

# HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

FEB/MAR 2019



Commission  
demands 3.1  
million new  
homes

Another UC  
u-turn



Grenfell Inquiry  
on pause

£1 billion TA bill

Homeless deaths  
– shocking rise



## Pro-active roof asset management

Dean Wincott of Langley Waterproofing Systems explains the benefits of implementing a full roof asset management plan. See page 43



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## Features

### 31 Insulation & Energy Efficiency Roofs renewed

Kingspan Insulation's Adrian Pargeter explains why tapered insulation systems should be considered when refurbishing flat roofs in order to avoid water ponding

### 35 Bathroom Refurbishment Comfort height – a big deal

Lecico's Adam Lay discusses what comfort height means and why it's something to consider when planning a bathroom refurbishment

### 39 Doors, Windows & Glazing The no compromise composite door

John Whalley of Nationwide Windows & Doors discusses the advantages of composite doors for social housing

### 43 Roofing Pro-active roof asset management

Dean Wincott of Langley Waterproofing Systems explains the benefits of implementing a full roof asset management plan

### 46 Security & Tenant Safety Safe and secure

Kate Descamps of DAD UK explains how installing secure mailboxes in multi-occupancy buildings can bring peace of mind to both tenants and landlords

### 47 Boilers & Gas Safety The importance of boiler protection

Craig Mitchell of Sentinel discusses how social housing providers can improve resident satisfaction while improving the performance of heating systems

### 49 Software & Apps Making maintenance manageable

Kirona's Neil Harvey explains how workflow management solutions can benefit housing providers, making it simpler to monitor and manage necessary maintenance and repair work

# Feb/ Mar 19 Contents

## In this issue of **HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE**

Industry news .....	04
Events .....	06
Appointments & News .....	27
Futurebuild Show Preview .....	29
Directory .....	51



## Products

Efficiency	
Air Quality & Ventilation (HVAC Control) .....	30
Heating & Renewable Energy .....	32
Insulation & Energy Efficiency .....	31

Maintenance & Refurbishment	
Bathroom Refurbishment .....	32
Building Products & Services .....	34
Cladding & External Finishes .....	38
Coatings, Sealants & Paints .....	38
Doors, Windows & Glazing .....	38
Floors & Flooring .....	41
Interiors .....	41
Plant, Tools & Equipment .....	41
Roofing .....	42

Safety & Regulation	
Boilers & Gas Safety .....	47
Security & Tenant Safety .....	45
Smoke & Fire Protection .....	45

Technology	
Monitoring & Smart Controls .....	48
Software & Apps .....	49



News Editor:  
Patrick Mooney  
patrick@netmagmedia.eu

Editorial Assistant:  
Roseanne Field

Studio Manager:  
Mikey Pooley

Production Assistants:  
Georgia Musson  
Kim Musson

Advertisement Manager:  
Paul Field

Sales Executives:  
Suzanne Easter  
Kim Friend

Circulation:  
Jane Spice

Managing Director:  
Simon Reed

Cointronic House,  
Station Road,  
Heathfield,  
East Sussex TN21 8DF

Advertising &  
administration  
Tel: 01435 863500  
info@netmagmedia.eu  
www.housingmmonline.co.uk

Editorial features  
Tel: 01435 863500  
rfield@netmagmedia.co.uk

Press Releases  
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

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## Editor's comment

# Safety and security issues should be paramount



Patrick Mooney,  
News Editor

The ease with which tenants can be evicted from their homes in the private rented sector and on-going concerns over the safety of tenants' homes should focus the attention of our national and local politicians like no other. In fact the recently published report 'Building for our future: a vision for social housing' from Shelter's cross-party Commission, should be essential reading for all politicians and policy makers with even the slightest interest in housing, our economy and social cohesion. The Commission was formed in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy and has taken its time talking to thousands of people up and down the country and deliberating over tons of evidence and statistics. Therefore its findings should be taken very seriously and used to shape the national agenda, irrespective of the ongoing confusion surrounding Brexit. In summary the commissioners recommend we build 3.1 million new social homes over the next 20 years and establish a new regulator focused on safeguarding tenants and ensuring standards of rented housing are fit for a modern age. The report makes a compelling case for both. The commissioners argue politicians cannot remain idle at a time when half of our nation's young people have no chance of ever buying a home, private renters on lower incomes spend an average of 67 per cent of their earnings on rent, and almost 280,000 people in England are homeless.

### MEANINGFUL SOLUTIONS

Their solution is a 20-year housebuilding programme designed to offer a social home to all those who fail to qualify under the current system. They have costed this in detail and worked out the programme pays for itself over a 39-year period because of lower rents, a lower benefits bill and increases in economic activity. Those specifically helped include: 1.27 million homes for those in greatest housing need – homeless households, those living with a disability or long-term illness, or living in very poor conditions; 1.17 million homes for 'trapped renters' – younger families who cannot afford to buy and face a lifetime in expensive and insecure private renting; and 690,000 homes for older private renters – people over 55 struggling with high housing costs and insecurity beyond retirement. There is an understandable focus on the plight of Millennials – those born in the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s who are facing a whole heap of pressures, as a result of actions by the baby boomers' generation. But the commissioners recognise housing is not just a numbers game. They rightly point out the need for a new regulator – who listens to tenants and whose priority is ensuring their homes are safe and that they receive good standards of service. Sadly the current regulatory system does not truly operate in the interest of tenants. Instead we have a regulator which focuses almost exclusively on value for money (but not from a tenant's perspective) and on how housing association boards operate. It virtually ignores the millions of tenants living in council housing and those in the private rented sector, as well as the thousands who are homeless through no fault of their own.

### FIRMER ACTIONS REQUIRED

The Government's allocation of just £2.4million to more than 50 councils for them to take firmer action against rogue landlords falls woefully short of what is needed in the way of additional resources. The Local Government Association is also asking for councils to be given powers to establish more local licensing schemes of private landlords. Down in Kent we see controversial landlord Fergus Wilson is starting the process of mass evictions so he can sell his buy-to-let property empire, while in London the inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire has gone into a state of hibernation, while core participants wade through the more than 200,000 pieces of evidence before it resumes some time in the next 18 months. The fact that families of the bereaved, survivors of the fire and others directly affected by it are still waiting for some sort of closure a year and a half after the tragedy is an unimaginable horror. Over the winter we have seen, read and heard about more personal disasters linked to accidents in people's homes, underlining the importance of health and safety and highlighting that it's not 'red tape' or unnecessary bureaucracy. Instead it's a matter of life and death and something we should not pennypinch over. It really is time for the Government to take proper ownership of resolving problems, like the time it is taking for high rise tower blocks to be re-clad in safe materials. One of the few bright points of recent months has been the news that the development of new affordable homes by housing associations has picked up. We need to see this continue, for the numbers to expand and for this growth to be extended to councils. We also need to see reforms delivered to Universal Credit. Currently it accounts for many failed tenancies and evictions across all types of rented housing, blighting the lives of those who the Shelter Commission wants to help and support. The Government has been provided with a blueprint for solving this, but will it run with it?

Patrick Mooney

### On the cover...

Dean Wincott of Langley Waterproofing Systems explains the benefits of implementing a full roof asset management plan. © High Level Photography Ltd, commissioned by Langley Waterproofing Systems Ltd

See page 43



# Shelter report demands wholesale changes and 3 million extra social homes

A pivotal and groundbreaking report from the housing charity Shelter has demanded wholesale changes are made to the nation's housing policies, including the building of 3.1 million new social homes over the next 20 years.

It is also demanding the establishment of a new regulator to protect social housing and private sector tenants, based on a common set of consumer friendly service standards and backed up by the resources to tackle rogue landlords and protect tenants from no-fault evictions.

Following the horrors of the Grenfell Tower fire, Shelter set up a commission under the stewardship of influential national figures and campaigners. It consulted more than 31,000 people over the course of 12 months and has produced a series of hard-hitting recommendations designed to make "once in a generation" changes to solve the country's many housing ills.

Launched at the beginning of January, it attracted huge attention from the broadcast, print and digital media. The report's authors warn that "Unless we act now, we face a future in which a generation of young families will be trapped renting privately for their whole lives, where more and more people will grow old in private rentals, where billions more in welfare costs will be paid to private landlords – and hundreds of thousands more people will be forced into homelessness."

The Government has already promised new legislation to reshape and revitalise the country's social housing and the commission's report has clearly been designed with the aim of strongly influencing future housing policies.

Politicians of all major parties were slammed for their poor records in recent decades, with both Conservative and Labour Governments criticised for failing people over housing.

## CATASTROPHIC DECLINE

"Today we are feeling the effects of 40 years of failure in housing policy. This crisis has seen a catastrophic decline in social housing, leaving millions in insecure and unaffordable rented homes – with home ownership an impossible dream, and increasing numbers of people tipped into homelessness.

"From the Second World War up to 1980, we were building an average of around 126,000 social homes every year. Last year, there were only 6,463 new social homes. The private rented sector is bursting at the seams – with many renters trapped in unaffordable, insecure homes."

The commissioners say that the building of new social housing should be treated as a national infrastructure project. If the development work is funded at least initially from borrowing, they say that the new housing will pay for itself over 39



The Government has already promised new legislation to reshape and revitalise the country's social housing and the commission's report has clearly been designed with the aim of strongly influencing future housing policies

years, largely through lower housing benefit bills and the economic boost derived from lower rents. The report says that high property prices and high rents have stifled ambition and adversely affected the population's prosperity.

The commissioners conducting the study included the former Labour leader Ed Miliband, the Conservative former cabinet minister Sayeeda Warsi, the campaigner Doreen Lawrence, whose son Stephen was murdered in a racist attack in 1993, the former Treasury minister Jim O'Neill, Ed Daffarn of Grenfell United, which represents survivors, and Gavin Kelly of the Resolution Trust thinktank.

Ed Miliband was critical of Labour's record on social housebuilding during his time in the cabinet and urged Jeremy Corbyn to be more ambitious in setting the opposition's plans for new housing. Baroness Warsi and Jim O'Neil acknowledged that this was a problem the market alone could not solve.

## REGULATORY FAILURES

One of the main findings is how the current regulatory system is failing social renters. In 2017-18 the average time taken for a decision by the housing ombudsman was eight months.

The commission is demanding a regulator with similar muscle to the body set up in the aftermath of the financial crisis to fix a system that has left social tenants feeling ignored or branded as troublemakers for raising serious concerns.

The commission also proposes a new national tenants' organisation to give social housing residents a voice at a regional and national level and the scrapping of rules that slow down tenants from complaining to a regulator.

These views chime with those voiced by Grenfell United, who represent the families of those who died in the fire, as well as survivors and neighbours.

Research for the commission by the Britain Thinks agency found that 31 per cent of social renters feel their landlord does not think about their interests when making decisions, a figure that rises to 38 per cent in London. Nationally only 19 per cent of social renters felt able to influence the decisions made by their landlord about their home.

Ed Daffarn said: "Social housing is not like choosing a doctor – you can't just up sticks and move if your housing association gets a low rating. Much more is needed to put power in residents' hands. We need a new regulation system that will be proactive and fight for residents, with real repercussions for housing associations or councils that fail in their duty."

The Government has not made a formal response to the report's publication but it will be under pressure to include many of its recommendations in a forthcoming White Paper on social housing. Housing Secretary, James Brokenshire, has previously stated he wants to make social landlords more accountable to tenants and was conscious of the "need to increase regulation".

## Further reforms of Universal Credit needed to fix system

The charity Citizens Advice has called for a “root and branch overhaul” of Universal Credit, to ensure it delivers on its promise of being a fairer and simpler system of support to individuals and families in need.

It says that a half of all claimants who came to it for help with the new benefit are at risk of being evicted, owing to rent arrears and hardship. Since the initial roll out, the charity has helped over 190,000 people with UC issues. It acknowledges improvements in claimants’ circumstances as a result of changes made in 2017, but says these have “only made a dent in the problem, rather than fixed it.”

It summarises the main problems as - people face particular problems during the five-week wait for a first payment but financial problems last well beyond this; UC is paid in rigid ways that make it hard for some to budget and leaves little financial wriggle room; and deductions for debt repayments are common, affecting more than half of all claimants in September 2018.

Further changes are needed so that people are paid enough to live on and in a way that reflects people’s lives and how they budget. Citizens Advice is calling for the following actions:

- Make sure people can access adequate financial support at the beginning of their claim and look to improve Universal Credit design to reduce the wait;
- Ensure Universal Credit provides enough to live on by reviewing how benefit rates are set and ensuring deductions are manageable; and
- Help people to budget by designing Universal Credit around real lives, providing greater flexibility in how UC is paid and income is assessed.



## U-turns on Universal Credit welcomed

**A** softening of the Government’s welfare programme to alleviate its impact on low-income families has been welcomed by campaigners, but further changes are being demanded.

Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd revealed plans to scrap extending a benefits cap on families with more than two children (for children born before the system began in 2017). She also proposes lifting the freeze on benefit levels when the current cap ends in 2020 and consulting MPs before rolling Universal Credit out to more than 3 million claimants.

Charities like the Child Poverty Action Group said the decision was “fantastically good news”, but it is still calling for the two-child cap to be scrapped for all other families. Labour and the SNP said the change “does not go far enough”.

There is also pressure on Ministers to speed up the process for making payments to new claimants. This has already fallen from six to five weeks, but

Rudd is proposing to run a pilot involving 10,000 people and learn from this.

Ms Rudd said: “I’m making a number of changes to our welfare system to make sure that it delivers on the intent which is to be a safety net and also to be a compassionate and fair system helping people into work.”

Dropping the benefits cap on families with two children born before UC was introduced is thought to affect about 15,000 households, while up to 3 million people were expected to migrate from the old benefits system to Universal Credit in the coming months and years.

Frank Field, who chairs the Work and Pensions Committee, was supportive of the changes. He said: “I strongly welcome the decision not to press ahead with what could have been the cruellest benefit cut in history. At the eleventh hour, she has prevented thousands of children from being plunged into poverty by an unjustifiable retrospective policy.”

## Events

**Futurebuild**  
05 - 07 March, London  
[www.futurebuild.co.uk](http://www.futurebuild.co.uk)

**Facilities Show**  
18 - 20 June, London  
[www.facilitiesshow.com](http://www.facilitiesshow.com)

**CIH Housing**  
25 - 27 June, Manchester  
[www.cihhousing.com/home](http://www.cihhousing.com/home)

**UK Construction Week**  
08 - 10 October  
[www.ukconstructionweek.com](http://www.ukconstructionweek.com)

**Homes UK**  
27 - 28 November, London  
[www.homesevent.co.uk/home](http://www.homesevent.co.uk/home)

# Grenfell Tower inquiry goes into year-long hibernation

The public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower disaster will rarely sit this year, with campaigners worried that the momentum for radical reforms to housing safety, building regulations and tenants' protection could fade and disappear as time passes.

The first stage of the inquiry ended in December. It has heard from hundreds of witnesses – survivors, families and friends of the 72 people who died, the firefighters and many more emergency responders, as well as expert witnesses – in an attempt to set out the events leading up to the fire and what exactly happened on the night of 14 June 2017.

Whether recommendations from stage one will be issued before the year-end we do not yet know, but the inquiry chairman Sir Martin Moore-Bick, has already said that stage two hearings are unlikely to start before the end of 2019.

Many participants believe it should be possible to publish some initial recommendations from stage one by March this year. These relate to issues like the 'stay put' guidance in the event of a fire, the safety equipment provided to residents and firefighters, the resident consultation processes which landlords must undertake before major works begin and the quality of components used in residential buildings. The installation of water sprinklers is another contentious issue.

## BUILDING SAFETY DELAYS

The Government's banning of combustible materials in the future building schemes has failed to satisfy campaigners, who understandably want to see it removed from existing buildings including

those below 18 metres in height.

The second stage of the inquiry is due to focus on the management of the tower, communications with residents, its refurbishment and fire safety. This means that conclusions about aspects of building safety and how they need to be improved – which could affect many thousands of other tower block residents – are likely to be delayed until 2021. Survivors and families of the deceased claim this is denying them justice.

The survivors' group Grenfell United has said the defensiveness and silence of companies involved in the flawed refurbishment of the tower, was "an insult to our families and continues to put families at risk across the country".

Meanwhile teams of lawyers acting for the building companies involved in the refurbishment of the tower as well as for Kensington & Chelsea Council, are now being given time to trawl through more than 200,000 documents collected by the inquiry team, so they can prepare for stage two of the inquiry.

## BROKEN CULTURE

Ed Daffarn, who escaped from the 16th floor of Grenfell Tower, spoke as stage one of the inquiry came to an end. He said: "What's key isn't that Grenfell is remembered for what happened before the fire, but for the change we achieved after the fire."

"We are looking to change the culture around social housing and the institutional indifference it entails. Grenfell United has come to believe that can be achieved through a two-pronged attack –

There are 361 high-rise residential and publicly-owned buildings in England where ACM cladding systems remain in place and are unlikely to meet current Building Regulations guidance

tenants' voice and regulation. Grenfell wouldn't have happened if we had been heard and respected ... People are still not being listened to."

It is remarkable to think that not all of those who were made homeless by the fire have yet to move into permanent housing.

In addition there are 361 high-rise residential and publicly-owned buildings in England where ACM cladding systems remain in place and are unlikely to meet current Building Regulations guidance. Only 73 buildings have had all of their combustible cladding removed in the near 20 months that have passed since the Grenfell Tower fire.

There are 13 private sector residential buildings where the cladding status is yet to be confirmed and 50 buildings where the removal plan is unclear. The Government also announced the BRE will start tests on non Grenfell-style cladding in March, with the results expected in the summer.

## Councils told they are responsible for removal of cladding from private tower blocks

A Government minister has told local authorities they are responsible for ensuring that dangerous cladding panels are removed from dozens of privately owned tower blocks.

In the latest building safety release from the MHCLG, it was revealed there were 272 tower blocks in the private sector in need of remediation works. Of these 48 had started or finished remediation work, 158 had plans drawn up or in development, while no known plans existed for the remaining 69 blocks.

The Government has made money available for social landlords to pay for the removal of cladding from buildings in their ownership, but has repeatedly refused to fund removal works in the private sector. Instead it has relied on ever more vocal warnings to building owners that they needed

to take action. In November ministers told councils they should organise for the work to be done and to reclaim costs from the owners.

Speaking in a debate in the House of Lords last month, Lord Nick Bourne, under-secretary in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, repeated this sentiment, saying: "The ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the cladding comes off those (69 blocks) rests with local authorities. They can require the private owners to take action."

Following this and speaking in the same debate, Lord Gary Porter, who chairs the Local Government Association, raised concerns about this. "Councils have to operate inside the law of the land, and that doesn't allow us just to go in and take off cladding from other people's buildings."



It is understood the Government plan involves making a change to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System to ensure that cladding was covered by existing guidance, even though this has only been used for correcting faults like damp in privately rented properties. Councils would probably require a court order to carry out work if the building owner refused.

# £38 million to boost accommodation for London's homeless

**T**housands of extra homes will be made available for vulnerable Londoners at risk of becoming homeless as a result of councils in the capital joining forces and extra financial support from the Government.

Through an innovative new scheme London boroughs are combining to provide safe accommodation for families on the verge of homelessness. They are being backed by almost £38 million of funding over the next three years from the Government's £1.2 billion overall investment in tackling homelessness.

The additional homes will help provide a long-term, stable solution for vulnerable families struggling to find secure accommodation, providing a safety net for those who may otherwise feel they have nowhere else to go.

Currently, all London boroughs are responsible for providing accommodation for those at risk of homelessness both inside and outside their area. This often leads to councils competing for the best accommodation, driving up prices and slowing down the provision of quality housing for the most vulnerable.

The new scheme will stop this from happening by encouraging London boroughs to work together in boosting accommodation to tackle homelessness across the capital.

Communities Secretary James Brokenshire said: "Everyone deserves a safe and secure home. I've seen for myself how hard each of the London boroughs works to provide those that are homeless with the support they need and a roof over their heads.

"This radical new way of working and unprecedented collaboration between the boroughs and government will make a real difference – providing more accommodation for the vulnerable and helping them to get back on their feet and away from homelessness for good."

## COLLABORATION

Councillor Darren Rodwell, London Councils' Executive Member for Housing & Planning, said:



Thousands of extra homes will be made available for vulnerable Londoners at risk of becoming homeless as a result of councils in the capital joining forces and extra financial support from the Government

"With so many homeless households and so little accommodation available, London faces the country's most serious homelessness challenge.

"Capital Letters is a crucial opportunity to do things differently – and we are extremely pleased to have the Government's support for this innovative work.

Through collaboration, boroughs will collectively strengthen our market position and secure much better housing options for homeless Londoners."

To date, 11 London boroughs have signed up to the scheme, with more expected to come on board in the future. Over the next three years, the scheme is expected to help over 35,000 households within Greater London out of homelessness.

The councils are establishing a not-for-profit company to deliver the Capital Letters programme. They will be tasked with providing this vital service

on behalf of the boroughs and will undertake the management of the homes which are provided.

The joined-up approach will also give those at risk of homelessness the chance to stay closer to where they currently live, meaning that disruption to their employment or education can be reduced during what is already a difficult time.

Capital Letters is being supported by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as part of the Government's commitment to addressing homelessness and encouraging collaborative solutions to tackle the issue.

A group of 11 boroughs will join Capital Letters initially, with others expected to become members at a later stage. The initial members are Tower Hamlets, Bexley, Haringey, Waltham Forest, Brent, Ealing, Barking and Dagenham, Croydon, Lewisham, Redbridge and Southwark.

## Rough sleeping rises in most English cities

The number of rough sleepers rose in almost all of England's major cities despite a modest fall across the whole country, according to official figures.

Overall there were 4,677 people sleeping rough in England in late 2018, which represents a two per

cent fall (equal to 74 people) on a year earlier. This is the first decline in eight years but the total is 165 per cent higher than in 2010. The Government has pledged to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to eradicate it altogether by 2027.

Almost a third of the rough sleepers were counted in London, where the annual figure rose by 13 per cent. Big rises were also recorded in Birmingham (60 per cent) and Manchester (31 per cent). The place with the largest number of rough sleepers was Westminster, with 306 people on the streets.

Rough sleeping figures fell outside of the metropolitan areas with the biggest falls recorded in

the south east, south west and the east of England. Brighton and Hove saw the biggest fall, down 114 per cent to 64 people on the streets.

Charities working with the homeless and rough sleepers believe the true figure is much higher. Research for the charity Crisis undertaken by Heriot Watt University estimates that 12,300 people were sleeping on Britain's streets last year, with a further 12,000 spending the night in cars, trains, buses or tents.

Fourteen per cent of the people recorded sleeping rough were women, the same as in 2017; and six per cent were aged 25 years or under, compared to eight per cent in 2017.



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# Homeless deaths “shocking and shameful” says CIH

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics revealed there were an estimated 597 deaths of homeless people in England and Wales in 2017, a figure that has increased by 24 per cent over the last five years.

Chartered Institute of Housing chief executive Terrie Alafat responded to the news by saying: “It is shocking and shameful that so many people are dying on the streets of our relatively prosperous countries - and that the number has jumped by almost a quarter in five years.”

The ONS figures are the first official estimates of the number of deaths of homeless people. There were 482 deaths among homeless people in 2013, rising to 597 in 2017. Overall, an estimated 2,627 homeless people have died during the five-year period, which staff at many housing charities consider to be a significant under-estimate.

A detailed breakdown of the ONS figures shows:

- Men represent 84 per cent of those who died;
- More than half of the deaths were because of drug poisoning, liver disease or suicide;
- Deaths increased throughout England, but fell in Wales;
- London and north-west England had the highest proportion of deaths; and
- The average age of death was 44 for men and 42 for women, compared with 76 for men and 81 for women among the rest of the population.

Ms Alafat commented: “These statistics are a stark reminder of the suffering at the very sharpest end of our national housing crisis. And we must remember that they are only an estimate, so the true figure could be even higher.

## CHRONIC HOUSING SHORTAGE

“We must take action now. In England, the Government’s rough sleeping strategy aims to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027 – this is achievable, but only with the right level of investment and all of us pulling out the stops to end homelessness.

“A chronic shortage of affordable homes combined with the welfare reforms introduced since 2012 has created a toxic mix. To truly get to the root of the problem, the Government must invest in more genuinely affordable housing as well as reviewing the cumulative impact of welfare reforms like the benefit cap, Universal Credit and the housing benefit freeze for private renters.”

Speaking for the Government, Communities Secretary James Brokenshire responded: “No-one is meant to spend their lives on the streets or without a home to call their own. Every death on our streets is too many and it is simply unacceptable to see lives cut short this way.”

Mr Brokenshire said the Government was committing £1.2bn to tackle homelessness, with £100m earmarked to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

Ms Alafat commented:

“These statistics are a stark reminder of the suffering at the very sharpest end of our national housing crisis. And we must remember that they are only an estimate, so the true figure could be even higher.”

He added that councils were now required to provide early support for people at risk of having nowhere to live, “boosting access to affordable housing and making renting more secure”.

Labour’s shadow housing minister, Melanie Onn, called the figures shameful and said a Labour government would end rough sleeping within five years. Greg Beales, campaign director at Shelter, called the deaths a source of national shame, “a consequence of a housing system which fails too many people”.

Crisis chief executive Jon Sparkes called on the Government to fix the root causes of homelessness, “like building the number of social homes we need and making sure our welfare system is there to support people when they fall on hard times”.

## Brokenshire wants social houses prioritised for former service personnel with PTSD

Former service personnel suffering from PTSD or other mental illnesses will be prioritised for social housing under proposals put out for consultation by Communities Secretary James Brokenshire.

The measures will also help people who divorce or separate from their partners in the Armed Forces, by exempting them from rules requiring them to be a local resident before being given a property. The consultation will run until early March.

An overhaul of the allocation system will mean all applicants for social housing will be asked if they have served in the Forces at the outset of the process to ensure veterans get extra help. Council staff will also get extra training so they can give support to current and former Armed Forces personnel.

Since 2012, current and former service personnel have not had to be ‘resident’ in an area to get access

to a social home for their families.

## GREATER SUPPORT

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said: “We have a duty to ensure our heroic military personnel get the support they need when applying for a social home. We want to see that applying for social property should not be a challenge in the transition from military service to civilian life.”

Under the proposals, those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental illnesses could be treated in the same way as those with physical injuries, and get the priority they deserve.

People who split from their partner in the Forces are made to move out of military accommodation and can be denied social housing because they have “not been resident

The measures will also help people who divorce or separate from their partners in the Armed Forces, by exempting them from rules requiring them to be a local resident before being given a property. The consultation will run until early March.

in the area for long enough”. They may not be willing or able to settle in the district where their military spouse or partner is stationed, particularly if they have been the victim of domestic abuse.

Some councils already support people in this situation but the Government is consulting on publishing new guidance which will encourage councils to waive the residency rules.



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# New housing complaints services to be established



**H**ousing Secretary James Brokenshire has announced a complete overhaul of the broken housing complaints system to ensure all residents have access to a redress scheme.

For the first time private landlords will be legally required to become members of a redress scheme, with a fine of up to £5,000 if they fail to do so, giving extra protections to millions of private renters. To safeguard the interests of homeowners

who buy new homes, the Government repeated its commitment to set up a New Homes Ombudsman to hold developers to account.

Brokenshire said legislation will be brought forward at the earliest opportunity to require all developers to belong to the Ombudsman. Developers will have to belong to the new body by 2021 if they wish to participate in the Help to Buy scheme.

The Housing Complaints Resolution Service will be developed on a voluntary basis initially with a new Redress Reform Working Group made up of representatives from across the sector, working with industry and consumers. But the Government says it could put this on a statutory footing if it is not satisfied with the sector's response.

A press release from the MHCLG says the new complaints resolution service will potentially help millions by providing a straight-forward way of getting help when faced with unresolved disputes about problems with their home, from broken boilers to cracks in the wall.

Establishing a single housing complaints service for all residents, whether they rent or own their home, will prevent people from battling with their landlord or builder to resolve issues on their own and make it easier to claim compensation where it is owed.

Redress for social housing residents is being considered separately. The response to the social housing green paper and the call for evidence for the review of social housing regulation are due to be published in Spring 2019.

Kate Henderson, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, said plans for a single service were very welcome. "It's important that, when a complaint can't be resolved directly between a landlord and tenant, it can be addressed effectively, independent and fairly," she added.

In a joint statement, Mark Hayward, Chief Executive, NAEA Propertymark, and David Cox, Chief Executive, ARLA Propertymark, said: "We are very pleased the Government has listened and accepted our recommendation to establish a single 'front door'. We welcome this approach and are pleased to see a holistic approach to redress being taken right across the property industry, creating the beginnings of a more integrated housing strategy rather than the piecemeal, sectoral and issue-specific approach that we have all had to deal with for too long."

## Councils are putting increasing numbers of vulnerable young people into 'risky and unsuitable' homes

Growing numbers of children as young as 16 are being housed alone in bed and breakfast rooms, bedsits and even caravans by councils struggling to cope with growing demands on the care system.

A joint investigation by the Observer newspaper and the BBC's 5 Live radio programme found there has been a 28 per cent increase in the number of under-18s placed by councils in so-called independent living accommodation, which lacks live-in staff support and includes unsupervised B&Bs, over the past eight years.

Figures obtained from the Department for Education through Freedom of Information Act requests showed that the number of looked-after children placed in independent living arrangements by English local authorities rose from 2,420 in 2010 to 3,090 in 2018. In Wales, the figure went from 75 to 130 in the same period, a rise of 73 per cent.

Responses to FOI requests revealed that four local authorities had placed up to 14 children in caravan parks and 17 councils placed up to 133 children in B&Bs over the past two years.

### UNSUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

While some independent living arrangements with dedicated social-work support are appropriate for those aged under 18, other types, such as B&Bs, are prohibited by statutory guidance because they are considered "too risky".

Although social services are meant to assess and, in most cases, care for homeless teenagers, some authorities are placing under-18s in B&Bs and adult hostels without any checks or support.

In October, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman found that Cornwall council

failed to provide appropriate accommodation to a 17-year-old boy, who was placed in a tent, a static caravan and B&Bs during 2016.

Plymouth City Council said it was hard to find suitable placements for older teenagers. A spokesman for the council said: "Sadly, there is a national shortage of foster placements willing to take 16 to 18 year-old young people, which severely limits the options available to local authorities."

The Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, has said she will be investigating the housing of vulnerable children this year. "None of us would choose for our own children to live alone in caravan parks, B&Bs or adult hostels, yet I often hear from young people in care who have been dumped into substandard housing under the guise of 'independent living'."

# Councils charged £1 billion for temporary accommodation

Local authorities are being “ripped off” by private landlords taking advantage of a housing shortage, by charging almost £1 billion for temporary accommodation provided for homeless households.

Research by The Guardian newspaper and the housing charity Shelter found that English councils spent £997m on temporary accommodation in 2017/18, a 71 per cent increase on the £584m spent in 2012/13.

The number of homeless households in TA has risen by 47 per cent over the same period, showing that costs are rising faster. Currently there are over 83,000 families in temporary accommodation across England, up from 55,840 in June 2013.

Temporary accommodation for homeless households is typically provided in hostels, Bed & Breakfast hotels or in poorly maintained houses converted into multiple flats. The problem is worst in the capital.

About 55,000 of London's households are living in temporary accommodation, with some councils spending as much as £200 per head of their local population on housing the homeless.

Hackney spent the most per head of its population (£208) on temporary accommodation, more than 10 times the national average of £18. There are 3,000 households living in temporary



accommodation in Hackney alone, with more than 13,000 households currently on the housing waiting list. The 32 councils in London all feature in the 45 highest spending councils in the country.

Among the non-London councils to reach the top 45 were Luton, at number 17 (£77 per resident), Brighton & Hove at number 18 (£76) and Milton Keynes at number 30 (£38). Manchester and Peterborough were the first areas outside of the South East to appear in the list at 33 (£30) and 40 (£22). Birmingham came in 42nd place, spending £20 per head on temporary accommodation.

## SOARING COSTS

Councillor Darren Rodwell, the London Councils executive member for housing and planning, said

the cost of securing suitable accommodation for homeless households was growing and the situation was unsustainable.

“These figures show how local authorities and taxpayers are being ripped off by failings in the national approach to this issue,” he said. “The Government needs to take action. It's clear we can't keep relying on increasingly expensive private-sector accommodation, so more must be done to boost provision of social housing.”

Greg Beales, the campaign director of Shelter, said: “Long queues of homeless families pleading with councils for help and a billion pounds spent on temporary accommodation are just some of the unwanted consequences of welfare cuts, rising rents and a failure to build social homes.

“And this bill is getting even higher as landlords charge desperate councils over the odds for some of the least suitable and worst places for homeless families to live, like emergency B&Bs. Not only are these incredibly expensive, but families are often forced to share bathrooms and kitchens with strangers, sleep in one cramped room or even share a bed, and children are left with nowhere to play.”

The Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Heather Wheeler, said: “Having somewhere to stay and a place to call home is vital in helping those who are homeless rebuild their lives, and we are determined to make this a reality.

“Temporary accommodation acts as an important safety net – ensuring that the most vulnerable have a roof over their heads until longer-term housing can be found. We're providing more than £1.2bn to tackle all forms of homelessness, including funding for programmes such as the Private Rented Sector Access Fund, which will support more homeless families into long-term private rented accommodation.”

## Tenants get far less Government subsidy than homeowners

Homeowners get a much bigger slice of Government help than renters, whether they are social or private tenants, according to a report published by the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Contrary to widespread beliefs, an analysis of Whitehall spending, taxation and regulation of the housing market has shown that homeowners are the most subsidised, followed by social housing tenants and then private landlords and renters.

The study made a broad comparison of Government intervention in the housing market, taking account of public spending on grants, loans and guarantees, as well as on tax reliefs, welfare benefits and regulatory mechanisms.

The research was carried out by housing finance experts Steve Wilcox, former Professor of Housing Policy at the University of York's Centre for Housing Policy and Peter Williams, departmental fellow in land economy at the University of Cambridge and funded by UK Finance.

It shows that the Government is directing about £8 billion annually into private housing over the five years to 2020/21, with over half going specifically to support home ownership and the remainder being more broadly aimed at the private market.

In contrast, direct funding for new social housing is less than £2 billion annually, although most of this is grant spending whereas much of the private market support is via loans or guarantees.

Tax reliefs deliver a much bigger benefit to homeowners than they do for private landlords. Net tax relief for owners was some £29 billion in 2016/17 (£10 billion paid in tax; £39 billion received in tax reliefs). In contrast private landlords paid net tax of at least £8 billion.

## PRIVATE MARKET SUBSIDIES

On the other hand, the benefit system aids tenants much more than homeowners, with about £15 billion annually going to social housing tenants and £8.5 billion to private renters.

Although regulation in different forms constrains both the homeowner market and private renting, the latter has a strong advantage in having access to interest-only mortgages whereas new home buyers have to navigate various restrictions on mortgage availability.

Overall, the report 'Dreams and reality? Government finance, taxation and the private housing market' concludes that home ownership is

the most 'subsidised' tenure, followed by social housing and then the private rented sector.

CIH chief executive Terrie Alafat said: “This report demonstrates just how much Government support is going to the private market, and to homeowners in particular. It takes a comprehensive look at the way the Government supports our housing system and we would urge ministers to do the same.

“Currently just 21 per cent of Government investment is going to affordable housing. Rebalancing this budget to support people on lower incomes who can't afford to buy could make a big difference. It is vital that the Government supports councils and housing associations to build more homes for social rent.”

The research, funded by trade body UK Finance which represents about 250 banks and financial firms, builds on work the Chartered Institute of Housing has previously done to show how almost four-fifths of Government grants, loans and guarantees now go to support the private sector. Combining this with analysis of the net effect of the tax and benefits system shows the marked advantage homeowners have in terms of state support.

## HAs' operating surplus falls for the first time in years

The combined operating surpluses of housing associations has fallen for the first time since the regulator started publishing financial data, as spending on day to day running costs and major repairs rose.

Although this was the second year of the enforced one per cent annual rent cut, the joint income of all 1,500 HAs with more than 1,000 homes increased by £500m to £20.5bn. Rents and service charges accounted for £14.7bn, as the number of homes owned or managed by HAs rose to 2,712,000.

In the 2018 Global Accounts, the Regulator of Social Housing reported that the sector's operating surplus on social housing fell by two per cent from £5.2bn to £5bn.

At the same time management costs (on staffing, running offices, utilities etc) went up by six per cent (up by £152m) while spending on major repairs rose by four per cent (up £20m). These combined resulted in a fall in the overall operating margin to 28 per cent.

### STRONG PERFORMANCE

Despite this, the regulator reported that the sector's financial performance was "strong", with the sector's underlying surplus continuing to increase, going up by five per cent to £3.7bn.

Social landlords raised £10bn in new loans and borrowing facilities from banks and the capital markets, up 32 per cent from the previous year. The sector had £17bn in undrawn loan facilities and £6bn in cash, meaning HAs have plenty of access to funding – usually to fund the development of new homes.

Some 41,556 new homes for rent were completed last year, a nine per cent increase on the previous year, as spending on development rose £1bn to £7.3bn. Around 15,000 homes were sold and approximately 1,000 were demolished. Almost 10,000 homes were converted from social rent to the higher, affordable rent.

In 2018 void losses and current tenant arrears were consistent with 2017 at 1.5 and 4.4 per cent of gross rent respectively, but bad debts increased slightly from 0.7 per cent of gross rent in 2017 to 0.8 in 2018. Total reserves increased from £45.2bn in 2017, to £49.5bn in 2018.



## Housing association mergers continue apace

The trend for social landlords to grow through mergers has continued as the pressures to reduce operating costs and to increase the building of more affordable homes persists.

In the west midlands Bromford has completed a merger with Severn Vale Housing to create a new 44,000 home landlord. This follows an earlier merger with Merlin completed in July last year.

The new organisation, which will retain the Bromford name, has an annual turnover of £270m. Its chief executive Robert Nettleton, said: "The combined financial strength of our new organisation gives us a great foundation, enabling us to build more new homes and invest more in people."

"By pooling our resources we can make a real difference by building even more new homes than we would have built individually. This year we'll build more than 1,200 homes and we plan to increase that in the years ahead."

Elsewhere in the Midlands, Longhurst is collapsing its group structure in a bid to save half a million pounds a year in running costs and to help it make quicker decisions. It owns more than 22,500 homes and consists of the group parent plus four subsidiary HAs: Friendship Care and Housing, Longhurst and Havelok Homes, Spire Housing and Axiom.

### FLAGSHIP

Over in East Anglia two HAs have joined to form the region's largest landlord with a stock of around 28,000 homes. The larger of the two organisations, Flagship Group has acquired 5,000 home landlord, Victory Housing Trust as a subsidiary.

The new organisation plans to build 10,000 homes over the next ten years, while also investing £534m in maintaining and upgrading its existing housing stock over the same period. The merger is expected to save more than £38m in costs.

Peter Hawes, chair of Flagship, said: "We are both

strong and successful housing associations, but together we can be even stronger and more successful. Collectively we have enhanced financial strength, greater effectiveness and efficiency, the ability to invest more in our existing homes, and support our customers."

### ANCHOR

Meanwhile the largest provider of care and supported housing to older people in England has been formed through the merger of the Anchor Trust and Hanover.

The new 54,000 home landlord will employ 9,000 staff and has a combined annual turnover of £530.7m. It provides services across the whole of the country and works in nearly every local authority area.

Jane Ashcroft, former chief executive of Anchor, retains her role while Dr Stuart Burgess, former chair of Hanover, will lead the new board. A spokesman for the organisations said the merger would increase efficiencies, allowing them to negotiate better contracts with suppliers and pool resources.

### NORTH WEST

In the North West, Torus has merged with Liverpool Mutual Homes to form a 38,000 home landlord, with 1,500 staff and had a combined annual turnover of more than £180m. It is aiming to deliver 5,300 new homes by 2024.

Steve Coffey, chief executive for the new group and former chief executive of Liverpool Mutual Homes, said, "The vision for new Torus is driven by a shared commitment to the communities we serve and by a determination to build positive futures across our heartland areas.

"This is more than a joining together of landlords. As a larger, more diverse organisation – simultaneously landlord, property developer, commercial contractor and social entrepreneur – we'll deliver our vision on a larger scale."



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## DWP changes Universal Credit direct payments to landlords

Direct rent payments to social landlords for tenants claiming Universal Credit can be paid on a monthly cycle in future following a change agreed by the Work and Pensions Department.

The DWP has agreed to alter the way it delivers Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs), which sees the housing costs element of UC paid straight to landlords rather than being included in a claimant's monthly allowance.

APAs have traditionally been paid over 13 four-weekly cycles throughout the year, despite being deducted from tenants' Universal Credit claims on a monthly basis. Social landlords have long complained that the system causes confusion because there is one four-week cycle where no APA money was released.

A spokesman for the DWP said: "We listen carefully to feedback about Universal Credit and continue to make improvements where necessary. We have heard the concerns of social landlords and have moved social landlord payments to a monthly cycle in 2019 as a result."

Jordane Shaw, policy officer at the NHF, said: "This is a very positive change. We're pleased the Government has listened to concerns and acted on them. This change will have a real impact on tenants, helping to minimise uncertainty and ensure the benefits system works well for claimants."

## Right to Buy ends in Wales

The legal right for Welsh council tenants to buy their homes at a substantial discount has come to an end.

The Right to Buy was first introduced by Margaret Thatcher's government almost 40 years ago and since then more than 139,000 council homes have been sold in Wales.

The Welsh Government scrapped the RTB last January, but deferred the ban for 12 months to give tenants a last chance to become homeowners. Would be purchasers had to submit an application by the 26 January cut-off date to qualify.

# CIH calls for suspension of right to buy



**T**he leading body for professional staff working in the social housing sector has called on the Government to suspend the right to buy for council housing, to allow the stock of low-cost housing to be built up.

Figures released by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have shown that between July and September 2018, councils in England sold 2,417 homes under the right to buy scheme, with 1,160 homes started or acquired to replace them during the same period.

Since RTB discounts were increased in April 2012, some 72,929 homes have been sold, while just 20,746 have been started or acquired to replace them.

Chartered Institute of Housing chief executive Terrie Alafat said: "Not only are we failing to build enough homes for social rent – right to buy means we are losing them at a time when millions of people need genuinely affordable housing more than ever."

### ACTION REQUIRED

"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."

CIH analysis has shown that RTB is costing councils £300 million a year. Cutting the discounts available by a third could lead to an extra 12,000 homes being built a year, CIH has calculated. But the organisation says the policy should be suspended altogether to stem the loss of social rented homes.

Chartered Institute of Housing chief executive Terrie Alafat said: "Not only are we failing to build enough homes for social rent – right to buy means we are losing them at a time when millions of people need genuinely affordable housing more than ever"

Terrie Alafat said: "We support the principle of helping tenants move into home ownership if that's what they want, but it cannot be at the expense of other people in need. And we know that 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, remove the barriers stopping councils from replacing homes sold and look at more effective ways to help people access home ownership."



# Government confirms funds for councils to crack down on rogue landlords

**M**ore than 50 councils across the country will share £2.4 million to crack down on rogue landlords, protect private sector tenants and drive up standards across the sector.

Housing Minister Heather Wheeler confirmed the funding for individual councils in mid January, honouring a commitment made late last year. The cash boost will enable local councils to step up action against the minority of landlords who continue to flout the law and force vulnerable tenants such as young families to live in inadequate or unsafe housing.

On average the councils will receive additional funds of just under £50,000 each. As it is a one-off payment, there are no guarantees similar support will be provided in the future.

Authorities receiving the money will be encouraged to share best practice and examples of innovative approaches, to help improve enforcement work in other areas. Among the councils to benefit are:

- Walsall - to improve cross-agency enforcement work, including the innovative use of drones and thermal mapping to identify problem properties;

- Lancaster - to create a training programme for existing enforcement staff across the Lancashire region; and
- Greater London Authority (GLA) and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) – allocated over £330,000 between them to carry out coordinated work to tackle rogue landlords who operate across multiple local authorities in their regions.

Heather Wheeler said: “Everyone has the right to live in a home that is safe and secure, and it is vital we crack down on the small minority of landlords who are not giving their tenants this security.”

The funds will be used to support a range of projects that councils have said will help them strengthen action against criminal landlords – for example, to build relationships with external organisations such as the emergency services, legal services and local housing advocates.

Councils may also decide to support tenants to take action against poor standards through rent repayment orders, or develop digital solutions, helping officers to report back and make decisions quicker.

## One in 10 rentals in England being advertised unlawfully

Research by the National Housing Federation and Shelter shows at least one in 10 rental properties in England is being advertised unlawfully by discriminating against people who rely on housing benefit to pay their rent.

Analysis of around 86,000 letting adverts on Zoopla revealed that 8,710 property adverts contained the words ‘no DSS’ or ‘no housing benefit’. Others used phrases like ‘professionals only’, demonstrating a similar sentiment.

NHF chief executive Kate Henderson has condemned the practice, saying the discrimination on display in the adverts is blatant and unacceptable, but was becoming increasingly widespread.

She said: “It is beyond me why property websites are permitting these adverts. They’re sending the message that they’re OK discriminating against someone, simply because they’re on benefits. This has to change.

“Many housing associations were created in the 1950s and 60s in reaction to discrimination and racism from private landlords who wouldn’t house migrants. Today’s discrimination is hardly any different, and we refuse to turn a blind eye to it.”

Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Shelter, said the survey showed that the discrimination against tenants on benefits was being brazenly enforced by letting agents, landlords and online property websites.

“Statements like ‘No DSS’ are outdated, offensive and causing misery for thousands. Families are finding themselves barred from renting homes time and time again, simply because they need a housing benefit top-up,” she said.

“We need the lettings industry to stop blaming each other, accept its role in this shocking practice and clean up its act.”

The current housing crisis, characterised by a shortage of social housing and high house prices has led to increasing numbers of people having to rent privately. High rents and stagnant wages has meant many tenants depend on housing benefit to pay their rent, whether they are in work or not.

Indirectly discriminating against woman and people with disabilities, by banning people on housing benefit, is likely to violate the 2010 Equality Act.

Analysis from the two housing organisations revealed the discrimination is more prevalent in coastal and rural areas.

# Is Buck's Bill the solution to the rogue landlords' problem?

Patrick Mooney looks at a new law passed to protect private sector tenants

After several years of hard work, frustration and steadfast determination the MP for Westminster North, Karen Buck has finally succeeded in getting a new law passed to protect private sector tenants from landlords who are intent on exploiting and abusing them.

The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act received Royal Assent just before Christmas. It was Ms Buck's third attempt at getting greater protections for tenants onto the statute book with her previous efforts talked out largely by Conservative MPs, who also happened to be private landlords themselves.

However, on this occasion she got Government support for her private members' bill and this made all of the difference. She had also won over representative bodies like the Association of Residential Letting Agents.

A happy Ms Buck later said: "There are a million properties, home to some three million people, that are unsafe or unfit to occupy and this act will provide those tenants, private and public, with a way to act against bad landlords."

The new law does not actually impose any new standards on the quality and type of housing which tenants can expect. Its main focus is providing tenants with the power to enforce those standards that already exist. However, it does contain a clause extending its remit to the common parts of a building - this is understood to have been added as a result of concerns over safety problems in the communal parts of buildings like Grenfell Tower.

## THREATS OF COURT ACTION

The new law means that if landlords fail to provide accommodation that meets existing legal standards, their tenants can take the landlords to court and force them to undertake the works. It also means tenants are not reliant on councils' enforcement teams to prosecute landlords on their behalf.

All social and private sector landlords or agents acting for them will be required to ensure that a property is fit for human habitation at the beginning of the tenancy and then throughout its duration. The one exception being where the tenant causes damage to the property and this makes it unfit.

It is hoped that the simple threat of court action with the associated penalties, legal costs, damages and reputational harm will be enough to get even the worst of landlords to mend their ways and carry out essential repairs and other works in agreement with their tenants.

It will be interesting to see how quickly spaces can be found in busy court schedules and how smoothly the first few prosecutions go. If there are



delays in the process, then it is easy to imagine some landlords will simply evict their tenants in response to the legal processes being started, or they could increase rents to pay for any repair works.

## SELLING UP

There is of course another fear which is that the new law could result in many private landlords leaving the sector - either by selling some or all of their properties, or in simply leaving them empty. This could exacerbate problems over the supply of rental properties, with a shortage of available properties already forcing rents up in many parts of the country.

Before Christmas figures emerged showing that the number of landlords in the East of England who were exiting the rental market had shot up and now stood at twice the national average. Rising costs and continuing legislative changes are being blamed for the latest rise in landlords selling up, with some forecasters predicting the upward trend will continue into the early months of 2019 with Brexit adding to feelings of uncertainty.

In a briefing note on the new law, campaigning group Shelter said, as well as helping tenants take action directly, it would "help to raise conditions generally, through the broader positive impact on landlord education and awareness of their responsibilities and the risk of being sued".

While David Cox, Chief Executive ARLA Propertymark is aware of the challenges faced by his landlord members, he also welcomed the new law. He said: "These rules give renters greater protection against criminal operators and it is a step in the right direction for the market. We congratulate Karen Buck and we look forward to continuing to

work with her to achieve better enforcement against those who bring the sector into disrepute."

The new act, which amends the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and the Building Act 1984, comes into force in late March and will affect new tenancies from that time. Existing tenancies that are renewed will be brought under its scope in a year's time.

## OVERCROWDING TACKLED

In other good news for tenants and landlords alike, the Government has re-issued its guidance on the permitted size of bedrooms to combat the number of overcrowding cases being reported. There were an estimated 231,000 overcrowded households in the private rented sector in 2017.

Since last October, rooms used for sleeping by one person over 10 years old have had to be at least 6.51 square metres, and those slept in by two people over 10 years old will have had to be at least 10.22 square metres. Rooms slept in by children of 10 years and younger have to be at least 4.64 square metres in size.

There were concerns that the changes could have seen councils forced to take action against landlords, where a tenant gave birth and as a result there were two people in a room sized for one. A landlord who sought to evict in this scenario would be carrying out unlawful discrimination.

Following extensive discussions across the sector, fresh guidance has made it clear this should not happen. It notes that, in instances where a tenant has given birth to a child since moving into a House of Multiple Occupation, there is an expectation that local authorities will not be acting in the public interest if they commence a prosecution.



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## Minister tightens rules on electrical safety to protect renters



Private tenants will receive better protection as a result of new measures designed to ensure mandatory electrical inspections are carried out by competent and qualified inspectors.

As part of the Government's drive to raise standards in the private rented sector, landlords will be legally required to ensure the inspectors they hire to carry out safety inspections have the necessary competence and qualifications to do so. Tough financial penalties will be imposed on those who fail to comply.

New guidance is to be published setting out the minimum level of competence and qualifications necessary for those carrying out these inspections, so both landlords and tenants can be assured their home is safe from electrical faults.

Minister for Housing and Homelessness Heather Wheeler said: "Everyone has the right to feel safe and secure in their own home. While measures are already in place to crack down on the small minority of landlords who rent out unsafe properties, we need to do more to protect tenants.

"These new measures will reduce the risk of faulty electrical equipment, giving people peace of mind and helping to keep them safe in their homes. It will also provide clear guidance to landlords on who they should be hiring to carry out these important electrical safety checks."

As well as making homes safer for tenants, improving electrical safety benefits landlords by making a material improvement to their property and helping to prevent fires, which can cause costly and significant damage.

The Government announced last July that regulations would be introduced requiring private sector landlords to undertake 5 yearly safety checks of electrical installations in their properties. It is expected the new guidance will be broadly in line with existing regulations in Scotland.

A decision on penalties for non-compliance will be made before the secondary legislation is introduced. Penalties are likely to include a range of sanctions, with local authorities being given discretion to decide which is the most appropriate in particular cases.

## Warning of fire-spread risks two years before Grenfell tragedy

Experts warned both the Government and the construction sector two years before the Grenfell Tower disaster that not enough was being done to tackle the risk of fire spreading through concealed cavities in buildings.

Studies by fire experts at the Building Research Establishment produced in March 2015 warned of potential fatalities unless officials addressed the danger of flames passing through concealed cavities.

Their advice has only just come to light after being published by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Officials said this is so they can inform a review of the fire regulations for buildings.

BRE experts referred to 20 fires between 2003 and 2013 that involved inadequate, missing or badly fitted cavity barriers. They urged Government to consider new building regulations guidance and new ways for building inspectors to check works were safe. They also advised that builders needed education on the dangers of getting things wrong, but it is unclear what, if any, action was taken at the time.

One of the studies presented to officials in the building regulations division of MHCLG said

Publication of the BRE reports now has sparked anger from Grenfell United, the support group for survivors and bereaved families

barriers intended to stop fires spreading were "often found to be missing or incomplete or incorrectly positioned". Another study warned that people had died because of fire or smoke spread in concealed spaces and "the potential risks and the potential losses remain high".

Publication of the BRE reports now has sparked anger from Grenfell United, the support group for survivors and bereaved families. The group said the reports showed "people and organisations that were meant to keep us safe knew the dangers and didn't care enough about our lives and the lives of our loved ones to act".

## Ban on sale of fire doors lifted

A ban on the sale of composite fire doors has been lifted after talks between the Government and industry representatives resulted in agreement over a new set of compliance standards.

The ban was originally imposed after it emerged that fire doors widely used across the housing sector and at Grenfell Tower had failed safety tests, by resisting flames for just half of the 30 minute minimum standard set out in building regulations.

Tests on the fire doors revealed that many of the products on sale differed from the approved specification of the doors used in official safety tests. The new tests had been ordered after news emerged that fire doors installed in Grenfell Tower suffered a range of failures. These problems were compounded by broken or defective closures and door furniture that further compromised fire retardant qualities.

Andrew Fowlds, chair of the Association of Composite Door Manufacturers, said: "The cost to the composite door industry during this period has been very heavy, with a number of casualties in terms of jobs and revenue. However, as long as all manufacturers of such products have completed bilateral testing in strict accordance with the

building regulations, and provided the necessary written confirmation to their supplier, then supply may resume."

The ACDM will become the governing body for the composite door industry, leading on the development, implementation and policing of standards while also promoting the use of composite doors. It will compile a database of all fire door products tested by members and provide technical advice.

A Government spokesman said: "We are pleased the industry has taken steps to ensure their products meet the required standards to be sold on the UK."

"Fire doors must meet the safety requirements as set out in building regulation advice and we are continuing to work with the industry and local authorities to make sure this is the case."

# Mixed news on private sector rents

Conflicting news on the direction of travel for private rents is emerging with different bodies reporting either above-inflation increases, or small falls as worries over the impact of Brexit continues to dominate.

Data from the property website Rightmove showed rent levels continuing to rise. They report average asking rents in London hit an all-time high of £2,034 in the fourth quarter of 2018 as the number of available properties dwindled. Compared with a year earlier, the number of properties available to rent is down 22 per cent.

Rightmove is predicting that rents will rise four per cent in London this year and by three per cent outside the capital. Away from London, places in the north-west have had the biggest demand from tenants, with Bootle, Runcorn and Birkenhead all proving popular.

But according to figures from the Deposit Protection Scheme, rents across Britain fell in

2018 for the first time in a decade, offering relief for tenants after years of inflation-busting rises. The DPS is a Government-backed group that supervises tenancy deposits and it showed the average monthly rent fell by £9 (down 1.17 per cent) from £774 in 2017 to £765 last year, while the typical UK tenant spent 31 per cent of their income on rent in 2018, a fall of 0.5 per cent from the year before.

## TAX CHANGES IMPACT

The biggest percentage fall was in Yorkshire and the Humber, where the average monthly rent dropped by £21 (3.63 per cent) to £546. London recorded the biggest fall in cash terms, with the typical property rented at £1,294 a month, down £30 from a year ago.

Despite the drop, Londoners spend the biggest proportion of their pay on rent, with the typical tenant losing 41 per cent of their monthly wage.

The fall in rents confounds forecasts from landlord groups, which said they would have to rise in 2018 to reflect higher taxes on mortgaged buy-to-let properties.

The sting in the tail for tenants is that while the DPS recorded rent falls nationally over the first nine months of 2018, it began to see a small uptick in the final three months of the year. Landlords said demand from EU nationals had slowed, but insisted rents would have to rise in 2019 to claw back money lost through buy-to-let tax changes and the letting fees ban, which comes into force in June.

RICS has warned that with demand outstripping the supply of rental properties, rents could increase in 2019 by an average of two per cent. To counterbalance this, uncertainties around the impact of Brexit and their impact on house prices, could encourage longer tenancies and fewer rent increases.

## Councils in the capital spending millions renting and buying back RTB homes

London's local authorities are spending more than £22m a year renting back former council homes previously sold to their tenants under the Right to Buy, as Ministers are urged to drop the policy in the capital.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Tom Copley, Labour's London Assembly housing spokesman, shows that at least 2,333 ex-council homes are being used to house homeless families with London councils picking up

the tab for their rent from private landlords. Newham are the biggest known renter of such properties with 808.

Figures supplied to Copley by 18 of the 33 councils across London showed the combined rent paid out on these properties was £22.3m. Copley wants the London Mayor to lobby the Government to have the RTB abolished in the capital, or at the very least to have newly built council homes exempt from it.

London's local authorities are also buying back ex-council properties either for re-letting or to help deliver regeneration schemes. Ealing Council has bought back 516 homes mainly for regeneration projects, at a cost of £107m. This is more than six times the £16.2m the council received from the original sales.

Copley says that since 1998/99 some 102,480 council homes have been sold in London and only 3,000 new ones built in their place. At least 54,000 ex-council homes have been sold by the original purchasers and are now being rented out by private landlords across the capital. In Westminster, Harrow and Enfield more than 50 per cent of ex-RTB properties are now owned by private landlords.

## Growth in build-to-rent housing market

Research published by the British Property Federation shows that the total number of build-to-rent homes under construction across the UK has increased by nearly 40 per cent to hit more than 43,000.

The number of completed build-to-rent (BTR) homes has also risen significantly, up 29

per cent to reach 29,416 nationally, while the number of BTR homes in planning is up ten per cent to 66,718.

For the first time, the total number of completed build-to-rent homes across the UK regions has caught up with the total in London as 14,615 homes were completed in the regions compared to 14,801

in the capital.

But new developments in the regions are now being given the greenlight at a faster rate, with 24,010 homes under construction in the regions and 19,304 in London.

As build-to-rent has grown, it is also changing shape with 15 per cent of schemes in the pipeline now including houses, rather than just consisting of high-rise apartments, making it more suitable for family accommodation.

## Wates wins £90m fire safety contract in Camden

A £90m contract to replace cladding on the Chalcots Estate in Camden, has been awarded to Wates. Work is expected to start on the estate in the summer and last until the summer of 2021.

As well as replacing cladding across the estate, the contract will also see new windows, curtain walls, roof parapets and the replacement of brickwork on the bottom floors

of the five tower blocks.

The north London estate consists of 717-homes and it hit national headlines when it was evacuated in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire in the summer of 2017.

The work is being funded from the Government's £400m remediation fund for social housing blocks with aluminium composite material cladding, as well as £26.5m of the council's funds.

# Two companies fined £1.5m over death of young child

A social landlord and its specialist lift maintenance contractor have been fined £1.5 million following the death of a five-year-old girl who became trapped while using a lift at her home in Weymouth, Dorset.

Bournemouth Crown Court heard Alexys Brown's family moved into the property in 2009 of which Synergy Housing Limited, as part of the Aster Group, became the owner. The property had an internal lift used by Alexys' brother who is wheelchair bound.

On 13 August 2015, Alexys got into the lift to get her brother's phone from upstairs. She put her head through a hole in the vision panel and as the lift moved upward, the five-year-old's head got stuck between the lift and the ground floor ceiling. Alexys Brown died as a result of her injuries.

To ensure the lifts were maintained and repaired, Aster Property Limited managed a contract with Orona Limited on behalf of Synergy Housing Limited. The contractual relationship was that Synergy Housing Limited had an agreement with Orona Limited for the maintenance and repair of lifts, including the lift at the property in which the Brown family lived.

Synergy Housing also had an agreement from June 2013 with Aster Property Limited, another company from the Aster Group, to arrange the maintenance and repair of lifts and to control the work. When one of the Perspex vision panels in the lift became damaged in early 2013, this was not fixed or replaced. In May 2015 an Orona engineer visited the property to inspect the lift and noted the vision panel was damaged.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found a catalogue of failures by the three companies; Synergy Housing as the Brown family's landlord which had primary responsibility for the safety of the lift at the property; Aster Property as the company to which responsibility for arranging lift maintenance issues fell; and Orona

who were responsible for the relevant lift maintenance and repair work.

## FINES AND COSTS

Synergy Housing Limited pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and was fined £1m and ordered to pay costs of £40,000.

Synergy Housing accepted that its duties were not to be delegated and that the failings of Aster Property were part of its breach. A charge against Aster Property Limited was ordered to be left to lie on the court file and was not separately sentenced.

Orona Limited pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and was fined £533,000 and ordered to pay costs of £40,000.

After the hearing, Lorraine Brown, the mother of Alexys Brown said: "The last three years have been unimaginable; the loss of Alexys has impacted our lives and our children's lives immensely. To have this investigation brought to an end has now offered us some closure. I hope that what has happened to our family sheds light on others in order to avoid anything like this ever happening again."

HSE inspector Leo Diez said: "These companies failed in their duties to put systems in place to ensure the lift in the Brown's family home was kept safe – more could have been done by Synergy, Aster and Orona.

"As a result of their negligence, a wholly avoidable tragedy, under horrific circumstances, has occurred where a five-year-old child has lost her life and a family have been left utterly devastated at the loss of their little girl. Companies should know HSE will not hesitate to take the appropriate enforcement action against those who flout health and safety law."

## MAINTENANCE FAILINGS

Leo Diez continued: "Safety-critical aspects of the use and maintenance of the lift were missed. From

December 2013 until 12 May 2015, the lift was not inspected at all, even though safety critical problems had previously been identified they were not rectified. In 2015, when the call-out report contained a warning, there was still a failure to act. Those breaches went unchecked over a long period of time during which the lift became more dangerous for the Brown family to use."

Findings by HSE during the investigation included:

- Tenants were not provided with safety critical information concerning the operation of the lift;
- No risk assessment was carried out following the change of lift user when the Brown family moved in;
- Concerns raised during service inspections were not addressed including:
- *The Perspex vision panel had been damaged for up to 18 months prior to the incident. On 12 May 2015, an Orona engineer completed a service inspection and, in his report, wrote "Routine service visit - Glass in door smashed!" but this was not fixed or replaced;*
- *Problems with the emergency lowering and lack of emergency hand winding wheel during the whole of the Brown family's tenancy, and which was shown in the documentation from at least January 2011;*
- *The key switch used to control operation of the lift had been modified from factory installation to allow removal of the key in any position. Because the switch was in the "on" position with the key removed, it could be operated by anyone at any time.*
- Concerns raised by Alexys' brother's health workers were not taken seriously enough;
- According to HSE guidance, lifts carrying people should be inspected every six months but, in this case, the lift was serviced only four times between 2009 and 2015 and was not thoroughly examined since 2012.

## Jump in the number of dangerous gas appliances in our homes

The number of dangerous gas appliances in our homes has risen to hit a five-year high, reversing an earlier improving trend.

Tenants are more at risk than owner-occupiers with 1,674 dangerous appliances reported in rental properties compared to 1,037 dangerous appliances in homes where the resident was also the owner.

Given that just one-third of our homes are occupied by tenants, this suggests that gas safety is not enough of a priority for landlords, whether they

are in the private or social housing sectors.

The figures come from the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) and have been released by the Health & Safety Executive.

There were 2,474 dangerous fittings reported in 2013/14 and this fell to 2,384 in 2014/15, then to 2,362 in 2015/16 and reached a low of 2,299 in 2016/17 before last year's significant increase of 412 to 2,711.

However, the number of gas related incidents resulting in deaths and injuries fell to its lowest level in five years with two deaths and 193 injuries. One person died and 154 were injured from carbon monoxide poisoning, which is usually associated with a defective boiler or fire which has not been properly maintained. One person died and 39 were injured by explosions or fires.

In all there were 129 'gas incidents' reported in 2017/18, down from 154 incidents in the previous year and 211 in 2013/14. Carbon monoxide poisoning accounted for the majority of the problems (100), with explosions and fires accounting for the remainder.

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## Tenant Fees Bill heads for statute book

The Tenant Fees Bill has passed its final hurdle in Parliament and this means that from 1 June 2019, letting agents will no longer be able to charge fees to set up or renew a tenancy in the private rented sector.

In addition, security deposits will be capped at five weeks' rent, amended from the originally proposed amount of six weeks' rent.

Commenting on the legislation, Housing Minister Heather Wheeler MP said:

"I know these changes may concern some in the lettings market, but agents who offer good value and high quality services to landlords, will continue to be in demand and play an important role in the sector."

Citizens Advice chief executive Gillian Guy added: "This is a landmark moment for the millions of people who rent privately. For too long families and other renters have had to hand over hundreds of pounds on unfair and uncompetitive letting fees every time they moved home."

## Changes in council housing revealed

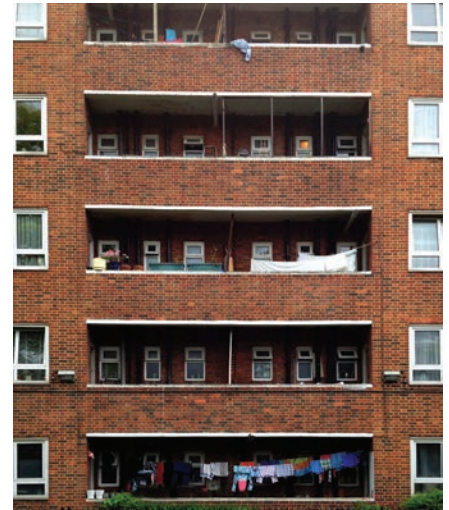
The changing face of local authority housing in England is shown in a statistical release which revealed a fall in the numbers owned by councils to 1.59 million dwellings, down 0.6 per cent from the previous year.

This continues an historical trend which has been driven by large-scale voluntary transfers of homes to housing associations, Right to Buy sales and demolitions. HA stock has increased at the same time and the overall social housing stock has risen from 4 million in 2008 to 4.14 million at the end of 2017/18.

English councils made 108,300 lettings during the year, down four per cent from the previous year, and a huge drop from the 326,600 lettings made in 2000/01. There were 1.11 million households on local authority waiting lists on 1 April 2018, a decrease of four per cent on the previous year.

The average council rent in England in 2017/18 was £86.58 per week, which is one per cent lower than the previous year and in line with the social rent reduction set out in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

At 1 April 2018, there were 70,300 "non-decent" council owned dwellings, a decrease of 11 per cent



from the previous year and a 91 per cent reduction from 2006 when the decent homes standard was updated.

In 2017/18 councils reported that 5,500 evictions were carried out by court bailiffs on their behalf, down six per cent on the previous year.

## Overcrowding in social housing rises to 24-year high

Overcrowding in the social housing sector has risen to its highest recorded level with more than 300,000 households squeezed into too few rooms, coinciding with the introduction of the bedroom tax.

In addition more than 250,000 households in the private rented sector are also living in overcrowded conditions, according to the latest English Housing Survey. Taken together it shows that at least one million people are being crammed into overcrowded homes.

Overcrowding rates are now eight times higher in social housing and six times higher in private rented accommodation than among owner-occupied homes. Meanwhile at the other end of the spectrum some ten per cent of social rented homes are underoccupied (with two or more spare bedrooms) compared to 15 per cent of privately rented homes and 54 per cent of owner-occupied homes.

Figures from the latest EHS report for 2017/18 shows there are 4.5 million private rented homes and 4 million social rented homes (2.4m HA homes and 1.6m council homes), representing 19 and 17

per cent of all households in the country. These figures have recently stabilised after big changes from the 1980s, when the private rented sector provided no more than ten per cent.

### LIFESTYLES REVEALED

Social renters have lived at their current address for an average of 11.9 years, (for local authorities renters the figure is 13.4 years, while for HA renters, the average is 10.9 years). For private renters the average length of residence was 4.1 years. Half of private renters have lived in the private rented sector for less than five years, while 25 per cent had been in the sector for 5-9 years and 26 per cent for 10 or more years.

Between 2007/08 and 2017/18, the number of households with dependent children in the private rented sector increased by about 795,000, with an almost equal fall in the numbers in owner occupiers.

About three quarters of private renters are working, mostly in full-time work with 12 per cent in part-time work, eight per cent are retired, five per cent in full-time education and just three per cent are unemployed.

Among social renters, 41 per cent were working, with two thirds in full-time work and one third in part-time work. Over a quarter of social renters were retired. A quarter were 'inactive' - a group which includes those with a long-term illness or disability and those looking after the family or home.

### IMPROVEMENTS FLAT-LINING

The energy efficiency of our homes has improved hugely in the past 20 years but has recently flatlined with no improvements recorded in average SAP ratings, for all tenures, since 2016. Overall, the standard of our homes is improving. In 2017, a fifth of dwellings failed to meet the Government's decent homes standard, down from just over a third a decade earlier.

But privately rented homes are more likely to be damp, less likely to have at least one working smoke alarm and they are more likely to contain hazards such as infestations and electrical dangers that pose a risk to life. In all 14 per cent of privately rented homes have "Category One" hazards compared with six per cent of homes rented from councils or housing associations.

The housing charity Shelter, said the figures revealed a market "full to bursting". "It's no coincidence that the number of people trapped in expensive and unstable private renting is still incredibly high, while the supply of new social homes has become almost frozen," said Polly Neate, Shelter's chief executive.

"The private renting market is full to bursting and that comes with a heavy price tag. From the parents at their wits end bringing up their children in short-term rentals where they can be asked to move at the drop of a hat, to the older, retired renters who live in constant fear of the next rent hike."

# R&M weaknesses exposed at major HAs

Two of the country's biggest housing associations have been hit with critical reports of their repairs service to tenants, at a time when customer services are coming under greater public scrutiny.

Metropolitan Thames Valley which has 57,000 homes was criticised by the Housing Ombudsman in a rare 'special report' for failing to comply with an order after an investigation into a tenant's complaint about repairs.

The ombudsman said it found "maladministration" at the association back in November 2017 in relation to maintenance at one housing block. At the time it ordered Metropolitan Thames Valley to provide more information to the tenant who had complained, pay compensation to them and carry out the maintenance by April last year. The HA carried out the first two orders, but failed to finish the works before the deadline.

The association said the delay was caused by "procurement and personnel difficulties". It acknowledged that failing to comply with the order "had caused further distress and inconvenience to the complainant and to other residents in the block affected". A spokesman said a review was being undertaken to learn from the outcomes of the case.

## PAINFUL LESSONS

L&Q with 95,000 homes admitted that its maintenance of Portway House in Southwark, south-east London fell below its normal standards as residents endured four years of "poor service and inadequate responses". The new build scheme was handed over to L&Q in 2014 and residents were regularly reporting problems from the outset. A



L&Q with 95,000 homes admitted that its maintenance of Portway House in Southwark, south-east London fell below its normal standards as residents endured four years of "poor service and inadequate responses"

highly critical newspaper article appeared in The Observer in August 2018.

The HA then commissioned a report from consultants who found there were 412 defects on the 85-home development. The scheme housed a mix of private and social tenants, as well as shared owners. Faults included a leaking roof and issues with its heating, plumbing and sewage. Water ingress was known about prior to handover and the heating failed within four weeks of residents moving in to their new homes.

The consultants reported: "Our main conclusion is that despite evidence of serious and continuing problems at the scheme, residents suffered poor service and inadequate responses over a sustained period." They also said the issues that arose at

Portway House had the potential to be replicated at other new build schemes.

The association has taken the unusual step of publishing the consultants' report along with its own action plan. Its chief executive David Montague, has said "I'm pulling no punches here, we got it wrong, we didn't fix things when we should have, and as result we let down our residents. We've worked hard to put things right. And we're determined to learn lessons, however painful that is."

Despite residents regularly reporting problems and making use of the official complaints process, the association's systems and processes failed them because no-one at L&Q took responsibility for resolving the problems and ensuring lessons were learned.

## Mears snaps up its former R&M business rival

Mitie has sold its social housing business which provides repairs and maintenance work to more than 30 landlords, to Mears in a deal believed to be worth up to £35m.

It is understood that Mears will pay an initial £22.5m for the business and then a further £12.5m

over the next two years, dependent on the business achieving certain performance milestones.

The deal is conditional on Mears completing a private placement to raise funds to pay for the acquisition, and the TUPE transfer of 1,000 Mitie staff. For the 12-month period ending 31 March,

Mitie made a pre-tax profit of £5m on turnover of £128m.

David Miles, group chief executive of Mears, said: "I am delighted with the acquisition, which will further strengthen Mears' market leadership and contract profile in social housing. Given our strong operational platform and differentiated service delivery, together with our proven ability to turn around underperforming businesses, I am confident that we will deliver significant improvements to contracts, customers, tenants and employees."

## Landlord issues batches of eviction notices to Kent families

Dozens of families living in the private rented sector in Kent are facing the risk of losing their homes after receiving eviction notices from one of Britain's most controversial landlords.

It is being widely reported that Fergus Wilson has given 90 households in Ashford just two months to leave their homes, after he decided to sell his portfolio of several hundred properties. Wilson

started sending out the "no fault" Section 21 eviction notices in mid January.

Wilson and his wife Judith built up a portfolio of 700 homes across Kent. In recent years the couple have courted controversy by refusing to let houses to people who cook curry and in the long time taken to carry out repairs to tenanted properties.

Much of their portfolio is located in or around

Ashford, where the council has a waiting list of about 1,500 households.

Evictions from private rentals are now the cause of over a quarter of the reported cases of homelessness. Last year the Government proposed the possibility of introducing three-year tenancies, to give people greater security, but it has not acted on this yet.

# How will we heat our homes if we can't rely on gas?

Patrick Mooney explores the alternatives to traditional heating

**A**t a recent housing conference I heard an expert warn his audience that we better get used to heating our homes with something other than gas, because by 2050 this energy source would no longer be available for domestic purposes.

To be perfectly honest I was shocked and I suspect many others in the audience were too judging by the looks on their faces as I glanced around the hall.

We have all heard the warnings about global warming - the relentless use of carbon based fossil fuels and their dangers to the planet and our continuing existence, but I don't think any of us could recall being told before that we only have another 30 years to use this invaluable resource ([les.mitsubishielectric.co.uk/the-hub/12-years-left](http://les.mitsubishielectric.co.uk/the-hub/12-years-left)).

It's also far easier to fit heat pumps during the construction process

## SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

What on earth are we supposed to do without it? And what are the alternatives because 2050 is not that long away and surely we need to be doing something about this now. With a little hindsight I guess that this was probably the speaker's intention.

Like many people I always thought of gas as a relatively clean fuel and certainly much better than coal or oil and a lot safer than nuclear. The arguments around the safety and environmental impacts of fracking has meant this potential source of energy probably needs to be sidelined for the moment and not included in any future plans unless and until those concerns are allayed.

But back to our problem about how we replace gas. After 2050 it appears what little gas is left will be used almost exclusively for industrial purposes and we will need alternative energy sources to heat our homes and cook our meals. In fact many of the alternatives are already to be found around us.

## ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES

We are becoming increasingly familiar with the sight of solar panels (on roofs mainly, but now appearing in fields by the side of motorways), wind turbines (both on and offshore), hydroelectric dams and even wave and tidal barriers to make use of renewable or 'green' energy sources.

Most people are wary of increasing our use of nuclear power and the prohibitive cost of building new plants has seen several schemes recently hit the buffers.

Offshore windfarms are already greatly contributing to our reduced reliance on coal-fired power stations, which the Government has

committed to phase out by 2025. In fact as a whole country, the UK isn't doing too badly.

## IS SCALEABILITY THE PROBLEM?

Analysis by the website Carbon Brief found that renewable sources (including biomass, hydro, solar and wind power) supplied a record 33.4 per cent of our electricity last year, up from 29 per cent in 2017. Sadly gas remained the top source of electricity supplies at 39 per cent, even though its contribution fell by 4 per cent over the year.

Back in 2009 renewables contributed just 6.7 per cent to the mix, so we're certainly heading in the right direction. But more clearly needs to be done if we are to hit another of the Government's targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by the year 2050.

Many of the new energy sources look fine on an industrial scale, but how can we scale them down to more practical uses in our homes?

We are close to reaching saturation point in terms of solar panels on our roofs, so we need to find alternatives for property owners and tenants to invest in, if we are to maintain the progress of recent years.

## ARE BATTERIES A SOLUTION?

The experts predict we should be able to make much more use of lithium batteries as an energy source in our homes. These could be charged during the night, when electricity consumption is traditionally at its lowest and then switched on for use during the day. The catch is that we are an unspecified number of years away from turning the theory into practice.

There are concerns about their safety and storage at present, as the current working models are too big for the average sized home and the risk of over-heating and fires still needs to be overcome.

The answer could lay in increasing the use of geothermal and air source heat pumps and heat exchangers which take energy from the earth or the air around us, to heat or cool our homes. These are greener than biomass heaters, which still rely on the burning of carbon-emitting products although they are far less polluting than coal.

## AN ANSWER FROM ANCIENT TIMES

Geothermal energy is a powerful and efficient way to extract renewable energy from the earth through natural processes. Its use in Britain dates back to Roman times and can still be found in use in the heated spas and pools at Bath. But its use in our homes is still at a very low level.

Geothermal power requires no additional fuel to run and is therefore immune to fluctuations in fuel cost, but the capital costs of drilling into the earth are high and it's not suitable for all types of geology. It would be unrealistically disruptive and expensive in major towns and cities, so plants need to be located on their outskirts with hot water and generated power piped in.

Finding an answer to the scalability issue so that smaller power plants can supply districts within urban areas, tower blocks or individual homes, appears to be key. In the meantime we have the option of using air source heat pumps and heat exchangers. These are being installed in single properties, but the number of new installations is increasing from a very low base.

It is also far easier to fit them during the construction process to new build properties and what we really need is a low cost model which can easily be retrofitted to our existing housing stock – for use in all house types, including flats and terraced housing.

## IMPROVING DOMESTIC ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Of course the other side of the equation is reducing our use of energy – which can benefit both the planet and our household incomes. The news from the latest English Housing Survey contains a mix of good and not-so-good news.

The positive headline is that the energy efficiency of English homes has increased considerably in the last 20 years, but more recently that progress has stalled and it has not increased since 2015.

In 2017 the average SAP rating of English dwellings was 62 points, up from 45 points in 1996. This increase was evident in all tenures. However, the increase has been slowing and there was no change in the average SAP rating of homes between 2016 and 2017 (in any tenure).

## PROPERTY STANDARDS

Similarly over the last decade, the proportion of non-decent homes has declined from 35 per cent of the overall housing stock in 2007 to 19 per cent in 2017. This decrease was observed across all tenures, but again the rate of improvement has stalled in recent years.

There is a lower proportion of non-decent homes in the social rented sector (councils and housing associations) than in the private rented and owner occupied sectors. In 2017, 13 per cent of social rented homes failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard compared to 25 per cent of private rentals and 19 per cent of owner occupied properties.

With an increased focus on the quality and safety of privately rented properties, there are more reasons for landlords to upgrade their flats and houses. But the Government needs to act decisively to ensure this focus stretches out to 2050 and beyond, and includes for the replacement of gas fired heating and cooking facilities.

# How smart thermostats are changing the way housing is managed

A smart thermostat in every privately rented and affordable home sounds years away from reality, but we might just be closer than you think. For the last few years, Switchchee has been steadily working away to make this a reality. Switchchee is a smart home solution for housing providers designed specifically to help them maintain properties efficiently and compliantly. To do this we've built a smart thermostat that optimises heating settings around residents' day-to-day lives, reducing energy usage and bills. Overlaying this is a landlord dashboard that analyses information from installed Switchchees in order to display live, remote property performance and wellbeing metrics.

Often our clients come to us with the same problem: large numbers of properties, often geographically dispersed, with complex repair and maintenance obligations exacerbated by different stock types and incomplete job records. Systems have evolved to cope, but as the pace of technology evolution quickens, a comparative lack of real time insight and data is shining an increasingly bright light on easy efficiency gains many landlords are failing to capture.



With a Switchchee installed, a housing provider is capable of visualising and understanding a property's individual characteristics on a granular level. We arm you with the digital tools to identify the problem and the information needed to fix it. The dashboard we provide gives you real-time access to mould risk, humidity and temperature statistics, as well as overall portfolio health which includes heating system performance, thermal efficiency and even fuel poverty alerts.

Switchchee can detect failing insulation, poor ventilation and a whole host of other systemic problems with a property without the need for a manual inspection. This allows you and your maintenance teams to spend your time fixing problems, not diagnosing them.

Switchchee therefore enables housing providers to engage in preventative maintenance rather than reactive maintenance; this can drive efficiency gains and better resident outcomes. We give our clients early warnings about mould, heating system



notifications and other maintenance issues that they can then use to plan their work schedule more efficiently. With the insights we provide, our clients are also better equipped to engage in strategic asset management. Utilising the data-based insights and alerts from our dashboard – they are now capable of allocating resources to challenging properties that require attention.

We enable housing providers to better protect their tenants with gas safety compliance checks through our occupancy-based appointment scheduling tool. This allows them to book gas safety – or indeed other – visits at times most convenient for residents, thereby reducing no access appointments.

With recent government policy placing an increasing focus on the right of residents both to timely repair and to hold their landlord accountable for maintenance decisions, having objective data to evidence and audit proper repairs and stock investment is increasingly important. Last year's Green Paper set the framework for accountability; there has been a lot of focus recently on the Fitness for Human Habitation bill and the changes it will bring to landlord standards and residents' right to claim for disrepair. Switchchee provides data-backed evidence on property performance and the effectiveness of retrofit and repair solutions.

For tenants, the Switchchee Smart Thermostat can mean the difference between a comfortable home and fuel poverty. Our smart thermostat monitors a property's heating performance and sets the best heating profile to reduce energy wastage and save residents money (we save residents up to 15 per cent off their heating bill). This benefits both the resident and the environment as for every Switchchee

installed, a home will have its CO2 emissions reduced by around 177 kilograms a year. That's the same as driving for nearly 7 hours non-stop in the average car. The device also isn't reliant on a residents' Wi-Fi connection. Its connectivity is over an independent GSM connection – allowing it to work in areas where broadband connectivity doesn't reach. The screen on the device can also be used to utilise the Switchchee messaging service to communicate directly with residents to conduct surveys and post announcements.



For all these reasons and more – our system is being deployed across more than 40 housing associations and local authorities, including Flagship, Peabody, Optivo and Notting Hill Genesis. As more and more housing associations begin to deploy innovative technological measures to help manage their properties, Smart thermostats are well placed to help deliver an evolution towards strategic, pre-emptive and more efficient maintenance whilst directly benefitting residents.

020 7043 2310 [www.switchchee.co](http://www.switchchee.co)

## Enhancing production capabilities

Hadley Group is delighted to announce that it has further enhanced its UK production capabilities with the addition of a new heavy-duty flying cut-off press at its Downing Street headquarters in Smethwick. The new addition means Hadley Group can process a wider range of metal products than ever before. The capacity to work with larger, heavier-duty products of greater sectional complexity and gauge thickness is enabling Hadley Group to take on jobs that they haven't been able to quote for previously meaning the company can deliver even more innovative solutions to customers across a diverse range of industries.



0121 555 1300 [www.hadleygroup.com](http://www.hadleygroup.com)

## Hadley Group to exhibit at Midest

Hadley Group will bring its technical expertise to the Midest exhibition in Lyon later this year. The international show, which runs from 5-8 March at the Eurexpo Centre, will cover a number of industrial subcontracting sectors. Hadley Group's team will highlight how its product portfolio is helping firms find innovative solutions to complex challenges across a range of industries. Visitors to Hadley Group's stand at stall 6N92 will get a first-hand insight into its comprehensive range of industry-leading products. Hadley Group's technical team will be on-hand to introduce the company's product portfolio, with a particular focus on the company's vinepost and custom rollformed products.



0121 555 1300 [www.hadleygroup.com](http://www.hadleygroup.com)

## Designer Contracts strengthens team

Designer Contracts has announced a new, senior appointment to support its continued success. Lee Hassett joins the head office team as project executive with over 30 years' experience in the flooring industry. With 11 years of operational expertise, Lee also has 19 years retail knowledge and has worked within the logistics sector. Designer Contracts was recently named in the Business Reporter's Best of British Campaign, which recognises success stories in British business. The accolade was awarded to just 10 companies in the UK. Designer Contracts operates across 15 UK regional facilities. As well as flooring the company provides curtains and blinds, furniture and lighting.



01246 854577 [www.designercontracts.com](http://www.designercontracts.com)

## Vent-Axia shortlisted for three awards

Vent-Axia is delighted to announce that it has been shortlisted three times in the H&V News Awards 2019. The company's PoziDry Pro™ Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) unit has been shortlisted in both the 'Air Movement Product of the Year' and 'Domestic Ventilation Product of the Year' categories while the Floating Homes project, in which a Sentinel Kinetic BH MVHR was installed, has been shortlisted in 'HVAC Project of the Year (Under £0.5m)' category. This triple shortlisting confirms Vent-Axia's leading position in the ventilation market and demonstrates its commitment to helping provide good indoor air quality (IAQ) for its customers.



0844 856 0590 [www.vent-axia.com](http://www.vent-axia.com)

kms.uk.net

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## kms.uk.net

**futurebuild**  
05-07 March 2019 / ExCeL, London

5 - 7 March 2019 | London's ExCeL

# Futurebuild 2019: the challenge for housing managers

Taking place from 5 - 7 March at London's ExCeL, Futurebuild will focus on exploring and tackling the biggest challenges impacting the industry

**F**uturebuild is the leading built environment event for professionals working across the social and private rented sector to meet and learn, be inspired and do business. Running from 5 - 7 March, it will be a unique destination for visitors to gain unrivalled insight and hands-on experience around the latest thinking, innovations, products and materials in order to address these issues.

Developed in conjunction with renowned industry leading partners, Futurebuild will provide over 500 hours of structured learning across an inspiring conference programme and 11 seminar streams – all completely free and CPD accredited.

## MEETING CHALLENGES AND MAKING COMMITMENTS

Central to Futurebuild is the ecobuild conference, which will inspire visitors to take action on the most pressing challenges through insights from leading experts and knowledge-sharing. With an overarching theme of 'Time For Action', the conference sessions will be collaborative forums where visitors will develop plans for implementing change and proposing action for a more sustainable future.

A total of 13 key challenges will be tackled through this programme. These include 'The Housing Challenge – more than houses' which will see key speakers such as Jon Sawyer, director of Housing and Residential Growth at Manchester City Council explore why there's a housing crisis in the 21st century. The Health and Wellbeing Challenge and The Urban Challenge will also be addressed.

## FUTURE PRODUCTS, MATERIALS AND APPROACHES

More than 500 market-leading brands and organisations will be showcasing their latest innovations and contributing to the extensive knowledge programme. To ensure visitors gain a truly immersive and in-depth experience across all areas of the industry, these exhibitors will be hosted across six curated hubs covering: Buildings, Interiors, Urban Infrastructure, Materials, Energy and Offsite.

Each Hub will include unique features and concentrated education programmes hosted by a relevant sector-specific authority.

The Buildings Hub will tackle challenges across all aspects of building, with exhibitors including Bauder, Internorm, Mapei and ROCKWOOL showcasing their technologies. A dedicated seminar programme will focus on the latest thinking and initiatives in building quality, performance and occupier comfort, and will explore new tools and delivery approaches to improve new and existing buildings.

Visitors can find the latest solutions across blue, green, grey and social infrastructure in the Urban Infrastructure Hub. Topics such as placekeeping and urban climate led design will be explored as part of the hub's seminar programme. Exhibitors here include ACO, Biotecture, Green-Tech, Ronacrete and Wavin.



In the Energy Hub, visitors will have access to the latest research and best practices. Meanwhile, full-scale builds and new system demonstrations that showcase the latest advances and innovations from across the globe will be hosted in the Offsite Hub.

Across the hubs, visitors will also have access to a variety of new and expanded pavilions and attractions, including: The City Walk, Made In Britain, Vision @ Futurebuild, the Association of Decentralised Energy (ADE) pavilion, the Home of the Future by Tufeco, the RIBA Stand designed by Gundry + Ducker, and many more.

## NEW AND EXCLUSIVE FEATURES

New for 2019 is the Knowledge Forum – a dedicated area where industry-leading partners, academia and professional bodies will offer a comprehensive look at the biggest issues facing the built environment. Hosting CPD workshops, the Knowledge Forum will provide useful solutions and guidance for visitors to take back to the office.

As an official UK Government Innovation Partner, Futurebuild will also be hosting the Innovation Zone with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Innovate UK. At the zone, BEIS will be showcasing the work of the Energy Innovation Programme and demonstrating how it is delivering the Clean Growth Strategy. Focusing on true innovation, it will provide a platform for investment and knowledge exchange across three areas: a dedicated three-day seminar series; an exhibition featuring innovative companies BEIS and Innovate UK has provided funding to; and a 'Business Bar' in collaboration with the Knowledge Transfer Network – providing one-to-one advice and support on accessing funding.

The Waste Zone will return with new and expanded features, including the new Circular Economy Hub. Curated by architect, academic and author Duncan Baker-Brown, the area will take a unique beach hut format and showcase how waste can be a valuable industry resource.

To register for your free tickets, visit:  
[www.futurebuild.co.uk/register](http://www.futurebuild.co.uk/register)

## Stylish conversion of three Listed buildings are up for an award

Developer Thomas Homes, has spearheaded the restoration of the buildings on the University of Reading's London Road Campus.

The most noteworthy among them is the Grade II\* Listed St David's Hall, built in the 1830s, which was a former hall of residence and was on Historic England's 'Buildings at Risk' register. Also included are St Laurence's Hall and St Mary's Hall,



both Grade II Listed and a further single storey building which is not Listed in its own right, but included in the curtilage of St Mary's Hall.

The project demanded that where possible all the original single glazed timber sashes had to be retained. The planning obligations required secondary glazing to the large majority of windows in these apartments. With the windows having timber shuttered surrounds, the secondary glazing was required to sit in these reveals.

Thomas Homes sought advice from Selectaglaze to assist in reducing the external noise levels. With the Royal Berkshire Hospital, the University of Reading and the Oracle Shopping Centre all just a stone's throw away, London Road's busy thoroughfare would be a distraction.

Over 300 units were fitted to all three of the Listed Buildings, across all floors over a two year period. Due to the successful reduction of drafts and outside noise, Selectaglaze was recently asked to return to one of the apartments to fit more secondary glazing.

Founded in 1966, Royal Warrant holder Selectaglaze has worked on all buildings of all types from listed to traditional and even new build. The Company's wide range of products are fully tested and certified and produced to exacting quality standards. A free technical advisory



service is offered and a RIBA approved CPD is available to architects and designers. Selectaglaze will be showcasing a variety of secondary glazing products at Futurebuild from the 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> March, ExCel London at Stand D21.

01727 837271 [www.selectaglaze.co.uk](http://www.selectaglaze.co.uk)

## Ancon to exhibit at Futurebuild 2019

ANCON will be showcasing its latest fixing innovations at Futurebuild (formerly Ecobuild), 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> March, London ExCeL, stand number C82.



Awarded with the Queen's Award for Innovation in 2018, this is the third time that Ancon has been honoured in this prestigious award scheme. Alongside a string of innovation and product development accolades, Ancon will continue to enhance its product range further in 2019.

For more information, call Ancon or visit their website.

0114 275 5224 [www.ancon.co.uk](http://www.ancon.co.uk)

## New camera that pushes the boundaries

For building inspection and the prevention of energy loss, a thermal imaging camera is now considered an essential tool and thanks to its continuous development strategy, FLIR Systems provides this industry with an exceptional choice of products. Year on year FLIR Systems introduces new infrared features and capabilities that help users do their job quicker and more efficiently and 2019 is no exception. Indeed, Futurebuild 2019 has been confirmed as the UK launch platform for a new infrared camera and the showcase for the latest technological developments in test and measurement instrumentation. FLIR Systems is now one of the market leaders in thermal imaging.



[sales@flir.uk.com](mailto:sales@flir.uk.com)

## Council first to specify new ATMOS units

Residents of the Tresefion estate in Holyhead who live in properties owned by the Isle of Anglesey County Council will be the first to benefit from the new ATMOS® PIV systems from EnviroVent. ATMOS® is the first smart range of PIV solutions with five different units available designed to improve indoor air quality and eradicate the problem of condensation and mould growth in all types and sizes of homes. ATMOS® has great connectivity as it features the new myenvirovent app, which is the first app of its kind that gives the homeowner complete control of their ventilation system at the touch of a button. All the loft-mounted products within the ATMOS® range come with a 10 year warranty



[www.envirovent.com](http://www.envirovent.com)

## New Atmos ventilation range

EnviroVent, one of the UK's leading ventilation manufacturers, has revolutionised its Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) range and added a whole collection of new features and functionality to make it even more appealing for homeowners, self-builders, social housing providers and private landlords. Atmos® is the first smart range of PIV solutions with five different units available designed to improve indoor air quality and eradicate the problem of condensation and mould growth in all types and sizes of homes. This includes: Atmos®; Atmos® Air; Atmos® Dual; Atmos® Air Dual and a wall mounted Atmos® unit suitable for apartments and flats that do not have a loft space.



[www.envirovent.com](http://www.envirovent.com)

# Roofs renewed

Kingspan Insulation's Adrian Pargeter explains why tapered insulation systems should be considered when refurbishing flat roofs in order to avoid water ponding

**W**ater ponding is an all too common sight on flat roofs across the country. When carrying out refurbishment work on these areas it is important to tackle the underlying issue rather than simply patching over the problem. The latest tapered insulation systems can provide a lasting solution, enhancing drainage and thermal performance without adding significant weight to the deck.

## FALL ANGLE

Despite their name, even flat roofs require a gradual slope for drainage. Without this, rain and snow will simply sit on the surface forming ponds. In addition to being unsightly, this can cause significant long-term issues such as alkaline formation and mould growth. The weight of the water may also lead the surface to deflect over time. This will result in further ponding and may mean the entire deck has to be stripped and replaced at significant cost to the owner.

The obvious question when creating a fall on an existing surface is what gradient is required to ensure the water will actually drain away. The British Standards recommend that installers design surfaces to a fall of 1:40 (that is a one unit fall for every 40 units of horizontal roof length). This should ensure that all areas of the actual construction achieve a minimum fall of 1:80.

## THERMAL PERFORMANCE

When undertaking any major re-roofing work, the Approved Documents for the Building Regulations in England and Wales and Section 6 (Energy) of the Building Standards in Scotland require project teams to look at whether the thermal performance of the surface can be improved. Typically, contractors should look to achieve a U-value of at least 0.18 W/m<sup>2</sup>·K for refurbished flat roofs in England and Wales or 0.15 W/m<sup>2</sup>·K for flat roofs in Scotland.

Typically, this is either achieved with a warm roof construction, where the insulation layer is installed above the deck, or a cold roof construction, where insulation is installed between and below the roof rafters with a minimum air gap of 50 mm between the insulation and the deck.

Recently, some installers have adopted a hybrid approach – fitting a thin layer of insulation above the deck with the rest below. In theory, this allows a thin layer of insulation to be fitted above the deck and eliminates the need for a ventilation gap below the deck. In practice, however, it can lead to some significant issues.

The above-deck insulation layer often offers insufficient performance to keep the deck warm, allowing moisture to form below the deck and with no ventilation gap, this is not removed before it forms condensation. As such, this construction should only be attempted with a full condensation risk analysis and, even then, installers should be aware that workmanship will need to be almost perfect to avoid the potential pitfalls.

Tapered insulation systems can often provide a more practical solution.

## TAPERED

Tapered systems typically comprise tapered boards, hip and valley boards and flat packer boards. They can be installed above a variety of decks either with standard waterproofing or as part of a green roof system.

The systems can significantly reduce installation times. In most cases they can be fitted directly over the existing surface and their dry installation process means no time is lost waiting for the surface to set. They can also weigh as little as 1.5 per cent that of a screed to fall system – removing structural loading concerns.

The latest tapered insulation systems combine polyisocyanurate (PIR) sloped, hip and valley boards with phenolic insulation packer boards which have thermal conductivities as low as 0.018 W/m·K. This enhanced level of thermal

Kingspan Thermataper systems combine insulation and drainage in a single, lightweight solution allowing simple, fast-track installations



The latest tapered insulation systems can provide a lasting solution, enhancing drainage and thermal performance without adding significant weight to the deck.

performance can allow desired U-values to be met with thickness savings of 20 – 40 mm, depending on the individual scheme and build-up, when compared with a full PIR system.

Beyond these benefits, some manufactures also provide tapered design services to support installations. These provide contractors with a detailed layout ensuring drainage and insulation performance are met with a minimal construction depth – streamlining the retrofit process.

## A FRESH START

Adding a fall to an existing flat roof was once a complex, costly and time-consuming process. However, by taking advantage of the latest tapered roof insulation systems it is now possible to transform the thermal performance and drainage of these areas with a quick and simple installation which doesn't add significantly to the structural loading of the surface.

Adrian Pargeter is head of technical and product development at Kingspan Insulation

## Boiler Plus Compliant Controls from ESi

ESi is enjoying phenomenal growth and is a highly competent heating controls brand, and it proudly stands behind two of its Boiler Plus compliant controls.

ESi's ESRTTP4RF and ESRTTP5 Wifi controls are both fully Boiler Plus compliant, offering a smart thermostat with Automation and Optimisation as standard.

Take a closer look at the ESi solutions available to you on the company's straightforward and easy to navigate website. You can also give them a call for more information.

01280 816868 [www.esicontrols.co.uk](http://www.esicontrols.co.uk)



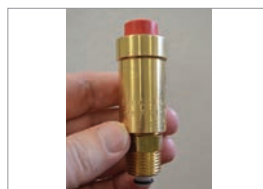
## Flexvent success for Flamco

One of the leading HVAC component manufacturers, Flamco is celebrating the sale of its three millionth Flexvent air vent valve in the UK and Ireland in the past ten years.

Selling around 300,000 of these a year it's clear to see that these are essential components to keep on every heating installer, air conditioning installer and plumbers van.

For more information, head for Flamco's website or go to their YouTube page and see a presentation on the installation of a Flexvent.

[www.youtube.com/user/flamcogroup](http://www.youtube.com/user/flamcogroup) [www.flamcogroup.com/uk-en](http://www.flamcogroup.com/uk-en)



## Longcliffe Quarries launch LONGFLOOR

Revolutionary fast drying floor screed solution for domestic, commercial and underfloor heating applications.

**Longcliffe Quarries** are now supplying LONGFLOOR, a groundbreaking dry powder bulk binder for the manufacturer of liquid cement screeds. The LONGFLOOR liquid cement screed system has major advantages over both traditional screeds and anhydrite/gypsum flowing screeds. LONGFLOOR can be laid at ten times the speed of traditional screeds, manual handling is avoided and a denser, more even surface and creamy smooth finish achieved. LONGFLOOR dries at three times the speed of anhydrite/gypsum based flowing screeds.

01629 540284 [www.longfloor.co.uk](http://www.longfloor.co.uk)



## Wilo small circulators

Wilo offers the new generation of the Wilo-Yonos PICO series small circulators to the UK market. A range of new features has been added to this popular circulator primarily for residential homes, for heating systems and air conditioning equipment.

Wilo has succeeded in not only upgrading one of the most established products in the market, but also to an extent, it has been able to reinvent it thanks to new functionality and ease of use.

For more information on the Yonos PICO and the other small pumps in the energy efficient Wilo family of circulators, visit their website.

01283 523000 [www.wilo.co.uk](http://www.wilo.co.uk)



## Evinox Energy Supply Canary Wharf's New District, Wood Wharf

A new urban district is being created in London's Canary Wharf, which when complete will feature up to 3,600 new homes, a GP's surgery, a two form primary school for 420 children, 490,000sq ft of retail space and eight acres of public spaces squares and parks. The development, called Wood Wharf, has been designed to provide a new residential led, mixed use, waterside community and is expected to be completed by 2023. Working with the developer, Canary Wharf Group (CWG), in combination with SES Engineering Services, Emico and Haydon Mechanical & Electrical contractors, **Evinox Energy** supplied heating and cooling interface units for 1330 apartments for the first phases of this development, with more to follow for the remaining phases. Interface units were tested by BSRIA as a requirement of this project, something Evinox were happy to undertake, confident their first-class product manufacturing and performance would exceed the required results. In addition to the efficient performance of the ModuSat units, Evinox equipment was also chosen due to the flexibility of manufacturing and short delivery timescales. "On-time" delivery schedules were critical for this project, as some of the equipment was being built into prefabricated pods by a third party prior to delivery to site. Their range of heat interface units are designed and developed internally by technical engineers to UK standards, and built in Evinox's own production facility in Brasov Romania by partner Romradiatoare, using lean manufacturing principles.

01372 722277 [www.evinoxenergy.co.uk](http://www.evinoxenergy.co.uk)



## Accessibility report highlights opportunities in rented housing

A new survey is highlighting the growing need for accessible rented accommodation, and particularly homes with accessible bathrooms. An accessible WC and shower were rated the most important accessibility features by 90 per cent of respondents. The findings affect both social and private rented sectors (50 per cent of respondents would like to move into the PRS, yet only 18 per cent are currently in privately rented accommodation). Of the respondents, four out of five live in a home that does not fully meet their needs. The bathroom accessibility can be met efficiently using a project management service available from **Closomat**. The leading provider of accessible bathroom solutions can survey, offer design advice, supply, install, commission and provide ongoing service & maintenance. The service is available across Closomat's product offering, including shower toilets, toilet lifters, washbasins, shower seats, ceiling track hoists. It is fully Construction (Design & Management) compliant. Closomat is already the 'go to' provider for accessible toilet provision in domestic and 'away from home' environments. Its website is acknowledged as a key resource to help take the first steps towards efficient accessibility provision, including design guidance, white papers, CAD blocks, NBS specification clauses and case studies. The expertise within the company represents the combined wealth of knowledge amassed from 57 years' helping disabled people optimise their dignity and independence in the bathroom, at home and away.

0161 969 1199 [www.clos-o-mat.com](http://www.clos-o-mat.com)



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Now there’s a Toilet Waste Pumping Unit which can do things the others can’t!

The new FlushMaster from Aldermaston based Pump Technology Ltd. can do a number of things which other units can’t. It can pump further and higher, making it possible to handle longer pipe runs. The pipework can be run horizontally first, include a double lift (horizontal, then vertical, horizontal again and then vertical again), or even be run along an uphill gradient.

These features vastly extend the places where an extra toilet can be installed! All of this is possible because the FlushMaster uses a submersible, open, free flow, vortex impeller pump and not a domestic cutter pump, making it ideal for both domestic and light commercial applications. The open vortex pump impeller with large clearances between pump opening and tank floor also makes the FlushMaster more tolerant of user abuse. Multiple fitting positions are possible and each pump is supplied with a full set of installation connections for direct mounting behind the toilet or behind a partition wall.

Pump Technology Ltd products are available from stock & local merchants.

01189 821 555 [www.pumptechnology.co.uk](http://www.pumptechnology.co.uk)



Saniflo launches new shower enclosure

Fast 2000 is a new range of Saniflo Kinedo shower enclosures. Taking its name from the 2000mm high profiles and the rapidity of installation, the enclosures suit every size and shape of bathroom and offer exceptional value for money. Choose between pivot doors, sliding doors, corner entry sliding doors, quads with sliding doors and fixed panels. The Fast 2000 shower enclosures can easily and swiftly be assembled by one person thanks to the interlocking aluminium profiles for the frame and easy release rollers that can be fixed to the door profiles without any tools. Handles are attached using pre-supplied screws and fixings for the glass panels slot neatly and securely into place.

020 8842 0033 [www.kinedo.co.uk](http://www.kinedo.co.uk)



Perfect jacket and trouser combination

Snickers Workwear is continually improving its working clothes with superb new stretch Work Trousers and Hi-Tech Jackets. With great fit and superb value for money, the brand new comfort fabrics woven into Snickers’ newest street-smart Work Trousers deliver enhanced freedom of movement as well as improved comfort and close quarter mobility. They’re perfectly complimented by the new, Hi-tech range of AllroundWork and FlexiWork jackets. They include 37.5° fabric technology garments for superb working comfort as well as others that are 100 per cent waterproof, plus Hi-Vis working clothes for tradesmen and women that deliver maximum warmth, dryness and visibility when you need it most.


[info@snickersworkwear.co.uk](mailto:info@snickersworkwear.co.uk)






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# Comfort height – a big deal

Lecico's Adam Lay discusses what comfort height means and why it's something to consider when planning a bathroom refurbishment



**C**omfort height is a buzzword that anyone shopping for a new toilet will probably hear, be it in a showroom or in a traditional plumbers' merchants. But what does comfort height mean, and what is the fuss all about?

In short, comfort height is a taller seating position, designed to be a more comfortable seating position for the user. The concept was born from commercial and speciality sanitaryware products, but now comes with a modern domestic twist. Comfort height toilets are not bound by any legal restrictions and can be designed with a wider audience in mind than the original raised height DocM (Document M of the Building Regulations) products designed for wheelchair users.

When the modern toilet was designed in 1778 (by Joseph Bramah – not Thomas Crapper) the average height of a man was 5'6". Today's modern man stands at around 5'10", yet this increase in height has not been matched by changes to toilets, which have remained around the same height for the last 250 years. Due mainly to legislation surrounding accessible WCs and in particular DocM, the manufacturing of toilets with an increased height has grown significantly.

These products have now started to make their way into domestic life and are far more comfortable to use. They also provide benefits for an aging and taller population, providing relief on the user's knees and back.

Looking after your knees is increasingly important within the plumbing trade, where there is a real focus on knee health – the use of knee pads being heavily advised and promoted. What was once an afterthought is now being viewed as a preventable issue, so simple things like using comfort height toilets can only be a good thing.

This new generation of raised height WCs have taken the traditionally commercial designs and modernised them, making comfort height a viable option for a modern family bathroom or washroom. As demand for comfort height grows, manufacturers are responding and adding products to their collections. Looking around bathroom showrooms today you'll see this increased presence of comfort height products which, when paired with stylish basins or furniture, are at first glance indistinguishable.

An average toilet pan is 400 mm high, a dimension that hasn't changed in over 250 years. Comfort height toilets add an additional height of around 40 to 50 mm, which makes a far more comfortable seating position of around 475



These products have now started to make their way into domestic life and are far more comfortable to use

mm to 500 mm (including the toilet seat). Such a small increase may seem like it would not make much difference – it's only when you try one of the new comfort height toilets that you appreciate what a difference that 4 cm can make for users of all ages. The increase in height is also subtle enough to not draw attention, and only when you actually experience the difference will it become obvious, and hopefully more comfortable to use.

As our population ages, there is an increased need for homes and commercial premises to ensure their facilities can safely accommodate the needs of all of the occupants or users. DocM has increased the awareness of raised height products, but the more rigid layout this calls for is often more than is required in a domestic setting and for users who have only a slight reduction in mobility.

In an era of multi-generational living, choosing a comfort height product makes more and more sense. They enable a bathroom layout to be future-proof, and as the additional height is not a real problem for young and agile users, the drawbacks are minimal.

In addition to comfort height toilets, new products are being invented and introduced into the market that also help mobility and ensure the lifespan of a new bathroom. Support rails are one such example, now finished in modern and attractive designs so this practical support can be an attractive addition. These newer design-led rails are following comfort height in a move away from the clinical look and feel of DocM and reflecting current design trends. Similarly, the growth in popularity of shower seats represents a move towards forward planning within bathrooms, with people designing homes to last as they require increasing levels of support to retain independence.

Adam Lay is marketing manager at Lecico

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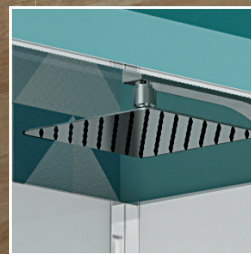


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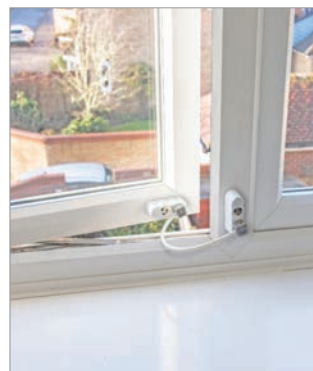


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## Raising window restrictor awareness to protect patients

Thousands of window restrictors installed in health facilities across the UK may not be giving the level of protection required and as a result could be falling foul of their duty to keep patients safe. **Newstar Door Controls**, innovators of the Cubelock range of window restrictors, is raising awareness of these inadequacies and sending the message to estate and facilities managers who may be unsure of the guidelines. "The Department of Health, Estate and Facilities Alert EFA/2013/002 is now more than five years old," says Toby Staff, Managing Director of Newstar Door Controls. "Despite this, we still see specifications for window restrictors coming through with nothing more than the BS Standard. As recently as January 2019, there was a reported incident at Medway Maritime Hospital where a man suffered serious injuries after falling from a ward window. The hospital confirmed that a patient fell from a ledge after forcing a window open and climbing out. It's believed that he suffered a fractured skull, hip and jaw from the 20 feet drop. Toby continues: "To assist estate and facilities managers, we retested our products and confirm that when our keyed window restrictor is used in tandem with our non-keyed fixed version, a maximum holding force of 5250N is achieved, 10 times more than what is required in the standard." "Our key is designed with three teeth, which means it cannot be opened using another instrument, and if for any reason the lock fails – it will fail in the locked position."

01474 353111 [www.cubelockrestrictor.com](http://www.cubelockrestrictor.com)



## Take the strain out of stain removal with Crown Trade

As regular and rigorous cleaning can wear away the paint finish and leave decor looking tired, **Crown Trade's** market-leading Clean Extreme Stain Resistant Scrubbable paints are providing specifiers with the perfect solution to reducing maintenance requirements and helping surfaces retain that 'just decorated' appeal for longer. The high-performance formulation of Crown Trade's Clean Extreme Stain Resistant Scrubbable Matt and Acrylic Eggshell offers exceptional durability, combining the dual benefits of helping to prevent stains from forming on the paint surface and being able to withstand regular cleaning by minimising the amount of paint film that is removed each time. Crown Trade's Clean Extreme range of high performance paints has been specially developed and tested to perform in even the most challenging high-traffic environments. Based upon the ISO 11998 testing method, which is the industry standard for determining the wet scrub resistance of dry paint film, Crown Trade's Clean Extreme Scrubbable Matt achieved a Class 1 rating and has an impressive durability level of 10,000 scrubs. This equates to a 400 per cent increase in resistance to wet scrubbing when compared to conventional matt emulsions. Crown Trade's Clean Extreme Stain Resistant Scrubbable Matt was also recently voted 'Best Trade Durable Matt in the Market' by the Decorators Forum – an online hub for thousands of professional painters and decorators across the UK.

[info@crownpaintspec.co.uk](mailto:info@crownpaintspec.co.uk)



## A hit for old record factory car park

The redevelopment of a famous record factory to the west of London has included the construction of a visually striking multi-storey car park, where two high performance waterproofing and wearing course systems produced by **tremco illbruck** have been used to complete a rapid build methodology. Huber Car Park Systems, the main contractor, specified the use of TREMCO CP polyurethane system to waterproof the roof deck, as well as TREMCO MMA for the internal floors. Referring to the specification of TREMCO systems, Huber's Tomer Meirum said: "We began using TREMCO products back in 2012, and have never experienced any problems with the waterproofing performance."



[www.tremco-illbruck.com](http://www.tremco-illbruck.com)

## Bradite wins hands down for refurb

Tests involving a range of well-known leading paints convinced a firm of professional decorators that **Bradite's** EW99 epoxy floor and wall coating was the correct choice for a challenging job in Leeds. Concord Street Apartments comprise two residential blocks, six and seven stories respectively, in the Northern Quarter of the city. A car park and walkways needed attention as part of a refurbishment contract. Builders merchants Brewers recommended that the Bradite product should be considered particularly because of its adherence and quick drying properties, as well as its toughness. "We sampled four products and the Bradite's performance was flawless" says Gavin Shaw.



01248 600315 [www.bradite.com](http://www.bradite.com)

## Council funding helps homeowners

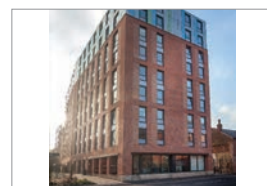
**The Window Company (Contracts)** has joined forces with Basildon Borough Council in an innovative scheme aimed at giving private homeowners the chance to upgrade their homes to match council owned properties being refurbished around them. Together, they are offering homeowners access to the same windows and doors being installed as part of the council's ongoing replacement programme, at the same low unit price and with low interest finance available if required. The company was awarded the Basildon Council window replacement contract back in 2017. The project manager at Basildon Council has been impressed with the quality of the products and service.



01245 268120 [www.thewinco.co.uk](http://www.thewinco.co.uk)

## Profile 22 delivers glazing solution

**Profile 22** Flush Tilt and Turn windows have been used in the construction of flats for University of Derby students. The vibrant, modern flats accommodate between four and six students and house 244 students in total. Given the nature of student accommodation, and the shape of the building's aesthetics, the Flush Tilt and Turn Window from Profile 22 was the best choice for optimum ventilation and maximisation of space. It has a sash that is neatly positioned inside the frame of the window to create an elegant and sleek 'flush' appearance that delivers the appearance of aluminium. The window is Secured by Design accredited.



[www.profile22.co.uk](http://www.profile22.co.uk)

# The no compromise composite door

John Whalley of Nationwide Windows & Doors discusses the advantages of composite doors for social housing



Specifiers and asset managers have lots of choice when it comes to the different types of materials on the market for doors. Naturally, product specifications and performance vary depending on where the doors are and what they are required to do.

Traditionally, one of the most popular materials to make doors out of is PVCu, which is highly weather resistant, has great maintenance free properties and offers value for money. In contrast, while as a nation we may have an emotional affinity with the integrity of timber doors, they can require varnishing, painting and weather sealing many times over their life span.

While both PVCu and timber doors come with their own pros and cons, in recent years, millions of social housing properties have been improved with what have been described as 'no compromise' composite doors. As the name suggests, composite doors are manufactured from a combination of materials.

The beauty of composite doors is they can be designed to look like the timber doors the nation has a preference for, without the associated maintenance. For example, one such composite door available on the market has a skin made from impact-resistant fibreglass (thermoset GRP – glass reinforced polyester), and is compression moulded to offer detailed panel definition and an authentic woodgrain effect which will not expand, contract, bow, warp or twist.

The stiles and rails are composed of water-resistant polymers which are bonded to the skin and filled with an insulating core of 100 per cent CFC-free polyurethane, providing thermal efficiency nine times that of a timber door.

The end product is tough, tried and tested and offers the ultimate in security and durability. Reputable manufacturer's doors should be independently tested

Millions of social housing properties have been improved with what have been described as 'no compromise' composite doors

– for example Nationwide doors are tested by a UKAS accredited test house to BS: PAS24 and Secure By Design licensed (Association of Chief Police Officers).

## KEY ADVANTAGES OF COMPOSITE DOORS

Composite doors offer a range of advantages including the following:

- Provide a safe, sturdy and robust entrance to a home
- An energy efficient choice with insulating properties, helping to reduce heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer
- Low maintenance, requiring very little upkeep – just a quick wipe down with a damp cloth
- They look good, with realistic woodgrain finishes, a wide variety of colours, and the option for glasswork inserts
- They are strong and resistant to wear and tear, easily standing the rigours of day to day use
- They will not warp, chip, scratch, rot or discolour
- Their long lifespan means they offer great overall lifecycle value



Composite doors are an energy efficient choice with insulating properties, helping to reduce heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer

#### A PREFERRED DOOR PARTNER

When it comes to looking for a supplier/manufacturer, there are a few things to consider. Look out for a manufacturer who is a member of The Association of Composite Door Manufacturers (ACDM). This is the representative body focused on ensuring that composite doors, and all those involved in manufacturing and supplying them, maintain a high level of quality and credibility. There is a minimum requirement to join the ACDM, based upon product performance.

The host of accreditations a manufacturers holds – such as PAS 24 and Secured By Design – is testament to the commitment it has to stringent quality control across all areas of its business, as well as any independent testing it puts its products through. For example, Nationwide products are rigorously tested by a third party UKAS accredited test house to ensure they will perform in real-life situations.

Also take into consideration a company's manufacturing facilities. Last year, we invested in a technologically advanced, high volume, dedicated composite door manufacturing facility.

It's also worth checking suppliers' websites as you'll often find useful tips and advice such as downloadable guides.

When you choose a partner for your door upgrades to housing stock, choose a company who is committed to ensuring this innovative door continues its foothold within the UK's housing market.

John Whalley is managing director of Nationwide Windows & Doors

## Challenging project shows Shelforce capabilities

When Birmingham City Council needed a company to design, supply and install energy efficient windows and doors for the refurbishment of seven high rise tower blocks they knew who to turn to for help. Shelforce has been providing high-quality products to local authority building projects around the country for a number of years, including for Birmingham City Council, so they were the perfect fit for what was a hugely challenging project. The Birmingham-based window and door manufacturer had to replace windows and doors for 238 flats on a site with very limited access and busy public highways on all sides. However, thanks to Shelforce's logistical management, the project ran smoothly without any lost build time and the project was completed in just 18 weeks. Shelforce provided the structures with RAL 7016 grey external/white internal windows and doors and balcony infill's for the 238 flats and supplied "A+" rated energy efficient windows to provide a unique and highly efficient solution to meet the Council's requirements. While Shelforce makes it their mission to help provide quality housing for the wider community, it will come as no surprise that the company is also aware of its social responsibility. In fact, when it comes to training and employment opportunities in the glass and glazing industry, the full Eurocell systems supplier is leading the way in inclusivity by employing and training people with a range of disabilities, thus ensuring equal opportunities for all.

0121 603 5262 [www.shelforce.com](http://www.shelforce.com)



## Shelforce boss backs Leaders pledge to make people proud of social housing

Prime Minister Teresa May's recent pledge to make sure residents are proud to call social housing their home has been backed by the General Manager of a Birmingham-based PVCu window and door manufacturer and installer. Mrs May told a National Housing Federation summit in London that she wanted "to see social housing that is so good people are proud to call it their home." And with Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn stating earlier this year that "a decent home is a right owed to all...and the only way to deliver on that right for everyone, regardless of income, is through social housing," Howard Trotter of Shelforce is delighted that social housing is in the spotlight.

Shelforce provides high-quality products to local authority building projects around the country, including Birmingham City Council, and Howard said: "Social housing should never be seen as something that simply needs to be 'good enough' which is why we ensure that we only supply the highest quality products to allow our citizens to enjoy a comfortable and safe home."

One of the current projects Shelforce have been working on is Adelaide Tower in Birmingham. Managed by Birmingham City Council, the retirement housing high rise is currently being transformed, and Shelforce installed 221 windows for the project, which is being delivered by lead contractor Wates Living Space.

0121 603 5262 [www.shelforce.com](http://www.shelforce.com)



## Design-driven flooring solution

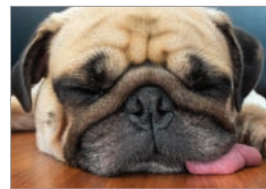
Havannah House is a brand new six-storey, purpose-built building which accommodates 458 students in a variety of stylish accommodation options from different sized individual and shared studio apartments. It was therefore necessary to find a flooring solution for the living areas within the student apartments that would be environmentally sustainable and reflect both the aesthetic of the whole building and complement the interior design scheme. It was an excellent mix of innovative designs and vibrant colour choices, including very modern, matte effect Nest Black, together with high specification qualities, which ensured that Gerflor's Taralay Impression Comfort was the flooring product of choice for Havannah House.

01926 622600 [www.gerflor.co.uk](http://www.gerflor.co.uk)



## Let sleeping dogs lie with Norbord

Norbord's CaberFloor P5 – one of the UK's most specified chipboard flooring products, 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.



[www.norbord.co.uk](http://www.norbord.co.uk)

## Beaulieu Fibres launches UltraBond

Beaulieu Fibres International unveils a unique opportunity for carpet manufacturers to create fully recyclable needlepunch carpets, and benefit from production and resource savings, without influencing performance. UltraBond is a patented polyolefin bonding staple fibre that eliminates the need for latex or other chemical binders to bind nonwovens. It opens up a new path for creating 100 per cent polypropylene needlepunch carpets which meet the same performance requirements as traditional latex-bonded carpets while reducing the end-of-life environmental impact. Functional properties such as pilling resistance, resistance to wear and abrasion, and also UV resistance are guaranteed.

+32 56 66 81 91 [www.beaulieufibres.com](http://www.beaulieufibres.com)



## Polyflor launches new flooring collection

Polyflor is delighted to announce the launch of the new Polysafe QuickLay PUR Collection.

Polysafe QuickLay is a loose lay safety flooring designed for adhesive-free installation and is the perfect solution for busy commercial environments in need of a quick turnaround and where sustainable slip resistance is a priority.

Polysafe QuickLay is a temporary or permanent floor covering which achieves the same performance and durability as other Polysafe flooring collections but with the added benefits of adhesive-free installation.

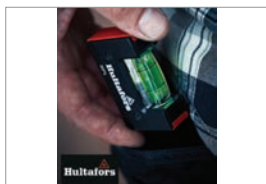
0161 767 1111 [www.polyflor.com](http://www.polyflor.com)



## New Mini Pocket spirit levels

It's always been Hultafors Tools' vision to give professional tradesmen and women the best quality tools for optimal on-site performance. That's why these NEW Mini Pocket spirit levels have now been added to its range of best in class levelling and marking equipment. The ergonomic design includes a crush-proof vial with a +60 per cent magnifying effect and luminescent effect for easy reading in light or dark conditions. There's also a strong protective casing and, what's more the magnetic version is ideal for accurate vertical measuring. Both new models look great and, added to all the other products in the Hultafors' range, there's something to suit every conceivable levelling requirement.

[www.hultafors.co.uk](http://www.hultafors.co.uk)



## Screed speeds renovation contracts

TREMCO SX100 Renovation Screed has been developed specifically to speed the installation of new floorcoverings. Supplied in 25kg plastic lined sacks, the grey powder incorporates special fibres to reinforce the screed and provide excellent crack resistance. Meanwhile, the fast application, self-levelling characteristics help minimise downtime, while the option to apply by pump means areas of up to 2,000m<sup>2</sup> can be laid during a single day. SX100 offers an open time of 30 minutes and provides an average coverage of 4 m<sup>2</sup> per mix at a thickness of 4mm. It can be walked on in two to four hours and achieves a 28 day compressive strength of 30 N/mm<sup>2</sup>. For further information, visit the [tremco illbruck](http://tremco-illbruck.com) website.

[www.tremco-illbruck.com](http://www.tremco-illbruck.com)



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## Combatting harmful condensation with Glidevale universal tile and slate ventilators

**G**lidevale, the specialist building products and ventilation solutions provider, offers a range of universal roofing ventilators fitting a large number of tile profiles to help housing providers to manage the risk of harmful condensation in their properties.

Research has shown that about 20 per cent of the air entering a dwelling, leaves via the roof. Moisture laden air moving through the property can create condensation on the rafters which in the long term could cause serious damage, including structural weakening by wet and dry rot, reduced insulation effectiveness and mould growth staining, often seen on ceilings. Not only does the building suffer, the health of the occupiers is at a higher risk of respiratory problems such as asthma, skin irritation and even nausea. Harmful condensation only increases unless controlled ventilation strategies are put in place.

Glidevale's compact universal range can be used where a single solution is required for a number of roofs and tile matching is unnecessary. This includes the Versa-Tile G5, purpose made to match virtually all interlocking single lap tiles and also the Universal Flat Interlocking In-Line® Tile, which can be used with a range of tile profiles. Both are available in seven UV-stable colours.

Glidevale also offers a comprehensive range of profile and colour matched slate and tile ventilators, including hundreds of dedicated profiled tile ventilators to match almost any tile available in the market, making Glidevale tile vents suitable for both new build and retrofit schemes. When profile matched and colour blended with neighbouring slates, tiles and ridges, the ventilators are almost indiscernible once installed.

The compact universal tile and slate vents range is typically available ex stock. Profile and colour matched tile and slate ventilators are made to order and can be on site within a few working days of manufacture. For more information, please email [technical@glidevale.com](mailto:technical@glidevale.com).

0161 905 5700  
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# Pro-active roof asset management

Ensuring that a property's roof condition is maintained and monitored is vital, especially for social housing where budgets need to be carefully managed and disruption to tenants minimised. Dean Wincott of Langley Waterproofing Systems explains the benefits of implementing a full roof asset management plan

When budgets for repair, maintenance and improvement of social housing properties are limited, focus is often given on the most visible areas. For this reason, a full assessment of the overall condition of a flat roof is often only considered when an issue arises.

However, roofs will very rarely fail without warning. Often the problem has been evolving over a long period of time and with intervention, could have been addressed before it reached a critical stage. For example, a typical modern flat roofing system is made up of a layer of insulation with additional membranes below and above. If the waterproofing layer fails, water can become trapped in the internal layers and begin leaking into the building.

When degradation of the roof system becomes obvious and it begins to leak, repairs are often made reactively with an immediate, low cost fix. While these emergency repairs will resolve the immediate symptoms, they are unlikely to have addressed the underlying cause, risking the reoccurrence of further problems. These repeated fixes are not only potentially disruptive for tenants but can prove costly in the long run, especially if the failure causes unexpected additional damage to the interior that needs to be repaired.

As with all areas of the building it is more cost effective to carry out checks and planned preventative maintenance (PPM) rather than frequent reactive repairs. This approach is increasingly being embraced by local authorities and housing associations, with several creating new PPM teams funded by the savings made from avoiding unnecessary repairs.

To manage roofs strategically they must be considered assets and approached in the same way as any other asset the organisation owns. At its most basic, asset management is the process of introducing, operating, maintaining and upgrading an asset.

However, to manage flat roofs in this way in the long term, housing providers need a clear understanding of the condition of each roof. While a basic check and visual inspection by a maintenance team can help to identify the obvious signs of degradation such as visible blistering, cracking and vegetation growth, it will not show what is under the surface. A more thorough examination is required to uncover evidence of deeper system degradation and any existing water ingress.

A professional site condition survey, carried out by a technical specialist, will assess each roof area using core samples, moisture readings and photography to create a comprehensive overview of the condition. Although this type of in-depth appraisal will prove valuable for any building with a flat roof, the benefits are even greater for housing providers that need to manage a large number of sites across a wide area all of differing ages and condition.

The survey will provide details of the systems that have been used, their current condition, all previous repairs and any urgent concerns. By analysing these reports, a roofing system specialist will be able to predict the expected life of each roof area by looking at the type of system, its age and exposure to the elements. For example, greater exposure to UV rays will contribute to the





## To manage roofs strategically they must be considered assets and approached in the same way as any other asset

degradation of the roof, as will proximity to trees due to an increased risk of physical damage from debris.

The roofing specialist can work in partnership with the housing provider and service provider to create a long-term maintenance and repair plan. These plans can exceed 20 years, providing a detailed view of what work is needed and when. The property management team will know what work is likely to be required during each financial year. This helps to manage budgets more effectively, providing cost certainty and minimising the risk of sudden or unexpected costs occurring.

Despite the obvious value of these long-term plans, they must be combined with annual inspections and regular planned maintenance. The predicted lifespan of the roofs is based on the assumption that a maintenance schedule will be adhered to. While it can be tempting to postpone or cancel regular maintenance to reduce costs, this can lead to increased expenditure later. If left unchecked a minor issue can worsen over time and accelerate the rate of degradation significantly. Often what started as a relatively simple, inexpensive repair can require substantial work to rectify.

These inspections will also highlight issues that can be easily managed by an in-house team but would have serious implications if allowed to escalate. For example, blocked rainwater outlets can cause water to start ponding on the surface and increase the risk of water ingress.

Finally, a key part of asset management is upgrade and improvement. Pro-active planned repair and roof refurbishment in advance provides the opportunity for managers to consider options and seek advice on how the performance of the roof or the building can be upgraded.

One possibility is to improve on the original specification by investing in a longer lasting, more robust system. This will help extend the lifespan of the roof and reduce long term costs.

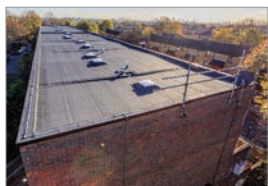
Furthermore, any refurbishment of the roof provides the opportunity to increase the standard of the insulation and improve the efficiency of the building. This can help reduce heating costs for the property and improve the comfort of tenants.

Managing flat roofs as assets can help ensure effective use of budgets, reduce unexpected costs, prevent disruption to tenants and extend the lifecycle of the roof system. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the current condition of the roof through a thorough site condition survey. A partnership with the right roofing partner gives local authorities and housing associations access to expert advice and provides peace of mind with the creation of a long-term plan and regular scheduled inspections and maintenance.

Dean Wincott is managing director at Langley Waterproofing Systems

## Award winning refurbishment

Langley Waterproofing Systems Ltd has delivered one of its high quality torch applied roofing systems and expert technical support to the award winning refurbishment of the Girdlestone Estate in the London borough of Islington. The new roof installation addressed persistent underlying waterproofing issues with the existing system as part of a wider refurbishment of the buildings within the estate. David Hodgson, Executive Managing Director at Mears Group, added: "With such a challenging project, Langley's support throughout the refurbishment was invaluable and the solution they provided will ensure that the estate's roofs are protected from any future problems."



01327 704778 [www.langley.co.uk](http://www.langley.co.uk)

## Langley Structures celebrates award win

Leading roofscape specialist **Langley Structures Limited** has been awarded Best Flat to Pitch Roof System at the Pitched Roofing Awards 2018 for its pioneering roof development scheme in Lytchet Way, Enfield. Despite strong competition from fellow nominees, Langley Structures' Flat to Pitch (FTP) system used on the London project was recognised as the best in the category at the ceremony. "We are thrilled to have received this award," commented David Gatehouse, Head of Langley Structures Limited. "It's great to have the system acknowledged within the industry and we're proud of what has been achieved onsite working with Enfield Council."



01327 704778 [www.langleystructures.co.uk](http://www.langleystructures.co.uk)

## Unforgettable day for Designer Contracts

**Designer Contracts** – one of the UK's largest flooring contractors – has supported one of the country's leading children's charities, ChildLine, by sponsoring its services for one day. (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018.) The leading counselling service charity, provided by the NSPCC, helps thousands of young people throughout the UK each year, relying on the generosity of the public to continue raising essential funding. By sponsoring ChildLine for one day, Designer Contracts offered vital support to the charity, which requires £30,000 per day to enable it to help the 800 children that may call on a daily basis. Said Peter Kelsey, md at Designer Contracts: "We were thrilled to be able to support ChildLine."



01246 854577 [www.designercontracts.com](http://www.designercontracts.com)

## 'Makeover magic' at Chesterfield Hospice

**Designer Contracts** is to provide more 'makeover magic' at Ashgate Hospice. Following the complete makeover of the Chesterfield hospice's family room earlier this year the company is to redesign and refurbish three counselling rooms at the hospice. Designer Contracts' interior design team focused on a calming and relaxing scheme of sages, lilacs and warm greys, incorporating several seating areas, to include sofa beds where friends and family could sleep when necessary. Designer Contracts was recently named in the Business Reporter's Best of British Campaign, which recognises success stories in British business. The accolade was awarded to just 10 companies in the UK.



01246 854577 [www.designercontracts.com](http://www.designercontracts.com)

## Housing Association Mergers, what is the impact?

In many areas of our society, organisations are merging to improve the efficiencies and reduce costs to deliver their services. Housing Providers are no different.

In going through a merger, there are many different areas that need to be considered, some, that might not seem significant to many, can have an impact on the management of housing blocks. This may include how access is managed through the communal doors. Many Housing Providers can have different communal door access control systems and managing two systems can be time-consuming, costly and cause confusion with communal door access control management.

The KMS SimpleKey Web communal door access control solution can help overcome these issues. The system can be easily installed with all existing communal door entry systems, without the need to change Doors and Door Entry panels. The benefits including reducing administration costs to the combined Housing Provider are significant. With SimpleKey Web being based in the cloud, quick to install and simple to use, the new association can minimise the impact of the merger and maintain the levels of service to their tenants.

To find out more on how SimpleKey Web can help when Housing Providers merge and increasing the levels of service to tenants, please contact the company or visit its website.

[www.kms.uk.net](http://www.kms.uk.net)



## Housing association's switch to Aico

Grove Community Housing Association in Northern Ireland has replaced its existing Smoke Alarms with Aico's Multi-Sensors and Ei164e Heat Alarms in more than 80 per cent of its properties. The Multi-Sensor Fire Alarms contain two sensor types, optical and heat, to constantly monitor smoke and heat levels, sending and receiving information via its intelligent detection software, for fast response and reduced false alarms; the latter is enhanced through a dust compensation feature. Since the new Aico alarms have been installed, Denis states that he has not had any false alarms reported. Furthermore, the installer confirmed there were no faulty alarms which is testament to Aico's quality control.



[enquiries@aico.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@aico.co.uk)

## Aico alarm used in fire safety systems

Fire safety start-up company Lite4Life has adopted Aico's unique Ei414 Fire / Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarm Interface into its Multiwatch tower block fire safety system and AlightforLife Directional Way Finder Safety Light. The Ei414 is being used to alert these systems in the event of an activation from Aico Fire and CO Alarms.

In the case of AlightforLife it activates LEDS pointing to the nearest exit. The Ei414 Fire/CO Alarm Interface from Aico provides a dedicated connection between Aico Smoke and CO Alarms and third party safety systems. Reliable, easy to install and use, it features a 'test' setting to test the entire system including a signal being transmitted to the third party system.

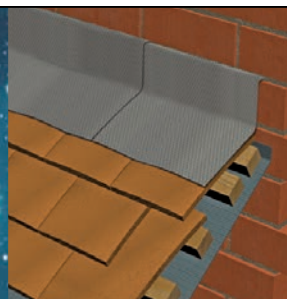


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# Safe and secure

Kate Descamps of DAD UK, a Decayeux company, explains how installing secure mailboxes in multi-occupancy residential buildings can bring peace of mind to both tenants and landlords

They might not seem of great importance, but it's often the smaller details that give tenants peace of mind and make them feel safe and secure in their home. A secure mailbox is one such example, with more and more people shopping online they need the reassurance that their deliveries are safe and secure, particularly when living in a multi-occupancy building such as flats or student accommodation. DAD UK has installed fire-rated letterboxes in a variety of projects including the 2012 Olympic Village accommodation, Belfast's Titanic Quarter and student accommodation at universities in Reading, Spitalfields, Liverpool and Coventry.

When it comes to purchasing secure mailboxes, as with any safety and security-based product, Secured by Design (SBD) accreditation is always a good starting point.

However, beware! "SBD compliant mailboxes" or "conforming to the Secured by Design Homes 2016 guide" need only to be made of metal, have a lock and a not-too-large aperture to reduce the risk of fishing – they have not necessarily been tested and are not necessarily certified to any standard or specification.

Secured By Design TS009:2012 certified mailboxes answer to technical specification from the Door & Hardware Federation (DHF), backed by SBD, with the purpose to enhance the security and general requirements for freestanding, surface mounted or recessed mailboxes.

In this case the letterbox is a proven and tested security product, against both manipulation and attack tests. The stringent tests carried out by Exova Warringtonfire, one of the world's leading independent laboratory-based testing groups, is both trusted by the SBD and the DHF. If the box passes the tests successfully, it is then given a certificate TS009 grade 1 (security) or grade 2 (High Security). So always ask for a certificate!

## SMART MAILBOXES

Alongside security and innovation, many manufacturers including Decayeux Group focus on technology. Smart mailboxes can create connected entrance lobbies, especially when used alongside connected apps.

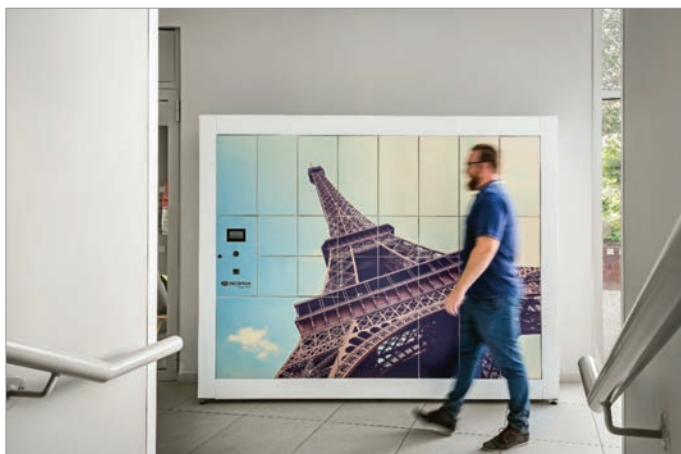
Smart mailboxes allow residents to retrieve parcels 24/7 after placing an order online to any supplier. There's no need to wait for a courier or go to a collection point.

The way these work generally is there will be a number of lockers with different dimensions that are shared between residents, but only one parcel at a time can be placed in one locker. As soon as the locker has been closed a text message is directly sent to the recipient with a single use access code. Once the parcel is retrieved the locker is available for another resident.

We recommend one locker for three apartments and a GSM system for more security. If these mailboxes are to be placed outside of the building, we also recommend installing a CCTV camera in front of it. It's then up to you whether or not these are used in combination with standard mailboxes.

Smart mailboxes can be used in conjunction with compatible apps, allowing residents to share information with neighbours, property managers, concierges and local stores or service suppliers. All these solutions can be discussed with a specialist.

These apps are designed to have a social and societal dimension, fostering social cohesion. They are dedicated to improving the everyday life of residents within multi-occupancy buildings, helping communication between the occupants. Smart mailboxes can even become an integral part of the community, as residents can not only receive their parcels, but also barter, lend items and receive special offers from local businesses. Alongside these apps, many providers also offer digital notice boards as a substitute to standard notice boards, allowing residents and property managers to access real-time information. Some manufacturers are even offering a completely integrated



"Smart mailboxes can be used in conjunction with compatible apps, allowing residents to share information with neighbours, property managers, concierges and local stores or service supplier"

lobby, where the main door is also connected to the app.

The advantage for property managers when it comes to a smart mailbox is that they will have access to software from which they can manage the database (names of residents and flats numbers) and the set up of the mailboxes (for instance, the number of days one parcel can stay in one locker before sending a new text message to the recipient to retrieve it).

Manufacturers should have a dedicated team to assist with the set up of these systems and provide training on how to use them. While the concept of including these mailboxes in UK residences is still relatively new, it's a growing market – in France major developers and student accommodation providers have installed smart mailbox systems, while in the UK we've seen the appearance of Amazon lockers in public spaces.

Kate Descamps is business development manager at DAD UK

# The importance of boiler protection

Craig Mitchell of Sentinel discusses working with ALMO, St Leger Homes, to demonstrate how social housing providers can improve resident satisfaction while improving the performance of heating systems across their housing stock

Customer satisfaction is a key priority for social housing providers but with tight budgets to manage, they face an increasingly difficult job in balancing the scales between being profitable and still providing a duty of care. One area that is often overlooked, yet has the potential to impact both the wellbeing of social housing tenants as well as throw up unexpected costs for providers, is the maintenance of central heating systems.

There is a clear problem when it comes to heating properties in the social housing sector, with 23 per cent of residents saying they are unable to keep their living rooms warm, almost double the national average of 12 per cent. In line with this, research we carried out revealed there are over 3.3 million call outs to social housing properties each year because of heating system failures. When you also consider that the average lifespan of a boiler is 15 years, but in the social housing sector they are only lasting around seven to nine years, the extent of the problem is clear.

With the purse strings tighter than ever, social housing providers looking to keep costs down can ill afford the expense of repairing a faulty central heating system or spare the resource needed to deal with unhappy tenants who are stuck with no heating or hot water. With this in mind, providers need to assess how to get maximum efficiency from boilers and extend the lifespan of systems across their property portfolios. The good news is that there's a simple solution to this – improved water treatment.

## THE ROLE OF WATER TREATMENT

Our research shows that approximately 87 per cent of boiler call outs within the sector are to systems without correct water treatment. Correct water treatment helps to prevent the corrosion that occurs when untreated water comes into contact with the metal inside the central heating system. This corrosion impacts the components within the boiler, increasing the likelihood of it failing or breaking down. The amount of call outs that can be attributed to a lack of water treatment helps to demonstrate that a large number of the repairs, which are chipping away at already stringent budgets, can actually be easily prevented.

## IMPACT ON RESIDENTS

Social housing providers have a duty of care to give residents a good quality of life and they shouldn't be left cold in their own homes, particularly when the cause of the problem can often be easily prevented. Carrying out water treatment and correctly maintaining central heating systems in social housing properties not only improves system performance, meaning tenants are less likely to be left without heating or hot water, but also increases system efficiency, which can lead to reduced energy bills for residents.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Sentinel has seen first-hand the positive impact of water treatment in social housing developments. One example is our work with St Leger Homes, an Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), in Doncaster. The organisation had previously been suffering from a high number of boiler breakdowns and issues with its heating systems across its property portfolio, which had led to reoccurring, expensive call outs. These unnecessary service and repair costs were in large part due to inefficient and faulty boilers caused by poor water treatment. This boiler inefficiency not only resulted in unplanned costs for St Leger Homes, but also increased energy bills for tenants.



Providers need to assess how to get maximum efficiency from boilers and extend the lifespan of systems



By working with Sentinel to support the implementation of water treatment best practice, St Leger Homes has been able to dramatically improve the efficiency of boilers across its properties, helping to lower maintenance, repair and associated labour costs and most importantly improve tenant satisfaction.

#### A SIMPLE PROCESS

For providers that may think implementing a water treatment programme will be complex, time consuming and costly, it is actually very straightforward. The improved efficiency of heating systems at St Leger Homes was achieved via a simple three-step process; clean, protect and maintain. The first step involved cleaning the systems by removing any corrosion debris, residual flux or greases from circulating water, ensuring the systems were ready to be treated and helping to prepare for better performance. Step number two was protection to prolong system life; this involved adding chemical inhibitor fluid to the central heating systems to optimise water chemistry, extending the life of the systems by preventing the build-up of limescale and corrosion. The final step in the process was ongoing maintenance of inhibitor levels to ensure protection against the problems associated with poor water treatment.

In addition to water treatment, a powerful magnetic filter was installed on each heating system across St Leger Homes' portfolio of properties. Filters offer additional insurance against unexpected corrosion or debris problems, capturing residual corrosion particles and removing them from circulating water. Such issues can arise when a heating system hasn't been thoroughly flushed after cleaning or where the concentration of inhibitor in a system has been diluted by water top-up, perhaps after a leak or change of radiator, and not replenished to the correct level.

The three-step process to correct water treatment, alongside the installation of filters, should be adopted by social housing providers across the UK who are looking to proactively improve tenant satisfaction and wellbeing. The fact that taking these steps also results in significant cost savings offers an added incentive, providing a win-win situation for social housing providers.

Craig Mitchell is sales director for social housing at Sentinel

## Don't be left out in the cold

As the winter season starts to take hold, we all know that boiler breakdowns will become more prevalent. There are a number of recommendations available from various parties as to how these can be minimised and one of the recommendations is that condensate pumps should be fitted both in new and remedial situations. Grundfos Pumps offer a useful product to perform this task – the CONLIFT. This pump comprises of just two models; the CONLIFT1 and the CONLIFT1 LS and both variants are supplied with an integrated NC/NO contact and cable so that if the overflow switch detects a high-water level, this can be used to switch off the boiler. Find out more about the CONLIFT from Grundfos' website.

01525 850000 [www.grundfos.co.uk](http://www.grundfos.co.uk)



## Grundfos are with you on the GO

Grundfos have been working to make life easier for anyone who fits domestic and commercial circulators, and these apps are available for free from the App Store and Google Play. Take the GO REPLACE that you can use with new Grundfos UPS3. This app will allow you to easily check to see if the UPS3 can be used as a replacement pump simply by scanning the old pump and then following the instructions and seconds later you will have your answer. The GO BALANCE works the Grundfos ALPHA3 and allows you to wirelessly hydraulically balance a heating system. Finally, the GO REMOTE delivers an easy and reliable remote-control tool for installers during commissioning and maintenance.

01525 850000 [www.grundfos.co.uk/newteam](http://www.grundfos.co.uk/newteam)



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01249 443377 [www.danlers.co.uk](http://www.danlers.co.uk)



## Consort Claudgen launches CRXSL

Consort Claudgen has launched the CRXSL wireless controller which is compatible with all Consort's RX and SL heaters and allows multiple control of RX and SL heaters at the same time.



It is mains or battery-powered and offers up to six temperature settings a day, seven days a week. It has three different operating modes and features a 15-minute Boost with temperature control to provide the maximum comfort quickly.

Other features include optional open window detection, child lock, large backlit LCD display and touch screen.

01646 692172 [www.consortepl.com](http://www.consortepl.com)



# Making maintenance manageable

Kirona's Neil Harvey explains how workflow management solutions can benefit housing providers, making it simpler to monitor and manage necessary maintenance and repair work

**M**obile workforce products provide organisations with the opportunity to have a stable and seamless work management solution. When they're combined with other programmes or applications such as dynamic resource schedulers and job managers, organisations can benefit from a reliable and scalable field service management solution.

For example, Kirona recently launched a new work management system, Work Hub. Systems like this are designed to allow housing providers to manage the workflow between central functions and field-based operatives, pulling together disparate back-office data and systems to enable reliable, seamless data flow throughout the organisation.

These products can offer a number of benefits including:

- **Holistic work management:** Through defining work and available resources, businesses can ensure that every variation of work allocation is accounted for during the scheduling process, reducing cost, meeting customer commitments and optimising the workforce.
- **Agile & intelligent working:** Users have the ability to define how each item of work will be managed, as well as being able to continually monitor and update the item. Optimising resources and sequencing tasks can also be features.
- **Frictionless process:** All work management is centralised which removes the need to manage various aspects of the process through disparate systems. Systems can usually be used stand-alone or integrated into other systems with dynamic scheduling, mobile working and back-office systems.

As housing providers are increasingly targeted to ensure they are putting customers first, effective workflow management systems can enable this key

As housing providers are increasingly targeted to ensure they are putting customers first, effective workflow management systems can enable this key objective to be achieved

objective to be achieved. Reliable, real-time data empowers call-centre operatives with information that enables them to resolve as many in-bound customer contacts as possible at first point of contact by telephone.

Added to this, mobile workers are able to carry out work as effectively as possible, having the right information, in the right location at the right time. They have access to all the information required to carry out tasks and raise follow-on work as required, with real-time integration into the back-office. They aren't having to travel back to the head office to rekey information or type up notes.

The scope of what can be achieved using an effective workflow management solution for housing providers is very exciting. Any organisation who is currently feeling frustrated and held back by the inefficiency of their current back-office system and management of their field based workers will profit greatly from the many features and benefits that these solutions provide.



The potential scope also goes beyond the housing repairs team to other departments within the council, connecting departments with one another, and their mobile workers in real-time

CASE STUDY

Kirona recently worked in partnership with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council's Asset Management and Maintenance Service, which covers housing repairs. This work involved collaborating on the development of the company's new workflow management system. This partnership ensured the solution truly benefitted them with scalability that extended the potential benefits at a corporate level. The council is already seeing a number of benefits as a result of rolling out the solution to this initial department.

After implementing the system Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council now has a reliable and stable workflow management system that integrates with their housing management system, dynamic resource scheduler and job manager, enabling housing repairs and asset data to be monitored and stored in one system. The potential scope also goes beyond the housing repairs team to other departments within the council, connecting departments with one another, and their mobile workers in real-time.

Neil Martin, business manager at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council said: "The system we have now is more reliable, and staff are more productive." Ryan Davies, senior repairs coordinator and systems officer at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council added: "We are planning on widening the system to other services in Sandwell Council."

Neil Harvey is CTO at Kirona

NEW



## CRXSL Wireless Controller

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For more details, call 01646 692172 or visit our website: [www.consortepl.com](http://www.consortepl.com)

The image features the 'allpay' logo in a blue circle with three dots below it. In the background, there is a small brown house-shaped object, some gold coins, and a white calculator on a wooden surface.

allpay provides secure payment solution

allpay has completed the roll-out of Call Masking to Newydd Housing Association. Based in North Cardiff, Newydd Housing Association now securely accepts regular rental payments from around 6,000 tenants, occupying around 3,000 affordable homes in the regions of: Powys, Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Cynon Taff and Rhondda. Call Masking has been developed by contact centre and PCI payment specialist Eckoh, and is supplied to the Government sector by allpay, to provide an economical solution to PCI DSS compliance. The system now enables customers to key credit or debit card details securely into their phone, in line with PCI DSS regulations. Bill Barker, customer services officer Newydd Housing Association explains: "We have used allpay's Callpay solution to take rental payments for some years. However, with changes to the Data Protection regulations, we were looking for more protection for our customers and staff and needed to upgrade to a more compliant solution." Nick Peplow, bill payments director, allpay confirms: "Our innovative partnership with Eckoh has resulted in a simple, secure and reliable solution for our clients in the Government and Housing sectors."

0844 557 8320 [www.allpay.net](http://www.allpay.net)

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# HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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## Newsletter

The monthly Housing Management & Maintenance email newsletter is designed to provide you with the latest products and services, direct to your inbox. You can quickly gather a snapshot of information from up to 12 carefully selected companies and easily follow links through to further information on the website or go directly to the company's website. Go to the Housing Management & Maintenance website to subscribe.

## Digital Issue

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