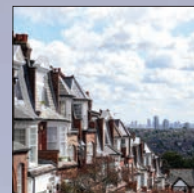


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

11.18



PM's tonic for
social housing

UC hit by
further delays

Combustible
materials
cladding ban

Homeless
deaths scandal

Calls for RTB
changes



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HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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Editor's comment

Was the budget a missed opportunity?



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

With the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond repeatedly saying that the age of austerity is coming to an end, many of us were expecting further positive changes to Government policies to build upon the recent spate of good news for social housing. Perhaps the biggest litmus test was whether the Chancellor was going to sort out the benefit payments mess (known as Universal Credit) which is affecting huge numbers of people across the country, as well as their landlords in both the private and social rented sectors. The new benefits system has been beset with difficulties since its introduction, but its importance is demonstrated by the forecast that 8.5 million people will be in receipt of Universal Credit by 2023. That's about 12 per cent of the entire population. In what was hailed as a generous concession, the Chancellor announced an extra £1 billion will be paid over five years to help existing claimants who are moving on to UC in the near future. A sort of transitional relief to cushion them from other planned benefit cuts. He also announced a £1,000 increase in the amount people on UC can earn before losing any benefits, at a cost to the Treasury of £1.7 billion a year. Hammond claimed the changes – which are reversing much (but not all) of the benefit cuts made in previous Budgets – would make 2.4 million working people and people with disabilities £630 a year better off. These are welcome, but they are not as generous as some of the other tax allowance changes he announced. Lifting the higher rate of tax up to £50,000 means the gap between rich and poor will grow wider. (This looked suspiciously like a pre-election tax giveaway!)

FURTHER SLIPPAGE

He also said that UC is here to stay – something that will have disappointed a great many people, although the timetable for its full roll-out appears to have slipped once again – this time by a further six months to December 2023. Nothing was said about the increased use of food banks in areas where UC has already been rolled out and it remains to be seen if the extra cash will be enough to see off further backbench rebellions in the Commons. Intriguingly some research bodies like the Resolution Foundation have already pointed out that other planned cuts to benefits (announced in the 2015 Budget) are still due to take effect from next year, so what the Chancellor gave with one hand at the end of October he will probably be taking away from people on low incomes come next April! MPs from all parties want the proportion of claimants who are paid in full and on time to be significantly improved. They are also want the roll-out of UC paused so a full review of the system can be carried out and changes made, ensuring the Government's flagship welfare policy becomes 'fit for purpose.' Elsewhere, the Budget contained a plethora of announcements many of them designed to give a further stimulus to the housing market. The abolition of Stamp Duty for all first-time buyers of shared ownership properties valued up to £500,000 was unexpected, as was his decision to back date it to the previous Budget. He also extended the Help to Buy scheme by a further two years to 2023, but this will only benefit first time buyers and housebuilders like Persimmon. Potentially the most significant step was making £500 million available for the Housing Infrastructure Fund, which the Chancellor says will enable a further 650,000 homes to be built. There was good news in the shape of new partnerships with nine housing associations to deliver 13,000 new homes and guarantees of up to £1 billion for smaller house-builders.

BAD NEWS

Sadly some of the gloss was removed by analysis from the Office for Budget Responsibility who estimated that the number of homes built as a result of the HRA borrowing cap being scrapped, will only amount to 9,000 new homes by 2023/24. Although they think councils will build an extra 20,000 homes over the next five years, they estimate that housebuilders and HAs will build fewer homes over the same period. Also on the down side, the Chancellor announced that lettings relief is to be limited to properties where the owner is in shared occupancy with the tenant. This will have a negative effect on the buy-to-let market and could prompt more private landlords to abandon the rental sector altogether. Where their tenants will go is anybody's guess. It was regrettable that no new money was found to pay for the retro-fitting of water sprinkler systems in all residential tower blocks. This single move would greatly improve the safety of residents of high-rise blocks and complement the programme of removing flammable cladding. Council leaders were understandably disappointed that the Chancellor did not announce a temporary suspension of the Right to Buy, nor did he provide any new funds to tackle homelessness or the rising number of empty homes. Overall there were some welcome changes in housing and welfare policies but we still need a clear and coherent strategy for housing overall and one that can withstand Brexit and a possible change of Prime Minister and Chancellor. Above all we need the Government to demonstrate a proper understanding of why the housing market is broken and the commitment to fix it.

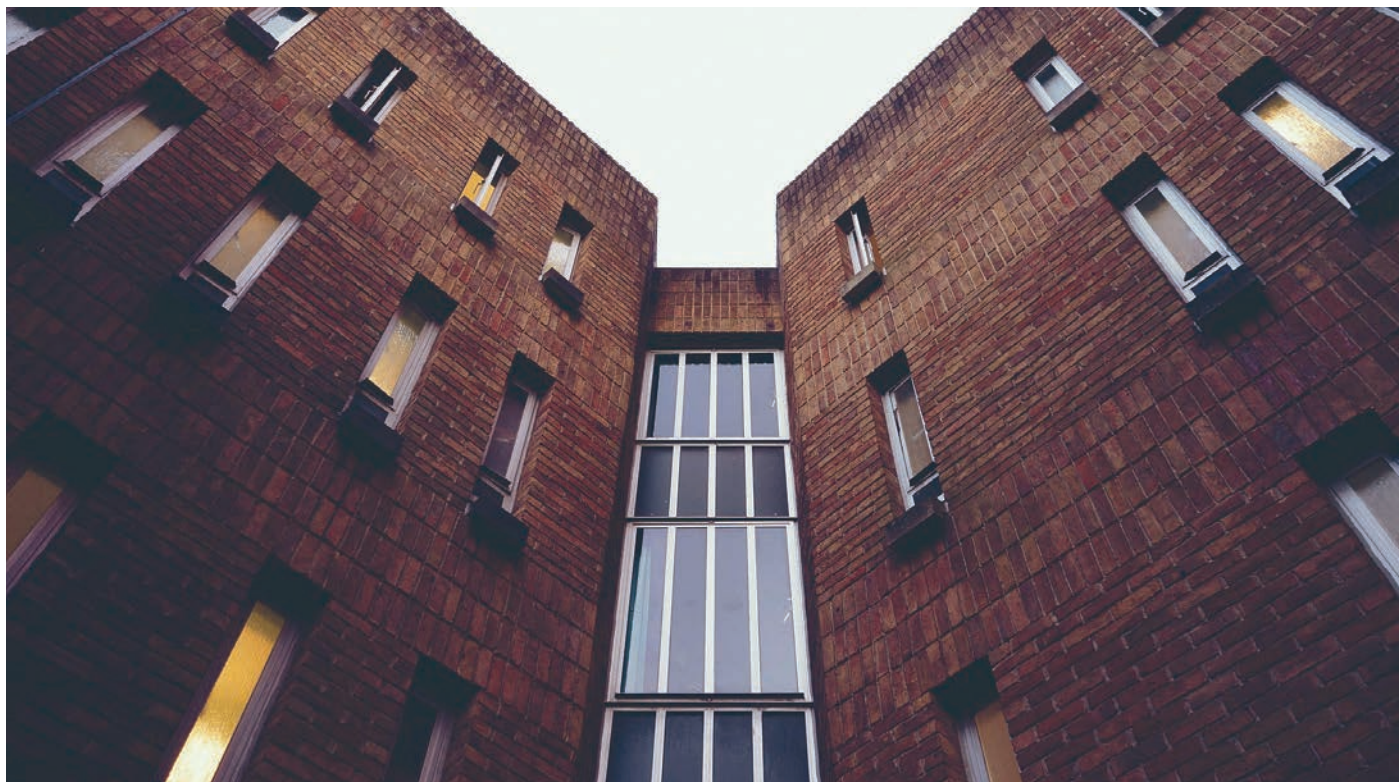
Patrick Mooney

On the cover...

The Courtyard, University of Hull

Combining a robust design and excellent acoustic properties, aluminium windows from Senior Architectural Systems have been specified for several new projects in the student accommodation sector





Prime Ministerial boost for social housing

Social housing has been given its biggest boost in decades as Theresa May makes solving the housing crisis her Government's top domestic policy priority with a series of eye-catching announcements.

The icing on the cake was the decision to scrap the borrowing cap which has severely restricted the amount of money local authorities have been able to spend on building new council homes. It is giving Town Halls exactly what they have been asking for in recent years, but it also loads the pressure on them now to deliver.

There can be no excuses, unless the Treasury heaps on lots of difficult to meet conditions. The early indications are that this is not the case. Local authorities are simply being asked to meet the 'normal' rules for prudential borrowing.

With just over 3,000 council homes built last year and the Government falling well short of meeting its ambitious target of 300,000 new homes a year, Mrs May decided to lift the shackles off local authorities. Initial estimates show that at least 10,000 new council homes a year will be built now, but there are hopes that figure could rise significantly.

Already some 60 council leaders have pledged an immediate drive to build thousands more council homes signing an open letter vowing to use their new powers to borrow more money to build a new generation of properties. It has led to hopes of the biggest council house-building programme since

the 1970s, when 100,000 new council homes a year were being built.

CHALLENGE

"Solving the housing crisis is the biggest domestic policy challenge of our generation," Mrs May told delegates at the Conservative Party conference. "It doesn't make sense to stop councils from playing their part in solving it."

This announcement followed hot on the heels of her speech to the National Housing Federation, when she highlighted the central role she expected housing associations to play in building new homes and challenging the attitudes that hold us back.

The Prime Minister announced an extra £2 billion in new funding to give HAs the long-term certainty they need to deliver tens of thousands of new affordable and social homes.

As the first Prime Minister to address the NHF, Mrs May pledged to work in partnership with associations to get more people on the housing ladder and make sure those who cannot afford their own place also have somewhere they are proud to call home.

We have also heard of the first allocations of £248m to pay for the removal of combustible cladding from social housing tower blocks. While it has taken more than 15 months since the tragedy of the Grenfell Tower, at least the tenants of councils and HAs living in high-rise blocks should soon be able to feel safer in their homes.

These welcome moves come after decisions to ditch unpopular housing policies brought in by David Cameron and George Osborne, including forcing councils to sell off their most valuable homes and ending lifetime tenancies.

RTB CHANGES

If the PM and her Housing Secretary James Brokenshire really want to endear themselves to the Local Government sector then they will go for a hat-trick and amend the Right to Buy rules – either by suspending the sale of council houses and flats entirely for a period, or increasing the amount of each sale receipt that can be spent on building a replacement home.

In recent years it has been easier for councils to invest in the building of commercial space and shopping centres, than it has for them to pay for building council homes. This has helped produce a situation where councils spent almost £1bn last year on temporary accommodation for homeless families.

Then if the Prime Minister could find a way to make Universal Credit more palatable to claimants and their landlords, then local authority leaders really do believe we would be entering a new 'golden era' for council housing.

However, Labour's shadow housing spokesman John Healey MP struck a more cautionary tone when he pointed out that the extra £2bn for HAs would not be available until 2021/22 and that it has taken the Conservatives six years to scrap the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap on councils.

He has called for more urgent help to solve the plight of homeless families, with over 120,000 children going to bed each night in temporary accommodation or on the streets.

Landlord tax relief proposals revealed in Onward report

Landlords could be offered capital gains tax relief to encourage longer tenancies and sales to tenants in private rented housing.

Conservative Think Tank, 'Onward' has revealed proposals for the tax relief to encourage landlords to sell to sitting tenants and to offer longer leases.

It says the Government should introduce a 50 per cent capital gains tax (CGT) exemption, or 'Landlord Sales Relief', on existing rental properties that are sold to tenants who have lived in a property for three or more years continuously.

The report argues this would encourage landlords to offer long-term tenancies and sell to sitting tenants. The proposals have been cautiously welcomed by the Residential Landlords Association.

David Smith, Policy Director for the RLA said: "We welcome Onward's acceptance of the need for more positive taxation in the rented sector which the RLA has long argued for. Last year, we suggested using CGT reliefs in a similar way to that being proposed.


"Since then, a report by academics at Cambridge University for the RLA has argued that it is not clear whether a reduction in the rates at which CGT is applied would incentivise landlords to sell their properties to sitting tenants.

"A more suitable approach would be a tax relief on rental income for the provision of longer tenancies with a refund on the stamp duty levy for additional properties where a landlord is prepared to sell a property to a sitting tenant."

He added: "Where Onward is wrong is in its call for landlords to disinvest from the sector.

"With the demand for private rented homes showing no signs of abating, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies warning of the difficulties many young people have affording a home of their own, to choke off the supply of rental homes would leave many young people stranded and continuing to rely on the home of mum and dad for a place to live.

"The Chancellor should use his budget to scrap the stamp duty levy on additional properties where landlords are prepared to invest in property adding to the net supply of homes. This could include bringing empty homes back into use, new build properties or converting larger properties into



The report estimates some 1.9 million households would be eligible for these new reliefs, with around 88,000 households benefiting each year, based on current rates of churn and expected take-up

smaller, more affordable units. To tax new housing supply given the current housing crisis we face is simply ludicrous."

In addition to the 50 per cent capital gains tax exemption the report proposes HMRC should offer any tenant buying a property in which they have lived continuously for three or more years a 'Long-Term Tenants Credit' equivalent to the remaining 50 per cent of capital gains tax relief on that property. The report suggests this would operate as a contribution towards the deposit they require to secure a mortgage on the property.

"To further encourage longer tenancies and landlord divestment, the Government could consider extending the relief to any landlords selling to long-term tenants of any property, not merely

those currently resident in the landlords property. This would extend the scope of the policy"

Onward suggests that under its proposals:

- In England, an average landlord selling under the scheme could expect to benefit from Landlord Sales Relief worth an estimated £7,500, rising to £19,500 in London.
- The average tenant would benefit by up to £7,500 towards their deposit for a mortgage, providing significant help towards their first home. This rises to £19,500 in London.

The report estimates some 1.9 million households would be eligible for these new reliefs, with around 88,000 households benefiting each year, based on current rates of churn and expected take-up.

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

Futurebuild
5-7 March, London
www.futurebuild.co.uk



Budget fails to please housing chiefs

The Autumn Budget has united the leaders of organisations across the public and private sectors, who voiced their disappointment at the Chancellor's failure to tackle problems in rented housing.

David Smith, Policy Director for the Residential Landlords Association, said: "The Budget fails the country's private tenants. While the Chancellor again outlined the Government's desire to boost homeownership, he failed to address the needs of the millions of people who cannot or do not want to rent."

"With the demand for private rented housing rising while supply is shrinking, we needed pro-growth taxation measures to ensure that tenants have an adequate supply of housing to choose from."

"Despite being given innovative suggestions to protect tenants in their homes, encourage sale to tenants, and improve energy efficiency, we got a damp squib with little more than promises of further consultations. Eventually the Government will need to stop consulting on the housing crisis and take action."

His frustration was echoed by leaders of the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation, who welcomed the new money for Universal Credit but warned that greater care was needed in implementing changes and in the roll-out of the new system.

Kate Henderson, chief executive of the NHF, said: "The Chancellor's announcements on housing are not the wholesale changes needed to fix our broken housing market. We desperately need tens of thousands more social homes to be built every year, which is why we are disappointed the Government

has missed a real opportunity to overhaul how land is sold."

"The current set up means last year landowners pocketed more than the global profits of Amazon, McDonald's and Coca-Cola combined, raising the cost of land and making it almost impossible for organisations who want to buy land for social housing to afford it."

Ms Henderson warned the new cash for UC must be used urgently and the Government must ensure claimants "receive the money they desperately need, when they need it, before even more people are moved on to the system".

Terrie Alafat, Chief Executive of the CIH tried to see some positives in the extra money found for Universal Credit, but was critical of the ongoing freeze in the local housing allowance.

NOT ENOUGH HELP

"There are some welcome elements in the budget announcements including £1.7bn to increase work allowances under Universal Credit and £1bn over five years in additional protection for existing claimants moving on to Universal Credit from other benefits. It is vital to get this right to make sure that people don't live in fear of homelessness because they can't afford to meet their housing costs."

"However, it was disappointing not to see any movement on the length of time people have to wait before receiving a Universal Credit payment which we know is causing great hardship to many people or any willingness to remove the local housing allowance freeze which we know is making it very hard for people to find or keep an affordable place to call home."

A more critical tone was struck by her colleague Melanie Rees, the CIH's head of policy, who said "I have to admit it – I'm disappointed with what the Autumn Budget offered for housing and welfare."

"Despite the Prime Minister stating that, after Brexit, housing is her number one priority, you wouldn't have picked that up from the Chancellor's statement." She said her thoughts were on the recent revelation that at least 440 people have died while sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation since October 2017.

She said the three things she had hoped to see were:

- A rebalancing of the £53bn housing budget, which is currently skewed towards private housing initiatives with affordable housing receiving just a 21 per cent share of the cake;
- Restoring the link between the consumer price index and Local Housing Allowance rates, recognising that the existing freeze is seriously affecting people's ability to find and keep a decent place to call home, as our recent research showed; and
- Reversing the cuts to Universal Credit work allowances so that people can keep more of their earnings as their income increases – an important principle of this benefit when it was originally designed.

"The housing measures took up just two of the full Budget statement's 106 pages. Some will make a difference. But overall the Autumn Budget lacked the ambitious vision we need to make sure that we have the right homes, in the right places, at prices that everyone can afford."

Government investigates full regulation of the housing sector



Housing Minister Heather Wheeler has announced that a new working group is to be set up and tasked with raising standards across the whole of the housing sector.

The working group will be headed up by Lord Best, supported by professional bodies including ARLA Propertymark and consumer groups such as Citizens Advice. They will look at ways to improve standards for homebuyers, sellers, tenants, landlords and leaseholders. It is expected to report back next Spring.

At present anyone can operate as a property agent, although lettings professionals can set themselves apart by joining a membership organisation. In doing so, they agree to abide by a Code of Practice and provide greater protection for tenants and landlords, including Client Money Protection and belonging to a redress scheme.

The Regulating Property Agents Working Group is to consider the case for a fully regulated industry, including mandatory qualifications for all property agents and will work towards a new framework which will be consistent across letting agents, managing agents and estate agents.

Full regulation would make it easier for the public to understand the level of professionalism

Full regulation would make it easier for the public to understand the level of professionalism and protection offered by those working in the housing sector. This should increase confidence among consumers and give a boost to the industry's reputation

and protection offered by those working in the housing sector. This should increase confidence among consumers and give a boost to the industry's reputation, making it similar to the legal or accounting professions.

ARLA Propertymark and NAEA Propertymark have been lobbying the Government for a fully regulated industry and were influential in persuading the Government to take action. The working group will look at the following issues:

- a model for an independent property-agent regulator, including how it will operate and how it will enforce compliance;
- a single, mandatory and legally-enforceable Code of Practice for letting and managing agents, and whether similar could be provided for estate agents;
- a system of minimum entry requirements and

continuing professional development for letting, managing and estate agents;

- a standardised approach for presenting transparent service charges to leaseholders and freeholders;
 - an easier statutory-backed process for consumers to challenge unfair service charges;
 - whether other fees and charges which affect both leaseholders and freeholders are justified; should be capped or banned; and
 - further measures to professionalise estate agency.
- Mark Hayward, Chief Executive of NAEA Propertymark said: "We have been working closely with Government since the announcement of the Regulating Property Agents Working Group. We are pleased this has been now set up and look forward to progressing this in the interests of all parties."

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Government warns private block owners over cladding costs

Housing Secretary James Brokenshire has written to private building owners threatening them with financial penalties if they fail to remove dangerous combustible cladding from tower blocks.

Around 60 building owners and developers have received letters telling them that “enforcement action” will be taken if they do not strip unsafe material from their blocks.

The firms include Lendlease, Pemberstone, Paddington Development Corporation and GLA Land & Property – a subsidiary of the Greater London Authority. Meanwhile developers such as Barratt, Mace Group, Legal & General and Taylor Wimpey have already agreed to meet the costs of cladding removal works.

Building owners that do not take urgent steps to remediate buildings clad in flammable ACM could be restricted from accessing government schemes, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) said.

Mr Brokenshire said: “There is a moral imperative for private sector landlords to do the right thing and remove unsafe cladding quickly, and not leave leaseholders to cover the cost.

“A number of leading developers have stepped up to the mark and agreed to pay for work, and we urge others to follow their lead. If they don’t, we have not ruled anything out.

At the last count, 291 private sector residential high rises had been identified as being clad in ACM, which is unlikely to meet building regulations. MHCLG has not been informed of action plans for 121 of these buildings.

The Government has promised to “fully fund” the removal and replacement of dangerous ACM cladding in the social housing sector, at an estimated cost of £400m.



Right to buy is costing councils £300 million a year

Total right to buy discounts have climbed to £1 billion a year – leading to a net loss of some £300 million to local authorities, according to new analysis from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Cutting the discounts available could lead to an extra 12,000 homes being built a year, the CIH has calculated. But the organisation says the right to buy should be suspended altogether to stem the loss of social rented homes.

The extent of the cost to the public sector is revealed in the UK Housing Review 2018 Autumn briefing paper. RTB discounts were increased to £80,000 (£108,000 in London) by former PM David Cameron in April 2012.

Since then 69,467 homes have been sold while only 18,958 have been started or acquired. This trend is continuing with figures for the first quarter of the year showing 2,452 homes were sold by councils in England, while just 837 homes were started or acquired to replace them.

CIH chief executive Terrie Alafat CBE said: “Not only are we failing to build enough new homes for social rent, we are losing them at a time when we need them more than ever. Our research shows that we lost more than 150,000 social rented homes between 2012 and 2017

due to right to buy and other factors, and that figure will reach 230,000 by 2020 unless we take action now.

“This research reveals just how much right to buy is costing the public sector every year. Suspending the scheme means the Government could invest the savings in more homes for social rent – which is often the only truly affordable option for people on lower incomes – and also in fairer and more cost-effective ways to help tenants access home ownership.”

Ms Alafat continued: “We support the principle of helping tenants move into home ownership but it cannot be at the expense of other people in need. About two-thirds of the discount that a tenant who buys their home now receives is justified because they are sitting tenants paying sub-market rent. But one-third is an excessive discount, which if clawed back, would lead to more money coming to councils to build new homes.

“We know the Government is consulting on ways to make it easier for councils to replace the homes they sell under right to buy, which is welcome – but we still believe ministers should suspend the scheme to stem the loss of social rented homes and look at more effective ways to help people access home ownership.”

Almost all Welsh social homes now meet Housing Quality Standard

More than nine in 10 social homes in Wales meet the Welsh Government's Housing Quality Standard, with full compliance expected within two years.

Official figures show that at the end of March 2018, 91 per cent of homes owned by housing associations and councils in the country complied with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), up from 86 per cent last year.

Housing associations achieved 99 per cent compliance, while councils reached 77 per cent. The Welsh Government has a target to reach 100 per cent WHQS compliance by 2020, with £108m available to social landlords each year for improving their stock.

The WHQS measures homes on 42 factors covering state of repair, fuel efficiency, and kitchen and bathroom facilities among other categories.

Rebecca Evans, Welsh housing and regeneration

minister, said: "I am clear that there is more to do, but these figures show our investment is paying off. Good-quality housing is a Welsh Government priority because it is crucial to our health and well-being.

"Public Health Wales' work tells us that poor housing costs the NHS £67m a year, so this investment is an investment in people's health, an investment to tackle fuel poverty and an investment to improve people's lives."

East Anglian HA given governance downgrade

A 4,000-home housing association has been warned by the social housing regulator that it needs to strengthen its risk management and internal controls after its governance rating was downgraded.

Orwell HA manages properties across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge and Essex. It was hit with the downgrade following an in-depth assessment by the

regulator, who said the association's board needed to be strengthened.

The regulator said: "To support continued effective delivery, the board needs to strengthen its capacity to review and challenge its own governance arrangements. It needs to ensure that it reviews its governance performance in a rigorous and evidence-based way."

It noted that Orwell has "reviewed its internal audit framework and is making changes in response to the findings and recommendations".

In a separate judgement, the regulator upgraded its rating for the 7,000-home housing association Castles and Coasts - formed last year from the merger of Two Castles and Derwent & Solway, in the north west.

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Bellway to replace cladding on two developments

One of the country's biggest housebuilders has agreed to meet the full costs of replacing combustible cladding on tower blocks in Cardiff and London, ending months of uncertainty for hundreds of householders.

Bellway has set aside £5.9m to replace the Grenfell-style cladding used on two of its apartment developments at Prospect Place in Cardiff and New Festival Quarter in east London.

The move follows threats from the housing secretary, James Brokenshire, that builders could face enforcement action if they do not “do the right thing” and remove unsafe cladding quickly. At the Government’s last count, only 40 of 457 high-rise buildings with combustible cladding have been fully repaired.

Brokenshire welcomed Bellway’s decision. He said: “Building owners and developers have a moral imperative to keep people safe by removing unsafe cladding and protecting leaseholders from the cost of this work.”

Bellway said that as well as setting aside almost £6m for the work to proceed, it has strengthened its processes and training relating to fire safety issues and will continue to develop these in the year ahead. Its results statement showed the firm made a gross annual profit of £753.4m, up 14 per cent.

Bellway’s decision means they have joined other developers like Barratt Homes, Legal and General, Galliard Homes, Mace Group and Taylor Wimpey in agreeing to cover removal and replacement costs.



Almost 50 student blocks still covered in Grenfell-style cladding

Thousands of university students have started the Autumn term staying in accommodation which is covered in combustible cladding according to official figures.

Forty-seven residential blocks reserved for students remain clad in aluminium composite material similar to that which helped spread the fire at Grenfell Tower. Hundreds of students live in each tower block.

Only 15 of the 62 student towers rising over 18 metres and using material that officials said breached building regulations have so far been completely fixed, according to the data. Work has started on another nine but remediation plans remained unclear for 21 of the towers, officials said.

The National Union of Students has said the buildings should not be used until they have been repaired and called for a full list of the affected premises to be published.

But the Government has refused to identify which tower blocks are covered in the cladding. It said revealing the information could endanger the

mental and physical health of people living in the buildings and could compromise their safety.

“It’s absolutely appalling,” said Eva Crossan Jory, the NUS vice-president for welfare. “It’s incredibly concerning to see private providers gambling with students’ lives.”

The Office for Students called for urgent checks of the halls of residence. “We would hope that the local fire authority and the Health and Safety Executive checks these blocks urgently to reassure students of their safety,” said the higher education regulator’s chief executive, Nicola Dandridge.

The Government has also revealed for the first time that 28 high-rise hotels were among 291 private sector buildings that would have to remove the cladding, but again it would not say where they were. None of the affected hotels has had the cladding removed or have even started remediation works, according to the figures. Plans are in place for remediation of 14 of the 28.

More PRS landlords are seeing their tenants in arrears

Almost two-thirds of private landlords with tenants receiving Universal Credit have experienced them falling into rent arrears.

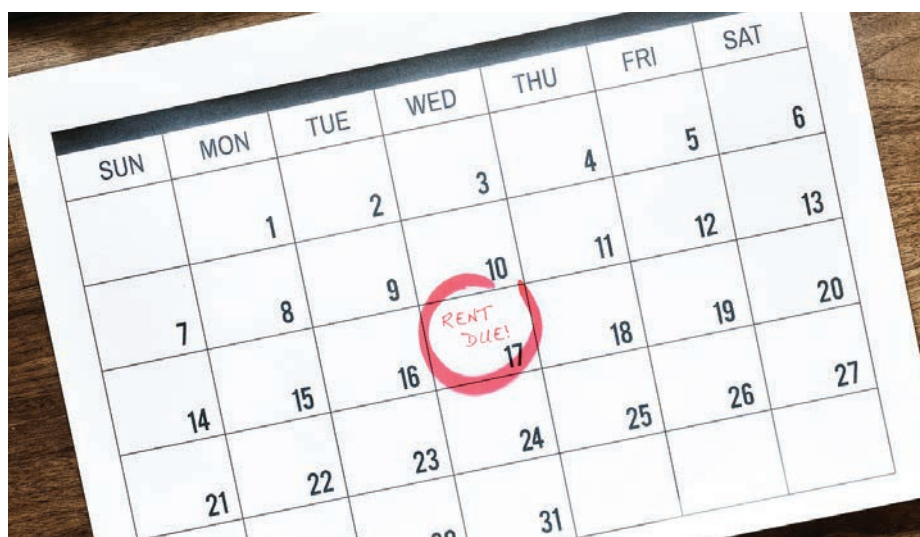
Based on responses from more than 2,200 landlords, the Residential Landlords Association found that 61 per cent of landlords with tenants on UC have seen them in rent arrears. This is up from 27 per cent in 2016.

The research found that on average tenants claiming UC and in rent arrears owed almost £2,400, a 49 per cent increase compared to last year.

Over half (53 per cent) of landlords with tenants on UC had applied for direct payment to be made to them instead of to the tenant, known as an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA).

Where successful it took, on average, over two months for this to be organised, on top of the two months arrears already accrued. This has caused arrears to build up substantially. Those landlords that have to wait for two months arrears before they can apply for direct payment are reporting that on average the APA process takes 9.3 weeks.

When added to the initial two months arrears accrued, this means that landlords are on average owed four months' rent before they are successfully awarded direct payment.



The RLA is calling for the APA process to be improved as a matter of urgency, particularly before managed migration begins next year and more families and complex cases are moved onto Universal Credit.

One fifth of landlords also reported that their mortgage lender prevented them from renting homes to tenants in receipt of benefits. The RLA is calling for tenants to be able to choose, where it is best for them, to have the housing element of Universal Credit paid directly to the landlord.

It is also calling for private landlords to be given more information about a tenant's claim, such as when they receive payments, where this is in the

best interest of the tenant to sustain the tenancy so that suitable rent payment schedules can be arranged. At present, this is provided to social sector landlords, but not to those in the private sector.

Formal mechanisms should also be put in place to enable landlords to reclaim rent arrears where UC tenants leave a property owing rent.

RLA Policy Director, David Smith, commented: "Our research shows clearly that further changes are urgently needed to Universal Credit and more work is needed to give landlords the confidence they need to rent to those on Universal Credit."

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Lords welcome launch of new Property Guardian trade group

Seven of the UK's leading property guardian firms have come together to form the sector's first trade association to lead on safety and standards, to represent and promote the industry, and to foster best practice.

The Property Guardian Providers Association (PGPA) has been warmly welcomed by all parties in a debate on property guardians in the House of Lords. The new association was formally launched at the Empty Homes Conference in Birmingham in mid October

The PGPA was founded jointly by Ad Hoc Property Management, Guardians of London, Live-in Guardians, Lowe Guardians, VPS, Dex Property Management and Camelot. It has been created to provide the industry with effective representation, to formulate policy, and to ensure that its members are at the forefront of meeting or exceeding legal and safety standards.

The seven founding members provide over 80 per cent of the guardian accommodation in the UK.

"The industry has grown to a size where it now needs a structured framework in terms of best practice and progression to not just raise standards, but to also ensure that guardians are getting the best out of their experience," said Simon Finneran, Managing Director of Ad Hoc Property Management, one of the drivers behind the new body.

After an industry-wide census of its members was conducted, the association found that many people cannot afford to live in the city where they



work, and yet property guardianship provides a cost-effective way to do so. It was also found that no less than 60 per cent of guardians remain in the same accommodation for a year or more, breaking down the myth that guardians are constantly on the move.

Mr Finneran added: "Property guardianship is becoming a more popular way of living as it allows

for people to save money to get on the property ladder themselves. One in four guardians are in their 30s and one in three are key workers, all of whom are benefitting greatly from living closer to work."

For more information about the Property Guardian Providers Association, please contact info@propertyguardianproviders.com

Enfield's MOT for social housing properties

A new scheme to improve the standard of social housing, reduce repair costs and provide a better service for residents is being launched by Enfield Council in north London.

Dedicated 'Property MOT' teams will visit social housing properties in the borough each year to check their condition and put right any faults that are found. The scheme will also help identify vulnerable residents who need extra assistance from social services and enable the council to more accurately assess the condition of its stock as the repairs schedule rolls onwards.

Enfield Council's Leader, Councillor Nesil Caliskan, said: "Improving the quality of Enfield Council's accommodation was a key priority for me when I became leader and this new service will play a vital role in achieving that goal.



"These checks and works will proactively tackle issues before they require responsive repairs and will improve the condition of the entire property. The MOT team will also identify larger issues, diagnose the fault and either plan and complete the works themselves or raise jobs with specialist contractors.

"The beauty of this scheme is that we expect to see a significant reduction in the number of repairs we need to carry out across our housing stock and because the vast majority of the repairs will be

completed in a single visit it will reduce disruption for residents."

Enfield Council contractors currently carry out 42,000 repairs to its 10,500 properties each year, with most being minor jobs such as fixing leaking taps and broken door handles. However, there is also a backlog of larger problems such as blocked drains which are outstanding and the new teams will help to tackle. The council expects the new scheme to be self funded from a reduction in responsive repairs costs.

Over 400 homeless people have died in UK in past year

An investigation has found at least 440 homeless people have died on the streets or in temporary accommodation in the UK in the past year – more than one per day.

The figures were produced by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) in conjunction with Channel 4 News and represent the first attempt to catalogue the number of homeless people to die in a year. Ages of the deceased ranged between 18 and 94, and 69 per cent of them were men.

However, the figures are likely to be an underestimate as no organisation currently records the number of homeless deaths in Britain. An earlier investigation by the Guardian newspaper found that at least 230 deaths of homeless people were recorded by councils between 2013 and 2017.

A Government spokesperson said: "We take this matter extremely seriously and are investing £1.2

billion to tackle all forms of homelessness and have set out bold plans, backed by £100m, to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027."

Howard Sinclair, chief executive of homeless charity St Mungo's, said the "entirely preventable" deaths were a "national scandal". Charities have called the deaths a national disgrace and blamed soaring homelessness on austerity, expensive private rents and a lack of social housing. They called on councils to investigate every death.

HORRIFYING

Deaths were caused by violence, drug overdoses, illnesses, suicide and murder, among other reasons. The average age at death was 49 for men and 53 for women, but those who died ranged from 18 to 94.

Jon Sparkes, chief executive of the homelessness charity Crisis, said: "To learn of the sheer scale of

those who have lost their lives in the past year is nothing short of horrifying. This is a wake-up call to see homelessness as a national emergency."

Polly Neate, chief executive of the charity Shelter, said: "This important investigation lays bare the true brutality of our housing crisis. Rising levels of homelessness are a national disgrace, but it is utterly unforgivable that so many homeless people are dying unnoticed and unaccounted for.

"To prevent more people from having to experience the trauma of homelessness, the government must ensure housing benefit is enough to cover the cost of rents, and urgently ramp up its efforts to build many more social homes."

The BIJ investigation has prompted the Office for National Statistics to request access to the database to help produce their own estimates on homeless deaths, which they hope to publish later this year.

L&Q and Countryside given go ahead for huge east London scheme

Plans to build thousands of new homes on a former Ford factory site in London have been given permission by the mayor's office despite being rejected by one of the two host councils.

Plans initially submitted by L&Q and house builder Countryside for the derelict site at Beam

Park, in Dagenham, included 2,899 homes but this was raised to 3,000 houses, with 50 per cent of them being affordable housing.

The scheme will also see a new rail station, two primary schools, a nursery, community facilities, retail and open spaces provided.

Around 195 new jobs are expected to be created by the development.

Barking and Dagenham Council approved the proposals but neighbouring Havering Council rejected the scheme on the basis that the development would harm the character of the local area.

The development sits within the London Riverside Opportunity Area, which has the potential to deliver at least 26,500 new homes and 16,000 new jobs, the mayor's office said.

Construction companies fined over asbestos work

Companies in Bristol and Manchester have been prosecuted for failing to follow safe working practices on the removal of asbestos from buildings.

A Bristol-based construction company was sentenced for carrying out unlicensed asbestos work. Bristol Magistrates' Court heard how, during July 2017, a project was undertaken to refurbish The Cherry Tree pub at Oldland Common, Bristol, into eight flats. T.W. Parker (Building & Groundworks) Ltd was commissioned to conduct the works.

A survey of the site on 13 July found waste materials, including asbestos insulation board, were left lying outside the building. Asbestos containing materials, which would require a licence to remove them, were also found to be present among the debris and in the building structure.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the removal work was initiated under the control of T.W. Parker (Building & Groundworks) Ltd and was done prior to the

refurbishment survey. Mr Parker had been advised that a refurbishment survey was to be undertaken before works commenced. He failed to request information from the client with regards to the potential presence of asbestos containing materials, despite some material being marked as containing asbestos, and failed to use a licensed contractor to undertake the removal works.

T.W. Parker (Building & Groundworks) Ltd of Hicks Common Road, Winterbourne pleaded guilty to breaching Section 5, 8(1) and 16 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. The company was fined £7,000 and ordered to pay costs of £1,264.60.

In an unrelated case, a Manchester-based businessman was prosecuted after failing to check whether asbestos was present in a building before starting major refurbishment works.

Manchester Magistrates' Court heard how Mr Whaid Ahmed did not survey his property at 1-3 Stephenson Square, Manchester for asbestos before carrying out renovations to the building between 1 April 2012 and 12 October 2017.

Following a routine inspection from a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector, a survey was subsequently carried out. Large amounts of asbestos, some of which was in very poor condition, was discovered on the premises, indicating that asbestos could have previously been removed without any controls in place from areas of the building already renovated.

The HSE investigation found Mr Ahmed failed to identify the risks involved, and put appropriate measures in place to prevent exposure to asbestos. Mr Ahmed has had previous enforcement action from HSE over a similar issue so was aware of his duties under the law.

Mr Whaid Ahmed of Hale Barns, Altrincham pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations 5(a), 11(1)(a) and 16 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. Mr Ahmed was given a six months prison sentence, suspended for two years, sentenced to 250 community service hours and ordered to pay costs of £5,742.14.

Calls to end banks' discrimination against tenants on benefits

An influential private landlords' group is demanding urgent Government action to tackle discrimination against benefit claimants by buy-to-let mortgage providers.

It follows news that a landlord had her mortgage revoked because she is renting to a benefit claimant. The Residential Landlords Association (RLA) says this matches findings from their own research and this should prompt the Government to end such practices by lenders.

David Smith, Policy Director for the RLA said: "With growing numbers of benefit claimants now relying on the private rented sector, it is shameful that many lenders are preventing landlords renting property to some of the most vulnerable in society with little or no justification. The banks have had long enough to get their house in order. It is now time to take firm action to stop such unjust practices."

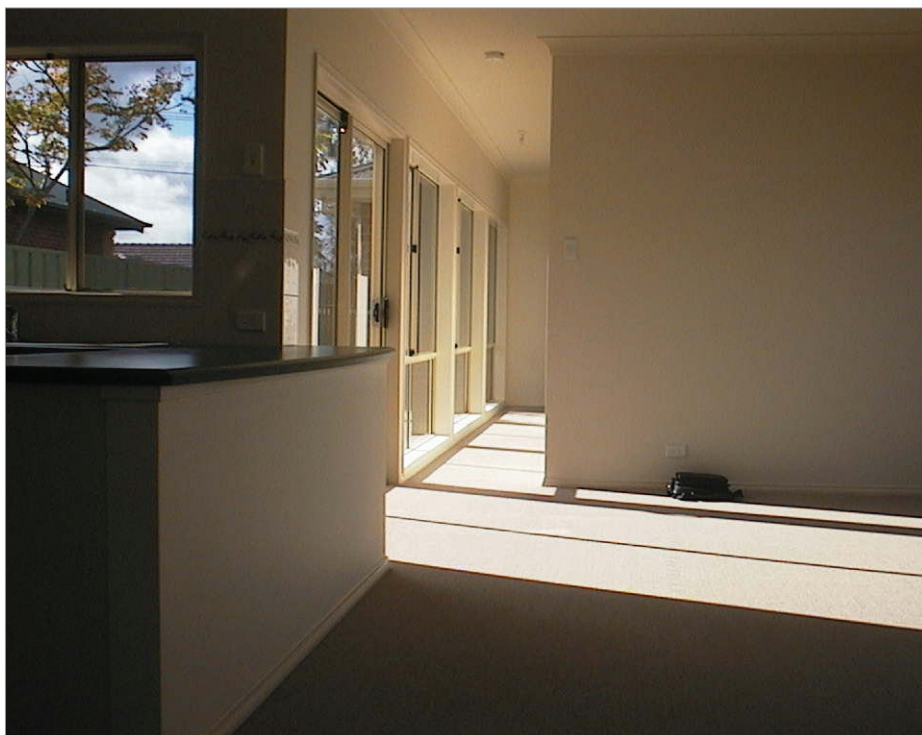
The campaign was triggered by Nat West's refusal to give a buy-to-let mortgage to Helena McAleer, a landlord from Northern Ireland, who wished to release equity on her house after it increased in value. In discussions with the bank, she was told it was their policy not to allow rentals to benefit claimants.

Helena McAleer said the bank expected her to kick someone out of their home simply because of their circumstances. Ms McAleer has since started a petition calling for measures to tackle such practices which clearly discriminate against benefit and Universal Credit claimants.

Research carried out for the RLA last year found that 66 per cent of lenders representing approximately 90 per cent of the buy-to-let market do not allow properties to be rented out to those in receipt of housing benefit.

In a letter sent to John Glen, the Treasury Minister responsible for banking, the RLA is calling for:

- The Government to use the influence it has in those banks in which it currently has shares to end such discriminatory practices;
- The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), working with the Bank of England, to undertake a full investigation into the extent of this problem and prepare plans to end it; and
- The Equalities and Human Rights Commission to undertake a review of whether such practices breach equalities law.



The scandal of empty homes exposed

The number of long-term empty homes in England has risen for the first time since 2008 and now stands at more than 205,000 vacant properties across the country.

Figures collated by the Empty Homes charity from local authority council tax records shows that 37 of the 53 local authorities with 1.2 per cent or more of their homes long-term empty are in the North, nine are in the Midlands, and seven are in the South.

Some groupings of authorities (i.e. counties and combined authorities) stand out as having 1.2 per cent or more of their homes long-term empty as a whole. They are all in the North: Cumbria, Durham, Humberside, Lancashire, Merseyside, Northumberland, Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear.

While there appears to be a strong link between large numbers of empty properties in a locality and economic decline or stagnation, the report also revealed a disproportionate number of high value homes (in the most expensive council tax band) are also empty, being owned by companies, institutions and overseas investors.

The council tax data does not show why homes are being left long-term empty. However, the charity says there is evidence that in some areas people are purchasing properties not to rent out or use primarily as their own home, but for reasons that include finding a safe store for their wealth, seeking a high capital gain and keeping a place for occasional use. Such purchases are characterised as 'buy-to-leave'.

FUND PURCHASES

They claim that the general public wants both central and local government to place a much higher priority on tackling empty homes, with a favoured option being that councils and charities should be funded to buy and repair long-term empty homes to rent or sell to people in housing need.

The Empty Homes charity is encouraging all local authorities to introduce empty homes strategies for their areas, with the aspiration to reduce the number of long-term empty homes. It is also asking councils to work with owners of long-term empty properties – including landlords – to encourage, advise and support them to bring homes back into housing use.

In its latest annual report it provides examples of a number of innovative projects across the UK, many of which are offering grants or interest free loans to landlords to bring empty properties back into use.

Since April 2013, local authorities have been allowed to charge up to a 50 per cent premium on the council tax if a dwelling has been empty for two years or more. It is possible that this policy has had an impact on the willingness of people to tell their council that their property is empty so the actual figures could be even higher than are being reported.

As of October 2017, 288 out of 326 authorities reported that they were charging the premium on 60,898 empty dwellings across England. It is not clear why the remaining 38 councils are not using this mechanism.

Can late changes save Universal Credit from the scrapheap?

Ministers have gone back to the drawing board in an effort to make their flagship welfare benefits scheme more acceptable to MPs and better able to deliver payments and work incentives to claimants.

Amid warnings from ex-Prime Ministers and facing a widespread rebellion among its own backbenchers, the Government decided it needs to make some important concessions to get Universal Credit back on track. Reports of strong disagreements between the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions (who are in charge of UC) did not bode well. But the high cost of changes could limit the extent of changes made in the Budget.

First introduced to the north west of England in 2013, the rollout of UC will be slowed again (it is already several years behind its original schedule) while efforts are made to tweak it further so that 2.6m families 'in need' do not suffer the £2,400 a year cuts in their benefits that was being projected.

In reality the impact of proposals could be even worse than this as the Child Poverty Action Group has calculated that 4.3m families and close to 10m people (mostly children), will lose money.

UC merges six benefits into a single payment but it has been beset by IT delays, complexities, processing problems and cuts in payments to claimants. It was due to be fully in place by 2017 but problems and delays mean that the programme is now not expected to be fully complete until the end of 2023.

Social and private landlords have long complained about UC saying it has pushed up levels of poverty and rent arrears, with charities blaming the new benefit system for higher levels of evictions and homelessness. In areas where UC has already been introduced, landlords can point to much higher levels of rent arrears than previously.

WARNINGS

Sir John Major warned the Government that UC is becoming its very own poll tax from the 1980s, while Gordon Brown urged the Government to halt the roll-out of UC to prevent a period of discontent, chaos and riots. Conservative and Labour MPs lined up with the RLA in an unlikely alliance to condemn the scheme, while in a House of Commons debate Frank Field claimed that some of his constituents were being driven into prostitution by problems with late payments and how the scheme is working.

With Esther McVey, the DWP Secretary of State and Theresa May contradicting each other in the Commons on the likely impact of future cuts on benefit claimants, it was perhaps inevitable that Ministers would call 'a pause' to the roll-out.

Eventually Iain Duncan Smith, the former DWP Secretary and architect of the UC scheme was wheeled out to tour TV and radio studios claiming the system was working well and that thousands of people would find themselves better off in work. However, he did admit there was a problem as a



result of £2bn of work allowances being taken out of payments in 2015 by the former chancellor George Osborne. These have never been replaced and further cuts have since been implemented.

"We should direct the money back into universal credit exactly as it was originally planned to be rolled out," he said. "The reality is that £2bn was taken out."

Leaked Whitehall papers now suggest that a large-scale transfer of existing claimants to the new system will not happen until November 2020, some 15 months later than originally envisaged. The Work and Pensions Minister, Alok Sharma, confirmed a slower rollout in interviews he gave to BBC news.

Other changes could see some existing legacy benefit payments continue to be made until a claim for UC is processed and a lower cap is imposed on how much money can clawed back from claimants for 'in advance' payments.

Bespoke qualification professionalises housing experience

A major social landlord is using £100,000 from the Apprenticeship Levy to fund a new bespoke qualification in housing, helping experienced staff to back up their on-the-ground experience with a nationally recognised certificate.

The first cohort of students at Sovereign Housing Association will see a lettings officer, housing officer, ASB officer, and a support worker among others line up as the first participants keen to achieve the level III Chartered Institute of Housing/Sovereign Housing Qualification.

Matt Hensby, Head of Tenancy Management, said: "At a time when our teams are faced by increasingly complex scenarios, including ASB, safeguarding vulnerable people, or resolving customer complaints, it's ever more important to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to understand each situation that they come across.

"That's why we're so excited to provide this CIH course, which will help our people to understand the context in which they are working. Having an overview of the political, historical and financial

decisions that govern housing associations and seeing how that connects to their own role, will enable them to make informed decisions and deliver the services that our customers need, now and in the future."

One student Sam Hebbs, an Independent Living Officer for Sovereign, said: "Like many people, I fell into housing by chance. I moved to a new area, saw a temp post, went for it. But what I found after only a short time, was that I loved working in housing. The days fly by, and it's rewarding because you're helping people.

"The reason I'm doing this course, though, is because I believe that knowledge is power: I can do even better in assisting residents if I have a good understanding of what other departments do. This qualification will also help me feel confident that I have the skills to move onto different roles within the housing profession."

Jill Cheshire, CIH Apprenticeship Manager, said: "The Apprenticeship Levy has enabled organisations to invest in their employees in

the long term. They can now provide an avenue to increase their knowledge, skills and behaviours using a structured programme of learning and practice application through an apprenticeship.

"We are very excited to be working with and supporting Sovereign right from the beginning, to create a bespoke programme that underpins their values and ways of working. As housing professionals we all want to be able to serve our communities and residents as best we can."

Sovereign has also used the levy to support employees to gain several construction-based qualifications and will soon fund courses in STEM subjects, support supply chain partners with apprenticeships, and enter into partnerships with schools and other key organisations. The landlord owns and manages 56,000 homes across southern England and was originally the stock transfer association of West Berkshire Council in Newbury. It employs about 1,800 staff.

Calls made for outright ban on combustible cladding on all buildings

The banning of Grenfell style combustible cladding from all new buildings over 18 metres high has failed to damp down protests from those wanting to see a complete ban on the use of such materials.

Former residents of the Grenfell Tower, fire fighters, architects, insurers and a group of mainly Labour MPs are calling on the Government to extend the ban to all existing buildings, including those under 18m tall.

Led by Steven Reed, the 20 MPs say that while the ban on using combustible cladding on new buildings is welcome, it does not go far enough. They warn that many existing buildings – including schools, low-rise hospitals, care homes and sheltered housing – are clad in dangerous materials and they are all used by people who would have serious difficulty in getting out if there was a fire.

The MPs are asking Housing Secretary James Brokenshire to extend the ban “so that everyone in our country can be reassured that the buildings they use are safe from fire.” The ban is due to come into effect this Autumn through a change made to building regulations.

The Fire Brigades Union said the measures were “designed for political convenience” and failed to address the issue of Grenfell-style cladding already used on nearly 500 buildings across England.

Matt Wrack, the FBU general secretary, said: “This is not the outright ban on combustible cladding that firefighters have been calling for. The Westminster Government continues to allow cladding of limited combustibility for any building work in the future. The FBU called for a universal ban on these flammable materials.”

He added that the measures should apply to all buildings, not just those over 18m high, and include a ban on the use of A2 materials.

“I welcome this correction of the building regulations in regard to non-combustible materials,” said Arnold Tarling, an independent fire safety expert. “It takes us back to the safety standards we had in 1935 under the London Building Act. But what about all of the other buildings that have been built in the interim? Unprotected combustible insulation is used in cladding systems on thousands of buildings. What is the Government going to do about that?”

Social housing landlords get £248m for cladding removal

Almost £250 million has been allocated to 43 social housing landlords to pay for the removal and replacement of unsafe combustible aluminium composite material cladding from 135 high-rise tower blocks.

This is the first tranche of money to be released from the £400m programme announced by the Prime Minister earlier this year. Eighty per cent of the estimated removal costs will be paid up front to allow for an early start on the works. The remaining 20 per cent will be paid when the works are complete and the final costs are known.

Applications had been received for funds to pay for the removal of Grenfell-style ACM cladding from 159 buildings, all of which need to be 18 metres or higher. A dozen applications were deemed ineligible and more information has been requested on a further twelve.

No details of the landlords or the tower blocks has been released by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as a matter of public safety although it is understood most of the tower blocks are in London.

According to MHCLG statistics, work had already begun on 120 of the 157 social housing



blocks, with works completed on 22 of them. This is in stark contrast to the private sector where work has started on only 38 of 291 private sector blocks with ACM cladding, with work completed on just 17.

Housing Secretary James Brokenshire has issued another stark warning to private developers and freehold owners, saying he “will not rule anything out” if the building owners do not pay for remediation works.

Regarding the financial help being given to social housing landlords, he said: “I am pleased the £400m funding has started to be released. We are doing the right thing by residents and fully funding the replacement of unsafe ACM cladding in social housing buildings 18 metres or above.”

Of course this still leaves question marks hanging over the future of the other buildings that have ACM cladding on them, including student halls of residence, hotels, schools and hospitals. At the moment the Government is holding its line that a height of 18m is crucial in determining the need to remove combustible cladding from buildings.

There is also no news on whether the Government will assist with the costs of retrofitting water sprinklers in tower blocks. Council leaders at Birmingham and Croydon have been vociferous in demanding help with the multi-million costs of these works, which many safety experts are also calling for.

Midlands tower blocks to be demolished

Hundreds of high-rise homes are to be demolished in Birmingham and Rugby as a result of decisions to knock down seven tower blocks.

In Birmingham the council is demolishing five large panel system tower blocks as part of a £43.3m regeneration project of the Druids Heath Estate in the south of the city. Three more tower blocks on the estate will be refurbished including structural strengthening, re-roofing and new external wall insulation.

The council is planning on building 250 new homes on the estate to replace those demolished, with 150 for affordable or social rent and 100 for sale. “It’s fantastic to see the regeneration of Druids Heath moving forwards in this way,” said Sharon Thompson, the council’s cabinet member for homes and neighbourhoods.

Just over 30 miles away to the east in Rugby, two tower blocks at Biart Place are to be demolished

after they were found too expensive to fix. The high-rise blocks are considered to be “beyond economic repair” – costing £20m to fix, whereas for an extra £3m the blocks can be knocked down and replaced with new council homes.

The future of the two towers has been in question since residents were told they had to move after an investigation found the large panel buildings were built to “a poor standard”. Over 90 of the 124 flats at Biart Place are already empty with both blocks expected to be empty by next March. Neighbouring high-rise blocks at Rounds Gardens are in better condition and will not be demolished.

Michael Stokes, leader of Rugby Borough Council, said the total cost of repairing and replacing homes could be as much as £60m and he would be approaching the Government for financial support.



HAs to scrap fixed-term tenancies

Housing Associations are turning their backs on fixed-term tenancies and returning to the previous regime of granting permanent tenancies to their residents.

L&Q was the first major social landlord to make the decision, converting all of its existing 8,500 fixed-term tenancies to lifetime tenancies. Its chief executive David Montague, said that fixed-term tenancies were a “crude tool” that caused “unnecessary worry” for residents.

That decision has sparked a flurry of debates among the boards and executive teams at many HAs.

Fixed-term tenancies were introduced by the

Localism Act in 2012. Typically these last for one, three or five years, with options for them to be renewed if the property is still appropriate for the tenant’s circumstances.

However, not all HAs are expected to follow the example of L&Q. Kate Davies, chief executive of Notting Hill Genesis and Mark Henderson, chief executive of Home Group, have both said their organisations would not be scrapping fixed-term tenancies.

“I don’t think it does make people feel unsettled. You have to give that good quality housing management a caring and compassionate approach. I don’t think the idea that we’re going and telling

people they’ll be out in five years has ever been our way of using it,” said Ms Davies.

Mr Henderson said the system was under “constant evaluation” but added: “We haven’t picked up concerns from our customers because we’ve been very clear that if you pay your rent, don’t commit anti-social behaviour, then there’s no issue with renewing your tenancy. It works pretty well for Home Group at the moment.”

During the launch of consultation on the Social Housing Green Paper, the Government announced it was dropping its proposal to scrap lifetime tenancies in favour of rolling fixed-term tenancies for all new social housing tenants

More HA mergers proceed

The trend for housing associations to merge in a bid to reduce their costs and increase the amount of new housing they can build, shows no sign of abating.

In the Midlands a new 45,000 home landlord called Platform Housing Group has been formed as a result of Waterloo Housing Group and Fortis Living joining forces. The new organisation has a development pipeline of 18,000 homes to be built over the next ten years.

Meanwhile Metropolitan and Thames Valley have also completed their merger, bringing some 57,000 homes together. They hope to build 2,000

new homes a year, adding to their existing stock in London, the south east, east of England and the East Midlands.

In London and the south east Catalyst and Aldwyck are in talks to form a 30,000 association with a completion date of next April. As a combined landlord they hope to build at least 1,300 homes a year across the capital and the home counties. Aldwyck took over Cambridgeshire based King Street Housing earlier this year.

Interestingly or coincidentally two of the mergers involve chief executives who have been bosses at both organisations involved. Geeta Nanda



was CEO of Thames Valley before moving to Metropolitan, while Ian McDermott recently left Aldwyck to take over the leadership of Catalyst from Rod Cahill.

Council unveils drone service to survey roofs

A council-owned organisation is to start a new drone-based service by surveying the roofs of almost 8,000 local authority homes in the city of dreaming spires.

Oxford Direct Services (ODS) is the service and delivery arm of Oxford City Council. It will offer a variety of drone based services including roof and building surveying, land mapping, aerial photography and filming.

Its first job is to inspect the roofs of 7,800 homes it maintains for the council. ODS claims it is the first time a local authority-owned organisation has brought drone services in house. ODS also said using drones will save time, drive down costs and “reduce the health and safety challenges typically encountered with this type of work”.



The organisation has acquired a DJI Phantom 4 Advanced quadcopter drone to carry out the work and has a Civil Aviation Authority licence to offer commercial services.

Simon Howick, managing director at ODS, said:

“Hiring a drone firm costs between £300-£1,000 to survey a roof, so with scaffolding expensive and cumbersome it made total sense to invest in the drone equipment, flight training and licensing and add this skillset to our portfolio.”

Government's rogue landlord list still empty after six months

An investigation has found the Government's much vaunted rogue landlord database has not got a single name on it and it is not available for public scrutiny.

The database went live over six months ago and it was intended to be a key tool in tackling the worst behavior of private sector landlords. But work by The Guardian newspaper and ITV News has uncovered a complete failure of the system to work as publicised.

It appears only convictions for offences committed since April this year can be used to ‘name and shame’ an offending landlord. And even when rogue landlords have their details entered on the database, it will only be accessible to people who work for central or local government. Not allowing public access to the list is a major flaw and appears to undermine commitments given during the consultation phase.

Because of flaws in legislation it also means that landlords banned from one local authority area can still let out homes in other areas, while they are also free to operate in the locality where they have been banned provided they use an approved third party.

The news agencies were forced to use Freedom of Information Act inquiries to find out what is and is not happening with the database, as it appears the Government is understandably embarrassed by the inadequacy of this ‘flagship’ scheme to improve conditions in the private rented sector.

The Guardian provided details of some notorious landlords, many of them who are still operating despite having a string of convictions for housing offences and being blasted by council officers and judges for their appalling treatment of tenants.

The secrecy and absence of information on the Government's database contrasts sharply with a

separate rogue landlord database run by the Mayor of London's office.

The London version allows the public to view prosecutions of rogue landlords in the capital's boroughs for a year after the conviction date. Data available includes the nature of the offence, the landlord's address, their fine, which council prosecuted them and which property the offence was committed at.

David Cox, chief executive of the Association of Residential Letting Agents slammed the situation, saying “This is a truly ridiculous piece of legislation. How on earth is a tenant supposed to know if a landlord has been banned?”

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government said it was “exploring further options for making information contained with the database available to prospective and existing tenants”.

Social sector league tables expected within two years

League tables for social landlords are expected to appear within two years and they will include housing associations, councils and ALMOs according to the sector's regulator.

The prospect of using tables to rank social landlords by their performance was included in the Social Housing Green Paper published a few months ago. It provoked a series of angry protests and warnings that they could be counter productive by encouraging landlords to chase targets for performance indicators.

Simon Dow, interim chair of the Regulator of Social Housing has said critics have no “compelling case for what to do instead”.

Jonathan Walters, deputy director of strategy and performance at the RSH, said: “If we are asked to develop a suite of metrics we would want to take the time and work with others to make sure we were coming up with the right metrics. I think it doesn't really matter who your landlord is as far as tenants are concerned. It shouldn't matter whether it's a local authority or a housing

association, it would be the same metrics that apply.”

“With regard to league tables, I think the question is what government is trying to achieve with that and I think there are two things really. The first is that league tables are trying to achieve transparency, so tenants can see more about what their landlords are actually like. The other thing is that no one wants to be at the bottom of the league table, so this would persuade people who aren't doing well to do better,” he added.

“And if you really don't like the idea of league tables, what you need to do is accept the outcome that Government is trying to achieve and come up with an alternative system that can meet those aims and help social landlords do better.”

Fresh concerns raised about tower block safety

Concerns over the safety of hundreds of tower blocks housing an estimated 100,000 people have been raised by residents and construction experts, with warnings that the properties are at risk of collapse.

In a report run by The Independent newspaper it is claimed that 41,000 flats in total are at risk due to flaws in the Large Panel System (LPS) construction method used by many councils in the 1960s and 1970s. This is identical to the way Ronan Point was built in east London – it collapsed in 1968 after a gas explosion.

The flawed construction method has reportedly left cracks in some flats wide enough to allow residents to slide their hands in between the walls. It also leaves them at risk of collapse in the event of a fire or gas explosion.

The newspaper says that structural defects have already been discovered at LPS blocks in Leicester, Rugby, Portsmouth and two estates in London over the past year. Hundreds of council tenants and leaseholders are said to be in the process of being moved out for their safety. It is feared the defects could be present in at least 575 similar tower blocks across the UK.

Tower Blocks UK, a campaign and research group, is calling for the Government to set up a nationwide safety audit, ensuring inspections are carried out at all LPS tower blocks in the UK.

"This is an even bigger issue than Grenfell

because more tower blocks are affected by these structural problems than by cladding problems," said Sam Webb, a retired architect who is the co-founder of Tower Blocks UK. "The Government needs to take responsibility for this as a matter of urgency."

The campaign group is urging the Government to commission the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government or the Building Research Establishment to lead the inspections.

"The Government needs to carry out a safety audit to identify all the large panel system tower blocks, and make sure qualified experts check whether or not these blocks are safe," said Frances Clarke of Tower Blocks UK. "We have the face up to this because residents can't be left at risk living in potentially unsafe buildings," she added.

A spokeswoman for the Ministry of Housing told The Independent that the department held its first forum last week to discuss the LPS tower block problem with local authority representatives.

"Building owners are responsible for checking their properties and we have given councils and housing associations advice on checking the structural safety of buildings which use large panel systems," said the Government spokeswoman.

The Local Government Association confirmed the meeting had taken place but could not say how many council representatives attended.

HA boards alerted to sector's reputational risks

After a turbulent year in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire and with austerity measures still affecting rents, the social housing sector has been warned by its regulator that it is under greater scrutiny than ever before.

In its annual Sector Risk Profile which runs to just over 30 pages, the regulator has summarised what it sees as the major risks which HA boards need to be alert to and have appropriate plans for dealing with them.

It opens by drawing attention to three specific risks it sees as increasing in importance. These are:

- Health and safety risks;
- Reputational risks; and
- Sales risks.

On health and safety it reminds boards that they are ultimately responsible for ensuring the safety of their tenants and staff. It acknowledges that significant investments in fire safety have taken place in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, but it advises HAs to ensure they have the appropriate controls in place to comply with the full range of health and safety requirements.

Highlighting the higher level of scrutiny facing the sector, the regulator says "It is vital that boards should have regard to stakeholders' expectations in their decision making." This can be seen as an indication of a greater focus on consumer protection and resident engagement in the future. It will also be interesting to see how much attention is given in next year's report to the likely introduction of league tables for HAs.

It is clear from the many charts and tables included in the report that the regulator has concerns over the potential exposure which many HAs have to a possible downturn in the property market, particularly with more social landlords undertaking open market sales.

"More registered providers than ever are reliant on sales income to fund their development programmes including some registered providers with limited previous experience in this area. While sales revenues can make a valuable contribution to delivering much needed affordable housing, it is vital that boards should understand the markets they operate in and have skills appropriate to the activities their business undertakes."

With Brexit on the horizon and further interest rate rises possible, it is clear the regulator wants HA boards to plan carefully for a challenging environment and a variety of scenarios including falls in the value of land. This could be made more difficult by cuts in welfare benefits and the future roll out of Universal Credit to existing claimants.

Welsh regulator intervenes over 'serious' failures at HA

The Welsh Government is intervening at a medium sized housing association after it found evidence of "serious failures of governance."

Hendre requires regulatory intervention because a "significant risk has not been effectively managed". It has also failed across a number of areas, including "leadership and culture", "board oversight and control", "non-compliance with policy" and "ineffective management and poor professional practice", the judgement said.

Currently the 6,000 home association, which operates in nine council areas across South Wales and is part of the Welsh Housing Partnership joint venture along with three other landlords, has been told to undertake an "independent review of governance and leadership across the organisation". It will need to implement any recommendations or actions from the review to a timetable agreed with the regulator.

The regulator did not specify what issues it had uncovered at Hendre, but mentioned "concerns" with its compliance with three performance standards, relating to "board and executive management", "self-evaluation" of compliance and "compliance with regulatory requirements". Hendre has maintained its "standard" grading for financial viability.

Nigel James, chair of Hafod, said: "The board fully accepts the regulatory judgement and we have entered into a voluntary undertaking with the Welsh Government regulator, which clearly sets out their expectations for improvements and what we will do to address the issues.

"We would like to stress that nothing in the judgement relates to our frontline services. There is no impact on our tenancies or care packages. These are unaffected and our dedicated staff will continue to deliver high quality housing, care and support services.

Product Focus



The Platform Lift Company

www.platformliftco.co.uk

Where space is an issue, the FlexStep from the Platform Lift Company provides an ideal 2-in-1 solution. This clever product can be configured as a flight of stairs and transformed at the touch of a button into a platform lift. The FlexStep is available in different step widths and step heights: the 6-step FlexStep model is intended for travels up to 1250 mm. Customers can choose from a variety of materials and finishes to complement an existing interior or exterior design. The Platform Lift Company provide full installation as well as ongoing service and maintenance of the FlexStep.

Vectaire

www.vectaire.co.uk

Vectaire have three new models in its vertical MVHR range. To ensure the user experience is as comfortable as it possibly can be, the Midi, Maxi and Maxi Plus are now available with advanced acoustic attenuation. With extremely low noise levels, the "AT-BY" models are complete with summer bypass and frost-stat, and commissioned via an integral LCD. Functions including trickle, purge and boost speeds for each motor, boost speed over-run time, the time delay before the boost speed kicks in, holiday mode and night-time boost are easily adjusted. Products are SAP PCDB Listed and manufactured in Vectaire's own factory in the UK.



Horbury Property Services

www.horburypropertyservices.com

Horbury Property Services, part of the Horbury Group of companies, has secured a project to replace fire doors and update fire compartmentation in a number of buildings, including offices and a library for Nuneaton and Bedworth Council. This is part of a significant programme of fire door installations to blocks of flats where there is a closed balcony/corridor. The new fire doors will meet current requirements for fire resisting doors. Horbury Property Services will also ensure that the fire compartmentation within ceilings is brought up to the latest standard.

Tenants to qualify for better credit scores

Tenants who regularly pay their rent on time will soon be able to qualify for better financial products such as loans and mortgages as a result of changes made by credit reference agency Experian. Following a public campaign and a Parliamentary debate, the company said it was now taking account of the payment habits of 1.2 million tenants, with the vast majority of those (79 per cent) standing to benefit from improved credit scores.

"Tenants pay a significant amount of money each month for the roofs over their heads, so it's right to

recognise these regular payments in a similar way as mortgages," said Clive Lawson, managing director of Experian Consumer Services.

Some 150 social housing providers have signed up to the scheme so far, called the Rental Exchange. It was developed with the help of Big Issue Invest, the social investment arm of the Big Issue group.

On the down side anyone who has a poor record of paying their rent on time could see their credit scores adversely affected, making it harder or more expensive for them to access financial services.



Legal Aid Agency criticised for refusing to help rough sleepers

The human rights organisation Liberty is taking the national provider of legal aid to court because of its refusal to help rough sleepers challenge the use of powers to move them on.

Over 50 councils have used Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) to prohibit begging and loitering, among other things. They have also issued hundreds of fixed-penalty notices and pursued

criminal convictions for "begging", "persistent and aggressive begging" and "loitering" since being given strengthened powers to combat antisocial behaviour in 2014.

This is despite updated Home Office guidance at the start of this year, instructing councils not to target people for being homeless and sleeping rough.

Liberty has now launched the legal challenge against the Legal Aid Agency because the LAA will not offer assistance to rough sleepers and other local residents who want to challenge local authorities' use of PSPOs.

"Many local authorities are criminalising those in need, but the Legal Aid Agency's position robs all but the wealthy of their ability to challenge council abuse of power. It is essential this case goes ahead so that anyone can challenge illegitimate public space protection orders," said Rosie Brighouse, a lawyer for Liberty.

Can we change our bad energy habits?

Patrick Mooney asks if we are about to see a major shift in how energy is provided to private tenants' homes

Tenants in the private rented sector spend more money on heating their homes than other residents, but the recently published United Nations report on climate change could spark a major shift in how energy is provided to tenants' homes and bring a welcome reduction in their domestic bills.

In Britain our homes are the country's second biggest user of energy after transport.

The electricity and gas we consume in vast quantities is mainly used for heating, hot water and cooking, as well as running the vast array of white goods (fridges, freezers, dish washers, tumble dryers etc) and smart devices like televisions and personal computers that we all possess.

The Government has set itself a target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent, by the year 2050.

Housing has an enormous part to play in achieving this, with radical changes and solutions required across an industry that has often been slow to react in the past.

DAMP AND DRAUGHTY HOMES

For years the private rented sector has lagged behind other tenure types in terms of its general condition and tenants' quality of life.

Due to the nature and age of properties owned by private landlords, they tend to be less energy efficient than other forms of housing – as shown in property SAP ratings.

In the latest reported survey of property conditions, the average SAP rating of private rented homes was 60, just below the level of owner occupied homes (61), but considerably lower than social rented homes which are far more energy efficient with a rating of 67.

The difference is partly explained by the private rented sector having an 'older' housing stock (much of it is pre-1940 terraced houses) which is generally less well insulated. But it is also more likely to be damp and to suffer higher rates of disrepair.

BETTER INSULATION

The good news is that conditions in the private rented sector are improving at a faster rate than in other housing tenures. Much of this improvement has happened in the last 20 years and is down to the huge growth in newer homes being rented out through buy-to-let or property being specifically built for rental purposes.

To date much of the nation's focus has been on improving energy efficiency through new insulation to walls and roofs, fitting double glazed windows



and new doors, as well as other improvements in property conditions, such as replacing roofs and fitting new boilers.

Since April 2018 there has been a requirement for all private rented homes to have a minimum energy performance rating of E, unless there is an applicable exemption.

In 2016, around seven per cent (320,000) of private rented homes had a rating lower than E, with an F or G EER rating band which are the two least energy efficiency bands. The proportion of social rented homes with the lowest (F or G) EER bands was just one per cent.

CHANGING TO RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES

But these measures have all been focussed on simply reducing our use of energy.

The UN report is surely a wake up call for all of us to make a step change in our efforts and to tackle a largely overlooked aspect – changing the sources of our energy from traditional carbon based fossil fuels, to more environmentally sustainable ones.

One way to do this is by changing energy suppliers. The Guardian newspaper's financial advice team estimate that the average British householder can save more than £250 on their annual domestic fuel bill by switching to an energy supplier that offers electricity from 100 per cent renewable sources.

Offshore windfarms already provide nearly one tenth of our electricity with further growth planned although the large turbines are unpopular with many people and obtaining consent for new windfarms is likely to be more difficult. There is also a reluctance to focus too much effort on nuclear power plants because of worries over their safety, while fracking is a very divisive issue.

GOING GREEN

As individuals we can also make a difference by

turning to 'green' energy sources for our homes. Existing examples of these include the following:

- Photovoltaic solar panels on our roofs;
- Geothermal heat pumps or heat exchangers to move heat energy into the earth (cooling) and out of the earth (heating)
- Air source heat pumps which harvest renewable heat from the outdoor air and upgrade it to deliver heating and hot water for the home
- Biomass plants, which can turn waste into useable energy.

Alternatively, more use can be made of district heating systems which are far more efficient than individual property based central heating systems and can justify the higher initial costs.

The Green Deal which supplied loans and grants to people to have insulation installed or improved in their homes, was scrapped after only a few years and has not been replaced.

In any case it was primarily directed at homeowners and failed to get much traction with landlords or their tenants, ignoring the needs of 40 per cent of the population.

INCENTIVES REQUIRED

This programme of investment needs to be redesigned and restarted so that landlords and their tenants can make their contribution to changing our energy habits.

Through the use of tax breaks and grants to subsidise the initial cost of installing new equipment, or in funding discounts in energy charges from renewable sources, the Government can stimulate and incentivise changes that can also benefit tenants (as energy consumers) through lower costs and lower bills.

Future generations will not thank us for failing to take decisive action now.

Huge rise in number of homeless being moved out of London

The number of homeless households being moved out of London has risen to over 1,200, a jump of almost 50 per cent in the first half of this year. In some cases families are being sent hundreds of miles away to cities in Scotland, Wales and the north of England.

Council chiefs in London are blaming a sharp rise in homelessness, a continuing tightening of public finances and a lack of affordable housing in the capital as the main causes for the crisis.

According to figures collected by local authorities, 740 households have been relocated to Kent, 574 to Essex, 30 to the West Midlands and 69 to Surrey. This is on top of figures for the 15 months to June 2018, when almost 2,500 homeless families were moved out of London – mostly to Kent and Essex.

Experts are highly critical of the practice which they say turns families' lives upside down. "Losing

your home is a deeply traumatic event and then being offered accommodation miles away from your community, your work, your children's school and your care responsibilities compounds all that trauma," said Karen Buck, the MP for Westminster North.

"People are struggling against the most appalling odds to hold their own lives together and above all to hold their kids' lives together." She said it was almost impossible to get a local housing offer for her constituents.

Almost 70 per cent of all of England's homeless households are in London. Councils say they are struggling to rehouse people within the capital because social housing is full and the amount people can spend on private rent under housing benefit has been frozen since 2015 even as rents have risen.

Shelter said the figures were "a damning

indictment of our housing system" and show how desperately more social housing is needed. "We see people having to quit jobs, drop out of education and move hours away from friends and family," said Greg Beales, the director of campaigns at Shelter.

Labour's shadow housing secretary, John Healey, called the figures "shameful". "This is a crisis made in Downing Street," he said. "There are now 120,000 children homeless in temporary accommodation each night, but deep Conservative cuts to housing investment mean the number of new social rented homes has fallen to a record low."

The Housing and Homelessness Minister, Heather Wheeler, said: "Councils should try to place homeless households within their own area, and they must take into account healthcare needs, jobs and schooling when finding a suitable property. We are investing more than £1.2bn in tackling homelessness."

Bill to give tenants more powers makes good progress

Tenants in both private and social housing are to get more powers to challenge their landlords over homes that are "unfit for human habitation" after a Private Member's Bill won Government support.

From next year tenants in England will be able to force their landlords to remedy problems or hazards that make their home "unfit" and will be able to seek compensation under the Bill introduced by Labour's Karen Buck.

It passed an important hurdle in the Commons and has moved to the House of Lords where it is sponsored by Lord Best, but Government support means that it will almost certainly become law unless Brexit problems result in an early General Election.

The Bill will allow tenants to bypass council enforcement teams, some of which have poor records of taking action against rogue landlords. It will also give council tenants an avenue for

redress, as local authorities cannot bring cases against themselves.

It is being supported by the Residential Landlords Association who say they welcome the fact it places all tenants on an equal footing, while giving tenants greater opportunities to tackle rogue landlords.

Currently, a landlord commits an offence when they fail to comply with a local authority enforcement notice, so they cannot be held responsible for poor conditions unless they have been told to carry out repairs by a council.

During the Commons debate, Ms Buck said: "Living in a cold, damp or unsafe home is hell. It damages people's physical and mental wellbeing. It erodes the income of the poorest households. It impacts on children's education. The most vulnerable tenants are most at risk of being trapped in substandard accommodation.

"There is a huge degree of variability in inspection, notices and enforcement rates by councils. About half of all councils have served none or only one Housing Act notice in the last year. Newham Council has an active enforcement policy, amounted to half of all notices served nationally and 70 per cent of those in London

"This means is that there is a complete postcode lottery on the prospects of councils taking steps – and with the real prospect being that the council won't do so."

Heather Wheeler, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, said: "[Buck's] bill is an important part of our work to raise awareness of this vital issue – that of standards in rented properties."

It is expected to become law in the early part of 2019 and will apply to new tenancy agreements as well as existing social tenancies after a 12-month period.

Landlords welcome rental housing standards review

The Government's decision to review the safety standards expected of rental housing has been welcomed by the Residential Landlords Association.

David Smith, Policy Director at the RLA, said: "We welcome the Government's decision to review the safety standards around rented

housing which the RLA has long called for. The current system has not been updated for 12 years with the guidance alongside it equally out of date.

"This review provides an important opportunity to improve enforcement against the minority of landlords who bring the sector into disrepute

and fail to provide the safe accommodation they should."

The Housing, Health and Safety Ratings System is used by local authorities to assess health and safety in residential properties – this includes both private rental properties and properties in the social housing sector.



HOMES 2018: ensuring a high quality standard of housing

HOMES 2018 is the premier event dedicated to the residential development, strategic asset management and procurement solutions. Housing sector professionals from housing associations, local authorities and the commercial sector will meet and discuss how to build more homes and ensure a high quality standard of housing.



At a time of widespread change and uncertainty in the housing sector, it has never been more important to attend HOMES. The Hackitt Review, the Social Housing Green Paper, Brexit and the 300,000 homes delivery target have all raised questions for housing professionals.

For the housing sector to move forward, HOMES has selected over 150 expert speakers across two days and six theatres of packed content. In addition, there will be 120 exhibitors showcasing leading housing solutions that can help.

Over 4,000 housing sector professionals are expected to find the answers to fixing the broken housing market together with access to some of the highest-quality content in the sector.

WHAT TO EXPECT THIS YEAR

This year, visitors will meet leading suppliers to the housing sector on the exhibition floor as well as benefit from a range of interactive features. Highlights of this year's event include:

- MITIE Solution Street
- Higgins Regeneration theatre
- Fusion21 Buy Smarter theatre
- Knowledge Centre silent theatre
- Fortem Local Authority lounge
- New partnerships with RIBA, UKAA, RTPI and more to broaden your networking with housebuilders, architects, Build to Rent specialists and planners
- National Leasehold Group Annual conference co-locates on Wednesday
- National Sales Group conference co-locates on Thursday





Delegates from National Leasehold Group Annual conference, National Sales Group conference, and HOMES will be able to attend certain sessions in each other's theatres.

In addition, Kit Malthouse MP, Minister of State for Housing, will appear at HOMES 2018 giving the keynote at Kier Theatre Two on 29th November.

THE EXHIBITION

The benefit of attending HOMES 2018 is that you can catch up with all your key suppliers in one room. Over 120 exhibitors, 40 sponsors and 10 key partners will be attending HOMES with key focuses on innovation, product launches, hospitality areas and pioneers.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

As Brexit draws near, residential development of new homes remains a focus for the housing sector. HOMES will help provide housing professionals with the innovative thinking to build more homes and ensure high quality standard of living by discussing Home England's strategic partnership deals, post-budget housing delivery priorities, and how Build to Rent can work for the social housing sector.

ASSET MANAGEMENT

HOMES' attendees will explore the latest thinking and best practice around repairs and maintenance in the housing sector, which include strategic asset management in a post-Grenfell world, implementing the Hackitt recommendations, and the need for a review of the Decent Homes Standard.

PROCUREMENT

HOMES' attendees will also discuss the significance of procurement in the housing industry and how it benefits housing professionals. Housing professionals will explore the methods of procurement and what works best for their organisations, achieving social value from procurement, and whether procurement stifles innovation.

To register for your free ticket (fee applies to commercial organisations), visit www.homesevent.co.uk

Break the mould with Crown Trade

The mild, wet autumnal weather can provide the ideal conditions for mould and mildew to thrive but thanks to Crown Trade's range of Clean Extreme Mould Inhibiting paints, the outlook has just got brighter. Ideally suited for damp-prone areas such as bathrooms and kitchens where condensation can build, Crown Trade's Clean Extreme Mould Inhibiting paint range offers long lasting protection from unsightly and unhygienic mould. By helping walls and ceilings retain a cleaner, fresher appearance for longer, Crown Trade's Clean Extreme Mould Inhibiting range provides the perfect solution for damp and dirty surfaces and can help reduce maintenance cycles and redecoration costs.



www.crownpaintspec.co.uk

Sava launches new qualification

Sava has announced the launch of its new vocational qualification. The Diploma in Building Surveying and Housing Management specifically addresses the lack of skilled technical staff required by modern housing providers. Sava's new qualification allows learners to study part time to acquire the knowledge and skills that are required to undertake a building surveying and housing management role within a housing provider. The first intake for the Diploma will be in Birmingham March 2019 with other training centres available in England and Wales subsequently. Sava will be running regular webinars where housing providers and interested trainees can find out more.



01908 442158 www.sava.co.uk/bshm

Stormdry gets EST 'verified status'

Stormdry Masonry Protection Cream from Safeguard Europe - a leading UK specialist in damp- and waterproofing, and masonry repair solutions - has been granted 'verified' status by the Energy Saving Trust (EST) in respect of its contribution to improving the energy performance of buildings. The Energy Saving Trust's verification scheme provides independent evaluation of performance for energy-efficient products. After considering peer-reviewed scientific papers and the results of extensive long-term testing, the EST awarded the prestigious recognition to Stormdry for its claims to enhance thermal performance of masonry walls.



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Designer Contracts, one of the UK's largest flooring contractors, has been named in The Business Reporter's 'Best of British Business' campaign, distributed with The Daily Telegraph, celebrating success stories in British business. The prestigious accolade has been awarded to just 10 companies in the UK, which have all demonstrated leadership and excellence, and who continue to drive the UK economy. Celebrating its 25th year in business, Designer Contracts originally started in md Peter Kelsey's garage and has grown to become the biggest player in its sector with 15 regional centres now established across mainland UK.



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futurebuild

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The future of Housing

Introducing Futurebuild 2019

Futurebuild is the evolution of ecobuild. It will bring together opinion-shapers, decision-makers and product innovators from across the built environment, under a common purpose to explore the latest technologies and approaches, and debate the biggest issues facing the industry – now and in the future – both in the UK and overseas.

Futurebuild is home to six focused Hubs dedicated to knowledge sharing across key elements of the built environment and an industry-leading content programme driving meaningful debate on the biggest industry issues.

Tackling the under-supply of housing in the UK is one of the issues that will be high on the agenda at Futurebuild – not only will the conference programme include sessions dedicated to the future of housing, but the Offsite Hub, in partnership with Explore Offsite, will also demonstrate the technologies and solutions available for the delivery of new homes through examples of full-scale builds.

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REDGATE



Improving accessible homes with platform lifts

Sean O'Sullivan of The Platform Lift Company highlights the main considerations when specifying a platform lift and what can be achieved in terms of design, installation and ongoing maintenance

When you read about the shortage of accessible homes and the fact that the number of disabled people in this country is increasing it is very worrying. It is also distressing to hear stories that some people eat, sleep and bathe in one room because they cannot access other areas of the house. Therefore, when working with a private house, developer or social housing association to install a platform lift solution it gives specifiers a huge sense of satisfaction as it is helping to make a difference.

Installing a platform lift within a house has become a lot more achievable with the innovative solutions that are now available on the market. Even the issue of available space can be overcome with bespoke design; if the user has the room to enter and exit the lift and changing the layout is viable then the installation of a platform lift should be a possibility.

When specifying a platform lift, the main requirement is that the product is fit for purpose and not necessarily price driven. The type of lift will always depend on the environment and the user – the occupational therapist and

When specifying a platform lift, the main requirement is that the product is fit for purpose and not necessarily price driven

surveyor will assess each individual case and give their recommendations. Therefore, a standard residential style of lift might need to be modified.

In the domestic environment a platform lift doesn't necessarily need to comply with Part M of the building regulations as it does within a commercial application. This means there is scope to make a lift much smaller than the standard 1400mm by 1100mm size.



Of course, every individual case can be different therefore specifiers measure the user's wheelchair and measure from the base of the spine to their toes to make sure they can sit comfortably in the lift.

Of course, every individual case can be different therefore specifiers measure the user's wheelchair and measure from the base of the spine to their toes to make sure they can sit comfortably in the lift. They also take into consideration whether the person also needs a carer to be present and whether their condition is likely to change. By taking all the factors into account it is possible to future proof a design and to ensure it provides a long-term investment.

When it comes to safety features again this will depend on the environment and who is using the lift. For example, if the lift is going to be installed in an environment where there is likely to be children present, then it should be fully enclosed and either a key switch control or fob so that only the user can operate the lift.

As mentioned previously, the lift always needs to be fit for purpose, consequently one specifier was recently asked by a housing association to take a standard residential style of lift to a much high specification. They introduced key fob control, intercom, automatic door closers and openers and remote-control stations. These additional safety features coupled with school control – which means once the lift has reached the floor and the user has exited the door closes behind them to prevent anyone else getting in the lift – means a much higher specification of residential lift has been created.

Although the standard residential style of platform lift is a recognised solution within the housing industry, a high specification of lift will appeal to local authorities, housing associations and other organisations wanting to achieve a safe access solution in similar types of environments where there is a high footfall of people visiting or using the lift.

Provided there is adequate room, the installation of a through floor residential platform lift can be achieved without major structural changes and

installation is typically completed within three days with minimal disruption to the property. The external facing doors can be any RAL colour to match a surrounding decor, which gives design flexibility, and there is an option to have a glass shaft to give more feeling of space within a room.

If the requirement is to overcome steps within a house, then the recommended solution will provide both stairs and a stairlift, which can be installed even in the tightest of spaces. At the touch of a button this two-in-one platform lift solution will transform from a flight of stairs to a platform lift. There is also a cantilever style of platform lift that is mounted in a pit at the floor of a staircase. When not in use it is flush with the surrounding floor but will then, in operation, rise up and over the steps and then back down again. Both access solutions offer design flexibility so that customers can choose colours and finishes to blend in with the decor of their home.

Because platform lifts come under the machine directive it is recommended that they are serviced at least twice a year, but this depends on their usage. It is advisable that this service is carried out by a platform lift specialist as the product differs from normal passenger lifts – this can mean that servicing, repairs and replacement parts can be achieved a lot quicker than through a lift engineer.

Individuals can live more independently and spend time with their families because of the installation of a platform lift. Although the progress in creating accessible homes is slow, the design of the platform lift has advanced and will continue to develop as they can be life changing within the home environment and therefore are a valuable investment.

Sean O'Sullivan is the managing director of The Platform Lift Company

Peace of mind through intelligent design.

The Kinemagic is no ordinary shower. The same size as a standard bath, this clever cubicle is suitable for all the family, with anti-slip flooring, grab bars and rails and a fold-down seat for less mobile users.

As if that's not enough, installation can be completed in a day,* thanks to its silicone and grout-free design, plus it comes covered by a reassuring two-year guarantee. Genius.



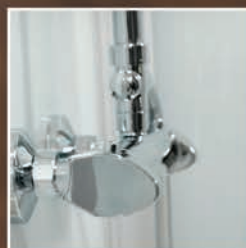
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*It's possible to fit a Kinemagic Serenity + in one day with two people. This is subject to site situations and the competency of your installer.



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Making it easy to adapt

A new briefing paper from the House of Commons is highlighting increased funding that should lead to almost a doubling of home adaptations under Disabled Facilities Grants. To help social housing providers deliver in a timely manner, Closomat – a leading provider of disabled toilet solutions – has a unique package in its sector. It means that, from one source, bathroom adaptations can be efficiently project managed, while being fully compliant with all appropriate Regulations, and then serviced and maintained. No other shower (wash & dry) toilet manufacturer has the capability to offer, and deliver, such a full service. In addition, the service extends beyond simply installation of an appropriate shower (wash & dry) toilet. Closomat can offer design advice, supply and install a raft of supplementary bathroom equipment, including ceiling track hoists, toilet lifters, height adjustable washbasins, shower seats, and even adult-sized changing benches and body driers. Closomat produces, in the UK, the brand leader and biggest seller in shower toilets, the Palma Vita. The company was the first to introduce the concept of shower toilets into the UK, almost 60 years ago. The Palma Vita is the only unit of its kind developed specifically for disabled people, and which can be accessorised – initially and retrospectively – to accommodate the user’s changing needs. Details of Closomat product and service offerings can be found on its website, the ‘go to’ resource for enabling intimate hygiene strategies.

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Protect your investment

HRV Group explains to landlords how vital it is that ventilation systems are serviced regularly

The summer was good, glorious in fact. So glorious that we should accept the winter that is coming right? Whatever the autumn and winter season has in store for us, one thing never changes – our transition to the ‘condensation season’

This is the time when moisture levels in properties reach an all-time high. Streaming windows, the minimal opening of windows and doors as to not let the cold in, or the warm air out, drying clothes indoors... the list of activities adding to moisture generation in the home is endless.

Did you know that a family of four can create up to 24 pints of moisture per day from cooking, showering, boiling the kettle, hanging clothes to dry and breathing?

Given all of these activities and changes that come with the end of the summer, the need for effective ventilation in the home is crucial.

As landlords, you should be considering how your property will be protected against issues such as condensation and mould as we move into the winter of 2018/2019.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF VENTILATION?

You can't see air, but a ventilation system is one of the most crucial services needed in your home – right up there with your heating system.

Ventilation systems come in a range of different types and sizes, but ultimately, they have two main purposes:

- To protect people from the effects of moisture, pollutants and airborne particles in the air e.g. carbon monoxide, radon, VOC's, carbon dioxide
- To protect the building from degradation caused by moisture e.g. mould, damp, wet rot

In 2012 the English Housing Stock Survey reported over five million homes were suffering with mould, condensation and damp. Six years later, the issue continues, and landlords continue to spend considerable amounts of money dealing with mould, damp and in extreme cases, tenant actions relating to indoor air quality and health impacts.

The issue is that it's often too late when the lack of ventilation, or lack of effective ventilation is realised. While the lifestyle of tenants is a contributing factor, occupancy levels, insulation improvements like double glazing or cavity wall insulation, and age and type of property all have bearing on the way air moves around a home and the level of ventilation required. And of course, if there is a ventilation system and it's not used, turned off, or not even working effectively you may already be on the back foot.

WHAT VENTILATION STRATEGIES ARE AVAILABLE?

As a landlord, protecting your property, your investment and your tenants is fundamental. You can choose from a range of ventilation strategies including:

- Intermittent kitchen/bathroom fans
- Continuously running fans
- Central extract
- Positive pressure
- Whole house heat recovery ventilation

Each with their own benefits and suitable for varying property types, the drive toward continuous ventilation however has been significant in recent years mainly due to increase thermal improvements to properties via the government schemes for cavity wall and roof insulation. Basically – if you insulate, you must ventilate!

DON'T JUST FIT AND FORGET

Once you have an effective strategy it doesn't end there. Ventilation systems work in slightly different ways, but ultimately, they are extracting air, and some are supplying air as well e.g. heat recovery ventilation system (likely to be found in new build apartments and houses).



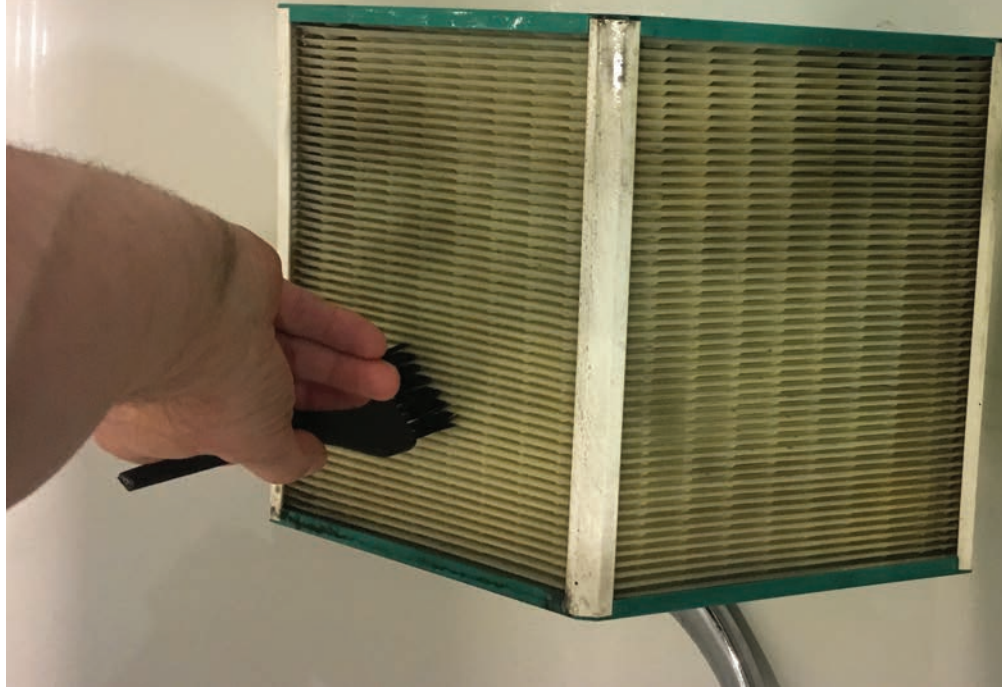
You can't see air, but a ventilation system is one of the most crucial services needed in your home – right up there with your heating system

Air that is passing through the ducting and the system (either extract air or internal air) is often full of particles such as dust, debris, pollen as well as pollutants we can't see with the naked eye – perhaps NOx from car engines if the property is located close to a busy road. These particles are passing through the ventilation system and over time rest or stick to the internal components, leading to clogging. This is also happening in the duct work connected to the system.

With a heat recovery ventilation system, there are a set of filters which are managing the removal of dirt and debris to protect the motor and the heat exchanger and crucially filtering incoming air as well. These filters are quickly and easily clogged as well.

Whether there are filters in the system or not, you can't just fit and forget.

A clogged, dirty and unmaintained ventilation system can result in issues such as reduced airflow performance, which leads to issues with condensation and mould and an uncomfortable 'stuffy' feeling inside the home



Cleaning a heat cube

Ventilation systems like boilers that are providing a crucial service in protecting the building and its occupants need to be maintained to ensure they are doing the job they are supposed to.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE SYSTEM ISN'T CHECKED OR SERVICED?

A clogged, dirty and unmaintained ventilation system can result in issues such as:

- Reduced airflow performance, which leads to issues with condensation and mould and an uncomfortable 'stuffy' feeling inside the home
- Increased noise levels as dust and debris build up causes resistance and air 'fights' against it, leading to people turning the systems off, which isn't good
- Energy wastage simply by the fact that the system is still working, but it's not doing the job it's supposed to

All of the above result in one single thing for landlords – complaints.

As time goes on, poor, ineffective, or no ventilation can impact both the health of the building and the health of the tenants.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE MAINTAINED?

The most important aspect of ventilation is that it is doing the job it is supposed to do. Clogging, dust and debris can impact performance by up to 18 per cent over just 12 months. This means the system is running, but is not effective and risks of mould and condensation are increased.

Each ventilation system has maintenance and cleaning requirements. A system such as heat recovery ventilation has a number of areas that need attention on an annual basis:

FILTER REPLACEMENT

Recommended to be checked every six months, and can be washed on first cycle, but must be replaced after 12 months.

REMOVING AND SANITISING ROOM AIR VALVES

Both extract and supply valves are located in each room and attract dust and debris easily.

CLEANING INSIDE THE HEAT RECOVERY UNIT

You would be surprised what makes its way inside the unit around the motors and impellers – especially insects.

REMOVING AND SANITISING THE HEAT EXCHANGER

The heat exchanger is dealing with high volumes of air coming out of the property and coming in from outside and can be easily clogged with debris.

CLEAN AND SANITISE DUCT WORK

Ducting is recommended to be cleaned approximately every five years as dust and debris builds up and can cause resistance.

OTHER FILTRATION SYSTEMS

NOx (new properties in high pollution areas may have additional filtration systems installed with ventilation systems that need maintenance as well) need maintaining approximately every five years.

UPGRADES AND REPLACEMENTS

Nothing lasts forever. Ventilation systems unlike heating systems are working 365 days a year to extract and supply air to the property. Seek advice on replacing systems between five and 10 years (depending on system type, location etc.).

As a landlord, protecting your home and your investment is crucial and your consideration of ventilation in your home as we move towards the colder winter months should be on your agenda. In new build properties, ventilation systems such as heat recovery are fundamental due to high insulation levels designed to 'keep the heat in' – the thing is that the building and its occupants need to breathe too.

The costs of dealing with mould, condensation, dry and wet rot, and tenant complaints around indoor air quality can spiral quickly. To help keep a fresh and healthy indoor environment, check you ventilation system and get it serviced annually.

Builder and Plasterers Essentials

One of the world's largest construction manufacturers: **Simpson Strong-Tie**, has released a new catalogue of structural connectors, beads and meshes aimed squarely at the repair maintenance and improvement sector.

The 2018 'Builder and Plasterers Essentials' brochure includes all of the core products that the professional builder or plasterer reaches for when renovating or extending homes.

Simpsons' Sarah Greenway explains: "We wanted to provide something more accessible to the builders merchant. We spoke to our customers and they told us what they really like to see in the catalogue (and what they don't particularly need) and this is the result – a brochure focussed entirely on the things that matter to the RMI sector.

The lighter and easier to navigate brochure is available online from the Simpson Strong-Tie website, hard copies are available on request.

01827 255600 www.strongtie.co.uk



Saniflo Kineduo walk-in shower-bath

Saniflo has added several new features to its walk-in shower-bath, the **Kineduo**, making it completely customisable. Now with the option to choose the brassware and shower, the Kineduo is an ideal choice for versatile, modern living. Select between a T-bar shower or classic model. The overhead rainshower comes complete with taps and water filler. Also new, are the round overflow filler, which can be purchased separately; an 800mm glass end screen panel added to the offering of the existing 750mm panel; and, a new soft close seat. Kineduo's practical features include a simple step-in access using a hinged, toughened safety glass door and the bath is available in a variety of sizes and fit options.

020 8842 0033 www.saniflo.co.uk



Fibo wall panels win over County Council

Fibo bathroom wall panels were recently specified by Powys County Council for a long term maintenance programme that will involve installing Fibo's panels as part of their bathroom programme. The refurbishment programme, which is the first of its kind where wall panels are being offered as a choice over traditional tiles, is going down well with tenants and installation teams alike! Mike Jarrett, WHQS Contracts Officer for Powys Council said: "We have a number of tenants who have dementia or are blind or partially sighted. Therefore we had to choose a RNIB friendly panel. For this reason we specified Fibo's traditional range in frost blue to be fitted in all properties where tenants express this preference."

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New Force™ 10Typhoon™ Full Face Mask

The NEW Force™10 Typhoon™ is an extremely lightweight, easy to maintain full face mask at only 365g with a completely clear panoramic visor to maximise light levels within the mask giving optimum visibility. The unique Typhoon™ exhalation valve has been designed to reduce breathing resistance, heat and moisture build-up. The valve is unaffected by any moisture, and therefore can be used with the same performance under very low temperatures (-40°C tested). The Force™10 Typhoon™ Mask is compatible with both JSP Classic filters and JSP PressToCheck™ filters, which allow for Daily Face Fit Reassurance™ so the user is confident of an excellent fit.



www.jsp.co.uk

High tech safety boots for the winter

Solid Gear's Falcon and Apollo boots are probably the most robust boots you can get for the winter months. With durable uppers these heavy-duty boots will keep your feet dry and insulated so you can work comfortably in the roughest conditions on site. The new oil and slip resistant Vibram soles deliver outstanding grip on snow and ice – even at low temperatures. The Apollo has a premium full-grain impregnated leather upper while the Falcon is a mix of full grain leather and a Cordura Rip Stop fabric. Both boots deliver better water repellency and breathability than many other boots, while their fiberglass toecaps feature multilayer technology for a roomier toe box.



www.solidgearfootwear.com

Snickers climate control underwear

Snickers Workwear Baselayer clothing uses high-tech breathable fabrics for ventilation and body moisture transport for consistent warmth and comfort. The seamless designs are available in 37.5° ventilating technology as well as polyester and merino wool to suit different types of work in a variety of cold weather conditions. The FLEXIWork and LITEwork designs and fabrics will keep you warm and dry – so you won't get cold, wet and shiver. All the garments are made from quick drying, lightweight fabrics that come with special ventilation features to control and regulate the heat from your body. Snickers Workwear Baselayer will give you the kind of warm, dry and fresh working comfort you wouldn't have thought possible.



www.snickersworkwear.com

Donation from The Window Company

A giant cheque for £10,000 was presented by the team from The Window Company (Contracts) to Moat recently to support the latest project being undertaken by its charitable arm, Moat Foundation. The donation is an integral part of the pledge made by The Window Company when it was appointed to Moat's window and door replacement framework in the autumn of 2017 to support the housing provider's social value activities. Alongside this, the commercial installer is also providing work placements and supporting community events to benefit Moat residents within the wider region covered by the framework, which includes Essex, London, Kent, Surrey and Sussex.



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Intratone access control technology installed at over 900 sites for Hounslow council

Door entry and access control equipment from Intratone, one of Europe's leading manufacturers, has been installed at over 900 different sites across Hounslow Council's estate.

The access control systems across the Council's residential and commercial portfolio had become obsolete with the desire to move from keys to a fob-based system.

Residents had been complaining at the delays in receiving new keys – in some cases taking up to six weeks for them to be delivered. New fobs can now be obtained straight away by residents when visiting their local housing office through the new cloud-based technology. Since late 2016 the Intratone fob readers have been installed at low and high-rise apartment blocks and Council offices, commercial buildings and operational sites, and complaints have dropped significantly.

Ian Williams, Electrical Engineer for Hounslow Council is in no doubt as to the benefits of the new Intratone proximity readers: "We hadn't heard of Intratone before it was recommended by the installer. So far, we have been very impressed – although it is a sizeable investment for the Council initially, the build and technology of the readers means that they will last for at least ten years.

"At one point the fob programming was carried

out by two full-time members of staff who would visit site daily to program residents' fobs. This can all now be programmed remotely by the relevant housing officers at the local housing office which will be a large long-term saving to the council."

The cloud-based fob-reader system has significantly enhanced control over who has access, for how long and to which properties. Because it is cloud-based, changes made to key fobs are almost immediate and can be facilitated from anywhere where there is internet access – whether that's at a PC, laptop or a smartphone on site.

"The simplicity of the database is such that some of our concierge and caretakers are being trained to manage the system themselves which frees up even more of the engineer's time," Ian adds. "With the older technology residents were also able to copy fobs in some local shops which did not give the council full control over who could access certain blocks.

"The new Intratone fobs have similar technology to an Oyster card – you cannot rewrite or copy them so when someone tries to use a copied fob it sends the system a notification. We can check the system when a certain fob has been used so we can assist Police when they have been trying to track someone's whereabouts."

Daniel Bacon, Area Sales Manager at Intratone



says its products are flexible enough to suit a wide range of sites and applications: "Our access control and door entry systems are installed across Social Housing, Private Properties and HAS all over the UK and Europe, and prove popular for residents of all ages, but especially the elderly, because they are very easy to use. Installers and customers also like them because they are very easy to install and competitively priced."

export@intratone.fr www.intratone.com

VEKA continues to offer a safe pair of hands, when the industry needs it most

VEKA Group has reaffirmed its position as a stable systems company that continues to prepare for growth. Sales Director Neil Evans explains: "Our ethos as a company has always been one of reliability, stability and support. 'Safe' might not sound like a very exciting way to describe something, but in an industry awash with uncertainty I'm happy to say VEKA Group is exactly that; a safe pair of hands that customers can rely on. "To maintain our position as an industry leader, we have continued to grow despite (and throughout) a period of rising costs of raw materials. With our strong heritage and the support of our global family, we are always evolving and further strengthening our reputation for quality, service and trust. "Throughout 2018, an incredible 99.3 per cent of all our thousands of deliveries have been made on time and in full. To maintain these enviable results, we hold an average £10M of profile in stock or en-route at all times and in the run up to Brexit we'll be building our stocks even more extensively, thereby increasing our buffering capabilities. In conjunction with this, we'll also be supplementing stock levels of key raw materials used in our compound; which is mixed here on site in our industry-leading, purpose-built facility. "Thanks to our extensive ongoing investment in people, plant and technology – which includes £5M this year alone – VEKA Group is more stable and committed to UK manufacturing than ever. We are also very excited about an imminent new product launch and new colour offering."

salesenquiry@veka.com



KMS hit 1.5 million fobs in the UK

KMS, a leading supplier of communal door access solutions to the UK housing industry have now passed 1.5 million fobs in operation with their web based access control system with SimpleKey Web. As the leading supplier to the social housing sector, KMS are now delivering more systems in the private sector and along with their latest development, SimpleKey Event Manager (SEM), the functionality of SimpleKey Web continues to grow. SEM provides additional functions and control such as emergency lighting and alarms, plus provides lift control when connected to a SimpleKey Web system controller. SimpleKey Web can also be used to control access to gates and parking barriers, providing a one stop shop for all communal access points in the building. As a cloud-based system, SimpleKey Web provides the ability to add and delete fobs wherever you are, as long as you have access to the internet and at the same time you can monitor usage, identifying unusual patterns immediately. The success of SimpleKey Web is seen in the figures with over: 1.5 million fobs in operation; 27,000 doors controlled; 11,000 residential housing blocks managed. SimpleKey Web with this latest development of the SEM, has answered customer's needs giving further control and monitoring of additional functions within buildings & gives full web based administration.

To find out more about KMS and SimpleKey Web visit our website.

01494 531099 www.kms.uk.net



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Acoustic vinyl flooring solutions for housing

Kenny Miller of Gerflor argues that vinyl flooring is the right acoustic solution for the housing sector



Unwanted sound can have a detrimental effect on people's health and well-being especially when living where constant nuisance noise can be acute.

In residential environments nuisance noise is usually more bothersome to occupants of homes where impact sound travels from one dwelling to another, especially from rooms above to spaces below. This has been exacerbated by the building of more flats and multi-storey apartments, the conversion of older, single dwellings into multi-occupancy homes, and the trend for extending homes to include three or more floors.

The greater use of hard floorings such as wood, stone, and wood laminates over carpets and cushioned floorings in homes has also contributed to higher levels of disturbance caused by impact sound on upper floors to rooms below.

Impact sound transmission is a form of structure-borne sound made by the impact of an object on another, generating sound transmission. Impact

sound can be transmitted through the floor construction to the room below, commonly by footsteps. Sound insulation levels are measured using a decibel (db) scale, which involves logarithmic units to measure airborne and impact sound.

Pioneering vinyl flooring manufacturers have therefore responded to the need to control impact sound by introducing residential acoustic vinyls with sound insulation levels as high as 19db. These floorings are now playing a vital role in minimising impact sound within homes, both in multi-occupancy and single dwellings, and in the private and public sector.

As acoustic, residential floorings can mimic wood, wood laminate, and stone floorings so successfully and look and perform better than ever before, they provide a quieter and more practical solution where sound-proofing is required, especially in buildings that have been converted into flats and apartments.

The UK's Building Regulations 2003 Part E: Resistance to the Passage of



Some of the new wood-effect interlocking click and lock system residential vinyls provide a secure yet floating floor and are a quieter alternative to LVT, wood and wood laminate

Sound sets minimum standards for impact sound insulation. Acoustic floorings can help achieve performance requirements.

Whereas wood and laminate floors generally rely on underlay to provide acoustic insulation, domestic, cushioned vinyls with integrated textile-backing systems and sound-insulating foam backing systems benefit from sound-insulation built into their specification. And, usually the thicker and more effective the textile backing system, the more sound-absorbent and thermally-efficient the flooring will be. Textile-backed vinyl floorings can also be loose-laid, thereby speeding up fitting and lowering installation costs.

For housing applications where slip resistance is as essential as sound insulation, some high performing, acoustic textile-backed and foam-backed residential vinyl floorings are $\geq 36/R10$ slip-resistant and meet HSE guidelines.

In addition, some of the new wood-effect interlocking click and lock system residential vinyls provide a secure yet floating floor and are a quieter alternative to LVT, wood and wood laminate.

Cushioned, high performing, easy-maintenance, acoustic residential vinyl floorings with additional benefits such as waterproofing, slip resistance and cost-effective installation are bringing solutions to housing projects. While flooring manufacturers continue to invest in innovative new technologies, advanced acoustic, thermal and high performing vinyl floorings will meet the challenges ahead for flooring in housing.

Flooring specialists are committed to providing the social housing sector with a range of flooring products that deliver fantastic quality, together with providing the all-important levels of comfort, safety, and wow-factor. Just because tenants live in 'affordable housing,' it doesn't mean they need to suffer poor standards of flooring. Flooring specialists supply a variety of superb flooring options that look stunning, are easy to maintain and are truly fit for purpose. Vinyl flooring solutions in particular provide excellent longevity, outstanding comfort and slip resistance as well as high acoustic performance. They are available in a wide selection of designs and colourways loved and wanted by tenants.

Kenny Miller is the national sales manager of the Housing team for Gerflor



Polyflor launches new Colonia Collection

Polyflor is delighted to reveal an exciting new Colonia range. The updated Colonia Collection features all 18 original shades with the introduction of eight brand new on trend designs. Following extensive design, trend and performance research each shade is carefully developed to complement a variety of residential interiors and reflect the current interior design trends, identified by its in-house design teams. With a 2.0mm gauge and a 0.2mm wear layer, Colonia has been constructed to withstand the demands of busy lifestyles and engineered specifically for the residential sector including private housing, social housing, housebuilders and housing association.



0161 767 1111 www.polyflor.com

Norbord launches super-quiet flooring

Norbord's CaberFloor P5 has been upgraded to produce a high performance floor with reduced impact and airborne noise transmission. Called CaberAcoustic, the new product comprises 18mm or 22mm CaberFloor P5 chipboard with a 10mm acoustic felt layer permanently bonded to the underside. Designed as a floating floor laid over an existing deck in either new-build or refurbishment applications, CaberAcoustic is installed with the tongue-and-groove joints glued with CaberFix D3 adhesive and all perimeters of the panel sealed with acoustic flanking strips. The boards are 2,400mm long x 600mm wide and are available in 28mm and 32mm thicknesses with standard TG4 edge profiles.



www.norbord.co.uk

Heating controls for housing specialists

ESi is providing installers and specifiers with the best options in BoilerPlus compliant heating controls, a range already being welcomed by a number of new build and social housing providers. The products on offer are ideal for new build or replacement heating projects with everything from simple controls that older and more vulnerable people find easier to use right up to the most sophisticated wifi enabled controls that allow you to control the levels of heat in your home from across the world via a smart phone. Demand for these high quality controls is up significantly this year through the merchants, from installers keen to take advantage of these cost effective, high quality controls.



01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

DANLERS just got better!

DANLERS Outdoor Security Switch range are neat and compact and now benefit from an IP66 rated polycarbonate enclosure and therefore can be installed across a greater range of challenging environments. The product range includes: IP66 Compact Person Detector with both improved time lag options and upgraded photocell range of 10-1000 lux together with a new photocell inactive feature; IP66 Twilight Switch turns lights ON from Dusk to Dawn; New IP66 Twilight Switch featuring DANLERS 'Intelligent' Photocell; IP66 Dusk Switch with new 'Intelligent photocell' and LED feedback for determining time on duration from 2-16 hrs. All products are covered by DANLERS five year warranty.



01249 443377 www.danlers.co.uk

Heat Interface Units can be Commissioned & Maintained Remotely Over the Internet

Evinox Energy has introduced remote commissioning and warranty validation for its ModuSat heat interface units (HIUs), which can significantly reduce the cost of commissioning and time spent on site by engineers manually checking and adjusting settings. Many other heat interface units for communal and district heating developments require an engineer to physically attend site to set-up every individual unit manually, adding time and cost to the project. Evinox's electronically controlled ModuSat HIU's feature SmartTalk communication technology and can be connected over the internet to remote servers, enabling Evinox to check the operation of each unit remotely and adjust settings where required. Once ModuSat units are installed and ready to be commissioned the following quick and simple process takes place: Installer Registers ModuSat Units Using Evinox's Online Registration Portal; Evinox Check the Operation of Each ModuSat Unit remotely; Evinox Visit site to inspect a sample of units (Around 10 per cent of the total units); Evinox will then certify the units and issue certificates; The Warranty period begins. The benefits don't just end there! During the aftercare period, following practical completion, Evinox's SmartTalk remote communication system enables checks to be made and faults to be diagnosed away from site. Evinox's SmartTalk® communication system enables them to carry out scheduled maintenance checks remotely over the internet.

info@evinox.co.uk www.evinoxenergy.co.uk



Stokvis EVOLUTION boilers

The continuing housing shortage and the demographics of an ageing population are increasing the popularity of apartment living as well as sheltered housing schemes, and also fuelling rapid growth in the uptake of communal or district heating schemes. The new EVOLUTION boiler ranges from Stokvis Energy Systems are ideally suited to power such projects. The R40 EVOLUTION and R600 EVOLUTION series represent the latest generation of Stokvis Energy Systems' long-established and widely-specified boilers, which can be installed along with the manufacturer's H Series Heat Interface Units (HIUs) to supply heating and domestic hot water to individual dwellings.



www.stokvisboilers.com

RedProtect water treatment

The use of the RedProtect water treatment system from Flamco offers the heating industry an opportunity to take advantage of the only new approach to water treatment currently on the market, along with the opportunity to significantly reduce the amount of plastic waste generated by most water treatment options. Compared to traditional liquid water treatment products, RedProtect offers approximately 84 per cent reduction in plastic waste compared to a typical one litre jerrycan. And as a solid product it guarantees no spills or leaks in transport or storage. For more information, please visit the Flamco website.



info@flamco.co.uk www.flamco-redprotect.com

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Smart heat controls: are social landlords warming to IoT heat technology?

Nigel Ebdon of Secure Meters UK Ltd explores the significance of 'Internet of Things' (IoT) technology and how social landlords benefit from smart heat controls

Social landlords are investing in IoT technology to better measure and manage energy use including home energy efficiency, tenant health, safety and welfare, and asset management.

Secure Meters UK Ltd was keen to better understand market expectation and need, so in early 2018 we commissioned a broad survey of UK social asset, sustainability and energy managers.

It has been interesting to observe that once housing professionals grasp the fundamentals of home sensor and IoT technology they are alive with ideas on how to deploy it across their housing stock.

In particular, they comprehend the potential dual value of IoT. Tenants benefit from greater control, improved customer service and a more responsive, better-informed landlord. Landlords on the other hand are able to make better, evidence based decisions, improve service delivery and efficiency and better manage assets.

This is certainly true of smart heat controls where tenants can reduce heating bills through increased control via smart phones, while landlords use remote access to data to better maintain boilers and identify issues such as high humidity and over and under heated homes.

The following breaks down three key questions from the report, along with reaction from Southern Housing Group's senior home energy advisor Patryk

Szczerba. Patryk and the London based housing association have been assessing a 20 home smart heat control pilot installation over recent months.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF SMART HEAT CONTROLS

Interestingly, at a time when cost and efficiency savings are perceived to be at an ever increasing priority for landlords, tenant support and welfare related benefits came out on top, in particular reducing bills and tackling fuel poverty.

Patryk Szczerba comments: "I'm actually not surprised by this. Although it is the asset management value of smart heat controls that could potentially save landlords significant money over time, the most obvious upfront benefit is reducing tenant fuel bills.

"This is the starting point for many landlords: can the cost of heat be reduced without compromising the quality of warmth in the home? If the answer to this is yes, then it's a massive tick in the box."

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ASSET MANAGEMENT BENEFITS OF SMART HEAT CONTROLS?

We have been long aware of the damaging impact of humidity and subsequent mould growth, and Secure Meters has recently partnered with the University



of Southampton's faculty Engineering and Environment to better understand the problem.

Patryk agrees: "Mould growth is often an expensive, perennial and ongoing problem for landlords. Firstly, there are health implications for tenants exposed to mould growth for prolonged periods of time – including nasal lung conditions, asthma and allergies in children.

"Removing and stopping mould growth isn't always a simple process and

often requires a combination of tradespeople and services to fix it. This can include the complaints team, housing managers, surveyors and contractors. In the meantime tenants may have to be rehoused. It all mounts up.

"Smart heat controls should be able to assist in a number of ways. Firstly, it can alert us to the homes with problematic levels of humidity, allowing us to take preventative action before mould growth takes hold."

Patryk further explains: "Secondly, it should provide my team with the information needed to have an informed conversation with the tenant. If we can see that humidity is spiking at say meal or shower times, we can suggest ventilating the bathroom or putting lids on pans."

WHAT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS TO THE ADOPTION OF SMART HEAT CONTROLS?

The two main barriers to adoption identified are the upfront capital investment required to purchase and confusion over various technologies.

The issue of CapEx isn't a surprise, and in our experience landlords would rather spread the cost by paying monthly for managed services – with guarantees that products will be maintained and kept up-to-date as part of any contracts. With solutions evolving so quickly you can understand why landlords are anxious to avoid purchasing 'yesterday's technology'.

Patryk comments: "Smart heat controls should provide ongoing financial, environmental and social benefits – and this return should be balanced against upfront costs. However, keeping upfront capital costs as low as possible definitely makes purchasing easier, and most landlords now prefer to pay for new solutions as an ongoing service funded by the value they deliver."

"There are a lot of different connected home technologies out there from a growing number suppliers, and in an ideal world they would all be able to integrate and work together, but landlords understand that's never going to be the case."

Patryk concludes: "As well as conducting their own trials to test and compare various new technologies, landlords are also sharing pilot and installation data. This should prove reassuring to landlords and speed up mass adoption of the right solutions."

Nigel Ebdon is the market development manager at Secure Meters UK Ltd



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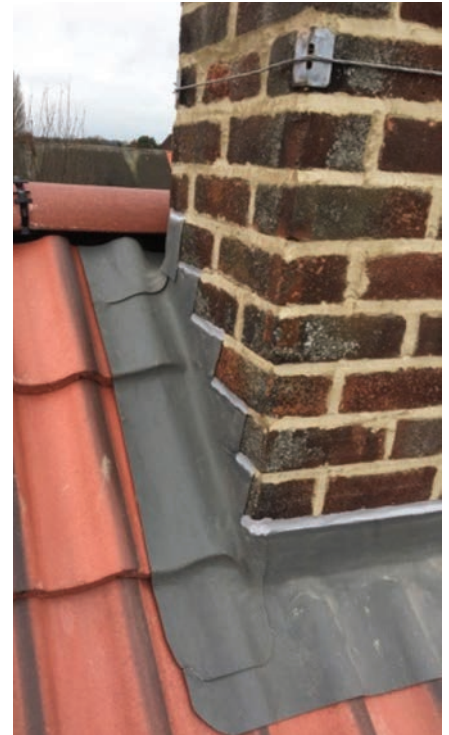
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Aico has now commenced its flagship apprenticeship programme. Aico received over fifty applications from potential apprentices, with four apprentices commencing employment within the Customer Service, Finance and Technical departments. Aico has also widened the participation in the programme to include existing members of its workforce, by offering two staff the opportunity to upskill via an apprenticeship. SBC Training will be providing the training and support for Aico's apprentices and have been working with managers to provide a comprehensive induction experience and to ensure that the apprentices have the best possible start to their apprenticeship journey.



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The challenges of smoke control in existing multi-occupancy buildings

Whitesales explores the ventilation solutions for smoke control and management in multi-occupancy buildings




With 53 per cent of fire-related fatalities resulting from individuals being overcome by smoke or toxic fumes, smoke heat exhaust vent systems (SHEVs) make a critical difference by helping to keep escape routes smoke-free. In multi-occupancy buildings in particular they enable firefighters to tackle blazes more safely and effectively and can, therefore, make a significant contribution to reducing structural damage.

British Standard guidance varies according to building height and the distance from the furthest apartment entrance door to its nearest escape route. However, life-saving devices and systems should, ideally, exceed standards and achieve strictly defined performance criteria. Thorough analysis of the proposed fire strategy and design of common escape routes is therefore essential.

Performance criteria and SHEV system design will depend on the layout of corridors and communal areas. As such, a mechanical smoke extraction system can give greater flexibility in terms of floor space utilisation. Indeed, in addition

Performance criteria and SHEV system design will depend on the layout of corridors and communal areas. As such, a mechanical smoke extraction system can give greater flexibility in terms of floor space utilisation

to providing greater efficiency than a natural ventilation system it can effectively be designed around space constraints. The need for a secondary power supply may increase initial outlay but this must be set against greater efficiency, design



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With so many high-rise buildings obviously in need of upgrading, there are long term benefits in terms of both smoke control and management of the living environment to be derived from use of a SHEV system

flexibility, and the ability to operate in the event of a mains power failure. In addition, it will provide a mechanism for the fire service to stop, override, and ultimately re-set it into a different mode of operation.

Factors to take into account when designing a smoke control system are far-reaching. A mechanical smoke extraction system utilises an extract shaft so that when smoke is detected, the fire damper to the shaft on the fire floor opens while all others remain closed. The vent at the head of the staircase then opens so that a fan at the top of the shaft can extract smoke and prevent its migration into adjacent compartments. A recent innovation is the modular smoke ventilation system, an example of which is the Es-SHEV Mechanical Pod. This gives the architect or M&E consultant the guarantee of flow rate and pressure performance while offering greater ease and speed of installation. With refurbishment and new build windows so limited, a choice of sizes can be supplied pre-commissioned in a prefabricated, prewired pod, ready for a single lift to the rooftop.

In terms of day to day living, overheating has become a feature of multi-occupancy buildings. Centralised heat generation systems significantly increase temperature build-up in communal areas, a factor which, ironically, has been made worse by improved energy efficiency and air tightness standards. The secondary use of a mechanical smoke ventilation system is, therefore, becoming more common as it provides an effective means of reducing temperatures deep within a building. It does so by using the smoke shaft as a cooling chamber so that, when combined with low-level inlet air, it provides negative pressure to draw air up through the building.

For the Grafton Quarter in Croydon, a £25 million project to regenerate a former industrial site into a mixed use scheme, 97 residential units were built in which a Fire Engineer recommended a mechanical ventilation system for each

of the eight-storey blocks. The system was required to provide adjustable flow rates to run in 'escape' and 'firefighting' modes. A control system was linked to the central fire alarm and fireman priority switches were installed within the stairway on each level. During the planning phase it was also identified that the central boiler systems were constructed to run through the mechanical risers, so it was also necessary to facilitate temperature control for these areas. As a result, a fully integrated system, utilising CFD analysis, was designed within the requirements of Approved Document B and BS9991. A mechanical ventilation unit featuring integrated smoke vent louvres was installed in each building incorporating controls over floor vents plus electrical invertors to adjust extract flow rates. These adjust the fan speed and allow the system to be run at varying levels of output in the event of fire. Additional comfort fans were installed, designed to run continuously at lower speed for energy efficiency with additional dampers providing comfort ventilation for six of the eight floors in each building. The adaptive controls enable the comfort functionality to be shut down in the event of fire.

With so many high-rise buildings obviously in need of upgrading, there are long term benefits in terms of both smoke control and management of the living environment to be derived from use of a SHEV system. In terms of overall efficiency, commissioning and cost there are also advantages in the manufacturer being involved in specification and installation. Such a complete smoke extraction package ensures that, for example, uninterrupted power supplies enable a mechanical system to be installed without the requirement for two dedicated three phase power supplies. It also removes the risks associated with split sourcing of products and inadequate contracting standards, while ensuring that complementary accessories facilitate a system's efficiency and commissioning.



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