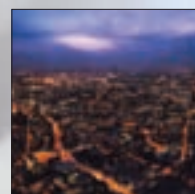


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

09.18



Cool reception for
Green Paper

Supported
housing funding
u-turn

Rough sleepers
strategy launched



Campaign to
end retaliatory
evictions

Call to stop
lettings
discrimination



Better fire testing and certification for the UK

Chris Miles of UL discusses how a new international alliance aims to shake up the UK fire testing industry. See inside

SO QUIET

WE HAD TO SHOUT
ABOUT IT

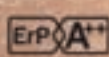


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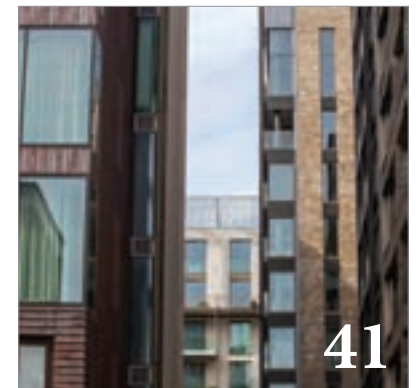
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Editor's comment

Welcome changes but more still required



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

Over the late Summer months while the country was basking in an unusually long spell of hot weather, the Government launched a series of new policy papers which taken together demonstrated a welcome change in its approach to social housing. Some of the most divisive housing policies developed under David Cameron's premiership are being quietly dropped or amended. Alongside the generally positive reactions from the social housing sector was a sense of frustration and a desire to see the Government go even further. Above all else, people from all political persuasions and none want Ministers to commit additional resources for building the homes that people so badly need and to provide them with good quality services at a reasonable price. Brexit has been an all-consuming issue over the past year for our politicians. Whether this accounted for any of the delays in producing the Social Housing Green Paper it is hard to say. But the absence of any money from the Green Paper for developing 90,000 new social homes a year was a huge disappointment and it does put a question mark over the Government's commitment to reviving the social housing sector. Survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire were understandably critical of the Green Paper, or parts of it at least. They felt it was not bold enough to ensure the tragedy could not be repeated elsewhere and it will not lift the stigma of social housing from the millions of households living in it. Much depends on what changes are made to the draft legislation when it emerges as a White Paper, but after a year of waiting it is clear that people wanted to see more concrete and radical proposals to put tenants safety and their views centre stage.

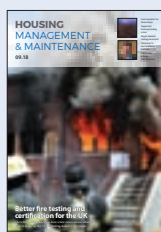
RESOURCES RATHER THAN GIMMICKS REQUIRED

Establishing league tables for housing associations has rightly been seen as something of a gimmick, but it's one that this Government appears to like using where publicly funded services are concerned – think of schools and hospitals. The trouble with the idea is that tenants will struggle to use the league tables to transfer to another landlord, or to hold their landlord to account in any meaningful way. Unless of course a new regulatory framework focussed on tenants' views is delivered to replace the current landlord friendly system and a reformed regulator can be transformed into a pro-active and interventionist champion of tenants' rights. On a positive note the Government has shown some willingness to rethink and listen to alternative views by delivering a u-turn on the funding of supported housing, as well as dropping its commitment to force local authorities to sell their most valuable houses when they become empty. It is also rethinking the use of Right to Buy receipts so councils can use more of them to build replacement homes. Ministers have also listened to campaigners in the development of its new rough sleeping strategy, but once again experts and lobbyists fear that the policy will fail to deliver on its ambitions unless more money can be found for the range of support services it promises. Strangely it has found more money to fund the pilot of extending the Right to Buy to HA tenants in the West Midlands than it has for delivering its rough sleepers strategy. This decision smacks of ideology triumphing over sound policies and pragmatism.

PRESSURES ON SAFETY, RENTS AND TENANCIES

Progress in removing combustible cladding from residential tower blocks is moving at a snail's pace, but when the Grenfell Tower inquiry resumes you can be sure that Ministers will come under pressure from all quarters to deliver on a variety of safety measures. While James Brokenshire appears to have made an assured start as the Housing Secretary, it is how he deals with the aftermath of the Grenfell fire that could define his time in office. The housing phenomenon of the past 20 years has surely been the growth of the private rented sector. It has doubled in size and is now bigger than the social rented sector, but there are some signs that its growth is slowing considerably or it is actually shrinking. This is happening at a time when demand is still growing so inevitably this is forcing up rents. This situation is not sustainable (especially while social rented numbers are growing so slowly) and maybe the Government needs to reflect on whether it needs to revisit some of its tax and regulatory changes which are causing a number of BTL investors and small-scale landlords to sell up and withdraw from the market. At the same time it will need to look at housing benefit rates for private renters as the Chartered Institute of Housing is warning that these have fallen so far, that thousands of tenants are going without life's necessities in order to pay their rent, or they face homelessness. This of course could put even more pressure on the Government's new rough sleeping strategy and I am sure Ministers do not want to face cries of "We told you so" before the ink has even dried on the strategy.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Chris Miles of UL discusses how a new international alliance aims to shake up the UK fire testing industry.

Read more on page 35...

Delayed Green Paper fails to deliver on blue sky thinking or any new social homes

The long awaited Housing Green Paper was launched with a media fanfare during the Parliamentary recess, but it failed to deliver on the high expectations raised by the Government in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower disaster.

When he announced there would be a Green Paper a year ago, the then Communities Secretary Sajid Javid promised us something radical, that would set a new and positive tone for social housing, giving it a prominent role in the nation's life. He said "getting more of the right homes built in the right places" would be at the heart of the proposals.

This tone was echoed by the Prime Minister in a foreword to the Green Paper, when she wrote: "Towards the end of the last century council house building virtually came to a halt. Since 2010 that has begun to turn around, but now we need to get back to the scale of new social housing that will deliver a real difference to communities – that's why we've already made it easier for councils in the most expensive areas to access the money they need to build homes for Social Rent.

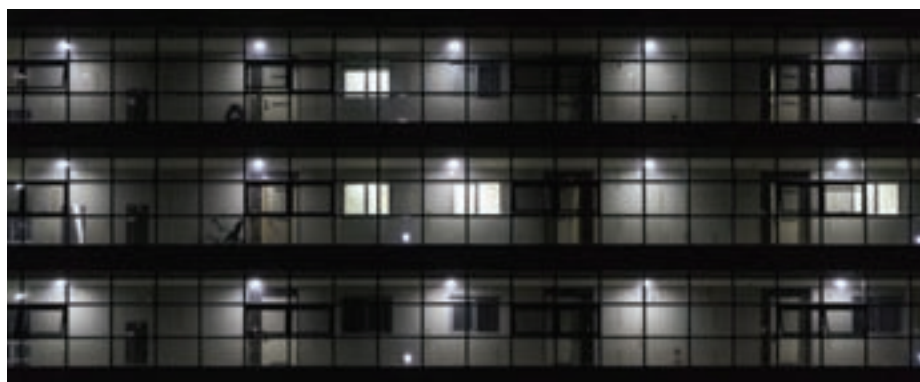
"This Green Paper will provide a further boost to the number of council houses. But it goes further still, renewing and deepening our commitment not just to the fabric of social homes, but also to the people who live in them."

WARM PLATITUDES

Instead we appear to have got some warm platitudes and a desire to rebalance the relationship between tenants and their landlords, while also removing any stigma from the sector. But the Government still appears to see social housing as a stepping-stone towards home ownership, rather than as an end in itself. The Green Paper enjoyed plenty of media exposure, but failed to excite and its future success probably lies in the degree of positive engagement which councils and housing associations can force upon themselves.

After the Grenfell tragedy Ministers spent countless hours touring the country talking to hundreds of tenants of social landlords to find out what they wanted and in the end they delivered an odd collection of ideas, some rehashed from the past including league tables for housing associations. Links to the welfare and benefit system appear to have been lost or overlooked. The Green Paper is now open for consultation until 6 November – the day after Bonfire Night!

There is a linked call for evidence on the fitness for purpose of the Regulatory Framework as a whole. This is likely to produce a recalibration of the Regulatory Standards with the Consumer Standards and tenant safety taking a more prominent role and requiring greater



When he announced there would be a Green Paper a year ago, the then Communities Secretary Sajid Javid promised us something radical, that would set a new and positive tone for social housing, giving it a prominent role in the nation's life

pro-active intervention from the regulator. It will almost certainly mean the end of the "serious detriment" threshold.

In addition it appears we will see an updating of the Decent Homes Standard, which is welcome if a bit overdue. This will probably focus on improving the health and safety features of tenants' homes. When the standard was first brought in it was accompanied by a significant funding boost, but so far we are unclear on whether this update will attract any extra money. This has led some stock holding councils to raise viability concerns about their Housing Revenue Accounts and business plans.

The proposals to tackle social stigma appear well intentioned but flimsy. Funding street parties as a way of rewarding neighbourhoods looks trivial, while much of the community and financial inclusion work undertaken by HAs has been cut back as a result of the Government's rent reduction policies.

RESOURCES QUESTIONS

Campaigners, sector bodies and tenants were almost unanimous in slamming the proposals as overly timid and failing to address the core problem of not enough social homes being built. The Green Paper acknowledges the need for up to 300,000 new homes but does not promise a single extra penny for new social homes. Last year only 5,380 social homes were built whereas sector figures are demanding up to 90,000 new social properties a year.

Among its other proposals are allowing tenants to buy one per cent shares in their homes each year (but this only applies to new shared ownership properties), speeding up complaints processes against social landlords, giving the regulator additional powers so it is more like Ofsted and restarting the stock transfer programme from councils to community-led associations.

On a more positive note, the Government appears to have dropped plans to force councils to sell off their most valuable housing properties, while it has also launched a further consultation on the details of the Right to Buy which could see councils able to use more of the sales receipts for building new homes. It is also scrapping plans to force social landlords to only offer fixed-term tenancies in social rent housing.

Housing Secretary James Brokenshire, who launched a consultation on the proposals, said: "Our Green Paper offers a landmark opportunity for major reform to improve fairness, quality and safety for residents living in social housing across the country. Regardless of whether you own your home or rent, residents deserve security, dignity and the opportunities to build a better life."

But the Shadow Housing Secretary John Healey said the Green Paper was "pitiful", with nothing that "measures up to the scale of the housing crisis". He added: "The number of new social rented homes is at a record low but there is no new money to increase supply, and Ministers are still preventing local authorities run by all parties from building the council homes their communities need."

Green Paper – what the experts said

A cautious welcome mixed with some disappointment is perhaps the best description we can give to the responses given to the Green Paper, by representatives from across the social housing sector. On a school report the phrase “could do better” and a score of four out of ten would probably feature.

Some of the most critical comments came from representatives of the residents and families who survived the Grenfell Tower and clearly felt that not enough was being proposed to ensure tenants’ voices are heard and acted upon in the future. It was also clear that there was frustration at the repeated delays in the publication timetable and that the final version was not more detailed, ambitious and wide ranging.

Jenny Osbourne, chief executive of tenant engagement body TPAS, said: “We know from our landlord and tenant members that a renewed focus on empowerment, a more respected tenant voice and raising the standards, quality and safety on current homes will be welcomed by all. We also note so far there is little evidence of additional social homes investment within the headlines of the green paper which is frustrating.

She added “The lack of link up to the issue of welfare reform, so clearly articulated at the tenant roadshows as a major concern, is also disappointing

and misses a fundamental problem.”

Meanwhile Campbell Robb, chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said families on low incomes are still not being helped. He said “Families up and down the country are being trapped in poverty because of high housing costs. The Social Housing Green Paper was an opportunity to right this wrong and deliver a plan that would build a new generation of social housing that would loosen the grip of poverty on families and help people to build a secure future.”

INDUSTRY VOICES

“While the plans to empower tenants and give them a real voice are very welcome, the lack of concrete plans to build significantly more truly affordable homes risks failing a generation. Against a backdrop of rising foodbank use, families on low incomes will continue to face impossible choices about whether to pay the rent or put food on the table. We urge the Government to invest in 80,000 genuinely affordable homes a year at the next Spending Review to put things right,” he added.

Industry professionals generally tried to put a positive spin on the Green Paper’s content. They welcomed plans to give tenants more influence over their landlords and quicker redress when services

went wrong, but there was a strong consensus that the real solution is in building more new homes for rent that families on low incomes can afford.

David Orr, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, said the consultation process must address concerns about the shortage of affordable homes and welfare reforms. “Without significant new investment in the building of more social housing, it is very hard to see how it can be a safety net and springboard for all the people who desperately need it.

He added “Our ambition for the Green Paper is that it sets a course for a future where everyone can access a quality home they can afford. To do that we need to build 90,000 new social rent homes every year.”

Gavin Smart, deputy chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing, welcomed proposals to strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing and tackle stigmatisation. “The Green Paper rightly recognises the importance of new supply, but we are concerned that the plans for new affordable homes are not ambitious enough.”

“This is why we have called on the Government to rebalance the £53bn funding for housing so that affordable housing gets a fairer share than the 21 per cent it has now,” he added.

Benefit freeze puts private renting out of reach for low-income tenants

A new report by the Chartered Institute of Housing claims that even the lowest private rents are now out of reach for people on low incomes and are putting thousands at increased risk of homelessness, or going without life’s basics.

In ‘Missing the target?’ the Institute’s research shows that more than 90 per cent of Local Housing Allowance rates (housing benefit for private renters) across Great Britain now fail to cover the cheapest rents, as they were originally designed to do.

LHA rates were frozen for four years in 2016 and the CIH is warning that they have fallen so far behind even the cheapest rents that private renting has become unaffordable for most low-income tenants. This is putting them at risk of homelessness as they are forced to choose between basic living expenses and paying the shortfall. The organisation is calling on the Government to review the policy and to end the freeze immediately.

The findings are consistent with recent warnings from RICS and ARLA who say that private sector rents are rising because there are more people chasing a limited supply of properties for rent. Buy

to let investors and small-scale landlords are reportedly leaving the rental market because of increased regulation and tax changes. This in turn is pushing up rents across the private sector.

LHA rates are meant to cover the cheapest 30 per cent of homes in any given area. But the CIH point out that rates have not been increased in line with local rents since April 2013 and they remain frozen until April 2020. As a result, renters are facing gaps ranging from £25 a month on a single room in a shared home outside London to more than £260 a month on one to four-bedroom homes in some areas of London. Over 12 months, those gaps rise to £300 and £3,120 – making it increasingly likely that renters will be forced to choose between paying for basic necessities like food and heating or their rent.

The Government introduced targeted affordability funding in 2014 to bridge the biggest gaps but CIH’s new report has found that its impact has been negligible, covering only a handful of the shortfalls completely. Although not part of this research, the CIH estimates that a full realignment of LHA rates with local rents would cost around £1.2 billion.

GROWING HOMELESSNESS

CIH chief executive Terrie Alafat CBE said: “Our research makes it clear just how far housing benefit for private renters has failed to keep pace with even the cheapest private rents. We fear this policy is putting thousands of private renters on low incomes at risk of poverty and homelessness.

“We are calling on the Government to conduct an immediate review and to look at ending the

freeze on Local Housing Allowance.” CIH say that LHA rates should be restored to the 30th percentile rent with immediate effect.

Matt Downie, director of policy and external affairs at Crisis, said: “This report highlights just how much housing benefits for private renters are falling short of the levels needed, leaving many homeless people stuck in a desperate situation and putting yet more people at risk of homelessness.

“There are 236,000 people across Britain experiencing the worst forms of homelessness – this includes those sleeping on the streets, living in unsuitable hostels, and sofa-surfing. In many of these cases, people simply can’t find a home because there isn’t enough social housing and housing benefits are too low to cover private rents.”

“Homelessness is not inevitable – there is clear evidence that it can be ended with the right policies in place. The Government must urgently reform housing benefits for private renters, so they not only match the true cost of renting but also keep pace with future rent changes.”

CIH claim the policy is hitting single people aged under 25 particularly hard, because they are only entitled to LHA to cover the rent on a bedroom in a shared home. Even small gaps between their LHA and their rent can be serious because the levels of other benefits they may be entitled to (for example Jobseeker’s Allowance) are also much lower. CIH policy and practice officer Sam Lister, who wrote the report, said general benefit rates for single people aged under 25 are too low to contribute towards any gap without putting them at significant risk of homelessness.

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Plan to end rough sleeping in England by 2027

The Government has promised to end rough sleeping on England's streets by 2027, as it launched a new strategy backed up with £100m "to help people turn their lives around".

The Rough Sleeping Strategy will focus on preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place by offering a range of support and then providing them with the right help to find work and live independently. It plans to assist upto 6,000 vulnerable people with rapid specialist assessments and support.

Longer term, those sleeping rough will be rapidly housed and offered comprehensive support to ensure their specific needs are addressed so that they can move into suitable permanent accommodation at the earliest opportunity.

In launching the new strategy Communities Secretary James Brokenshire said: "It is simply unacceptable that people have to sleep on our streets and I am determined to make it a thing of the past. Whether people are at risk of rough sleeping, already on the streets or in need of settled accommodation, we now have a solid plan to help the most vulnerable in our society.

"And this is not just about putting a roof over their heads but helping them find a place to call home. They need and deserve our support and, through our expert-backed strategy, I am confident they will get it," he added.

The strategy sets out a three-pronged approach:

- Prevention – understanding the issues that lead to rough sleeping and providing timely support for those at risk;
- Intervention – helping those already sleeping rough with swift support tailored to their individual circumstances;
- Recovery – supporting people in finding a new home and rebuilding their lives.

The new strategy received a warm reception from campaigners and specialist providers of support, but there were also doubts raised about how much of

the promised resources was actually new money and how much had been recycled from other parts of the Government's budget.

Polly Neate, chief executive of charity Shelter, said: "Let's be clear, this is a step forward and not a total fix for homelessness. We still need to tackle the chronic lack of genuinely affordable homes, deep instability of renting and problems with housing benefit that are leaving so many without a home."

NOT A COMPLETE FIX

Seven homelessness charities - Crisis, Homeless Link, National Housing Federation, Shelter, St Basils, St Mungo's and Thames Reach - who advised Ministers on the strategy said in a joint statement that it was "a significant step towards the Government's goal of ending rough sleeping by 2027".

However, they added that Ministers "must also set out bold, cross-departmental plans to tackle the root causes of all forms of homelessness and prevent it from happening in the first place".

Labour's Shadow Housing Secretary John Healey described the strategy as "a feeble plan that lacks any urgency to tackle the crisis of rising rough sleeping". He added that the next Labour government would end rough sleeping within its first term by making 8,000 homes available to those with a history of sleeping on the streets.

Rough sleeping has been increasing for the past seven years and, according to the latest official annual count, last autumn, 4,751 people were on the streets in England, a rise of 15 per cent on the year before. Critics say numbers have risen because of welfare and spending cuts and a failure to build enough new homes.

Of the money announced alongside the new strategy about £30m will be spent on mental health help and treatment for substance misuse as part of the proposals, which were developed in conjunction with charities and experts.

In addition, the Government will put about £50m towards homes outside London for those who are



Rough sleeping has been increasing for the past seven years and, according to the latest official annual count, last autumn, 4,751 people were on the streets in England

ready to move on from hostels or refuges. Rough sleepers will also be helped to access services and accommodation by a network of specialist "navigators".

A further £17m will also be made available to fund about 15 pilots scheme aimed at trying to ensure that rough sleepers do not spend a second night sleeping on the streets, as part of a scheme called Somewhere Safe to Stay.

Ministers are also expected to review legislation on homelessness and rough sleeping, including the Vagrancy Act - which currently makes it illegal to sleep rough or beg in England and Wales.

Events

Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in Housing Conference 2018
2 October, London
diversity.housing.org.uk

Treasury Management Conference 2018
3 October, London

www.housing.org.uk/events
The Big Question
4 October, Cardiff
www.cih.org/events

UK Construction Week
9 - 11 October, Birmingham
www.ukconstructionweek.com

Women in Housing Awards
11 October, Manchester
www.womeninhousingawards.co.uk

CIH North East Conference
8 - 9 November, Newcastle
www.cih.org/events

London Development Conference 2018
21 November, London
londondevelopment.housing.org.uk

Welsh Housing Awards 2018
23 November, Cardiff
www.cih.org/events

Homes 2018
27 November, London
homesevent.co.uk

Social Housing Annual Conference
5 December, London
www.insidehousing.co.uk/events

GraftersLIVE
5 March, Lancashire
www.grafters-nw.co.uk/grafterslive



Attempts to protect tenants from retaliatory eviction have failed

A national charity and lobbying organisation is claiming that efforts to end the practice of private landlords from evicting tenants after they make legitimate complaints about their home, have failed.

Citizens Advice found that tenants who made a formal complaint have a 46 per cent chance of being served with an eviction notice within six months, because it is easier for landlords to move unwanted tenants rather than fixing problems. This is despite the Government banning retaliatory evictions in 2015.

The charity is calling on Ministers to protect tenants from the point when they make a complaint regardless of its outcome. This is one of the main recommendations in their report *Touch and Go*, based on a survey of more than 2,000 private renters earlier this year. It claims about 141,000 tenants have been adversely affected since 2015 when the ban was put in place.

Now the Citizens Advice are recommending that tenants be allowed to leave a fixed-term contract

early and without any penalty, if their landlord fails to uphold their legal responsibilities and is in breach of contract. They are also backing the Government's proposal to introduce a mandatory three-year tenancy for all private rented sector tenancies.

Housing is the third most 'popular' issue raised with the charity after benefits and debt advice. Problems with repairs and maintenance are the most common issue across all rented tenures. Almost a half of private tenants who have experienced a problem chose not to make a complaint to their landlord because of a fear of eviction or rent increases.

Compared to those who have not, tenants who have received a Section 21 notice are:

- Over twice as likely to have complained to their landlord in the previous six months;
- Five times more likely to have complained to their local authority prior to their notice being issued; and

- Eight times more likely to have complained to an independent redress scheme.

GREATER PROTECTIONS

Only ten per cent of council Environmental Health Officers reported seeing a reduction in the number of retaliatory evictions since 2015. And last year, seven in ten of Citizens Advice advisers helped tenants who were facing a retaliatory eviction.

Gillian Guy, chief executive of Citizens Advice, said: "The chance of a family being evicted from their home for complaining about a problem shouldn't carry the same odds as the toss of a coin. Those living in substandard properties must have greater protection against eviction when they complain."

She said there were "serious question marks" over Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, which allows landlords to evict tenants without reason.

Local authorities rarely serve the notices required to protect tenants due to the lack of resources and a preference for informal negotiation. Cuts in council budgets over the past ten years have fallen particularly hard on public protection services, limiting the resources available to work with tenants and landlords.

In most consumer markets, Citizens Advice say that transactions come with customer guarantees. Consumers know that businesses will generally provide a remedy, reduction or refund for poor practice or sub-par products. But in the private rented sector they say this is often not the case.

Merger deal for troubled HA

A year of uncertainty rooted in a poor regulatory assessment came to an end for a Cumbrian social landlord when it completed its merger with a large association celebrating 90 years in existence.

Workington based Impact has 2,770-homes. It was rated non-compliant for both governance and viability last year, when it was found to have

insufficient financial headroom in its business plan by the regulator.

After an exercise to find a suitable rescue partner, Impact chose Riverside, a large association based in the North West with more than 52,000 homes, including 6,500 in Cumbria. The merger was completed after a vote by Impact's shareholders and consulting with their residents.

Carol Matthews, chief executive at Riverside, said: "Welcoming Impact into the Riverside family is a really fitting way to celebrate our 90th year as a provider of social housing. It's a landmark event and the start of an exciting new chapter for both our organisations.

"We will maintain local service delivery to customers through the offices and colleagues they know and trust while we begin scoping out with them the ambitious housing improvement programme."

HA surpluses – winners and losers

A busy season of reporting financial results saw many large housing associations disclose varying fortunes due to investment in building new homes, refinancing of loans, operational efficiencies and spending more money on safety work to existing homes.

Among the big winners with increased surpluses were giant social landlords like L&Q, Places for People, A2 Dominion and Sovereign. But the news was not all positive as other big HAs reported falls in their surpluses, including Clarion, Metropolitan, Notting Hill, Genesis, Southern and Optivo.

A record surplus of £348m for the year 2017/18 was posted by L&Q, up from £220m in the previous year when results were adversely affected by refinancing loan costs and their merger with East Thames. Annual turnover was over £1bn for the first time, a huge increase of 25 per cent from the previous year's figure of £756m.

L&Q spent £35m on fire safety works in the year including the replacement of ACM cladding, similar to the type used on Grenfell Tower. It expects to finish all planned work on cladding by the end of this year and has started a five-year programme to provide smoke alarms to tenants' homes.

INCREASES

Meanwhile Places for People saw its annual surplus rise from £119.7m to £130.2m in the same year in which the 60,000-home association acquired Luminus, after an eventful period for the east Midlands based landlord.

The higher surplus in 2017 was achieved despite its turnover falling from £795.1m to £754.4m although its income from social housing activities

rose from £314.4m to £335.8m, while income from non-social housing development and construction work fell from £234.2m to £157.5m.

Newbury based Sovereign increased its surplus from £89.1m to £103.9m in the year despite operating costs rising from £193.5m to £197.8m. This was attributed to £4.1m it spent on replacing cladding and upgrading fire prevention services on one block of flats.

The 57,000-home association's biggest growth area was in open market sales. It also sold 413 homes to other HAs as part of its stock rationalisation programme, to make it more efficient.

In the capital, A2 Dominion posted a 10 per cent rise in its surplus to £92.5m on turnover that fell from £371.9m to £300.7m, with operating costs down to £158.2m from £166.4m. The 37,000-home landlord built 954 homes in the year, although only 332 were for affordable rent or shared ownership, down from 393 in the year before.

FALLS

The country's largest housing association with 125,000-homes, Clarion saw its surplus fall for the second year running, down to £157.5m from £176m on turnover that rose from £796m to £829m operating costs fell from £495.2m to £478.9m. The association said the decrease in its surplus was "in line with expectations", although its development work also slowed with both starts (on 1,428 homes) and completions (1,263 homes) down on the previous year.

Despite this, investment in new housing by the organisation increased 46 per cent to £426m in 2017. Their development pipeline of new homes

more than doubled in the year and stands at over 14,000 new properties.

Several one off investments in the condition and safety of its stock were identified by Metropolitan (with 38,000 homes) as the reason for its operating surplus falling from £117m to £103m. Over the year, the association spent £84m on property maintenance, up from £73m, as it boosted annual turnover by over eight per cent to £288m. It built 623 new homes and has a development pipeline of 5,870 homes.

INCREASED COSTS

Southern Housing Group with 27,000 homes in London and the south east saw its surplus drop by a quarter from £62m to £44.9m with both increased pension costs and extra investment in safety works cited as the reasons.

Group turnover was down to £199.7m while income from social housing lettings was up at £155.5m and property sales grew to £27.8m. It invested £119m in its homes, including £104m on new build work, with 197 properties completed and a further 700 new homes on site.

The recently merged landlord Notting Hill Genesis reported a reduced combined surplus of £119.3m in 2017, in their last year as two separate entities, down from £160.6m in the previous year. Genesis saw its surplus increase from £18.2m to £19.8m, while Notting Hill's fell from £142.2m to £96.9m.

Optivo which was formed by the merger of Amicus Horizon and Viridian Housing also saw a drop in its turnover from £347m to £317m as it took less money from the sale of shared ownership properties compared with the previous year. Its operating costs fell by £5m but accountancy rules over how its loans should be treated saw a basic surplus of £90m reclassified as a pre-tax loss of £51m.

The organisation also completed the development of 470 homes in the year, with 433 of them for affordable tenures. It began the construction of 912 – above its target of 880.

HAs downgraded over risk management and safety issues

The social housing regulator has shown its intent to improve risk management and tenant safety across the rental sector, by downgrading three housing associations.

North Somerset based Alliance Homes, with 6,300 homes under management was downgraded to a G2 rating for governance, but retained its top V1 rating for financial viability.

The regulator said the landlord "needs to enhance its business planning and strategic risk management". It said there is a lack of clarity about financial headroom in its business plan, which does not provide the regulator with assurance that the board has adequately developed mitigating strategies and triggers appropriate to the association's development ambitions.

Equity Housing Group, which owns around

4,600 homes across Greater Manchester, Derbyshire and Yorkshire, was downgraded to a 'G2, V2' rating following an in-depth assessment. It had previously been given the highest rating of 'G1, V1'.

The regulator criticised Equity for a lack of clarity over the respective roles and responsibilities of the board and its committees, resulting in cases of duplication, or insufficient board attention on matters which had been delegated.

Exposure to the open sales housing market for the first time as part of an expanded development programme was cited as a reason for the viability regrade, as well as reduced financial performance and covenant headroom in the early part of its 2018-2023 corporate strategy.

Leeds & Yorkshire HA had its governance downgraded to a G2 rating, while its viability rating remained at V1. The association had referred itself to the regulator after identifying problems with its electrical safety compliance.

The regulator said the association needed to strengthen the controls it has in place to manage and monitor key risks, as well as improving its performance reporting and internal controls assurance.

Meanwhile, the Shepherds Bush Housing Group was upgraded from G2 to G1, following a downgrade in April 2016. It maintained its V1 grading for viability. The west London association has improved its work on the value for money standard and its stress testing now meets the regulator's expectations.

Select Committee urges Government to make safety changes to prevent another tragedy



The committee heard from a variety of experts and interested parties, including Dame Judith Hackitt and survivors from the Grenfell Tower tragedy

The committee said that while the Hackitt Review focused on high-risk residential buildings of 10-storeys or more, many of their recommendations could and should be applied to a wider range of buildings and to the construction industry as a whole.

They added that a ban on the use of combustible cladding should also apply to non-residential buildings where there is a particular and significant risk to life, such as residential homes, hospitals, student accommodation and hotels.

MPs sitting on the Housing and Communities select committee have given Ministers a short list of actions they should take immediately in the wake of the Hackitt Review into building regulations and fire safety, to improve safety of the public.

The influential cross-party group of MPs have given the Government two months to respond to their recommendations, which are:

1. Combustible cladding should be banned on existing high-rise residential buildings – not just new ones (and from all tower blocks including hospitals and student accommodation);
2. Sprinklers need to be retrofitted to all high-rise residential buildings, where structurally feasible;
3. Conflicts of interest in the construction industry – such as companies arranging their own inspections – need to be eliminated; and

4. The Government should introduce a low-interest loans scheme to help remove combustible cladding from private buildings and ensure costs are not passed on to leaseholders.

The committee heard from a variety of experts and interested parties, including Dame Judith Hackitt and survivors from the Grenfell Tower tragedy. In moving testimony, Natasha Elcock from Grenfell United told the MPs:

“It’s quite simple: it should be banned... no one should go through what we have gone through—absolutely not—but also no one should go to sleep at night knowing they have got combustible cladding wrapped round their building... It should be banned, and it should be banned now. We shouldn’t wait.”

Edward Daffarn, also from Grenfell United, warned that, “Grenfell 2 is in the post unless you act, and quickly”.

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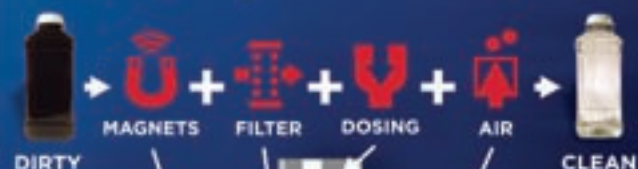
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Government U-turn on supported housing funding is welcomed by a relieved sector

The social housing sector has breathed a huge sigh of relief after the Government announced it was scrapping plans to reform the funding of supported and sheltered housing.

As part of its welfare reforms Ministers had been consulting on capping the level of housing benefit paid to supported housing tenants. They had expected any additional costs to be paid for by 'top-up' grants administered by local authorities, but no guarantees existed for their duration.

A lengthy and vocal campaign against the changes appears to have persuaded the Government to change its plans and retain the current system, allowing housing benefit to cover both the rent and associated support costs of vulnerable tenants.

This ended almost three years of uncertainty, during which time many supported housing schemes closed and doubts were raised over the future viability of the whole sector.

The sector houses people in different forms of crisis – such as those facing homelessness or fleeing domestic violence – and provides them with a secure place to stay. It also provides a life-long home for those with learning and physical disabilities, mental ill-health and older people.

FUNDING FRAMEWORK

The chief executives of three major housing associations involved in the provision of housing and care services for the elderly had been at the forefront of the campaign lobbying the Government.

In a joint statement issued after the announcement Jane Ashcroft (Anchor), Clare Tickell (Hanover) and Bruce Moore (Housing & Care 21) said: "We welcome the decision. It is clear the Government has listened to the concerns of the sector and they have taken on board suggestions that will help alleviate the fear that many providers and tenants felt if the proposed changes to funding had been implemented.

"We are particularly keen to continue working with the Government to make sure the appropriate level of funding provision is in place for tenants. This includes having a framework which ensures access to key services, helps provide suitable housing across the country and which provides value for money," they added.

Another relieved lobbyist was David Orr, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, who said: "After years of uncertainty, we are delighted that housing costs will remain in the social security system for all supported housing, sheltered and extra care.

"This announcement means that hundreds of thousands of people, many of who are vulnerable,



The sector houses people in different forms of crisis – such as those facing homelessness or fleeing domestic violence – and provides them with a secure place to stay

will continue to receive the support they need by right, through the social security system."

RELIEF

In addition to announcing a U-turn on its proposals, Ministers said they will work with providers, local authorities, membership bodies and resident representatives over the coming months to develop a robust oversight regime.

Melanie Rees, head of policy at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said: "This type of housing provides vital support for some of the most vulnerable people in our society – people who have been victims of homelessness or domestic abuse for example – and it is absolutely right that it will continue to be funded by the welfare system.

"Without that certainty there was a real risk that refuges and other supported housing schemes would have been forced to close."

Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Chairman of the Local Government Association's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This announcement will give councils

and housing providers the certainty to sustain and invest supported housing for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

"It is, however, crucial that councils have the leading role in overseeing and ensuring the provision of housing for vulnerable groups is good quality, value for money, and fits in with the wider local services offered in places. We look forward to working with the Government and our housing and care partners to ensure that the future of supported housing best achieves our ambitions for communities."

Providers had warned that the new system would lead to further scheme closures and an end to the development of new support and sheltered housing schemes by creating financial uncertainty.

Those fears were further allayed with an announcement there will be £76m a year available over the next three years to support the construction of homes designed for people with disabilities, mental health issues or for older people who need extra support.

Council rapped by regulator over fire and water safety issues

The social housing regulator has taken the unusual step of criticising a South coast local authority for failing to carry out risk assessments or to carry out the necessary work arising from them.

Arun District Council in West Sussex did not have a programme of fire risk assessments for its high-rise flats until 2016. It had previously only carried out assessments when issues were reported. The regulator says the council has now carried out

the assessments, but it has not acted on all the issues raised in them.

It also criticised the council over its approach to water safety, where it was operating a largely reactive system of risk assessments, failing to proactively identify and assess the risks of their tenants' exposure to the bacteria Legionella.

In 2017, the council carried out a review of its health and safety arrangements and established a

new team to lead on health and safety in its housing stock. After the regulator notified the council of its failure to comply with the Home Standard, it commissioned an external review, which in May 2018 found that there were "significant weaknesses" in its current system.

The regulator said the council's actions constituted a breach of the Home Standard, through creating "the potential for serious detriment to Arun District Council's tenants".

Regulator finds just five breaches of tenants' rights

The social housing regulator undertook 77 investigations into tenant-related issues last year, but found just five instances of the consumer standard being broken by social landlords. Figures published by the Regulator of Social Housing in its review of consumer regulation in 2017/18 show that it received 534 consumer

referrals, 204 of which were considered by its consumer regulation panel and 77 were investigated.

These numbers are very similar to the previous year, when it received 532 referrals, considered 217 and investigated 105, resulting in a single breach.

The regulator said it believed the dip in the

proportion of investigations from 21 to 14 per cent of referrals, was "attributable to the increase in self-referrals from registered providers and associated improvements in the quality of information provided to the regulator from registered providers, which meant that further investigations were not required".



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Grenfell Tower style safety worries continue to emerge

Over the Summer months the Grenfell Tower public inquiry took a break after hearing harrowing evidence from firefighters involved in tackling the fire, but disquieting news continued to emerge about safety failings potentially affecting millions of residents.

Concerns about the quality of fire doors used across the housing sector grew when it was revealed that doors manufactured by five different companies had failed tests. The fire doors have been withdrawn from sale and one of the leading manufacturers contacted over 100 organisations advising them that the doors had not received third-party accreditation.

An advice note sent out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on behalf of its expert advisory panel on fire safety, said flat entrance front doors should be replaced if landlords or building owners “suspect they do not meet the fire or smoke resistance performance in the building regulations guidance”.

Meanwhile, guidance about what materials can be used to clad tower blocks is still unclear. Some of the products that are still on sale includes insulation products of limited combustibility that were used at Grenfell Tower.

The Government has committed £400m to fund the removal of cladding in the social housing sector, but the work is progressing very slowly and Ministers are not putting any money into the removal of the material from private blocks. No

commitment has been made to help leaseholders with bills to remove dangerous cladding, although Ministers continue to say they will “not rule anything out”.

CLADDING REMOVAL

According to the latest Building Safety Programme data release issued by MHCLG, the remediation of buildings with ACM cladding (removal and replacement) has struggled to move forward at any great pace despite the understandable concerns of residents. There are still an estimated 466 buildings that fail to meet current building regulations guidance.

Of the 159 social housing buildings that failed large-scale system tests, removal work has started on 121 of them with work completed on 14 tower blocks. These have received sign-off from building control where necessary.

In the private sector it is believed there are 293 residential buildings with cladding systems that are unlikely to meet current Building Regulations guidance. MHCLG is aware of plans for remediating 93 buildings, work has started on 34 buildings and been completed on just nine. Excluding student accommodation and hotels, remediation is complete or there is a clear plan or commitment to carry out remediation for 59 private residential buildings.

The cladding status of approximately 60 private sector residential buildings is still to be confirmed.

The Government has committed £400m to fund the removal of cladding in the social housing sector, but the work is progressing very slowly and Ministers are not putting any money into the removal of the material from private blocks

Details on all of these buildings have been passed to fire and rescue services. Enforcement notices have been issued for the vast majority of these buildings so that councils can get information on building construction from owners and pass this to the Government.

Housing association Peabody has promised not to pass on the costs of replacing cladding onto its leaseholders in four privately-owned blocks.

The landlord has written to residents of 101 affected shared ownership flats in four developments across London (in Lambeth, Greenwich, Paddington and Poplar) informing them that it will not be seeking to recoup remediation costs through service charges.

Meanwhile, a number of housing associations around the country are facing issues involving dangerous cladding on blocks of flats leased from private owners, typically under Section 106 agreements. Where associations do not own the freeholds of buildings it is unclear if they will qualify for any financial help with the cladding removal costs.

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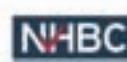
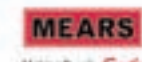
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Campaign launched to end discrimination against benefit claimants

A joint campaign has been launched by Shelter and the National Housing Federation to end any form of discrimination by private sector landlords against people who are reliant on welfare benefits to pay their rent.

Shelter claim the problem of benefit claimants being refused private tenancies is growing. They quote from a YouGov survey of almost 4,000 private renters which found that almost a third of people receiving housing benefits said they had not been able to rent a home due to a 'No DSS' policy in the last five years.

The charity has been undertaking mystery shopping – by telephoning letting agents to find out if they would accept benefit claimants as tenants. In 20 out of 21 calls made to one agency they were told they would not, even though the firm subsequently told them this was not their policy. Shelter claims this was not an isolated case and they are urging people to join their campaign.

The problem has been exacerbated by low wages which have stagnated since the financial crash in 2008 and has seen increasing numbers of those in work, also claiming benefits. It is now estimated that 40 per cent of Universal Claimants are in paid work. Television programmes like Benefit Street tend to stigmatise claimants and harden attitudes against them.

Back in July Shelter published analysis of official Government figures which showed that in 2017 some 55 per cent of the families living in temporary accommodation were working - this represented over 33,000 families who were holding down a job despite having nowhere stable to live.

Many private landlords complain that

accusations of discrimination are unfair because it is the policies of mortgage lenders and insurance companies which are forcing them to be restrictive about who they let their properties to. There are also problems caused by benefits being paid in arrears to claimants, so they often accumulate debts with rent and other bills, which are difficult to pay off.

CRITICISMS

In addition recent tax changes (stamp duty increases and withdrawal of tax relief on mortgage payments) are forcing many smaller landlords to sell up or look at ways of cutting costs, while unpaid rent poses a serious problem for them.

The Residential Landlords Association have slammed Shelter and the NHF 'for pointing fingers at letting agents and private landlords' while failing to offer any solutions. John Stewart, Policy Manager at the RLA said there are many reasons for landlords being reluctant to let to those on benefits.

"Private landlords see tenants who are claiming benefits as a higher risk. The key to widening access to the private rented sector for these tenants is to reduce that risk. This is something that is understood by the homelessness charity Crisis" said Mr Stewart. "Their rent guarantee and bond schemes help many people into private rented accommodation by taking on some of that risk" he added.

Explaining the need for the campaign, Greg Beales, the Director of Campaigns at Shelter, said: "Go onto any housing website now and you will see it. 'No DSS'. The Department for Social Security (DSS) was renamed years ago, but the meaning of 'No DSS' is still known to all. It means we will not



Shelter claim the problem of benefit claimants being refused private tenancies is growing

rent this property to you if you are 'on benefits'.

"In 2018 Britain we have landlords telling people don't apply if you are on benefits. Don't apply, I won't even consider you. It doesn't matter if you have always paid your rent on time. It doesn't matter if your references are great and you and your family really need a home. 'No DSS'. It's prejudice and it's discrimination."

Shelter believes such actions are indirect discrimination and illegal. They plan to bring a series of test cases to the Courts in the coming months to challenge those who refuse to consider letting to people on benefits and to ask the courts whether their practices are lawful or are in fact indirect discrimination.

High Court Right to Rent challenge set for year end

A date has been set in December for the hearing of a High Court challenge to the Government's Right to Rent scheme on the basis it discriminates against foreign nationals.

The challenge has been launched by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) and will take place on the 18th and 19th of December. The JCWI is being supported by the Residential

Landlords Association.

A study by the RLA's research arm PEARL found that as a result of the right to rent policy, 42 per cent of landlords are now less likely to rent to someone without a British passport for fear of prosecution for getting things wrong.

Permission was granted for the JCWI to launch a judicial challenge of the policy in June. At the time, RLA Policy Director David Smith said: "Landlords will welcome the High Court decision to allow a judicial review of the Right to Rent policy which has put them in the impossible position of acting as untrained Border Police trying to ascertain who does and who does not have the right to be in the country.

"This has created difficulties for many legitimate

tenants as landlords are forced to play safe and only rent to those with a UK passport. The announcement is an important step towards overturning a policy which the government's own inspectorate had described as having yet to demonstrate its worth."

The announcement of the court hearing coincides with the RLA's call for the Government to issue guidance as a matter of urgency on the rights that EU nationals will have to rent property both before and after the UK leaves the EU, including under a no deal Brexit.

Analysis of Government data by the RLA PEARL suggests that 66 per cent of EU nationals (excluding those from the Republic of Ireland) live in private rented housing.

Buy-to-let landlords could face shorter deadline to pay capital gains tax

The consumer protection magazine Which? is warning landlords and second-home owners they could be required to pay capital gains tax within 30 days of selling their properties, under new rules being proposed by the Government.

Currently sellers of second homes or investment properties can postpone paying capital gains tax (CGT) until they file their tax return for that tax year, which could be more than 18 months after the property is sold. But draft legislation will mean property investors have just 30 days to pay up.

CGT is payable when people sell a valuable asset like a second home or a buy to let property for a profit. People can earn £11,700 (or £23,400 for couples who pool their allowances) before paying tax. Above this, basic-rate taxpayers have to pay 18 per cent of any gain on property, and higher rate taxpayers pay 28 per cent.

Under the current rules, landlords must pay CGT for property sales by 31 January after the end of the tax year, at the same time as their self-assessment tax returns are due (for online filings). So, if they sold an investment property in July 2018, it would be taxed within the 2018-19 tax year, and the landlord could wait until 31 January 2020 to pay the bill.

But under the new rules, people will need to pay up within 30 days of the sale going through. For some landlords, this could move up their payment date by more than a year and a half and cause problems with their cash flow. This follows a number of other tax reforms that have pushed up bills for landlords, including the scaling back of mortgage interest relief, and the introduction of a stamp duty surcharge on buy-to-let and second homes.

The new rules have not yet been confirmed, as the draft legislation is currently passing through Parliament

The change was originally due to come into effect in April 2019, but the proposals have been delayed and are likely to take effect for property disposals on or after 6 April 2020.



Think tank calls for an end to deposits on private rentals

A property expert is proposing that the deposit system used in the private rental sector for protecting property from damage and future payments of rent, should be replaced by an insurance scheme.

In his new report 'Down with deposits', Brian Sturges proposes that the Government should promote a deposit replacement insurance system as an alternative. This would allow renters to insure against potential damage or missed rent payments without having to find a large up-front deposit, currently estimated to average around £1,041.

Such insurance schemes could easily be developed within the existing insurance market and they would allow renters to keep more of their own money when moving into a rented property. It would avoid them having to borrow money to gather enough funds for a deposit. This would be particularly useful for the 31 per cent of private renters who have less than £100 in the bank.

An insurance-based model would also allow renters to build up a reputation as a good tenant through a ratings system similar to no-claims bonuses for motor insurance, while ensuring that landlords received protection against property damage and missed rental payments.

The report has been published by the Centre for Policy Studies. Another benefit of the proposal is that an insurance-based model would significantly improve the lives of 'Generation Rent,' but at no cost to the Treasury.

In the report Brian Sturges said: "Many people are simply unable to enter the rental market due to the need for a large upfront deposit to be provided before they move in. These proposals offer a

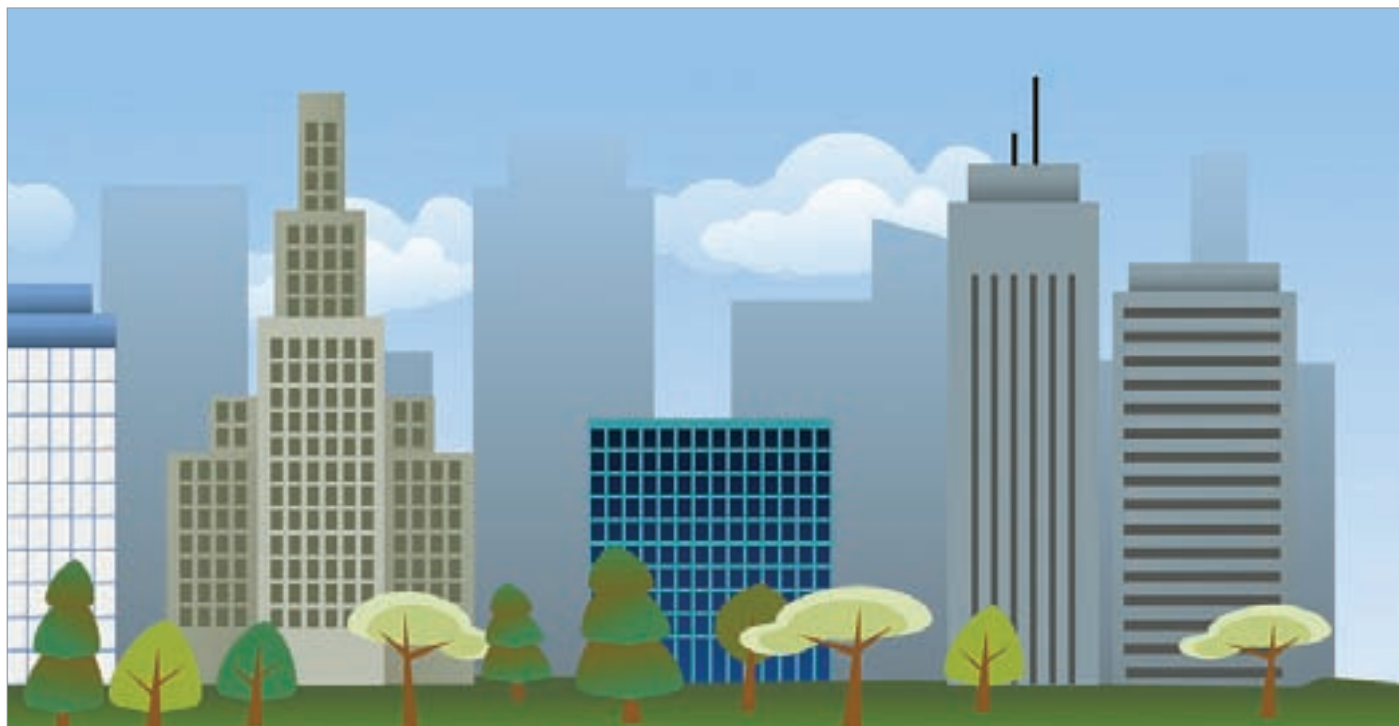
Polling by YouGov has shown that 43 per cent of renters would support a deposit replacement insurance system with a small cost, rather than the current system of tenants paying large upfront deposits

solution to the inherent unfairness of renters losing out on the interest they would have accrued on such a deposit, and often having to struggle to get their money back at all."

Polling by YouGov has shown that 43 per cent of renters would support a deposit replacement insurance system with a small cost, rather than the current system of tenants paying large upfront deposits.

The report finds the average renter loses over £300 per tenancy due to lost interest and inflation because of forced participation in the existing deposit protection schemes.

Forcing tenants to pay large up-front deposits means many people struggle to move between properties. They also lose out on earning interest on their money which instead is retained by their landlord or letting agency, and they often face a struggle to get all their money back.



Voluntary Right to Buy pilot for HAs launched

A pilot of the controversial scheme to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants was launched in the Midlands but residents were only given one month to register their interest.

Tenants were given until 16 September to apply for a place in a ballot with those who are successful then given until Spring 2020 to complete the purchase of their home.

The Treasury is providing £200m to pay for discounts on the sale prices and with expectations high that the pilot scheme will be oversubscribed, the idea for the ballot emerged. A Government spokesman said this would “ensure fairness and

manage interest within the funding available”.

No decision on whether to proceed with a full-scale scheme to allow HA tenants to buy their homes or a suitable equivalent at a discount, will take place before 2020 at the earliest. A key part of the Midlands pilot will be testing the concept of portability, where tenants are able to transfer their RTB discount to buy another HA property if the one they live in is exempt.

HOME OWNERSHIP DREAM

Housing Secretary James Brokenshire said: “Our £200m investment into the Midlands voluntary Right to Buy pilot is the first step in helping housing

association tenants to realise their dream of home ownership.”

The National Housing Federation received considerable criticism for helping to shape the Midlands pilot scheme. Controversy was further fuelled by the Government’s plans to fund the expansion of the RTB scheme by forcing councils into selling their most valuable homes and then handing over the receipts. Plans to get councils to replace RTB sold properties on a like-for-like basis have spectacularly failed to deliver new homes.

Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation David Orr said: “Over the past three years, we have worked closely with the Government on its proposal to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Of course, this pilot is not the finished product. We want to take the time to get this major endeavour right.

“It will be a success for everyone involved only if every home that is sold is replaced with a new affordable home, and if the application process is as smooth as possible for tenants.”

Scottish regulator acts over governance failures

The Scottish housing regulator has intervened in the running of two housing associations after its investigations found serious governance failures.

The regulator has told Wishaw & District Housing Association it needs to find another landlord prepared to merge with it. This follows a review by an appointed manager David Jepson, who “concluded the option to merge with another HA would provide the best opportunity for Wishaw & District to meet its strategic objectives.”

The association is now seeking expressions of interest from landlords and Mr Jepson will stay for a further year to oversee the process. The regulator is

also increasing the number of its appointees on the governing body to seven.

The HA owns and manages just over 1,000 homes and employs around 22 people. Its problems stemmed from a site it bought for £1m in 2010 but which it has failed to progress plans for and to develop the site.

An options appraisal in 2016 revealed “serious risks” with the development and a subsequent investigation revealed “serious governance failures”, “significant weaknesses in risk management” and “serious financial risks” as a result of buying the site.

The regulator has also intervened at Glasgow based Thistle Housing Association, which owns 950 homes, where it has appointed a manager and five members to the group’s management committee.

The regulator said it acted to safeguard tenants’ interests after an independent review identified failures to meet regulatory standards of governance and financial management.

The HA was also failing to meet the Scottish Social Housing Charter in relation to communications standards with tenants and other customers, the regulator said.

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Companies plead guilty after death of five-year-old girl in a lift

Before Bournemouth Crown Court, two companies pleaded guilty following a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation into the death of a five-year-old girl who became trapped while using a lift at her home in Weymouth.

On 13 August 2015, Alexys Brown got into the lift and put her head through a damaged vision panel. As the lift moved upward, her head got stuck between the lift and the ground floor ceiling. Alexys died as a result of her injuries.

Synergy Housing Limited of West Street, Poole and Orona Limited of Europa View, Sheffield Business Park both pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc

Act 1974. They are due to be sentenced at Bournemouth Crown Court on 14-15 January 2019.

Charges against a third company, Aster Property Ltd, under Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, have been ordered to lie on file.

A HSE spokesperson said: "HSE acknowledges the guilty pleas but will not make a further comment until after sentencing."

Fitter sent to prison for unsafe gas work

A self-employed gas fitter has been sentenced to 16 months in prison after he carried out unsafe gas work while falsely pretending to be Gas Safe Registered.

Nottingham Crown Court heard that Richard Trezise was prosecuted following investigations by Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors at seven different locations where the Gas Safe Register had been alerted to unsafe work.

Mr Trezise had produced Landlord's Gas Safety Certificates and falsely claimed to be Gas Safe Registered by using the registration number of another business who had never heard of him. He left customers with faulty installations that presented risks of gas leaks and dangerous accumulations of the products of combustion.

A HSE investigation found that, between May 2015 and July 2016, Richard Trezise had carried out

work while unregistered and while falsely pretending to be Gas Safe Registered at seven different locations in Nottinghamshire, Mid Glamorgan, Gwent and Yorkshire.

This was contrary to the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 and in breach of a prohibition notice previously served on Mr Trezise.

Richard Trezise had previously pleaded guilty to 21 offences under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 in Nottingham Magistrates Court. He was sentenced to a 16 months prison and a concurrent 28 day sentence for not attending the court hearing.

Speaking after the hearing HSE inspector Emma Madeley said: "Richard Trezise undertook gas work which he knew he was not registered to do. Some of the work was unsafe and it was fortunate that no one was harmed.

"All gas work must be done by registered Gas Safe engineers to ensure the highest standards are met to prevent injury and loss of life. The public should always ask to see the gas engineer's identification and check the registration number at www.gassaferegister.co.uk or ringing gas safe register customer helpline 0800 408 5500."

HSE inspector Emma Madeley

Peterborough company fined for failing to undertake asbestos assessment

A property management company has been sentenced after failing to carry out an asbestos survey prior to undertaking extensive refurbishment works.

Huntingdon Magistrates' Court heard that Thistlemoor Healthcare and Management Ltd undertook construction work at two properties, one of which was part of a medical centre in Peterborough. In this time, the company failed to carry out an asbestos survey for either property, both of which were likely to contain asbestos.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the company undertook and carried out construction which was likely to disturb asbestos containing materials during the strip out and part demolition of the two properties. Despite this, the company failed in its duty to carry out an asbestos survey for either property.

Thistlemoor Healthcare and Management Ltd of Thistlemoor Road, Peterborough pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 5 of Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and was fined £15,000 and ordered to pay costs of £1,805.60

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Samantha Wells said: "The risk of exposure to asbestos could so easily have been avoided if the company had carried out a suitable and sufficient asbestos assessment to identify the presence of asbestos within properties prior to commencing refurbishment work. Companies should be aware HSE will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against those that fall below the required standards."

Average residential rents reach a new monthly high in London

The average private rent in the UK increased by 1.3 per cent in the 12 months to July while in London they were up by 3.3 per cent, surpassing £1,600 a month for the first time.

Nationwide the average rent is now £937 but when London is excluded it is £777, up by one per cent on last year, according to the index data from tenant referencing firm HomeLet.

The region with the largest year on year increase in rent was Northern Ireland with a 4.5 per cent increase in average rental prices, while month on month the biggest increase was 2.6 per cent in the South East.

While nine of the regions identified by the HomeLet Rental Index saw rents rise this month, Scotland, the North East and the East of England saw rents fall from June to July 2018.

Rents were down month on month by 0.3 per cent in Scotland to an average of £651 but are still 3.3 per cent higher than July 2017. In the North East they fell by 0.8 per cent on a monthly basis to £525 and are 0.2 per cent down year on year while in the East of England they fell 0.7 per cent month on month to £909 and are down 1.1 per cent on an annual basis.

Rents in Wales and the South West also fell year on year by 0.3 per cent to £611 and by 0.6 per cent to £818. But in Wales they increased 1.3 per cent month on month and were up by 1.5 per cent month on month in the South West.

The highest rent in London is now £2,307 in Westminster, followed by £2,213 in Camden and the City, while the lowest rent is £1,078 in Croydon, followed by £1,209 in Barking, Dagenham and Havering.



The highest rent in London is now £2,307 in Westminster



Supply shortage could push rents up 15 per cent

Private sector rents could rise 15 per cent by 2023 as the supply of new rental properties dries up, according to a survey by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

It said small-scale landlords are pulling out of the market, largely because of tax changes brought in last year which have made buy-to-let investments less profitable. RICS said its survey suggested that East Anglia and the South West of England were likely to see the sharpest growth in rents from now until 2023.

RICS said it was time the Government looked again at the way the private rented sector was regulated. It said its members have seen the supply of new rental property falling consistently for two years.

The views were echoed by the Association of Residential Letting Agents, who reported that BTL investors are being pushed out of the rentals market by increasing costs and continued regulatory changes, while new landlords are being deterred from entering it. Increased demand from tenants was pushing up competition and the rents being charged.

David Cox, chief executive of ARLA said "To put tenants back in the driving seat, we need more homes available to rent, and the only way this will be achieved is if the Government makes the market more attractive for BTL investors."

REDUCED SUPPLY

The majority of both RICS and ARLA members

are seeing steady increases in the number of people looking to rent, although the numbers are levelling off. Simon Rubinsohn, RICS chief economist, said: "The risk... is that a reduced pipeline of supply will gradually feed through into higher rents."

A Treasury spokesperson said the reasoning behind the tax changes was to make more houses available to homebuyers. "We want to realise the dream of home ownership for a new generation, and that's why we introduced a cut to stamp duty for first time buyers, and have built 1.1m additional homes since 2010," the spokesperson said.

Changes to the buy-to-let tax regime brought in last year mean that mortgage tax relief for landlords will be restricted to the basic rate of income tax by 2020. RICS said the full impact of the changes and increases in stamp duty have yet to be felt.

Abdul Choudhury, RICS policy manager, said: "Withdrawing tax breaks that small landlords relied on, placing an extra 3 per cent on second home stamp duty, and failing to stimulate the corporate build-to-rent market, has understandably [had an impact on] supply."

"The Government must urgently look again at the private rented sector as a whole, including ways to encourage good landlords. Ultimately, [the] Government must consider the impact of its policies, and if the wish is to move away from the private rented sector, it must provide a suitable alternative."

The new normal in social housing procurement

Increased regulatory and financial constraints on local authorities, such as social rent cuts of 1 per cent each year from 2016-2020, and welfare reforms mean that social housing providers need to find ways of stretching their budgets to meet the need to build new affordable housing and maintain existing stock. Finding opportunities to make savings on construction, refurbishment, repair and maintenance is therefore a priority.



PREVENTION BETTER THAN THE CURE

Taking a more preventative planned approach to maintenance as opposed to the much more costly one of waiting for a problem to arise before fixing it is therefore the way to go. As part of such an approach, social housing providers could, at the same time, consider making earlier adaptations to meet the housing needs of an ageing population.

According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, by 2030 there will be 50 per cent more over-65s – and more than double the number of over-85s – alive in England than in 2010. And because 80 per cent of the homes we will be living in by 2050 are already built, efforts to extend the lifetime value of refurbishments by making them sufficiently flexible and practical to appeal to and meet the needs of all age groups should be front of mind for social housing providers.

HOMES THAT ANYONE COULD LIVE IN

It makes a lot of sense for housing associations to find ways of futureproofing the investment they are

making today in their refurbishment and building programmes. One way this can be achieved is by choosing contemporary interior products which just happen to be suitable for inclusive living. Floor level showers, essential for many with limited mobility wouldn't look out of place in any home. Similarly, installation of slip-resistant waterproof flooring, which provides extra traction and stability; and easy-clean surfaces illustrate how unobtrusive adaptations can be introduced even before they are needed on the grounds of age-related mobility or frailty.

From a whole host of perspectives, making small adaptations at the same time as repairs and maintenance or locking them into building specifications, has real benefits, not least being the improvement of the quality of life of residents over their lifetimes.

We can benefit economically as well from introducing adaptations at an early stage. Analysis from the Building Research Establishment shows that, making minor practical home adaptations

along with other home improvements can lead to annual savings for the NHS and social care services of at least £500m through a 26 per cent reduction in falls. These currently account for over 4m hospital bed days each year in England alone.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS FOR HOUSING PROVIDERS

Whilst some of the adaptations considered will benefit residents through the various stages of their lives, they can also be of immediate and long-term value to housing providers. Many practical adaptations are very easy, quick and economic to install. Waterproof wall panels and flooring in bathrooms and wet rooms, for instance, provide durable watertight spaces that reduce the risk of water ingress from one unit damaging properties in the floors below. And because these sorts of products are extremely robust, requiring very little maintenance, ongoing repair and maintenance bills can be considerably reduced.

UP-FRONT SAVINGS

Multipanel waterproof wall panels can be fitted directly to almost any surface, including existing tiles or straight onto studwork. They can be fitted and ready to use in just 24 hours, ensuring that units are fit to re-let much more quickly.

Waterproof wall panels are up to three times quicker to install than tiles, says Multipanel's Key Accounts Director, Michael Dobson, "and as they require no additional tradesmen to install, the resultant cost savings that can be achieved by switching from tiles is considerable – typically up to £20 per m2.

"On a modest bathroom refurb project comprising, say 50 properties, for example, with

average size bathrooms, the overall savings could be as much as £5,000. Even more, if you factor in shorter void periods between tenancies which result from getting the job done faster."

The Centre for Better Ageing predicts that 96 per cent of us will continue to live in mainstream housing in later life. We therefore need to be thinking of the ways in which we maintain, adapt and create homes to make them suitable for inclusive living – homes that are just as appealing to say, an able-bodied person and his family, as they would be to an older person with declining mobility.

ABOUT MULTIPANEL

When it comes to manufacturing products to

achieve completely watertight low maintenance bathrooms and kitchens, Multipanel are the industry experts.

With a history of innovation spanning over 135 years, Multipanel is at the forefront in manufacturing waterproof wall panels, vinyl and wet room flooring, and ceilings that enable housing professionals to create great looking, practical, waterproof interiors —ones that tenants will enjoy and appreciate.

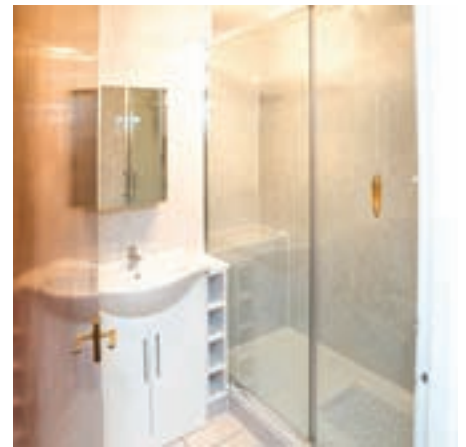
The ease with which our products can be installed, together with negligible ongoing maintenance, makes our products a clear choice in the social housing sector. For more information, contact michael.dobson@multipanel.co.uk or visit www.grantwestfield.co.uk

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

For Simon Bonney, Disabled Adaptation Supervisor at Plymouth Community Homes, choosing Multipanel waterproof wall panels is all part of his approach to refurbishment. "We gravitate towards quality products that are easy to install in our properties as this helps us to get work done quickly, thereby reducing the time taken to adapt a property to provide a mobility solution that supports the most suitable adaptation.

Simon manages hundreds of bathroom adaptations each year, and his contractors recently completed three refurbishments using waterproof bathroom wall panels. These were for family homes where restricted mobility needs had to be factored in. Residents were allowed to choose the colour scheme and were, according to Simon, extremely pleased with the finish.

"Our residents, he says, "are now able to maintain their living area more effectively due to the easy-to-clean wall panels — great for all our residents, but particularly so for those who have mobility issues which impacts their ability to clean tiles and grout."



Landlord given custodial sentence for gas safety offences

A landlord has been sentenced for failing to maintain gas appliances at a rental property in Norwich and repeatedly failing to provide his tenants with a Landlords Gas Safety Certificate.

Norwich Magistrates Court heard that inspectors

from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Gas Safe Register inspected a property at Kings Lynn in Norfolk in 2017 where they found a gas oven to be 'at risk' and the gas central heating boiler to be unsafe to use.

The subsequent investigation found the landlord, Mr Steven Ladell, had failed in his duty to have the gas appliances regularly inspected or maintained, and failed to provide a Landlords Gas Safety Certificate for a number of years, all of which are legal requirements. In addition, Mr Ladell failed to comply with an Improvement Notice issued on 13 July 2017 which required he take action to deal with these issues.

Mr Steven Ladell of Great Harwood, Blackburn,

pleaded guilty to breaching Section 21 of the Health & Safety Work etc. Act 1974 and breaching Regulation 36(2) and Regulation 36(3) of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. He received a 20-week custodial sentence, suspended for two years, was ordered to carry out 100 hours of unpaid community work and to pay full costs of £4,146.34.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Paul Unwin said: "Landlords must ensure gas appliances at their tenanted properties are checked by a Gas Safe Register engineer at least every 12 months, and are maintained in a safe condition. The HSE will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against those that fall below the required standards"

Plymouth landlord put tenants' lives at risk

A landlord from Plymouth has been sentenced to 15 months imprisonment after gas appliances at his rental property in Plymouth were found to be 'Immediately Dangerous'.

Plymouth Crown Court heard how the gas appliances in the property on Laira Street were

worked on by someone who was not registered with the Gas Safe Register.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Lokendra Khadka had failed to ever have gas appliances checked for safety at his rental property. Further, he had arranged for a person to make alterations to a gas boiler flue and that person had left it in an extremely dangerous state.

Mr Khadka was unable to provide any details to HSE or to Plymouth Crown Court on who did this work on the gas boiler flue for him.

Lokendra Kumar Khadka of Albert Road, Plymouth, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations

36 (3)(a) and 36(4) of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. He has been sentenced to 15 months imprisonment, suspended for 24 months and ordered to pay costs of £4,904.

Speaking after the hearing HSE inspector Simon Jones said: "Mr Khadka put his tenants and their children at a very real risk of death from the gas work he arranged at his rental property, done by someone who was not competent to do it safely.

"Landlords must ensure they only use Gas Safe Register installers to work on gas appliances at their tenanted properties. Further, landlord's must ensure that gas appliances at their tenanted properties are checked for safety at least every 12 months"

The wonder of wetrooms

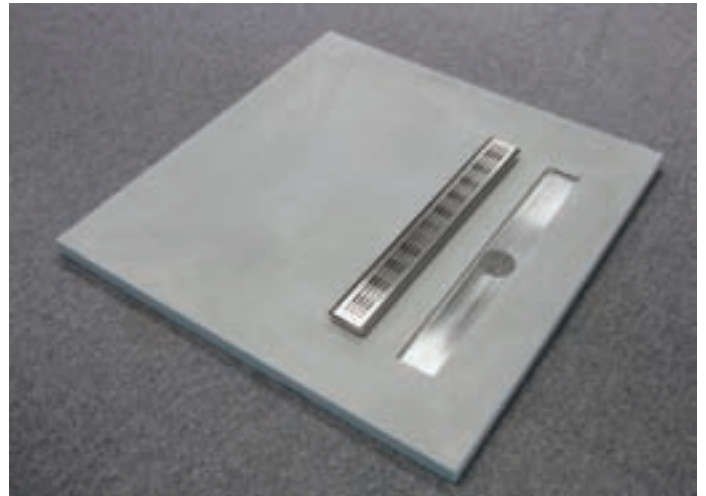
Sarah Viney of Marmox considers the attractions and challenges of creating a wetroom

A wetroom is effectively a fully waterproofed bathroom, where walls and floors are 'tanked' or sealed with layers of water resistant material, which stops damp from seeping out into the fabric of the building.

Although their advantages are many, perhaps the main one is that – freed of baths, trays, screens or other enclosures – they can make a striking addition that increases the value of your home. Wetrooms are, in general, easier to clean, as there's no shower screen or tray to worry about, and if you go for a wall-hung sink and toilet, the floor can be kept completely clear. In addition, they should prove more hygienic as the opportunities for mould growth are much restricted compared to a standard bathroom layout. Although not always designed with this in mind, wetrooms are particularly good for the elderly or less able bodied. With no shower step to negotiate, adding half height screens can allow a carer to remain dry while assisting someone in the showering area. Unquestionably, a wetroom allows greater flexibility for future adaptation: ready for any decline in the mobility for the end user.

A further argument in their favour is that for those considering spending out on a new shower enclosure, a wetroom without one can work out at a very similar price, while looking a lot more modern and stylish. However, a couple of caveats need to be heeded if your wetroom is going to be a success: it is absolutely vital that the installation is professionally waterproofed, then tiled or lined from floor to ceiling – which costs more than simply tiling above a bath.

In some respects a wetroom can be viewed as a blank canvas – free from most of the normal obstructions – which can then permit greater design freedom in respect of the finishes. Tiles are the most popular wall and floor covering, but it is circumspect to choose non-porous options such as ceramic or porcelain. Porous materials (including slate, marble and limestone) unfortunately require sealing every few months to prevent water damage. Meanwhile, floor tiles should be non-slip for obvious safety reasons and many people will want the additional comfort of underfloor heating. This will not only keep the



"In some respects a wetroom can be viewed as a blank canvas, which can then permit greater design freedom in respect of the finishes"

surface warm underfoot, but also help the water evaporate. Sheet vinyl or even composite materials, which are seamless and non-porous for low-maintenance, are other options for both walls and floors as are the many attractive panel alternatives available. Often manufactured in the form of high pressure laminates, these are large format which can feature special interlocks or the use of joint profiles, to avoid the need for grout and thus the almost inevitable future chore of scrubbing or bleaching to get rid of stains and mould.

The long term durability and success of any wall or floorcovering is, however, very much dependant on the stability of the substrate. Ideally the background for any finishes should be sound, completely water resistant and, if possible, provide a degree of thermal insulation. Whether the structure of the building is traditional masonry, timber frame or some other hybrid, a wetroom will benefit from the installation of a well-proven tile-backer board to present a uniform background, which also offers excellent bonding characteristics for tile cement or other adhesives. Those with a core of extruded polystyrene (XPS) and a facing of reinforced polymer concrete meet all of these aspirations and can also support substantial loads including wheelchairs, when laid across joists or other sub-floors.

In all situations, adequate provision must be made to remove water from the room, which requires both a drain outlet and direction for the run-off. For a workable wetroom therefore, probably the best way of achieving this is to make use of a pre-sloped tileable shower base.

The most user-friendly option is to purchase one which offers the same positive physical characteristics as the best tile-backer boards, but incorporates an adequately sloping surface and an integral drain that is adjustable for direction of outflow and it is essential that the waterproofing membrane laid beneath the tiling can be permanently sealed to this drain.

Given that these multiple criteria are met, then with their ease of maintenance and the sense of luxury, a contemporary wetroom is considered super-stylish by both design professionals and property pundits, meaning that – properly executed – they can add to both the enjoyment and the value of a home.

Sarah Viney is managing director of Marmox





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UK Construction Week (UKCW), the premier built environment event, takes place at Birmingham's NEC between 9-11 October, boasting global exhibitors, innovative products, seminars, CPD sessions and networking opportunities over nine industry-specific shows.

FUTURE OF CONSTRUCTION

Facilities and housing managers won't get left behind with this year's UKCW, which is celebrating the *Future of Construction*.

The *Future of Construction Hub*, in collaboration with Birmingham City University, provides visitors with an immersive opportunity to discover digital construction, 3D printing, robotics, AI and AR, and modern methods of construction. Visitors can also experience life as a site manager with Coventry University's virtual reality simulator.

An *Innovation Trail* offers a journey of discovery, with the latest innovative ideas, products, and systems from companies including Canon, Containex, Kore Wireless, Okappy, Soudal, Timber Structures, and Yu Energy. The University of Birmingham is also exhibiting and showcasing its alternative raw materials with low impact (ARLI).

PLENTIFUL PRODUCTS

Keeping on top of the latest maintenance and refurbishment products and trends has never been easier with more than 10,000 products and 650 exhibitors at this year's show.

Hikoki, Trumpf, Karcher, Velux, and OnLevel are among those set to launch new products at UK Construction Week. Other exhibitors include Aggregate Industries, American Softwoods, Cemex, Containex, Easy-Trim Roofing & Construction Products, Fischer Fixings UK, Glennon Brothers, Kessel, Kingspan, Quinn Building Products, The Concrete Centre, and Tradepoint (B&Q).

BROADEN YOUR HORIZONS

Once the deals are made, housing management and maintenance professionals can get up-to-date on industry issues with leading industry experts:

- *UKCW Stage* is hosting high-level discussions from speakers including Barbara Res, the female project manager behind Trump Tower, and Kunle Barker, leading the discussion *Political correctness has gone mad?*
- *Digital Construction Hub* is delivering case studies, thought-leadership and expert insights into topics such as: intelligent big data in building facilities and services and IoT and innovation in construction. Speakers include James Crowter from Technology Management and Dr Greenberg from EAVE
- *Infrastructure Hub* discussing enabling sub-contractors and power for a cleaner, quieter world with speakers from Equality Gold and Intelligent Energy
- *Regeneration Hub*, sponsored by Easy-Trim, discussing the circular economy and the future of construction skills post-Brexit with speakers

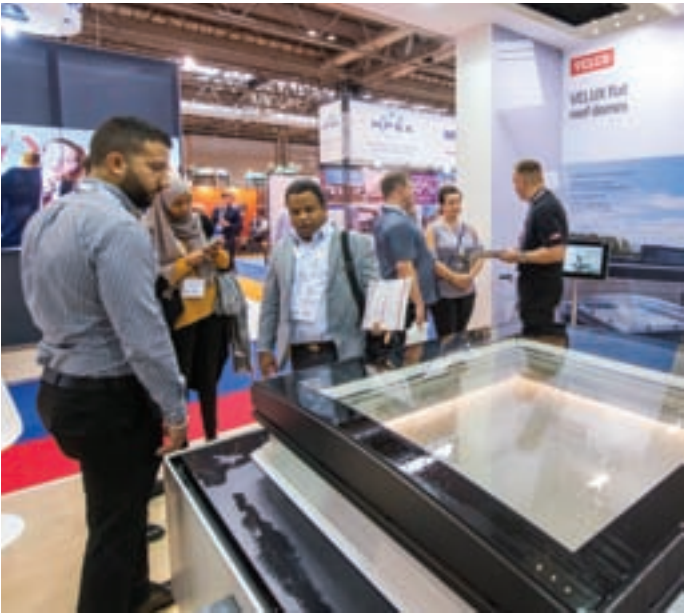


from Arup and the Home Builders Federation

- *Timber Focus Theatre*, supported by TRADA, covering timber cladding and fire safety performance and making the right connection with speakers including Ramboll Engineers
- *Building Tech Live Theatre*, sponsored by Voltimum and ECA, covering the IOT evolution with simPRO; and LED efficiency vs LED efficacy with Integral LED
- *Sustainability Hub*, covering common causes of temperature problems, humidity and its impact on human comfort and how the Planning and Energy Act 2008 could affect you

BUILDING UP YOUR INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE

Free CPD sessions cover topics including: sound insulation, fire doors, IoT



All images ©UKCW

security, and the role of daylight and ventilation. Booking is essential.

The *Working at Height Stage*, sponsored by AIF, will also deliver 40-minute CPD sessions on staying safe working tall and features RMD Kwikform's full-size Ascent Screen and Megashor Tower, alongside virtual reality.

The Scaffolding Association is providing scaffolding safety advice, and OM Group is hosting health and safety CPD sessions, directly from their stands. The BRE Academy is also running a separate CPD programme that visitors can sign up to.

Filling up the rest of UKCW is the Construction Enquirer Awards, the first BMF Young Merchants' Conference at the BMF Pavilion, announcement of the

Role Models initiative role model of the year winner on 10 October, and the Beer Festival sponsored by Velux.

Ticket holders have unlimited access to all nine UKCW shows and free visitor tickets are available from the website.

Keep up to date about exhibitors, product launches and speakers via the website and Twitter at @UK_CW or using the hashtag #UKCW2018.

To register for your free visitor ticket visit www.ukconstructionweek.com

Product Focus



Key Management Systems (KMS)

kms.uk.net/contact-us

KMS SimpleKey Web has been developed to provide building and property managers with immediate access to usage information by using the cloud and latest mobile technology. Anywhere you have access to the internet, you can see exactly which fob users are entering the building communal doors, be the tenants or contractors. SimpleKey Web also allows you to set up triggers for specific fobs, alerting you to their use and allowing you to improve the overall management of the block. To find out more about KMS and SimpleKey Web and how it could help your Housing Organisation get in touch by calling KMS, or visit their website.

Consort Claudgen

www.consortepl.com

The WMH3E Chelsea and HE6137E Flowzone fan heaters are the latest addition to Consort Claudgen's Electronic 7-day Timer range. Both heaters have a digital control panel with easy-to-read display and four large control buttons with audible and tactile feedback. They are robust to suit demanding environments and are quiet in operation. These heaters offer six heating periods per day, 7 days a week and have an optional open/close window detection feature which reacts intelligently to a sudden temperature change in the area or room. They are also easy to operate and can set comfort and setback temperatures which helps reduces the overall energy consumption.



Neaco

www.neaco.co.uk



An apartment development in Blaby has joined the long list of residential projects to specify Neaco's all-in-one balcony solutions. The three-storey complex includes Neaco's walk-on and Juliet balconies which are manufactured and assembled at the factory stage for fast installation, minimising time, energy consumption and waste on site. Neaco has experienced an exceptional growth in demand for its balconies in recent years. The rails, stanchions and open grille decking are manufactured from aluminium, a lightweight-yet-strong metal which has an A1 Fire Rating - the highest achievable score for non-combustibility.



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Designer Contracts delivers

Designer Contracts, one of the UK's largest flooring suppliers, demonstrated its ability to work to a tight schedule when it installed complete interiors schemes to two properties in just one day. Modular property experts like Homes called on the help of Designer Contracts when it built two properties outside the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Exhibition in Manchester, at the end of June. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: "We were delighted to have been asked to help with the design and installation of the full interior, which included furniture and flooring, all of which our talented team installed in just one day!"



01246 854577 www.designercontracts.com

Mitsubishi creates social communities

With the government forecasting that heat pumps will overtake gas heating over the next decade and to coincide with the launch of **Mitsubishi's** Ultra Quiet Ecodan air source heat pump, two social communities, on Facebook and Instagram have been set up to provide consumers and heating installers with regular updates and tips on the company's latest efficient, renewable heating systems. The Facebook page offers a selection of videos and images that provide information on the Ultra Quiet Ecodan, detailing its uses, specifications and unique characteristics that set it apart from alternative heating solutions. On the Instagram page, followers will be treated to a range of graphics that highlight the benefits of choosing to install the Ultra Quiet Ecodan.



01707 278666 www.heating.mitsubishielectric.co.uk

Remmers showcase at Exhibition

Environmentally-friendly and sustainable aren't just buzzwords for **Remmers** (UK) Ltd, who will showcase their new LW-722 [eco] stain finish at the W18/Elements Exhibition which starts on 30th September. Replacing fossil fuels with biomass process technology, they have used cutting edge technology to create a coating that protects both wooden windows and the environment. Remmers (UK) offers options for factory and site application, including state-of-the-art, environmentally and user-friendly, water-based systems. Remmers' customer-focused approach is backed by a team with decades of experience in the British wood protection industry.



01293 594010 www.remmers.co.uk

PoziDry Pro™ PIV boosts comfort

Resident comfort is at the core of **Vent-Axia's** newly updated PoziDry Pro™ PIV unit. Designed by a leading ventilation company, specifically to tackle condensation and mould and improve indoor air quality (IAQ) in social housing properties, the next generation PoziDry Pro™ boasts three new features to help landlords improve resident comfort levels. These design innovations include a tamper-proof lock mode to ensure consistent ventilation performance; selectable summer and winter comfort settings; and a new easy-to-install discreet diffuser, which allows more air movement at a lower noise level.



0844 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com

Red dot recognises Ultra Quiet heat pump

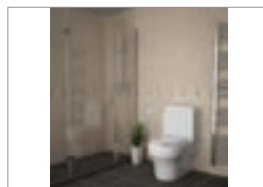
Mitsubishi Electric's Ultra Quiet Ecodan PUHZ-AA air source heat pump range has been presented the Red Dot Award for Product Design, an award that recognises the highest levels of design quality. The Ecodan units are designed to provide homes with reliable, trouble free renewable heating and hot water. The design of the new Ultra Quiet unit is highly compact, and the colour combination of white and anthracite exudes a simple yet elegant appeal, with the dark colour of the fan section underlining its unobtrusive design. The Red Dot Award is judged by an international jury of experts, who said that, "the design of this air-to-water outdoor unit has been thought out to the last detail."



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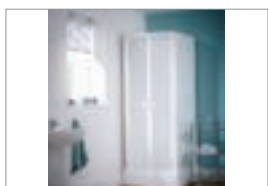
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North View Housing chooses Saniflo

North View Housing in Scotland recently installed 13 Consort shower cubicles from the **Saniflo Kinedo** range to upgrade bathrooms. Installer Jim Girdwood comments: "These units are very straightforward to install - we have a working, leak free shower up and running in under half a day. I've fitted many of these now and they are really a great choice for these properties - with no tiling or grouting and no silicone required they are practical and modern in style. With a single piece interior and the lightweight doors, it slots together very simply." For more information then please call or you can visit the Saniflo website.



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In the flush of ultimate wellness

A loo that claims to deliver the ultimate in intimate care can also deliver the ultimate in future-proofed and stylish bathroom design, through developments in flushing technology. The Asana is the latest multi-functional WC to be designed and engineered by **Closomat**. It combines shower toilet assisted technology (integrated douching and drying) for able and disabled alike, with contemporary styling - which extends right through to the flush operating mechanisms. Closomat has deliberately offered a range of flush plates that suit manual dexterity or design preference. Users can push-button on the side of the toilet or via the remote control included as standard.



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Showering solutions

Ann Boardman, Saniflo UK's head of Marketing and Product Development, explains some of the main trends and developments in bathroom refurbishment and showering



As someone who's responsible for housing management and maintenance, it's important to know about products, trends, legislation, and much more. This is no easy task. Looking at the bathroom space alone, there is so much to keep abreast of.

Ask people what they want in their accommodation and a top priority is a decent shower experience. Today, the range of shower types is vast and it can be a daunting task in itself just knowing where to start. There are many reasons why shower cubicles are the right choice. Shower cubicles are swift and easy to install, they minimise disruption, and they don't require tiles, grout, or silicone. They're also leak-free, in many cases can be fitted and working in less than a day, and they're easy to maintain and keep looking pristine.

Besides those benefits, when it comes to showering, there are other factors that we as an industry need to consider. We have an ageing population, not only an ageing end user population but also an ageing plumbing industry workforce; everyone wants projects to be completed as fast as possible with as little hassle as possible and affordably as possible. Also, the number of timber framed buildings is growing and these require special considerations that many people overlook.

In terms of an ageing population we have been seeing the rise of inclusively designed showering options. This means that showering options, while being inclusively designed, must be stylish enough for everyone to find attractive. This includes the growing popularity of low-level shower trays including wetroom style options that can accommodate a wheelchair and walk-in shower cubicles with grab rails and seats.

If we look at this example, and consider not only the ageing population but also the ageing plumbers, there is a great difference between the enclosure,

"No tiling, no grout, no silicone. You can turn a bathroom around in a day in many cases"

the wetroom style option, and the shower cubicle option. Wetrooms and enclosures place more physical strain and time demands on plumbing professionals, in terms of the intensity of labour required and project duration, while cubicles can be intuitive and easy to install. Not only that, but the fact that cubicles can be up and working in less than a day is another reason why they are becoming the choice of more property managers, housebuilders, installers, and homeowners.

There are even shower cubicles that are designed to fit exactly into the space where a bath was. This means that all you have to do is rip the other bath out and fit the bath replacement shower cubicle. No tiling, no grout, no silicone. You can turn a bathroom around in a day in many cases.

By installing shower cubicles which are leak free thanks to the design, property managers, can maintain margins and labour rates while boosting customer satisfaction and minimising call backs. Choose the right shower cubicle and you will be able to deliver a quick fix without compromising on design or performance.

A growing number of public and private sector building projects are turning to shower cubicles combined with pumps and macerators to help them complete

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“Choose the right shower cubicle and you will be able to deliver a quick fix without compromising on design or performance”

refurbishment and new build projects affordably and swiftly, and in some cases, add a bathroom space to an existing property.

North View Housing in Scotland recently installed 13 shower cubicles to upgrade bathrooms. Installer Jim Girdwood comments: “These units are very straightforward to install – we have a working, leak-free shower up and running in under half a day. I’ve fitted many of these now and they are really a great choice for these properties – with no tiling or grouting and no silicone required, they are practical and modern in style. With a single piece interior and the lightweight doors, it slots together very simply”

River Clyde Homes, also in Scotland, recently guaranteed that a showering facility in a downstairs room in 13 new homes, which will be installed in the event of a tenant becoming immobile. Jim Tedford, Site Manager, comments: “Using pumps saved us digging the floors back up to install new water pipes that may – or may not – be used in future to take water waste from a shower. It was a good idea to add the infrastructure in case tenants need a downstairs shower due to immobility issues and plumbing in the pumps was very straightforward and cost-effective.”

Contemporary shower cubicles not only look good, but they are highly durable and need minimal maintenance. With no grout to discolour or unsightly silicone to maintain, the cubicles remain looking pristine for years. Models that feature an anti-limescale coating on the glass panels eliminate the issue of limescale build-up and watermarks, making them very easy to keep clean and tidy. European manufacturers can offer robust guarantees and designs with inclusivity in mind.

Ann Boardman is head of Marketing and Product Development for Saniflo UK



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Better fire testing and certification for the UK

Chris Miles of UL discusses how a new international alliance aims to shake up the UK fire testing industry

It's rare for a British Standard to receive so much media attention. BS 8414 has even starred on Newsnight. However, post-Grenfell and the Hackitt Inquiry, many are looking for a modernised, comprehensive, and effective standard to address the fire safety challenges of modern building materials.

Indeed, the whole issue of large-scale fire testing and the product certification that follows is hugely controversial at the moment, leaving many developers, landlords and the construction industry supply chain that serves them wondering who and what they can trust.

This piece looks at the current concerns around the testing regime for cladding and facades, the government consultation on BS 8414 and the reasons behind the launch of a new international alliance that is set to challenge BRE and improve testing standards in the UK.

SCEPTICAL STANDARDS

BS 8414 is the two-part British Standard and test method for the fire performance of external cladding systems. The standard was considered well developed, having first been introduced in 2002 and recently updated by the BSI group in 2015.

The standard enables building designers to use cladding composed of combustible materials if they can sufficiently resist the spread of fire in a high-rise building, something that the tests should confirm. This provides greater flexibility and artistic licence in building design, using cladding that has

a higher environmental rating, looks better, and costs less than some traditional non-combustible alternatives.

However, several high-profile fires, including the one at Grenfell Tower, have led building professionals (and the public) to question whether this test is still fit for purpose.

Igniting these concerns are the results of a series of carefully controlled research experiments carried out by the Fire Protection Association (FPA), commissioned by the Association of British Insurers (ABI), earlier this year. The FPA tests were conducted in a real-life test environment and included factors such as plastic, voids in cladding, and vents.

The differences between the current testing setup and the FPA's recent test results were alarming, with fires burning 100°C hotter and flames one metre higher. The demand being heard loud and clear from the industry is that this is a challenge that needs to be swiftly addressed.

GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

Following the recommendations of the independent review led by Dame Judith Hackitt, the government is consulting on banning the use of combustible materials in the external walls of high-rise residential buildings.

As part of this consultation, the government is reviewing:

- The use of desktop studies
- The definitions of 'combustibility' and 'cladding'



- Exemptions from a possible ban
- The treatment of existing buildings
- The impact on energy efficiency and the innovative development of building materials.

With the current concerns surrounding BS 8414 and whether it is sufficiently robust, an outright ban on combustible materials in cladding systems would undoubtedly lower the risk, but is an outright ban the answer that addresses the issue at hand? The FPA doesn't think so.

NEW INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE

Currently, the only UK-based facility capable of testing facades for fire resistance is fully booked, which, given the volume of manufacturers seeking to confirm that their current products are safe and to ultimately bring safer alternatives into the market, is concerning.

With this unprecedented demand for fire-testing for building facades, building professionals are left with little option other than to join a long waiting list or accept the additional time and expense of product testing abroad. However even overseas the choices are limited; there is currently just one other test facility in the world that offers building façade testing to BS 8414.

These limited options are especially concerning for an industry under pressure to confirm the safety of existing buildings and to meet the demanding targets for new homes.

To help address this problem and relieve an over-burdened system, the FPA has signed a cooperation agreement with UL, a global safety science company. The new alliance will see UL investing in the FPA's existing fire test and research facilities, enhancing the capability, and broadening the scope of testing available to social and private landlords.

It should also help to rebuild public confidence in a robust, reliable, and real-life testing regime, an outcome much preferable to the consequences of an outright ban.

THE FUTURE

Significant changes are expected to the current British Standard BS 8414, following the outcome of the FPA's research this year, and UL has committed to test and certify to an updated standard, once published.

It is hoped the new alliance can bring greater capacity and rigorous standards to the fire-testing market, which in turn will bring greater confidence to social and private landlords in their choice of materials for high-rise residential buildings.

Chris Miles is business development manager of UL

Ancon launches IHR Head Restraint

ANCON has re-engineered its IHR internal head restraint to accommodate gaps at the wall head of up to 75mm, extending the previous maximum of 50mm. Head Restraints provide a simple support at the top of masonry panels. They are typically installed in the inner leaf of blockwork on a framed structure, where the masonry is non load-bearing. Design resistances are available for this new improved IHR range, based on independent product testing. This information is available in the Ancon Wall Ties and Restraint Fixings technical literature available to download. Recording, analysing and fulfilling unmet customer demands, are a key driver to Ancon's on-going success.

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RCM first approved stockist of Rockpanel

RCM a specialist in complete through wall solutions, are delighted to be the first, and currently only stockist of A2 Rockpanel in the UK. RCM are now able to offer Rockpanel in a selection of colours directly from stock. Made from compressed mineral wool, originating from basalt, Rockpanel has the strength and durability of stone, yet the workability of wood. The addition of this 'stone-based' cladding further enhances RCM's already extensive facades offering. Recent supplied projects by RCM have included the University of West England in Bristol, where over 1,000m² of Rockpanel Metallics were supplied to newly built high-quality student accommodation on the Frenchay campus.

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Simpson expands range

Introducing the latest products offerings by leading construction connector manufacturer Simpson Strong-Tie; masonry reinforcement and render mesh solutions for timber and masonry construction: Bricktor® for crack control reinforcement; Brickforce® for structural reinforced masonry applications; Bricktie® - developed to overcome the problems associated with lifting heavy blocks in the construction of 215 mm and greater thickness walls; STUCANET HGBM and EBM - purpose designed steel welded wire mesh plaster and render carriers.

Sales Director Jon Head comments: "The introduction of a complete suite of masonry reinforcement products means that, along with our wall ties, frame ties and joist hangers, we can now offer the widest range of masonry connectors to the UK construction sector."

Visit our Resources page for more information and to download our handy flyer, packed with product details and installation advice.

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Colour Book seeks to educate and inspire

Crown Paints is continuing its focus on colour with the launch of a new Exterior Colour Book as a key aid for specifiers and designers. The Exterior Colour Book has been created by the Crown Paints Colour Service to provide guidance and inspiration for exterior decoration projects. The Colour Book includes details on Sandtex Trade, Crown Paints' external substrate decoration and protection brand, as well as superior wood protection brand Sadolin. As well as providing information about how colour interplays with the surrounding environment and architectural styles, the Exterior Colour Book includes details of how colour influences people's sense of place and even their mood.



info@crownpaintspec.co.uk

Council see the Attraction® in Gerflor

The onus on local authorities and borough councils to provide affordable housing has never been greater. It's a weighty responsibility and one that Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (Dudley MBC) take extremely seriously. Dudley MBC approached international flooring specialist Gerflor to supply 20m² of their fast track GTI Attraction® in 'Moheli' for a trial area. The requirement was for a hard wearing, durable, and heavy traffic resistant flooring solution for their apartment block corridors that is easy to maintain. Gerflor's Attraction® range was hugely beneficial to Dudley MBC as it can be lifted individually tile by tile and replaced if damaged without lifting the entire floor.



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Dulux Trade provides warmth to school

Dulux Trade has provided an expert coating specification to deliver improved thermal performance for a detached Victorian property located in Tonbridge School, Kent. Made from solid wall construction, the property suffered from damp as well as extensive heat loss through the walls. Dulux Trade Plus Thermacoat+ is a revolutionary three-part coating system comprised of an innovative basecoat with insulating properties, a leveling fiberglass fleece and a Dulux Trade Plus Smooth & Protect+ finish. Applied to all of the interior externally facing walls of the property, the Thermacoat+ system is just 6mm thick once complete; making it an ideal solution for this project.



0333 2227070 www.duluxtradepaintexpert.co.uk

Appointed to LHC frameworks

Award winning commercial installer The Window Company has become an LHC Appointed Company for the first time, after being appointed to the public sector procurement group's Framework Agreements for both PVC-U and timber window and door products. This was the first time that the Chelmsford based company had tendered to join any LHC framework, so it was a significant achievement to be named on both at the first attempt. Commercial Director Mark Crane said: "The LHC Frameworks obviously give us access to key public sector clients and in return provide those clients with fast track procurement and transparent rates."



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New view for stylish London hotel

Located at the heart of London and on the doorstep of landmarks Kings Cross and St. Pancras, is The California Hotel. This city hotel plays hosts to folk from around the world, all looking out onto the streets of London through traditional looking box sash windows. Now, this iconic and rather special hotel has been transformed using REHAU's stylish Vertical Sliding window profile, combining today's modern conveniences with the elegance of yesterday's grand accommodations. Heritage Rose vertical sliders - manufactured using REHAU Heritage profiles by specialist fabricator Roseview Windows - are a prestigious and a market-leading sash window that oozes period charm and character. The Heritage Rose has been engineered to ensure the highest levels of security and scores high for its acoustic and energy efficiency credentials. It incorporates an exclusive stylish run-through sash horn designed to replicate the fine details you would find on a timber sash window. The run-through sash horn was developed by the R&D team at Roseview and lends perfectly to the requirements of The California Hotel's renovation.

01676 526568 www.rehau.co.uk



Evinox launches fresh new website

Evinox Energy announce the launch of their new company website, which features a fresh look and feel and user-friendly navigation, enabling users to browse through their extensive range of heat network products and services with ease. These include a range of smart heat interface units (HIUs) and comprehensive support services including metering, billing, revenue management and service and maintenance. Delivering a fully responsive experience, the new website gives users a seamless transition from desktop to mobile browsing and has been designed to provide heat network information for Housing Developers, M&E Consultants, Housing Associations and Building Managers, covering all stages of a communal or district heating project. Emma Alexander, Marketing Manager at Evinox Energy, said - "We are really excited about the launch of our new site, which we've packed with useful heat network information, including articles, case studies, best practice and regulation advice, alongside technical information about our ModuSat® Smart HIU range and metering, billing and maintenance support services."

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Ecodan QUHZ heat pumps provides cheaper heating bills for residents at Bowling Court

Mitsubishi Electric's Ecodan QUHZ air source heat pumps have been installed at the Bowling Court apartment building in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, and residents have been reaping the rewards since installation was completed earlier this year.

Bowling Court, which is managed by the charity Hightown Housing Association, had previously relied on electric heating, and was looking for a new, low cost system. By selecting the 4kW monobloc Ecodan QUHZ heat pump system and thermal store, the buildings' tenants are benefitting from low cost heating, efficient hot water production and reliable, renewable heat provision all year round.

Mark Salmon, Procurement Manager at Hightown Housing Association, believes the installation will prove to be a great investment, saying, "The benefits of the Ecodan system, both short and long term, played a big part in our decision to upgrade the heating system at Bowling Court. Its flexibility, easy operation, low noise levels and, perhaps most importantly, low running costs will prove popular with our tenants at Bowling Court".

This popularity is already evident, with one tenant saying that the Ecodan system has reduced her heating bill from £35 a week to £15.

Kim Faulkner, Managing Director at Faulkners,



a Reading-based installation company with years of experience dealing with renewable technologies, praised the Ecodan system. "Air

source heat pumps are an ideal solution that will help reduce both running costs and emissions over traditional carbon-intensive heating", comments Faulkner. "The Ecodan system is particularly suitable for properties like Bowling Court, which is in an off-gas area".

Finding a system that could reduce fuel costs was particularly important for Hightown Housing Association as they pride themselves in being able to assist those who cannot afford to buy or rent a home at market value. Tenants are able to control their heating and hot water via Wi-Fi with Mitsubishi's MELCloud application; a built-in energy monitoring system which comes as standard with the Ecodan heat pumps. They are able to monitor their energy consumption, set up schedules and timers, get temperature history reports, receive a live weather feed from the Ecodan's location and share or restrict access to the application. All this helps tenants to better manage their heat and energy usage, lowering their heating costs.

As well as helping to reduce fuel costs, the Ecodan QUHZ also operates with a very low noise output. This was a key factor in Hightown selecting the QUHZ as it enabled the units to be fitted on the balcony of all properties.

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Light and healthy homes

Findings from a new study reveal how the choice of external wall insulation can significantly impact the thermal performance and natural lighting of a room. Kingspan Insulation reports

The drive towards a healthier built environment has picked up pace in 2018 with the WELL Institute introducing the pilot WELL Standard v2. BREEAM New Construction has also been updated, with a number of changes designed to better assess how a building will impact occupant wellbeing. When creating healthier homes, the key considerations include ensuring good levels of natural light and maintaining comfortable temperatures throughout the year. A new study has now shown that the choice of external wall insulation can significantly impact not only the thermal performance of the element but also the amount of natural light entering a room.

DAYLIGHTING

Many of the health and wellbeing benefits associated with proper daylighting provision are highlighted within BS 8206-2: 2008 (Lighting for buildings. Code of practice for daylighting). They include a regulated circadian system, reduced symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and improved levels of vitamin D.

Internal natural light levels are affected by many factors, including window dimensions, room layout and even the choice of paint. Daylight designers must find a balance in natural light levels as too much can cause overheating, while too little can lead to dark spaces. One way to identify this is through the average daylight factor (ADF).

AVERAGE DAYLIGHT FACTOR

The ADF calculation estimates how much light will reach occupants throughout a building. To estimate this, a horizontal surface (working plane) is plotted at the height that work will typically be carried out. The ADF then looks at the amount of daylight reaching each area of this plane, in comparison with its

ROOM TYPE	MINIMUM ADF (%)
Bedroom	1
Living Room	1.5
Kitchen	2

total area. The outside daylight levels used within the calculation is based on a standard overcast sky.

The final ADF is expressed as a percentage representing the average amount of light (illuminance) on the working plane compared with outside. Put simply, an ADF of one per cent would mean the average internal light level is one hundredth that of the outdoor (unobstructed) light level.

Many building codes suggest or require a minimum ADF. For example, BS 8206-2: 2008 (Lighting for buildings. Code of practice for daylighting) recommends an ADF of at least two per cent for a whole property. The code of practice also sets minimum ADFs for individual rooms (see table).

These values are used to define ‘provision of good daylighting’ within BREEAM and can contribute towards the award of two credits.

As previously mentioned, there is a fine balance to achieve: large areas of glazing can result in summer overheating or excessive heat loss in winter (as the thermal performance of the glazing layer is typically poorer than the rest of a wall or roof construction). BRE BR 209 suggests that interiors with ADFs of over six per cent are likely to suffer from these issues. To ensure good daylighting provision, ADFs should therefore be in the range of around two-five per cent.



INSULATION RESEARCH

The advantages of fitting higher performing insulation materials are well understood. By fitting insulation materials with better thermal conductivities, it is possible to minimise the construction thickness and weight required to achieve the desired thermal performance for that element (U-value). What is less well known is how the thickness of external walls, and therefore window reveals, can impact daylighting.

Kingspan Insulation commissioned Peutz BV to assess how different insulation constructions could affect internal natural light. The research compares two rainscreen build-ups — one insulated with phenolic insulation (with a thermal conductivity of 0.020 W/m.K), the other with mineral fibre insulation (with a thermal conductivity of 0.035 W/m.K). Each build-up was assessed in three different configurations designed to

achieve U-values of 0.11 W/m².K; 0.15 W/m².K; and 0.21 W/m².K. Four different window layouts were also considered. ADFs were generated for each scenario.

The ADF calculations assume a 2.8 m high internal space with a facade width of 5 m and a depth of 3.5 m. The calculation plane was positioned at 0.7 m above ground level with the exclusion of a border zone of 0.5 m from the walls. The internal reflective properties of the room were 30 per cent for the floor (dark grey carpet), 70 per cent for the walls (light grey paint) and 80 per cent for the ceiling (white paint). No other buildings, obstructions, or furniture were considered.

RESULTS

In all four window arrangements, the phenolic constructions, had a higher ADF than those with mineral fibre with the percentage improvement ranging from 10.6 per cent to 63.2 per cent. In addition, all results for the phenolic constructions exceeded the minimum daylighting criteria from BS 8206-2: 2008 (Lighting for buildings. Code of practice for daylighting) for bedrooms and living rooms. The maximum ADF for the phenolic constructions was 5.132 per cent, far below the level of six per cent at which BR 209 suggests overheating may become an issue. All other results were below the ideal maximum of five per cent.

The phenolic construction therefore provided a slimmer and more effective approach to achieving both thermal comfort and improved daylighting than the comparative mineral fibre construction.

BETTER HOUSING

Good daylighting provision can transform internal spaces making them not only healthier but also more visually appealing to prospective house buyers. It makes sense, therefore, for developers to consider techniques and approaches which may help to easily deliver this. Specification of highly thermally efficient wall insulation is one option to achieve this while simultaneously raising the fabric performance of the property.

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A change of scenery with Kingspan

Kingspan Kooltherm K108 Cavity Board has been installed on the first phase of houses constructed in the major redevelopment of The Poets in Swinton, helping the project to meet its thermal performance requirements with slim wall build-ups. 5mm Kingspan Kooltherm K108 Cavity Board was installed behind traditional red stock brickwork facades. Part of Kingspan's premium performance Kooltherm K100 range, the insulation board features a fibre-free phenolic core with an outstanding thermal conductivity of 0.018 W/m.K. This excellent performance enabled the target external wall U-values to be met without the need for thicker insulation which would encroach on living space.

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Combi-repair kit – from FLAMCO

The Flamco T-plus is a key part of the Combi Repair Kit from FLAMCO.

Replacement expansion vessels in combis can be expensive and few contractors will carry all the spare parts required to get all makes of combis up and running quickly. An option is to mount a new expansion vessel on the wall close to the boiler and connect a filling loop using a Flamco T-plus.

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Understanding the performance of roofing membranes

Iain Fairnington of A. Proctor Group provides an insight into the performance of roofing membranes and what this means for specifiers and contractors, in ensuring compliance with building standards and assured performance to reduce the risk of failure and minimise ongoing maintenance costs



For years the debate on how to achieve a true ventilation free cold-pitched roof has continued across the construction industry. Now architects and roofing contractors working on projects in both the public and private sector are coming to the understanding that underlays can perform at an exceptional level, providing a failsafe option, without the need for additional ventilation.

IMPROVED THERMAL AND MOISTURE PERFORMANCE OF PITCHED ROOFS

The combination of cold-pitched roof construction and increasing thermal performance requirements has fuelled the tendency to place additional insulation above the ceiling joists, leading to an increased risk of condensation in the roof space. In an effort to combat this problem, the industry developed a series of breathable membranes, which were designed to be installed over the rafters as roof underlay, and allow the vapour to escape.

The majority of these membranes were vapour permeable, but airtight, rather like a Gore-Tex jacket. While water-resistant, they did not completely prevent condensation within the roof space, meaning additional ventilation had to be introduced in order to allow air to circulate.

NOT ALL ROOFING UNDERLAYS ARE THE SAME

Generally, two types of technological solutions have been presented to specifiers; vapour permeable, but airtight solutions, based on film laminated polypropylene technology, or a vapour and air permeable version, alleviating the need for additional ventilation.

“Roofing underlays come in all manner of different colours, but it’s what you can’t see that does most of the work – the middle layer”

– Iain Fairnington, technical director, A. Proctor Group

Iain Fairnington, explains: “Roofing underlays come in all manner of different colours, but it’s what you can’t see that does most of the work – the middle layer. While the colour of the top surface or underside is useful for identification, it is irrelevant in terms of performance. This middle layer can be likened to the same robustness as normal kitchen cling film and needs the protection of the sandwich construction to make this suitable and fit for purpose in a pitched roof. Taking a microscopic view of the middle layer clarifies the difference between an airtight and air permeable membrane. The difference between air permeability and air tightness is fundamental to the products performance and use.”

BRITISH STANDARDS UPDATE – FEB 2018

CLEAR DEFINITION OF AIR PERMEABLE UNDERLAYS

In February, a second amendment and updated version of the British Standard for Slating and Tiling BS5534 was introduced. For the very first time BS5534:2014 + A2:2018 now includes a clear industry definition of air permeable underlays.



Previously an underlay would be defined as type HR (high water vapour resistance) – an underlay with a vapour resistance greater than 0.25 MNs/g and type LR (low water vapour resistance) – underlay with a vapour resistance less than 0.25 MNs/g. The updated standard now also defines a type LR and air permeable underlay as “underlay that has a water vapour resistance not more than 0.25 MNs/g combined with an air permeability of not less than 20 m³/m² h at 50 Pa which allows for the transfer of both water vapour and air.”

Iain Fairnington, explains what this means: “Selecting a pitched roof underlay which is both air and vapour permeable will ensure the highest performance and protection for the building fabric.”

NHBC TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

In 2011 NHBC confirmed that it would be adopting guidance as outlined in BS5250 ‘Code of practice for the control of condensation in buildings’, requiring a ventilation gap to be installed at high-level, equivalent to a 5 mm continuous slot at or near the ridge. The basis for this was that vapour permeable roof underlays permit the movement of vapour through the membrane, but generally do not permit the passage of air. Since 2012 NHBC issued technical guidance, which acknowledged that there are some vapour permeable roof underlays that permit both vapour and air to pass through them. Where an underlay can be shown to provide suitable ventilation, i.e., at least the equivalent of a continuous 5 mm high-level slot, NHBC will accept that underlay without the need to provide any further ventilation.

In line with the guidelines issued by the NHBC, independently certified air and vapour permeable underlays can be used without additional ridge ventilation in cold roofs.

Iain Fairnington, explains the benefits of using an air and vapour permeable membrane: “The use of a high quality air and vapour permeable membrane will lead to savings in labour and material costs, due to no VCL required, and its high-performance air permeability means that the roof space has similar air changes to that of a roof using traditional eaves/ridge ventilation.”

Iain Fairnington is the technical director of the A. Proctor Group

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How to manage and maintain lift safety

LIFTEX 2019 show director Oliver Greening explains how to ensure that passenger lifts remain compliant to safety regulations

Several regulations place legal requirements on building owners to ensure that all lifts and escalators are maintained to a safe standard. In addition, if passengers become trapped, building owners have a responsibility to free them and ensure their safety.

These requirements can be a minefield, but it is essential to make sure your equipment is working and that tenants can exit a building safely.

MAINTAIN YOUR EQUIPMENT REGULARLY

By conducting regular maintenance checks you can ensure that your equipment is working efficiently, and save money on costly repairs further down the line.

FIND A MAINTENANCE CONTRACTOR

A good contractor will offer advice and keep you well informed. Many owners and managers choose to also employ consultants. However, most consultants don't carry out maintenance themselves; therefore using a specialist maintenance company will help solve issues, and save money in the long-term.

AGREE A MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

A good agreement ideally spans three to five years, and allows the contractor to set up an effective maintenance programme. The reason being that shorter periods can result in reactive maintenance which is not ideal for the longevity of the lift. A good programme of maintenance will protect the value of the assets and maximise their lifespan – reducing future health and safety problems.

CONDUCT A 'THOROUGH EXAMINATION'

A 'thorough examination' of passenger lifts should be conducted every six months. It's important to note that this is not the same as general maintenance, and is in fact a check of the safety of the equipment. However, reports can be used to indicate the effectiveness of such maintenance.

Lifts used as work equipment must be thoroughly examined – usually every six months for passenger carrying lifts – under The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations (LOLER) by an independent 'competent person'. The reports of a thorough examination should be shared with the maintenance contractor who would be asked to carry out any repairs recommended in the report. As part of the thorough examination, the competent person often asks for supplementary tests to be carried out to check safety. These are typically conducted by the maintenance contractor, who has the specialist knowledge needed to do this.

MAKE SIMPLE IMPROVEMENTS

Personal injury claims can cause a major headache for owners and managers, and many of these relate to basic issues such as from impact of the doors or with the levelling of the lift car. By regularly maintaining the lift, it will minimise the risk and keep levelling consistent. Another simple improvement is fitting full height light curtains to re-open the doors before they hit passengers. Always ask your maintenance company to check the closing force and impact from the doors to make sure they are within the accepted limits.



SURVEY EQUIPMENT AND MAKE SIMPLE CHECKS

Standards are available which provide a recognised format for surveying the safety levels of lift and escalator equipment. These also have prioritisation of areas for improvement. Other standards will help assess lifts for improvements in accessibility or vandal resistance. Ask your maintenance contractor to carry out these surveys.

It is also important to check on the basics: does the lift stop level at each floor? Does the alarm system work? These are simple and straightforward checks to ensure the equipment runs safely.

READ THE BS CODES OF PRACTICE FOR SAFE WORKING

British Standard documents BS 7255 (safe working on lifts), BS 7801 (safe working on escalators and moving walks) and BS 9102 (safe working on lifting platforms) give guidance for owners as well as people working on the equipment.

TRAPPED PASSENGERS

Ideally if any passengers are trapped, the maintenance contractor should attend to release them. In some circumstances, for example in gearless lifts or machine room-less installations, it is recommended that only a lift engineer help free trapped passengers. Untrained individuals could do more damage and cause further accidents.

FIT A CONNECTED ALARM

Since 1999, alarm communication systems have been connected to all new lifts to allow passengers to call for help. It is essential to make sure the connection to the rescue service is maintained. If the alarm is out of order from disconnection, then you should consider removing the lift from service, or providing a temporary alarm or communication system.

MAKE FIRE ESCAPE PROVISIONS

Under fire safety regulations the 'responsible person' for the building must carry out a fire risk assessment, make an emergency plan, and undertake other fire safety duties related to these. The responsible person must provide and maintain sufficient fire precautions so that people can live or work in safety, and escape safely in the event of a fire. Evacuation lifts, which are protected from fire by the building design, have special features to allow them to be used for the evacuation of people unable to use stairs. They have been included in British Standards for many years.

Oliver Greening is show director for LIFTEX 2019

On the up – lift management at its best

Your lift service provider is your key to safe and secure accessibility and, in turn, happy residents.

With an estimated 50,000 operational lifts in UK housing, we can all recognise that their performance and reliability are absolutely central to well-managed housing.

It is also known that at least 25,000 of those operational lifts were installed more than 25 years ago – essentially prior to the lift regulations that are in place today. That's where our lift expertise can help.

REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND LIFT EQUIPMENT INSPECTION

It is every building owner/manager's responsibility to ensure the lift equipment they provide for residents is safe and reliable. A reputable and expert lift service provider will inspect equipment regularly, service all moving parts and advise when additional work may be necessary to repair worn parts or bring equipment within current guidelines.

NEW LIFTS OR REFURBISHED?

If you manage a housing development with ageing or troublesome lifts there are several pathways to improved and reliable accessibility for building occupiers.

NEW LIFTS

You may need to consider installing new lifts, firefighting lifts, evacuation lifts, vandal-resistant lifts - removing old equipment from an existing shaft or space in order to install new.

ALL NEW PASSENGER LIFTS are equipped to conform to British Standard EN81-73: Behaviour of lifts in the event of fire. This ensures the lift is connected to the fire alarm system and, in the event of a fire, will travel to the ground floor and remain there with its doors open so firefighters



can immediately see no one is trapped in the lift. The lift is then no longer operated within the building until the fire has been resolved.

FIREFIGHTING LIFTS are especially designed to offer additional protection to users. Built to British Standard EN81-72, fire-fighting lifts are specifically designed to be used under direct control of the fire and rescue service to assist in containing or quelling a fire. In some cases this lift might also be a designated evacuation lift installed and fortified to satisfy British Standard EN81-76.

VANDAL-RESISTANT LIFTS feature toughened car finishes and durable materials and accessories to resist damage by fire and water, in line with British Standard EN81-71.

It is worth noting that the cost of a new lift can be equivalent to a large scale modernisation. A site survey will assess the potential lift configuration and features that can be accommodated in the existing shaft and advise accordingly.

REFURBISHED LIFTS IN EXISTING SHAFTS

Our lift engineers can also refurbish or modernise your lift equipment to ensure safety for all,

improved performance, running cost savings and modern aesthetics inside the lift car and on all landings. Improving some or all parts of your existing lift equipment will extend the life of your lifts and building and can significantly reduce running costs. Modernising your lifts can also reduce maintenance costs, particularly if troublesome equipment has meant frequent call-outs and unhappy users. Many of our projects are modernising equipment whilst maintaining the heritage feel of a lift.

MINIMISING DOWNTIME OF YOUR LIFT EQUIPMENT

Many lift owners/managers are focused on eliminating downtime of essential lift equipment. To guarantee the safety of building users at all times lifts do need essential maintenance downtime. There should, ideally, be two lifts available in a building so that one can always be operational.

When our engineers carry out major lift repairs, refurbishment, removals and replacements your residents are our first priority. We liaise with all who have an interest in the building, often joining resident associations, providing temporary alternative lift equipment and scheduling our work to make life flow as well as possible.

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Top category protection with Aico

Watford Community Housing has completed the installation of Grade D, LD1 fire detection systems in two 16 storey tower blocks using Aico Multi-Sensor Fire Alarms and accessories, wirelessly interconnected with Aico's award winning RadioLINK+ RF technology. Aico's Multi-Sensor Fire Alarm uses two sensor types, optical and heat, to constantly monitor smoke and heat levels which are processed through intelligent detection software to provide the best response to all fire types, as well as reducing potential false alarms; the latter is enhanced through a dust compensation feature. David Wright, Surveying Manager at Watford Community Housing comments: "Aico are great!"



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Upgrade sheltered housing with Aico

The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) has completed the first phase of an upgrade of the Fire Alarm systems in one of its retirement communities using Aico's range of advanced alarms and accessories. Built to national standard 'Lifetime Homes', Hartrigg Oaks empowers people to remain independent by enabling aids and adaptations to be easily fitted. Aico's RadioLINK+ based Fire Alarm systems fit well with this philosophy, being simple and cost-effective to adapt to meet the differing needs of residents. Aico's Multi-Sensor Fire Alarm is particularly beneficial in this setting due to its fast response time, which provides residents with more time to evacuate.



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Warden call systems for maximum safety

South Cambridgeshire District Council is upgrading its 1400 sheltered housing properties with new warden call systems connected to Aico mains powered Multi-Sensor, Heat and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms. South Cambridgeshire District Council is pleased with the outcome of this latest project, as Eddie comments: "The service provided by Aico is impeccable. The stock provision and minimal failure rate has ensured that this project is running smoothly and to time. We have also integrated an online monitoring trial into the project and the ongoing support from Aico has been really useful and has made the system work for us."



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Managing & maintaining water safety: top tips for landlords

Julie Spinks, director of WaterSafe, advises landlords how to manage and maintain water safety to the best standard



Dealing with plumbing problems can be time-consuming and costly. However, many call-outs can be prevented if landlords are familiar with the key regulations regarding water safety management and follow best practice.

KEEP ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LAW

Water safety legislation exists to protect public health and promote the efficient use of water. The key regulations that landlords need to familiarise themselves with include the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 and Scottish Water Byelaws, alongside the recommendations of water suppliers in the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme's (WRAS) *Water Regulations Guide* and any conditions of consent from the local water provider.

USE AN APPROVED PLUMBER

For peace of mind, it's recommended that landlords use a qualified approved plumber.

WaterSafe, the national register for plumbers, provides a dedicated online search facility bringing together thousands of qualified contractors employed by plumbing businesses. Members are fully trained in the water supply regulations and byelaws, carry agreed levels of public liability insurance, and operate a customer complaints scheme.

They can also offer advice on water efficiency and repairing leaks, which can help save money if there is a water meter, and check for misconnections, where toilets or appliances like washing machines are wrongly connected to rainwater drains – causing pollution to the local environment.

GIVE ADVANCED NOTIFICATION OF PLUMBING WORK

Plumbing work may require permission from the local water supplier before work can start. Notifications are required by law and cover a wide range of plumbing work, from installing a bathroom in an extension or new home, to fitting a large bath.

To gain permission, the water supplier will need the landlord's name, address, and contact details, a description of the proposed work and location, and details of the plumbing contractor if an approved plumber is being used. Some water suppliers may ask for additional information such as a list of water fittings and evidence of their compliance with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations.

Notifying the local water supplier is free and the process is quick, but failure to do so could result in prosecution or the need to carry out additional work later.

Approved plumbers can carry out some work without the need to give advanced notification. They can also advise on approved products and provide

customers with legally recognised certificates, confirming the plumbing work carried out is compliant with the regulations.

USE APPROVED PRODUCTS AND ENSURE PLUMBING SYSTEMS COMPLY

Landlords have a legal duty to ensure their property's plumbing system is installed and maintained to comply with national requirements.

Plumbing materials and fittings must be of a suitable standard. Under the regulations, it is not illegal to sell unsuitable fittings and appliances but to install one would be, so check suitability before purchase.

BE WINTER READY

Plumbing must be properly maintained to protect against damage or freezing. When temperatures drop below zero degrees, frozen and burst water pipes can cause flooding, damage and leave homes without water.

Here is a handy checklist for winter-ready properties:

- Know where the stop tap is and check it's working
- Make sure all pipes in unheated areas and outside taps are insulated
- Fix any dripping taps or toilet cisterns – this will also save water
- Check central heating boilers have been serviced by a Gas Safe engineer
- Advise tenants to leave heating on and set the thermostat to 14°C
- Give tenants the name and number of an approved plumber to hand for emergencies

KEEP DRINKING WATER SAFE

Once water enters a private property, it's the landlord's responsibility to ensure it remains fresh, healthy, of the highest quality and safe to use.

Having ensured that approved products are used, and plumbing systems comply, landlords should follow these top tips to maintain healthy drinking water in their properties:

- Check for lead pipes, and never use lead solder on plumbing for tap water – lead pipes should be replaced to avoid high levels in the water, which can particularly affect children
- Ensure taps are regularly cleaned to avoid the growth of bacteria and other microorganisms
- If drinking water has an antiseptic taste, it may be due to rubber or plastic materials used in the home, such as tap washers, washing machine and dishwasher hoses. Connections for these appliances should be made with approved products or include a single check valve. This will prevent water returning to drinking water taps or the mains supply
- Ensure that the plumbing system is designed to prevent stagnation. An earthy or musty taste may be due to poor plumbing which allows water to remain in the pipes or tanks for longer than necessary
- If the property has a cold water storage cistern (tank), make sure it is in good condition and has a close-fitting lid of a suitable material that will not deteriorate or allow microorganisms to grow on it and drip into the water. The lid prevents debris falling in and polluting the water supply
- Where required, make sure you give notification of plumbing work

HELP NEW TENANTS HELP THEMSELVES

WaterSafe runs a *Moving House* campaign providing five top plumbing tips for people moving into a new property. It's available as an A5 postcard and electronic flyer, which landlords can share with tenants.

Julie Spinks is the director of WaterSafe

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