

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

JUN/JUL 2019



Grenfell's 2nd anniversary passes

Cladding rows rumble on

More blocks face demolition



PRS landlords threaten more sales

New domestic violence duties unveiled





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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.co.uk
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

Root and branch changes needed to avoid another disaster



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

This month marks the second anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire which claimed the lives of 72 people and constituted the worst loss of civilian life in a single peacetime incident in this country. It was an entirely avoidable tragedy. For all of the horrors of Grenfell, it was not a wholly unique or isolated incident. Similar fires on a smaller scale had already occurred. The same tragedy could have happened at many other places AND the awful truth is that it could so easily happen again. At worst the housing, construction and building maintenance sectors appear to be repeating many of the mistakes that resulted in the Grenfell fire. At best, we appear to be learning the lessons very slowly and only gradually putting right the systemic, cultural and funding failures. After the failed deregulatory experiment of Cameron and Osborne, we need to accept that regulations and high standards are there for a good reason – they protect and save lives. When applied correctly they can also improve our lives with greater comfort and through the promotion of innovation and efficiency. Our housing management and maintenance standards and working practices need a serious overhaul to modernise them and ensure much higher standards of service are provided. Tenants and leaseholders deserve better than they are receiving at present, with some notable exceptions of excellence. The regulatory framework needs to encourage improvement as well as better customer service, rather than continually focusing on governance by HA boards and councillors, while continually banging on about value for money in a manner which most normal people do not understand. As important as these topics are, they failed to prevent Grenfell and they will fail to prevent a repeat from happening.

LOOKING FORWARD

Instead, the housing management and maintenance sectors need to adopt a new set of values, with residents given a proper voice in the management of their homes and staff at all levels encouraged to question and challenge what they see as poor or sub-standards of service. Whistleblowing needs to be encouraged, legitimised and possibly even rewarded, to drive a culture of change. Leaders need to spend less time in their comfortable offices and more time listening to their customers and front-line staff, so that real experiences help to inform decision making across the sector. At Grenfell, bad allocations or lettings practices resulted in many vulnerable tenants, some of them frail or wheelchair bound, being housed in the upper floors of the tower block. Individuals felt isolated but their complaints were not acted upon. It does not take a genius to work out that people with mobility difficulties will struggle to get in and out of flats on the top storeys of a high-rise block. And yet this and similar practices are still being repeated at many locations up and down the country. If lessons from the Lakanal House fire in July 2009 had been acted upon, then it is likely that the Grenfell Tower fire would most certainly have been avoided. Our litany of mistakes and failings since Grenfell has sadly continued to the present day.

A QUICKER AND MORE FAR REACHING AGENDA

There are survivors from the fire who are still waiting to be permanently rehoused. There are thousands of flats in blocks which are still clad in dangerous materials. We have confusion over the 'Stay Put' policy, which some fire brigades have now ditched but others have not. There are demands for water sprinkler systems to be installed, while some experts claim they are not the answer. The public inquiry which so many survivors and families of the bereaved gave evidence to is taking far too long and so far no learning or recommendations have emerged from it. No doubt there are reasons for the delay and due processes are being gone through, but the publishing of even interim lessons is long overdue. The inquiry's delays have also pushed back the prospect of criminal proceedings until 2021 or 2022 at the earliest. The safety testing of cladding is working to a very slow moving timetable and new building regulations have yet to emerge. As a country we are failing to act with the urgency which is surely needed, to ensure the safety of our homes. Comments about not acting in haste ring hollow as we pass the second anniversary of the Grenfell fire. Because the problems are so deep rooted and endemic, it does require Government action and support to put things right. But they also need the active engagement from regulators, professional and trade bodies, as well as individual landlords to ensure a higher set of standards are put in place and that when tenants and front-line staff point at problems, they are listened to and not ignored.

Patrick Mooney

On the cover...

A unique new council housing development in Hackney will see an old boiler house transformed to create sympathetic new housing for the area

See page 26



Private sector cladding removal plan fails to satisfy critics and leaves many questions unanswered

The Government has established a £200m fund for replacing Grenfell Tower-type cladding from more than 150 private tower blocks, but critics have been quick to point out this is not new money and it is insufficient to pay for all of the costs of removal and replacement with a safer alternative.

Housing Secretary James Brokenshire previously said the bill for removing dangerous cladding should be met in full by the building owners, not by the taxpayer. In May he eventually gave in to pressure just short of the tragedy's two-year anniversary, but also admitted the money was coming from existing budgets at the Housing Ministry.

Brokenshire acknowledged the long wait for remedial work to be carried out had caused anxiety and strain for thousands of people living in high-rise blocks. Critics say the money is insufficient for the average £4m to £5m removal cost per tower block and it fails to answer questions about the funding of other fire safety measures, such as water sprinkler systems and 24-hour watch patrols. They said the Housing Secretary's solution had created a "cladding and safety lottery".

In addition the fund has only been set up for the remediation of the ACM cladding that was used on Grenfell Tower and not for any other type or form of cladding, such as high-pressure laminate, some of which are considered to be just as unsafe. At present there is no respite for the residents of tower blocks covered in the non-ACM cladding, although these are the subject of further safety tests. Brokenshire suggested it was too early to make a decision on whether these cladding systems would be included or not, at a later date.

Similarly residents of nine tower blocks in Salford were caught in no-man's land where the city council's Pendleton Together blocks are considered to be owned by a PFI firm and therefore fail to qualify for either this funding scheme or the £400m remediation scheme set up last year for social housing. Instead the council and Together Housing arranged a deal to finance the cladding removal and put interim fire safety measures in place.

RESIDENTS' STRESS

In his statement to Parliament, the Housing Secretary was critical of many owners of private tower blocks saying they had been trying to offload the costs on to leaseholders. He said the new fund would allow removal work to start urgently, even though almost two years had already passed since the Grenfell Tower fire.

Latest figures show 166 private residential buildings are yet to start works on removing and replacing aluminium composite material cladding,



compared with just 23 residential tower blocks in the social sector.

Building owners have until early August to claim the funds, with one condition being that they take "reasonable steps" to recover the costs from those responsible for the use of the cladding.

Mr Brokenshire admitted he had changed his mind on demanding freeholders pay up for safety work. He said some building owners had threatened residents with bills running into tens of thousands of pounds per household and saying that safety works could not start ahead of payments being received.

"What has been striking to me over recent weeks is just the time it is taking and my concern over the leaseholders themselves - that anxiety, that stress, that strain, and seeing that we are getting on and making these buildings safe."

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We've seen a number of building owners and developers coming forward and doing the right thing." The Housing Secretary was forced to write to his most senior civil servant in the MHCLG after Melanie Dawes, his Permanent Secretary, raised concerns over value for money aspects of the private cladding removal fund.

AN UNNECESSARY FIGHT

Grenfell United, a group of survivors and the bereaved, said the news offered hope to people feeling at risk at home. "This result is a testament to residents themselves, in social and private blocks,

who refused to be ignored. The truth is we should never have had to fight for it," the group said.

It asked the Government to consider financial support for residents as they continue paying for night watches and wait for the remediation work to begin.

Rituparna Saha is one of the founders of the UK Cladding Action Group (UKCAG) who lives in the Northpoint block in Bromley where leaseholders are facing a combined £3.5m cladding replacement bill. She said the announcement also introduced a "cladding lottery" because it only covered ACM panels of the type which helped spread the fire at Grenfell. Combustible non-ACM cladding and other fire safety problems such as faulty or missing fire breaks in wall systems would not be covered.

Lord Gary Porter, the chair of the Local Government Association, said: "This announcement will come as an enormous relief to leaseholders who are in no way to blame for the dangerous cladding on their homes. They have suffered for far too long. Reputable developers have done the right thing and paid for buildings to be fixed, but it would be wrong if the taxpayer had to pay the bills of those developers and contractors who are responsible for this crisis."

Building owners and developers who have already fully funded the remediation of buildings are Pemberstone, Aberdeen Asset Management, Barratt Developments, Fraser Properties, Legal & General, Mace and Peabody.

Grenfell Inquiry report timetable delayed yet again

The decision to put back publication of the first phase Grenfell Inquiry report until October has been met with understandable anger and frustration, particularly from the tragedy's survivors and victims' families.

The Grenfell United group reacted to the news by saying the inquiry's slow rate of progress was causing them further pain. They widely criticised the authorities (in general) saying it was the residents' group and other campaigners who had taken the lead on forcing through a ban on combustible cladding, as well as pushing for changes in the 'stay put' policy and lobbying for the installation of water sprinkler systems in tower blocks.

This means that the second anniversary of the terrible fire, which claimed the lives of 72 people on 14 June 2017, will have passed without any recommendations being published on how to prevent a similar event.

Expert witnesses, survivors and lawyers for the victims' families had argued during phase 1 that "obvious recommendations" should be published at the earliest opportunity, in order to save lives. But the inquiry chairman appears to have resisted this pressure in favour of including recommendations within a fully detailed report on what happened on the night of the fire.

FURTHER DELAYS

It could also mean the all important second phase of the inquiry will also be delayed in starting, which will have the knock-on effect of further delaying the start of any criminal proceedings against those considered to be responsible for the fire in west London, until 2021 or even later.

In a letter to all core participants in the inquiry, the chairman's solicitor wrote: "Writing the Phase 1 report has proved to be a far more complex and time-consuming task than the Inquiry had originally anticipated... There is a significant volume of evidence to be reviewed and detailed work to be done to ensure findings are properly tied to all relevant parts of the evidence."

The Inquiry has had to build in sufficient time for the Rule 13 process to complete. This is the procedure under which warning letters are sent to

individuals or organisations advising them that they may be subject to criticism in the report. This gives them an opportunity to respond before the report is finalised and is likely to apply to leaders at the local council, the fire service and various manufacturers and contractors. Representatives of firefighters are claiming that lessons from the Grenfell fire have not been learnt and the country is unprepared for tackling a similar incident.

The Inquiry expects the Rule 13 process to begin in July with the Chairman then in a position to write to the Prime Minister with his final report after the parliamentary recess, for publication in October.

Phase 2 will then focus on establishing how Grenfell Tower came to be in a condition that allowed a tragedy of this scale to occur. The Inquiry plans for hearings to re-commence in January 2020 and to last for up to two years.

SLOW AND PAINFUL JUSTICE

Sir Martin Moore-Bick, the chairman of the inquiry, had previously told survivors that his conclusions would be ready this Spring, but the solicitor to the inquiry, Caroline Featherstone, said that reaching conclusions was proving "far more complex and time-consuming task than originally anticipated".

Representatives of Grenfell United voiced their frustration that the delay was another sign of the authorities being slow to tackle the problems revealed by the fire.

"It is survivors and bereaved that fought to get dangerous cladding banned," Natasha Elcock, a former resident and the chairwoman of Grenfell United said. "There is still no change to the stay-put policy, people are living in tower blocks without sprinklers and social housing residents across the country are still be ignored and mistreated."

"We want the inquiry and the criminal investigation to be thorough and to get to the truth, but there must be no more delays. We are living in a limbo, increasingly frustrated, and we need to know there will be some resolution soon. A slow justice is a painful justice for all of us."

AN INADEQUATE RESPONSE

Meanwhile, Matt Wrack, the leader of the Fire



Brigade Union has accused Nick Hurd, the Fire Service Minister, of failing to "grasp the severity or even the basic details of the risk across the country".

This followed a FBU survey which revealed fire brigades had different or inconsistent plans for dealing with high-rise fires but these were still based on assumptions of fires staying within individual flats and not spreading, as a result of compartmentation failures.

He said: "It's no longer possible to claim that a fire like Grenfell is unforeseeable. Firefighters were placed in an impossible situation that night. But two years on, the Government still has not provided the planning and resources necessary to prepare firefighters for what are now completely foreseeable risks."

He said the resources planned to be deployed in high-rise fires were "mostly utterly inadequate. The difference in predetermined attendances is also deeply worrying – there is no reason why which part of the country a building is located in should determine the safety of its residents."

Events

National Landlord Investment Shows

8 October, Manchester

5 November, London

www.landlordinvestmentshow.co.uk

RESI Convention

11 - 13 September, Wales

www.resiconf.com

National Housing Summit

25 - 26 September, London

summit.housing.org.uk

UK Construction Week

08 - 10 October, Birmingham

www.ukconstructionweek.com

Homes UK

27 - 28 November, London

www.homesevent.co.uk/home

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Grenfell gas supply company hit with record penalty

The giant gas network company Cadent is to pay a record sum of £44m in fines and compensation to customers, after an investigation found serious safety failings including having no details of gas pipes in 775 high-rise buildings.

An investigation last year found Cadent did not have safety records for many of its gas supply pipes and that pipes in the 775 tower blocks may not have received regular maintenance inspections, or been serviced. In addition individual customers were left without gas for months on end and not receiving the compensation they were entitled to.

The company's failings only came to light after it was asked to provide information to Ofgem, in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire. It claimed that Grenfell was not among the blocks of flats affected by its missing records, although many other tower blocks in London were.

It has since created a new database of all its assets. Cadent has also committed to a set of

improvements and recommendations to keep its records fully updated and accurate and will report back to Ofgem on progress

Cadent chief executive Steve Hurrell apologised, saying the company had "fallen short of customer expectations and the higher standards we have now set ourselves". Some of the company's record-keeping systems are decades old but they are now being updated, Mr Hurrell said. The Health & Safety Executive is now investigating the issue.

The company runs half of Britain's regional gas networks. It has been ordered to pay a record £24m fine and will set up a £20m support fund for vulnerable customers after the energy watchdog discovered "serious" failings.

Ofgem chief executive Dermot Nolan said: "Cadent has a duty of care and responsibility to millions of people across half of the country who rely on the gas it pipes to their homes for cooking and heating.

"Cadent acknowledges that it failed these

An investigation last year found Cadent did not have safety records for many of its gas supply pipes and that pipes in the 775 tower blocks may not have received regular maintenance inspections, or been serviced

customers by leaving many without gas for longer than necessary, failing to properly compensate some of those affected and not having the proper systems in place to keep records of all the high-rise blocks of flats it supplies."

Campaigners welcome additions to Grenfell inquiry panel

Survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire have welcomed the appointment of two new panel members for the second phase of the public inquiry. They called the move a step towards "truth and justice".

Professor Nabeel Hamdi and architect Thouria Istephan will join Sir Martin Moore-Bick's panel, after the Prime Minister gave in to pressure from the Grenfell United campaign group. The PM said she was "confident" in their "diversity of skills".

Phase two of the inquiry is expected to start

either later this year or early next year. It is expected to focus on the causes of the fire and its rapid spread up the external cladding, which many witnesses have blamed for trapping many residents in the fire ravaged tower block.

Grenfell United who represent the survivors and bereaved families, said: "We campaigned hard to secure a panel at our inquiry and thanks to support from 150,000 people across the country, now we've got one."

"We fought for this because we are certain that, at every layer, this inquiry will uncover practises that led to the deaths of our loved ones and neighbours, and continues to put lives at risk," it added.

It said it hoped Professor Hamdi and Ms Istephan along with Sir Martin Moore-Bick, will show the "courage to speak truth to power and a commitment to deliver change".

Professor Hamdi is an academic with an international reputation in housing and participatory design and planning. He works at Oxford Brookes University, while Ms Istephan has been a partner at Foster + Partners architectural practice since 2007 and their Technical Design Deputy since 2015.

HA to demolish tower blocks over fire safety concerns

A Merseyside housing association is to demolish four tower blocks which failed fire safety tests and resulted in the landlord being censured last year by the housing regulator for governance failures.

Knowsley Housing Trust owns the high rise blocks at Gaywood Green in Kirkby, comprising 256 flats. The organisation had been considering the long-term viability of Gaywood Green for five years

and the demolition plan was approved by their board in 2018.

Some tenants have already been moved away from the blocks, with a full decant expected to take another 18 months as it develops regeneration plans for the estate.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service issued KHT with four enforcement notices for the Gaywood

Green tower blocks in 2018. It then emerged it had previously received three enforcement notices for tower blocks at Quarry Green Heights, also in Kirkby, in November 2017.

The Gaywood Green notices raised concerns over the blocks' electrical trunking, lack of fire action notices for residents, lack of emergency lighting in escape routes, fire doors, windows, use of unprotected plastic pipes and the presence of MDF panels in fire-resisting screens and doors.

KHT became the first HA to be downgraded to a non-compliant G3 governance rating by the social housing regulator on fire safety grounds since the Grenfell Tower disaster.



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HA residents moved out of London blocks over fire safety issues

Two housing associations are moving the occupants of flats in London out of their homes, after revealing that urgent fire safety works are required in each case to make safe the tower blocks where they live. Residents of the 50 homes at the Merle Court development in South Kilburn were told by Catalyst that they would be moved out of the seven-storey block so that work to rectify a series of fire safety issues could begin.

Then residents at the 54-home Arch Street scheme property in Elephant and Castle, south London were told at the beginning of May by L&Q, that they needed to move for emergency fire safety work. In both instances the work is expected to take between 18 and 24 months to complete with no guarantee that residents will be able to move back when it is completed. The works include the replacement of external cladding. At Merle Court it is aluminium composite material cladding, while at Arch Street the cladding is high-pressure laminate.

While the two HAs have said they will try to rehouse residents in the same areas as the blocks, they are unable to promise this will be possible in all cases.

Compensation for the disruption and reasonable associated costs with moving are to be paid. L&Q and Catalyst confirmed that they will buy back properties from shared owners and leaseholders if they chose to take that step.

This is the second Catalyst block found to have fire safety issues that need to be rectified.

Dan Court at Park Royal estate, in Brent has ACM cladding but residents will not be required to move out. L&Q has set aside £50m to cover the costs of replacement cladding and additional fire safety works at its properties with 15 of its blocks identified as having ACM cladding.

Government consulting on new duty to support survivors of domestic abuse

Thousands of survivors fleeing abusive and violent relationships will receive greater protection from local authorities through a new package of support announced by the Government.

For the first time ever, a legal duty is to be placed on councils to deliver support to survivors of domestic abuse in accommodation-based services backed by funding to place services on a sustainable footing and ensuring need in their local area is met.

This is intended to provide consistency across the country, ending the current postcode lottery in the support given to those fleeing domestic abuse. Currently domestic abuse is estimated to affect the lives of over 2 million survivors and their families every year.

A 12 week consultation was launched in mid May as part of a Government drive to bolster protection for survivors of domestic abuse, including a landmark Domestic Abuse Bill.

Local authorities will also be required to work together with neighbouring councils to ensure domestic abuse services reflects the needs of local people – including targeted, specialist support for BAME, LGBT and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller survivors.

The Domestic Abuse Bill will introduce the first-ever statutory definition of domestic abuse to specifically include economic abuse and controlling and manipulative non-physical abuse. The Bill will also establish a new Domestic Abuse Commissioner and prohibit the cross-examination of victims by their abusers in the family courts.

ABHORRENT CRIME

In launching the consultation, Theresa May said: “I’ve always vowed to leave no stone unturned in tackling domestic abuse – this abhorrent crime has no place in our country. Whoever you are, wherever you live and whatever the abuse you face, you will have access to the services you need to be safe.”

Communities Secretary, James Brokenshire, added: “Domestic abuse destroys lives and I am determined to drive the change necessary to ensure families never have to endure the pain of domestic abuse in silence. For the first time, local authorities will have to legally assess levels of support needed in their local area and match that need with vital, life-saving services – helping untold numbers of families to safely rebuild their lives, free from the threat of pernicious abuse.”

Local authorities will be required to develop and publish strategies which set out in detail the range of support services available for survivors and their children – including refuge accommodation and

Theresa May said: “I’ve always vowed to leave no stone unturned in tackling domestic abuse – this abhorrent crime has no place in our country. Whoever you are, wherever you live and whatever the abuse you face, you will have access to the services you need to be safe.”

specialist support from safety through to independence.

Funding will be provided to place these vital services on a long-term, sustainable footing, with the level of funding to be determined with stakeholders as part of the consultation process.

Ministers say they want to hear from victims and survivors, service and housing providers, local authorities, police and crime commissioners, other public agencies and other professionals who support victims and their children every day.

NEW REFUGE PLACES

In November last year, ministers awarded £22 million for domestic abuse projects across the country – ensuring thousands more survivors have access to the help they need as they move towards a safe and healthy future, free from domestic abuse.

Funding will help to provide over 2,200 new beds in refuges and other safe accommodation, as well as access to education and tailored employment and life skills guidance.

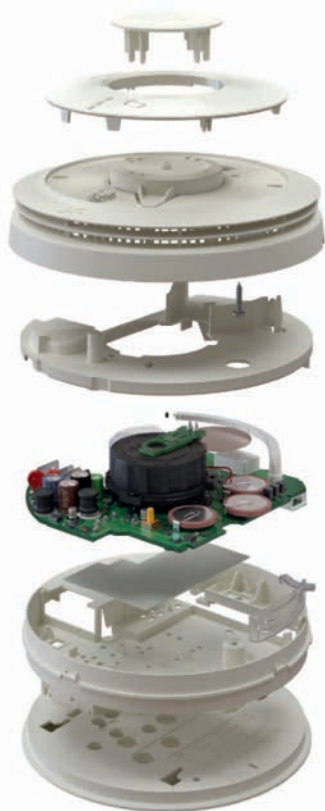
Sandra Horley, CBE, Chief Executive of Refuge, said: “We are delighted by the decision to place a legal duty on local authorities to provide funding for accommodation based support for survivors of domestic abuse.

“This has the potential to end the postcode lottery for refuge places and could put these life-saving services on a secure financial footing for the first time.

It could provide vital protection to tens of thousands of women and children who experience violence and intimidation in the home. Women and children deserve and need to live in safety.”



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Councils concerns over HAs cherry picking tenants resurface

Fresh tensions between councils and housing associations over the provision of accommodation for homeless households have been revealed in a national survey designed to monitor trends in housing practices and policy outcomes.

The allocations and lettings policies of HAs typically requires them to offer between 50 and 100 per cent of their empty properties to tenants nominated to them by councils. Homeless families are usually given the highest priority by councils for nominations to any empty homes.

Disagreements between councils and HAs periodically surface over the people granted tenancies and those who are rejected. In the past this has often seen people with a series of difficulties or issues, such as a history of anti-social behaviour, refused housing. This is reportedly changing, with those dependent on welfare benefits and most likely to run up rent arrears, now facing the most difficulty.

Evidence for this view has come from 'The Homelessness Monitor: England 2019', the eighth annual report from the charity Crisis and funded by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

It reports that representatives of local authorities say their attempts to tackle homelessness are being undermined because HAs are turning down the poorest prospective tenants in favour of those in work and with stronger credit ratings.

SCRUTINY GAPS

Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive of Crisis, said: "At the moment, there is very little scrutiny of how housing associations fulfil their legal duties to help people experiencing homelessness. Moreover, some see homeless people as risky tenants – in part due to certain welfare reforms – and will only rent to them if they can pass certain financial checks, making the huge challenge of finding a home near impossible."

Some critics within the sector are saying that HAs have become too commercially focused and are losing touch with their social mission to provide housing for society's poorest and most vulnerable people.

The monitor reports some bleak predictions from councils of rising homelessness. Nine out of 10 councils say the freeze on local housing allowance support means the poorest claimants are increasingly "living on a knife edge" because they cannot afford to pay their rent.

The monitor's survey of English local authorities reveals unease that some HAs routinely refuse to take on "higher risk and economically inactive" households who fail financial capability tests, in favour of those with higher incomes.

In some cases prospective tenants failed the tests because they had fallen foul of the benefit cap, while others failed because they were unable to pay one month's rent in advance as a deposit.



Nearly two-thirds of councils in England reported to the survey that they agreed with the statement: "Affordability/financial capability checks are making it more difficult for homeless households to access social tenancies in my area."

HAS DEFENDED

The performance of HAs was strongly defended by Kate Henderson, the chief executive of the National Housing Federation, their trade body. She said: "Data shows that the same proportion of new housing association lettings are going to homeless people as they were 10 years ago. Housing associations have not lost their social purpose but in the face of drastic government cuts continue to ensure people in severe need and on the lowest incomes can access social housing."

"We share the deep concerns of Crisis and local authorities that social housing is under immense pressure and changes to welfare are making it hard for people to access it. The answer to this problem is more housing, a properly funded welfare system and properly funded support services."

Crisis said it was likely that a homeless household turned down for a social rented letting would stay in expensive and insecure temporary accommodation paid for by the council.

The backdrop for this year's Monitor has been the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, and the Rough Sleeping Strategy in Summer 2018. Among other trends highlighted in the report:

- 71 per cent of councils reported that homelessness had recently been increasing – in a quarter of cases to a "significant" extent.
- The rise since 2010 in the number of households made homeless by the ending of private tenancies seems to have peaked.

- Homelessness temporary accommodation placements, however, have continued to rise, and now stand 71 per cent higher than in 2011, with a disproportionate rise in Bed & Breakfast use also ongoing.
- After rapid growth since 2010 rough sleeping appears to have levelled off in England with official estimates recording a 2 per cent decrease nationally.
- However, there are still rising trends in three of England's four broad regions, including core cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester, and among Central and Eastern European migrants.
- Private rents appear to be falling in real terms across the country as a whole, but rising in London. Affordability in the sector as a whole also seems to be improving, and repossessions falling.
- However the growth in the private rented sector has exposed many more low-income households to higher housing costs, a smaller proportion of which are protected through housing allowances in the benefit system.
- The safety net once provided by Housing Benefit, has now effectively ended for the bulk of private tenants, with young people under 35 particularly badly affected by reduced Local Housing Allowance rates and the working age benefit freeze.
- The full roll out of UC is the subject of greatest concern with nearly two thirds of councils anticipating a "significant" homelessness increase as a result. Most LAs anticipated that homelessness would "significantly" increase due to the freeze in LHA rates (53 per cent) and other working age benefits (51 per cent), with almost as many councils (47 per cent) reporting likewise for the lowered benefit cap.

Tenant satisfaction survey methodology to be reviewed

The survey most widely used to collect data on the customer satisfaction of social housing tenants is being reviewed over the Summer to ensure it is up to date with modern methodologies, can be used to make accurate comparisons and to drive service improvements.

The STAR survey is currently run by HouseMark. It was introduced in 2011 and over 300 social landlords used it in 2018. The results of the review are expected to be reported on in September.

In Scotland the regulator has adopted STAR and requires all Scottish social landlords to submit STAR compliant satisfaction results to them annually. It is likely that following last year's Green Paper, the English social housing regulator will take a similar approach.

Laurice Ponting, chief executive of HouseMark, said: "We know that STAR provides landlords with the insights needed to drive better real-life experiences for tenants.

"It has been the dominant framework since its release, but we believe that in light of both the green paper, and innovations in this area from out of sector, the time is right to review its methodology. Recognising that social tenants have less opportunity to switch providers should not be used as an excuse for poor customer experience."

The review will include consultation of the system for measuring the customer experience, as well as a sounding board for landlords' staff and professional bodies.



The STAR survey is currently run by HouseMark. It was introduced in 2011 and over 300 social landlords used it in 2018. The results of the review are expected to be reported on in September

Birmingham to invest £350m in new homes by 2029

Birmingham City Council's housebuilding company is planning to build 2,708 homes over the next decade as part of a combined £346m investment in regeneration and development work.

Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust was set up in 2009 and has so far built 3,126 homes, with another 365 homes under construction. The council is England's biggest local authority landlord with

more than 61,000 homes, but it is struggling to meet demand with more than 10,500 households on the council's waiting list.

Sharon Thompson, cabinet member for homes and neighbourhoods at Birmingham City Council, said: "The national housing crisis is one of the biggest contributing factors causing homelessness right now in Birmingham.

"With the city's population set to grow by a further 10 per cent over the next 15 years, there is a pressing need to deliver more affordable family housing within accessible locations to relieve the increasing burden. I'm delighted that Birmingham City Council is leading the way in social housing and is moving forward with its ambitious plans for the next ten years."

Liverpool to build its first new council homes in 30 years

Liverpool City Council is planning to build its first new council homes in 30 years having previously transferred, sold or demolished all of its own housing stock.

The council has announced it is reopening its Housing Revenue Account and will use its borrowing powers to build 150 council homes on a

site at Knotty Ash. These will be the first of an intended 10,000 new homes, mostly for affordable rent, to be built by the council.

The about-turn was prompted by the Government scrapping the borrowing cap on council-run HRAs, which makes it easier and cheaper for councils to build and manage their

own housing.

In December last year the council announced it had set up a housing company, Foundations, to deliver £1bn worth of development over the next decade. The company is expected to deliver homes of all tenures, including new homes on a discounted rent to buy scheme.

Difficult trading conditions being reflected in HA accounts

Problems associated with a stagnant house sales market and an increased regulatory focus on tenant services and compliance with health and safety, is combining to put pressure on the accounts of some housing associations.

Giant social landlord L&Q reported a sharp drop in its annual surplus as it was hit by rising fire safety and maintenance costs. The HA has 102,000 homes but saw its post-tax surplus fall 45 per cent to £191m in the year to 31 March. Turnover in the same period was also down, falling nine per cent to £937m.

The group warned in January that its annual surplus would be significantly down, partly due to a £40m higher-than-expected fire safety and maintenance bill. 15 of its blocks have ACM cladding and it has set aside £50m for remediation work in 2019. It also revealed that it was selling 150 homes in response to the stagnant housing market.

Another London based HA Optivo, also reported a fall in its turnover after it stopped building homes for open market sale. In an update to the stock market, Optivo said it made a turnover of £314m, a slight fall in the £317m figure for the previous year.

It made no open market sales during 2018/19 and therefore made no income from this tenure, but had made £12.5m in the previous year. Optivo also had an increased number of unsold shared ownership homes, which rose from seven to 27. Its chief executive, Paul Hackett, said the HA had re-allocated its planned market

sale homes to affordable housing.

The 44,000-home landlord also revealed that its surplus before tax fell slightly in the last financial year from £90m to £89m.

Bromford Housing Group had a busy a year during which it acquired Merlin Housing Society and Severn Vale Housing, but it also reported a drop in the amount of money it has to invest in its housing stock in the future.

The HA said surpluses after tax for the year to the end of March was £56m, down from £64m a year previously, on a turnover of £257m, although this was up from £221m in the previous year. It now owns and manages almost 43,000 homes across central and South West England.

Bromford's operating surplus reduced slightly year-on-year, which it said reflected the ongoing investment it was making in the HA's business transformation programme and neighbourhood coaching model. It says this will drive an improved customer experience and longer-term operational efficiencies and financial savings.

LiveWest saw its operating surplus increase 15 per cent last year, despite a drop in its margins for social housing lettings and open market sale. In a trading update, the 36,000-home housing association said it made an £81m operating surplus for the year ending 31 March 2019, up from £69m the previous year.

Livewest was formed out of a merger between DCH and Knightstone in March 2018, and is now

In an update ahead of its full accounts for 2018/19, the 19,000-home social landlord said its surplus was £13.2m, up from last year's figure of £11.8m, on turnover of £109m, an increase from £100m last year

one of the biggest associations in the South West. The results show their turnover was up from £231m to £233m in its first full year as Livewest. Its surplus after interest payments was £56m, up from £44m.

But demonstrating a healthier set of results, the Manchester based social landlord Great Places increased both its surplus and turnover for the latest financial year it has revealed.

In an update ahead of its full accounts for 2018/19, the 19,000-home social landlord said its surplus was £13.2m, up from last year's figure of £11.8m, on turnover of £109m, an increase from £100m last year.

North East HA to invest £417m in property over next five years

Sunderland-based housing association Gentoo Group is to invest £417 million on improving its homes and bringing 1,900 rented properties and new homes for sale to the market over the next five years.

The housing provider's 2019-24 business plan features an ambitious £300 million investment package to improve its existing homes. This includes:

- £22 million to fit more than 9,000 properties with full double-glazed windows by 2023;
- £38 million on fire risk works, external painting and environmental improvements to estates; and
- £110 million on repairs and maintenance services.

The Group also announced plans to increase the number of affordable rented properties available in Sunderland. Through its affordable homes plan, Gentoo will invest a further £117 million and provide an additional 900 homes for affordable rent in the city by 2024 via a mixture of new build and

existing properties.

In addition, its commercial arm, Gentoo Homes, will build in excess of 200 new homes for sale each year and generate an annual profit in the region of £4 million to subsidise the Group's affordable homes plan.

Gentoo manages over 28,000 properties across Sunderland and Wearside. Nigel Wilson, Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "Our five-year business plan is an ambitious programme of investment and house building but our tenants are at its heart.

"We want to ensure our tenants' voices are heard and they have the chance to influence and shape the services we deliver for them. Our property investment programme will also ensure they have the best quality homes possible in estates they are proud to call home.

"Gentoo is directly addressing the ongoing shortage of affordable rented homes in the city by committing to bringing 900 more properties to the market in the next five years. Together with our Gentoo Homes build programme, we will provide a

Nigel Wilson, Group Chief Executive Officer, said: "Our five-year business plan is an ambitious programme of investment and house building but our tenants are at its heart. We want to ensure our tenants' voices are heard and they have the chance to influence and shape the services we deliver for them."

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Consultation on new rent standard launched

The Regulator of Social Housing is consulting on a revised five year Rent Standard, due to come into effect from 1 April 2020. The process ends at the end of July, with the new standard bringing an end to the annual round of one per cent rent cuts at councils and housing associations.

It follows Housing Secretary James Brokenshire's direction to the regulator, back in February. The standard provides for the following:

- For the regulator to also regulate rents charged by social housing stock-owning local authorities, aligning the regulation of council rents with private registered providers;
- To lock in the annual reductions in social rents between 2016 and 2020, implemented through the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016;
- To restrict rent increases on social rent and affordable rent properties by up to CPI+1 per cent annually from 2020 for a period of at least five years – striking a balance between the interests of landlords, tenants and taxpayers
- To reinstate the five per cent flex for general needs stock and 10 per cent for supported housing providers – allowing registered providers discretion over the rent set for individual properties, taking into account local circumstances and affordability in consultation with tenants.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of the RSH, said: "The direction itself has previously been consulted on by the Government, but the aim is to ensure that the setting and management of rents is clear and easy to understand for all registered providers of social housing.

"The long-term rent settlement should help provide a stable financial environment for the social housing sector to make the best possible use of its resources in supporting the delivery of new homes and effectively managing and maintaining properties, while protecting the interests of social housing tenants."

The standard also states that private registered providers may be granted exemptions from the rent standard, if the regulator feels that complying with the standard jeopardises its financial viability.

Half of private landlords likely to sell over Section 21 plan



Nearly half of all private landlords and letting agents are more likely to sell some or all of their rental properties as a result of Government plans to end Section 21 repossessions, so-called 'no fault' evictions.

The headline outcome from the Residential Landlord Association's biggest ever survey of more than 6,500 landlords and agents showed that more than 46 per cent of them plan to sell.

The research also found that over 40 per cent of landlords are waiting for other planned changes by the Government to become clear before they make decisions on their ability to provide homes to rent.

The findings come just weeks after the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors warned of private rents increasing by an average of three per cent a year over the next five years as a result of landlords being less prepared to rent property while demand from prospective tenants increases.

In April, the Government announced plans to end Section 21 repossessions, alongside proposals on improving the Section 8 process, under which landlords can repossess properties on grounds such as rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.

This process requires landlords to apply and be granted permission to repossess via the courts, yet official data shows that it takes over five months on average from application to repossession. According to the survey, of those landlords with experience of such repossessions, 79 per cent did not consider the courts to be reliable.

Almost 91 per cent of landlords supported the establishment of a special housing court, bringing together all housing disputes under a single body.

REPOSSESSION GROUNDS

With concerns that landlords selling property will usually require tenants to be evicted, the RLA's survey found that 48 per cent of respondents said that they would be encouraged to purchase a

More than 6,500 landlords and agents showed that more than 46 per cent of them plan to sell

property to rent with a tenant in situ if they could reclaim the three per cent stamp duty levy on the purchase of rental homes on the condition that the tenants can remain in the property for a year or more.

The survey also found widespread support for new grounds to be established upon which landlords can regain possession of a property. These grounds could be used by landlords who wanted to sell a property, for example, or those who want to let to groups such as students, who do not require the indefinite style tenancies being proposed by the Government.

David Smith, RLA policy director, said: "Security of tenure means nothing unless the homes to rent are there in the first place. With the demand for private rented housing showing no signs of slowing down it is vital that landlords are confident that they can quickly and easily get back their property in legitimate circumstances.

"While the system should clearly be fair to tenants, it needs also to support and encourage good landlords. Our survey shows how complex it will be to ensure that the grounds on which landlords can repossess properties are both clear and comprehensive.

"This needs to be underpinned by a court system that is fit for purpose and properly resourced. At present it is neither. It is vital that the Government's planned reforms are carefully considered to avoid finding ourselves needing to reopen this whole issue later down the line."

Mayors launch £3.7m scheme to help cut homelessness



Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and Salford City Mayor Paul Dennett have helped launch a new £3.7m housing development to prevent homelessness in the city region.

The pair teamed up to cut the first sod at a new development being delivered by ForHousing in Salford, which could see up to 39 new homes built for people at risk of becoming homeless.

The one-bedroom self-contained apartments will transform three former garage sites in Eccles that were anti-social behaviour hotspots. Planning approval has been secured for the site in Haddon

Road, where work is under way. Two other sites on Vicars Street and Somerset Road are awaiting approval. Completion of all three sites is scheduled by Summer 2020.

The scheme will help to address a shortage of low-cost supported accommodation available to people at risk of homelessness by providing homes for social rent. More than 5,500 people are homeless across Greater Manchester and more than 1,000 are homeless in Salford.

The Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, said: "It is a simple fact of life that, when people are settled in one place and their basic needs are being met, they can start to move forward again.

A big part of reducing levels of homelessness is to build more homes for social rent. Greater Manchester is on a journey towards a better understanding of the homelessness crisis and, hopefully, better solutions to it."

The new homes are being built by ForHousing and will be let at a low cost sub-social rent, inclusive of all associated utility bills and service charges.

ForHousing will provide support to each tenant for two years to link them into employment and training opportunities, and long-term accommodation. The landlord owns and manages more than 24,000 homes across the North West.

£40m modular homes contract to house London's homeless

A group of London councils have awarded a £40m contract to a Northern Irish company to supply 200 modular homes for temporary accommodation for homeless households in the capital by 2021.

Pan-London Accommodation Collaborative Enterprise (PLACE) is a not-for-profit company launched by London councils last year. It chose Belfast-based Extraspace Solutions to supply the two and three bedroom modular homes at various sites, with the first homes expected to be on site later this year.

The first homes will be installed in Ealing, Lambeth, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets, with 16 boroughs having registered their interest in the scheme. The sites being used must be available for at least five years, but the modular homes can also

be moved between sites if any of them are needed for development.

Darren Rodwell, executive member for housing and planning at London Councils, said: "This is the first time UK local authorities have jointly procured modular housing for this purpose and it shows London government's determination to create better housing outcomes for homeless families."

Darren Rodwell, executive member for housing and planning at London Councils, said: "This is the first time UK local authorities have jointly procured modular housing for this purpose and it shows London government's determination to create better housing outcomes for homeless families."

Eleanor Moloney, lead designer at Extraspace Solutions, added: "Our precision-manufactured

The first homes will be installed in Ealing, Lambeth, Redbridge and Tower Hamlets, with 16 boroughs having registered their interest in the scheme

modular houses will deliver the quality of permanent homes, meeting the London Plan's space standards, and can be relocated to the site of most need."

Councils report rise in residents at risk of homelessness

Nine out of 10 councils have warned that an increasing number of people on the lowest incomes will become homeless because the benefits freeze means they cannot afford to pay their rent.

Cuts made to Local Housing Allowance and other benefits in recent years means those who need it most are not able to cover their housing costs, according to a report from housing charity Crisis, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Heriot-Watt University.

The charity asked 167 English local authorities about their experiences of dealing with homelessness. Seven out of 10 reported a rise in demand for their homelessness services in the past year alone. More than three-quarters of councils in the North and the Midlands reported a rise in the need for their services, as well as 80 per cent across London.

One said the freeze to LHA in 2016 had been “a huge factor in the increase in homelessness, pushing families into a position where they cannot afford the private sector”. Others reported that the mismatch between LHA and market rents was growing, and that the problems had been exacerbated by the roll-out of Universal Credit.

Crisis and JRF called for the Government to restore rates in UC to ensure they fully cover the cost of rent and in the long term make major investment in social housing. Nearly 90 per cent of local authorities surveyed for the report said there is not enough housing in their area for those who need it.

Jon Sparkes, chief executive of Crisis, said: “Everybody deserves a safe and stable home to build their lives in, but it’s clear from councils that the growing gap between private rents and Local Housing Allowance is leaving far too many people at risk of becoming homeless, and keeping those already experiencing it trapped in a cycle of destitution.”



The charity asked 167 English local authorities about their experiences of dealing with homelessness. Seven out of 10 reported a rise in demand for their homelessness services in the past year alone

Crisis revealed in record homelessness figures



The growing homelessness problem has resulted in record numbers of people in temporary accommodation, an outcome which has been labelled a “national disgrace”.

A total of 83,700 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of last year, a five per cent increase on the previous year and at its highest level in more than 11 years. Almost three quarters of these households included dependent children.

Some 6,940 households were being put up in Bed & Breakfast hotels, a 20 per cent rise on the previous year-end. Of these, 2,420 households included children with 810 of these households staying longer than the six-week statutory limit.

Commenting on the figures, Chartered Institute of Housing deputy chief executive, Gavin Smart, said: “These figures reveal the stark reality of our homelessness crisis. It is quite simply a national disgrace that over 124,000 children are stuck in temporary accommodation, including B&Bs.

“The Government must make sure that councils have the resources they need to properly support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.”

He called on Ministers to increase the building of affordable homes and ensure the welfare system properly supports families on lower incomes. “For many people on lower incomes, the only truly affordable option is social rent, but our analysis shows that more than 165,000 homes for social rent were lost between 2012 and 2018.”

CRAMPED AND UNSAFE

Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive at Crisis, said: “B&Bs are no place to call home. They’re often cramped or sub-standard and sometimes even dangerous. What’s worse is more and more people are becoming trapped in these B&Bs for months or even years at a time with no hope of moving on, in

Some 6,940 households were being put up in Bed & Breakfast hotels, a 20 per cent rise on the previous year-end. Of these, 2,420 households included children

part because Local Housing Allowance (LHA) no longer covers the true cost of renting in large parts of the country.”

More positively the statistics also showed that homelessness has been prevented for 39,640 households since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force last year.

The number of people owed duties by councils under the Act fell at the end of 2018 for the first time since the new law was introduced. In total, 61,410 households were owed either a prevention or relief duty under the legislation. This was 8.3 per cent down from the 66,960 households in the previous quarter.

Mr Sparkes added: “The Homelessness Reduction Act, which places an increased duty on councils to prevent and resolve people’s homelessness, has great potential, but can only work alongside further measures that tackle the root causes of the issue. That’s why we need to see Government bring LHA back in line with market rents. It will help to stop people becoming homeless in the first place and give those stuck in temporary accommodation the chance to access the safe and stable homes they need to move on with their lives.”

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Labour pledges to fit solar panels to a million social homes

The next Labour government will fit solar panels to a million social homes as part of a new Decent Homes Programme, Jeremy Corbyn has announced.

The Labour leader also unveiled plans to fit 1.75 million homes in total with electricity-generating solar panels. Corbyn says this will provide social tenants with free energy, saving them an average of £117 a year on their bills, which could rise to £270 for retired households.

In July last year, the Government scrapped subsidies for the installation of solar panels, meaning social landlords missed out on further funding. As well as the million social homes, Labour plans to provide interest-free loans and grants and make changes to regulations to enable the installation of solar panels on another 750,000 homes. This is estimated to cost £350m over 15 years.

Mr Corbyn said: "In this country, too often people are made to feel like the cost of saving the



planet falls on them. Our green industrial revolution will benefit working-class people with cheaper energy bills, more rewarding well-paid jobs, and new industries to revive the parts of our country that have been held back for far too long.

"By focusing on low-income households, we will reduce fuel poverty and increase support for renewable energy. Social justice and climate justice as one. Environmental destruction and inequality not only can but must be tackled at the same time."

Benefit cap challenge lost at Supreme Court

Chartered Institute of Housing deputy chief executive Gavin Smart called on the Government to scrap the benefit cap, saying the impact it is having is "fundamentally unfair."

Speaking after a group of single parents lost their challenge to the benefit cap at the Supreme Court, Mr Smart said the benefit cap was putting extra pressures on the poorest in society and fuelling higher rates of homelessness.

After considering the parents' appeal for ten months, the judges concluded that the £20,000 annual limit on welfare payments had an "often harsh" effect on single parents and the legislation

that introduced the revised cap was "tough." But they said it did not breach the parents' and their children's human rights despite hearing evidence suggesting that they had been plunged into poverty.

The legal action was brought by the single mothers and their children relating to the losses suffered following the lowering of the cap on the maximum weekly benefit income from £500 a week to £384.62 in January 2017. One woman with four children lost entitlement to £80 a week. A mother of five, who has three children with significant health needs, lost £110.

Smart added: "The benefit cap has increased

poverty and hardship among the poorest households across Great Britain. Some people are going without food or heating so they can pay for their housing, or falling behind with their rent and being put at risk of homelessness.

"The Government's own figures show that the majority of households affected by the benefit cap are single-parent families – many with very young children – and people who are too unwell to work. Quite simply, the cap is punishing those who will find it most difficult to find work. We believe the impact is fundamentally unfair – it's time for the government to scrap the benefit cap."

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "The decision is deeply disappointing, and is a blow to the many lone parents who are struggling to keep a roof over their children's heads due to the benefit cap. Some families we work with are left with 50p a week towards their rent.

Large HA had fire safety problems at all its tower blocks

Social landlord Hyde Group found fire safety problems at all of its 86 tower blocks when it inspected them following the Grenfell Tower tragedy two years ago.

The revelation was made by the association's chief executive Elaine Bailey, when speaking at a Fire Protection Association seminar recently. She said

Hyde carried out 'Type 4' fire risk assessments on all 86 of its buildings over 18 metres in height and found that 100 per cent of them had their fire safety "compromised in some way".

The assessments involved them going into every flat in the tower blocks and investigating the interiors of walls. As a result, Hyde is carrying out significant remediation work on 10 of its tall

buildings, as well as thousands of smaller remediation actions" coming out of the fire risk assessments. Works range from installing new fire exit notices to replacing the entire cladding on several blocks.

In one case the cladding found was the same aluminium composite material, used at Grenfell Tower, while at other locations it was high-pressure laminate cladding of the type which experts are now warning about.

Ms Bailey said that Hyde is in the process of taking legal action in a number of cases over work that it does not believe was done to the appropriate standards.

Fire sprinkler boxing and FSC® compliance – Ignorance is no defence

Social housing providers and contractors involved in concealing fire sprinkler pipework, as part of ongoing tower block fire protection upgrades, could be inadvertently contravening compliance and sustainability policies, as non-FSC® certified plywood boxing is still available in the UK.

As these products are manufactured from wood, contractors should be purchasing only FSC® or PEFC certified products, as required by the government's 'Timber Procurement Policy' (TPP) guidelines, as well as the latest edition of the Timber Procurement Advisory Note (TPAN) from Defra.

Extracts from Defra's guidance on compliance with the TPP states: *Government procurers and their suppliers should have documentary evidence to show the timber supplied is at a minimum from legal and sustainable sources. This evidence should include full chain of custody from the forest source(s) to the end user. Suppliers and buyers must check evidence to verify its validity.*

Also, The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has stated, 'If you don't know where your timber and paper come from, you could be part of the problem'. The FSC's procurement factsheet provides clear recommendations on procurement procedures and compliance checks that should be made:



- Check that delivery notes and invoices clearly identify the FSC certified products and includes the supplier's FSC certificate code. In addition Encasement advises that to be confident of compliance, always ensure that the individual product description for every item listed is identified specifically as FSC® compliant.
- Specify FSC certified materials when placing your order and let your supplier know that you need them to make an FSC claim on their sale documents.
- Source from an FSC certified supplier. All FSC

certified organisations are included within the FSC certificate database at <https://info.fsc.org>

Encasement's Managing Director, Martin Taylor, explained: "The best way for HAs and LAs to enforce this is to explicitly specify the use of FSC Chain of Custody certified products as the default and diligently monitor the products used by contractors and suppliers. Ignorance is no defence, especially when guidance and information on procedures is readily available."

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Merger news



In the south and south-west, Radian and Yarlington announced they are discussing options for a “partnership” designed to deliver long-term benefits for residents, through the development of digital services and supporting more tenants into jobs and careers.

The merger trend in the social housing sector shows no sign of abating as housing associations look to grow in size as part of a two-pronged approach to increase their development programmes and to improve their efficiency through cost savings.

The deals are being done at all levels and come in a variety of formats, with terms such as strategic partnerships and full integration being used to describe the legal and administrative arrangements for joining forces.

At the smaller end of the scale, two of the country’s oldest specialist HAs for the housing of women announced they are talking to each other about a merger. If it proceeds then the new social landlord will have a combined housing stock of almost 2,000 properties across London.

Women’s Pioneer Housing and Housing for Women said their boards are examining a merger to create “greater financial and operational capacity” to offer a “stronger” service to women in the capital. The merger will allow them to deliver “high-quality” homes and give women “wider housing solutions and choices”, they added in a joint statement.

Women’s Pioneer was established in 1920 and owns around 1,000 properties across eight London boroughs while Housing for Women, was formed in the 1930s and manages over 900 homes across 10 London boroughs.

HISTORY MAKING

Another deal involving one of the country’s most historic social landlords has seen Peabody take over the Kent-based stock transfer association Town and Country Housing, which was originally set up to take over the housing of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

Town & Country Housing, which owns and manages 9,500 homes across Kent and Sussex, is becoming a subsidiary of Peabody, which has 55,000 homes in ownership. Town & Country Housing is hoping to increase its development

programme to 800 homes a year, some 500 more than now, taking Peabody’s overall development programme to 3,300 homes per year.

In a joint statement, Lord Kerslake, chair of Peabody, and Francis Salway, chair of Town & Country Housing, said: “This move combines the strength of two organisations to deliver more much-needed affordable homes in the South East.”

PARTNERSHIP DEAL

In the south and south-west, Radian and Yarlington announced they are discussing options for a “partnership” designed to deliver long-term benefits for residents, through the development of digital services and supporting more tenants into jobs and careers.

Gary Orr, chief executive of Radian, joined the organisation from Yarlington last October. If it proceeds the new organisation would have a combined housing stock of more than 36,000 properties. Radian mainly operates in Hampshire and Berkshire while Yarlington are based in Somerset. The former has plans to develop 3,500 homes by 2023, while the latter wants to build 1,500 by 2021.

Mr Orr said: “We’re excited by the potential of this partnership, and with the increased scale and reach it could give us the capacity to do so much more.

We want to create an organisation that is ready for the future, is a major contributor to addressing the housing needs of Southern and South West England, and together we can continue to provide a fantastic experience for our customers and communities.”

FULL INTEGRATION

Catalyst Housing and Aldwyck Housing Group have also completed their deal, which sees Aldwyck become a subsidiary of Catalyst with the new organisation owning 32,000 homes and a plan to deliver 1,300 homes a year by 2022.

Ian McDermott, Chief Executive, joined Catalyst from Aldwyck earlier this year. They plan to integrate fully over the coming months and become a dual-regional organisation, spanning London and the south-east.

Richard Brown, Chair of Catalyst’s Board, said: “I have been greatly impressed by the Aldwyck team over the last few months. I am delighted to welcome our new colleagues to the Catalyst family, and I look forward to building even stronger business together.

“Beyond our geographical synergies and business ambition, it is clear we have shared values and are similarly driven by the same social purpose to provide homes for those that need them most. This merger means we can use our combined strengths and pool our experience and resources to make faster progress in our goal to provide more homes and excellent service to our residents.



Another deal involving one of the country’s most historic social landlords has seen Peabody take over the Kent-based stock transfer association Town and Country Housing, which was originally set up to take over the housing of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Confusion over impact of lettings fee ban

The much heralded ban on letting fees charged by private landlords and agents on tenants in England has begun amid mixed views on its likely impact on the rentals market.

First mooted some three years ago, the ban means that tenants should no longer be charged for a range of services or activities including property viewings, credit checks, taking up references or establishing a tenancy. In theory this should save each tenant many hundreds of pounds.

The charity Citizens Advice claims that private tenants have collectively been paying £13m of fees each month in England. But many industry experts are warning that landlords and lettings agents will make up any income losses through rent rises and property sales.

"The new law means families and other renters don't have to hand over hundreds of pounds every time they move home," said Gillian Guy, chief executive at Citizens Advice.

Others point to the experience of Scotland where a ban has been in place since 2012 and rents have risen at a faster rate than before the ban. The new rules in England prevent landlords from simply charging a higher rent for the first month to cover the cost.

"It is unlawful to charge anything other than rent and deposit in Scotland, but unfortunately there's a complete lack of enforcement," said Sean Baillie, lead organiser for Living Rent in Scotland. "What we're finding is that letting agents will charge small fees for signing or continuing, as well as direct debit fees, reference fees, admin fees, and opaque fees with no breakdown. People are often desperate to



get a house, so they sign these contracts."

The new law in England does not mean tenants will not have to pay any upfront fees. They are still expected to pay the first month's rent and a deposit of five or six weeks rent (depending on the size of the annual rent). Holding deposits have been capped at one week's rent and charges can also be made for replacing lost keys, changes to the tenancy agreement and early departures. Interest is also chargeable on any unpaid rent.

An impact assessment prepared by the Government last year indicated the first year of the fees ban would cost landlords nearly £83m and letting agents would lose £157m. This will be on top of other costs from various tax changes, such as the Insurance Premium Tax, which have hit landlords.

Daniel Gibson, an experienced property management consultant based in Newcastle, said the changes will mean more costs passed on to

landlords, who are likely to increase rents to mitigate their potential losses. He is making cost savings in his business, but expects others to respond differently.

"This new Act means that the letting charges which would normally be split between the tenant and the landlord, now have to be completely paid by the landlord," said Gibson. "And that means landlords will be looking at ways to recoup the money which will inevitably come back to the tenants."

The London Renters' Union said: "It's vital that this new law is properly enforced, and renters know and can assert their rights without fear of being turned away or mistreated by landlords and agents.

"We know that this one change will not fix the private rented sector. Without strong rent controls, there is still the risk that agents will pass on the cost of fees in the form of rent hikes."

Wales fee ban to come into force in September

The Welsh Housing Minister Julie James has announced that the tenant fees ban will come into

force in the principality on 1st September 2019, after it receives Royal Assent. The announcement follows the Tenant Fees Act coming into force in England, on 1st June.

The Renting Homes (Fees etc) (Wales) Act makes it illegal for letting agents and landlords to charge for anything other than permitted payments, which are rent, security deposits, holding deposits, utilities, communication services, council tax, and

green deal charges.

The Residential Landlords Association was active in the progression of the legislation, since it was formally introduced by the Welsh Government last year. During the early stages of the Bill, the RLA's Director for Wales, Douglas Haig, gave evidence on the Renting Homes (Fees etc.) (Wales) Bill to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, in the Senedd.

Regulator intervenes at Welsh extra care housing provider

The Welsh Government has intervened at a small, specialist extra care housing provider over concerns about its governance, ability to manage risks and financial viability.

Polish Housing Society owns 93 extra care flats and a care and nursing home. It was given an 'intervention' regulatory grading after the Welsh

Government's housing regulation team identified concerns with the landlord's compliance in five of the 10 performance standards.

The intervention will involve "continuing to progress the board's decision to secure a business model which protects residents and service users", the judgement said.

The society acknowledges it is experiencing a number of challenges across its business. It has been working with the Welsh housing regulator and other organisations, for some time to find a solution to these challenges and agree a way forward to ensure continuity of services for its residents.

NHS trust fined over asbestos removal at accommodation block

Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust has been fined after refurbishment work undertaken in an accommodation block at Royal Shrewsbury Hospital exposed Trust employees and contractors to asbestos.

Telford Magistrates' Court heard Trust employees were removing fixtures and fittings from the empty flat when they disturbed asbestos containing materials (ACMs). The Trust then failed to take adequate measures to deal with the initial release of asbestos, exposing other contractors who later worked in the flat.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive found the Trust did not properly record ACM on their estate. The Trust had arrangements in place to manage asbestos, however, the overall management plan for dealing with asbestos was not recorded in a clear and concise manner or effectively communicated to its employees and contractors working on site.

The Trust had insufficient auditing procedures to ensure that the arrangements contained in the policy and management plan were fully implemented, working properly and effective. The procedures in place upon the discovery of asbestos were inadequate and the Trust failed to prevent re-entry into the contaminated area by other workers.

Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust of Mytton Oak Rd, Shrewsbury pleaded guilty to two breaches of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and were fined £16,000 and ordered to pay costs of £18,385.80. The incident took place in June 2012, but has only recently been resolved in court.

After the hearing HSE inspector David Kivlin said: "The Trust should have controlled this potentially lethal risk by identifying the type, location and condition of any asbestos-containing-materials within the accommodation block at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, by implementing suitable precautions to prevent its disturbance.

"Although there is no indication that members of the public at the hospital were exposed as a result of the failings, asbestos related diseases are currently untreatable and claim the lives of an estimated 5,000 people per year in the UK.

"This prosecution should act as a reminder, not just to Hospitals but to anyone in control of the repair and maintenance of non-domestic premises, of the need to ensure that correct control measures are put in place to ensure that exposure to asbestos is prevented, so far as is reasonably practicable."

London's families living in cramped, substandard and unaffordable homes dubbed 'slums of the future'

Families in the capital are finding themselves in "cramped, substandard, and unaffordable homes" due to "flawed" Government planning regulations, new research has found.

Almost 16,000 homes have been built under relaxed conversion to residential rules (Permitted Development) since 2013, but fewer than one per cent are affordable according to analysis from Labour's London Assembly Housing spokesman, Tom Copley.

His report, Slums of the Future – Permitted Development Conversions in London, found that over half of Permitted Development homes identified flout minimum space standards, with one property in Croydon measuring just 10 square metres. Office space the size of 224 Wembley football pitches has been lost due to office-to-residential conversions during this period.

Mr Copley urged the Government to scrap Permitted Development, and said current proposals to extend it would result in "condemning tens of thousands more Londoners to living in miserable conditions" and place the high street in "serious jeopardy". The rules allow developers to convert office and industrial buildings to residential use without going through the full planning process, to speed up the delivery of new homes.

London requires 65,000 new homes a year, according to the New London Plan, with 65 per cent of these needing to be affordable. Analysis of London Development Database figures by Mr Copley, has revealed that of 15,929 homes built through these types of conversions since 2013, only 71 were affordable – accounting for just 0.4 per cent.

With the Mayor of London's current minimum target set at 35 per cent on privately owned land, this means the capital has missed out on 5,504 affordable homes. Croydon has seen the largest number of Permitted Development conversions (2,722), followed by Hounslow, Sutton and Barnet. Lambeth and Islington, both inner London boroughs, are also seeing a significant impact.

Copley said: "This cannot carry on. We need to solve the national housing crisis, but subjecting London families to cramped, substandard and unaffordable homes is not the way to do it. Permitted Development is an unnecessary and deeply flawed policy.

"If this continues unchecked, we will be condemning tens of thousands more Londoners to living in miserable conditions. Some may call them 'rabbit hutches' or others 'micro-homes', but we must be clear about what we are building when we allow masses of Permitted Development conversions: the slums of the future."

Councils reminded of their H&S duties after Home Standard breaches

The Regulator of Social Housing has written to all landlord councils in England reminding them of their health and safety obligations to tenants after recent breaches of the Home Standard.

In a letter to council chief executives, the regulator said it had recently issued regulatory notices to two local authorities which had failed its Home Standard on health and safety grounds.

It reminded councils they must comply with its standards even if the management and maintenance of its housing stock has been contracted to another body such as an ALMO.

A regulatory notice was issued to Gateshead Council in April over serious fire, asbestos and electrical safety concerns, while in August last year a notice was issued to Arun District Council for its failure to properly carry out fire and water risk assessments.

The letter from the regulator's chief executive Fiona McGregor, said: "While the regulator's governance and financial viability and Value for Money Standard do not apply to local authorities, the consumer standards do apply."

It added: "You may wish to seek your own assurance that your authority is complying with the consumer standards. I would be grateful if you could bring this letter to the attention of your elected members."

After the Grenfell Tower fire two years ago, the regulator sent a similar letter to all social landlords warning them that "boards and councillors must ensure they have proper oversight of all health and safety issues". The letter stressed that contracting out services "does not contract out responsibility".

London council to demolish Ronan Point-style blocks

Hammersmith & Fulham Council in west London is to demolish two 14-storey tower blocks at a cost of £14m after structural surveys identified significant safety concerns.

Of the 112 flats in the two blocks at Hartopp and Lannoy Points, 56 of them are already empty. A Fire

Risk Assessment of Hartopp Point carried out in December 2018 concluded the building posed “moderate” risk to life from fire and warned of “major deficiencies” in compartmentation.

The report by engineering and construction consultancy firm Arup warned the council that “an accidental extreme event could lead to the collapse of a disproportionately large part of the building”. Refurbishing the blocks would have cost a projected £16.5m.

Advice to the block’s residents in the event of a fire changed from a stay put policy to full and immediate evacuation in November 2017, with a round-the-clock waking watch in place since then.

The council offered residents the chance to move out since concerns were first raised about safety in November 2017. It launched a consultation in February stating its preference was to demolish the blocks and said residents were “overwhelmingly supportive” of the plans.

Leasehold flats will be bought back at a cost of £4.7m, with owners offered portable equity share loans to allow them to buy another home in the area.

Stephen Cowan, leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council, said that redevelopment of the blocks would help the council deliver new affordable homes.

Ashford appoints ENGIE for £25m housing R&M contract

Ashford Borough Council have awarded a 10-year contract worth £25m to energy and regeneration specialist ENGIE after a tender process which set a high benchmark for service levels and efficiency, innovation and value for money.

Tenants of the council’s 5,500 homes will enjoy a range of benefits following the appointment of an international company to handle maintenance and emergency repairs. Sharon Williams, Head of Housing at Ashford Borough Council, said the authority had previously worked with up to a dozen

suppliers in delivering reactive housing repairs and maintenance.

“Integrating all that work through one supplier is already bringing considerable benefits to the council, while tenants are also enjoying improvements in the service they receive” she said.

ENGIE and Ashford have integrated their contract management system and housing repairs system, helping to streamline administration and reduce paperwork. As part of this “smarter way of

working”, ENGIE has 10 staff embedded in the council’s housing repairs team, said Ms Williams.

The new contract delivers various service improvements including faster response times for urgent repairs, out-of-hours response times reduced from four to two hours, more choice and flexibility over appointments – with the available slots extended until 8pm on Wednesday and 1pm on Saturdays.

ENGIE has committed to utilising a local supply chain to put back into the local community, while offering 40 work experience placements for young people in the region, five apprenticeship schemes lasting two years each and a further five traineeships. The apprenticeships will be arranged in conjunction with Ashford College.

Plumber sentenced for moving gas boiler while unregistered

An Essex-based plumber has been given a suspended prison sentence and ordered to pay court costs of over £3,000 after carrying out unsafe and unregistered gas work at a property. in September 2016.

Basildon Crown Court heard that Andrew Goodchild, of ASG Plumbing and Heating was served with a Prohibition Notice (PN) by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) earlier in 2016 for carrying out gas work while not being registered

with Gas Safe, but he continued to do so.

Mr Goodchild ignored the requirements of the PN when he removed a gas cooker and pipework from the kitchen and moved a gas boiler, in Leigh-on-Sea in September 2016 leaving it in a dangerous condition. He had not become registered with Gas Safe Register and did not possess the necessary qualifications for carrying out gas work.

Andrew Goodchild of The Maples, Harlow, Essex pleaded guilty to breaching the Prohibition Notice

and Regulation 3(3) of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 and was found guilty in a Newton hearing of breaching Regulation 3(1) of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. He has received an 18 month suspended sentence, ordered to carry out 250 hours of unpaid work and pay £3,200 in costs.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Saffron Turnell said: “Mr Goodchild showed a clear disregard for the law and put a number of people’s lives at risk. Carrying out gas work is difficult, specialised and potentially very dangerous. It is therefore vital that only registered gas engineers, who are trained and competent, work on gas appliances and fittings.”

A for-profit landlord signs management agreement with HA

One of the country’s biggest housing associations has agreed a ten year deal to manage the entire retirement homes stock of for-profit provider Residential Secure Income.

Under the new deal, Places for People, which already owns and manages almost 200,000 homes across the UK, will carry out the day to day management, rent collection and maintenance of

the 2,219 ReSI portfolio.

The two organisations have been working together on a number of projects since 2017, with ReSI buying several hundred properties from Pfp. In the new deal the association is being tasked with reducing voids and improving operational performance across the ReSI stock.

Pete Redman, managing director of property at

ReSI Capital Management, said: “Following a competitive tender process, we are confident that, with the new contract structure and through working more closely together, Places for People is best placed to maximise returns from our retirement housing portfolio, with enhanced incentives to reduce voids and improve portfolio operating performance for the benefit of ReSI shareholders.”

New building safety regulator to oversee new safety regime

The Government is to create a new national regulator for building safety as part of its response to the Grenfell Tower fire and the subsequent Hackitt Review.

Proposals just published by the Housing Ministry say that all existing and new high-rise buildings will need to be registered with the new body. The regulator will issue certificates detailing the work that needs to be done to keep registered buildings safe.

The Government wants most of the new system to apply to buildings over 18 metres high, which is more strenuous than Dame Judith Hackitt proposed, although it suggests retaining the 30-metre threshold for some of the new requirements.

An eight-week consultation on the proposals has been launched with responses due back by 31 July.

Other proposals include the need for 'dutyholders' – individuals who will be responsible for a building's safety at different points in the building's lifetime.

This will generally be the building owner or the management company, with a named board member being ultimately accountable for the building.

During construction or any major refurbishment of a high-rise building, there will be a different system in place. The proposal is for five dutyholder roles with the client, principal designer, principal contractor, designer and contractor all expected to name a dutyholder.

For an existing building, the dutyholder will be required to provide a safety case to the regulator, which will outline any safety issues with the building and detail planned works to resolve these.

The Government expects some additional costs to be generated by its proposals and says these should be paid by leaseholders and landlords, but it is "examining other options to mitigate or provide alternative financing routes to meet such costs".

Other proposals include giving residents a bigger role in the regulatory system, including ensuring that relevant information about a building is available to residents on request. This includes a full and current fire risk assessment, the fire strategy for the building and structural assessments – all are seen as a direct consequence of the Grenfell fire.

The challenges of renovating an existing boiler house to create a new council housing development in Hackney

Couch Perry Wilkes (CPW) has been appointed as the main mechanical, electrical and plumbing consultant on a unique new council housing development in Hackney, which will see an old boiler house transformed to create sympathetic new housing for the area.

CPW were tasked to create a robust energy strategy for the development, which has already satisfied planning considerations and will meet The London Plan. This included a 35 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions which was achieved through the inclusion of photovoltaic panels to generate electricity onsite – which will save over nine tonnes of CO₂ each year – and electric vehicle charging points.

As part of the project, CPW undertook enabling works to redesign the existing boiler house which currently supplies nearby council properties. This involved careful planning to redesign the boiler house, including new boiler flues and a controlled turn down of the existing heating system to ensure that reduced hot water supply to local residents was minimised while the project timings were also unaffected.

The development will replace a tired old boiler house and create much needed genuinely affordable housing for the Borough of Hackney. It will comprise 26 units in total, half of which will be social rent and half of which will be offered as shared ownership. There will be a selection of one, two and three bedroom properties split between an eight story and three story building.

The building thermal envelope was 50-70 per cent more efficient than the maximum allowable



specification levels in Building Regulations. As part of the MEP design, a high efficiency heat recovery ventilation system to all occupied rooms will ensure fresh air all year round in an energy efficient manner, while offering acoustic separation from the outside area. All lighting (internal and external) is LED with daylight linked and occupancy detection controls. A building-wide heat network design incorporates heat interface units to

all apartments, ensuring accurate separate billing of hot water and heating using smart meters in accordance with Hackney Council's design guide. There is also a rainwater capture system for irrigation purposes.

The sympathetic new development has been designed by architects Ash Sakula and includes new green spaces, which the surrounding housing stock will also benefit from.

ASCP Safety and Compliance Conference & Exhibition 2019 proves to be big success



The ASCP Safety and Compliance Conference & Exhibition took place on 24 and 25 April at Celtic Manor Resort, Newport with over 500 delegates in attendance, making it the largest event to date.

Specialists covering areas of compliance such as gas, electric, fire, legionella, asbestos and lifts provided a wide range of regulatory updates, industry insights and thought-provoking stories for delegates to take away.

Alongside the conference was the ASCP exhibition, bringing visitors the latest and most relevant products available for them to browse. There was also a charity golf challenge, held at the Roman Road course at Celtic Manor, which gave both delegates and exhibitors a chance to network and some friendly competition!

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

The conference was opened with a welcome speech by Claire Heyes, chief executive of ASCP, AGSM and AESM. She reminded delegates of their common purpose – to provide safe homes, co-create and most importantly, make a difference to the people they support. She stressed the importance of embedding safety across the industry following the Grenfell tragedy and subsequent Hackitt Review.

Other talks were given by a range of industry experts on a host of matters such as health & safety, gas and boiler safety, compliance, legionella, fire safety, risk assessments, carbon monoxide, asbestos, and lifts. Speakers included company directors, safety managers, CEOs, product managers and more from a range of companies including Newport

City Homes, Sovereign Housing, Eversheds Sutherland, CORGI Technical Services, the Legionella Control Association (LCA), Vaillant UK, BRE Global, LABC, ASCP, Group Atlantic, Aico, ACS Physical Risk Control, SVM Associates, and Constructive Coaching. Eddie ‘The Eagle’ Edwards was also in attendance, discussing his journey to the Olympics 31 years ago.

AESM LIVE

The event also played host once again to AESM Live, a dedicated electrical safety session. Savills director Steve Martin opened the session with an informative overview of the recent changes to HMO licencing. These mean every landlord has to meet fire safety obligations, but those requirements vary depending on the type of property being rented out and the nature of the tenants. There are currently two types of licencing – mandatory and additional – but recent Government changes means the kinds of HMOs who must obtain mandatory licences will expand.

AESM Live also saw an electrical safety roundtable discussion held by the AESM and ECA, where participants could share their thoughts on the themes that emerged. Steve was also a part of these discussions, along with AESM CEO Claire Heyes, director of skill at ECA Andrew Eldred and Electrical Safety First’s technical director Martyn Allen. The session was concluded with a Q&A session with the audience.

Delegates also heard from Louise Taggart, a workplace safety speaker who is campaigning for better safety and care in the workplace following the

death of her brother, Michael, an electrician who was electrocuted at work. Martyn Allen also discussed electrical safety in high rise buildings.

WOMEN IN COMPLIANCE

A record number of women attended the Women in Compliance networking lunch, which was held at the conference for the third consecutive year. Attendees were treated to lunch and a glass of fizz while hearing from Claire Heyes, Newport City Homes CEO Ceri Doyle, and resident professional coach Stephanie Smith, who chaired the meeting.

Ceri and Stephanie both discussed their own personal stories on working in male-dominated environments and the barriers women in the industry often face. The session ended with a Q&A session with the 50 women who were in attendance.

AWARDS

On the evening of 24 April, the sixth annual ASCP Safety and Compliance Awards dinner took place. Celebrating the achievements and hard work of safety and compliance professionals as well as suppliers to the sector, there was a total of 14 categories including Safety Training & Development, Community Initiative of the Year, Customer Service Excellence, a Special Recognition Award and more. A full list of categories and winners can be found on the conference website.

Those interested in attending next years conference can save the date now – held again at Celtic Manor it will take place from 20-21 May. For more information on the 2020 event visit www.safetyandcomplianceconference.com

Designer Contracts increase in business

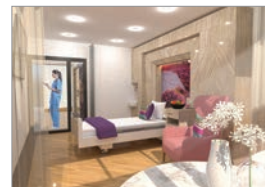
Designer Contracts, one of the UK's largest flooring contractors, is celebrating another record year. Latest end of year figures show a 15 per cent year-on-year growth with company turnover now in excess of £40 million and more than 300 employees working within the business. Critical to the growth was a 25 per cent surge in volume from its central distribution facility in Kettering which maintains a constant £2 million stock level, recently boosted to £3 million to ensure stock levels remain high during the uncertainty of Brexit. Adding to the business' success, an ambitious 20 per cent growth was forecast for 2019 – which has already been exceeded.



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Designer Contracts supports hospice

Designer Contracts has pledged a whopping £100,000 to help a hospice close to its headquarters in Chesterfield. The company has donated the six-figure sum to Ashgate Hospice's 'Three Bedded Bay Appeal', launched to raise money for renovations to its cramped patient bays. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey:



"We're really thrilled to be able to continue supporting Ashgate Hospice. Last year we helped to refurbish the family room and some counselling rooms, so it is a pleasure to be able to contribute towards further improvements that will benefit future patients and their families." Designer Contracts was recently named in the Business Reporter's Best of British Campaign.

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Creating a community with Kingspan TEK

Kingspan TEK Cladding Panels have provided an offsite wall solution for a school and leisure campus in Littleport. Kingspan TEK Structural Insulated Panels were designed and factory cut to the project's unique specifications by Kingspan Timber Solutions. This offsite production process minimised site waste and enabled the panels to be quickly installed onto the steel frame, ready for main contractors, Morgan Sindall Construction, to apply the final external finishes. The highly-insulated core of the Kingspan TEK Cladding Panels allowed the project to meet its thermal performance targets. Please visit the website for more information.



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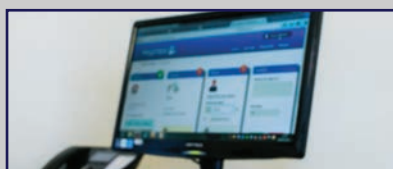


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We need more oversight for landlords

Patrick Mooney calls for more regulation of the private landlord sector

The lack of a single regulator for the private rental sector has always surprised me, but it's increasingly becoming an unsustainable position and one where change in the near future is almost inevitable. The rental sector is unrecognisable in many ways from ten years ago, during which time it has doubled in size and is now providing homes to more than five million people. Ministers have recognised the importance of this demographic (there are lots of actual and potential voters among that five million) and in recent years they have been legislating like mad in order to appear concerned about the safety and well-being of millions of tenants and their families.

AN UNFAIR CONTEST

A host of laws, regulations and orders are now in place. But responsibility for overseeing compliance and taking enforcement action has stayed with local authorities. And yet it's our councils who have borne the brunt of the swingeing cuts in public service budgets since the financial crash of 2008.

The phrase asking a boxer to fight with one hand tied behind their back springs to mind, but in this context it might be more correct to also have our boxer closing one eye and hopping around the ring on one leg. In short, our councils are being asked to deliver vital and much needed services to many more people than in the past, but to make do with a lot less money. But there is little sense in expecting every district or unitary council to resource themselves up to deal with any and every possibility, when the reality is that pressures on budgets will never allow this and even if they did, the rental markets vary enormously across the country and so do the solutions.

BEEN A BUSY TIME FOR RED TAPE

The most obvious answer I think is to centralise the powers of regulation in a single body, to be called something like Ofrent or Oflet, and for them to champion the delivery of high standards across the rental sector, protecting tenants from rogue landlords, but at the same time working with reputable landlords and trade bodies like the Residential Landlords Association, to professionalise the industry. In recent years there has been a plethora of law-making, which can make it all very difficult to keep up with what should and should not be done. Recent examples include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- Banning tenant fees
- Extending HMO licensing
- Establishing a Rogue Landlords register
- Banning Orders
- Implementing the Homes (Fitness for Human

Habitation) Act 2018

- Abolishing Section 21 evictions

The private rented sector is an increasingly important part of our housing system, but as the above list suggests, all is not well in the garden otherwise such measures would not be necessary.

A COMPLETE LOTTERY

The quality of the accommodation and the way it is managed is by no means universally poor, but it is widely acknowledged that it is extremely variable.

After all something like 27% of all privately rented homes do not meet the decent homes standard - more than in any other housing tenure.

Then there is also the problem at the bottom end of the market where unscrupulous landlords exploit, often vulnerable, tenants who have few other housing options. Targeted action to address this issue is therefore welcome. But what we see instead is a real postcode lottery. We currently "enjoy" huge variation and inconsistency in how councils inter-act with and regulate private landlords - from what some regard as overbearing (local licensing schemes) to the other end of the spectrum, where no enforcement action has been taken for many years despite clear evidence of illegal practices. This includes dangerous conditions, revenge evictions and tenant harassment.

SLUM CONDITIONS

Channel 5 recently broadcast a programme called 'Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords' showing the work of enforcement officers at the London Borough of Harrow, who found 30 people crammed into a three bedroom semi in the north west of the capital. Mattresses had been piled high and even placed in the garden, to maximise the number who could be charged rent in the squalid living conditions. Similar cases of overcrowding have been exposed in many cities and urban areas, with west London and the M4 corridor appearing to be particularly vulnerable, as rogue landlords maximise the number of tenants that they can extract money from, with garages and even garden sheds being utilised to increase rental incomes.

A problem of this type in Slough may not exist in Norfolk, but if something similar then cropped up in Great Yarmouth, you would ideally want quick and easy access to informed and experienced experts to deal with it.

A CALL TO ARMS

Many landlords are clearly working on business models which factor in the occasional prosecution and fine, but they rightly assume that relatively few of them will ever be caught and even when they are,

it is very easy for them to set up new lets elsewhere.

New regulations on safety, minimum occupancy spaces and energy efficiency mean nothing to these landlords. Stronger and more consistent enforcement from a properly resourced central regulator is surely the answer in order to give proper protection to tenants and ensure standards are improved. It would also need to work hand in glove with local authorities, who would retain responsibility for low-level action and oversee the implementation of improvements to properties and landlords' tenancy management practices.

Where specialist knowledge is required or a bigger stick is needed then the regulator can be called in to 'take on' the rogue landlord. The regulator could also focus its attention and resources on specific geographic areas or 'hot spots' where problems are being experienced.

WORKING ACROSS CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

I can also see a central regulator being able to work more effectively and efficiently in dealing with complicated issues such as overseeing the sector's response to climate change and the need to change landlords and tenants' behaviours in cutting energy consumption and improving the energy efficiency of our rented homes.

A regulator can liaise with relevant Government departments and quangos such as the Department for Energy and Climate Change and the Treasury, on developing policies and strategies for delivering significant change as well as the means for funding their delivery, whether this be through taxation or other means. Working closely with local councils as their agents, or 'eyes and ears on the ground', the regulator probably stands a better chance of having a real impact in solving such knotty problems.

The dysfunctional introduction and delivery of the rogue landlords' database has been a case in point in terms of what needs to be avoided. If we are to ensure that well-intentioned but poorly planned legislation is not repeated, then we need to have a properly accountable body with the necessary powers, resources and expertise.

AN OVERDUE CASE FOR REGULATION

Such a body should be given clear targets for improving the standards of accommodation across the sector, with specific measures for improving tenants' safety and ensuring that boiler replacement schemes and insulation improvement programmes are costed, planned and delivered.

Matters like this are too important to be left to the vagaries of a postcode lottery, where the competence of individual council officers (good and bad) or the political whims of elected members can dictate what level of protection private tenants receive. It is strange that we have regulators for everything from the railways, to our schools and hospitals, as well as food standards and our pensions, but we do not have one for the private rental sector. We do after all have a regulator for social housing, although arguably it is also in need of some re-energising and refocusing towards greater customer protection in the post Grenfell context.

ESi – heating controls for all homes

ESi offers a range of programmers that enables the installer to comply with Part L of the Building Regulations, providing separate timed heating control for living and sleeping zones in a home, whilst also providing timed control of hot water.



The ESi range offers 24 Hour/5/2 day and 7 day programming options for each channel.

And these programmers also feature a “Landlord” option to encourage social housing and private tenants to allow access for annual maintenance.

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Excellent solution from Flamco...

The Flexconsole Plus contains a mounting bracket for an expansion vessel, a Flexvent auto air vent, a Prescor pressure relief valve and a pressure gauge. Installer Glen Wakeling from HeatSpec, says: “One of the key advantages is that the expansion vessel can be removed to service without draining down the system water.



Importantly it provides a far stronger mount when compared to alternatives. It offers a generally much neater install and offers a decent time saving from installation and servicing. It's a great piece of kit.”

Visit the Flamco website for more information.

01744 744 744 www.flamco.co.uk

Replace pumps for energy efficiency gains

Wilo now 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 and properties, for heating systems and air conditioning equipment.



With this new version, 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 the Wilo website.

01283 523000 www.wilo.co.uk

Stainless vented hot water cylinders

Using the extensive knowledge gained through years of leading the industry in developing the highest quality water storage solutions, Kingspan has launched a range of vented hot water cylinders manufactured from high grade Duplex stainless steel. The new cylinders are the only stainless steel cylinders available on the market today that offer a straightforward like-for-like replacement for traditional copper vented cylinders. They have been designed to be a perfect match for the BS 1566 models – having the same physical dimensions, connections types and positions, the new cylinders minimize any re-work of pipework, ensuring a quick and hassle-free cylinder replacement.



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Intelligent tanks

David White of Mixergy explains why housing associations and landlords should consider installing intelligent hot water tanks, detailing the vast array of benefits they can bring both landlords and tenants

We now live in a world where macro industry themes creep into all aspects of modern life. The rise in the adoption of renewable technologies being used to generate electricity for the grid and for the home is now affecting everything from the price of electricity to the need for distributed storage devices being promoted within the home.

The interaction between grid and home leads to a greater need for inter-connectivity, so the Internet of Things (IoT) becomes increasingly relevant. The rise in IoT devices creates access to more data, such as smart thermostats that can tell whether a tenant lives in a damp home or if they are even in! Knitting these together can create a sustainable eco-system of technologies that helps the national grid use renewable energy, tenants save energy (and money!), and housing associations take a more informed view as to the hygiene and performance of their estate.

LIMITATIONS OF CONVENTIONAL TANKS

Many homes across the UK have stored hot water systems as opposed to directly heated hot water by a combi-boiler. This is beneficial to homeowners as they can have hot water available throughout the day and heat it using a boiler or by direct electric, often using economy 7/10 tariffs. Combi-boilers aren't suitable for all homes as some apartment blocks are electric only and some homes are too large for a combi-boiler, where hot water needs to feed more than one bathroom concurrently. So, for those with hot water cylinders in their homes, access to new innovations and opportunities to help them save energy and money have been limited.

The main innovation in hot water cylinder design in the last 30 years has been a move from copper to stainless steel, improved insulation performance and to install expansion vessels within the cylinder, rather than externally – and that innovation only serves the installer as it speeds the job up! Conventional hot water cylinders behave like kettles, heating all or nothing. When the hot water is used they allow cold water into the cylinder while the hot water is present, diluting the hot water store. This means that the water has to be reheated again.

Conventional hot water cylinders also have hygiene concerns as they can only heat to the bottom of the lowest heat exchanger, meaning there is a grey area at the bottom of every cylinder that is at risk of growing water-born bacteria. And finally, there is no way of knowing how much hot water is inside, leaving householders playing shower roulette or unnecessarily boosting the tank with its immersion heater.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The advent of the IoT, computational fluid dynamics in design and advanced software development and micro-electronics has facilitated a step-change in the way in which hot-water storage can be viewed as a solution. The deployment of a smart hot water cylinder can now provide compelling benefits to the full value chain from grid to occupant. Smart sensors and controls now offer occupants visibility of how much hot water they have, the ability to schedule which heat-source to use and opportunity to only heat what is needed, rather than what is allowed.

If you live in a three-bed house and no showers are run that day, you will have heated the full volume of the cylinder just to serve your hand and dishwashing needs. Selectively heating known volumes of water within the



Volumetric control with a smart schedule has delivered up to £124 per annum in hot water bill savings for some users. This is made easy for tenants with a smartphone app

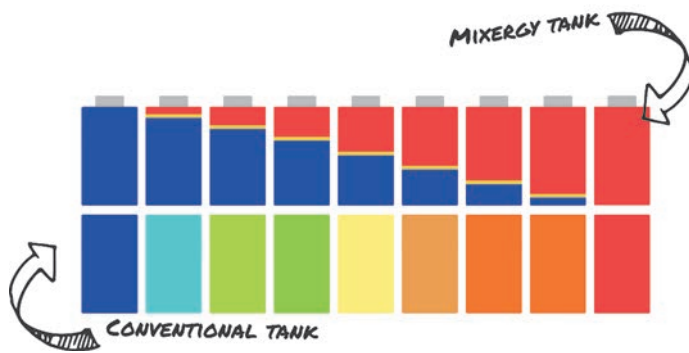
cylinder ensures that occupants are in control of how much energy they wish to invest in hot water and empowers them to reduce their hot water bills as much as possible.

Taking the idea of dynamic volumetric storage even further, smart machine learning algorithms can aid tenants in their search for energy cost reductions, ensuring hot water is always available but never more than is required.

THE SOLUTION

All of the above is achievable using a smart hot water cylinder, such as Mixergy's, that exploits thermal stratification to revolutionise how cylinders behave.

How does this benefit the registered provider? Empowering tenants to reduce their hot water bills by up to 40 per cent is a great way of contributing to the association's fuel poverty strategy. There are also some new previously inaccessible data sets and insights made available. Having smart networked tanks, visibility of the usage and hot water temperature performance within the



tank now enables housing associations to have an auditable water hygiene strategy. Is it at a safe temperature? Has it been pasteurised recently? Is my tenant using hot water at all?

The smart technology deployed on the Mixergy smart hot water tank has allowed some really interesting data insights to be gathered.

When given the opportunity to selectively heat a cylinder by volume (i.e. 1-100 per cent) the average state of charge of over 400 networked tanks was shown to be only 60 per cent, showing that over 400 customers are no longer needing to heat the full volume to serve their hot water needs. Volumetric control with a smart schedule has delivered up to £124 per annum in hot water bill savings for some users. This is made easy for tenants with a smartphone app, a desktop login and simple visual gauge or even a remote control, ensuring that even the most technophobic can still benefit from the technology.

Data has also shown that there is less than 5 per cent probability of an occupant using more than 60 per cent of a hot water tank in one event – and these rare events can be boosted and planned for rather than the ‘just in case’ daily full charge only offered by conventional cylinders.

Measurement and control of the cylinders water temperature from top to

bottom also provides new opportunities. The Mixergy cylinder, for example, uses a pump to drive the hot water thermocline to accurately control water volume to an accuracy of 1 per cent, and it can also drive hot water to the absolute bottom of the cylinder. This ensures that complete pasteurisation of the cylinder takes place. Pasteurisation events are controlled by the tank, as is the stored water temperature. This ensures that cleansing cycles are carried out at suitable intervals, proactively managing the health of the domestic hot water system. This data is provided to housing providers in a smart intuitive dashboard.

Additional savings are also achievable now cylinders behave like a hybrid, enabling control of each available heat source. For example it can be set to use electricity between 3 am to 9 am, solar between 9 am to 4 pm and gas between 4pm to 3 am, meaning that occupants can reduce bills as much as possible by using whichever energy source is cheapest or most prevalent at any given time.

Sensor networks on smart cylinders like Mixergy's allow remote diagnostics and maintenance to be carried out, reducing the number of field service visits required and improving the first time fix rate.

Reheat recovery times are improved when charging the tank volumetrically – reheating up to five times faster than conventional cylinders through use of its diffusers that prevent hot and cold water mixing. This means that housing associations can now install cylinders that are 30 per cent smaller than the one they replace, making more room for storage in their tenants homes.

The opportunity to meet the demands of macro themes upon our organisations while offering tenants a better user experience and lowering their costs is a challenge, but smart deployment of the right technologies can make this easier.

One simple lifecycle replacement that doesn't require an additional infrastructure and can improve the asset management and maintenance strategy of the housing provider and effectively manage an estates fuel poverty and water hygiene is now in possible with the use of intelligent hot water cylinders.

David White is business development manager at Mixergy

Estate constructed with Kingspan TEK

The Kingspan TEK Building System is providing a precise offsite building solution for one of the country's largest Passivhaus developments in Bowthorpe, Norwich. RG Carter are constructing 112 of the 172 properties on the development to the Passivhaus Standard. After reviewing the market offering to achieve the demanding fabric requirements of the Passivhaus Standard, it was concluded that the Kingspan TEK Building System was the best solution for the project on the basis of technical specification and value offered. Kingspan TEK structural insulated panels (SIPs) feature a high-performance insulation core sandwiched between two layers of OSB/3.



01544 387 384 www.kingspantek.co.uk

Insulation solution for Bristol development

A private development for contemporary urban living in Bristol is benefiting from the latest advancement in vacuum insulation technology and exceptional thermal performance with the Kingspan OPTIM-R E Roofing System. The Old Library is an exclusive new-build featuring 36 spacious studios and apartments in the vibrant, North Bristol neighbourhood of Cotham. Kingspan Insulation provided detailed information regarding the fitting of the Kingspan OPTIM-R E Roofing System, ensuring the ratio of Kingspan OPTIM-R E panels to OPTIM-R flex infill strips was optimised. This ensured that the U-value requirements were met without compromising on aesthetic design.



01544 387 384 www.kingspaninsulation.co.uk/optim-r

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Airtech tackles condensation and mould

The dangerous impact of poor indoor air quality (IAQ) on our health is now well established, with condensation, mould and the use of household products all adding up to create an unhealthy living environment. To combat this, Airtech has developed a comprehensive service over the last 30 years to offer landlords solutions for healthy homes. Further expanding its range of data gathering ventilation solutions is the new Air+ Wall Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) that is ideal for apartments and smaller homes without a loft. Airtech's new AIR+ Wall PIV gently operates in the background introducing drier air into the home, removing stale humid air and replacing it with fresh air from outside.



01823 690 292 www.airtechsolutions.co.uk

Use your smartphone to turn your water supply on or off any time, any place, anywhere

Surestop have launched their new i-watercontrol system that gives you the ability to turn your mains water supply on or off with any smart device. Just download the surestop app and away you go.

Leaks from pipes, plumbing fixtures and fittings contribute to more than 10,000 gallons of water wasted every year in the UK.

Small leaks can sometimes be easily identified like a dripping tap, unfortunately leaks such as toilet cisterns and weeping joints are not always visible. These none visible leaks over time can cause damage to property and increase your water consumption cost. Using our app to turn your water off when the property is unoccupied will

reduce damage and water costs.

Mains pressure burst can cause serious damage to a property with 3,500 claims having been recorded for burst pipe damage in a single day, costing the average household £7,000. In addition these situations cause panic, increased levels of stress to the occupier, costly repairs, loss of irreplaceable items and lost time from work etc. These issues could be reduced when the i-water-control system is used with water sensors, as soon as you get a notification of a leak use our app to turn off your water. Any time any place anywhere.

The Surestop i-watercontrol system has flexibility. It can be used with up to 10 valves and controllers off one hub. This gives the ability to zone off a property and isolate water where the issue is, giving access to water in other zones reducing inconvenience to the house holder.

The Surestop web portal is ideal for Landlords and managed facilities. It can control the water supply to multiple properties from a web-portal and smart device app offsite.

- Saving money on emergency callouts.
- Speedy isolation of water reducing damage to the property.
- Reducing disruption to the occupation of the property.
- Reduced insurance claims protecting your insurance premium.



The Association of British Insurers (ABI), the trade body for the insurance industry, states that insurers pay out around £2.5m every day to customers who've made 'escape of water' claims on their insurance. Nearly one in five claims made on buildings and contents insurance is for damage caused by leaks.

The system is WRAS approved and uses materials that does not suffer from lime scale build up, so will not seize up when you need to use it.

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TREMCO provides a firm foundation

When the call went out to build a much needed community centre in a tragedy struck area of West Kensington, Dartford-based flooring specialist, Arcadia, and tremco illbruck donated their skills and materials to achieve a fast, quality flooring installation. In an intense 14-hour period, Arcadia put a 10-strong team to work sealing and levelling the new composite concrete decks, in preparation for laying the vinyl and rubber floor finishes within the centre and gymnasium. Arcadia's Managing Director, Gary Perry, was delighted with the quality of the finish, explaining: "I was very keen to use TREMCO products; the company's Area Sales Manager ensured we used the very best in terms of suitability for this challenge."



www.tremco-illbruck.com

Towers are granted new lease of life

Golding Homes selected Langley Structures' award winning Flat to Pitched (FTP) system to improve the long-term value and aesthetics of two of its high-rise towers. The Langley Structures' team expertly designed all aspects of the re-roofing envelope, including a lightweight pitched roof frame, a standing seam roof covering that facilitated fixing of the PV panels, plus the facias, ventilated soffit, vertical arrowhead cladding and rainwater goods. Chris Francis, Head of Property Services at Golding Homes, commented: "From conception to completion, Langley has surpassed our expectations, both in terms of its technical expertise and the quality of its product."



01327 704778 www.langleystructures.co.uk

Vent-Axia helps reduce plastic waste

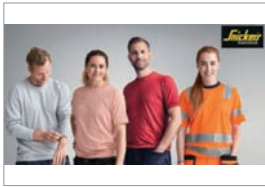
With over 1 million tonnes of plastic going to landfill every year in the UK alone, industry-leading ventilation company Vent-Axia is helping social housing providers reduce their environmental impact by designing modular products to reduce plastic waste. By carefully considering the design of its products, Vent-Axia's latest energy efficient fans are even easier to repair and recycle, reducing carbon footprints and helping make ventilation even more cost effective for social housing providers. "We are working hard to help social housing providers reduce their environmental impact, and make cost savings" explains Tom Wodcke, Product Marketing Manager at Vent-Axia.



0844 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com

It's time to stay cool at work

Lightweight fabrics in the new Topwear range will compliment Snickers Workwear Stretch Garments perfectly this Summer. The warmer weather will bring a need for professional craftsmen and women to be cool and dry – to maintain wellbeing and working efficiency on site. That's why Snickers' new Topwear for the summer uses 37.5° fabric technology, which is really good at 'wicking' moisture away from the body and keeping you dry. There's stylish new Shirts, Hoodies and Sweatshirts in a range of styles and colours that are super-light and quick-drying with advanced ventilation to keep you cool in the heat. They've all got superb, body-mapping designs for an amazing fit, outstanding functionality and long-lasting comfort – all day, every day.



info@snickersworkwear.co.uk

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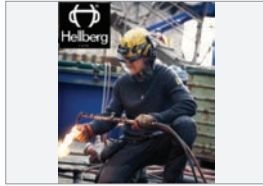
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The Hultafors Group Adds Hellberg Safety PPE products to its premium brand portfolio for professional tradesmen and women. With over 50 years experience in the PPE industry, the Hellberg Safety specialist equipment includes highly advanced hearing protection products, face protection and communication solutions for personal protection on site. From face guards, helmets and passive hearing protection with up to three levels of protection from low to extreme noise, Hellberg also supply secure electronic hearing protectors to suit different work environments. Getting information on the new Hellberg Safety product range is easy – just visit the website.



www.hellbergsafety.com

Airtech provides radon mitigation

Airtech, the ventilation specialists, has undertaken radon mitigation works for specialist rural housing association, Hastoe. Radon sumps or Air+ Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) units were installed in 61 homes across Hastoe's West region, from Cornwall to Wiltshire, to reduce Radon levels. While working on this contract Airtech also repaired and replaced extract fans in a number of the 61 houses and also undertook radon testing in five freehold properties at one of Hastoe's schemes. PIV is a proven and effective way of significantly reducing radon gas levels. Air+ PIV forces contaminated air out of a home by introducing fresh air into the property.



01823 690 292 www.airtechsolutions.co.uk

Helifix adds to its vast portfolio

Structural repair specialist, Helifix, has recently made an addition to its extensive range of over 100 Repair Details, which give full technical and installation information on how to overcome a wide variety of structural faults. The new Repair Detail, RD WT35, gives guidance on how to connect a new timber frame to an existing masonry wall, when the new timber stud is erected within an existing masonry building and there is no access to install wall ties from the outside. This Helifix repair detail can accommodate large cavity width variations by using stainless steel RetroTies. The full range of Repair Details can be viewed, and individually downloaded, on the Helifix website.



020 8735 5200 www.helifix.co.uk/downloads

Housing Management & Maintenance

The Housing Management & Maintenance (HMM) website is an online provider of past and present news items dedicated to keep professionals within this sector updated with a wide range of topics including legislation, projects, products and more.



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ARP's innovative new design for Sentinel range helps improve lead times

ARP, a market leader in the supply of aluminium rainwater and roofline products is proud to continue on its pathway of bringing innovative design to the market, with the improvement of its Sentinel range of guttering to include a new jointing system for its Sentinel half-round snap-fit guttering and an upgrading of all associated components.

ARP has seen a sharp increase in demand for its contemporary Sentinel range, as specifiers and end users alike recognise the benefits of longevity, width of colour options and cost effectiveness over upvc systems, so the delivering of a simple no-mess jointing system is very timely.

18 months in the planning, the new jointing system works through a simple process of injecting silicone into a specially designed port in a joint (or stop end) and then letting it cure, leaving no silicone residue. In addition to this, all of the components within the Sentinel Beaded Half Round range and the Vintage Ogee range have been completely redesigned and feature very defined lines and a superior surface finish, which makes these systems some of the most striking within the aluminium rainwater sector.

ARP believes in the importance of continued advances within its supply process, so significant investment has been made in building stocks of all



the new components ensuring that they can be classified as “off-the-shelf” and satisfy the demand for short lead times.

All of these progressions are part of a plan which will bring a number of new products and design elements to the market in the coming months. Information on the above and updates on future developments may be found on the ARP

website or alternatively please make contact by calling.

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Compact kitchens

For landlords and specifiers in social housing, there is a constant quest for balancing budgets with longevity throughout their properties – particularly when it comes to kitchens. Bob Andrew of Elfin Kitchens explains how the latest pre-built compact kitchens offer long-lasting quality, without breaking the bank

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), there are over 4.5 million households in the private rented sector in the UK. This includes properties owned and run by housing associations and local councils, where budgets are often tight, yet products and facilities are required to stand the test of time.

Even though some properties are being rented on a temporary basis, sometimes for short tenures, the shadow of maintenance and repair always looms large – particularly over shared kitchens, which are in constant use and at frequent risk of suffering damage. This has led to durability becoming an essential factor when specifying a kitchen in rented accommodation, especially when there are numerous fire and electrical safety regulations to consider.

The last thing landlords want to do is spend essential funds on replacement cupboards and appliances. Taking money off the bottom line causes a rental property to become more labour and cost intensive than it needs to be; with this in mind, it is wise to avoid traditional, timber-based kitchen cabinets, which are not always built to last. Similarly, towards the bottom end of the market, doors

When looking for something that's practical, durable, and stylishly designed, pre-built compact kitchens tick all the right boxes

and drawers are regularly constructed from low grade materials (such as chipboard) leaving them open to water ingress and other damage.

PRE-BUILT KITCHENS

So, having identified some potential pitfalls, what is best kitchen option available to landlords and social housing managers? When looking for something that's both practical and durable, as well as stylishly designed and easy on the eye, pre-built compact kitchens tick all the right boxes. Not only will



A pre-built kitchen is only as good as the practicality it affords the tenants. It still needs to have all the necessary facilities to store, prepare and cook food, while fitting in a potentially restricted floorspace

they last for the duration of a tenancy and beyond, powder coated steel units – such as the models offered by Elfin Kitchens – look great and remove the need for constant maintenance.

With a pre-built compact kitchen, durability is guaranteed, with the unit constructed of powder coated steel, combined with a stainless steel sink and drainer. In addition, this design and robust construction removes the need for constant maintenance, while also reducing concerns over ‘makeshift kitchens’ appearing in tenants’ rooms.

Utilising a pre-built kitchen offers further advantages, such as arriving fully assembled on a pallet. With all cupboards and appliances already measured up to fit neatly together, installation time is greatly reduced, as much of the work has already been done – and no manual labour is required. Top quality compact kitchens also arrive for installation complete with an appropriate waste kit which, in turn, helps to reduce plumbing costs.

The best compact kitchens also benefit from versatility, especially in terms of design. Indeed, there are well constructed units that come in a broad choice of colours to suit a range of interior styles, which can even create a high-end ‘bespoke’ look.

PRACTICALITY

Of course, a pre-built kitchen is only as good as the practicality it affords the tenants. It still needs to have all the necessary facilities to store, prepare and

cook food, while fitting in a potentially restricted floorspace. As a result, it requires a well-conceived design – an aspect that separates quality manufacturers from the competition. The more experienced and established companies offer a wealth of options, not only in terms of unit size(s), but also the configuration of appliances. Whether it is extra cabinets for storage, larger worktops for food preparation or a choice of cooking appliances, these are all options available to landlords.

For example, larger properties can utilise pre-built kitchens comprising a built-in combination microwave oven and grill, ceramic hob, dishwasher, sink and integrated fridge. Alternatively, in a smaller studio space, a pre-built kitchen could simply consist of a sink, hob and fridge. Most importantly, whatever the final kitchen looks like or contains, it has to be suitable for the application in hand, its intended users and the space available, while remaining proportionate to the expected rental yield from a property.

By choosing a quality manufacturer offering high quality, compact kitchens, landlords and social housing managers can ensure they are getting strong, durable units that are not only built to last, but will also help reduce overhead costs over time. Plus, good-looking kitchens boasting the latest appliances will satisfy tenants’ needs for the duration of their rental period, ensuring a happy balance between property owners and occupants.

Bob Andrew is managing director of Elfin Kitchens

A decade of heating maintenance support

Managing the varying heating requirements of an average family can be hard enough, but imagine the headache involved when the heating for 238 properties is supplied via a communal, gas-fired, heating system. This is the scenario facing the management team of Courtlands Estate in Richmond, Surrey. This is a large, private estate comprising 11 residential buildings. Of these, half were built in the 1930s and retain much of their distinctive style, with the remainder being constructed in the 1960s. The majority of the flats are in private ownership on long-term leases whilst a few are retained and managed by the Courtlands Estate company.

Ken Hassan, Company Secretary, and latterly Estate Manager, explained more; "The estate has a communal, gas-fired, heating system which is housed in four boiler rooms and which serves all of the buildings, via a 6" district heating main. There are 15 commercial-size boilers, more than two dozen pumps of various sizes, and miles of over ground and underground pipework. The responsibility of the estate team is to maintain reliable communal services for heating and hot water, whilst dealing with the concomitant issues of repairs and maintenance that arise with plant of our complexity and size."

In 2009, the maintenance contract for the heating system was put out to tender and the successful provider was Southern Maintenance Solutions (UK) Ltd, (SMS). Over the intervening years, SMS has provided comprehensive maintenance and servicing

which can be split into three categories:

- The provision of reliable regular servicing of the major items of heating plant e.g. boilers, pumps and burners.
- Periodic major contract work including the replacement of ten old boilers.
- Dealing with service issues, both minor issues and those that are more urgent – e.g. a plant outage, where a prompt service response, seven days a week, is imperative.

Martyn Neves, Operations Manager at SMS, explained more about some of the specific issues the company has faced in the last decade. "A site like Courtlands Estate has two main requirements. The first is when there is a problem with the heating and our main challenge then is often finding the source of the problem. The solution is often relatively straightforward but locating and repairing a fault, say in the pipework, can be difficult, especially if we require access to several separate flats in order to deal with it. Secondly, as plant and equipment ages, regular and thorough servicing is important to make sure that it is kept in good condition throughout its working life."

Work on a site of this size and nature is required throughout the year, with the core element being a programme of scheduled quarterly maintenance. "We don't anticipate refurbishing any of the other boiler houses in the next few years, but this year we have a programme of replacing several old, belt driven pumps with new inverter driven pumps,



which are more efficient and should be more economical to run. We will also be replacing the gas booster sets in the main boiler plant room together with upgrading one of the two burners, again increasing efficiency and saving costs," explained Martyn Neves. "Otherwise we will be carrying out our routine maintenance of all plant rooms, together with water treatment and servicing of the BMS. We'll also be continuously renewing radiator valves as and when required."

Ken Hassan said: "Over the years of working with SMS, they have established a good understanding of our heating system. Their regime of regular and thorough maintenance has helped us to provide a reliable service to residents, with downtime kept to a minimum, which is very important. We also value their advice and guidance when it comes to considering future works; we consider pro-active maintenance very important, and their recommendations about this and plant replacement are always given careful consideration."

Each of the leaseholders on the estate holds a share in the freehold company that owns and manages the site. The elected Board of Directors appoint the staff who run the affairs of the estate from the on-site office. "The shareholders want the most cost-effective servicing of the estate's heating plant while having the confidence that when the weather turns cold, each and every one of the residents will be as comfortable as possible in their own homes. SMS has been able to help the estate meet these objectives and our satisfaction with the service they have provided remains very high," concluded Ken Hassan.

01635 33363 info@smsmaintenance.com



Look at the roof to achieve cost effective decent homes compliance

Latest statistics reveal that at least 20 per cent of homes (4.5 million) are still below Decent Homes standards.

In the drive to improve the insulation and energy efficiency, contractors working on behalf of social housing providers have to balance Building Regulations compliance with budgetary constraints.

Roof ventilation solutions from Hambleside Danelaw are proven in practice to provide a cost-effective solution towards achieving appropriate upgrading of homes, delivering compliance with Approved Document C2 and



British Standards such as BS 5534:2014+A1:2015 Slating and tiling for pitched roofs and vertical cladding – Code of Practice.

Equally suitable for new build, the range can be installed quickly and efficiently across the roof- be it underneath the roof covering via a vapour permeable low resistance underlay, or as an integral part of the roof covering at eaves, ridge, valleys and inbetween. The products can be used in refurbishment and upgrade projects, minimising disruption for the occupants.

Hambleside Danelaw has purpose-designed its products to be as simple as possible to fix, whether mortared or dry fix.

Graham Roofing is just one contractor for whom Hambleside Danelaw has become a preferred choice, after first using for a Dundee Council housing refurbishment project. That first contract featured the use of 400 HD TV15/1 tile vents. Project manager Alistair Tirns observed, "We are very pleased with the ease of use of the product."

Norfolk-based Breckland Roofing reinforced the ease of use, following inclusion of Danelaw Dry Fix Valley Troughs, Universal Dry Fix Ridge and Hip System and Interlocking Dry Verge on a new build housing association project. Site Contracts Manager David said, "We can give Danelaw products to the roof tilers and know



they will fit without problems."

Hambleside Danelaw is one of the UK's leading manufacturers of roofing ventilation solutions. Its in-house R&D and manufacturing capability gives the flexibility and speed to react to the continual design, technical, Regulatory and environmental changes within the building industry. Thus it continually brings to market products that are fully compliant, efficient to install, and meet performance criteria and expectations.

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Simpson Strong-Tie is celebrating 25 years in the UK. Simpson launched its European operations from well-established beginnings in America, where founder Barclay Simpson created his first joist hanger back in 1956. In 1998 a purpose-built manufacturing facility and head office opened in Tamworth, and subsequent acquisitions in the UK, Germany, France and Denmark have established Simpson as a European industry leader. In 2009 Simpson's UKAS accredited European Testing Laboratory opened, which now conducts over 10,000 product tests annually. Managing Director Malcolm Paulson says, "In my 14 years in role, I've seen the business grow and flourish. Our range has extended to include engineered structural connectors, fasteners and fastening systems, lateral-force resisting systems and bespoke one-off products. The exciting thing is that recent European acquisitions in the concrete repair market can only help us grow even further, bringing the quality and service for which we're known into new markets. In 25 years we've grown to over 600 employees with a presence in most European countries, helping make Simpson Strong-Tie the business it is today."

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New Kinelisse Trays

Saniflo has recently introduced a new shower tray aimed at the UK contract market. The new Kinelisse is the most recent edition to the Kinedo shower tray range and is a high quality, contemporary shower tray that is manufactured from durable stone resin.

A classic white gloss tray with a low profile of just 35mm, the new range is available in a wide range of sizes and shapes to suit the variety of shower enclosures on the market. The smallest model is 700x700mm – ideal for compact bathroom spaces – whilst the largest, at 1800x800mm, is perfect for a walk-in shower scenario; often required in cases of assisted showering. A multitude of sizes in between means every shower space is catered for. Shapes include square, rectangular, quadrant and offset.

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Flexible & functional

Stuart Reynolds of AKW discusses how social landlords can build flexibility into their housing stock for both able and disabled tenants

A major piece of research by the Smith Institute forecasts that by 2034 there will be 170,000 more residents with mobility problems living in housing association properties. In addition, according to an Equality and Human Rights Commission report demand for accessible housing is increasing, with insufficient supply across all tenure types. It's therefore imperative that housing associations and social landlords ensure they include bathrooms suitable for all possible tenants.

INCREASED DEMAND FOR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

In the social rented sector in England alone, the total of tenants aged over 55 living in social housing is projected to increase from 1.6 million to over 2.2 million by 2035 (if social housing maintains its current share of the housing market). In addition, disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to be social housing tenants and almost half (48.5 per cent) of all social rented households have at least one person whose illness or disability limits their activities. This is much higher than other tenures.

With this in mind, in the next 10-20 years, many more older and disabled people living in private rented properties, or homeowners with insufficient equity, will need to try and find more suitable, adapted accommodation. Inevitably, many of these will apply for social housing, putting further significant pressure on housing managers.

TAKING A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO MAKING HOUSING STOCK ACCESSIBLE

According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, there are some local authorities who are leading the charge for accessible housing provision by putting disabled people's needs at the heart of planning, and reaping the benefits. But they are the exception rather than the rule. For the majority of local authorities and housing associations, the challenge is how to refurbish and renew ageing adaptations and equipment while they still have available budgets. This short-term investment is offset by the long-term savings in maintenance costs for sizeable pieces of kit such as stairlifts.

Manufacturers are responding well to this, offering a wide range of cost-effective home adaptation solutions. Companies such as AKW offer detailed advice to OT's specifying particular pieces of equipment and have an experienced technical support team on hand to advise OT's, local authorities and housing associations on technical support, services, level access showering solutions and accessible kitchens.

THE ACCESSIBLE BATHROOM DILEMMA

Although a level access showering room enables those with mobility issues to maintain their independence and promotes long-term safety, this type of bathroom can cause difficulties when general-needs accommodation is re-let



and the next occupants require a more traditional bathroom layout.

Even in sheltered housing, or other accommodation designed for older people, standard wetroom solutions do not always work. Not all older people want showers, either because they are not used to them, or because they enjoy alleviating their aches and pains by soaking in a warm bath. ‘Personalisation’ is a common buzzword but it is expensive to deliver in practice. So, what can housing providers do to provide both value-for-money and flexible solutions to keep all tenants happy? It’s clearly a big challenge that urgently needs to be addressed.

To help build greater flexibility into housing stock, AKW has been working with many social housing providers to overcome this issue with their ‘bathroom for life’ option. This solution is a conventional bathroom layout that includes a bath; however the difference is that the bath can be very quickly and easily adapted to become a level access wetroom showering area (and back again if required). The bath effectively becomes more like a piece of furniture, so it is possible for landlords to keep it in place for families or remove it for older people or those with disabilities, as required.

This type of alternative solution minimises any adaptation costs for a housing provider by reducing the amount of building work needed. It also reduces disruption to tenants. Once installed, it takes approximately half a day to either install a bath or take the bath out and return it to a wet room, making it easy for new residents moving into a property, as they can have the choice of a bath or shower depending on their needs or preference. Typically, the price difference between a Bathroom for Life installation and a traditional bathroom refurbishment or new build is £500.

Although there is increasing pressure on housing stock to become even more accessible, manufacturers are working hard to help social landlords provide ‘real-world’ solutions. Thanks to these companies, many housing providers are saving time and building long-term flexibility into their housing stock.

Stuart Reynolds is head of product and marketing at AKW



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The key to everything

Victor D'Allancé of Intratone explains how intelligent access control systems can keep maintenance simple for housing managers and provide the best security for tenants

Managers of apartment blocks and those in charge of access to social housing face similar problems – how can they protect the residents of their buildings from the risks posed by fire; and how do they keep them secure in their homes and in their local areas. This is not an easy task in today's world, especially in this time of austerity and reduced budgets for local authorities.

One of the main priorities is ensuring the entrances to such properties remain secure day and night. Issuing physical sets of keys is costly and has proven difficult to manage. Keys are often mislaid or not returned by residents when they move out of a property, creating an almost impossible administration task.

FOB-BASED SYSTEMS

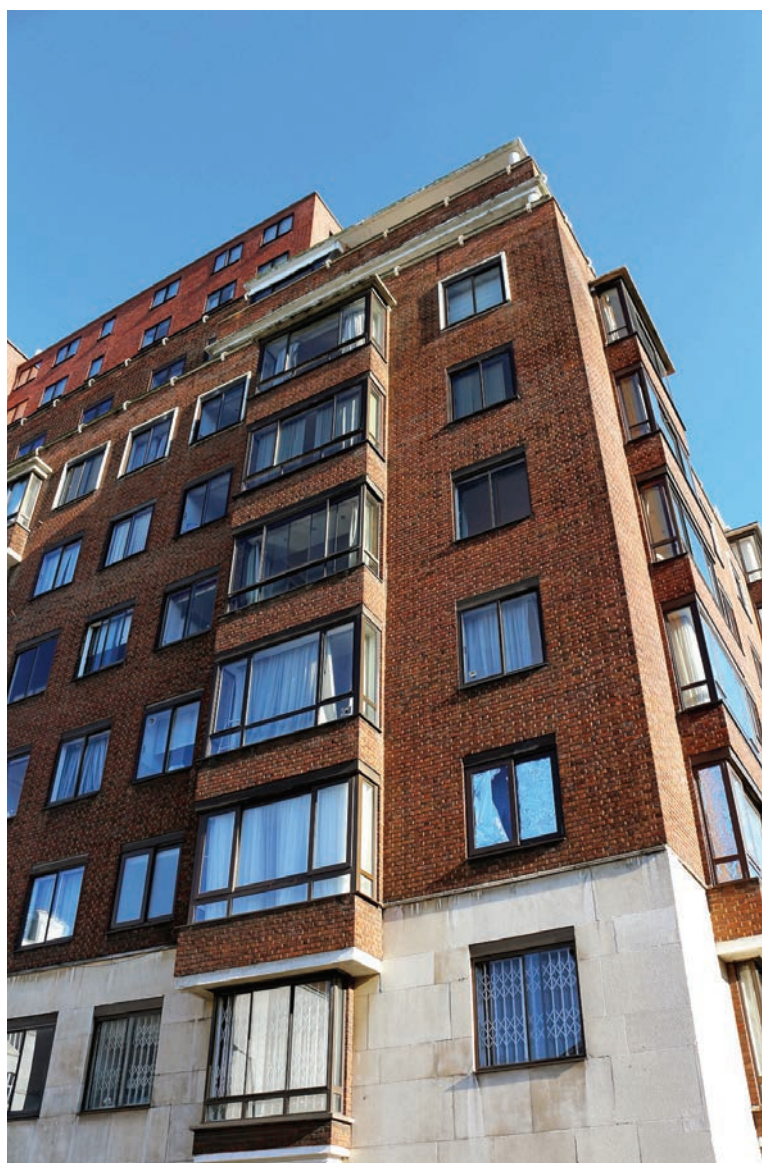
Some local authorities and housing associations have moved towards fob-based systems, but again a similar problem can arise with the management of the fobs. We have seen a situation where one block of just six flats had 99 fobs issued to it.

If a resident loses a fob, their property manager or housing association is instantly and remotely able to establish the identity of the fob and disable it for future use. A new fob can be easily activated on a free and secured cloud-based management site and sent out to that individual. This saves time and money, enhances the security of each property and provides the greatest ease of use for housing associations or facilities managers and their residents.

It is not possible to clone these fobs, so there is only a set number of fobs per flat. If a tenant loses a fob, we are able to check that the fob is in fact no longer being used, as well as cancel its functionality. However, there is another issue that we have encountered – some platforms can only be accessed with one log in and from a dedicated PC. Often when that user is out of the office or on holiday fobs cannot be programmed.

CLOUD-BASED PLATFORMS

Cloud-based platforms that can be accessed by anyone from any computer or smartphone mean that FM's can update, delete or issue a new fob to a tenant almost instantly. Using these platforms contractors can be given allocated time slots for maintenance visits – and their mobile phone numbers can be used as the door entry code. The platforms can provide an auditable timeline and trail should there be any cause for one.



Issuing physical sets of keys is costly and has proven difficult to manage. Keys are often mislaid or not returned by residents when they move out of a property, creating an almost impossible administration task

Unfortunately, the groundworks required for some installations can be disruptive and expensive. Many door entry system manufacturers have introduced panels that include 3G and 4G connectivity. One of the major headaches of existing systems that are 'pay as you go' is what happens once the credit has expired and who is responsible for meeting the ongoing cost.

This problem has been overcome by providing a pre-paid SIM that lasts for 15 years. Not only does this remove the risk of a new system becoming redundant through lack of funds, but it also brings more certainty and visibility to pricing and future running costs.

Further cost-efficiency benefits can also be achieved with this technology: since there is no handset for intercoms, maintenance and hardware installation costs are kept minimal. The requirement for overall systems' maintenance is virtually non-existent as everything is managed on a secure, free of charge web platform.

That is not to say that keys can be replaced altogether. Many property managers have keys for communal areas, lift voids or to utility cupboards and keeping these safe and secure at all times is obviously essential. In such



Each of the residents was given their own fob which allows them easy access; for visitors, the system calls the house phone via GSM, and if no one answers it then rings a second designated number, normally a mobile phone. Residents simply have to press any key on their device to allow entry

situations key safes are the best solution, and they have advanced significantly over recent years – many can now be accessed using a mobile phone or a keypad. Reminders can even be set to alert managers when keys have not been returned by a specified time.

We work with a number of housing associations throughout the country and in some blocks where residents are more elderly, they have found that soon after moving into apartments, electricians were regularly being called to site to relocate the existing fixed door entry handsets. Installers were called back to site to install a more cost effective and time efficient solution that was easy for the elderly residents to use.

Each of the residents was given their own fob which allows them easy access; for visitors, the system calls the house phone via GSM, and if no one answers it then rings a second designated number, normally a mobile phone. Residents simply have to press any key on their device to allow entry.

The combination of these systems provides best-in-class security, alongside flexibility and ease of use. Access control can make life easier for managers and residents alike.

Victor D'Allancé is UK country manager at Intratone



Door closer's fire credentials enhanced

Samuel Heath's commitment to ensuring that its Powermatic controlled, concealed door closers provide the ultimate assurance in quality and performance has been further underlined with the successful completion of additional full-sized fire testing on both timber and steel fire doors at renowned testing laboratory, Exova Warrington Fire. 30-minute testing in accordance with BS EN 1634-1 was undertaken on a timber fire door constructed with a Halspan core to replace Powermatic's current small-scale indicative testing for the BS476 assessment. The door set easily achieved the 30-minute test requirements, continuing until final failure occurred at 42 minutes. Significantly, where most timber door fire tests fail due to failure of the hinge/timber joint, which causes the door to drop and intumescent seal to break at the top of the door, Powermatic was actually shown to hold the door in place after the hinge/timber joint failure. This is attributed to the design, strength and location of Powermatic, which fits in a similar position to hinges, between the door and door frame. The uninsulated steel door passed the four-hour test comfortably. As a result, the test evidence will allow certification to cover both insulated and non-insulated doors at any fire rating up to and including four hours.

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Aico at home at Housing 2019

Aico – a market leader in domestic Fire and Carbon Monoxide Alarms – will be exhibiting at the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) 'Housing 2019 Conference & Exhibition' in Manchester Central, 25th – 27th June on stand D20. The last time Aico exhibited at CIH Housing was 2016. This year Aico will be showcasing a new stand design in the shape of a house. The new stand will be distinctive and different, offering an enhanced customer experience. The products taking pride of place on the stand will be Aico's 3000 Series which encompasses both Fire and Carbon Monoxide detection, providing whole property coverage from one series.



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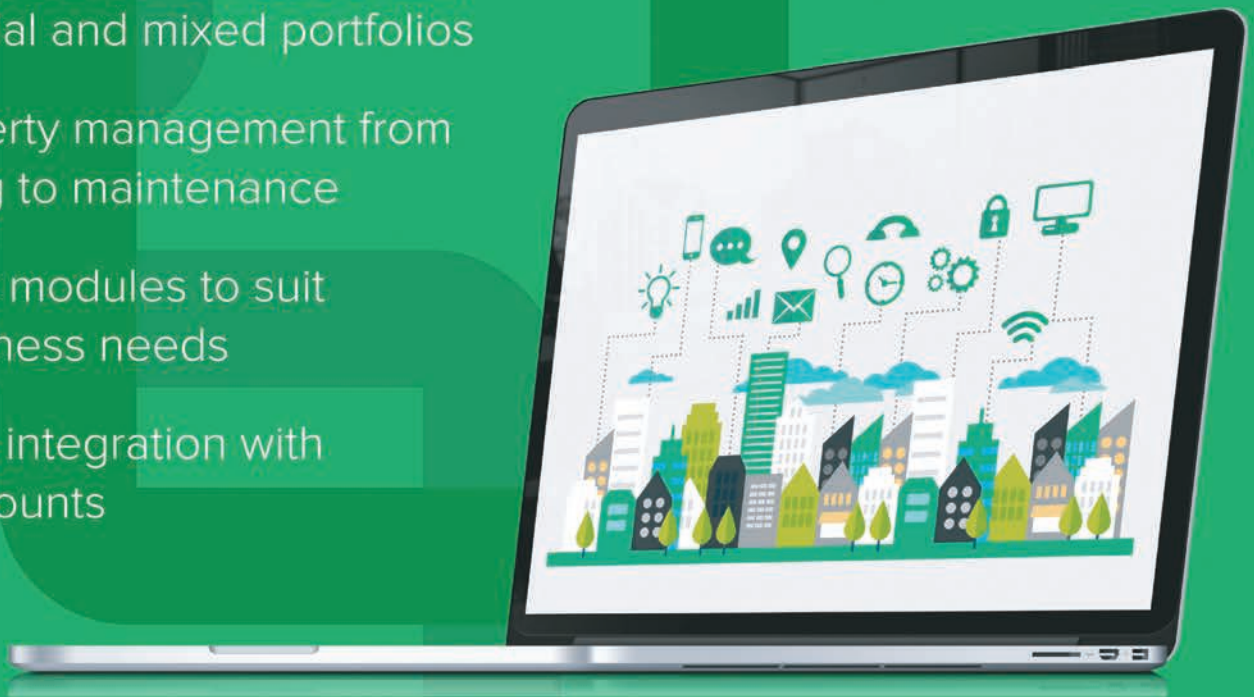
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Making key management easy

Tim Hill from Keyzapp explains how combining contactless tags and cloud-based software helped two housing associations solve an age-old problem



For housing associations key management can be a real headache. Keeping track of hundreds or even thousands of keys is often time consuming, yet it's an incredibly important aspect of housing management with the security of tenants at potential risk.

"How hard can it be?" thought Sam Spicer, customer service manager at Bath's biggest housing association Curo. Sam reviewed the process for tracking the company's 5,000 property keys, quickly uncovering that key management is actually a very tough job, taking his colleagues hours every day. Alan Hume, manager of the Private Sector Leasing (PSL) service within Edinburgh's Link housing association knew the problem only too well, observing his own team struggle to keep their key cabinets up to date.

Keys are notoriously hard to control, but the safety and security of residents and their property depend on keys being well managed, making it a critical process for all housing providers. "With modern data protection requirements, to write the address on a key would be unthinkable," says Sam.

FINDING A BETTER WAY

Sam consulted industry peers at a conference, and was surprised that most were still using spreadsheets and paper logbooks for tracking their keys, despite all acknowledging it was far from ideal. "Spreadsheets and paper weren't cutting it for us," says Megan James from Link. "It was just too difficult to maintain and prevent mistakes".

"We couldn't face any more spreadsheets," agrees Sam. "The best spreadsheet we could design had 13,000 rows!" Curo had previously adapted a library book tracking system for their keys, but it wasn't a perfect fit.

CONTACTLESS TECHNOLOGY – IDEAL FOR KEY TRACKING

Most of us are used to tapping our credit cards at the checkout, but this idea also works really well for tracking keys as well. By embedding a tiny chip into a key fob, a simple tap on a reader or phone lets you identify a particular key and issue it in a matter of seconds. For both Curo and Link, this was the answer they were looking for.

"Contactless fobs make it so much faster and more accurate to record who has a key," says Simon Bex, Curo's key manager. "It's improved security as there's no risk of written key tags falling into the wrong hands."

Sam loves that he can check keys by tapping them on his phone: "If I forget what key I need then I can simply look it up on my phone and check it out at the same time" he says.

The team at Link took the contactless idea one step further, using purpose

WHY SPREADSHEETS AND LOGBOOKS MAKE KEY MANAGEMENT HARD

- It's difficult for more than one person to use them at once
- Everyone fills them out differently, making reporting hard
- There's no detailed history of who's done what
- Reconciling of written records takes time (and money)
- Finding information is slow- often relying on alphabetical sorting

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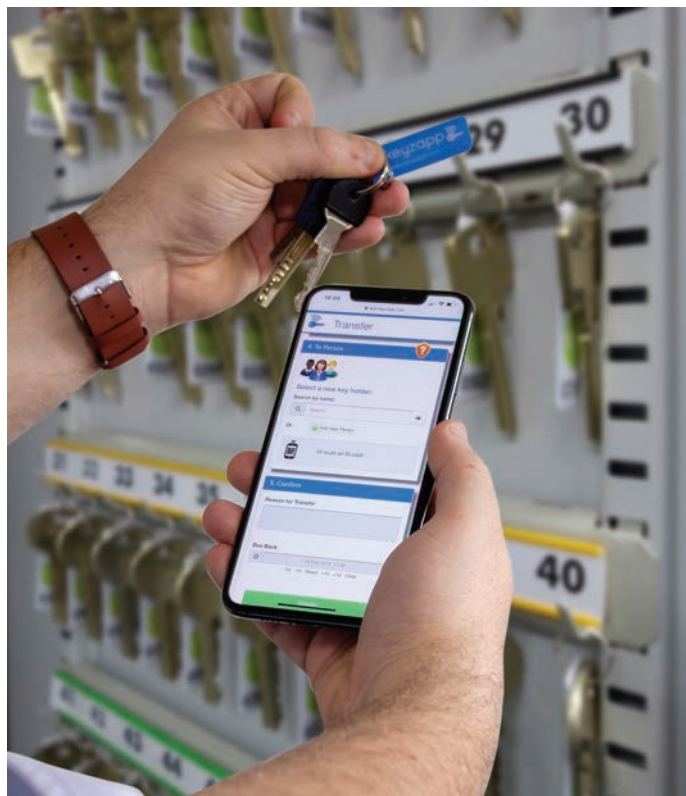
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Keys are notoriously hard to control, but the safety and security of residents and their property depend on keys being well managed, making it a critical process for all housing providers



built 'kiosks' to create a self-service experience for issuing keys, much like the machines at the supermarket. "I just have to scan my ID on the kiosk, and it lets me search for the key I need, then I just zap it to sign it out," says Megan.

PURPOSE-BUILT APPS MAKE IT EASY FOR EVERYONE

In the current smartphone age, we expect specialised apps that both fit our needs exactly and make our tasks easy and intuitive. Curo's digital system needed to reflect the real world subtleties of their daily work. For example, they needed to precisely catalogue the multi-property master keys protecting their vulnerable sheltered accommodation residents. They chose Keyzapp because it naturally handled the nuances of their process.

At Link, keys are tracked at the building's reception, as well as by the operational teams sitting some distance away. "Seeing what's going on at reception without leaving my desk makes life far easier," says Megan. "Before, I would spend a day a week checking keys in folders at reception. Now I've got all that time back."

THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY CHANGES THE GAME

At Curo, introducing digital key management has dramatically reduced the training requirement for new team members. "We were previously reliant on two people who knew the key system inside-out. Now, it's easy for anyone to find what they need," says Simon.

"Having late keys chased automatically by text message saves a lot of time" he continues. "I love that I can see what's out of place and fix it before it becomes a problem. Misplaced keys can take an hour or more to track down, but now it almost never happens."

In addition to the one day per week Megan saves, Link calculate that in the six months since they went digital, they've saved over £10,000 in unnecessary lock replacement and administration costs. The teams are now looking at applying the same principles to the other small assets they manage, like lockboxes and maintenance tools.

Technology is constantly evolving and developing in ways to make our lives easier. For housing providers, switching outdated processes for more time-efficient, digital alternatives is a natural step – especially where tenant safety and security is concerned.

Tim Hill is director at Keyzapp

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www.kingspanenv.com

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

Roofing

A Proctor Group
01250 872261
www.proctorgroup.com

Hambleside Danelaw Building Products
01327 701 900
www.hambleside-danelaw.co.uk

Ubbink
01604 433000
www.ubbink.co.uk

Scaffolding & Safety Equipment

Layher Ltd
01462 475100
www.layher.co.uk

Smoke & Fire Protection

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

BAFE
0844 335 0897
www.bafe.org.uk

Fire Protection Association (FPA)
01608 812 500
www.thefpa.co.uk

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

SE Controls
01543 443060
www.secontrols.com

Whitesales
01483 271371
www.whitesales.co.uk

Yeoman Shield
0113 279 58 54
www.yeomanshield.com

Software Providers

Kirona
01625 585511
www.kirona.com

Street Furniture

Go Plastic Ltd
02920 864 095
www.goplastic.co.uk

Tiling & Sealants

British Ceramic Tiles
01626 834774
www.britishceramictile.com

Water Hygiene & Sanitation

Vexo International Ltd
0207 953 1154
www.vexoint.com

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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