

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

03.18



Confusion over
tower block
safety costs

PSR regulatory
changes

HMO licensing
moves

Big hitters
depart long
term jobs

Rough sleeping
hits record high



Engineering student safety

Heriberto Cuanalo from Collegiate
AC gives his top tips – See inside



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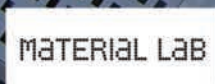
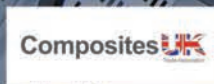
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Editor's comment

New decency standard for all rental properties is overdue



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

The single biggest contributor to improvements in the standard of social rented housing over the past quarter century was undoubtedly the introduction of the decent housing standard. It led to millions of rundown properties being upgraded and in doing so has improved the lives of countless people.

But surely the time has come to update it and to extend its remit to the private rented sector as well, so that many more residents can enjoy modern living conditions, with amenities that improve our lives rather than being injurious to our health.

Billions of pounds were spent on upgrading council and housing association owned homes to reach the decent homes standard, but it should never be forgotten that it was a minimum standard with social housing landlords encouraged to go beyond it. This led to a plethora of DHS Plus standards being devised by different landlords, often in conjunction with their tenants. But none of these were applied to the private rented sector.

Instead we saw the rather snappily titled Housing Health and Safety Rating System developed and implemented for private rentals. Usually shortened to HHSRS, this replaced the old fitness standard and it has been used by Environmental Health Officers to rate property risks to the health and safety of occupants for the last 11 or 12 years. There is a growing chorus of voices calling for the HHSRS and related guidance to be updated.

TIME FOR ACTION

So much has happened since the DHS and HHSRS were introduced that it's fair to say the world has changed out of all recognition and wholesale revolution rather than piecemeal tinkering is now required. The numbers living in rented housing has expanded enormously, it now accounts for almost 40 per cent of our housing, the prospect of owning your own home is disappearing into the distance for many, while the Grenfell Tower fire has refocused our attention onto the safety of our homes like never before.

Karen Buck's private member's bill to improve conditions in the private rental sector is making its way through Parliament and we await Dame Judith Hackitt's final report on building regulations and fire safety. Meanwhile registers of rogue landlords are beginning to appear alongside enhanced licensing schemes up and down the country.

On their own, each of these measures will have a positive impact. But isn't this all just adding to a postcode lottery and growing confusion over differing standards and what rules apply to which properties? What we really need is something that joins it all up – a simple but comprehensive, easy to understand set of standards, which provides modern, good quality accommodation in return for a fair and affordable rent.

This could also cover aspects on the management of homes, as well as the condition and attractiveness of the immediate environment. After all we don't live in bubbles, divorced from the reality of what lies beyond our front door. The area in which we live often has as much impact on us as what we surround ourselves with inside our homes. This also chimes with social tenants saying they dislike being stigmatised by where they live.

ENFORCEABLE STANDARDS

The Housing Secretary is consulting on his plans for establishing a single ombudsman service to provide a common redress system for resolving customer complaints across all types of housing. His arguments for doing this would appear to apply equally well to creating a new cross tenure standard for all rented housing, private and social.

We have been promised a green paper on the future role and purpose of social housing, but how much more useful it would be to have an enforceable standard, with all landlords (private and social) required to meet the standards if they wish to let out properties. This would need to be backed up with rules to prevent properties being left empty for long periods. It should also be possible to extend its remit to include any new fire safety standards recommended by Dame Judith Hackitt. For the avoidance of doubt, these should be prescriptive or mandatory rather than just desirable.

Ideally private landlords should not feel this is a negative development or something which punishes them, so there may be a need for incentives to encourage compliance with higher letting standards, possibly in the form of tax breaks, grants or other rewards.

It is clear the current housing market is broken. The Government is spending billions on trying to reignite the building of houses for sale, but it also needs to ensure rented housing is an attractive and viable alternative, with tenants safe in the knowledge that modern standards will be provided and their tenancy is not at risk of being ended at short notice. Now that really would be a significant legacy for the Housing Secretary to leave and millions of tenants would be forever grateful.

Patrick Mooney

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

The March issue of Housing Management & Maintenance features Marina Real student accommodation in Valencia © Collegiate AC

Collegiate AC CEO, Heriberto Cuanalo, discusses student tenant safety on page 48

Shambolic situation over removal of cladding from tower blocks

The Government is being embarrassed by the current confusion over who is responsible for organising and paying for essential safety work at high-rise tower blocks, including the removal of dangerous cladding.

Initially the problem was frustrating those in the social housing sector, but more recently it is blighting privately owned blocks. This has left tens of thousands of residents living in potentially dangerous homes some nine months after the Grenfell Tower fire and facing huge sums to make them safe. At least 130 privately owned tower blocks (including student residences) are believed to be clad in similar panels to those that were on Grenfell.

High profile cases have arisen in places like Salford, Slough, Croydon and Greenwich where owners, landlords and managing agents are refusing to organise and pay for such works. They say they cannot afford the costs (which often run into millions of pounds) and will only commence works if leaseholders and private tenants or the taxpayer, agree to fund the costs.

There are court cases taking place now to establish where responsibility lays, with teams of lawyers scrutinising the small print of leases and tenancy agreements. Their involvement is rarely a good sign and the only certainty is that the legal fees will be high.

Ministers have repeatedly urged the owners of private tower blocks to follow the example of social landlords in progressing with and paying for safety works. Housing Secretary Sajid Javid has said: "Whatever the legal case may be, the moral case is clear that the tab should be picked up by the freeholder."

CHALLENGES

However, this view is being challenged. "The Government has suggested that landlords should pay for the works but there is no suggestion that anyone has acted inappropriately or cut corners, rather that building control approved and signed off the various types of cladding at the time and have only now tested those very systems and found them unsuitable," said Nigel Glen, chief executive of the Association of Residential Managing Agents.

And earlier this month during a Commons debate MPs from across the political divide called on the Government to pick up the tab and take full responsibility for paying for the removal and replacement of dangerous cladding from private tower blocks. Conservative MPs featured prominently in the debate but new housing minister Dominic Raab was unmoved by their calls for financial help.

Several dozen councils are known to have written to Ministers seeking financial help with the cost of remedial works. Ministers are possibly awaiting the outcome of Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building regulations and fire safety

practices before committing themselves, but the ongoing delays are a serious worry to the residents of affected tower blocks.

Back in January we heard that four councils were to be given either extra Housing Revenue Account borrowing flexibility or an opportunity to make a one-off transfer from their general funds to pay for the works. Another six councils were in active discussions with civil servants. It was unclear if any agreement would include covering the cost of installing sprinkler systems as well as recladding and other fire safety works.

Lord Porter, who chairs the Local Government Association, has understandably said that landlords need "urgent clarity about how they should be replacing materials on their high-rise blocks". He added that the Government must "meet the unexpected exceptional costs" of the major remedial works.

So far only about ten of the 158 social housing tower blocks identified as dangerous after the Grenfell Tower fire, have been fully reclad with safer fire resistant materials. Many other towers stand in a state of limbo with cladding removal works only partially completed, while up to 66 blocks of flats have not had any combustible cladding removed at all despite the panels on them failing safety tests. A shortage of suitable alternative cladding and specialist labour is adding to the already protracted delays.

This lack of progress contributed to the campaign group Justice4Grenfell parading three advertising billboards outside Parliament and at other locations, with the slogans "71 dead", "And still no arrests?" and "How come?" It was a powerful reminder to our lawmakers that people are getting impatient and want to see effective action. Labour MP Steve Reed went further than many when he accused the Prime Minister of running the risk of a second Grenfell Tower fire by failing to act on the removal of cladding from blocks.

CONCERNS AND WORRIES

The construction industry and insurance sector have also waded into the debate on fire safety – so we are now unsure about the quality of the safety tests conducted on cladding materials in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, as well as being uncertain over the advice on what materials are safe or unsafe and what additional measures need to be taken to produce effective fire retardant conditions.

Over the course of the Winter temperatures inside the flats of tower blocks being worked on dropped because of a lack of insulation. In some cases the landlords have promised to reimburse tenants the cost of their higher heating bills, but not all housing associations or councils have done this. Nor has the Government stepped in to offer assistance due to exceptional circumstances.

Meanwhile residents at privately owned blocks



Reports are now emerging of growing numbers of council tenants asking to be moved from their tower block homes

are also being asked to foot the bill for the cost of fire wardens, which in many cases is costing several thousand pounds each week to provide round the clock cover. This is despite concerns being raised about the supervision, training and equipment available to the fire wardens.

Worries have also been raised about the quality and standard of fire risk assessments (FRAs) being carried out on large numbers of buildings, as doubts exist on the competency of all those involved in doing the assessments. Specific questions have been raised about the FRAs commissioned by the Kensington & Chelsea TMO, as for several months they allegedly continued to use the assessor who had cleared Grenfell Tower. Not surprisingly reports are now emerging of growing numbers of council tenants asking to be moved from their tower block homes.

With the public inquiry into the Grenfell tower due to resume hearings later this month, there are mounting calls for all the various processes to speed up so the victims and the residents of other high-rise blocks can get answers and move on with their lives. It also clear that recommendations arising from Dame Judith Hackitt's inquiry have to be mandatory and not just desirable. Safety regulations must be implemented and backed up by the force of law, rather than being seen as an a la carte menu to be chosen from or not, by developers and landlords.

Consultation on single housing ombudsman begins

The Government has launched its consultation exercise on setting up a single ombudsman service to improve customer rights across all parts of the housing sector, including all tenants, leaseholders and home buyers.

While other possible outcomes exist, a single ombudsman is clearly the favoured option of Housing Secretary Sajid Javid who originally announced plans for a consultation exercise last November. The current consultation was launched in February and is open until 16 April.

At present a patchwork of protection and redress services operate across different parts of housing, causing confusion among the public while also leaving gaps of uncertainty. Membership of the Housing Ombudsman scheme is compulsory for all social landlords, but private landlords do not have to be part of a scheme.

Mr Javid described the existing mechanisms of redress in the housing sector as “confusing and unco-ordinated”.

There are currently four different bodies that can deal with complaints: the Housing Ombudsman, the Property Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services: Property and the Property Redress scheme. In addition the Charity Commission deals with charitable bodies like the National Trust who own and let properties.

The largest of the current providers, Ombudsman Services announced earlier in the New Year that it would complete its withdrawal from complaints handling by early August as it did not want to interfere with the Government's plans.

Mr Javid said getting cases considered took too long and there are all kinds of barriers to doing so. He said the proposed streamlining “could help drive up standards across the whole industry and increase protections for consumers.”

He added “Research in other sectors has shown that redress works more efficiently for consumers when there's a single ombudsman in place. We're going to see if it's right for the housing sector too.”

The consultation exercise consists of 31 questions but respondents only need answer those relevant to themselves.



Big rise in BTL landlords with serious mortgage arrears

The number of private landlords who are struggling to pay their ‘Buy to Let’ mortgages has jumped by 20 per cent, raising twin fears over the supply of rental homes and the rate of future rent increases.

Latest figures from UK Finance – the new trade body representing over 300 banking and financial institutions – revealed that 1,200 BTL mortgages were in “significant arrears” in the last quarter of 2017, a fifth higher than in the same quarter in 2016.

At the same time, the number of homeowners with significant arrears fell by one per cent. Significant arrears means the borrower owes more than 10 per cent of the outstanding loan balance.

In the same quarter at the end of 2017 some 600 buy to let properties were re-possessed by banks as landlords defaulted. This was the same number that were re-possessed in the same quarter of 2016, whereas re-possession in the owner-occupation market have significantly fallen to stand at a 36 year low. This could reflect a harder approach being taken towards small BTL landlords (often referred to as hobby or amateur landlords) by banks and the courts.

In addition a further 5,100 BTL mortgages were in less serious arrears of 2.5 per cent. This was two per cent higher than 2016, while the number of homeowners with arrears of more than 2.5 per cent fell by seven per cent.

STRUGGLING TO COPE

The figures indicate that a growing number of private landlords are struggling to cope with recent tax changes (directly targeted at their businesses by the current and previous chancellors) as well as more of their tenants falling into rent arrears. As growing numbers of benefit claimants are moving on to Universal Credit, this is causing problems by

delaying benefit payments to tenants, who in turn then default on their rent.

In a further sign of the strains facing the BTL sector, the UK Finance figures show the number of new buy to let mortgages fell to 5,300 in December, down by 17.2 per cent year-on-year, while the number of landlords remortgaging was also down by nearly 12 per cent. Interest rates are forecast to rise in 2018 from their historic low levels and this will add further pressure on landlords who are struggling on tight margins.

“Landlords are facing increased burdens placed on them by the Government, which is significantly increasing financial compliance requirements,” said David Cox, chief executive of the Association of Residential Landlords (Arla) PropertyMark. “This is, in turn, is causing landlords to fall into financial difficulties.”

Arla has highlighted that one of the biggest problems which landlords face is the length of time it can take to get a tenant evicted if they stop paying their rent. Typically it can take up to nine or ten months and during this time, the landlord has to continue paying their mortgage, but may receive no rent.

While the Government is planning to introduce new specialist housing courts, to try to speed up the eviction process, this may come too late for many investors. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has already warned that growing numbers of landlords are pulling out of the market as a result of the problems. It said rents may rise as a result and David Cox says that he agrees with RICS.

Among the tax changes facing landlords have been a surcharge on Stamp Duty for any property they buy, and a gradual reduction in the amount they are able to claim in tax relief. Compliance costs have also increased with further tax changes expected in the new financial year.

Are you dealing with a high rise building that was involved in government testing?

If so, read on for an important update

Following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, a series of BS 8414 tests were commissioned by the government on specific combinations of insulation and ACM cladding panel. Based on the results of the tests, a number of high rise buildings were identified as having a problem, and guidance was issued.

BUT

BS 8414 tests are only valid for the precise combination and configuration of materials tested. Changing a small detail, can change how a system will perform. Yet the government has labelled complete classes of constructions as pass / fail based on a single test.

Since then, further BS 8414 tests have been carried out, to add to the bank of knowledge about what constitutes an acceptable façade system for buildings with storeys over 18 metres.

The results may have an impact on the necessity, or nature, of any remedial work that is being planned.

In particular the Government tested:

- FR cored ACM cladding with a 20 mm gap between the panels.

This passed with stone wool insulation, and failed marginally with phenolic and PIR insulation. However, a 20 mm gap between ACM panels would be uncommon practice in the UK.

Kingspan Insulation has now tested:

- Alpolic FR cored ACM cladding, with 10 mm and 4 mm gaps between the panels, and Kingspan Kooltherm K15 phenolic insulation.

These tests were successful. Therefore, if you have phenolic insulation with an FR cored ACM, but the joints between the ACM panels are 10 mm and not 20 mm, then the "fail" label and the need for remedial works may be invalid.

Similarly, if you are looking for a solution to replace a PE cored ACM installed over Kingspan Kooltherm K15 phenolic insulation, it might be as simple as replacing the PE cored ACMs with Alpolic FR cored ACMs with a gap (between ACM panels) size of 10 mm or less. This could provide an acceptable alternative solution to heavier options, helping to address potential structural limitations.

The BRE holds a register of systems that have been successfully tested to BS 8414:

www.bre.co.uk/regulatory-testing. Kingspan Insulation's new test data will be added to that website when BRE have signed off the test reports for the above tests. NB, this can take several weeks.

In the meantime, please contact Kingspan Insulation for further information.



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More than 150,000 social rent homes 'lost' in five years

More than 150,000 of the most affordable rented homes have been lost across England in just five years – either through sales or being re-let at higher rent levels, according to analysis from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The organisation, which represents housing professionals, is predicting that the figure will rise further to 230,000 by 2020 if current policies persist, making it increasingly difficult for people on lower incomes to access a decent home at a price they can afford.

The CIH argues that Government Ministers must focus on affordability as well as on building more homes to fix the country's broken housing market. According to CIH chief executive Terrie Alafat the Government should take an urgent look at shifting funding from the private 'for sale' market towards the building of genuinely affordable housing.

Figures from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Homes England show that 103,642 council homes and 46,972 housing association homes for social rent were lost between 2012 and 2017. Most of the losses were down to homes either being sold through the right to buy scheme, or being converted from social rents to the much higher 'affordable rents'. A smaller number were demolished, but this still outnumbered the new homes provided for social rent.

Based on current trends, the CIH is projecting that up to a further 80,000 homes currently let on social rents will be lost by 2020 – consisting of 55,500 council homes and 24,500 housing association homes.

Typically social rents are several thousand pounds a year below affordable rents (enough to make a big difference to low income households), as the latter are normally set at 80 per cent of the local market rent, whereas social rents will usually be at 50 to 60 per cent, but the percentages and rent levels vary according to the local authority area and council policies.

TRULY AFFORDABLE

CIH chief executive Terrie Alafat praised the Government's focus on housing and the extra investment in building more homes, but urged a change of direction. She said: "For many people on lower incomes, the only truly affordable option is social rent. It is simply unacceptable that we are losing so many of our most affordable homes at a time when more and more people are in need."

Last year Prime Minister Theresa May announced an extra £2bn investment in affordable housing, including some support for social rent while the Budget outlined the Government's ambition to deliver 300,000 new homes a year.

"Our analysis shows that 79 per cent of the housing budget up to 2020/21 is directed towards

private housing, with just 21 per cent going to affordable housing. Rebalancing this budget, so that more money is spent on affordable homes, could make a big difference."

Terrie Alafat added: "We need to increase the number of homes we are building but it's not just a numbers game – we need to make sure we are building the right homes, in the right places, and that people can afford them."

The building of new homes for letting at social rents has fallen to a trickle with just 5,380 built in the last financial year and 50,290 built in the past five years, with most of these financed by social landlords using a combination of sales receipts, cross subsidies, reserves and loans.

So they were provided in spite of the Government's policies, rather than because of them. This directly challenges the Prime Minister's much publicised commitment to help the 'just about managing' (JAMs) when she was first elected.

The CIH says the Government could also make some simple changes to the right to buy scheme to help councils build more homes to replace those sold. "We think local authorities should be able to keep 100 per cent of the money they receive from sales, rather than having to hand most of it over to the Treasury, as is currently the case. The Government could also give councils more time to use the receipts."

Tough approach from regulator leads to downgrades

In a series of grading revisions, the Social Housing Regulator has shown itself taking a tougher approach with housing associations over governance failings and flawed risk assessments connected to development work.

Radian, a large south east social landlord with nearly 21,000 homes has been downgraded for governance from G1 to G2 after the regulator said a planned growth in its house building programme had been delayed while the board put in place the required skills, systems and structures needed to deliver its plans. There had also been limited reporting to the board on the development programme, cashflow forecasts and budget performance. The financial viability rating was unchanged at V1. The association plans to increase its building programme from 500 new homes to between 600 and 700 a year.

East Anglian based Suffolk Housing Society had its governance and financial viability ratings downgraded from G1 to G3 and V1 to V2, making it non-compliant with the governance standard. The regulator was critical of the board of the 2,900 home

HA, saying it "failed to demonstrate an effective approach to reporting, quantification and management of key risks". It also found weaknesses in the association's internal controls assurance arrangements and its ability to deal with financial risks in its operating environment.

Islington & Shoreditch Housing Association which owns around 2,500 homes across six London boroughs, had its governance downgraded from G1 to G2 following an in-depth assessment which concluded the board was failing to adequately control or oversee health and safety issues including fire safety. It retained the V1 rating for financial viability. Byker Community Trust, which manages 1,800 homes on the Byker Estate in Newcastle, also had its governance downgraded from G1 to G2, for failing to demonstrate a systematic, risk based approach to internal controls assurance. Its financial viability rating of V2 was unchanged.

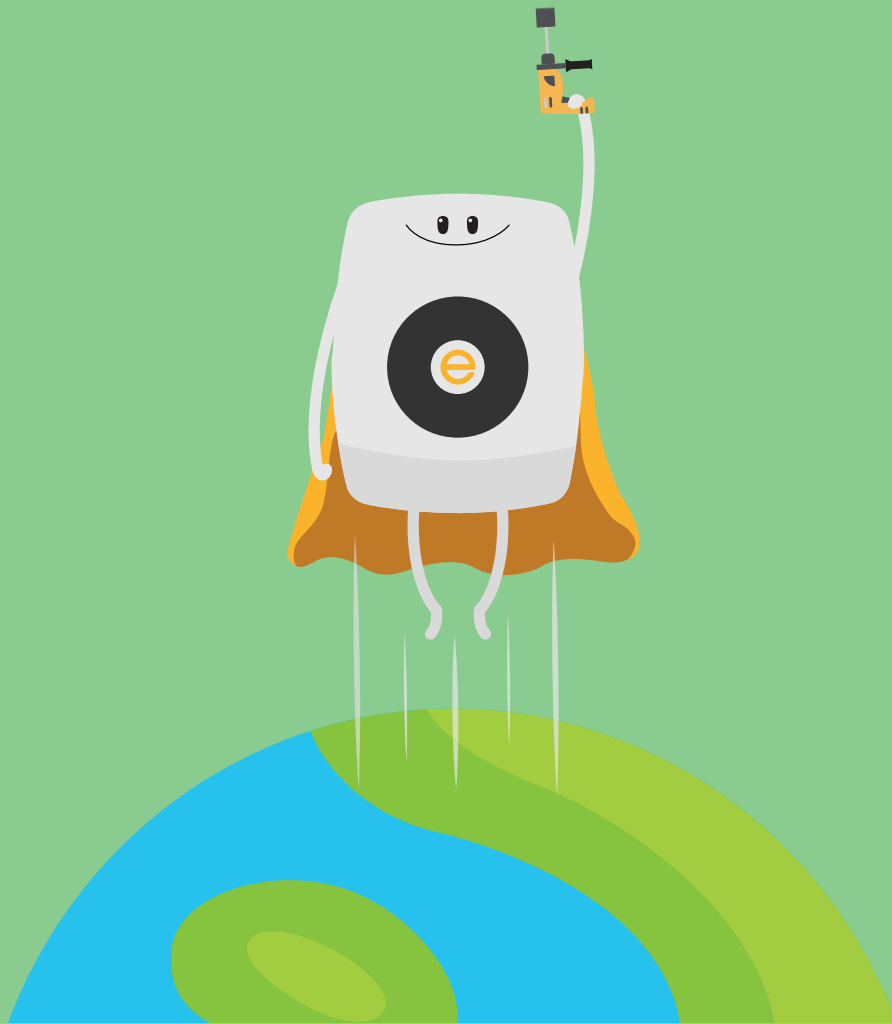
Four housing associations have been downgraded from V1 to V2 as a result of concerns over their financial viability arising from increased

development programmes and/or declining surpluses on new lettings. The landlords are: First Choice Homes Oldham, Connexus Housing, Cambridge Housing Society and Nehemiah United Churches Housing Association.

Small specialist housing provider First Priority HA has been found to be non-compliant with the governance and viability standards. The Regulator of Social Housing found the board was performing badly in terms of long term planning and risk management, putting its financial future under threat. The HA provides just over 1,000 bedspaces of accommodation for adults with mental health problems and learning difficulties, in 227 properties across 50 council areas.

The regulator found two medium to large sized associations breached its Home Standard over safety failings in tenants' homes, but has allowed them both to retain their top G1 ratings for governance. Vivid found last year that a number of its homes had not received gas safety checks for several years while Raven discovered failings in its testing programmes for electrical safety and Legionella in water tanks. All the problems were historic and have now been put right but it remains unclear what the outcomes would have been, if the problems had been reported to the regulator at the time they occurred.

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Court ruling questions councils' use of PRS licensing schemes

The Court of Appeal has ruled that councils cannot use selective licensing conditions to impose new standards on private rented homes, raising question marks over how tenants' lives are safeguarded.

The case saw Paul Brown, an Accrington landlord, challenge Hyndburn Borough Council over its use of a selective licensing scheme in certain parts of the borough to force the installation of carbon monoxide detectors and also to carry out electrical safety checks and implement their findings. Brown was supported in his action by the Residential Landlords Association.

Brown carried out both of these requirements, but he argued that imposing such standards through licensing schemes went beyond the powers available to local authorities.

The Court agreed with Brown and the RLA that rather than relying on licensing schemes which only cover certain properties, issues like electrical and gas safety were best addressed by councils using powers they already have under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System.

The HHSRS is a risk-based evaluation tool used to identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. It applies to all privately rented homes, whether they require a licence or not.

The RLA is calling for the guidance associated with the HHSRS, which was last published in 2006, to be updated urgently to reflect considerable changes in the sector since then.

The RLA Policy Adviser, Richard Jones, said: "This case was not about trying to stop councils from imposing requirements. It was about ensuring they use the proper processes that already exist. This judgement is a reminder that councils already have extensive powers to deal with properties found to be unsafe and they must act in a legal manner."



Contraction of HA sector continues apace

Several big mergers of housing associations took important steps forward as the contraction of independent providers in the social housing sector continues, although one planned partnership fell at a late hurdle.

Shareholders of Notting Hill and Genesis Housing Association voted in favour of a 64,000-home merger at separate meetings, despite vocal opposition from some residents, councillors and a former board chairman.

The merger was originally agreed in principle in July 2017, with Kate Davies, chief executive designate of the new organisation, saying she was planning to deliver £20m of efficiency savings and 400 extra homes a year.

A spokesperson for Genesis said: "We believe the merged organisation will be able to raise customer service standards even higher, contribute better to tackling the housing crisis by delivering more affordable homes and have more influence with local, regional and national government."

Not far behind them in size terms will be the result of a partnership deal between Metropolitan and Thames Valley Housing, with Geeta Nanda, named as the chief executive designate of the future organisation. Ms Nanda was chief executive of TVH until late last year, when she left to join Metropolitan. Coincidentally when she was at TVH, Ms Nanda led the organisation into merger talks with Genesis, which fell through at the last minute.

Between them Metropolitan and TVH manage more than 57,000 homes in London, the South East, the East Midlands and the East of England. One aim for the partnership is to get overall development up to 2,000 homes a year. They also hope to improve services for existing residents, support investment in local communities and become a financially

stronger group.

Ms Nanda said: "Metropolitan and Thames Valley Housing are two like-minded organisations with complementary strengths. We both have strong track records of investing in communities and are excited by the potential to reach more people and change more lives for the better. Together, we will be stronger and more resilient, with the capacity to do much more."

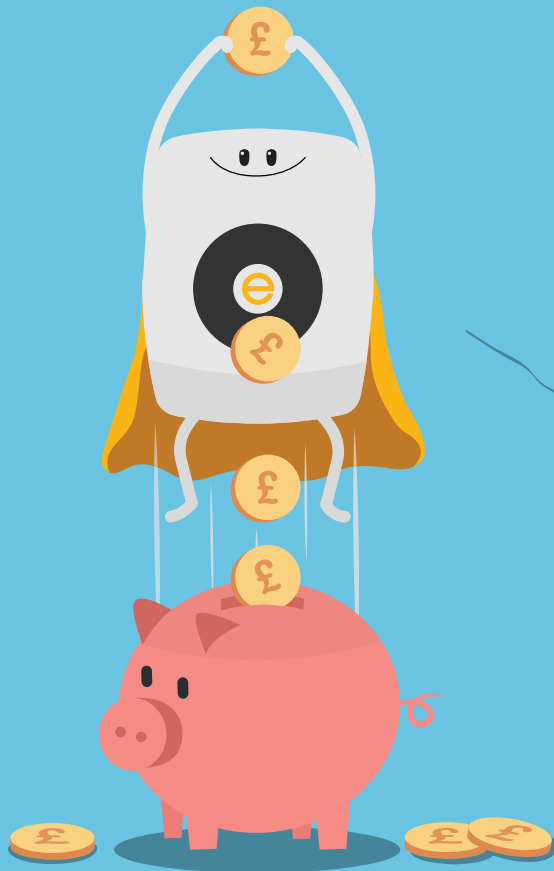
Meanwhile up in Merseyside, news has emerged that Torus and Liverpool Mutual Homes have opened talks about a merger, to create a 38,000 home landlord with 1,400 staff and a turnover of almost £190m, making it one of the biggest housing associations in the north west. Talks are expected to progress over the next few months.

Over in East Anglia talks over a new 28,000 homes partnership between the Flagship Group and Victory Housing Trust have begun. If the merger goes ahead the new organisation would probably be the biggest social landlord in the region with a turnover close to £150m and more than 900 staff. Plans to develop 10,000 new homes over the next decade are driving the agenda.

They will hope to complete matters more smoothly than proved the case with the collapsed merger of A2 Dominion Housing and the Radian Group – who own 57,000 homes across London and the South of England.

They announced their planned merger to the stock market late last year, but talks did not progress well and in a joint statement, they said they have "mutually agreed that at this stage it would be preferable to continue to deliver their respective strategic plans and transformation programmes independently". A planned consultation with residents will now no longer go ahead.

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Mainly bad news on affordable housebuilding for rent

The Government's commitment to providing additional low cost housing received a jolt with news it was failing to spend its allocated budget for new housing, while new figures also show the planning system and developers are failing to meet demand for social rentals.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has returned £817m to the Treasury as the department failed to spend the cash, despite claims it could have been used for funding health & safety works to high rise tower blocks and/or buying properties for use as affordable homes (for rent and sale). The unspent cash included £72m for affordable homes, £65m for London and £329m for the 'starter homes' programme for first-time buyers.

MHCLG has insisted the money will be spent in future years and it is investing £9bn in housing overall, but Labour has accused ministers of 'selling families short'. A Government spokesman said: "We are delivering the homes needed and since 2010 have built over 357,000 new affordable properties. We are determined to do more and are investing a further £9bn, including £2bn to help councils and housing associations build social rent homes where they are most needed."

An investigation by The Guardian newspaper has found many cities in England and Wales are giving planning permission for large private residential developments with little or no social or affordable housing. The worst performer was Manchester with no affordable housing approved in 2016 or 2017, followed closely by Sheffield, Leeds, Nottingham and Bristol – all with single digit percentages below seven. The best performing city was Cardiff where 24 per cent of the homes granted planning approval met the affordable definition, followed by Newcastle and Birmingham with 19 and 14 per cent respectively.

Ministers are being urged to significantly increase the building of affordable rented homes after analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that only 100 homes a week out of the 600 needed to meet demand, are due to be built under current proposals. The JRF said increasing numbers of families are being locked out of owning their own home and the Government's plans were falling "woefully short" of what is required. Overall it estimated that supply has fallen short of demand by 30,000 every year since 2011 and the cumulative shortfall could reach 335,000 by the end of this parliament.

The Local Government Association has published figures showing that more than 423,000 homes have been given planning permission but are still waiting to be built, a rise of 16 per cent in the last year. Councils are also approving nine in every 10 applications. LGA figures also show that developers are taking longer to build new homes. It now takes 40 months, on average, from schemes



receiving planning permission to building work being completed – eight months longer than in 2013/14.

Cllr Martin Tett, LGA Housing spokesman, said: "These figures prove the planning system is not a barrier to house building. In the last year, councils and their communities granted twice as many planning permissions as the number of new homes that were completed. No-one can live in a planning permission. Councils need greater powers to act where housebuilding has stalled. To tackle the new homes backlog and to get the country building again, councils need the freedom to borrow and invest in desperately needed new homes, as recognised by the Treasury Select Committee."

There was better news from the capital where London Mayor Sadiq Khan along with Croydon, Lambeth and Westminster councils have jointly invested £45m in a scheme to buy 330 existing properties from the private sector, to be let at genuinely affordable rents to families already homeless or who are at risk of becoming homeless.

The scheme, called "Real Lettings Property Fund 2", is being run by Resonance Limited, a social impact investment company, and the homelessness charity St Mungo's. Together they hope to attract enough support from other boroughs and investors in the capital to reach the fund's target of £100 million. They already run two similar projects that have housed approximately 1,300 people, with all tenants sustaining their tenancy for more than six months and 44 per cent in employment.

Transport for London is hoping to build its biggest housing scheme to date consisting of 1,500 homes (600 of them affordable) on land at the Limmo Peninsula in Newham, east London. The site is very close to the newly constructed east –

An investigation by The Guardian newspaper has found many cities in England and Wales are giving planning permission for large private residential developments with little or no social or affordable housing

west Crossrail Elizabeth line. The new homes will contribute towards a target of more than 10,000 houses and flats on 75 TfL sites across the capital.

Lambeth Council in south London has approved a scheme to lend more than £300m to its housing company (Homes for Lambeth) to build 300 homes over five years through estate regeneration works. It eventually hopes to build 2,000 new homes over the next decade.

But one quick build initiative has hit the rocks. Warrington based Your Housing Group, with 28,000 properties across the North West, Yorkshire and the Midlands, has pulled out of its £2.75bn joint venture scheme with Chinese backed Welink, to build 25,000 modular homes a year at six factories across the UK. The association's board decided the project was not progressing quickly enough to meet its development ambitions. Both companies still expect to continue with planned provision of new modular housing.

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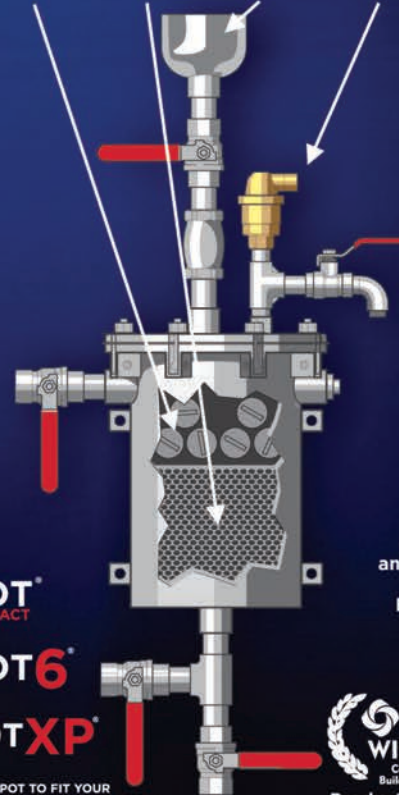
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Landlords group backs legal challenge to Right to Rent

The Residential Landlords Association is backing a legal bid to overturn the Government's Right to Rent immigration policy under which landlords are responsible for checking the immigration status of their tenants.

At present landlords face the prospect of prosecution if they know, or have "reasonable cause to believe", that the property they are letting is occupied by someone who does not have the right to rent in the UK.

The RLA is supporting the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) in calling for a Judicial Review, on the basis the policy discriminates against foreign nationals. The group is also supporting a similar case being brought by the Camden Community Law Centre.

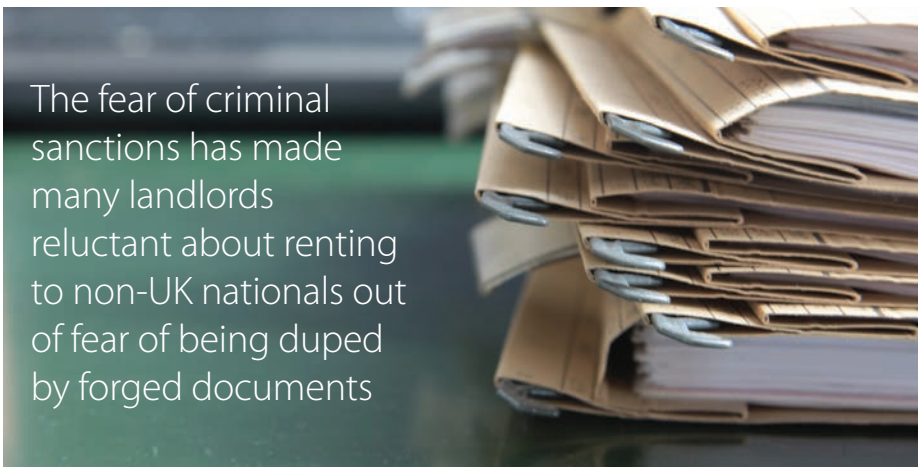
The fear of criminal sanctions has made many landlords reluctant about renting to non-UK nationals out of fear of being duped by forged documents.

Research by the RLA, which is being used to support both cases has found 47 per cent of landlords are less likely to consider letting to foreign nationals from outside the EU as a result of the scheme.

The same RLA research found that 42 per cent of landlords were less likely to rent to someone without a British passport as a result of the scheme because of the threat of criminal sanctions. This poses serious difficulties for the 17 per cent of UK residents who do not have a passport.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Despite requests, the Home Office has refused to



The fear of criminal sanctions has made many landlords reluctant about renting to non-UK nationals out of fear of being duped by forged documents

publish a database of what all acceptable forms of identification for the scheme look like, arguing that there are simply too many from different countries around the world.

A recent BBC investigation found that criminal gangs are helping undocumented immigrants to flout the law by selling them fake identity documents.

Last October the Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration announced a new review of the Right to Rent, but warned that this "will not examine any unintended consequences of Right to Rent, for example discrimination against would-be tenants, increased homelessness, or displacement." This is because, it said, it "does not have the capacity to conduct a meaningful examination of the

unintended consequences of Right to Rent at this time."

RLA Policy Director, David Smith, said: "When this policy was first discussed we warned the Government of the unintended consequences of the Right to Rent scheme. How can a landlord be expected to know what every passport in every country is supposed to look like?

"For the overwhelming majority of landlords it makes no commercial sense to limit their access to a large proportion of the prospective tenant market. It is the fear of criminal sanctions for getting it wrong which is causing many simply to want to play it safe. Landlords should not be used as scapegoats for the failures of the border agencies. It is time to suspend this controversial and unwelcome policy."

New licensing scheme for Nottingham's PRS to deliver better standards

Private sector tenants in Nottingham will benefit from better quality accommodation and greater protection from rogue landlords later this year after the Government approved a new licensing scheme for the city.

The new scheme covers more than 31,000 privately rented homes making it the largest licensing outside of London to be given approval by the Secretary of State.

A report by the Building Research Establishment Group estimated that 21 per cent of Nottingham's PRS properties are likely to have 'Category 1 hazards'. Examples of this type of hazard include exposed wiring, a dangerous boiler, cold bedrooms, a leaking roof, mould on walls or ceilings and vermin infestation. Selective Licensing will help ensure these issues are addressed.

In selected areas of the city, landlords will need to

obtain a licence and meet certain obligations to ensure tenant safety and good management of their property. The cost of a licence is still to be confirmed but is likely to be less than £2 per week, per property for accredited landlords and no more than £3 a week for non-accredited landlords. Money raised will help to cover the scheme's costs.

Good landlords who go above the legal minimum and those who are members of the Nottingham Standard accreditation scheme (DASH and Unipol) will receive a discount on the licence application fee.

The council hopes to introduce the scheme from this summer. Between now and then, landlords should find out if it will affect them and what they should do to prepare for this. Landlords can find out if their property is covered by the scheme at [gosever.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/myproperty/](https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/myproperty/).

There is also a link to more information including a list of FAQs and a good practice guide.

Councillor Jane Urquhart, the City Council's Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing & Heritage, said: "I'm pleased that Nottingham's selective licensing proposal has been approved by the Government. In areas that are covered it will help to improve standards for private tenants and landlords will know exactly what they must do to be able to rent their properties out.

"Having a Selective License allows landlords to demonstrate that they provide good accommodation for tenants. The cost of licensing will be reduced for responsible landlords who gain Nottingham Standard Accreditation. Tenants will also be able to check on both licensing and accreditation which will help to drive up private rented standards. This is a major step forward in improving living standards for many city residents."

Accredited landlords can use the Nottingham Standard accreditation mark to show they adhere to the standards required. There is information about the standard at

<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/nottinghamstandard>

New electrical tests considered for private rented sector

The Government is considering tougher standards for electrical safety in the private rented sector after experts recommended a series of measures to reduce fires and improve tenants' safety.

The Electrical Safety Standards Working Group has recommended introducing regulations for mandatory electrical installation checks in PRS properties every five years. The cost of these checks and any associated repair or replacement costs would be borne by landlords.

Other recommendations include undertaking visual safety checks of the electrical installation at every change of tenancy, providing tenants with copies of reports on electrical installations at the property and setting up a private rented sector electrical testing competent person's scheme.

The Government is now consulting on the recommendations, with responses required by 16 April. The report was commissioned after figures from the English Housing Survey showed that private tenants face a higher risk of electrical shock and fires caused by electrical faults in their homes than tenants in social housing.

A Government response will take into account consultation feedback and the findings of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety being led by Dame Judith Hackitt, which will submit its Final Report in spring 2018.

It is estimated the average cost to landlords of an electrical safety check will be around £160 per property every five years and that introducing mandatory five year electrical installation checks will cost landlords at least £100m per annum (or around £70 per landlord per annum) over ten years. This includes the cost of five yearly checks, hidden costs including those associated with researching and liaising with electrical testers, preparing the property and overseeing the checks, and one off familiarisation costs.

Any installations which were deemed to be unsafe for continued use would require remedial work to be funded by the landlord (estimated at around £140m per annum or £97 per landlord per annum).

Further work will be needed to establish the benefits of reduced instances of electric shock and electrical fires, such as the prevention of deaths and injuries and property damage. As well as making homes safer for tenants, electrical installation improvements benefit the landlord as a material improvement to their properties, helping prevent fires which could cause costly and significant damage.

Tenants pay record sum of £50bn in rents in 2017

Tenants in the private rented sector paid out a record amount of £51.6bn in rents in 2017, an increase of £1.8bn on 2016 and more than twice the £22.6bn paid in 2007.

As tenure levels in the housing market continues to change with fewer owner-occupiers and more people renting privately, it is likely that the total amount of rent paid by tenants will soon overtake the entire sum paid out by homeowners for their mortgages, which currently stands at £57.4bn for 2017.

The figures were compiled and reported by Countrywide, the UK's biggest estate agency and mortgage broker. They reveal a dramatic reshaping of the housing market, particularly in the last ten years as home ownership levels have fallen from 71 to 63 per cent, while private renting has doubled and now accounts for over 20 per cent of all housing.

Over the same period, the total amount that home buyers are paying for their mortgages has fallen, from a peak of £63.8bn in 2008 to £57.4bn in 2017 – largely the result of historically low interest rates and cheap fixed-rate deals which have benefitted buyers.

A breakdown of the figures reveals that the millennial generation, born between 1977 and 1995, are shouldering the largest part of the rise in rental costs. Countrywide estimated they spent £30.2bn on rent in 2017, or three times the £9.7bn paid in 2007.

With many tenants paying more than half of their take home pay in rents, campaigners have said rent controls are now urgently needed. This was a very popular policy suggestion when it was aired by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn last year while Conservatives

say it risks deterring landlords.

DOUBLING

Dan Wilson Crawl of Generation Rent said: "The private rental market has not only doubled in size in the past decade, but it is costing the economy more. With social housing unavailable and home ownership out of reach, millions of people have no option but to rent from a private landlord.

"This £30bn increase in the rent bill is money that people would rather be using to pay off their own mortgage or simply put food on the table. The government should be taking urgent action to bring down rents, by investing in new homes and bringing in rent control."

Countrywide attributed the surge in overall rent being paid to increases in the number of households renting, and inflation-busting rent increases in most years. "Despite average rents falling in 2008, the total amount of rent paid by tenants has risen in every year for the last decade as the number of people renting has grown," it said.

The latest English Housing Survey, published in January, found that 46 per cent of 25-34 year olds now live in private rentals, compared with 27 per cent in 2006-07. In London, private renting is now the most common form of tenure. Home ownership levels peaked in the early 2000s, at 71 per cent of households, but have fallen to 63 per cent today, although the figure has levelled off in recent years.

The typical private tenant in England paid rent of £192 a week to their landlord in 2016-17, compared with £102 for tenants in the social housing sector. In London, private rents average £309 a week compared with the £132 paid by council tenants.

High cost of rents for the lowest paid

The growing unaffordability of private sector rents for low paid workers has been revealed in research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

They found the proportion of people in the poorest fifth of the working-age population of the UK who spend more than a third of their income (including Housing Benefit) on housing costs has risen from 39 to 47 per cent over the last 20 years. This has been driven in part by the rise in the number of people renting in the private sector, where costs are highest.

Rent is more than a third of full-time local pay in over half of English districts, when the least expensive quarter of private rents is compared to the earnings of the lowest paid quarter of employees. This ratio is highest in the London districts of Westminster and Kensington &

Chelsea, where these rents amount to 79 per cent and 77 per cent respectively of those earnings.

Rent is also more than half of local full-time pay in another 25 districts (again comparing the least expensive quarter of private rents to the earnings of the lowest paid quarter of employees). All but three of these are in Greater London with the exceptions all being elsewhere in South East England.

The most affordable districts by this measure are in the north of England but, even here, there are parts of Greater Manchester and North Yorkshire where rent is more than a third of full-time pay. For more information about housing costs and poverty you can visit <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/housing-costs>

Shelter launches new commission to give tenants a voice on social housing

Housing charity Shelter has launched an independent commission into the future of social housing as research has highlighted the challenges faced by tenants in getting their views heard and their voices taken seriously.

The commission aims to give social housing tenants a far louder say in the future of the sector and a way of changing attitudes across society. It follows many public expressions of anger and concern over how Grenfell Tower tenants feel their safety worries were ignored before the terrible fire killed 71 residents and destroyed the homes of hundreds more.

Work to encase the tower in scaffolding and wrapping is expected to last until May, but in the meantime the burnt out edifice stands as a reminder of the tragedy and the lack of progress in resolving the many questions raised over how it happened, how we prevent a recurrence and the lessons to be learned.

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The Government was expected to issue its own Green Paper on social housing in the Spring and Alok Sharma, the previous housing minister held a series of roadshows with tenants around the country. His move to a new job in the reshuffle and replacement by Dominic Raab has left a big question mark over the Green Paper's content and launch date.

Highlighting the need for the commission, Shelter and YouGov revealed the results of new research. This showed that many of the challenges described by Grenfell residents in the aftermath of the fire, are also faced by social housing residents and their communities right across England. Namely that:

- Almost half (48 per cent) of families in social housing who reported issues around poor or unsafe conditions felt ignored or were refused help. Problems they had reported included fire safety, gas leaks, electrical hazards, mould and pest problems, among others;
- Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of families in social housing said they feel looked down upon because of where they live, compared with only eight per cent of families who are private renters or homeowners.

Chaired by Reverend Mike Long of the Notting Hill Methodist Church, which is situated close to Grenfell, Shelter has brought together a panel of 17 commissioners to examine the state of social housing in modern Britain and its future role in

ending the housing crisis. They include Baroness Doreen Lawrence, Ed Miliband MP, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, Lord Jim O'Neill and Grenfell Tower survivor Edward Daffarn.

ROADSHOWS AND CONSULTATION

Between now and October a series of roadshows will be held across the country, a public consultation will take place online, and a major piece of research with social housing tenants will be carried out. An independent report with recommendations will be presented to Prime Minister Theresa May and to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn before the end of the year.

The commission's chair Reverend Mike Long said: "I hope this commission will hold a mirror up to society. We need to take a long hard look at why communities such as Grenfell have felt ignored, forgotten, and too often like second-class citizens. The experiences of residents here in Grenfell are sadly common in many other parts of the country, too."

Commissioner Edward Daffarn, from the survivors and bereaved group Grenfell United, said: "Everyone who lived in Grenfell Tower knows just how devastating the consequences are when the well being of social housing tenants and leaseholders are disregarded – more than 70 members of our community needlessly lost their lives in a wholly avoidable tragedy."

He continued "If we are ever to achieve any kind of justice and recompense for what happened, it will come through genuine social change and by ensuring that people living in social housing will never again be treated like second-class citizens or experience such neglect and institutional indifference at the hands of housing providers. Grenfell United hopes that this independent commission may act as a catalyst for the social change this is needed for our community and for the whole country."

To find out more about 'Shelter's Big Conversation' on social housing, people should visit:
www.shelter.org.uk/bigconversation.

Rogue landlords should face minimum £30,000 fines

Rogue landlords who commit housing offences should be fined a minimum of £30,000 as part of common sentencing guidelines to improve standards in the private rental sector, the Local Government Association says.

Latest figures from the English Housing Survey show that more than a quarter (27 per cent) of privately rented homes failed to meet the decent homes standard in 2016. Eight per cent of properties also had some type of damp problem.

Under powers recently introduced, councils can enforce fines of up to £30,000 to private landlords for offences such as failing to license a property, or not complying with an improvement notice.

However, there are currently no guidelines for magistrates when sentencing for housing offences. Magistrates base their decision on how much a landlord says they can afford, rather than the seriousness of the offence or the harm caused to tenants.

The LGA, which represents 370 councils in England and Wales, says that the most serious cases such as for fire safety breaches or providing substandard housing which councils decide to take to a magistrates' court, should lead to fines that at least match the highest level of a civil penalty. This will raise standards and provide consistency across the courts.

Council leaders are also calling for greater freedoms to introduce private housing licensing schemes to improve rental standards for tenants across entire council areas.

Under the current system, councils have to apply to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for permission to introduce schemes that cover more than 20 per cent of an area or 20 per cent of privately rented homes in the borough.

Cllr Martin Tett, LGA housing spokesman, said: "The majority of landlords are decent, responsible law-abiding citizens who do a great job in making sure their tenants are living in safe and quality housing. Unfortunately there is a minority of rogue landlords who give those good landlords a bad name.

"Councils want to work with landlords, not against them. But with more young people and families renting privately than ever before, we need to see reforms that will maintain and improve housing standards. A key deterrent to rogue landlords would be for the Government to set common sentencing guidelines which delivers consistency across the courts."

Experts to carry out review of Disabled Facilities Grant

The University of West of England has been appointed by the Government to carry out an independent review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) in England, some 30 years after its introduction.

The University will be working with Foundations, the Building Research Establishment, Ferret Information Systems and an occupational therapist to look at the operation of the grant and the wider delivery of adaptations to support the independence of disabled people living in their own

homes.

Despite increases in the DFG budget, demand for adaptations regularly outstrips supply and this is set to continue as the population ages. The review will seek to ensure that home adaptation policy remains fit for purpose and that funds are being allocated as effectively as possible.

Topics to be explored include:

- How the DFG is used currently – who gets what and how it's delivered;
- How the DFG could change in the future – focusing on the means test, the £30,000 upper limit, the allocation formula and methods of delivery;
- The link between adaptations and health and social care services, including timely discharge from hospital;
- The changing aids and adaptations market – considering new innovations and technology,

market development and supporting people who are not eligible for a DFG; and

- The impact of Section 36 of the Equality Act 2010 on adaptations to communal areas.

The review will report back at the end of May with recommendations on how the grant could operate in the future. A series of consultation workshops are being held during March to debate the issues and draw conclusions for the final report. A short online consultation will follow based on the outcome of the workshops.

Sheila Mackintosh, Research Fellow at the University of West of England, said: "We have an ageing population and a high proportion of people of all ages with disabilities, including families with disabled children. To help as many people as possible live in suitable homes and remain independent the services that deliver adaptations need to be reviewed and updated."

HA clashes with Mayor over minimum space standards

A London housing association is lobbying for an exemption from minimum housing space standards, to allow it to make use of new modular homes being built at L&G's new housing factory.

The draft London Plan imposes a blanket requirement that all new one-bedroom properties be built with at least 37 square metres of floor space. It excludes an exception in the previous plan, which

allowed new housing of an exemplary design and contributed to other objectives.

West London based RHP, formerly known as Richmond Housing Partnership, is planning to use a new prototype called Launch Pod, to provide intermediate accommodation for young people and key workers at relatively low rents of £140 per week, significantly below the local market rate of around £250 per week.

However, each new property would only measure 26 square metres.

RHP is expecting to take delivery of the new modular homes in the summer. By then it hopes to have persuaded the Mayor and Greater London Assembly to have put the exception back. Failing that, RHP says it will adapt its scheme into a 'co-living' development, which falls outside the new requirements.



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Rough sleeping rises to highest recorded number

Rough sleeping in England has increased for the seventh year in a row and now stands at its highest ever recorded level, with critics saying the true picture is far worse and official figures only represent the tip of the iceberg.

Government figures show that in Autumn 2017, some 4,751 people were rough sleeping in England – a 15 per cent increase over a year ago and a 169 per cent increase since 2010 when the figures first started being recorded.

The figures themselves provide a snapshot of rough sleeping on a single night with about a quarter of rough sleepers being in London. Of the people counted in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government figures – 653 (14 per cent) were women, 760 were EU nationals from outside the UK, 193 were from outside the EU and 373 (eight per cent) were under 25 years of age.

A regional breakdown of the figures showed annual increases of 18 per cent in London, 39 per cent in the North West and 14 per cent in the rest of England. These increases are likely to make it even more difficult for the Government to deliver on its pledge to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to eradicate it completely by 2027. Hopefully the about to be implemented Homelessness Reduction Act will make a big dent in those figures, but only time will tell.

The figures are a combination of estimates by most councils based on intelligence from local services, while a minority conduct a physical count of the number of people seen sleeping rough on a single night. They do not include people who are in

hostels and shelters or sofa surfing with their family or friends. There are over 79,000 households housed in temporary accommodation, many thousands of them are families with children.

OUT OF SIGHT

A spokeswoman for housing charity Shelter said the figures may be an underestimate. She said: "Rough sleeping figures are particularly difficult to record because many people hide and remain out of sight, meaning that counts often miss those who bed down for the night in derelict buildings rather than the more obvious shop doorways.

"But these annual counts, are still a vital source in assessing rough sleeping trends. It's also crucial to remember that rough sleeping is only the tip of the iceberg and hundreds of thousands more are stuck in temporary accommodation or sofa surfing."

Chief executive of Shelter Polly Neate, said: "The figures expose the worst pain inflicted by our housing crisis. We have failed as a society when so many people are forced to sleep rough. But they are not alone, the scourge of homelessness extends far beyond our streets. Hidden away in emergency B&Bs, temporary bedsits and on friends' sofas are hundreds of thousands of other homeless people, including families with children.

"Most of these people are homeless simply because they couldn't afford to live anywhere, a situation made worse by welfare cuts. While the intentions of the Homelessness Reduction Act are good, it cannot fix this crisis. To do that, the government must act to build a new generation of

genuinely affordable homes to rent, as well as ensuring housing benefit is fit for purpose in the short-term."

From April councils will be legally obliged to provide services to anyone at risk of becoming homeless, not just those with a priority need such as vulnerable people or families with children. However, many rough sleepers are unlikely to be registered as homeless with local councils so this may not be the ready made solution for them.

TASKFORCE

A spokesperson for the Housing Ministry said: "To break the homelessness cycle once and for all, we are providing more than £1bn of funding, supporting rough sleepers with the most complex needs through a new Housing First approach and bringing in the most ambitious legislation in decades that will mean people get the support they need earlier.

"In addition a new cross-government taskforce supported by a panel of experts will drive forward a new strategy that will make life on the streets a thing of the past."

John Healey, Labour's Shadow Housing Secretary, said: "These shameful figures are a terrible reminder of the consequences of a Conservative Government. The number of people sleeping rough fell under Labour but has more than doubled since 2010, and is up for the seventh year in a row under the Tories.

"This is a direct result of decisions made by Conservative Ministers: a steep drop in investment for affordable homes, crude cuts to housing benefit, reduced funding for homelessness services, and a refusal to help private renters. A Labour government will end rough sleeping within its first term in office, and tackle the root causes of rising homelessness."

The chief executive of Crisis charity, Jon Sparkes said: "It is truly a catastrophe that in a country as prosperous as this, more and more people are finding themselves forced to sleep in dangerous and freezing conditions, when we have evidence to show how the situation could be turned around."

Rent Smart Wales continues its crackdown on landlords

Landlords in Wales who manage their own properties are being reminded that they must submit their licence application to Rent Smart Wales to avoid prosecution. The prompt comes as a number of landlords who have failed to become licensed were prosecuted at Cardiff Magistrates Court.

Kowser Chowdhury of Princes Avenue, Roath, Cardiff was fined £3,600 under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 for carrying out letting and management activities for a number of properties without a licence.

Mr Chowdhury completed his registration with Rent Smart Wales but failed to submit a licence application. He was found guilty in his absence and magistrates also ordered him to pay £692 costs and a victim surcharge of £66.

Cllr Lynda Thorne, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities at Cardiff Council, the single licensing authority for Rent Smart Wales, said: "Self-managing landlords in Wales must realise that registering with Rent Smart Wales is not enough to comply with the law. They are also required to pass training and submit a licence application.

"Anyone who carries out letting or property management duties needs a licence. Enforcement powers have been active for some time now and we are tracking down and prosecuting individuals who aren't licensed.

"Training can help people to become better landlords and of course by becoming licensed, landlords will be complying with the law and will avoid prosecution. So it's important for landlords to

complete the registration and licensing process as soon as they can."

Two landlords were fined at Cardiff Magistrates Court for failing to comply with Rent Smart Wales. Vale of Glamorgan landlord Anthony Thomas pleaded guilty to managing his 10 rental properties without a licence and must pay a total of £665 while Lee Jones of Albion Road, Port Talbot also pleaded guilty for failing to register or become licensed and must pay a total of £430.

Cllr Thorne added: "A conviction for a self-managing landlord has serious consequences as a condition of obtaining a licence is that someone is fit and proper to carry out letting and management activities. All those who continue to operate without a licence are putting their future business at risk."

News in brief

- The Government has confirmed changes to make it easier for landlords to directly receive the housing benefit element of Universal Credit where tenants are two months in rent arrears, also apply to the private rented sector. Although initially announced as part of the Autumn budget, concerns were raised by the Residential Landlords Association that payments would still rely on their tenants' consent but this proved to be unfounded following clarification from the DWP.
- Housing charities Crisis and Centrepoint, have both warned the Government that its controversial policy to withdraw the housing benefit element of Universal Credit from 18 to 21-year-olds will cost the taxpayer more money to enforce than it saves the public purse. Due to a host of exemptions in who the cuts can be applied to, the charities say less than five per cent of claimants are losing money. But they also say the policy is creating huge levels of stress and uncertainty for many vulnerable young people and it should be scrapped as it is contrary in spirit to the Homelessness Reduction Act, due to be implemented from April this year.
- Figures from the Department for Work and Pensions show it has spent more than £100m in just over two years on administering reviews and appeals against disability benefit decisions made by the department. In addition the Justice Ministry has spent 'tens of millions' on the appeals, about two-thirds of which were won by the claimants. Neil Heslop, the chief executive of the disability charity Leonard Cheshire, said: "To spend this amount on admin fighting to uphold flawed decisions that shouldn't have been made in the first place is staggering. Thousands of disabled individuals have had to fight to receive support to which they are legally entitled."
- A report from the Demos thinktank has identified more than a million benefit sanctions (or deductions in payments) have been imposed on disabled claimants in the past ten years, suggesting that DWP officials are imposing unrealistic and unfair standards on vulnerable people who are out of work. Sanctions are typically applied where benefit claimants miss or are late for an appointment, or fail to apply for a sufficient number of jobs. Sanctions reduce their benefit payments and in many instances are applied without prior notice. Of particular concern was a finding that unemployed disabled claimants are up to 53 per cent more likely to be docked money than claimants who are not disabled.
- The Resolution Foundation has warned that Britain's poorer families face another three years



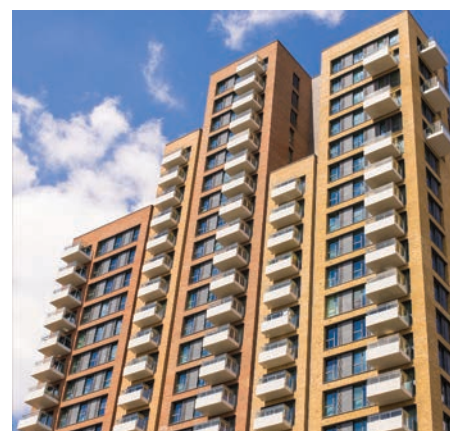
Grenfell Tower is likely to be demolished after forensic teams finish their work at the site later this year. The site of will then be turned into a memorial to remember those who lost their lives in last year's fire. Image © Natalie Oxford

- of stagnating incomes with the country at risk of the first sustained rise in inequality since the late 1980s. They say continuing cuts to working-age benefits worth £14bn are damaging prospects for eight million low and middle-income households as they offset gains from the national living wage. Torsten Bell, the thinktank's director, said: "This parliament risks seeing the first sustained rise in income inequality since the 1980s. But the story this time around is less about the rich soaring further away, and more about poorer families falling further behind as they bear the brunt of welfare cuts."
- Landlords and letting agents who refuse to let properties to tenants on housing benefit could be breaking the law after single mother Rosie Keogh won a compensation case for sexual discrimination against an agency who blocked her application for a tenancy to a flat in King's Heath, Birmingham in May 2016. Ms Keogh was supported in her claim by Shelter. She argued that as more women than men are reliant on housing benefit, it was discriminatory to impose blanket bans on tenants who needed assistance from benefits to pay their rent. The letting agent admitted unintentional discrimination and settled out of court with £2,000 compensation.
- The Labour Party has announced it wants to strengthen the rights of tenants to keep a pet in their properties as part of a package of proposed animal welfare measures. Many rental agreements insist on no animals being kept or they impose strict conditions. Labour wants a default right allowing tenants to keep pets unless there is evidence their pet will be a nuisance. The National Landlords Association says its members should have the right to refuse tenants with pets as long as they justified their actions, including in cases where properties were simply not geared up for animals. But chief executive Richard Lambert added that "tenants

who keep pets do tend to stay for longer periods of time, and there are a few simple steps that landlords can take in order to mitigate the perceived increased risks" - including insisting on larger deposits.

- The public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower is expected to resume its public hearings in late March, some two months later than originally expected. In an update the inquiry chair Sir Martin Moore-Bick revealed it has received over 267,000 documents and anticipates this could rise to 300,000. The inquiry team has written to the core participants proposing that evidential hearings – where the inquiry will start hearing from witnesses – could begin in May and no later than 4 June. Meanwhile Labour councillors have protested that they have not been granted core participant status separate to the main Conservative group.
- Grenfell Tower is likely to be demolished after forensic teams finish their work at the site later this year. The site of will then be turned into a memorial to remember those who lost their lives in last year's fire, after the RBK&C council said it would put the community at the heart of decisions over its future and had no other plans for the site. The death toll from the fire rose to 72 at the end of February, after Maria Fel Pilar Burton, a 74-year old who was rescued from the 19th floor of the tower, died in hospital.
- Hackney Council in east London has set up a wholly owned lettings company to allow it to acquire and manage homes on the London Living Rent (set at one third of average local incomes), saving tenants hundreds of pounds each month in comparison with market rents. The company also plans to undertake some lettings at open market rents in order to cross-subsidise the lower level of living rents, but has said it will offer longer tenancies with greater security.

- Lettings of social and affordable rented homes in England fell by almost 11 per cent last year, to their lowest level since statistics were first reported in 2007/08. Official figures showed that housing associations and councils let 334,602 homes for below market rents in 2016/17, down from 374,586 in the previous year.
- Karen Buck's private members bill, the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards) Bill passed its second reading in the Commons and has now moved on to its committee stage for line-by-line scrutiny. If it becomes law, it should improve the standard of privately rented homes and make it easier for legal action to be taken against rogue landlords. Similar legal provisions already exist in Wales.
- Newham Council in East London has won an appeal to enforce a £22,500 fine against property company Your Rooms London after 14 people, including babies and children, were found renting a damp and dangerous two-storey terrace in Stratford last July. The council said there was "a complete absence of fire safety equipment and a failure to provide a gas safety certificate". It said: "The general conditions in the property were described as filthy and damp, and at least one tenant was suffering ill health as a direct result." The house was split into five bedrooms, each one let at around £500 per month or £2,500 a month for the whole property.
- The Fire Protection Association has warned there could be hundreds of people working as fire risk assessors across the country despite them not being accredited by any of the four approved bodies. This raises concerns over their competence and levels of training received, as well as the standards of fire safety being applied across the housing sector at a time when there has never been a sharper focus on the issue.
- Consumer group Which? is demanding Government action to improve the safety of domestic white goods, as analysis of fire data has shown faults in them are causing more than 60 fires in UK homes every week. Faulty washing machines and tumble dryers are the most high-risk appliances in the home, causing 35 per cent of fires over a two-year period. Cookers and ovens, dishwashers then fridges, freezers and fridge-freezers were also listed as high-risk, all causing around 10 per cent of fires in the same period.
- One of the "immediate steps" they want the Government to tackle is the estimated one million faulty Whirlpool tumble dryers still in UK homes. Fluff catching on a heating element in dryers has been blamed for 750 Whirlpool dryer fires since 2015, and a door mechanism fault is believed to have started a fire which killed two men in Wales in 2014. Which? labelled the product safety regime "antiquated" and called for "an easily accessible, comprehensive database of recalled products".



Lettings of social and affordable rented homes in England fell by almost 11 per cent last year, to their lowest level since statistics were first reported in 2007/08

- The credit rating agency S&P says the Government's change in rent policy, allowing social landlords to increase rents by one per cent above inflation, will not automatically result in improved credit rating scores for housing associations. Because the new policy will not be implemented until 2020 and HAs still have to impose annual rent cuts before then, it feels that social landlords still have significant financial pressures on their businesses to withstand. Historically low grant rates and an increasing reliance on market rental income are among other negative factors cited.

Big hitters departing key housing positions

The early months of 2018 got off to an eventful start with announcements that several big names are leaving influential jobs they have held in the housing sector for a long time.

David Orr is standing down from his role as chief executive of the National Housing Federation in September, having been in post since 2005. Before he joined the NHF, Orr was previously chief executive of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Newlon Housing Trust. Earlier in his career, he also worked for homelessness charity Centrepoint.

Diana Warwick, chair of the NHF board, said: "It has been an absolute pleasure to work with David and on behalf of the board I want to thank him for his extraordinary contribution to the housing association movement. Over the past 12 years David has championed the independence and ambitions of housing associations, and their critical role in tackling the housing crisis."

Mr Orr was a strong lobbyist for the independent role and work of housing associations. This meant he sometimes clashed with Government ministers but one of his most controversial moves was to urge

HAs to sign up to a voluntary deal on the right to buy back in 2015.

Sir Edward Lister, chair of Homes England, added: "David Orr is an industry leader who has shaped the debate on affordable housing in recent years. He has overseen major changes in the ambitions and make-up of housing associations and he can retire proud in the knowledge that the sector is ready to make a significant contribution to addressing the housing shortage in this country."

CHANGE AT THE REGULATOR

Another big hitter to announce his departure was Julian Ashby, the chair of the Regulator of Social Housing. Mr Ashby stood down from his role at the regulator in January, a few months before his scheduled retirement in March, enabling him to join the 14,000-home Paradigm HA as its chair from April 2018.

Mr Ashby has been chair of the Regulation Committee since it became part of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) in 2012. He oversaw a complete revision of the regulatory framework in 2015 and the introduction of in-depth assessments.

His period in office at the regulator was also

characterised by a sharpened focus on governance by HA boards, as well as value for money and the financial performance of HAs. His critics said this was at the expense of service standards and listening to customers.

Simon Dow, the regulator's deputy chair, took over from Mr Ashby as interim chair until March 2019. Dow is one of just four members of the regulation committee with a recruitment process underway for further members.

Mr Ashby said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed and been privileged to have had the opportunity of chairing the Regulator of Social Housing. I feel I leave the regulator in a strong position as I move on to new challenges."

It is notable that both Orr and Ashby enjoyed long uninterrupted periods in their roles, in sharp contrast to the short terms (averaging under a year) enjoyed by the succession of Housing Ministers they have worked alongside

A tale of two housing associations



Joining two existing Registered Providers (RPs) together is exciting. However, realising the benefit of a merger can be tricky, particularly if both organisations have a very different approach and culture. Golden Gates Housing Trust (GGHT) and Helena Partnerships were brought together in April 2015. Together they own and manage 22,000 homes, have 850 staff and 44,000 customers. Torus, who was charged with merging GGHT and Helena in 2015, is based in St Helens (Merseyside) and Warrington (Cheshire), and has an asset value of £412 million.

There are often significant opportunities to create real cost savings from strategic moves such as a merger; however actually achieving them can be a difficult journey. Mergers and acquisitions often focus more on the infrastructure development, rather than the people and associated cultures, which will have been developed over many years and which cannot be changed overnight. Following the merger of these two local landlords, a repairs and maintenance cost reduction specialists – in this case, Vantage – was asked to come in and assist Torus in maximising the potential benefit and get the best out of their new structure.

There were three main questions: How do we come together with one new strategic approach to asset management? How do we efficiently bring together two existing in-house maintenance operations with radically different cultures and operating styles? And, how can we better communicate in a timely and effective way with customers?

Vantage spent time working alongside Torus to

really understand their strategic objectives, the different values of the two RPs and their concerns post-merger. The first question was really answered through Vantage's work with Torus. Torus led on the second two points, devising and implementing a radical change programme.

ASSET MANAGEMENT: ACTIVE NOT PASSIVE

Torus recognised that as their stock size grew, so did their ability to make a real difference to the community around them. By challenging their existing approach and revisiting the roles of the asset managers, client and in-house contractor teams they were able to establish clearer accountability for the in-house service leaders and free up time for the assets team to focus on strategic asset management priorities. Unlocking the relationships between the client and in-house maintenance team was key to this. We challenged who was accountable for specific workstreams budgets which led to a re-think in R&M budget management. Whilst strong governance was key, Vantage helped the leadership team to ask themselves why they 'cliented' maintenance teams in a way that they didn't any other part of their business. Ultimately all the required skills existed within the teams; it was about thinking differently and a re-focus on each team's priorities.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE: A NEW WAY FORWARD

Torus understood the potential issues in R&M. Pre-merger both teams had in-house repairs and

maintenance teams. Post-merger it was evident a new operating model, combining the best from both organisations, was necessary. Following on from the work Vantage had done on asset management, Torus devised their own approach to R&M.

Harnessing the benefits of the in-house teams, whilst creating an efficient, lean and customer-focused operating model, they were able to transform their R&M service. They conducted an in-house, in-depth review, speaking to their staff on the ground to understand where the strengths and weaknesses were and how a new way forward could be delivered.

The two in-house contractors had a combined budget of £30 million and over 400 staff. However, their service offers were vastly different, they had two different IT systems, there was a large variation in costs, their terms and conditions of employment were not the same and their operating models and practises couldn't have been more different.

They had some easy wins, such as bringing the two teams to one base and some which took longer and were more complicated. For example, adopting the outsourced stores models across the whole operation was time consuming and complex. Some of the short terms contracts were terminated in favour of defined workstreams. Capital workstreams and cost targets were set on a three-year rolling basis subject to best value review; giving them more long-term certainty.

As the two teams came together as one new RP, clearer accountability on budget responsibility was

established. Performance targets and costs were agreed at the outset allowing Torus to accurately measure progress and ensure that performance information flowed effectively from the operational staff up to the executive team. This protected the golden thread of information, creating a framework which encouraged joined-up working and ensured the new RP could grow and thrive.

Although some of the changes were not always easy to implement, they ultimately led to a significant cost reduction from the in-house contractors. This provided surplus funds for re-investment and growth, creating more homes across the region.

FUTURE PROOFING

Working with Vantage, Torus was able to shape and tailor their priorities to the needs of the customers of today and anticipate the requirements of tomorrow's customer.

The improved collaborative approach, as they began to work as one organisation, also freed up much needed resources, allowing Torus to invest in new ideas, particularly around their digital service offering.

Implementation of customer satisfaction surveys and increased take-up of customer self-service repairs reporting were both ways in which



Torus started to realise some of the benefits of their merger.

Haydn Hansford, managing director of the in-house contractor at Torus commented: "Challenging our existing approach, we came together as one company. This was followed by an

in-house repairs and maintenance transformation programme. The combination of these changes ultimately saved us a significant amount of money, improved the service we provide to our customers and helped us become fit and ready for the future."

News in brief

- Analysis by the Local Government Association has shown that almost 58,000 council homes have been 'lost' through the Right to Buy scheme over the past six years, with the average discount on sale prices now standing at £61,810. The total value of discounts on sales made in the past six years now totals £3.5 billion. Representing 370 councils in England and Wales, the LGA says they have collectively only been able to replace roughly one fifth of the properties sold since 2011/12. Over 1.8 million council houses have been bought by tenants since the RTB was introduced by the 1980 Housing Act. An estimated 40 per cent of these properties have subsequently been sold on to private landlords, who let them out at much higher private market rents.

- Windsor and Maidenhead Council has withdrawn plans to impose £100 fines and public space protection orders on rough sleepers as part of a new homelessness support strategy. The proposals lead to a public outcry and were criticised by the homelessness charities Shelter and Crisis, and the human rights advocacy group Liberty, who said the council was planning to punish people for being homeless. The council has separated its policies for supporting rough sleepers and for tackling anti-social behaviour.

- Land Registry data obtained by the BBC has revealed there are over 97,000 properties, mostly residential addresses, owned by overseas companies in England and Wales. Close to half (44 per cent) of these properties are located in London; more than one in ten (11,500) properties are in the City of Westminster; and more than 6,000 properties are in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea – the same borough where Grenfell Tower is located and where over half of the evacuated residents are still living in temporary accommodation. The value of less than a third of the properties is known but the most recent sale prices of 27,835 properties adds up to just over £55 bn. The most expensive sites are for hotels or luxury apartment blocks but the vast majority are residential properties. Foreign ownership is increasingly being viewed as unacceptable given that many of the residential properties are left empty for months or even years at a time, while they increase in value and are often situated in areas where housing is in short supply.

- The Empty Homes agency has mapped the location of councils with a higher proportion of dwellings recorded empty for more than six months and has found most of them are in more northerly areas. 36 of the 54 local authorities with 1.2 per cent or more of their homes long-term empty are in the North, ten are in the Midlands and eight are in the South, with coastal places standing out in the latter group. There are 200,145 long term vacant properties across England, down significantly from the figure of 326,954 recorded in 2008. Some groupings of authorities (i.e.



Land Registry data obtained by the BBC has revealed there are over 97,000 properties, mostly residential addresses, owned by overseas companies in England and Wales. Close to half (44 per cent) of these properties are located in London

counties and combined authorities) stand out as having 1.2 per cent or more of their homes long-term empty as a whole. This includes: Cornwall, Cumbria, Durham, Humberside, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland and Tees Valley. The results suggest that most of the problem is due to low demand and/or higher numbers of properties in poor conditions. Holiday homes are a further problem in specific coastal and scenic areas, like national parks. London has the lowest rate of long-term empty homes at 0.56 per cent, followed by the South East at 0.62 and the East of England at 0.63.

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1,460 days young

As Resident®, the revolutionary property management software business, celebrates its 4th anniversary, founder and chartered surveyor Kate Boyes reflects on the journey so far



It's incredible to think that just 4 years ago Resident® was merely an idea. A nagging ambition to create my own property technology software that had the potential to transform an

industry. Since then, thanks to an amazingly talented and determined team, we have 100,000 registered users across the UK & Ireland. 100,000! Including property managers, developers, landlords and leaseholders.

The idea for Resident® came from recognising a need for an affordable, scalable and importantly compliant solution that grows as a property portfolio grows.

Kate explains, "As a chartered surveyor I understand and have a passion for property. My father and brother are both surveyors so I guess it's in my blood. And I genuinely believe that managing a property, someone's home, is a privilege and something to take great pride in. But I was so frustrated by the cost and lack of functions of available property management software. I think my family thought I'd had one too many glasses of wine when I told them I was going to create a prop-tech start-up to create what I wanted myself!

"To say it's been a steep learning curve is a massive understatement, but I have a fantastic team of developers that work with me to ensure our functionality outperforms other software on the market."

Since 2014, Kate and the team have not only built the Resident® software from scratch, they have also rebuilt it entirely. In 2016 they completely rewrote the code architecture to ensure the system was future proof and scalable. In the past year alone, Resident has enhanced every single feature, responding to client requests and Kate's own ambitious vision for a product that all of the team care deeply about.

Resident® is designed to be as simple, secure and user friendly as possible.

"We have used the same cutting-edge technology Google and Microsoft use, to create a cloud-based system that is mobile friendly so it runs on any device or platform. Not only that, but Resident® clients get their own dedicated database, unlike other cloud-based software where one database stores all client data. This gives our clients complete flexibility to manage additional backups if they wish to".

Resident® enables landlords and leaseholders to log in and view financial budgets and accounts, ongoing maintenance tasks and health and safety



and insurance documents. And for block managers, it also combines the role of company secretary alongside the normal management functions.

It can generate share certificates as well as link to Companies House to store all shareholder information and help generate confirmation statements.

Resident® has its own accounts package to record income and expenditure and generates reports when required. An analysed cashbook is included for bank transactions and splitting between various expenses headings, with individual accounts maintained for each leaseholder.

Reactive maintenance is logged under the repairs section with a 'Little Black Book' of recommended contractors allocated under each expected type of repair and maintenance for users to contact.

A comprehensive checklist includes a reminder for insurance valuations and Resident® can recommend appropriate surveyors to provide this service. The resource centre provides help sheets on why and how often these are needed. It also contains a section for new developments including a comprehensive checklist for residents to use for a smooth transition in management from developer to residents. Other features include diaries and reminders for follow up for all key dates such as AGMs, servicing, health and safety risk assessments and insurance renewals and email alerts for new legislation and news.



"It's been a fantastic journey so far and I can't wait to see what this year brings"

Founder of Resident®, Kate Boyes

Resident® is fully customisable, whether it's the site layout and personal branding, arrears process, administration templates or security settings. In short, it does what its users want it to. And of course, as a committed prop-tech evangelist, Kate is always looking for ways to enhance the system. "We have recently added automated bank feeds to synchronise bank account transactions and we're currently trialling the integration of a brand new property inspection app. The most exciting thing about technology is that development doesn't stop. You can keep on improving. It's been a fantastic journey so far and I can't wait to see what this year brings".

For more information contact Kate Boyes at kate@resident.uk.com

Product Focus



KMS

www.kms.uk.net

Simplekey Web is a market leading cloud based, communal door access solution from KMS.

Simplekey Web has been developed for housing landlords to add and delete fobs securely across multiple blocks, from any web enabled device. The system is used by many housing organisations, as well as private landlords and property managers across the UK.

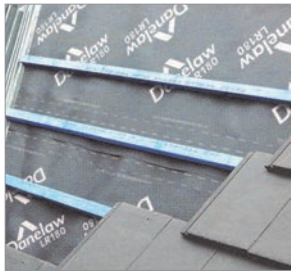
Simplekey Web has been designed and manufactured in the UK and has a high level of security, ensuring all data is secure. To find out what our customers think, visit the website.

Saniflo

www.saniflo.co.uk

The Kinedo range of cubicles from Saniflo has been extended with an extra model in the Kinemagic range.

The Kinemagic Serenity Plus is a high quality, all-in-one shower cubicle that has been designed to fit in exactly the same space as a standard bath and can be installed with the minimum fuss and hassle. Access into the cubicle is via a low entry shower tray that is just 30mm in height and has anti-slip flooring for the ultimate, safe showering experience. The tray has unique, adjustable feet for unbreachable and uneven floors to ensure a flat and even installation – something very important to those who are slightly shaky on their feet.



Hambleside Danelaw

www.hambleside-danelaw.co.uk

Roofing ventilation and accessories specialist, Danelaw, has launched two new vapour permeable underlays for slate and tile roofs, the middleweight Danelaw LR135 and the premium Danelaw LR180. They have been added to the range, alongside the Danelaw LR120 and LR150. Both can be used for warm and cold roof applications, either unsupported, draped over timber rafters or counter battens or fully supported over timber sarking and rigid insulation. LR135 and LR180 have been independently tested by the BRE for wind zone suitability and come with full BBA approval.

Johnson & Starley

www.johnsonandstarley.co.uk

Installers or homeowners looking to replace old warm air heating systems with the latest highly energy efficient technology should consider the advantages of the Johnson & Starley's Aquair Heat interface unit. This is possibly the most unique and versatile HIU (Heat Interface Unit) available and will provide all the benefits that a centralised heating system can offer. An Aquair can replace any warm air heater in a home, fully utilise the existing warm air ducting and be integrated in to almost any centralised heating source. It can be run in conjunction with an existing wet system and also has the option of supplying unheated air for cooling purposes during the warmer months.



Johnson Controls

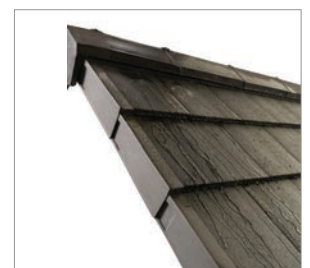
www.johnsoncontrols.com

Johnson Controls announces that its Tyco® EG-25 Sprinkler Guard is the first FM-approved guard on the market to meet FM Global design guidelines and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requirements for using a listed guard in areas where sprinklers are exposed to potential damage. The new sprinkler guard is designed for use with TYCO ESFR-25 pendent sprinklers. These sprinklers provide suppression load performance with ceiling-only fire protection for a wide variety of commodities and storage arrangements, enabling building owners to lease to the widest range of occupiers. To learn more visit www.tyco-fire.com.

Monier Redland

www.redland.co.uk/dryverge

Redland, the company that invented dry-fixed roofing systems, with patents dating back to 1966; has launched two new dry verge products to coincide with the publication of BS 8612: Dry-fixed ridge, hip and verge systems for slating and tiling – the new British Standard which aims to ensure that dry fixed products are adequately designed and installed to be fit for purpose. Redland's new dry verges – the DryVerge and Rapid DryVerge – are specifically designed to not only meet the requirements of BS 8612, but also to be best in class. Moreover, the dry verges have been designed to be even easier and faster to fix than their predecessors.



Norbord invests in Occupational Health

Occupational Health Advisors play a crucial role in maintaining the health, wellbeing and safety of employees. Allison O'Connor, Terri Brydon and Kim Clee have more than 90 years of nursing experience between them and, as Norbord's three UK-site Occupational Health Advisors, they are putting their knowledge to good use by providing a range of services to help keep employees safe and well at work. The OH team's role encompasses a wide range of services which include pre-employment medicals, routine employee health surveillance, undertaking health assessment referrals from managers, teaching first aiders and running health promotional activities.



www.norbord.co.uk

Airtech offers landlords free CPD

Airtech, the mould and condensation control specialist, is offering a free CPD accredited training seminar for social housing landlords on condensation and mould. The course looks at the difference between damp and mould, health implications, causes and consequences, solutions and data logging. This training will help ensure that landlords know how to break the cycle of condensation and mould, thus protecting both residents and their housing stock. Airtech's training course helps landlords understand the causes of condensation and mould and offer solutions and simple steps that guarantee that once mould has been removed it won't return.



www.airtechenvironmental.co.uk

Kingspan makes \$10M investment

Kingspan Group plc announced a \$10 million investment in Invicara, a provider of transformative software solutions for the entire ecosystem of the built environment. Kingspan has made a commitment to the development of a solution for digitalisation of the construction industry. Invicara will use its cloud-based platform to build a solution that uses design and construction data to create digital workflows that transform the customer experience. Kingspan is investing \$10m in a minority stake in Invicara, and Louise Foody, Kingspan's Director of Digital and Brand, and Mike Stenson, Head of Innovation at Kingspan, will join the Invicara Board of Directors.



01544 387 384 www.kingspan.com/group

British Ceramic Tile sponsor tiling show

The TTA is delighted to announce that British Ceramic Tile is to be the event sponsor of The Tile Association Tiling Show. The support of BCT, who have also signed up as a Gold sponsor of the Awards for this year, is a further demonstration of the enthusiasm with which the industry has received the launch of The Tiling Show. This is now definitely an event which should not be missed by anyone involved in the tiling sector. The Tile Association Tiling Show will take place from 10am on Friday 18 May at The St Johns Hotel, Solihull, the same venue which will host the TTA Awards that evening.



0300 365 8453 www.tiles.org.uk

PCA unveils two-day event

The Property Care Association (PCA) has unveiled the agenda for a unique two-day event, which brings together a national and international perspective to investigate a major issue currently affecting UK properties – excess moisture in buildings. The trade body's 2018 International Residential Ventilation & Preservation of Buildings Conference takes place on the 14th and 15th June at The Slate, University of Warwick, in Coventry. Speakers and panellists include representatives from RICS, the University College London Institute for Environmental Design and Engineering (UCL IEDE), UK Centre for Moisture in Buildings and Bangor University.



0844 375 4301 www.property-care.org/conferences

Vent-Axias Revive tackles condensation

British ventilation manufacturer Vent-Axia has supplied its Lo-Carbon Revive fan to tackle persistent condensation and mould in social housing in West London. Ealing Council selected the Revive fans as part of its Bramley Road refurbishment project working with the main contractor, Keepmoat and the sub electrical contractor, Onsite Electrical. The intelligent Lo-Carbon Revive is a filter-less unitary fan designed to meet the specific needs of social housing that boasts powerful, quiet and efficient ventilation. Revive's datalogger was an attractive feature since it allows the fan's usage to be tracked to ensure it is used as intended.



0844 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com

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Vectaire's WHHRs via an LCD screen

Vectaire's WHHRs can now be commissioned via an LCD screen. The upright units – the Midis and the Maxis – offer the option of an integral LCD or a remote LCD commissioning unit, whilst the in-line EVO250 and Mini can be commissioned using a remote unit.



The commissioning engineer is easily able to adjust unit functions including trickle, purge and boost speeds for each motor, the length of boost speed over-run time, the time delay before the boost speed kicks in, holiday mode, night-time boost inhibitor times etc. The user can see the speed at which the fan is operating, the relative humidity, and when the filters need replacing.

01494 522333 www.vectaire.co.uk

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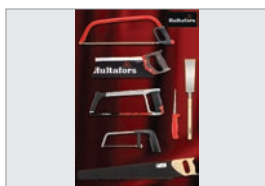
The Ultimate solution for working on your knees – delivering optimal freedom of movement and long-lasting durability. Snickers' new Floorlayers Work Trousers and the patented Knee Guard System combine very effectively to deliver the ultimate solution for working safely and in comfort on your knees. With an advanced body-mapping design, they're made from the highly durable Ripstop fabric with a 'mechanical stretch', providing great flexibility, comfort and advanced functionality. They come with an integrated belt for superior waist fit, with easy-to-access holster pockets with zipped compartment, leg pockets including knife fastener.



info@snickersworkwear.co.uk

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www.hultafors.co.uk

The Solid Gear 'One GTX' Safety Shoe

The ONE GTX from Solid Gear is a superbly constructed safety shoe with seven integrated layers to deliver excellent comfort and protection. It's designed and built for active professionals who need a highly breathable, light and flexible safety shoe. With a GORE-TEX® SURROUND® membrane they're fully breathable and ideal for warmer weather and combined indoor/outdoor activities. The shoe's stretchable upper is water-resistant with amazing performance when it comes to breathability, fit and flexibility. What's more, it has a honeycombed sole for enhanced grip and a composite midsole. It also has a stabilising heel support to minimise injuries from twisting.



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Mapei launches Dursilite Gloss

Mapei introduces Dursilite Gloss to the popular range of Dursilite water based paints for interiors. Dursilite Gloss is an internal enamel wall paint based on special acrylic and polyurethane resins and has a smooth, semi-gloss finish that enhances the brightness of colours. Dursilite Gloss allows you to create a high-end finish, is durable and resistant to yellowing and thanks to its polyurethane resin content, is highly resistant to staining and can cope with the most rigorous cleaning regimes and comes with a Class 1 wet scrub resistance, that conforms to EN ISO 11998. Dursilite Gloss bonds perfectly to all types of wall, plaster, skim coats and old paintwork that are sound and well-bonded; it also has good hiding power and is easy to apply. An elegant, high quality finish is achieved when using Dursilite Gloss in residential or commercial environments. Due to its hard wearing protection, excellent cleanability and low dirt pick up, Dursilite Gloss is recommended for use in areas that are used by the general public that are particularly exposed to high wear and dirt. Dursilite Gloss, along with all products within the Dursilite product family, can be tinted using the ColorMap automatic tinting machine. Other products within the Dursilite Gloss family include Dursilite Plus, Dursilite Matt.

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How to maximise return on investment from a bathroom renovation

Neil Bell of Easy Bathrooms explains how you can maximise your return on investment from a bathroom refit, while ensuring that tenants are happy with the quality of the finish

Whether you're a private landlord with a handful of tenants to look after, or a social housing firm with thousands of properties on your stock, the issue of return on investment remains the same.

Reputable landlords and housing associations want tenants to feel at home, comfortable and at ease in their properties, and part of that is about installing good quality furnishings and fittings. However, it's important to strike a balance between ensuring clients' happiness, and not overspending; even for the 'accidental' landlords who've had property passed down to them and don't consider themselves to be savvy investors.

When it comes to renovating an outdated bathroom, it's difficult for most people to know where that balance lies — how much should you spend? Is it worth paying a bit more for quality, or should you do things on the cheap to save on the upfront investment?

There's no justification in purchasing good quality products and appointing an inexperienced, poor fitter to install them

The truth is that those who choose poor quality fittings, usually end up going back to a reputable supplier to rectify the situation. It's therefore almost always better to invest in good quality fittings and finishes in the first instance. But that doesn't mean that you need to splash out on the most on-trend furnishings.

In fact, tenants usually prefer basic, robust products that will last for the duration of their tenancy, rather than fittings that are flimsy or break easily. After all, are there many people who actually enjoy complaining to their landlords?

And that's good news for you too, because keeping things simple means that you can appeal to a wider audience when you are on the hunt for a new tenant in the future.

So, it is best to invest in good quality, everyday fittings that are sold with a guarantee. That way, if anything does go wrong, the retailer will rectify it at no cost to you, reducing the price of the product over its lifetime.

But it's not just the products themselves that you need to consider. It's also vital to choose the right tradespeople to carry out the work. There's no justification in purchasing good quality products and appointing an inexperienced, poor fitter to install them. Using trusted professionals means that the finish of the bathroom will look great and last longer too.

So when it comes to quality, the choice is clear; pick good standard products and great workmanship. But what about knowing what type of products and furniture to install?

For example, if space is tight, then should you fit a bath over a shower, or a full shower? Full height storage or an under-sink vanity unit? These are frequently asked questions, and the most important thing to consider when



making these decisions is to focus on your target audience.

For example, fitting a bath in student accommodation might be a waste of



If you're not sure who your ideal tenant is, then look to the local area and consider the demand

time, but for families with young children, this could be a necessity.

On the other hand, accessibility is often an important factor for local authorities and elderly, so grab bars and full showers could be something to think about.

If you're not sure who your ideal tenant is, then look to the local area and consider the demand. If your property is a one-bedroom apartment in a city centre, the likelihood is that you want to attract young professionals. Whereas a three-bedroom semi-detached, close to a village, is more likely to be demanded by families. Sometimes, talking to an experienced estate agent will give you the best idea of your target client.

Once you know your audience, you can really start to plan what features this typical client would require from their bathroom. And if you get things right, it might even mean that you're able to charge more rent per month — after all, the bathroom is a place where we spend a lot of our time, and it's one of the main rooms that will help a potential tenant make their decision.

Then, once they've moved in, it's important to look after and maintain the products that you've invested in. By carrying out regular — preferably annual — property checks, you can ensure that your tenant is looking after their bathroom, and if they report any damaged or faulty items, it's important that you rectify it sooner rather than later.

That way, you're not only keeping your client happy, but are safeguarding your property for the future, too.

Neil Bell is head of retail at Easy Bathrooms

Take an inclusive approach

Closomat is at the forefront of aesthetic solutions for private and social housing. It has already developed more contemporary styling for the biggest selling range of shower toilets- Vita- and is now working on the next generation. The Palma Vita, the toilet itself can be fitted with accessories to accommodate user needs as they change with time. That flexibility adds value too. Closomat's Vita range encompasses floor mounted, wall hung and height adjustable variants. The shower toilets are complimented by contemporary fixed or height adjustable washbasins, shower seats, plus body driers, toilet lifters, ceiling track hoists, and adult sized height adjustable Changing benches.



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Polyflor helps create modern apartments

Luxury vinyl sheet flooring and Polysafe safety flooring from Polyflor, was recently installed throughout apartments on the Belle View social housing development, Stow Park Avenue, Newport. Approximately 1400m² of Designatex PUR sheet vinyl flooring, Polysafe Wood fx PUR and Polysafe Arena PUR safety flooring was installed during the interior fit out phase by Evabuild Interiors Ltd, under main contractor Willis Construction. The Platinum Oak grey wood effect design from Polyflor's Designatex collection of luxury vinyl sheet flooring for residential interiors was used throughout bedroom, living room and kitchen areas in each apartment.



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Next generation coatings and paints

Mike Turner of Ian Williams looks at some of the latest trends in coatings and paint products



Over the decades, formulations and applications have changed significantly and paint continues to be a dynamic sector, contributing heavily to the sustainability, aesthetics, health, safety and efficacy of buildings. Paints and coatings now offer solutions stretching way beyond their original ‘wall-covering’ function.

ENVIRONMENTAL SHAKE-UP

One of the biggest challenges faced by the coatings industry over recent years has come from an environmental perspective. Through legislation and best practice, we’ve all had to make the transition towards next generation products with reduced carbon and solvent content. For manufacturers, the challenge has been to invest significantly on new water-based formulations that are fit for purpose and offer the same longevity, lower whole life costs and durability as solvent paints, but without the environmental damage.

For maintenance providers, the challenge has been to develop new applications that take into account these formulation changes. We’ve had to implement solutions ranging from perfecting the intercoat adhesion of water-based coatings onto legacy solvent paints, to developing appropriate application

One of the biggest challenges faced by the coatings industry over recent years has come from an environmental perspective

techniques with new types of brushes and new brush strokes that ‘brush out’ differently. This in turn has put the spotlight on the top-level training and development of our team of painters and decorators and our commitment to 10 per cent of our workforce being apprentices.

INVESTMENT IN INNOVATION

In tandem, highly-engineered specialist and niche products are a big growth area for both internal and external coatings, especially across the highly diverse housing stock found in the public sector. Paint can now offer a whole host of features and benefits previously unavailable like, for example, anti-graffiti solutions. Graffiti can seriously compromise the reputation and feel of a

For maintenance providers, the challenge has been to develop new applications that take into account these formulation changes

building, but until now the only way to get rid of it has been an expensive and inconvenient refurbishment, with no guarantee that more vandalism won't occur immediately on completion of the project. However, thanks to sophisticated coatings which are applied in advance, spray paint and graffiti can now be removed from almost any interior or external surface.

Passive fire protection in homes – especially multi-dwelling and high rise properties – has understandably been in the media spotlight recently, and huge strides have been made in coatings to improve fire safety performance. Conforming to Fire Rating Class 0 is an obligation in certain premises such as Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) but is also recommended in other buildings to help prevent flame spread.

COATINGS TO HELP HEALTH

Another fast-moving area in coatings and paints is the use of light, colour, texture and finishes to improve life and work conditions. Scientific research has unequivocally shown that the way people engage with a building, positive or otherwise, can be directly affected by the colour and design of the space. The Equality Act Guidelines are designed to help avoid discriminating against people with disabilities, including visual impairment and dementia, concerns that are increasing against a backdrop of an ageing population.

It's now accepted that over 80 per cent of visually impaired people can discern colour differences, so the use of contrast can make way finding and building navigation much easier – e.g. painting whole doors and architraves in a contrasting colour with the surrounding surfaces; making the skirting boards



the same or a similar colour as the wall gives visually impaired people an accurate indication of the size of the floor; using a colour that contrasts with the background draws attention to key features like switches, sockets and handrails.

All of these developments mean that the features and benefits of paint now extend far beyond 'just a wall coating for a bit of colour' and we can't underestimate its potential benefits on health, well being and the protection of the UK's housing stock.

Mike Turner is the executive director of Ian Williams

Knauf brings revolutionary render to the UK market

Knauf is introducing a radical new render system, Knauf MineralAktiv, to the UK market. Designed to inhibit the growth of surface algae and fungi, the system addresses the most common problem associated with render finishes using a patented biocide-free composition. The clean contemporary aesthetics offered by render is a popular choice for specifiers, but the cool and often damp climate of the UK can quickly lead to disappointing discolouration because of the growth of algae and fungus on the surface. Some products tackle the problem by including biocides in the formulation, but this approach offers only a temporary solution as the biocide effect wears off over time. Knauf MineralAktiv, on the other hand, addresses the root of the problem by providing a naturally inhospitable environment. Fungus and mould both need damp and neutral PH conditions to flourish, so the formula of MineralAktiv addresses both of these issues. A long-lasting hybrid binder maintains high alkalinity for years while advanced moisture management works in combination with an IR absorber raising the surface temperature, increasing evaporation and limiting moisture on the render surface. These two characteristics ensure the finish remains bright and clean for years without the need for regular cleaning. Knauf MineralAktiv consists of a top coat and paint which can be used independently or in combination for maximum protection. Suitable for both new build and refurbishment projects, Knauf MineralAktiv is available in 230 colours.

01795 424 499 www.knauf.co.uk



Advantages of Osmo UV-Protection-Oil

Osmo UK, the eco-friendly wood and finishes specialist, has developed a quality finish to protect, maintain and restore exterior wood. Osmo UV-Protection-Oil has been specially designed to preserve the natural colour of the wood, leaving it looking in top condition. Protection of exterior wood is of the upmost importance as the colour can fade after harmful UV rays damage the lignin within the wood. Osmo UV-Protection-Oil is a clear, satin finish for exterior application onto vertical wooden structures only such as doors, cladding, fencing etc. Based on natural oil, it does not crack, flake, peel or blister. The UV-Protection-Oil 410 consists of natural ingredients.



www.osmouk.com

TeknosPro products shine in renovation

TeknosPro, from Teknos, is a range of multi surface paints and coatings which have been developed for professional decorators. They are based on low odour, quick drying, water-based technology and can be used on various surfaces. A recent renovation of an eighteenth century cottage in Surrey was completed by Nick Sammut who had been asked by his customer to use TeknosPro products. Nick commented: "They're really good products. I have also used Timantti 7 on another project for the conservatory walls, kitchen walls and ceilings." Timantti 7 is a waterborne matt special acrylate suitable for use in both dry and humid areas and can be used in conjunction with the Timantti 3 primer.



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Funded solutions

Simon Lomax of Kensa Heat Pumps explores innovative ways to access funding streams for heating and renewable energy installations



Many in the ground source heat pump (GSHP) industry are encouraged by the proposed refinements outlined in the Government's 2016 response to the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) consultation. Sadly, the unexpected General Election put paid to the original launch timetable, but reformed regulations are now imminent and will create significant market opportunities. So, what opportunities are in store?

According to the consultation response: "The Government is keen to support the deployment of GSHPs making use of shared ground loops". And: "This route (shared ground loops) will improve investment confidence and...will also offer the greatest flexibility, encouraging a broad range of shared loop projects to come forward including new build and mixed use projects."

Some manufacturers are pioneering the use of shared ground loops in the UK. Very simply, individual heat pumps are installed inside each dwelling linked to a shared ground loop. Crucially, this system architecture qualifies as district heating and so both retrofit and new build installations are eligible for support via the non-domestic RHI. The RHI reforms will introduce a significant change in the nature of this support.

Previously, RHI payments were based upon the metered heat consumption at each dwelling served by the shared ground loop. This requirement forced system owners to install expensive heat meters and engage in an onerous quarterly claims process. Worse, they had no certainty on the level of RHI income as they could only estimate the amount of heat consumed at each property, an estimate that was significantly impacted by occupant behaviour, a factor beyond their control.

This uncertainty discouraged many potential users, so Government embraced industry's proposal to base payments on the deemed heat consumption (taken from the property's Energy Performance Certificate); a step which mirrors arrangements in the domestic RHI. Unlike the 7-year payment term for the domestic RHI, the non-domestic RHI pays an index-linked tariff over 20 years, so returns are more attractive.

According to the consultation response: "The Government is keen to support the deployment of GSHPs making use of shared ground loops"

Of course, the pursuit of subsidy support should never be allowed to trump the technical elegance of any solution, so it is helpful that there are multiple arguments for supporting the use of ground source heat pumps and shared ground loops.

Firstly, the carbon intensity of electricity generation continues to fall. Carbon Brief reported the UK-wide average for 2017 was just 237 grammes of carbon per kilowatt hour, which is marginally higher than the carbon intensity of mains gas. While the carbon intensity will be higher during the winter heating season, as increased demand for electricity will prompt use of less 'green' sources, it is still clear that carbon emissions associated with a GSHP installation fall far below those of a gas boiler installation once you have factored in the relative efficiency of the appliances – 300 per cent plus for a GSHP and around 95 per cent for a gas boiler. With proposed reductions in the carbon intensity figures used within SAP, the specification of GSHP's will simplify compliance with building regulations.

Secondly, conventional district heating systems featuring a large central plant (of any flavour) require costly insulated pipes to protect the heat as it is circulated away from the source, and often impose high bills on householders who have no opportunity to select an alternative heat supplier. In contrast, by using a model in which a ground source heat pump is inside each property, heat is only generated close to the point of use, so the fluid circulating around the

Framework Directive for energy-related products

In October 2009, the European Commission published a framework Directive for energy-related products, thereby extending the scope of application to products that use, generate, transfer and measure energy. The energy-related products directive has already been implemented for a number of products and the new regulations will be applying to warm air heaters from January 2018. To enable the heaters to be placed on the market they must be fully compliant with the regulation. Appliances in the supply chain after the implementation date, can still be sold but they must be covered by an order, written or verbal. Orders would need placing for the non-condensing ranges of warm air heaters, the Hi-Spec and Economaire, by the end of December 2017 to comply with the new regulation. Providing these orders are in place, **Johnson & Starley** are able to sell these two models of heaters up until 26th September 2018. Naturally, Housing Associations and Social Housing who currently own, or are looking to upgrade their stock will wonder what the availability of spare parts will be. There is need to worry. Johnson and Starley has always been committed to keeping spare parts for heaters available for as long as possible and will not be making exceptions for these or any of our model ranges. Parts will be available for a minimum of 10 years after production of these two models of heaters has ceased. The company is so confident in its products that it is extending the guarantee period for the Economaire and Hi-Spec heaters from one to three years.

01604 762881 www.johnsonandstarley.co.uk



Seminar Explores Heat Interface Test

Evinox Energy has launched a new CIBSE accredited CPD seminar following the introduction of the first UK test standard for Heat Interface Units from BESA (British Engineering Services Association).

Until now, it has been a common misconception that heat interface units are "one size fits all"; results from the BESA tests show that this certainly isn't the case for today's modern systems – the network design and HIU specification must be closely matched to ensure optimum performance and the HIU must deliver the widest delta T and lowest return temperatures possible in all operational modes.

The Evinox seminar explores all aspects of the test regime and discusses how for the first time, designers and specifiers will be able to see the impact of a specific HIU on their network. Entitled "Understanding the BESA Test Standard for HIUs", the seminar is accredited by The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers and provides credits towards consulting engineers' Continuing Professional Development.

This 60-minute seminar is ideal for M&E consultants or housing providers interested in finding out more about the latest standard for communal & district heating systems and can be held at client's premises or at the Evinox Energy offices in Chessington.

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By mimicking the established arrangements, there is huge potential for GSHP deployment and the associated reduction in carbon emissions

distribution pipework (within any housing estate or apartment block) is at ambient temperature, massively reducing the installation cost.

Most importantly, householders can source electricity from their own preferred energy company, switching as required to secure the most competitive tariff. And the circulation pumps within each heat pump move the fluid around the shared ground loop so there is no need for any separate equipment imposing additional running costs. Householders typically benefit from a 300-350 per cent system efficiency which means running costs are consistent with mains gas, and are far lower than other renewable heat technologies. Ownership costs are also appealing thanks to the remarkable reliability and durability of the technology.

Of course, this system architecture is only practical in situations where there are neighbouring properties who all agree simultaneously to embrace GSHP technology. As such, early installations have focussed on the social housing retrofit and all new build sectors, but emerging financing models are encouraging adoption in private housing.

In these applications, funders will own and maintain the ground array in the same way that the gas infrastructure is owned by entities quite distinct from the householder. By mimicking the established arrangements, there is huge potential for GSHP deployment and the associated reduction in carbon emissions, the driving force behind the Government's revised RHI regulations.

Simon Lomax is the managing director of Kensa Heat Pumps

Tony Dumble @unequaled_heating
 Peter Booth @pbplumber
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New ESi heating controls brochure

Heating controls manufacturer and distributor ESi has released its brand new heating controls range brochure introducing its new five series range designed to be fully interchangeable by the home owner. The latest ESRT5 range is packed with energy saving features designed to save the homeowner money by lowering their fuel bills. It includes the ESRT5RF 5 series Wifi programmable room thermostat which provides seamless control at home or from your mobile or tablet. ESi Controls is one of the fastest growing designers and manufacturers of heating controls in the UK.



01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

Polypipe ventilation evolves into Domus

Polypipe Ventilation, manufacturer of energy-saving domestic ventilation systems, has been reborn as **Domus Ventilation**. The first stage in the creation of Domus Ventilation has included a move of all staff and manufacturing to modern premises in South Wales. A key part of the launch of Domus Ventilation has been a new logo and corporate identity. This branding has already been used across a new product catalogue and will be shortly applied to a new website. Domus Ventilation will provide differentiated ventilation solutions in the private and social housing sectors, transforming the way developers and contractors meet emerging environmental standards.



vent.info@domusventilation.co.uk

A hot and efficient open gas fire

The best just got better! The much-loved Paragon One gas fire has been a firm favourite for over a decade now. The team at **Charlton & Jenrick** have recently been working on a round of updates for the fire and are pleased to announce the launch of the new improved, hotter and more efficient Paragon One Evolution Natural Gas fire. The Evolution offers a toe warming 4.4kW output from its advanced technology firebox at a substantial net efficiency of 63 per cent. The fire is being launched in Manual, Slide and Remote for full versatility and is designed to work with the majority of trims, fascia's and frets in the Charlton & Jenrick range.



www.charltonandjenrick.co.uk

RAUTHERMEX Plus chosen

REHAU's RAUTHERMEX Plus pipework has been chosen for a district heating installation in Glasgow, which aims to provide more than 350 homes with affordable, low carbon heating. The heat pump would be supported by energy generated by solar panels and gas would be used as a back-up energy source if and when required. After speaking to REHAU about its district heating offer, WSP/Parsons Brinckerhoff decided to specify more than 1km of RAUTHERMEX Plus to be used on the Hillpark Drive project. The pipework chosen to be installed was a mixture of UNO and DUO RAUTHERMEX Plus pipes.



01989 762600 www.rehau.uk

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To see the range of options head for the Stelrad website – for panel and premium panel radiators, designer and decorative radiators and special application options.

0844 543 6200 www.stelrad.com

Shropshire rural renewable programme knows no boundaries

A rural new build development straddling England and Wales is the fourth project by Shropshire Rural Housing Association (SRHA) to feature ground source heat pumps, delivering on its commitment to provide affordable warmth to its 300-strong housing stock. The high specification development of new family homes in Llanymynech is built in the carpark of the former Lion Hotel, which famously was divided through the building by the national border, resulting in a front bar in Wales and back bar in England. Consisting of two, three and four bedroom detached and semi-detached family homes, let at rates to meet local needs, each house at Llanymynech has its own British manufactured Kensa Shoebox ground source heat pump installed in under stairs cupboards. Each heat pump is connected to a single district ground array in the centre of the development which consists of four boreholes drilled to depths of 122 meters. The district nature of the ground array means the scheme qualifies for 20 years of income via the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive, forecast to return £63k against the investment of £56k, whilst saving residents 15-20 per cent compared to oil or LPG alternatives.

www.kensaheatpumps.com

Care Home keeps warm with new system

Sheffield based plumbing and heating firm Pro Plumbers 24-7 has installed a new heating system in a care home in Rotherham, including a **BoilerMag XT** industrial boiler filter. The filter has achieved outstanding results for the care home. The BoilerMag XT is ideal for large heating systems, providing heating system protection by preventing the build-up of ferrous oxide and scale, reducing energy bills, increasing boiler life, and reducing maintenance call outs. The XT also includes an automatic air vent, which greatly reduces the potentially damaging effects of air accumulating in a heating system. With the range available from 2" to 12", the XT unit has a large collection capacity.



www.eclipsemagnetics.com

Icynene awarded Energy Saving Trust approval



Spray foam insulation specialists, Icynene has achieved the prestigious Energy Saving Trust [EST] approval for its high performance, Icynene Foamlite system.

Icynene Foamlite is a spray applied insulation system specifically developed for use in wall, roof and underfloor applications where high levels of insulation and air tightness are required.

When applied, Icynene Foamlite expands 100-fold within the first few seconds, sealing all gaps, service holes and hard to reach spaces completely eliminating cold bridging.

Icynene Foamlite can be applied directly to breathable and non-breathable roof membranes without the need for an air gap. Because the foam has a soft, open-cell structure it allows the free passage of moisture vapour, allowing buildings to breathe naturally.

It also means that roof timbers in contact with the foam will not “sweat” and promote mould growth.

According to Icynene UK Managing Director, Paddy Leighton, “Winning EST approval is a robust process and a huge achievement for Icynene and we are delighted to have our products recognised for their high performance”

The Energy Saving Trust is an independent and impartial organisation which promotes energy efficiency across the domestic housing sector, helping consumers save energy in their homes.

EST also provides advice, research and consultancy services to help consumers, businesses, governments and communities achieve sustainable use of energy.

Icynene provides a 25-year warranty for all its insulation products and as well as carrying EST

Approval, Foamlite is also BBA Certified. For more information please visit <https://youtu.be/xn4ZHQLWHM>

info@icynene.co.uk www.icynene.co.uk



A natural approach to thermal comfort in social housing

Fintan Wallace from Ecological Building Systems discusses the importance of an airtight and windtight building envelope and the natural insulation solutions that can help reduce heating bills and improve comfort for social housing tenants

The cost of heating a home remains a constant concern for social housing tenants, putting pressure on social housing providers to maximise the thermal performance of properties and help keep tenants out of fuel poverty.

Building regulations stipulate demanding U-values for new homes, and the Decent Homes agenda has helped to drive thermal performance through refurbishment projects too, but can more be done to ensure that social housing delivers its designed thermal performance and creates a healthier living environments for tenants?

FABRIC FIRST

The need to reduce energy bills for social housing properties has been a key driver for design and specification innovation in the sector. The introduction of energy efficient mechanical and electrical technologies has proved to be a significant step forward, with the specification of renewable technologies, HIU installations and LED lighting helping to drive down energy consumption.

The true value of these M&E innovations can only really be delivered, however, if they are installed as part of a holistic approach to ensuring that energy is not wasted in the home. And when it comes to heating energy, the most effective way to ensure minimum wastage is by preventing heat from escaping.

It's a specification philosophy that is referred to as 'fabric first': by maximising the thermal performance of the building envelope we can maximise the energy efficiency of the whole specification, which is better for the environment, better for the housing provider and better for the tenant.

MAXIMISING THERMAL PERFORMANCE

There are two factors that need to be delivered in parallel to achieve a successful fabric first specification in the wall and roof build-up of a home.

The first is the installation of an effective insulation that delivers high performance U-values with low thermal conductivity (Lambda value) to ensure that the warm air is trapped within the building. A highly insulated property with low thermal conductivity will not only maintain a warmer living environment in the winter, it will also minimise solar gain in the summer, creating a more comfortable, ambient home all year round.

It is vital, however, that the chosen wall and roof build up traps in heat and keeps out solar gain without trapping in moisture, because trapped moisture can be detrimental to tenants' health and wellbeing, as well as becoming a potential cause of damage to the building fabric.

Alongside the Lambda value of the insulation, other factors vital to ensuring that a property meets its designed thermal performance are airtightness and windtightness.

Airtightness requires the close fitting and internal sealing of insulation material to avoid any gaps in the insulated envelope. Any gap can result in thermal bridging, and even an airtightness failure caused by a gap of just a few millimetres can have a dramatic negative impact on thermal performance,



regardless of the insulation's Lambda credentials.

Windtightness, meanwhile, requires an effective membrane to provide a protective layer for the insulation, working like an anorak over a woolly jumper to maximise performance. Once again, it's advisable to select a vapour open membrane that will prevent the loss of warm air while enabling moisture to escape.

A NATURAL PERFORMANCE

While natural insulation products have historically been seen as a niche, eco product, the benefits they offer in terms of building comfort make them

While natural insulation products have historically been seen as a niche, eco product, the benefits they offer in terms of building comfort make them an ideal solution for social housing

an ideal solution for social housing. This is because they are free from chemical components and exploit natural properties of the material to offer both excellent Lambda values and breathability. As a result, they contribute to healthier buildings at lower risk of common problems such as damp, mould and condensation.

Among the proven types of natural insulation products available in the UK are wood fibre insulation and natural jute. Made by processing timber offcuts grown in sustainable forests, wood fibre can be fabricated with tongue and groove edges to facilitate a gap free installation, ensuring excellent U-value performance is achieved.

Meanwhile, natural jute insulation is manufactured from recycled 'gunny bags' used to transport cocoa to Europe. The fibres contain no proteins, which prevents any possibility of mould growth or insect infestations, and the insulation material is soft and flexible, enabling it to be used in a variety of locations, including between rafters, ceiling joists and floor joists, and in partitions and stud walls. Indeed, wood fibre and natural jute can be used in combination on a property as the rigid wood and flexible jute have varying advantages for different areas of the build.

SUSTAINABILITY & PERFORMANCE

As we look to ensure greater social sustainability through the provision of homes that stand the test of time, it's important to remember that building performance also plays a critical role in the long term effectiveness



of social housing environments and the health and wellbeing of those who live in them.

Fintan Wallace is the architectural technologist for Ecological Building Systems

DOES MOULD LOOK FAMILIAR?

Black mould on walls may be caused by over insulation or damp insulation in the wall cavities.

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Unit 23, Higham Grange, Higham Side Road, Inskip Preston Lancs PR4 0FT



Polyflor launches Polysafe Quattro PUR

Polyflor, has just announced the launch of their new Polysafe Quattro collection. This innovative safety flooring range offers barefoot and shod sustainable wet slip resistance with a stud-free finish for enhanced comfort underfoot. Polysafe Quattro has been specifically designed to provide a high degree of slip resistance in continually wet areas such as standard and adapted bathrooms, walk-in showers and wet rooms in the housing sector. As the potential for slips is higher in wet environments, it is important to choose a HSE compliant safety flooring such as Polysafe Quattro which offers sustainable slip resistance, assured throughout the product's guaranteed life.

0161 767 1111 www.polyflor.com



Capture the TrueScale of nature

Surfaces formed of natural materials like stones and woods are gaining popularity in kitchen trend guides as the ideal worktops. TrueScale from **Formica Group** captures the subtle variations and patterns found in natural materials but eliminates the high cost of sourcing and maintaining. Ideal for creating statement pieces, TrueScale provides the necessary sizing to bring your kitchen design concepts to life. The decors do not repeat across the full width of the laminate sheet so patterns can be unveiled in their full beauty. Available in 28 decors, TrueScale laminate gives you the authentic look of premium materials, while being lightweight, hygienic and stain resistant.

0191 259 3512 www.formica.com



Roof refurbishment made easier

A roofing company switched to using BreatherQuilt from the range of YBS, finding it more cost-effective to install while offering superior performance compared to rival products on the market. The first project where R. G. Leverett trialled YBS BreatherQuilt was a 1950s bungalow in Norwich whose original roof covering of concrete tiles was at the end of its life. YBS BreatherQuilt is a BDA, LABC and NHBC certified for pitched roof insulation material for use in new-build and refurbishment applications. Lightweight and thin, it is the equivalent of 65mm of mineral wool insulation, while also providing a breathable underlayment.

01909 721662 www.ybsinsulation.com



Kingspan provides premium solution

Residents of two community housing blocks in Ashton-under-Lyne are enjoying the benefits of a more energy efficient home, thanks to a major insulation retrofit featuring the premium performance of Kingspan Kooltherm K5 External Wall Board. After experiencing issues with the existing insulation, Ashton Pioneer Homes has invested in upgrading the thermal performance of two of its twelve-storey properties. Kingspan Kooltherm K5 External Wall Board achieves outstanding thermal conductivities as low as 0.020 W/m·K. It is designed to be installed behind lightweight polymer modified renders, such as the dry dash render applied to the flat blocks.

www.kingspaninsulation.co.uk





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Mapei launch Mapetherm Flex RP

Mapetherm Flex RP is a ready-mixed, cement-free flexible skimming base coat that is extremely elastic and due to added Bioblock technology, is resistant to the biological attack of mould and algae. Developed by Mapei's worldwide Research & Development laboratories, Mapetherm Flex RP is excellent for repairing deteriorated insulating systems and/or micro-cracked render to form reinforced skim coats on insulating panels and thermal insulation systems. Thermal insulation systems offer protection from bad weather and help to contain energy losses which can be costly and increase the levels of CO₂ emissions. These systems sometimes require maintenance and, in worst cases, may need to be completely removed and replaced. If the damage deterioration has been identified in time, it's possible to carry out repairs using technologically suitable product and, if applied by skilled workers, the intervention will be reliable, durable and economically advantageous. Mapetherm Flex RP contains versatile characteristics that have been successfully used to carry out repair and maintenance work that is efficient and has an aesthetically pleasing finish. An innovative use of resin ensures that Mapetherm Flex RP is highly elastic.

0121 508 6970 www.mapei.co.uk

Give-and-take

Andy Fell of Hambleside Danelaw summarises the pros and cons of different flat and low-pitched roofing membranes



Housing maintenance is a demanding task, with cost, performance, lifespan, ease of installation and maintenance being the main governing factors. 'Traditional' roofing systems are still considered to be valid for certain applications, but there are alternative products that should always be appraised for their merits.

BITUMINOUS

A good, robust product compatible with many other systems, with extremely good flexibility and resistance to rupture. Naked flame use however makes this a risky choice on combustible substrates, and the heavy environmental cost of sourcing and manufacture weigh against it.

PVC

Aesthetically pleasing, speedy to apply, easy to make a roof look decorative using standing seams applied to the surface. But, as well as being difficult to repair after long-term weathering, the potential for damage by following trades makes the specification of PVC waterproofing one to give serious consideration to if a roof is going to be trafficked.

TPO

Fairly robust, aesthetically pleasing, speedy to apply, and easy to make a roof look decorative using standing seams applied to the surface. TPO however is incompatible with many other membranes, especially bitumen, and can be difficult to repair after weathering. Like PVC, the potential for damage by following trades makes the specification of TPO waterproofing one which requires careful consideration.

The suitability of alternative waterproofing systems for refurbishment work does offer a wide choice

LIQUIDS

Polyurethane and PMMA (Poly Methyl Methacrylate) liquid systems can be ideal for awkward detailing with multiple roof penetrations. Quick curing acrylics such as PMMA are ideal for trafficked surfaces, but for refurbishment, these systems rely more heavily on the quality of preparation and condition of the underlying layers and substrate to be successful, so the relatively high cost of the product, added to extensive preparation can lead to an expensive system; the cost of which exceeds many other solutions.

EPDM

This can be a very hard wearing and robust waterproofing material which is usually adhered to the roof or laid loose and ballasted. However, failed EPDM roofs generally happen because detailing is more difficult to achieve, and the adhesive bonding upstand membrane can disengage from the substrate, causing flashings to fall away. Additional fixing at edge detailing is generally required, which usually means fixing through the completed membrane.



'WET-LAY' GLASS REINFORCED POLYESTER COMPOSITE (GRP)

Developed from boat-building, correctly applied, wet-lay GRP systems can work very well, providing the correct weight and continuity of fibreglass reinforcement is used, and the substrate is stabilised to minimise localised movement before laying. Wet-lay GRP can be extremely robust and hard wearing, and can be installed without the need for naked flame use, but wet applied systems are prone to being affected by rain and temperature changes during the installation and curing period. This can severely restrict the amount of time available for waterproofing. As the resin used in these types of system is partially absorbed into the roof substrate, this can restrict the ability of the

The old adage of "horses for courses" still holds true in many circumstances, but the suitability of alternative waterproofing systems for refurbishment work does offer a wide choice

finished GRP membrane to expand and contract, potentially leading to high stress points at board joints and abutments.

MEMBRANE GLASS REINFORCED POLYESTER COMPOSITE (GRP)

The difference between this type of system and wet-lay GRP is that with a pre-cured membrane based product, both the membrane and the detailing trims are factory manufactured under ISO 9001 conditions and supplied to site ready for installation, all by mechanically fixing. This can be completed over an existing roof finish, providing that the substrate is in good condition. Additionally, there is no need for a naked flame to be employed during installation. The mechanical fixing can be carried in all weather conditions, however like all liquid applied and wet-lay GRP systems, the air temperature should be consistently above 5°C and the roof surface free of moisture for a successful installation to be completed.

In summary, the old adage of "horses for courses" still holds true in many circumstances, but the suitability of alternative waterproofing systems for refurbishment work does offer a wide choice.

Long-term manufacturer guarantees of water tightness covering the first 20 years of an installed roof covering, along with an insured warranty, ease of maintenance and repair contribute to a strong case for liquid and GRP waterproofing systems for housing maintenance.

Andy Fell is the dryseal manager for Hambleside Danelaw Ltd

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Encasement’s simple solution to conceal fire sprinkler system pipework

Where fire sprinkler systems are being installed or retro-fitted in tower blocks and flats, Encasement’s ‘Versa’ pipe boxing range provides the perfect cost effective solution for concealing sprinkler pipework.

Manufactured from pre-formed FSC® certified plywood and pre-finished in a durable white melamine, Versa ‘L’ shaped boxing is available in either 5mm or 8mm thicknesses for use within flats and communal areas, such as stairs and lift lobbies where sprinklers are required.

Versa boxing can be used with standard sprinkler heads or concealed ‘pop-out’ units with cover caps.

Available in a wide range of sizes, Versa sprinkler pipe boxing helps save on installation time, as there’s no need for fabrication or painting on site. All that’s required is for the boxing to be cut to length and holes drilled for the sprinkler heads before securing to the wall or ceiling.

Encasement’s Managing Director, Martin Taylor, commented “Our fire sprinkler boxing has already been installed on a large number of number of high rise refurbishment projects, where pipework and sprinklers need to be concealed for both aesthetic and practical reasons. Not only are they cost effective and easy to install,



but Encasement also holds a full FSC® ‘Chain of Custody’ certification, which certifies that our products are manufactured from sustainable timbers. This means that local authorities can

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MORE THAN A FLAT ROOF SYSTEM

Engineering student safety

At a time when the volume of university students continues to rise across Europe, there is great commercial opportunity in the provision of housing to the growing demographic. But with great opportunity comes even greater responsibility. Heriberto Cuanalo of Collegiate AC speaks to HMM's Sébastien Reed about some top considerations for ensuring the safety and security of student tenants



“We’re quasi-parents,” says Cuanalo, who set up Collegiate AC, a leading developer and operator of student accommodation, about 15 years ago during the Blair Government’s campaign for bigger and fuller universities as a solution to the UK’s long-existing gap in productivity. This orientation of public policy towards ‘Education, education, education’ aimed ultimately to put 50 per cent of individuals under the age of 30 in advanced education before the year 2025 – an aim whose pursuit has gradually materialised a colossal population of students, each in need of a first home-away-from-home.

The corporatisation of the infrastructure around UK higher education came as a response to the upscaling of education and increased number of students as a funding solution. This is more or less where Collegiate AC fits in, combining experience in academia and hospitality with the aim to provide a “high-end student experience,” offering perks like gyms, pools, and other luxury amenities to its tenants. Keeping students safe, however, remains a leading concern.

VULNERABILITY & DENSITY

The safety particularities setting student accommodation apart from other types of housing are twofold: vulnerability and density. Well seasoned in the sector, Cuanalo has developed an empathy for his tenants and the specific circumstances they face: “Our residents are often away from home for the first time – long passed are the days when significant numbers of university students have already been to boarding school.” It’s crucial for management to recognise the novel experience of life without parents and families, and acknowledge how this can make them more vulnerable than most as tenants.

“Our residents are often away from home for the first time – long passed are the days when significant numbers of university students have already been to boarding school.”

Heriberto Cuanalo, Collegiate AC

From a building perspective, student accommodation is unique in that not only is it perhaps the most densely inhabited type of property that exists, the buildings tend also to be very large in scale. Cuanalo remarks that some complexes have up to 1,000 beds – “no other sector of property is quite like it. Not hotels, not even blocks of flats – so safety is of utmost importance.”

FIRE & ACCESS

The biggest risk for such buildings is fire. Given the density of rooms, appliances, and human bodies, it’s essential to establish a “meticulous feedback loop of checks” to ensure both the safety of the building’s users and compliance with regulations.

With both new builds and refurbishments (anything that delivers a revised or new interior floorplan), building control consultants should be commissioned to oversee the design and development of the project. Fire strategy consultants should be employed to advise on internal checks, and external fire risk

assessments should also be carried out and signed off by external bodies. Alarm, exit, and evacuation strategies also need to be implemented and, in terms of the operation of the building, inspection rotas should be established so that staff are consistently checking the building for potential fire hazards. “There are dangers, and we can’t afford to not be paranoid about them”, says Cuanalo, “we’ve got to overengineer.”

With the relative density of building, potential of fire occurrence and harm caused by fire are dramatically increased in student accommodation, the maintenance of a single clear entrance and exit is also pivotal - “you need to design safety into the way people enter buildings and leave buildings,” comments Cuanalo. Local staff should also instil safety into their management structure, getting to know the tenants by name and face, and controlling access to non residents. Management teams should know how many individuals are in the building at all times.

COMMUNICATION

Cuanalo also stresses getting the right message across to tenants as key to increasing levels of safety on site. Establishing a “network of trust,” as Cuanalo puts it, at each property is essential. Beyond face-to-face conversation between staff and tenants and printed material such as leaflets, communication can be made through social media and email.

Arrival events for incoming students are also praised as good opportunities to educate individuals about potential risks, standard procedures and safety strategies, as well as to foster a sense of community among tenants themselves.

“This is the online generation, and what they tend to do is buy everything online,” Cuanalo observes. Having separate post boxes or pigeon holes for each student can serve as a signifier of specific tenants’ levels of activity as uncollected post and parcels accumulate implying potential concern. “There are a number of little touch-points that can build up the picture,” says Cuanalo “and our managers know to look out for these things.”

“We also want tenants to look out for each other,” says Cuanalo. He notes how students are more prone to feeling lonely, even unstable, when they



first leave home. “Trust at the more informal level, led by student wardens in cooperation and local staff is also ideal – it’s not just about the personal safety, but also the general well being of the students.”

Heriberto Cuanalo is the CEO of Collegiate AC

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Powermatic's appeal to the social housing sector is further enhanced by its ability to enable doors to meet accessibility requirements.

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Tel: 0208 685 9685
www.comar-alu.co.uk

Marlin Specialist Glazing Solutions
Tel: 01535 603909
www.marlinwindows.co.uk

Mila Window & Door Maintenance
Tel: 0808 100 8881
www.milamaintenance.co.uk

Doors, Windows & Glazing

Windoork UK
Tel: 0870 0678810
www.windoork.co.uk

Eco & Green Products

Kedel
Tel: 01282 861 325
www.kedel.co.uk

EV Charging

Rolec Services
Tel: 01205 724754
www.rolecserv.com

Fire & Smoke Protection

Aico
Tel: 01691 664100
www.aico.co.uk

BM TRADA Group
Tel: 01494 569800
www.bmtradagroup.com

Sprue Safety Products
Tel: 02476 323 232
www.sprue.com

Kidde Fyrnetics
Tel: 01753 685 148
www.kiddefyrnetics.co.uk

Flood Control

Floodcheck
Tel: 08443 356 668
www.floodcheck.co.uk

Floors & Flooring

Designer Contracts
Tel: 01246 854 577
www.designercontracts.com

The Deck Tile Co.
Tel: 0118 3740123
www.thedecktileco.co.uk

Floors & Flooring

Flowcrete UK
Tel: 01270 753 000
www.flowcrete.co.uk

Gerflor
Tel: 01926 622 600
www.gerflor.co.uk

Mapei UK Ltd
Tel: 0121 508 6970
www.mapei.co.uk

Osmo UK
Tel: 01296 481 220
www.osmouk.com

Sika Ltd
Tel: 01707 394 444
www.sika.co.uk

Heating & Renewable Energy

Baxi Heating UK Ltd (Potterton)
Tel: 0844 871 1525
www.baxi.co.uk

Bosch Thermotechnology Ltd
Tel: 01905 752902
www.bosch-thermotechnology.co.uk

Evinox Energy
Tel: 01372 722277
www.evinox.co.uk

Ice Energy Technologies
Tel: 0808 145 2340
www.iceenergy.co.uk

Johnson & Starley Ltd
Tel: 01604 762 881
www.johnsonandstarley.co.uk

Kingspan Environmental Ltd
Tel: 028 3836 4400
www.kingspanenv.com

Mitsubishi Electric Europe BV
Tel: 01707 276 100
www.mitsubishielectric.co.uk

Heating & Renewable Energy

Wilo (UK)
Tel: 01283 523 000
www.wilo.co.uk

Insulation

Remmers UK Ltd
Tel: 01293 594010
www.remmers.co.uk

Stairs, Balustrades & Balconies

Coillte Panel Products Ltd
Tel: 01322 424900
www.coilltepanelproducts.com

Water & Air Quality

Airflow Developments Ltd
Tel: 01494 525252
www.airflow.com

Greentherm Solutions Ltd
Tel: 01708 720190
www.uksprayfoam.co.uk

Nuaire Ltd
Tel: 0292 085 8486
www.nuaire.co.uk

Spirotech UK Ltd
Tel: 0208 4513 344
www.spirotech.co.uk

Total Home Environment
Tel: 0845 260 0123
www.totalhome.co.uk

Urban Environments
Tel: 01732 743003
www.urbanenvironments.co.uk

Vent-Axia
Tel: 08448 560 580
www.vent-axia.com

Wavin
Tel: 0844 856 5152
www.wavin.co.uk

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