the Student Housing 2017 conference at the De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms, said the annual gathering had grown from 200 people to more than 500. He described student housing as a "truly global asset class".

Record numbers of tenants giving up on homeownership

Over 250,000 non-homeowners appear to have given up on the dream of owning their own property in the past year, putting further pressure on the private rental sector of Britain's housing market.

Now in its fifth year the 2017 Homeowners Survey, is an annual study conducted by the HomeOwners Alliance and BLP Insurance into the concerns, views and issues affecting British homeowners and aspiring homeowners. Its findings have been backed up by two further studies.

This year it found that for the first time there has been a drop in the number of non-homeowners who aspire to own. In 2013, 65 per cent of non-homeowners aspired to homeownership, with this number increasing every year and peaking at 73 per cent in 2016. But this year, the numbers have fallen for the first time, back to 71 per cent.

This equates to around 253,166 people across the country who have given up on ownership in the past 12 months. The statistics mirror the rise of the previous Government's flagship Help to Buy programme launched in 2013 and is now

receding with the cancellation of the mortgage guarantee part of the scheme in 2016.

Barrier

Not surprisingly a whopping 86 per cent of aspiring homeowners say the key barrier is house prices, up 3 per cent on the previous year. The ability to save for a deposit and availability of homes are also cited as major issues among aspiring homeowners.

The HomeOwners Alliance champions the interests of Britain's homeowners and aspiring homeowners, providing advice and acts as the voice for homeowners and buyers. Their findings have been supported by a thinktank, who say that a generation of young Britons are being confined to rented housing and a less secure future.

The Resolution Foundation has found that in the last 20 years, rates of home ownership have halved among young adults (aged 25 to 34) across huge parts of the country. Home ownership rates for this age group have fallen to as low as 20 per cent in outer London, to 29 per cent in Greater Manchester and 31 per cent in

West Yorkshire. Lindsay Judge, senior policy analyst at the thinktank, said "From Bristol to East Anglia and up to West Yorkshire, large swaths of young families simply cannot afford to buy a home. This has implications for the here and now, but also for the future when their children grow up and they approach retirement without this key asset to draw upon in old age."

Poverty

Further evidence of the growing divide came from a Cardiff University study that found in-work poverty was disproportionately concentrated in households in private rented housing, who have been hit by a combination of rising rents and caps on housing benefit. The continued growth of this form of housing tenure is projected to increase the numbers facing in-work poverty.

Rod Hick, a social policy lecturer who led the research, said "If policy does not do more to tackle rising housing costs directly, then it seems likely that these will eat up gains made elsewhere – for example, in terms of the planned increases in the minimum wage."

The study found a record 60 per cent of British people in poverty live in a household where someone is in work, with the risk of falling into financial hardship especially high for families in private rented housing.

Regulator to consult on 'new' value for money scorecard

"The new system would see the current system of self assessments being scrapped, while greater transparency and reporting is being encouraged"

England's social housing regulator is to consult social landlords on a new Value for Money Standard, designed to improve their efficiency and making cost and performance comparisons easier.

Based on a limited suite of indicators, believed to be between eight and 10, the new system would see the current system of self assessments being scrapped, while greater transparency and reporting is being encouraged.

The Homes & Communities Agency are relying very much on the work already done voluntarily by a group of housing associations, who agreed a suite of 15 indicators or metrics and use these in a VFM scorecard. More than 200 HAs have been taking part in a pilot exercise to trial their use.

The full suite of 15 indicators in the trial cover conventional financial measures such as operating margins, gearing and overheads, but also include customers' overall satisfaction, the percentage of rent

collected, property occupancy rates and the ratio of responsive repairs to planned maintenance expenditure.

Speaking at the Social Housing Finance Conference in London before the general election, Julian Ashby, chair of the HCA's Regulation Committee, said the new standard will still require a strategic approach to value for money, encourage investment in housing and improve the transparency of reporting.

Code of practice

Mr Ashby said the regulator will consult on a value for money code of practice with the aim of helping associations to better understand the standard. He conceded that "greater clarification" of the Value for Money Standard could have been "helpful" in the past.

The HCA's proposals have been backed by the previous Government and the National Housing Federation.

At the same conference, Mr Ashby highlighted that an overwhelming percentage

of the sector's forecast surpluses from commercial activities, such as building for outright sale or market rent, are due to come from a small number of HAs, perhaps as few as 20.


He added "Our analysis suggests that a relatively small number of providers will be carrying out the overwhelming bulk of non-social housing activities. For the most part we find that reassuring, rather than the reverse. If non-standard activities are being carried out by experienced specialists, in particular those who are large and financially strong, then they have good prospects of managing it competently and of coping with unexpected market conditions or other adverse circumstances."

But Mr Ashby also warned that the regulator is not as "reassured" by a "small number" of medium to large associations that have, or plan to have, "substantial non-housing activities, particularly relative to their size" after tracking this activity against the providers' financial strength.

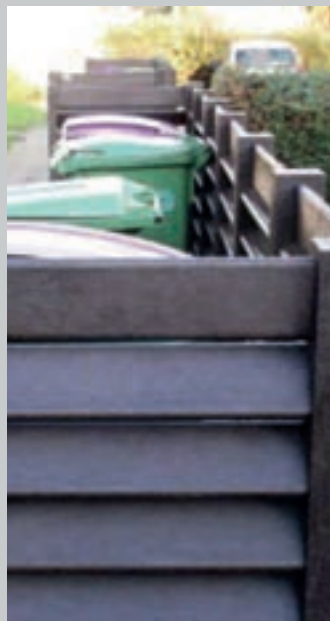
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Engage – Delivering on digital expectations

As the number of people living in rented accommodation is continuing to grow year on year, landlords and housing associations are looking to meet the demand within tight margins. This growth is set to increase throughout 2017 and into 2018, putting huge pressure on landlords to balance the growing expectations of tenants with the service they provide.

Private landlords are facing more challenges than ever before – rents have seen their first annual drop in six years, falling fastest in London by 4.3 per cent over the year to an average of £1,246 a month. Couple this with an increasingly competitive marketplace and ending mortgage relief on buy to let properties, and there is even greater urgency on landlords to implement more efficient processes and cut costs.

Digital expectations

Both the private and social housing sectors can't escape the need to keep up with today's digitally connected environment, where consumers are used to accessing the services they want at the swipe of a finger, especially millennials. A tenant is after all a customer and has the same expectations of service quality whether they are buying a washing machine, booking a flight or renting a flat – they want digital access and reasonable pricing.

Statistics from Forrester show that 70 per cent of consumers prefer to use a company's website to find answers to their questions rather than spending hours on the phone. It is therefore no surprise Gartner predicts that by 2020, 85 per cent of a customer's relationship with a business will not involve interacting with a person.

Despite this, when it comes to making efficiency savings do landlords see digitalisation as a top priority?

Quite often other aspects such as: reducing building overheads on any Build to Rent projects, asking for large tenancy deposits or using lettings agencies with cheaper management fees, are prioritised with the anticipation they will deliver significant cost savings.

Cutting costs but improving experience

As with all digitalisation projects the reasons for the decision to go ahead aren't solely focused on the cost savings, even though in isolation they alone can be significant. Digitalising services greatly enhances customer experience, empowering the customer to have more control and to be kept frequently updated – leading to a higher level of satisfaction.

It also facilitates better transparency of processes behind getting a repair logged,



the options for making the repair, booking the repair to be made and the completion of the repair. This never leads to a situation where tenants are left wondering what's happening and feeling neglected or frustrated by poor communication.

Organisations such as Soho Housing have implemented the ENGAGE portal to help engage customers online. As a result, tenants have 24/7 access to the portal which in relation to repairs allows them to go on the website or mobile phone app and complete a self-diagnosis.

A photograph or video can also be uploaded to help describe the issue. This information can then be sent directly into the repairs management system or routed to the repairs company. The tenant can then close the repairs ticket once it's been completed.

Soho reported that in the first six months 28 per cent of maintenance requests were made through the portal and this was set to increase. Organisations are now setting themselves targets to save 40 per cent in the administration of tenancies using customer portals and automation.

The digital future

Organisations like Soho Housing are transforming the housing sector by using self-service to adapt to the growing expectations of millennials (those who will be renting for longer than any generation before them) who have grown up in a world where practically everything can be done online.

Private landlords, councils and housing associations are under considerable pressure to create and maintain efficiencies. With lots of different options available to them not everyone chooses to integrate their services and provide online alternatives to save costs.

However, those who do are preparing for the continued dominance of digital communications and future proofing their organisations. This will continue to pay dividends in terms not only of cost savings, but time, effort and enhanced customer experience.

Article written and submitted by Peter Watson, Director of Engage Prop Tech

PRS rents fall in most parts of Britain

Average rents across the UK have fallen for the first time in more than seven years, as part of a general housing market slowdown sweeping out from London to the rest of the country.

The average rent on a new tenancy starting in May was £901 a month, down 0.3 per cent from the May 2016 figure of £904, according to the latest data from HomeLet. This is the first fall in average rents recorded by the company since December 2009.

The biggest falls have been in the capital where typical new rents have fallen by 3 per cent in a year, down from an average rent of £1,572 a month in July 2016 to £1,502 in May this year.

Four other regions of the UK saw rents on new tenancies fall during May – in the north-east, the south-east, Scotland, and Yorkshire and Humberside with falls from 2.3 to 0.6 per cent recorded.

Rent falls have followed a similar drop in property values. Martin Totty, HomeLet's chief executive, said its figures suggested landlords "are now facing a difficult balancing act between ensuring rents are affordable for tenants in a low real wage growth environment while covering their own rising costs".

Meanwhile the Nationwide reported house prices fell for the third month in a row, for the first time since the height of the financial crisis in 2009. Its monthly house price index showed the average house price fell 0.2 per cent between April and May. Commentators have suggested that a weaker sales market has prompted some homeowners to let out their homes rather than putting them up for sale, increasing the supply and forcing rents down.

HA investigated by HSE over gas safety

An East Anglian housing association is being investigated for possible health and safety breaches, which left more than 1,000 homes without a valid gas safety certificate for up to two years. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation into the Luminus Group follows action taken earlier this year by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), who downgraded the HA's governance rating to a non-compliant G3.

The Huntingdon based landlord was found to have more than 1,000 homes without a valid gas safety certificate, for at least part of the previous two years. Luminus staff face the possibility of a custodial sentence or a heavy fine if they are prosecuted as a result of the HSE investigation.

Luminus said all of its homes are now compliant with gas safety requirements.

It added: "There has been a comprehensive review of policy, procedures and systems to prevent the issue reoccurring and appointments are being booked eight weeks in advance.

"A dedicated helpline was set up, as well as a direct email reporting link by residents to the group chief executive. The HSE has been informed of the gas safety matter and the remedial actions taken." Luminus has also appointed three new board members following criticism of its governance by the HCA.

Unsafe gas work leads to prosecutions and heavy fines

An unregistered plumber has been sentenced after carrying out gas work at more than 1,000 addresses in north London over a two-year period. Whirlpool UK Appliances Limited was also fined for allowing the sub-contractor to carry out the work on its behalf.

Westminster Magistrates' Court heard that Errol Dillon carried out gas work at the properties without being Gas Safe Registered. Dillon had previously been registered while employed at a previous company contracted to Whirlpool. When he left that company and resumed contract work for Whirlpool through another company, he provided false details, which they failed to check.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) alongside Gas Safe Register (GSR) found Dillon had provided Whirlpool with a false GSR registration number, which Whirlpool failed to check. Whirlpool UK Appliances Limited of Peterborough, pleaded guilty to breaching regulation 3(3) of the Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1998 and was fined £ £90,000 and costs of £9,358.22.

Dillon of Woodford Green, Essex pleaded guilty to breaching regulation 3(3) of the Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1998. He was sentenced at an earlier hearing to six months imprisonment, suspended for two years, with 50 hours unpaid work requirement and costs of £2,000.

In south Wales a self-employed gas engineer was fined after two residents were hospitalised for carbon monoxide poisoning at a house in Pontardulais. Swansea Magistrates Court heard that Philip Cannon carried out unsafe gas work on a boiler in the property on 23 January 2015, leaving the boiler emitting extremely high levels of Carbon Monoxide (CO).

All three present in the property were later treated in hospital for Carbon Monoxide poisoning, including Mr Cannon. An investigation by the HSE and GSR found Cannon failed to prevent the gas leak after working on the boiler. He allowed the boiler to operate in an unsafe manner and he did not run the required tests, which would have detected the CO at the earliest chance.

Cannon of Neath Road, Pontardawe pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 6 (1) of the Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1998 Section 33 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. He was fined £933 and ordered to pay costs of £4301.66.

One in four households will rent privately by end of 2021

The number of households in the private rented sector is set to rise to almost 5.8 million over the next five years, with large corporate landlords moving in to take a bigger market share.

A new report from estate agency Knight Frank says that almost one in four households will be renting privately by the end of 2021, up from one in five today. Soaring house prices and stagnant wages are being blamed for putting home ownership out of the reach of growing numbers of potential home owners.

A key trend that will also emerge is a shift from small, private landlords owning the vast majority of rented homes, to a growth in the number and stock holding of large corporate landlords, such as City firms and property companies.

With around 5m households already living in privately rented homes, Knight Frank expects the figure to rise to 5.79m over the next five years. This is continuing its increase over the diminishing social housing sector, at 4.3m social tenants, where right to buy sales are continuing to reduce numbers despite the focus on building new affordable homes.

Knight Frank commissioned a YouGov survey of more than 10,000 tenants and spoke to 26 major investors. It revealed a startling 40 per cent of renters are paying more than 50 per cent of their incomes on rent.

Affordability

Not surprisingly, 68 per cent of renters still expect to be living in rented accommodation in three years' time. The most common reason for renting was saving for a deposit to buy a property (30 per cent), followed by 21 per cent

who said renting allowed them to live in an area where they could not afford to buy, while 18 per cent said renting was more affordable than paying a mortgage. Other results were:

- 8 per cent said they were renting because they did not want the responsibility of owning a home;
- 6 per cent needed the flexibility because of work;
- 6 per cent were downsizing;
- 6 per cent cannot find an appropriate property to buy; and
- 5 per cent do not want to be stuck in one location.

Young professionals aged 25 to 34 make up the largest proportion of private renters and this is expected to remain the case in 2021 – but they will be renting for longer than now while trying to save enough to buy a home, said Diana Babacic of PRS Research Consultancy, one of the authors of the Knight Frank report. She is also predicting slightly faster growth in the number of renters under 25, as well as an increase in older renters, especially the baby boomers.

Buy-to-let landlords have dominated the private market in recent years, but the introduction of higher stamp duty and tax changes affecting mortgage interest relief has prompted many private landlords to sell up.

City investment firms like Legal & General have started building thousands of flats for rent around the country in recent years. Knight Frank estimate the burgeoning "build to rent" sector is currently worth £25bn, but this will soar to £70bn by 2021.

Worst places for buy to let investment

Investment firm Property Partner has identified the ten worst places to buy housing for renting out in the UK and they are all in the south and east of the country.

Poole in Dorset is the worst place according to the online investor with neighbouring Bournemouth in fourth place. In fact Dorset is the only county in England with two places in the worst ten listing

Research carried out by the firm focussed on five key factors in towns and cities for investors

to have regard for – average incomes, median house prices, yearly rents, house price to earnings ratio and the annual rental yield. The annual yields varied from 0.22 to 3.73 per cent for the bottom ten, showing low returns for high outlays on deposits and loan costs.

Places at the bottom of the list all have high house prices and low levels of affordability with average property prices dwarfing the area's average income. Other places on the 'worst list' are all taken by towns and cities that have experienced long periods of rising house prices – so at least investors can take comfort from future increases in the value of their assets.

After Poole, the list of shame includes Central London, Sevenoaks (Kent), Bournemouth, Cambridge, Oxford, Winchester (Hampshire), St Albans (Herts), Chelmsford (Essex) and finally Brighton.

Quality street

Dujardin Mews, Enfield Council's exemplary affordable housing scheme, offers council tenants sustainable new homes and sets the tone for the area's wider regeneration, reports Teodora Lyubomirova

The latest economic and welfare data reveals a bleak picture of life in Enfield. The north London borough comprises some of England's most deprived wards, where life expectancy can be up to seven years lower than in the borough's more affluent parts.

In addition, Enfield's lowest-paid residents are plagued by significant Council Tax Support cuts, while two thirds of private renters rely on Housing Benefit to cope – that's more than double the London average. What's more, landlord evictions are at record levels in Enfield, with 30 in every 1,000 households forced to leave their rented homes – the highest rate in the English capital.

It's no wonder then that a key objective for Enfield Council is the provision of good-quality affordable housing. The local authority's portfolio of current regeneration projects includes the £6bn Meridian Water mega development in Edmonton, but also a wider estate renewal programme seeking to revive three council estates, including its largest, the Alma Estate in the Ponders End ward, of which Dujardin Mews forms part.

There, four 23-storey 1960s concrete towers stand tall near the Ponders End railway station, but all blocks and the comprising 717 homes are planned to be demolished to make way for a new 993-home neighbourhood. While the estate regeneration is in its initial phases, Enfield Council has begun taking steps to rehouse some of its residents.

A fresh start

Dujardin Mews is a mix of 38 affordable brick townhouses, flats and maisonettes arranged in two terraces on the edge of the Alma Estate and opposite Oasis Academy Hadley. The properties are broken down equally into 19 council homes for rent and 19 for shared ownership, and will become replacement homes for some of the Alma Estate residents.

The development has been praised for its design and construction, claiming two prestigious awards from the Royal Institute of British Architects, including 'London Client of the Year' for Enfield Council, who were commended for "their willingness to invest in quality, their openness to the design team's expertise and communication with the local community and prospective tenants."

Peter George, assistant director for regeneration at the council, explained the design aspirations of the scheme: "We were very keen to ensure that Dujardin Mews becomes an example of a future London street. [The architects] came up with a design concept that was stronger than what the council had intended originally. They understood that the strategic objective was to put Ponders End on the map and set a benchmark for other developments and set about achieving that through the use of simple but very well selected materials."

Dujardin Mews holds a special place in the council's development



The 38-home development borders the Alma Estate © Mark Hadden

history as their first directly delivered social housing scheme in over 30 years. "Since these were our first council houses in over three decades, we made a conscious decision to invest in really high quality architecture, space standards and materials," said George.

However, the scheme wasn't without its problems as various site constraints were present, such as a public footpath which had to be acquired, while at the same time access from a private road had to be arranged. In terms of privacy, overlooking from the nearby school was an aspect architects Maccleanor Lavington and Karakusevic Carson had to urgently address.

As a result, the newly-created residential estate has a new north to south route with the character of a quiet cobbled street that links the homes to nearby neighbourhoods and the railway station. Still, Dujardin Mews is much more than just brick and mortar, with the project boasting highly sustainable features and spacious living spaces.

Sustainability & space

The 'fabric-first' approach devised by the council aimed to maximise the buildings' performance and minimise their energy consumption. The east terrace's 'notched' roofs allow extra light onto the street and also give character to the development. A sustainable urban drainage system has also been specified.

The new homes' sustainability credentials were further boosted by the specification of a range of water and energy efficiency measures, such as photovoltaic panels on the roofs. All of this meant the homes matched



© Ioana Marinescu via London Borough of Enfield

levels four and five of the Code for Sustainable Homes, which was the council's goal from the outset.

Furthermore, the homes provide ample room for residents internally, exceeding the London Design Guide space requirements by five square metres. George explained the reasoning: "The council wanted bigger spaces for residents because there's a strong correlation between space standards and life opportunities."

In addition, to provide more space, the architects created courtyards on the eastern terrace houses, while on the opposite side the more traditional family homes have gardens at the rear.

The evident quality of the development begs the question how the council could afford it in these cash-strapped times? "When the [potential contractors'] bids came in, the estimates were a lot greater than our budget, so the council had to strike the balance between cost control and not value-engineering-out some of the design features that made the homes so attractive," said George. He added: "Despite the cost pressures, we stuck to the principle that the specification of the homes is largely the same, whether they are for tenants or shared ownership." And while the scheme has a number of signature features, the Enfield councillors opted to not overcomplicate their maintenance tasks – by specifying solutions that can be easily replaced. George explained: "The main thing we considered – especially since the flats would be maintained by a council housing team – was that as far as possible the specified components were not too bespoke." Meanwhile the residents were offered a choice with elements such as the type of flooring and kitchen units, but their engagement in the Dujardin Mews project was greater than that.

Listening to the community

As the new scheme was meant to rehouse residents from the Alma Estate, the council opened a ballot inviting them to express their interest in the development. "Because we knew those homes would be so desirable, we thought the fairest way to allocate them was through a ballot," clarified George, adding: "We invited tenants from across the estate to put their name in the ballot and approximately 85 of them did so; from the leaseholders, 19 came forward."

"We wanted to ensure that Dujardin Mews becomes an example of a future London street"

Peter George, Enfield Council

While 19 leaseholders were what the council was targeting, just 19 of the 85 rent-paying households could be allocated a home in the new street. Because of this, further criteria had to be devised, which is when the Alma Estate residents stepped in. George explained: "The council allowed the residents to come up with the criteria; they decided first priority should be given to tenants who had lived at the [Alma] estate the longest and that the council should consider whether their housing need was correct, or if the tenants in question had made a positive contribution to the area."

He added: "This was the different thing we did, and I think that empowered the tenants."

At the time of writing, all 19 council tenants have moved into their new homes, while councillors are currently working on moving the remaining leaseholders into the properties. Peter George admitted the whole of Enfield Council was "incredibly proud" with Dujardin Mews.

He concluded: "Local people have had a really positive reaction, the general view is that the homes are beautiful, and I hope the tenants are not only enjoying the quality of the homes, but also benefiting from the superior space standards."

Project team

Developer: London Borough of Enfield

Contractor: Gurkan

Architects: Karakusevic Carson with Maccreanor Lavington

Structural engineer: Peter Brett Associates

Heating controls – a wealth of options

Clever use of controls can help minimise energy consumption by ensuring each room is at the right temperature for comfort, while avoiding overheating. The range of heating controls that can be used around the home has grown to allow you to be in far more control day to day. ESI is typical in that it offers a range of programmers from a simple one Channel version to a three Channel Multi-Purpose Programmer which enables the installer to comply with Part L of the Building Regulations by providing separate timed heating control for living and sleeping zones in a home, while also providing timed control of hot water.



01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

New social housing brochure released

Now there is an even easier way to find out about the latest ventilation solutions for the social housing sector, as EnviroVent, one of the leading UK manufacturers of ventilation solutions to local authorities and housing associations, has launched a dedicated brochure for registered providers.



The 24 page brochure covers both the planned and reactive maintenance services that EnviroVent offers. This includes what to do when complaints are received from tenants relating to poor indoor air quality, plus a focus on EnviroVent's Rapid Response service, which guarantees to find and install a fully working ventilation solution within 10 days.

info@envirovent.com

Designer Contracts is recycling winner

Designer Contracts has been named 'Take Back Partner of the Year' by Carpet Recycling UK for the third time. The company initially trialled a recycling scheme at its central region before rolling it out to all 12 of Designer Contracts' regional offices. The scheme works by diverting 90 per cent of its fitters' unfitted carpet into felt underlay. What isn't turned into underlay is used in the equestrian sector for arena flooring. This innovative scheme saves a staggering 250 tonnes of waste going to landfill every year. The company has recently invested £40,000 in a baling machine that helps to recycle 70 tonnes of cardboard and 20 tonnes of plastic every year.



01246 854577 www.designercontracts.com

Kingspan takes the devil out of detailing

Kingspan Insulation has released a new technical bulletin and RIBA approved CPD article, designed to support enhanced detailing. The documents explore the effects of linear thermal bridging around openings in the building envelope, and present new research on the subject, allowing specifiers to use Kingspan Kooltherm Cavity Closer as a premium performance, one-size-fits-most solution. The CPD article and technical bulletin are based on a thermal modelling study of jamb details by BRE Scotland. The study covers a variety of cavity wall constructions closed using Kingspan Kooltherm Cavity Closer.



01544 387 384 www.kingspaninsulation.co.uk/psidetails

Vent-Axia celebrates Noise Action Week

Vent-Axia is celebrating Noise Action Week (22-27 May 2017) with the announcement that its Lo-Carbon Svara bathroom fan has been awarded the Quiet Mark by the Noise Abatement Society (NAS). Leading the way in silent fan design, this is the fifth year that Vent-Axia has supported Noise Action Week which is co-ordinated by Environmental Protection UK to tackle noise problems in our neighbourhoods. Offering a solution to noisy extract fans, Vent-Axia's Bluetooth-enabled Svara is the UK's first App-controlled unitary fan and offers exceptionally quiet running, operating at just 17 dBA on low trickle.



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Axim Architectural Hardware are celebrating their 30 year anniversary in 2017 and are delighted to have reached this milestone. Axim Architectural Hardware is a division of The Parkside Group Ltd. Axim designs and supplies a comprehensive in-stock range of Transom Closers, Panic Exit Devices, Electric Strikes, Deadlatches, Surface Mounted Door Closers, Floor Springs, Flush Bolts, Letter Plates, Locks and Handles. Renowned for their technical expertise and exceptional customer service, they pride themselves on their competitive pricing and excellent stock holding and are one of the UK's No. 1 suppliers of Concealed Overhead Transom Closers.



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New research and rigorous testing of **EGGER's** flagship flooring product, **EGGER Protect**, has shown that the structural board can remain exposed to the elements for 60 days. This is a substantial increase on the previously cited 42 days, is unrivalled in the industry, and gives UK house builders peace of mind when dealing with unforeseen delays. **EGGER Protect** is manufactured from the company's P5 flooring grade particleboard with a weather resistant surface layer applied to both sides. The board has a hard-wearing, anti-slip surface, is quick to install, and can be used with underfloor heating systems and tiles.



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Cavity Barriers protect against fire

According to Document B of the UK Building Regulations fire barriers must be installed in cavity areas that are vulnerable to the spread of fire. Using the correct passive fire cavity protection system within a building is crucial, in the event of a fire, intumescent fire barriers activate and seal holes, penetrations and cavities, preventing the spread of fire and smoke. Standards and Regulations also stipulate that two storey buildings and above require cavity barriers to stop fire from spreading through walls, floors and cavities. The **Envirograf®** Cavity Barrier range fully satisfies the requirements stated in Document B of the Building Regulations.



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Product Focus

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www.vectaire.co.uk

Vectaire's new catalogue details its ranges of high performance, low energy, economical, residential ventilation units with EC motors. It describes Whole House Heat Recovery Units which control condensation and pollution by providing low level, continuous ventilation in up to seven rooms with up to 93 per cent heat exchange efficiency. Also shown is the WHHR Mini DC (for small dwellings, student accommodation etc), and the slimline Microbox DC, particularly suited for apartment installation. Finally, the Elegance and Elix are dMEVs available for installation into toilets, bathrooms, utility rooms and kitchens.

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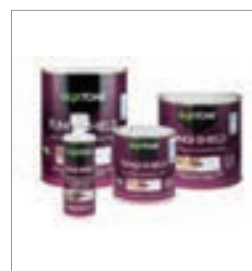
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Consort Claudgen's RXLC Landlord Control Heating System is an ideal heating system for student accommodation, hotels, or anywhere where a central control unit is required to control the temperature of all heaters in a building or rooms. It consists of an MRXLC controller and one or more CRXLC controllers connected to Consort's RX heaters. The MRXLC can control any number of CRXLC depending on the building construction. It sets the same seven day programme with six time settings per day for all CRXLC controllers. Room occupants can temporarily adjust the room temperature on the CRXLC for a predetermined length of time.

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Adapting for the future

Antony Newton of refurbishment specialist J Tomlinson addresses the implications a rising elderly population has on bathroom refurbishments and adaptations in the rental sector.

Projections show that society will age significantly over the upcoming decades. The number of people aged over 65 is expected to rise by more than 40 per cent in the next 18 years to over 16 million, and by 2040, nearly one in four people in the UK will be 65 or older, according to statistics collected by Age UK. The ageing of the population is likely to have significant implications for housing providers, who should consider adapting their housing stock accordingly.

The bathroom is one area of the home where particular attention should be paid to the choice of equipment, accessories and fabric. Specifying the right products and features can increase the lifetime of a bathroom and make it more suitable for the needs of its users as they grow older.

If building managers choose wisely, they can create bathrooms that are appropriate for tenants of all ages. Making the wrong choices could prove costly and wasteful in the long run, with unnecessary replacements and upheaval further along the line.

Since low-cost maintenance and repairs are high on the wish list of housing providers, it would make good commercial sense for housing providers to set out their product specification priorities prior to carrying out any refurbishments.

Coatings and sanitaryware

There are a range of low-cost options, which can have a positive impact on the lifetime of a bathroom. Some of these are quick and simple to undertake and can reduce maintenance costs, cut utility bills and help tenants to remain independent in their homes for longer.

“There are a range of low-cost options, which can have a positive impact on the lifetime of a bathroom.”

Opting for mould-resistant paints, for instance, is a simple solution that can make a big difference in terms of reducing mould growth and the costly maintenance bills associated with repairing mould-damaged building fabric.

Choose sanitaryware carefully to ensure that the required product has been manufactured to allow for simple adaptations and modifications in the future. Raised toilet seats, for example, are more suitable for elderly residents; however, not all products on the market fit every toilet, so specifiers need to think ahead and opt for solutions that would work well with adaptations that may be necessary at some point.

Creating a walk-in or level-entry shower would enable easier accessibility, while adding slip resistant coatings in baths and showers would reduce the risk of slips or trips. These measures can be enhanced





“The Lifetime Homes principle seeks to provide an accessible bathroom that has ease of access to its facilities.”

with the fitting of slip-resistant flooring. Easy-to-use tap handles, such as those in mixer taps, could also be more suitable for elderly residents compared to taps that twist, so consider this when deciding on the fittings for sinks and other sanitaryware.

Enhanced safety

For safety's sake, it's sensible to install anti-scalding devices for showers. These would be particularly useful for those who are at risk from burns or slips due to a sudden change of water temperature. However, such devices would be a welcome addition to any bathroom in a rented accommodation, where protection of scalds and injuries to tenants should be a top priority for facility managers.

Fitting humidistat fans will improve ventilation and reduce the risk of mould growth on the premises. While some tenants could be reluctant to turn on their extractor fans amid worries over energy bills, this is not a concern with humidistat fans, which operate automatically depending on the humidity level in the room. This alone makes these solutions a worthwhile investment, which can help protect the building fabric while

keeping bathrooms safe and pleasant for residents.

Another good idea is to install water resistant screening boards instead of tiles. Boards require limited maintenance, help prevent mould growth, and are less likely to require replacing compared to grouted tiles. Apart from creating a nicer bathroom environment, it could potentially lower the refurbishment costs of void properties.

Lifetime Homes

The Lifetime Homes principle seeks to provide an accessible bathroom that has ease of access to its facilities from the outset, and potential for simple adaptation in the future to meet the residents' changing needs.

With the number of people aged 65 or over set to increase over the coming decades, we expect the number of bathroom refurbishments and adaptations to also increase accordingly and we advise housing providers to think ahead. Bathrooms can typically have a lifespan of anywhere between 20 and 40 years, depending on the housing provider. With careful thought to the future and to the needs of current and future occupants, unnecessary costs and upheaval can be avoided if certain design decisions are made from the outset.

Through our liaison with tenants, we know that strong communication and swift completion of work is of utmost importance to residents, and something that housing providers and landlords should take into account when planning such works.

Antony Newton is regeneration director at J Tomlinson

Hoisting compliance with lifetime homes

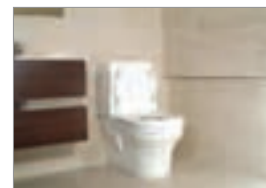
With the continuing emphasis on giving people the ability to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, housing providers are being offered a new resource to create lifetime homes. To help architects, social housing providers and builders get it right from the outset, **Clos-o-Mat** has produced a new white paper – *Design Guidance & Considerations for a Domestic Accessible Toilet/Wetroom*. The white paper covers everything from adequate space to manoeuvre a wheelchair through the role of colour and texture to the structural considerations to accommodate personal care assistive technology.



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

Stylish solution to assist supported living

Clos-o-Mat, the British-based manufacturer of the Clos-o-Mat range of bidet toilets, has introduced a new range, designed to enable elderly and disabled people have a stylish bathroom that can be easily adapted, evolved to meet immediate, and future, needs. The Vita range of bidet toilets looks like, and can be used as, conventional WCs. All have built-in douching and drying, so, if required/ preferred, the user is hygienically and consistently cleaned afterwards without they – or their carer having to clean with toilet tissue. Further, as the occupant's needs change, accessories can be added to help them retain their ability to toilet without help.



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

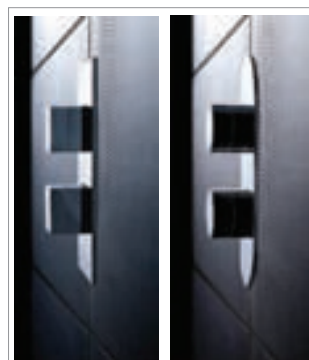
Slimming down for summer...

Look out for the stylish Indus & Lennox shower valves from **Hudson Reed**, which feature an ultra slim profile combined with thermostatic technology for anti-scald protection and manufactured here in Britain – making them the ideal solution for today's bathroom. These sophisticated shower valves are available in two contemporary designs – rounded for those who prefer curved brassware or pure square for a truly minimalist feel.

Choose from standard twin control valves to operate a slide rail kit or fixed head, or opt for the twin with diverter for the luxury of multi-option showering. All Hudson Reed shower valves are manufactured in Britain and are backed by our 20 year guarantee.

The valves also incorporate our patented thermostatic cartridge which is limescale resistant, offers accurate flow control and full thermal protection to prevent scalding. With retail prices for the twin valves at £278 and the twin with diverter at £306, the new showers are an affordable way to bring extravagance to your bathroom.

Complete the look with a wide choice of slide rail kits, fixed heads and body jets, available in square or round designs to complement both Indus and Lennox to give them the finishing touch they deserve. For more information please call Hudson Reed or visit the website.



01282 418000 www.hudsonreed.co.uk



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www.akw-ltd.co.uk/retro-fit

Norcros relaunches 4 into 1 grout range

Norcros Adhesives is relaunching its successful 4 into 1 grout range with new improved formulations, new colours, new packaging and marketing support. The Norcros 4 into 1 Grouts & Sealants range has established itself in recent years as one of the leading ranges on the market, known for technical excellence and ease of use, so the relaunch will be of considerable interest both to fixers and distributors. The new range has been considerably expanded and now includes a total of 15 colours. The products have been reformulated to be efflorescence-resistant and water-repellant. The formulation also contains Norcros Stop Mould Antibacterial additives.



01782 524140 www.norcros-adhesives.co.uk

Coloured radiators from Stelrad

Stelrad has just released the Vita Column Concept radiator – a 600mm high traditional column radiator that is now available from stock in Anthracite grey. The new radiator has joined the phenomenally successful Vita Series range and begins the process of seeing coloured radiators available from stock, anywhere around the UK within 72 hours of order. Until now, radiators have been available in up to 35 colours but there has been an order delivery delay of up to eight weeks as they were specially made for the customer. You can see regular updates from Stelrad on Twitter @Stelrad and Facebook @StelradRadiators.



0844 543 6200 www.stelrad.com

Thermostatic shower range

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 twelve months has been phenomenal with current and new customers keen to find out more about the extended offering that features in the new 'MX Collection' catalogue, available in printed form or online by visiting the MX web site. Shower trays, electric showers, thermostatic showers, shower enclosures, taps and mixers and shower accessories – it's a huge range.



01684 293311 www.mx-group.com

New anti-slip shower trays from Roman

International shower designer and manufacturer, **Roman**, has launched a new range of Shower Trays, which are anti-slip. Roman has added this dedicated range of Anti-Slip Shower Trays to their existing collection of Solid Surface Trays. They are available in matt white or matt grey and they are internationally approved for their Anti-Slip properties. These Shower Trays present a stylish finish with a domed aluminium waste cover. For volume orders Roman can accommodate a variety of colour finishes and sizes to your specification, including stone effect finishes to coordinate your bathroom design.



01325 311318 www.roman-showers.com

Roman Innov8

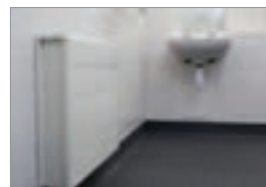
International shower designer and manufacturer, **Roman**, has launched a new collection of 8mm frameless pivoting Shower Enclosures. This innovative collection encompasses elegantly minimalist frameless Pivot Door Enclosures with a full length pivoting tube. These frameless Enclosures lead the way in minimal, inclusive and stylish design trends, presenting a distinctively modern collection. Innov8's obvious and outstanding differential is the low threshold (reduced height of the bottom rail), allowing level entry access into the Shower Enclosure. Finishing touches include the subtle bright silver frame and stylish chromed brass ergonomic feature handle.



01325 311318 www.roman-showers.com

Tarasafe Ultra H₂O for social housing

Gerflor can now offer certified social housing flooring solutions guaranteeing comfort and well-being, while meeting strict requirements. Gerflor's vinyl flooring products include different sets of benefits to meet the wide-ranging needs of diverse social housing projects and their Tarasafe Ultra H₂O is a perfect solution for a myriad of social housing applications where heavy duty slip resistance is essential in the shower, changing or bathroom environment. Gerflor's social housing applications are well-liked by tenants as they combine tenant-appeal with construction and installation features to address the needs of housing specifiers.



01926 622600 www.gerflor.co.uk

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10mm DREAM

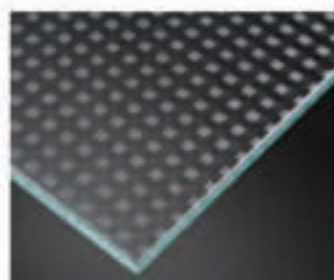
BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 64
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 55



INTERNAL USE ONLY

10/12mm DREAM CLEAR

BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 64
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 19



10mm ELEGANCE

BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 61
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 43



INTERNAL USE ONLY

10/12mm ELEGANCE CLEAR

BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 61
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 34



10mm SECRET

BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 62
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 51

- Tested To UK and European Standards
- Toughened and Laminated
- Multi Laminated with Vanceva Coloured Interlays
- Can be processed, Shaped, Drilled as required



10mm TRUST

BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 62
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 47



10mm COMFORT

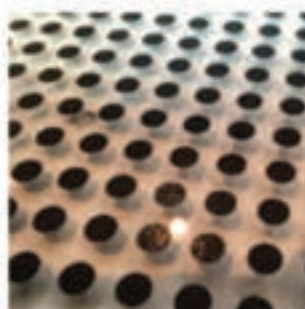
BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 60
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 44

- GLASS FLOORS
- BRIDGES
- STAIR TREADS
- EXTERNAL GRADE OPTIONS

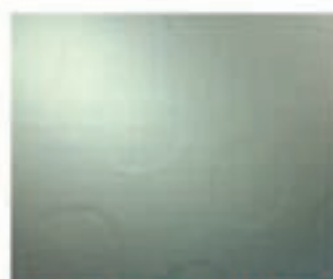
BESPOKE OPTIONS



Sandblast patterns



Paint patterns with applied grit



10mm COMFORT SANDBLAST

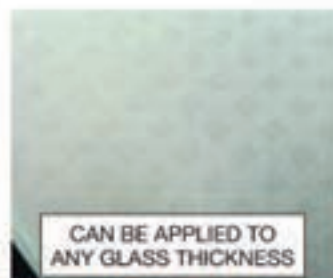
BS 7976-2 Av.DRY 65
BS 7976-2 Av.WET 61



CAN BE APPLIED TO ANY GLASS THICKNESS

FIRMAN SANDBLAST

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Tel: 01708 374534 Fax: 01708 340511 Email: sales@firmanglass.com

Designer Contracts invests in shades

Designer Contracts has invested more than £30,000 in specialist blind making machinery to manufacture blinds through the new arm of the business – designer shades. Peter Kelsey, MD of Designer Contracts said, "This investment further enhances our central curtain making facility which enables us to manage the production process from start to finish. It means that we keep our costs as low as possible to the benefit of all our customers, underpinning our promise of supplying our range of products at the most competitive price, as well as improving lead times by using our in-house transport fleet."

01246 854577 www.designercontracts.com



REHAU Passivhaus for social housing

REHAU's expertise in the Passivhaus sector has been perfectly demonstrated with an installation of windows and doors in one of the UK's first Passivhaus certified social housing projects. REHAU GENEIO tilt and turn windows, French doors and AGILA Passivhaus entrance door were all fabricated by Passivhaus specialists GRM Innovations for the pilot development in Sarisbury Green, Fareham. This is the first installation of the brand new AGILA Passivhaus contemporary styled entrance door which features a glazed in Rodenberg door panel. It achieves a U_d value of just 0.7 W/m²K, and comes pre-glazed and with high security hardware pre-fitted making it easy to install.

enquiries@rehau.com



PURE® makes the grade in the student accommodation sector

Combining a robust design, excellent acoustic properties and some of the lowest U-values available on the UK market, **Senior Architectural Systems'** innovative PURE® range of aluminium windows has been specified for use on several new projects in the student accommodation sector. One of the largest contracts to feature Senior's PURE® aluminium windows is The Courtyard scheme at the University of Hull. Comprising five separate blocks based around two central courtyards, the development has been designed by GSS Architecture and offers a range of facilities in addition to high-specification student accommodation. The extensive fenestration package, which was installed by Glass and Framing Solutions (GFS) also features Senior's thermally efficient SF52 aluminium curtain walling. Further additions to Senior's growing order book of contracts in this sector include two new student residences in Sheffield. Located close to the city's universities, the new Sharman Court scheme on Sheffield's Broad Lane offers students high-specification accommodation in a central location. Here, Continental Installations Ltd fabricated and installed Senior's PURE® aluminium windows for main contractor Watkins Jones and architects Kelsey Design Associates. The Printworks is another example of purpose-built modern student living. Senior's PURE® windows and SCW curtain walling have been installed throughout the six-storey building by fabricators.

info@seniorarchitectural.co.uk



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Attention to fire doors

Patrick Dean of fire door manufacturer Door-Stop highlights the key points landlords need to consider when choosing fire doors for a rental property.

Fire doors are an essential element in the passive fire protection of buildings. Put into context, people living in rented or shared accommodation are seven times more likely to have a fire, according to government statistics. Therefore, it is vital that reliable and certified fire doors are fitted throughout a building.

Fire safety within the home is an extremely important issue, especially in mixed-use premises and where unrelated occupiers, who live

independently from one another, share common areas of the same building. However, despite the amount of guidance available to building owners, there still seems to be a real lack of awareness when it comes to fire precaution and safety measures for those specifying building materials.

Fire doors can provide an effective line of defence against the spread of fire; they are engineered safety devices that are a crucial part of



the passive fire protection of every commercial, public and multiple occupancy building. They can save lives and property, and should therefore demand the appropriate consideration when specifying for any application.

Know the law

When it comes to specifying a fire door, there are three laws that should be followed: Building Regulations Part B, the Housing Act 2004, and the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005.

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a health and safety rating system that encompasses fire safety in housing – which includes making sure that fire doors with adequate fire and smoke resistance are installed and maintained in order to comply with the latest fire regulations.

Whenever there is a fire incident in a block of flats or a commercial building, there is always a 'responsible person'. In the Regulatory Reform, Fire Safety Order the responsible person is an employee in the workplace (if the workplace is to any extent under his control), a person who has control of the premises (as occupier or otherwise) or the owner. Similarly, the person responsible for fire safety provision and maintenance of residential accommodation is usually the landlord, or alternatively in HMOs, the building manager.

It is important to understand that the person responsible for an incident could receive a two-year prison sentence or a substantial fine.

Approved Document B of the Building Regulations sets out the law regarding fire safety in buildings, with Volume 1 covering residential properties and Volume 2 encompassing all other buildings.

Compliance checklist

In addition to the legal obligations, there are three elements that should be considered when it comes to actually choosing a fire door. However, by liaising with a reputable fire door supplier, you are guaranteed to receive a door set that has been fully tested and third-party certified.

The first step is to ensure that the chosen door has been tested to the exact specification that is being supplied. In fact, it is vital that the test evidence is checked and understood, in order to confirm that the door being installed is compliant. Doors must be tested to BS 476 Part 22 and BSEN 1634-3.

Secondly, all of the components that make up the door set should also have been tested. It is crucial that the door is supplied with the right hinges, locks and handles for the job – and that they are CE-marked and compatible with other products being specified. Indeed, incorrect hinges may cause a door to drop over time and thereby fail to provide the required protection from fire.

Lastly, the fire door must be manufactured exactly to the standard as tested. This should not be compromised; the door being offered should have been tested with an independent smoke test. It is recommended that a FD30s (fire and smoke tested for up to 30 minutes) door set is specified with third party certification for fire compliance.

A fire door with third-party certification ensures that the door being offered is exactly as specified and within the approved design scope. It also means that independent experts have monitored all aspects of its manufacture. Additionally, each door is individually registered and an audit trail is available for the client and any independent fire inspector. What's more, choosing to install a third-party certified fire door will reduce the risk of prosecution.

There really is no need to risk not having a fully effective and certified fire door installed to a multi-occupancy building, so when it comes to fire safety it is of utmost importance that you consult with a reputable fire door supplier for guidance and advice.

Patrick Dean is head of sales and marketing at Door-Stop

Designer Contracts backs Everest climb

Designer Contracts, is supporting a Mount Everest climb for The Furniture Makers' Company, the furnishing industry's charity. Damian Walters, chief executive of the British Institute of Kitchen, Bedroom and Bathroom Installation (BiKBBI), is to raise £100,000 for the charity, by attempting to scale the icy precipices of Mount Everest's summit. Peter Kelsey, MD said: "Designer Contracts is delighted to sponsor Damian's Everest challenge in aid of the Furniture Maker's charity. With its extensive education programme, together with the help that it gives to people in its industry who are facing financial hardship, the charity is an invaluable cause."

01246 854577 www.designercontracts.com



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www.pentairthermal.com




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Paragon branded efficient, realistic high quality gas flame technology is now available in a freestanding stove design both for conventional and balanced flue systems. The new Paragon gas stove models are manufactured with heavy-duty, seam-welded steel bodies and doors in keeping with high quality solid fuel originals. Conventional flue models can be fitted into Class one, Class two and Pre-cast flues and come complete with an innovative closure plate system. BF models have a rear mounted "through the wall" flue system. For more information please contact **Charlton & Jenrick**.



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The programmable EasyZAPP

DANLERS EasyZAPP range of PIR occupancy switches are designed for the automatic control of lighting or other connected loads, they are remotely set-up or adjusted using a free app on an Android phone or tablet. EasyZAPP products work as presence detector switches and can be adjusted for settings such as photocell override, time lag and maintained lux levels (dimmable versions only). The phone or tablet can also be used as a remote control on/off override, or to configure several EasyZAPP controls at the same time. The products are straightforward to install and make use of existing wiring and are suitable for either retrofit or new installations.



01249 443377 www.danlers.co.uk

New Inline product range launched by Micronics Ltd

Micronics Ltd, the Clamp-on ultrasonic flow-meter specialist is working exclusively with Engelmann Sensor GmbH, to market its range of In-line Heat meter products within the UK.

The Introduction of this range of products now enables Micronics to compete within the energy metering and billing market for new build, full refurbishment and retrofit projects offering the customers a choice of meter types and solutions to suit their individual needs and preferences.

Micronics will first introduce the UF50 Ultrasonic Heatmeter range for 15mm, 22mm and 25mm pipes, all available with a choice of M-bus, Pulse, Wireless M-bus outputs and one or two pulse inputs.

Additional products include Single and Multi-jet Heatmeters, water meters, Heat cost allocators with a range of radio and Wi-Fi add on accessories.

All energy meters are MID approved and are available for standard Temperature, High Temperature (+150C) and cooling applications (Glycol Versions available). And all the ultrasonic meters are battery powered with an estimated 10-year life depending on usage. For further information on this product range please visit the website or contact the sales office.

01628 810456 www.micronicsflowmeters.com



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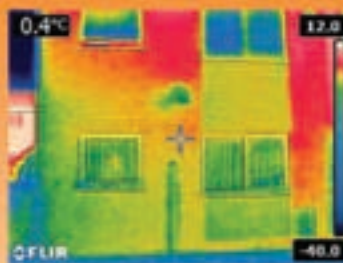
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Tread lightly

Robust floors are essential for tenant safety. Barry Eagle of GripClad offers advice on picking the right type of flooring for high-traffic areas.



Private landlords and housing associations are responsible for the welfare of their tenants, and so it is vital for specifiers to choose a flooring solution that not only provides safety, but is also reliable and requires low levels of maintenance throughout its lifetime. Heavy footfall contributes to the gradual wear of floorings, and as defects develop, the risk of injury increases. However, opting for a solid material such as concrete is one way to address these concerns. Easily shaped thanks to its fluid state and extremely robust, concrete is a popular option for high-traffic areas.

Concrete

For communal spaces, concrete is an ideal alternative to wood, vinyl tiles or carpets, and when combined with steel rebar it can withstand wear and tear from vehicles for years. Furthermore, concrete is a very low cost solution that's highly customisable and can be poured into any shape.

However, facilities managers should look to take an extra step to ensure longevity of the material by applying a protective coating. The application of such coating safeguards the surfaces against breakages or stains and enables the material to better endure heavy foot traffic. This is of particular importance if concrete is used in external areas, as it can begin to spall and crumble when exposed repeatedly to water.

Resin

Another option for high-traffic areas is resin flooring. Epoxy and polyurethane resin floors can be layered over existing flooring to provide a safe, anti-slip surface that is easy to maintain. This versatile type of flooring also offers hard-wearing quality finishes for both internal and external spaces. Moreover, resin flooring inhibits bacterial growth as there is no grouting, seams or joints, thus contributing to a hygienic environment.

Resin floors can also be used to protect concrete floors while providing an attractive, high quality finish designed to keep floors clean and odour-free. However, while resin floors are considered broadly slip-resistant, a textured finish should be considered for communal areas, where spillages are common, in order to mitigate the risk of slips.

Installing a resin floor can also take longer compared to other types of flooring as the base floor requires thorough cleaning to remove any grease, oil or solvents before the resin coating can be applied. Since resin doesn't "breathe" once it cures, any moisture trapped below the surface may necessitate refinishing of the floor if bubbling or buckling in the flooring material occurs.



“Depending on your needs, one might be better than another, but all flooring types have their limitations”

Vinyl

Available in sheets or squares, vinyl flooring varies in strength and quality grades, and this versatile material is a popular and cost-effective solution for those looking for flooring that is easy to install and maintain. Vinyl sheets can be laid in communal corridors as well as inside properties. The material is also easy to clean, making it an attractive choice to landlords looking to keep costs down. Moreover, compared to other flooring options, vinyl is relatively inexpensive and can be cut to shape and installed fairly quickly.

However, vinyl bonding can perish quickly when exposed to very high traffic and is susceptible to rips and tears. If this occurs, it cannot be refinished like resin – instead, the damaged area must be removed and replaced. Furthermore, vinyl can be stained more easily than concrete or resin.

Overcoming limitations

There is a huge range of flooring options available for managed sites and depending on your needs, one might be better than another, but all flooring types have their limitations. These can be overcome by enhancing

the materials with anti-slip solutions. GRP strips and nosings can be retro-fitted to existing flooring to protect both your flooring and the people walking upon it, making them ideal for entrance ways and other high-traffic areas.

For example, anti-slip stair tread covers are an easy to install solution for busy stairwells. They are a complete one-piece section, which includes a drop down nosing over the stair riser. This allows the edging to be colour contrasting, which has the additional benefit of assisting the visually impaired to define the step edge when descending or ascending the stairs. They will resist the high footfall and impact for many years without any wear or tear, making it ideal for any high traffic area.

Beyond periodic cleaning, anti-slip stair treads require no maintenance and can have a 100 per cent non-corrosion and rust guarantee thanks to their GRP structure. Furthermore, anti-slip covers and treads are designed to take long-term punishment. The aggregate grit surface of GRP treads is aluminium oxide, which is embedded within the base resin surface of the tread. This makes it very resistant to wear and when combined with traditional flooring materials and the flooring surface can last for years with little upkeep.

When it comes to flooring safety, a "belt and braces" approach is always favourable. Combining your flooring choice with a GRP anti-slip solution will give you the best possible resilience and protection for your property and the people walking through it.

Barry Eagle is the managing director of GripClad.

Guarantee your rent

Collecting rent on time is essential for a successful landlord. On behalf of Just Landlords, Rose Jinks explains the benefits of rent guarantee insurance.



It's no secret that a standard home insurance doesn't offer loss or damage protection to properties that are rented out. To cover your letting assets adequately, a specialist landlord insurance is required. However, simply keeping a property in good condition is not the only element of a landlord's success – receiving regular rent payments is just as vital.

That's where rent guarantee Insurance comes in. Unlike basic landlord insurance, which protects the physical property, a rent guarantee policy is 'a peace of mind' cover. By opting for rent guarantee insurance, which is often combined with legal expenses cover, landlords can be sure that they would get paid even if their tenants fell into rent arrears. Meanwhile, the legal expenses part of the insurance covers any legal costs incurred during a legal dispute with tenants.

Why it's essential

It would be fair to say that rent arrears are every landlord's worst nightmare; if a tenant withholds rent, this can immensely damage a landlord's business. For example, buy-to-let investors could be likely to have monthly mortgage payments which they fund through their rent income. Similarly, those with large property portfolios will likely need to put significant contingency funds in place for regular maintenance and unexpected repairs.

"Insurers often request reference and Right to Rent checks to be carried out before issuing the policy"

While landlords may have procedures in place to chase any late or lost rent, it's clear that even just one month's arrears can disturb your balance sheet, causing a decline in rental yield and possible mortgage arrears on your part.

Putting rent guarantee insurance in place for each tenancy can ensure that you continue receiving rental income during the period of arrears and, when legal expenses are included on the policy, can also cover the eviction costs incurred through the courts.

As this can be a lengthy and costly exercise, having cover in place to protect your pocket can ensure that the damage on your business is minimal. Recent research by a specialist student-only lettings portal even suggests that it can cost landlords up to £2,000 and take around nine months to evict a tenant – and this doesn't include the cost of missing out on rent.

However, rent guarantee insurance shouldn't be an excuse for landlords to become careless in their tenant vetting.



Policy conditions

All prospective tenants should be subject to referencing, including credit checks, employer's and previous landlord's references, and the legally required Right to Rent checks.

Before taking out a rent guarantee insurance policy, landlords must check whether these references are conditions of the insurance. At some companies landlords are expected to conduct these essential checks, as reference checks are a standard way of exposing any underlying issues with prospective tenants.

Nevertheless, even the most dependable renters can sometimes fall on difficult times. This is why it's important to consider having Rent Guarantee Insurance in place.

Current economic climate

As affordable rental properties continue to be in short supply, recent Government proposals, particularly the banning of the letting agents fees, could create additional financial constraints for landlords and their tenants.

If the ban comes into force, it is expected that the fees will instead be charged to landlords; thus, investors are expected to increase their rents to cover the added costs.

Under such turbulent times in the lettings industry, landlords should be more cautious with their income than they've previously had to be.

This includes protecting their rental income with a rent guarantee insurance.

This is especially suitable for landlords that self-manage their portfolios, as chasing tenants for rent arrears or evicting them can be even more difficult without the help of a letting agent.

Guaranteed rent schemes

Despite the name similarities, rent guarantee insurance and guaranteed rent schemes are two very different things. You may have heard of

schemes that guarantee your rental income for a period of time through investing in one of their properties. However, this is not the same as rent guarantee insurance.

Rent guarantee insurance is a policy that you take out per tenancy agreement – it is a cover that ensures you get paid if your tenant stops or cannot afford to pay the rent.

Guaranteed rent schemes, on the other hand, require investment in certain properties in return for guaranteed monthly payments. While this may sound like a safe decision, a thorough research into the scheme is highly recommended as landlords risk becoming stuck with tenants in their properties without getting rent if the scheme goes bust.

Protecting your rental income is vital for any landlord and getting caught out if your tenants fall into rent arrears can be avoided by taking out a rent guarantee and legal expenses insurance.

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Don't save it for a rainy day

Marley Alutec's Tony Wereszczynski explains why landlords shouldn't waste time when choosing rainwater and eaves systems and discusses the new industry standard relevant to the sector and the most recent technical advancements and trends in rainwater products.

Specifying rainwater and eaves systems may not be a top priority for housing providers, but these solutions play a crucial role in retaining the structural integrity of a building. Overlooking their importance could result in costly repairs in the long term. However, with the right guidance and technical support, these systems can not only be specified and maintained correctly, but also contribute to a property's overall aesthetics.

Material selection

The three key factors to keep in mind when choosing rainwater and eaves systems are durability, cost efficiency and aesthetics. In order to ensure all these are covered it's especially important to consider the choice of material the solutions are made of.

Typically, rainwater systems are PVC, cast-iron or aluminium. The most affordable option is a PVC system. Despite its low upfront cost however, this type of solution would require replacing at least twice during a building's lifetime.

"Covering all metal gutter systems, the new standard ensures they meet a core strength test giving complete peace of mind to specifiers"

The more durable, albeit expensive systems are those made of cast iron. While they are bound to last longer without requiring a replacement, these systems are extremely maintenance-intensive. Perhaps the best of both worlds is offered by high-quality marine grade aluminium systems, some of which can last at least 50 years with little to no maintenance.

Aesthetics

Beyond cost and maintenance considerations however, aesthetics must also come in to the mix, as rainwater and eaves systems



have a considerable impact on the exterior. Manufacturers offer a wide range of products in a variety of colours and finishes that specifiers can choose from. One way to approach this is to choose products that match the building's fenestration palette in order to achieve a uniform look. This allows housing operators to achieve any desired aesthetic and improve performance without compromise.

Metal guttering standard

To aid specifiers in their choice of metal rainwater systems, a new industry standard has been launched earlier this year. Building product standards have an important role within construction – to provide assurance over product quality and to help housing operators build a reputation for specifying quality and durable solutions.

For too long there has been an absence of standards within rainwater and eaves products, which makes the new standard, Standard BS9101, a welcome development. The Metal Gutter Manufacturers Association, the British Standards Institution and a select drafting committee comprising of

experts from all sectors of the industry, initiated the standard in 2014 before launching it this year. Covering all metal gutter systems, the standard ensures they meet a core strength test to provide peace of mind to specifiers. The standard would also make it a lot harder for unscrupulous manufacturers to copy existing designs and produce cheaper, less reliable systems.

However, the new standard does not offer guidance on gutter sizing to provide the required rainwater drainage capacity. In this regard, it is important that proper rainwater run-off calculations have been done in order to adequately size systems. Partnering with a trusted manufacturer with an experienced technical department is the best way to meet these requirements.

Marine grade aluminium

Another industry development is the growing trend being seeing across listed, heritage or period-style new build properties, and that is a demand for low maintenance replacements for cast iron systems. To satisfy this trend, manufacturers are using modern materials such as marine grade aluminium.

These products also have a life expectancy of 50 years or more and are highly corrosion resistant. This makes marine grade aluminium cost-effective when compared to cast iron installations, which require high levels of maintenance.

Over the last decade the industry has seen a lot of movement, from technological advancements, such as nano self-cleaning additives, to improved industry standards launched to provide specifiers peace of mind when choosing rainwater and eaves systems.

Installing high-quality rainwater and eaves systems can give a property a new lease of life and reduce lifecycle and maintenance costs.

Tony Wereszczynski is technical director at Marley Alutec



Aico expands training facilities

Aico Ltd, one of the market leaders in residential Fire and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms in the UK, has expanded and enhanced its training and support services for customers. This includes two new Mobile Training & Demonstration Units plus an extended Centre of Excellence at Aico's premises in Oswestry, Shropshire. Aico's new fully fitted Mobile Training & Demonstration vehicles enable the company to deliver detailed product and alarm technology information right to customers' very doors. Information boards on all Aico technologies and alarm ranges are installed within the units, along with a virtual tour of the company's manufacturing process.



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Remmers sets sail at Red Wharf Bay

Red Wharf Bay Sailing & Watersports Club is set in an area of outstanding beauty at Traeth Bychan on the Isle of Anglesey, North Wales. The member's clubhouse has been sited here for over 50 years due to its suitable sailing waters. The members of the committee decided that the exterior of the building was looking a little tired and a refresh was needed before the new season started at Easter. **Remmers** Compact Opaque PU topcoat was selected for the job due to its performance characteristics and suitability to coastal locations. Over two weekends, the clubhouse was transformed and the new colour gave the clubhouse the refreshed look it deserved.



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Firex low energy smoke and heat alarms

Kidde's Firex range now offers safety plus sustainability, with low energy mains-powered smoke and heat alarms that cost less than £1 a year to run. Interconnected, mains-powered smoke and heat alarms with reliable power back-up should now be the norm for most housing to satisfy Building Regulations requirements and Code of Practice recommendations. Firex alarms can be interlinked to create a low-energy network for protection throughout the home. But they can also interconnect with Kidde's 4MCO and 4MDCO mains-powered carbon monoxide alarms, using the unique 'Smart Interconnect' feature.



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Getting smart with solar energy storage

Peter Thiele, president of Sharp Energy Solutions Europe, demonstrates how solar batteries can store power for use when the sun isn't shining.

With the right infrastructure in place in your rented property, a solar system can supply up to 80 per cent of the tenant's energy needs. Intelligent home energy management systems, comprised of solar panels, a battery and an energy manager, mean that energy can be stored and used long after the sun has set.

Nowadays, solar panels have become fairly common and they are widely considered as a sensible investment for property owners. By adding a battery to a solar system, you can transform the amount of solar-powered energy the property consumes, which is typically 20-30 per cent a day, up to about 70-80 per cent, giving those living in the property greater independence from the grid and protection from energy price hikes.

When you are looking at solar panels, landlords need to consider power, efficiency and cell type, as well as the space available. Pmax is the power of each solar module. It is stated in Wp (watt peak) and refers to the output from the solar module electrical peak power under standard test conditions. The efficiency is the ratio of input (sun energy) to output (solar power).

Normally, the module efficiency is compared; however, some manufacturers also specify the cell efficiency. For this reason, specifiers should ensure they compare the correct values. Higher performance and greater efficiency are especially recommended when roofspace is limited.

Technologies

There are two prevailing technologies in the market: polycrystalline and monocrystalline cells. Monocrystalline cells are usually more efficient, but more expensive to manufacture, whereas polycrystalline cells can be produced more cost-effectively but have a slightly lower efficiency. Ultimately, the space available on your roof would determine which technology would be most beneficial.

Choosing a battery

When choosing a battery for your solar system, property owners need to consider its type and size. While some lead-acid batteries have been in use in the past few years, lithium-ion technology has now become the standard. The reasons for this are the smaller size and weight of lithium-ion batteries and the better usability of the capacity. This technology is also used in eCars or smartphones.

While lead-acid batteries can only be half-discharged, lithium-ion batteries have a "Depth of Discharge" of 90-95 per cent. Depth of Discharge describes how much of the total energy that the battery stores have been discharged, or can be discharged.

Landlords therefore need to take into consideration their PV system size and electricity consumption. If you look at the average PV residential installation in the UK, they are typically from 2.6 kWp (kilo watt peak) up to 4 kWp in size. For every 1 kWp installed, in the UK you're probably going to generate around 800 – 900 kWh per year, depending on where you are in the country.

The system's capacity and power are scalable simply by connecting multiple battery storage devices or battery inverters.



"Solar energy is produced in the day but increasingly required at night, so controlling energy storage is key"

Energy managers

The final part of a smart energy system is an energy manager. Energy managers allow users to see how much electricity the rooftop solar system is currently producing, feed and take from the grid, the battery charge status, and the current energy requirements of the home. Some managers can save this data for easy evaluation on a daily, monthly or yearly basis. They can also display how much and at what time of the day self-generated energy is being used, as well as measuring the energy performance of the home.

Some types of energy managers can also analyse how energy is used in the home and manage the energy going to household appliances automatically. The system can receive information from different devices in the home using smart interfaces, or with the help of wireless plug sockets or relays. The devices can be turned on or off according to previously-defined conditions, such as at certain times, when there is a surplus of solar power, or in a certain sequence.

As an example, when using our energy manager and battery storage, properties with solar panels can generate up to 99 per cent of the electricity they need on sunny days, and up to an average of 80 per cent during the whole year. With systems like this, consumers can reduce their electricity bill by 80 per cent during the year.

A major challenge when it comes to maximising domestic consumption of self-produced solar electricity is getting around the fact that solar energy is only produced during the day, yet is increasingly required in households when the sun is no longer shining. Controlling energy storage is a way to solve this problem and make solar energy available in the home right around the clock.

There has never been a better and more important time to support solar power.

Peter Thiele is the president of Sharp Energy Solutions Europe



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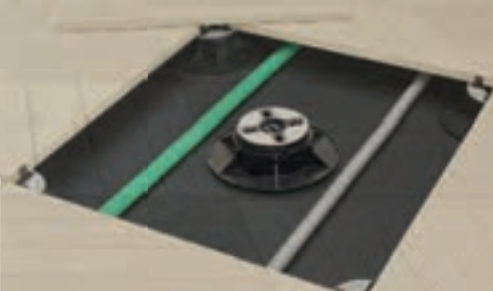
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