

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

AUG/SEP 2019



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Editor's comment

Grenfell tragedy will forever blight May's housing legacy



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

This summer marked a hundred years since the passing of The Addison Act, which led to the wholesale building of more than a million council houses across the country, in an effort to improve the living conditions and health of the population. It also marked an attempt by former Prime Minister Theresa May to portray her housing policies as a progressive attempt to redress the balance and end our national obsession with home ownership, giving a fresh lease of life to social and affordable housing. History will judge whether Mrs May succeeded in giving herself a positive housing legacy, but several key issues will surely condemn her attempts to failure. Her Government's response to the Grenfell Tower fire and the unsafe living conditions in which many people live in tower blocks is a national disgrace. Over two years have passed since the disaster and hundreds, if not thousands of high-rise blocks are still covered in unsafe cladding, while the occupants are unprotected from the risk of fire through a lack of water sprinkler systems and faulty fire doors. If the Government had acted on the recommendations of the Lakanal House coroner, made in 2013, then it's possible the terrible events some four years later in west London, might have been avoided. From the days immediately following the fire Mrs May appeared unable to deal with its terrible consequences. Establishing the public inquiry was not 'job done' and the lack of a single recommendation so far on how we avoid a similar tragedy is a truly lamentable position to find ourselves in.

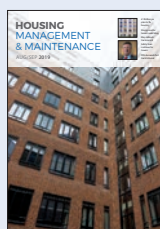
MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

But Grenfell is not the only negative. Her failure to reform the Right to Buy and Universal Credit policies both represent huge missed opportunities to deliver a more caring and sensible housing policy for now and the next decade. Despite the proven and well evidenced need for more low cost, good quality housing, the Government failed to suspend the Right to Buy which is seeing thousands of affordable homes getting sold each year. At the same time councils are only allowed to use a fraction of the receipt on their replacement. No wonder the number of new social rent homes being built is so pitifully low. Lifting the HRA borrowing cap might help to replace some of the lost council homes, but this is likely to be severely restricted as councils have to spend billions of pounds on improving the fire safety of their existing housing stock. Continuing with the Help To Buy initiatives is costing tens of billions of pounds each year, while propping up housebuilders' profits and providing an artificial stimulus to house prices. When it eventually ceases in the next decade, it could have serious consequences for the economy. Meanwhile more than 100,000 children are growing up in temporary accommodation, which blights their lives and damages their chances of making a success of themselves. This is also extremely costly and puts huge sums into the pockets of private landlords.

A READY MADE SOLUTION?

A way around this mess has been put forward by the National Housing Federation and others, in a suggested ten-year programme to build 145,000 new social homes a year, of which 90,000 will be for social rent. The report provides a well-argued and financially sound programme, good for both the country's population and its economy. It is anyone's guess if Boris Johnson uses the plan to reshape housing policies, but much of the hard work in terms of thinking and planning has already been done! In fairness to Mrs May, her Government did drop a number of the ill-conceived policies of Cameron and Osborne, but she should have gone further. There is now every indication that the new PM will change the Government's focus, resources and effort back to home ownership and building homes for sale. In the private rented sector far more reform work was done than expected, but we have yet to see the fruits of this activity. There are still plenty of rogue landlords exploiting and abusing their tenants, while organisations representing the wider body of legitimate private landlords continue to cry foul at the changes and threaten to abandon the rental market. The Addison Act led to a situation where councils housed about 40 per cent of the population. Not all of it was particularly good and there are issues with quality, but it did provide security of tenure. Today, councils provide housing for less than ten per cent of us. If Mrs May wanted a positive housing legacy then she should have given us a modern day Addison Act, backed up by modern service standards guaranteeing properties of a decent size and quality, at affordable rents. Tenants would be given a proper voice in the services they receive and an effective regulator and ombudsman to intervene when things go wrong. It's not rocket science. But will the new PM take up the challenge?

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Kingspan Kooltherm has been installed as part of the conversion and expansion of a former office building, adding luxury accommodation to Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter.

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Nearly £13 billion needed every year to end the housing crisis

New research from the National Housing Federation has revealed that the Government must invest £12.8bn a year to finally end the housing crisis in England.

Over ten years, this investment would kick start a nationwide housebuilding programme of around 1.45 million social homes for rent and shared ownership properties across the country.

It would also stimulate the economy and help more people to get on the housing ladder, while ensuring that millions of people no longer get stuck in unsuitable homes or are rough sleeping on the streets, or in hostels.

The findings are consistent with the recommendations of last year's Shelter Commission and it provides a blueprint for the next spending review, as well as providing a funding plan for the Housing Green Paper, due out in the Autumn.

A coalition of leading housing groups and charities is calling for the Government to make this significant investment in ending the housing crisis. It includes the National Housing Federation, the trade body for housing associations, who house a total of six million people, as well as Shelter, Crisis, the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

By investing £12.8bn per year (in today's prices) they argue that the Government would take spending levels back to those last seen under Churchill's government in the early 1950s, when enough homes were being built to meet the country's needs.

The coalition argues that a stimulus from the Government is the only way to solve the housing crisis, since the private sector alone cannot build the quantities or types of homes the country needs.

Over the course of ten years, this Government investment would amount to £146bn. This would cover about 44 per cent of the total cost of construction, unlocking the rest of the money to be raised from other sources, including a lower housing benefit bill.

UNLOCKING BENEFIT SAVINGS

Last year, the Government paid out £22.3bn in housing benefit, a significant amount of which went to private landlords to help cover rent for millions of low-income tenants. By moving many of these tenants into social housing, the taxpayer would save tens of millions of pounds every year.

The research also found that investing in new homes would add £120bn to the economy each year, through the creation of local jobs in construction and other industries across the country. Effectively, every pound spent by the Government would generate at least £5, boosting the economy in a balanced and sustainable way.

This new financial modelling is based on research, conducted by Heriot Watt University for the National Housing Federation and the



Over ten years, this investment would kick start a nationwide housebuilding programme of around 1.45 million social homes for rent and shared ownership properties across the country

homelessness charity Crisis, which showed that England needs to build 145,000 social homes every year for the next decade to both clear the current backlog of people who need a home and meet future demand.

Last year the Government spent £1.27bn on affordable housing, making housing one of the smallest Whitehall budgets, down 70 per cent on 2010 levels. As a result, far fewer social rented homes are being built. In 2017/18, just 5,400 were built, compared to almost 36,000 in 2010/11 before funding was cut.

The under-investment in housing has led to a huge 169 per cent increase in rough sleeping, while the number of households in temporary accommodation is at a 10-year high.

TEN YEAR PROGRAMME

In addition some 1.3 million children are living in poverty, in expensive privately rented accommodation, while many young people are stuck at home with their parents, unable to build an independent life and start families of their own.

Kate Henderson, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation, said: "The housing crisis is an economic, social and human catastrophe. But it can be solved. And now, for the first time, we know exactly how much it will cost. By investing £12.8bn in affordable housing every year for the next

decade, the Government can ensure millions of people have a stable and affordable place to live, at the same time as strengthening the economy across the country.

"By investing this money in affordable housing at the upcoming spending review, the Government can help families all across the country to flourish. They can help children get out of poverty, give young voters a foot up on the housing ladder and help out private renters who have to empty their bank account every month.

"As well as being the right thing to do, investing to end the housing crisis also carries huge economic benefits. It will advance the country's productivity, boost its economic growth and lower the benefit bill over time."

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "The steep decline in social housing is at the core of the housing emergency that now effects so many. Social homes are what this country wants and what it needs - they are the best solution to the problems we face and an opportunity to unite the country.

"Charting a course to build a new generation of social homes must be a key test for whoever walks through the doors of Number 10. The race to eradicate homelessness and provide millions with a stable home, is a race that every politician should be trying to win."

Outgoing PM defends her social housing record

Theresa May has mounted a strong defence of her Government's track record in delivering social housing policies and new homes after decades of home ownership dominating the political agenda.

Speaking at the CIH annual conference Mrs May said social housing had been a "victim of the single-minded drive for homeownership" under successive governments.

In a rare appearance before housing delegates, the outgoing Prime Minister said: "First, we moved to increase the supply of affordable rental properties in order to meet the rising demand.

"We've ended the forced sale of higher-value council properties, put £2bn of extra funding into the Affordable Housing Programme with an explicit provision for building homes for social rent and abolished the HRA cap so that local authorities are free to build once more."

With just weeks left of her time in Downing Street, Mrs May said the Government will publish an action plan and a timetable for its Social Housing Green Paper in September. She also said legislation to end 'no-fault' evictions will be brought in later this year.

She told delegates: "If you rent a property, it might not be your house but it is still your home. To me, that means that if you pay your rent, play by the rules and keep the house in good order, your landlord should not be allowed to throw you out on a whim. It is simply not fair."

RECORD CRITICISED

But the shadow housing secretary John Healey blasted Mrs May's record on housing, saying she had delivered very little for her three years in Downing Street and describing her speech as "a little sad"

He pointed to the huge rise in rough sleeping and its impact on families with children, as well as a huge decline in the delivery of Government backed new social rent homes, which fell last year to just 961.

"And when you reflect on those three years, her ministers launched 99 housing consultations. Just consider that – 99 housing consultations yet so little



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action, so little legislation to follow. And even today as prime minister, she was still only able to promise change in the future on building standards and on social housing."

Healey claimed that if the Government had continued to deliver new social rented homes at the same rate as Labour had in its last year in office, there would now be more than 180,000 extra units. Instead only 6,463 social rent homes were completed in 2017/18.

Many delegates questioned if her successor as Prime Minister would be tied to the same policies that Mrs May outlined in her speech. When Housing Secretary James Brokenshire spoke at the Local Government Association annual conference a week later, his focus returned to initiatives for increasing the delivery of new homes, with an emphasis on planning reforms and the contribution of the private sector towards the 300,000 new homes target.

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

8 - 10 October, Birmingham

www.ukconstructionweek.com

Homes UK

27 - 28 November, London

www.homesevent.co.uk/home

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COVERING THE WORLD

Housing sector braces itself after Ministerial changes

The rented housing sector finds itself facing an uncertain future after a round of Ministerial changes were made by the new Prime Minister and its professional body is also to undergo changes at the top.

A Social Housing Green Paper had been expected in the Autumn along with a new focus on safety, service quality and greater tenant involvement, but the personnel changes have put all of this in doubt. Instead it appears the new Government's focus will once again revert to encouraging higher levels of home ownership and building for sale.

Shortly after Boris Johnson entered Downing Street we discovered that the Housing Secretary James Brokenshire and the Housing Minister Kit Malthouse were being replaced by the relatively unknown Robert Jenrick and the much better known Esther McVey.

Ms McVey was previously a Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, where she was in charge of the roll-out of Universal Credit. She becomes the ninth housing minister since 2010 – a turnover rate which

makes it almost impossible for meaningful and trusting relationships to develop.

In her first statement after her appointment, Ms McVey said the new Government would “give millions of young people the chance to own their own homes so we can make the dream of homeownership a reality”. What this means for the housebuilding plans of housing associations and dozens of councils is unclear, but a shift back towards private development is expected.

Meanwhile Terrie Alafat has announced she is retiring in November from her post as chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing, where she will be replaced by her current deputy Gavin Smart. The changes come at a pivotal time for the housing sector, with a new financial settlement expected in the Autumn.

Over at Homes England, Sir Edward Lister has stepped down as chair of the board to focus on his new role as chief strategic advisor to the new Prime Minister. Sir Edward previously worked for Boris Johnson when he was Mayor of London.

In another high level change, the Clarion



Housing Group announced that David Orr has been appointed to chair the Clarion Housing Association board. Clarion is the country's largest social landlord with 125,000 homes and 350,000 residents across the country. Orr was previously chief executive of the National Housing Federation for 13 years until his retirement last year.

Regulator proposes 15 per cent increase in fees to fund extra staff

The social housing regulator for England has written to landlords setting out plans to raise fees by 15 per cent next year to pay for extra staff to check on the activities of housing associations.

The plans to raise the per-unit fee for registered providers with 1,000 or more homes were outlined in a letter to all HA chief executives last month. Their views were invited, with a short deadline of 14 August set for responses.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of the regulator, said increasing the fees from £4.72 to

£5.47 per unit in April 2020/21, was needed to increase the organisation's capacity to “effectively regulate the changing risk profile of the sector”. This includes keeping pace with the “increasing market focus among some registered providers” and new funding models such as “commercial for-profit providers”.

Ms MacGregor's letter said more resources are needed in the regulator's investigation and enforcement function. However, it remains unclear how many of the new staff will be health and safety

experts or how much of the increased work by the regulator will focus on services to tenants. Some of the increased income will be used for new IT and external legal advice.

Fees for small providers with less than 1,000 homes will stay at £300 a year and the initial registration fee will not be increased from the current rate of £2,500.

It remains unclear how the role of the regulator may change in the near future if the Government proceeds with issuing a Social Housing Green Paper in the Autumn. It's publication has already been delayed several times and it was expected to set out proposals for increasing tenant involvement in setting and monitoring service standards and delivery.

Clarion agrees home improvement contracts worth over £1 billion

The country's biggest housing association has signed long-term contracts with three companies to deliver £1.17bn of improvements to tenants' homes.

Clarion Housing Group selected three contractors to each deliver a 20 year planned investment programme. Residents of 67,000 properties will benefit from kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, external decoration, boiler replacements and heating system upgrades, electrical testing and re-wiring and renewals of

roofs and lifts.

Engie will carry out work in East Anglia, Birmingham and Coventry; Wates has been appointed to work in North London; while United Living will focus on homes in South London, Kent, the southern home counties and Dorset.

Clarion's Strategic Procurement Board, including resident representatives from its Property Engagement Group, jointly took the decision to procure long-term contracts for this work to

strengthen the Group's partnerships with contractors and maximise benefits for residents and their communities.

Peter Nourse, Director of Assets at Clarion, said: “Each year we invest significantly in maintaining and improving our existing homes. We are really pleased to announce the selection of three preferred bidders to carry out this vital work over a twenty-year period.

“Longer term contracts provide security to both ourselves and our partners, to realise the benefits of collaboration and investment at scale. All three preferred bidders share Clarion's commitment to quality and social value and our residents and their communities will be the beneficiaries.”

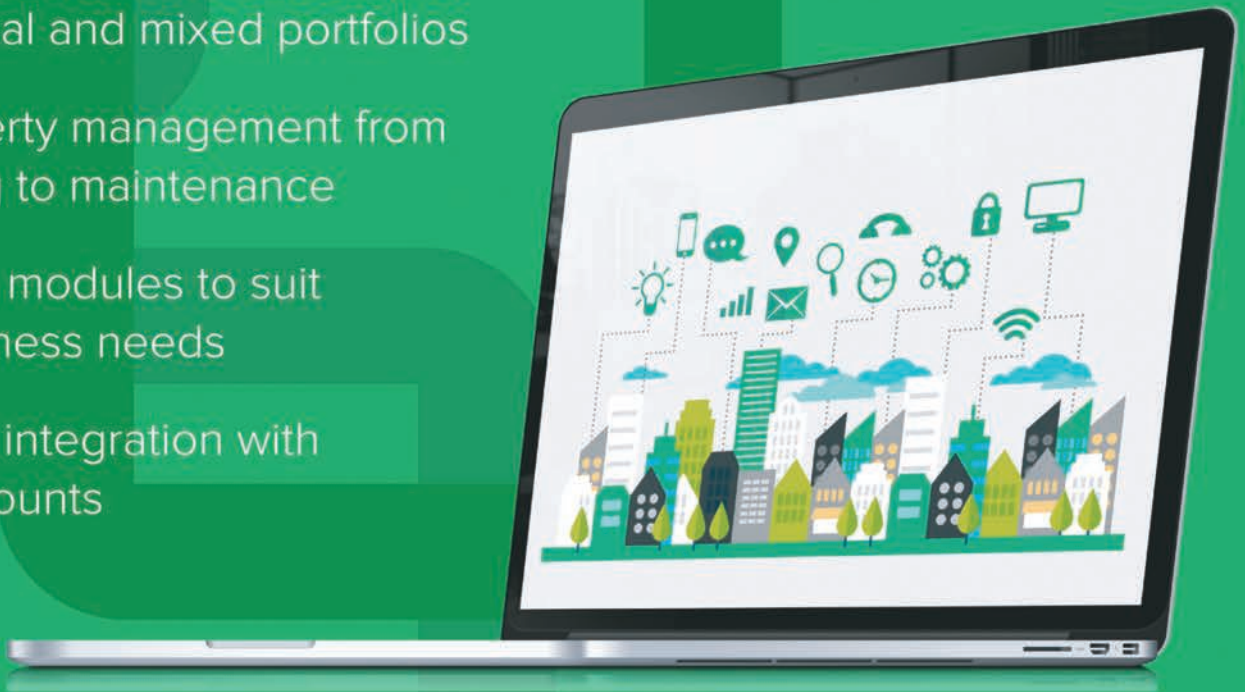
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Few tower blocks have water sprinklers fitted despite fire risk

Only five per cent of council owned tower blocks are protected from fire by water sprinkler systems despite strong support for their effectiveness in saving lives and property.

The shadow housing minister Sarah Jones has found that only 112 of a total of 2,107 council owned tower blocks taller than 10 storeys, have had sprinklers fitted to them.

Sprinklers have been legally required in all new high-rise buildings of 10 storeys and above since 2007, but the regulations do not apply to blocks built before then. This is despite the existence of National Fire Chiefs Council research from 2013 which found that deaths from fires have been almost eliminated in blocks with sprinklers.

Not surprisingly the National Fire Chiefs Council, as well as many fire and rescue services across the country have since said they believe water sprinklers to be a crucial safety measure in tower blocks.

Ms Jones is now calling on the Government to spend £1bn installing sprinklers in social housing tower blocks and to carry out other fire safety measures. In the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire (where sprinklers were absent) a number of councils requested financial help from the Treasury to fit sprinklers in their tower blocks, but their requests were rejected.

"It is simply a contradiction in terms for the Government to suggest that sprinklers are essential in new buildings while ignoring calls for them in older buildings. This creates a two-tier, hierarchy of harm in which social housing tenants are disproportionately affected," claimed Ms Jones.

Back in 2013 the coroner who oversaw the inquest into six deaths at Lakanal House in south east London recommended that social landlords should consider retrofitting sprinklers in their tower blocks. Other recommendations to the then Secretary of State Eric Pickles to take proactive measures to improve fire safety of tenants' homes were not acted upon.

Instead Pickles criticised the Welsh Government when they introduced a requirement for sprinklers in all newly built housing in 2013. His department failed to change building regulations and continued its drive to reduce health and safety requirements, often described as 'unnecessary redtape'.

Social housing tenants being failed by poor repairs and regulation

One in 10 social housing tenants are forced to report the same problem with their home more than 10 times before it is resolved, according to a national housing charity and campaigning group.

Two years on from the Grenfell Tower fire, Shelter is warning the Government it must listen to the third of families with children in social housing who feel less safe in their homes and take urgent action to prevent further tragedies.

Shelter fears a new building safety regulator will not go far enough to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all tenants is protected. Instead it is calling on the Government to introduce a tough, new consumer regulator that protects tenants and proactively inspects social landlords.

New figures released by Shelter show that over half (56 per cent) of social renters in England, equivalent to five million people, have experienced a problem with their home in the last three years, including electrical hazards, gas leaks and faulty lifts. Of those with a problem, one in 10 had to report it more than 10 times, suggesting tenants are still being failed by poor regulation.

A survey carried out by YouGov showed that over the same period more than 400,000 people encountered an issue with fire safety, which also affected their neighbours in over two-fifths of cases.

Shelter is concerned that the current regulator of social housing exists mainly to oversee finances and is not exclusively focussed on addressing the concerns of residents or tackling problem landlords head on. Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of social tenants in England have never heard of the current regulator.

COMPLAINTS AND VIEWS IGNORED

The research also reveals a deep mistrust in Whitehall since the Grenfell Tower fire, with half saying they have less trust in the Government to keep social tenants safe in their homes. Another third says the Government's response has made no difference, which is why Shelter and Grenfell United believe that only a new consumer regulator can protect tenants and rebuild trust.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "Social tenants living in Grenfell Tower raised serious safety concerns before the fire, but they were ignored. Two years on, social renters are still being failed by poor regulation and people are still fighting to be heard.

"It cannot be right that scores of complaints and problems that affect whole blocks of flats, like faulty lifts or gas leaks, go unheard. We need a new regulator that's firmly on the side of tenants.

"Tinkering with the current system just isn't good enough when people have lost trust in it to keep



Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "Social tenants living in Grenfell Tower raised serious safety concerns before the fire, but they were ignored. Two years on, social renters are still being failed by poor regulation and people are still fighting to be heard."

them safe. That's why we stand with Grenfell United in calling on the government to establish a new consumer regulator, which inspects social landlords and listens to groups of tenants when they say something isn't right."

Natasha Elcock, Chair of Grenfell United, the bereaved families and survivors' group said: "People were raising the alarm about fire safety in Grenfell before the fire, but they were ignored and belittled. The current housing regulator did nothing for us, it was entirely invisible. And two years later, despite all the promises, we still hear from people across the country who are not being listened to about their homes.

"If we want to stop another Grenfell fire, we need serious change – change that will genuinely make a difference to people living in social housing. We need a new system, not a rebrand of the current one. The government introduced a new regime for the banking industry after the financial crash, it should be doing the same for the housing sector. After all, what could be more important than people's homes."

Twin pressures on landlords to improve the standard of existing homes while also delivering more new homes

The importance of delivering their social purpose has leapt for councils and housing associations in the past 12 months, with an increased focus on improving homes for existing residents.

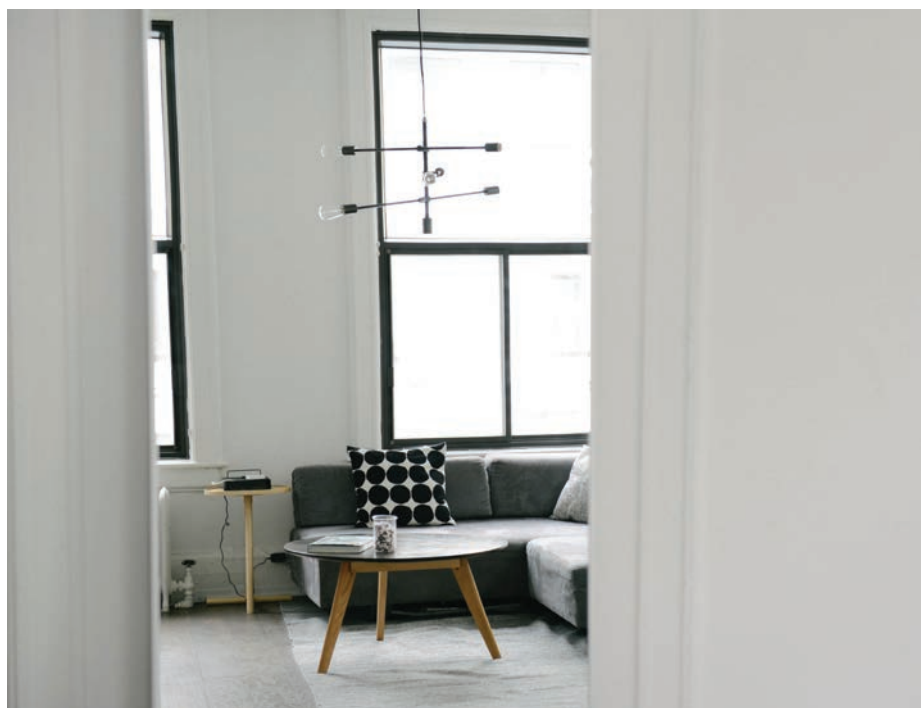
The annual Savills Housing Sector Survey 2019 found 84 per cent of senior housing professionals see the provision of social rented homes as a top priority, compared to 65 per cent last year.

The survey of more than 500 housing sector leaders across housing associations and local authorities also found that just over half of respondents now believe too little is being done to maintain existing homes, up from 35 per cent in 2017.

Compliance and fire safety remain central issues, with 78 per cent of respondents reporting increased investment in health and safety compared to two years ago, and tenant engagement has climbed the agenda for 59 per cent, up from 34 per cent in 2018.

Other key findings in the annual survey include:

- Local authority building: 70 per cent of local authorities plan to increase their delivery of affordable homes, while 25 per cent expect a big increase – though 61 per cent say financial capacity remains the key barrier, despite the removal of the HRA debt cap;
- For-Profit Registered Providers: 72 per cent believe FPRPs have a role to play in solving the housing crisis but 65 per cent believe they are not as concerned with tenant welfare as traditional housing associations;
- Land: 78 per cent say land is the key constraint to building more homes (down from 84 per cent in 2018); while a third of housing association respondents own some strategic land and 39 per cent plan to buy some in the next five years;
- Strategic land: a third of housing associations hold strategic land (consistent over the past three years) but the volume they hold has increased; 24 per cent had enough land for more than 500 homes in 2018, which has risen to 34 per cent in 2019;
- Modern methods of construction: 69 per cent of respondents expect to be using MMC for 10-50 per cent of their homes in five years' time – compared to 21 per cent at present;
- 91 per cent believe estate regeneration has a role to play in solving the housing crisis, but this must not just be focused on delivering more homes – the key is to balance viability with the right outcome for residents; and



The survey of more than 500 housing sector leaders across housing associations and local authorities also found that just over half of respondents now believe too little is being done to maintain existing homes

- Brexit: 33 per cent say a Brexit-related market downturn would affect their development activities – up from 27 per cent last year.

HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

The findings of the Savills Survey were launched in Manchester at Housing 2019, the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference. Commenting on the results, Robert Grundy, Head of Housing at Savills, said: "There is more expectation on the social housing sector than at any time in recent memory.

"First, pressure on new housing delivery continues in the face of a slowing housing market and the uncertainty of Brexit. Along with this, and in the long shadow of the Grenfell tragedy, the Social Housing Green Paper, the Hackitt Review and the likely review of the Decent Homes Standard have led to a sustained focus on health and safety compliance of existing stock."

Grundy added: "Crucially the results from our 2019 survey reveal that there are also exciting new opportunities in the sector. Perhaps the most notable is the potential increase in delivery from local authorities following the lifting of the HRA debt cap. Encouragingly, 70 per cent of local authorities who responded to our capacity survey are planning to increase their delivery of affordable homes – 25 per cent expect a big increase."

Despite this ambition and the lifting of the HRA debt cap, 61 per cent of council respondents say financial capacity remains a key barrier. The rise in joint ventures and other forms of development partnerships indicate how town halls are working with others to find solutions.

But there is widespread recognition that the ambition of housing professionals and policymakers to significantly increase affordable housing supply cannot be realised without continued and additional grant funding.

Health issues of homeless people revealed in study

Homeless people in England are 60 times more likely to visit Hospital Accident and Emergency units than members of the general population, according to a study that reveals the extent of health problems among those who sleep rough or are stuck in temporary accommodation.

The research also shows that the proportion of homeless people with more than one health problem is far greater than would be expected given their average age of 38. The figure of about one in five is on a par with people in their 60s in the general population.

Dr Vibhu Paudyal, a senior lecturer in clinical pharmacy at the University of Birmingham and co-author of the research, said that although recent policies had resulted in some healthcare services being specifically targeted towards homeless people, more needed to be done.

Among the difficulties facing homeless people, Paudyal said some were being turned away by GP surgeries that wrongly insist patients must have proof of address, while others have faced stigma.

“We need to strengthen the access, use and outcomes of mainstream services,” said Paudyal, adding that the focus should be on prevention of health problems and that help for multiple conditions should be available in one place.

Writing in the British Journal of General Practice, Paudyal and his colleagues report how they analysed health data from more than 900 homeless patients at a specialist healthcare centre in the West Midlands, which provides access to a range of health services.

The results showed homeless people were more likely to have a range of medical conditions than the general population. Less than one per cent the general population are on the register for severe mental health problems, the proportion was more than seven times higher for homeless people, at 6.5 per cent.

Just over 13 per cent of homeless men have a substance dependence, rising to 16.5 per cent of homeless women. In addition, more than a fifth of homeless people have an alcohol dependency and almost a third had visited A&E at least once in the past year, compared with 0.5 per cent of the general population. Hepatitis C was also more prevalent among homeless people – at 6.3 per cent, compared with 0.7 per cent for the general population.

Homelessness services under threat at a third of councils

One in three councils fear running out of funds for delivering legal duties such as preventing homelessness, within the next three years.

Other statutory services such as providing adult social care and protecting children could also suffer during the lifetime of the current Parliament. The Local Government Association estimates that councils in England face an overall funding gap of £3.1 billion in 2020/21.

The LGA revealed the initial findings of its survey of council finances ahead of the Spending Review, when it held its annual conference in Bournemouth. It disclosed that:

- 1 in 3 councils fear they will run out of funding to provide their legal duties by 2022/23;
- That number rises to almost two thirds of councils by 2024/2025 or later. The LGA estimates that councils face an overall funding gap of £8 billion by 2025;
- Almost a fifth of councils (17 per cent) are not confident of delivering all of the savings they have identified to make this year (2019/20); and
- An unprecedented rise in demand means many councils are having to spend more than they planned for in adult social care, children's services and homelessness support. These overspends have seen councils forced to make in-year budget cuts to try and balance their books.

Between 2010 and 2020, councils will have lost 60p out of every £1 they used to receive from Whitehall to run local services. Since 2010 recorded cases of homelessness had risen 56 per cent. The next Spending Review will be make or break for vital local services and the LGA says securing the financial sustainability of councils must be the top priority.

FINANCIAL UNCERTAINTY

Political uncertainty and an unresolved Brexit means the chances of the Government carrying out a full three-year Spending Review this year looks increasingly unlikely. Instead, councils may face a one-year roll-over settlement.

Either way, councils urgently need some certainty about how local services will be funded next year so they can try and plan financially for next year.

The LGA, which represents councils in England and Wales, is calling for the next Prime Minister to prioritise local public services in the Spending Review and give councils urgent certainty about future funding, business rates retention and the fair funding review.

At the very least, the Government needs to confirm the continuation of key funding streams



Between 2010 and 2020, councils will have lost 60p out of every £1 they used to receive from Whitehall to run local services. Since 2010 recorded cases of homelessness had risen 56 per cent

next year and provide councils with local freedom to make decisions about council tax levels.

Councils also need a guarantee they will have enough money to meet the growing demand pressures they face next year, particularly in adult social care, children's services, special educational needs, homelessness support and public health activity.

This is the only way to ensure councils can meet their legal duties to provide dignified care for our elderly and disabled, protect children, and prevent and reduce homelessness and protect the wide-range of other local services.

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, said: “Councils in England face a funding gap of more than £3 billion next year, rising to £8 billion by 2025. If the Government fails to adequately fund local government there is a real risk to the future financial viability of some services and councils.

“Councils would normally have started their budget-setting planning process but remain completely in the dark about how much funding they will have next year. Communities relying on the vital local services that make a difference to their lives deserve better.”

Private landlords call for change of attitude to rental sector

Landlords are urging the Conservative Party to adopt a more positive approach to the private rented sector.

In a letter sent to the two leadership candidates Jeremy Hunt and Boris Johnson, the Residential Landlords Association warns that the interests of tenants are not being well served by policies which are reducing the supply of homes to rent.

According to Government data, 10 per cent of landlords representing 18 per cent of all tenancies in the sector plan to reduce the number of properties they rent out while five per cent of landlords representing five per cent of tenancies plan to leave the sector altogether.

Recent RLA research suggests that 46 per cent of landlords are planning to sell some or all of their properties. It follows a raft of Conservative policies aimed at dampening investment in the market, including imposing a tax on landlord investment in new homes to rent.

Most recently the Government has proposed limiting the ability of landlords to repossess properties when they need to.

As a result of the fall-off in investment, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has warned that expectations for increasing rents are now at their highest point for three years.

The RLA called on the leadership candidates to back its five-point plan for the sector, namely:

- Pro-growth taxation to ensure enough homes to rent to meet demand;
- A fair system for repossessing properties that protects tenants from unfair evictions while



retaining the confidence of landlords to regain possession of their property where there is a legitimate need. This needs to be coupled with a dedicated, housing court to settle disputes swifter and easier;

- Supporting vulnerable tenants by ending the Local Housing Allowance cap;
- Rooting out criminal landlords by providing councils with more resources to better use the powers they already have; and
- Rejecting all forms of rent controls which dry up the supply of homes to rent, reducing choice for tenants and thereby increasing rents overall.

David Smith, Policy Director for the Residential Landlords Association, said:

“The new Conservative Prime Minister needs to reconsider the approach to the private rented sector. Otherwise the situation for tenants will just get worse as they face less choice and higher rents because of a growing shortage of properties.

“We need a raft of changes that will encourage more investment in high standard homes rather than efforts to scapegoat landlords for failures by successive governments to build enough homes.” The RLA has also called for the scrapping of the Right to Rent scheme, due to its discrimination against British ethnic minorities.

Campaigners demand an end to the long wait for a tenants watchdog

An influential group of campaigners are demanding the Government acts now to establish a regulator for the social housing sector. They have cited the lack of changes since the Grenfell disaster as the primary reason for their demand.

Writing to the editor of The Guardian newspaper, the group included several chief executives of major charities, tenant activists, academics and those involved in supporting Grenfell survivors in the immediate aftermath of the fire.

They say that previous governments have responded to other crises in the past by establishing consumer protection regulators, quoting the cases of the Food Standards Agency after a series of high-profile food deaths, and the Financial Conduct Authority following financial scandals.

In a strong and emotive challenge to this

Government, the letter asks: “Why should social tenants matter less?” They say tenants need to know that their wellbeing, health and safety will be protected, and standards rigorously enforced, by a regulator focused on working for them.

They called on the Government to show social tenants that they matter and will no longer be ignored. “When the next steps for social housing are announced later this year, the Government must go further than their initial proposals. We expect nothing less than a new consumer regulator.”

DEVASTATING FIRE

Signatories included Polly Neate of Shelter, Ed Daffarn from the survivors group Grenfell United, the Rev Dr Mike Long of the Notting Hill Methodist Church, Jon Sparkes from Crisis, Ed

Miliband MP, Lord Jim O'Neill and Professor Anne Power from the London School of Economics.

“Two years after the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower, bereaved survivors and residents are growing increasingly frustrated that there has been no response to their demands for a new consumer regulator for social housing.

“They want the loss of their loved ones to be a catalyst for positive change. Yet we are still awaiting meaningful action from the Government as to how it will ensure tenants in social housing are listened to, and how it will genuinely strengthen the regulation of their landlords.

“Theresa May's speech at the Chartered Institute of Housing conference spoke of a stronger consumer regulation regime, but we need more than this.

“If the nine million social tenants in England are to feel safe in their homes, and assured they'll receive the standard of service to which they're entitled, we need a tough new regulator to enforce consumer housing standards.

National register of private landlords proposed

A national register of private landlords has been proposed by independent experts who reviewed selective licensing in the rental market, but the idea was immediately attacked by organisations representing landlords.

Both the National Landlords Association and the Residential Landlords Association say the review demonstrated an unwillingness to listen to landlords, while its proposals are unlikely to drive rogue landlords out of business.

The Housing Ministry commissioned a consultant-led inquiry into selective licensing schemes last year. These have been available for councils to use since the Housing Act 2004 and were designed to tackle concerns over anti-social behaviour and low housing demand. The experts' 228-page report was released in late June.

The report finds that selective licensing is an effective tool when implemented properly, and identifies a range of areas where the operation or implementation of selective licensing schemes could be improved.

The RLA fears the proposals will push up costs and increase red tape for those landlords providing good quality homes to rent, while criminal landlords providing sub-standard or dangerous homes will simply ignore the requirement and continue to operate below the radar.

The RLA objects to selective licensing schemes on the basis they offer no guarantees when it comes to the quality of homes, with no property inspections required as part of the licensing requirement. RLA research has shown there is no clear link between a council operating a licensing scheme for landlords and levels of enforcement.

ALTERNATIVE SCHEMES

As an alternative to selective licensing, the RLA supports a system of self-regulation for landlords, whereby compliant landlords join a co-regulation scheme which deals with standards and complaints



in the first instance, while those outside the scheme remain under the scope of local authority enforcement.

Meanwhile Richard Lambert, chief executive of the NLA said: "Far too often we see local authorities failing to live up to their side of selective licensing. It's shameful that the Review has ignored our call for regular reporting against schemes' published objectives, which would be easy to implement and would actually hold councils to account.

"The majority of selective licensing schemes are introduced without any thought having been given to their implementation, funding and enforcement, leading to good landlords paying for effectively nothing. For the most part, selective licensing has failed to root out the bad landlords and the recommendations in the report will do very little to change that.

"The suggestion to introduce a national registration of landlords and a property MOT

would be a viable alternative to selective licensing, but would need to be well thought out and proportionate to avoid an unnecessary burden on good landlords."

The NLA does support the proposal for standardised requirements for property conditions, which local authorities can enforce against. However, the recommendations fail to include anything to close the loopholes which currently allow those who fail the 'fit and proper' person test to continue operating in other areas or through a letting agent.

Last year the Minister for the PRS, Heather Wheeler said: "The Government does not support a mandatory register of private landlords. The majority of landlords provide decent and well managed accommodation and requiring those landlords to sign up to a national register would introduce an unnecessary and costly additional layer of bureaucracy."

Landlords urged to push ahead with building safety

A top civil servant has urged social landlords to push ahead with works to improve the safety of tenants' homes rather than waiting for the Government to legislate on changes.

With leaders of housing associations and stock holding councils waiting for the formal outcomes of the Hackitt Review changes (expected in the Autumn), the deputy director of building safety at the Ministry of Housing said

they should proceed with plans for delivering greater safety.

Izzy Connell was speaking at the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference alongside senior sector figures, who said landlords could act now on the basis of the consultation proposals.

Ms Connell said: "I totally echo the view that others have put forward that if you can do this now, thinking about your buildings for all the other

reasons that you have to, then it's the right thing to do – it just makes you so much better placed as and when this legislation comes in."

A consultation exercise is underway until 31 July on Government plans for implementing recommendations from the Hackitt Review of fire safety and building regulations. This includes creating 'dutyholders', to be responsible for a building's safety at different points in its lifetime and the introduction of a regulator for building safety.

The proposals will apply to buildings higher than 18 metres, rather than 30 metres, as recommended by Dame Judith.

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Confused messages given over cladding

The Government is running the risk of giving mixed messages to the housing and construction sectors after a senior civil servant instructed councils they needed to check the safety of cladding on all buildings, irrespective of their height.

Last year Ministers decided to ban combustible materials on buildings over 18 metres in height, in a response to the Grenfell Tower fire and the Hackitt Review on fire safety and building regulations. In doing so, it resisted pressure to ban combustible materials from all cladding.

The instruction to check the safety on all buildings was sent to local authority building control officers in a circular from Frances Kirwan, deputy director of building safety at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

They were told to check the safety of cladding on all buildings, even those shorter than 18m. She added: "We are issuing this reminder because recent events have indicated that consideration is not routinely given to Requirement B4 and the need to resist the spread of fire over external walls in circumstances where the guidance... is not specific."

In a separate announcement a Government

spokesman said high-pressure laminate (HPL) cladding should be removed from high-rise blocks if it is combined with combustible insulation.

MISLEADING ADVICE

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesman said: "There should be no buildings in this country with this combination of cladding and insulation. Building owners are legally responsible for ensuring the safety of their buildings and need to make sure this is the case."

HPL cladding is different from the ACM cladding that was used on Grenfell Tower, but it is believed to have been used much more widely on thousands of medium and high rise buildings, both for residential and commercial use.

The repercussions are potentially enormous and will require many hundreds of millions of pounds to pay for the removal and replacement of HPL cladding. Labour MPs clashed with Housing Minister Kit Malthouse accusing him of misleading Parliament over HPL and whether it had been the subject of safety tests.

Meanwhile it was revealed in July that a privately funded safety test on the ACM cladding of the type

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesman said: "There should be no buildings in this country with this combination of cladding and insulation. Building owners are legally responsible for ensuring the safety of their buildings and need to make sure this is the case."

used on Grenfell Tower, had shown that it should not have been awarded a fire safety rating.

The British Board of Agrément had originally certified the Reynobond PE cladding panels (aluminium sheets with a polythene core) as Class 0 in 2008. The manufacturer Arconic subsequently marketed ACM as achieving this standard. But a new test on ACM panels by Warrington Fire ended prematurely when the polythene melted as the panels were heated.

No funding for removal of combustible balconies

The Government is refusing to provide funds for the removal of balconies made from combustible materials after a fire badly damaged a block of flats in east London.

Samuel Garside House in Barking had to be evacuated after a fire quickly spread from a single balcony, to rage across the external timber cladding on the walls and balconies. The fire destroyed 20 flats and damaged another ten. Fortunately only two residents suffered injuries from smoke inhalation.

After their evacuation residents claimed there were problems with the building's fire doors, the water sprinkler system and the fire alarm, raising a host of issues about the safety of the six-storey block and many others built to a similar design and with identical materials.

The ban on combustible materials brought in last November only applies to balconies and external

walls on buildings above 18 metres in height. Samuel Garside House is below 18 metres.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said that building owners should remove combustible materials from balconies "as soon as is practical", regardless of the height of the building.

Speaking at the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference, Housing Minister Kit Malthouse said the Government was still consulting on its legislation to implement the Hackitt Review recommendations, and that building height would be part of that.

He said the MHCLG would not contribute money towards the work. Malthouse said: "It's not envisaged that there money for this work at the moment. As we've said, building owners are responsible for the safety of their buildings."

EXTRA CHECKS

"ACM [aluminium composite material, which was used to clad Grenfell Tower] is an exceptional situation where we've had to act quickly and frankly. With ACM, quite a lot of private sector owners and developers are fronting the bills anyway. But with balconies, we're not currently envisioning any funding, no."

During his keynote speech, the minister focused heavily on the design and quality of new housing.

He suggested that poor design standards in new housing was holding back developments. "Ask yourself, why aren't you welcomed into an area... might it be something to do with the style, with the design of the product?"

Not surprisingly given its experience with Grenfell Tower, but Kensington and Chelsea Council has responded to the Barking fire and Government advice by saying it will check the balconies on its homes for fire safety issues.

A council spokesman initially said it was too early to say whether they would remove any combustible materials found on balconies, but they will check the insulation used underneath and other materials. Subsequently they revised this to say they will remove and replace any materials they are not satisfied with. It is also writing to housing associations and private landlords in the borough to ask them to check balconies on their buildings as well.

Councillor Kim Taylor-Smith, deputy leader of RBKC, said: "We have a number of families in the borough who have been rehoused after the Grenfell tragedy two years ago and we will make sure their homes are prioritised. But this is a borough-wide effort and goes hand in hand with other measures we are putting in place, including fire door upgrades."



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Landlords call for fast track housing tribunal if Section 21 evictions are abolished



Almost four out of ten private landlords want the Government to introduce a fast track housing tribunal if the Section 21 'no-fault' eviction process is abolished.

The Section 21 'no-fault' eviction process was introduced in The Housing Act 1988 and has been a mainstay of the UK's Private Rented Sector ever since.

It allows landlords to give tenants two months' notice of their intention to take back possession of a property at any time after the initial fixed term of the tenancy agreement has expired.

The Government announced its intention to abolish Section 21 in April. In its place, it proposes that landlords should follow the Section 8 process

which requires them to demonstrate that tenants are in breach of their rental agreement when serving notice.

Paragon Banking Group surveyed over 200 private sector buy-to-let landlords for its PRS Trends Report for the second quarter of 2019. The survey comes ahead of a Government consultation this summer, designed to gather views on how best to make the existing Section 8 process work more effectively.

Alongside a fast track tribunal, almost one quarter of landlords in Paragon's survey (24 per cent) called for a shorter court process; one in seven (15 per cent) would like a guaranteed way to cover their costs and seven per cent

argued for the ability to submit evidence online.

The majority of landlords (84 per cent) said they felt the maximum time from serving notice to taking possession should be no longer than eight weeks.

According to the MHCLG's recent English Landlord Survey the vast majority of tenancies end at the tenant's request.

John Heron, Director of Mortgages at Paragon said: "Some of the main concerns for landlords around a move to the Section 8 eviction process relate to the efficacy of the existing court process. What we see here is widespread support for a fast track housing tribunal that can deliver a fair and timely solution for both landlords and tenants."

Government call for evidence on reform of deposit protection

Housing Secretary James Brokenshire has announced a call for evidence on tenancy deposit protection in England.

The call for evidence seeks to understand the barriers tenants face providing a second tenancy deposit when moving from one tenancy to the next and looks at what can be done to speed up the return of deposits to tenants at the end of the tenancy.

The Government will look at whether existing initiatives to address deposit affordability are meeting tenants' needs and whether the market can offer improved products. It will also explore

innovative approaches that could be taken to help tenants move more easily, including allowing tenants to passport their deposit between tenancies.

ARLA Propertymark has been involved in a Government working group of stakeholders examining this issue throughout the last 12 months. It is supportive of the concept of tenants moving deposits between tenancies, but says it is essential that the solutions are workable and affordable for tenants.

David Cox, Chief Executive, ARLA Propertymark welcomed the Housing Secretary's announcement for deposit passporting in the

private rented sector: "We're supportive of this concept in principle, but it needs a practical, workable solution.

"We've been sitting on MHCLG's Tenancy Deposit Protection Working Group for the last 12 months, looking at the problem and finding answers. Significant progress has been made, and we think we're close to a practical solution, but we're not quite there yet.

"For deposit passporting to work we need to ensure that both the outgoing landlord's deposit can be used if needed, while the incoming landlord has certainty they will get the full deposit they have agreed by the tenant.

"Affordability for tenants of any bridging loan or insurance policy will be key if deposit passporting is going to be a workable and affordable solution for the future of deposits."

HSE investigates ALMO over missing gas safety checks

The Health and Safety Executive is investigating a management company of council homes in Kent after delays in carrying out hundreds of gas safety checks on appliances in tenants' homes.

East Kent Housing manages around 17,000 homes on behalf of four councils at Canterbury, Dover, Thanet and Folkestone & Hythe. It is the only ALMO which manages tenants' homes on behalf of multiple councils. Its responsibilities include the annual servicing of gas boilers for hot water and heating.

A spokesman at EKH issued an apology to residents when the issue first emerged in June. Rosie Duffield, Labour MP for Canterbury, called the situation "simply unacceptable". She claimed that at one stage up to 924 homes were affected by delayed or missing services.

The ALMO's spokesman added: "As soon as we became aware of the problem, we worked as quickly

as we could with our four councils to secure a number of additional contractors to support the service.

"Our staff have worked evenings and weekends to contact all residents directly affected to arrange appointments, by letter, visit and telephone, and we are offering evening and weekend slots to make it more convenient for residents.

"We are determined to make sure this does not happen again and we have commissioned an independent investigation into what went wrong and will implement any actions it identifies."

The HSE issued a statement saying it has been made aware of concerns regarding East Kent Housing and is currently investigating, but was unable to comment further.

In a joint statement, the four councils said they had worked with EKH to secure extra gas engineers and were determined to make sure this did not happen again. The results of an independent

Rosie Duffield, Labour MP for Canterbury, called the situation "simply unacceptable"

investigation into what went wrong were awaited.

Subsequently it emerged there may be further cases of non-compliance with regards to safety work to tenants' homes, as a report from Canterbury Council's chief executive identified potential issues with fire, lift, electrical and legionella works.

The city council is understood to be considering a number of options including consulting its tenants over withdrawing from the ALMO, or keeping it on but with a reformed structure.

South West HA downgraded over health and safety failings

A medium sized social housing landlord has been downgraded over health and safety concerns affecting services to tenants' homes.

The Green Square Group owns 12,000 properties across Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. Its grading for governance was moved to G2 by the Regulator of Social Housing, meaning that Green Square still complies with the regulator's requirements but needs to improve aspects of its governance arrangements.

The downgrading followed an in-depth assessment (IDA) which found "a clear lack of leadership around health and safety issues" at

GreenSquare. The HA failed to implement a large number of high priority actions arising from fire risk assessments, as well as gas and lift safety concerns.

The regulator's assessment added: "The seriousness of the matters identified and the historic lack of oversight on health and safety evidenced during the IDA led us to conclude that there were material governance weaknesses."

Commenting on the judgement, the association's chief executive Ruth Cooke said: "The change to our governance grading is of course no surprise following the regulatory

notice issued earlier this year.

"We have already apologised unreservedly for past failings in relation to health and safety, but saying sorry is not enough. What's most important is ensuring that previous mistakes are not repeated. The regulator has noted the work we have done, and are doing, in this respect and the assurances we have given."

Green Square has committed to undertake a full governance and risk review, but the regulator said "material issues of relevance to the regulator were not communicated in a timely or proactive way during the course of the IDA".

Rogue landlord guilty of putting tenants at risk and hit with hefty fine

A rogue landlord in Merseyside has been fined and ordered to pay more than £58,000 after putting vulnerable bedsit tenants at risk.

55-year-old Heather Jackson allowed tenants to occupy 16 bedsits which she created in a Southport property, despite not having a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licence and the building being in a shoddy condition with a

leaking roof and faulty fire alarms.

Council inspectors visited the property with police in December last year and found the fire alarms had been deactivated, escape routes were blocked, a fire exit corridor had been converted into a makeshift kitchen and a fire door had been locked shut. She also failed to provide evidence of gas safety records.

Jackson pleaded guilty to 12 housing standards offences at South Sefton Magistrates Court.

A spokesman for Sefton Council said: "HMO legislation is put in place to help protect tenants and also serves to ensure landlords comply with all rules and regulations. This was clearly not the case here and we welcome the outcome at court and the substantial fines imposed.

"We want to send a clear message to the small number of landlords who compromise the safety of their tenants that this is not acceptable and can end up in a court case. As proved today, large fines will be imposed by the courts and we will always act to protect our residents."

Criminals target new benefits system

The Government's flagship reform of the welfare benefits system has been targeted by criminals who are fraudulently claiming millions of pounds and leaving legitimate claimants out of pocket.

A BBC News investigation revealed how a major flaw in the Universal Credit system is being exploited. This allows criminals to make bogus on-line claims for hardship relief loans on behalf of claimants, who are then responsible for repaying loans often amounting to £1,500 per person.

It was reported that thousands of fraudulent claims were being made each month, with much of the activity centred on the north west of England. Over 1.5 million people are currently being paid benefits through the Universal Credit system, which rolls six separate benefits into a single payment. New claimants have to wait up to five weeks for their first payment.

Benefit claimants are being exploited by the criminals who often pose as officials, or as people who can help them to access financial help. Once the loan, typically of £1,500 is paid into the claimant's bank account, the criminal demands a "fee" of about £1,000.

Claimants then find their legacy payments of child benefit, housing benefit or jobseeker's allowance have stopped and they have been transferred onto Universal Credit.

The hardship loan is supposed to help them with their transition onto the new payment system, but the loan is a debt which needs to be repaid. This in turn is pushing claimants into arrears with their rent and council tax, which could see claimants losing their homes.

The BBC found evidence that staff at the Department of Work and Pensions were fully aware of the scam and had been for some time. It reported that at one job centre more than a third of claims were suspected of being bogus.

The irony is that Universal Credit was meant to reduce levels of fraud in the system and yet here was evidence that it's design was helping criminals to make millions of pounds from it.

The Department for Work and Pensions said it had already secured its first conviction for this type of fraud.

DWP minister Baroness Buscombe said: "We're encouraging people to listen to their instincts. If someone offers you a low-cost loan from the government, they may be trying to steal your identity.

"Treat your personal information for benefits in the same way you would for your bank. And if you think you've been targeted, we urge you to report it urgently."



Completion of new social housing rises almost 5 per cent

The completion of new social housing properties in England by housing associations and local authorities rose by almost five per cent in the past year according to official statistics.

Completions for the 2018/19 year rose 4.8 per cent to 30,470, up from a combined total of 29,070 in the previous year. HAs contributed 27,910 new homes and councils built 2,560 – the latter was up by 30 per cent from the 1,960 they contributed to the total in 2017/18.

Final quarter completions fell to the lowest figures recorded for the year by both HAs and councils, with the January to March totals falling to 6,830 and 550 respectively, down from 7,220 and 580 in the October to December third quarter.

New starts in the final quarter were also disappointing, as HAs and councils both recorded their lowest three month totals during the year. HAs started 5,810 new homes while councils started just 380 new homes. The figures were down just over 1,000 new home starts on the previous quarter, but were remarkably similar to the sluggish figures at the end of the previous year.

On a brighter note the annual figures for new starts were up for both HAs and councils, at 25,070

and 2,460 respectively, from 24,730 and 1,630 a year earlier. The joint figure of 27,530 new home starts was up 4.4 per cent on the previous year.

However, the figures represent disappointing totals overall as they fail to make a significant impact on the hundreds of thousands of households on local authority waiting lists.

When the figures are combined with those from the private sector, it shows that over the whole of 2018/19, the number of houses started rose just one per cent to 162,270 homes, while completions jumped six per cent to 169,770 new homes.

It is only when figures for conversions are added to these new build figures that the new homes total rises to a more respectable 240,000 to 245,000 new homes – the highest number for many years, although still some way short of the Government's target.

MPs on a select committee have warned the Government they risk never hitting the 300,000 new homes target unless they embrace modern methods of construction. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee said ministers needed to increase capacity and improve investor confidence in the sector if it is to have a meaningful impact on annual housebuilding targets.

Unregistered gas fitter jailed for dangerous gas work

A Staffordshire gas fitter has been jailed after gas work he performed at a domestic property was left in a dangerous condition.

Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court heard how Colin Christopher Batchelor carried out gas work in September 2016 that included removing an old boiler, installing a new boiler, reinstalling a gas meter and connecting pipework while he was unregistered.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that Colin Christopher Batchelor had performed gas work while falsely claiming to be a member of Gas Safe.

He was not competent to carry out work in relation to gas fittings, he did not have any relevant qualifications and he failed to carry out any test or examination to verify that the installation was gas tight following his work. This resulted in the work

not being performed in a manner which would prevent danger to people.

Colin Christopher Batchelor of Tean, Stoke-on-Trent pleaded guilty to five breaches of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. He was sentenced to eight months immediate imprisonment for each offence, to be served concurrently.

After the hearing, HSE inspector Dr Riley Roberts commented: "The Gas Safe Register exists to protect the public from people such as Colin Christopher Batchelor, who are prepared to work illegally, falsify records and carry out potentially dangerous gas work.

"Performing gas work without being competent to do so can be highly dangerous and lead to a loss of life. All gas work must be done by a registered Gas Safe engineer to ensure the highest standards are met to prevent injury and loss of life."

Right to Buy sales plummet by a quarter

Right to Buy sales of council homes fell by 23 per cent in the final quarter of last year, but the number of homes built and acquired slipped further behind the Government's one-for-one replacement pledge.

Official figures showed that English councils sold 2,612 homes to sitting tenants between January and March 2019. This was down from 3,396 sales a year earlier. Councils received £219.7 million from these sales during the quarter, which equated to an

average receipt of £84,100 per home down from £82,800 in 2017/18.

During the whole of 2018/19, some 10,213 council homes were sold, a fall of 21 per cent on 2017/18 and the lowest annual number of sales since 2012/13 when the discounts were substantially increased (to encourage more sales) and below the 17,684 homes sold in 2006/07. This brings the total number of council house

sales since 2012/13 to 78,271.

Despite the Government's much publicised commitment to replace all of the sold off properties, only 1,406 homes were started or acquired by councils during the last quarter of the year.

Replacements now lag 4,170 homes behind the replacement commitment total, with 23,685 additional affordable homes started or acquired between 2012/13 and 2018/19, against a target of 27,855.

Meanwhile councils are awaiting the outcome of a Government consultation exercise on how Right to Buy receipts can be used, which closed in October.

Sheffield Council upgrades its fire alarm protection

Sheffield City Council has decided to upgrade the fire alarm systems across its entire housing stock as part of a major electrical upgrade programme to keep tenants safe in their homes.

Phase one of the work will see over 20,000 properties upgraded with mains powered smoke alarms fitted in every circulation space on each storey (hallways and landings), in the principal

habitable rooms and in every access room serving an inner room, plus a heat alarm in the kitchen.

In addition, carbon monoxide alarms are being installed in every room that has a fuel burning appliance.

The city council is running the alarm upgrades alongside its fixed wire testing programme, to minimise disruption to tenants

and access issues to properties, until 2021.

Peter Marr from the Council's Repairs Policy and Investment Team, said: "Sheffield City Council believes that the best way to protect tenants from Carbon Monoxide poisoning is through the provision of an audible CO Alarm coupled with educating tenants on how to stay CO safe.

"Since the start of this programme, a small number of CO instances have been highlighted and acted upon. Coverage, therefore, is in every room with a fuel burning appliance (gas or solid fuel, open or room sealed, with or without flame shut-off features etc.)."

New deal to develop 900 build-to-rent homes in Battersea

Volume house builder Telford Homes has agreed to develop almost 900 build-to-rent homes as part of a £280million scheme at Nine Elms Park, Battersea in south west London.

Land for the new build scheme was bought from the Royal Mail and is situated close to the new

United States Embassy. The scheme is expected to be completed in 2024.

Jon Di-Stefano, chief executive of Telford Homes, said: "We are delighted to be building this exciting scheme for Henderson Park and Greystar. We have been working on the detailed design for some time

and we can start work on site immediately.

"We continue to make progress against our objective to increase the group's output of build-to-rent homes in London, and this contract with Henderson Park and Greystar, with whom we have a strong relationship, highlights our position as a trusted partner at the forefront of this fast-growing sector."

In March, Telford Homes announced that it had signed a deal with Invesco Real Estate and M&G Real Estate, as long-term strategic build-to-rent partners, to build more than 400 homes.



HAs urged to be more open and transparent by regulator

Greater openness with their tenants and the regulator has been stressed for English housing associations after it was found the number of social landlords investigated for possible breaches of consumer standards rose last year by 61 per cent.

The Regulator of Social Housing has revealed that 502 HAs were referred to it in 2018/19 (down from 543 in 2017/18) but of these, 124 were escalated to the highest level and investigated by the regulator, a significant increase on the 77 investigations in 2017/18.

Although the regulator said it did not consider this to be “a material change” which was in line with some earlier years’ experiences, it noted this was a “significant year-on-year increase”.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of the regulator, said that a review of consumer regulation in 2018/19 had reinforced its view that well-run and well-governed organisations needed to have systems in place to listen to and engage with tenants, and to take prompt and effective action when tenants may be at risk.

“I continue to urge all social housing providers to look at how accountable they are and how they can be more transparent with their tenants” said Ms MacGregor.

Of the 502 referrals made to the regulator, some 31 per cent were from HAs themselves, down from the 48 per cent figure in the previous year, when there was a spike in self-referrals following the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017.

One in seven self-referrals during 2018/19 came immediately after the regulator informed a HA that it planned to carry out an in-depth assessment. This has clearly irritated the regulator and prompted it to remind all HAs that they should communicate with them “in a timely manner, in all cases of potential non-compliance with our regulatory standards”.

The regulator also called on HAs to act to ensure all their homes are safe. It also encouraged associations to be able to demonstrate compliance with all the regulator’s standards, “including how they engage with their tenants”. It reminded HAs that they had to maintain good relationships with their tenants and handle complaints effectively.

Westminster council tenant hit with £100k sub-letting fine

A council tenant has been evicted and ordered to pay over £100,000 after being taken to court by Westminster City Council for illegally sub-letting his social housing flat in Victoria as a holiday home through Airbnb.

Legal action was taken against Toby Harman, after it was found the property on Vauxhall Bridge Road had been advertised on Airbnb with over 300 reviews dating back to 2013.

The council’s Corporate Anti-fraud Service found some of the reviews mentioned Harman by his name, thanking him for his advice and local restaurant recommendations. Bank statements also

proved he had been receiving payments from Airbnb for a number of years.

Harman was taken to court by the council for flouting the terms of his tenancy agreement and last summer the council was awarded a possession order for the property. The tenant’s permission to appeal this was unsuccessful and at a recent hearing, the judge made an Unlawful Profits Order of £100,974.94 – one of the highest ever awarded to the council. The tenant also been evicted from the property.

Westminster has a specialist team to tackle abuses of short-term lettings and more than 1,500

properties are under investigation. Last year, Westminster successfully recovered 24 social housing properties from fraudsters, allowing the properties to be re-allocated to residents in need of a new home.

The council is now calling on the Government to introduce a compulsory cross-platform registration scheme for property owners, so councils know what properties are being short term let and for how long.

Councillor Andrew Smith, Westminster’s Cabinet Member for Housing, said: “Social housing is there to provide much-needed homes for our residents, not to generate illicit profits for dishonest tenants. It’s illegal for council tenants to sub-let their homes and we carry out tenancy checks, as well as monitoring short-term letting websites for any potential illegal sub-lets.”

Is renting really just for the young?

Patrick Mooney looks at data that suggests significant changes in private renters are taking place

It's a commonly held view that one of the main drivers for growth in the private rental market over the past decade has been a huge rise in the number of young adults forced into becoming tenants because they are unable to buy their own home.

Mortgages have been scaled back to no more than 75 per cent of the typical purchase price and 25 per cent deposits are simply unaffordable for most, unless the lucky person is well off or has generous parents. As a result the private rented sector has doubled in size since 2007/08.

This perception of who private tenants may have been accurate, at one point, but several recently published studies and surveys have shown that demographics are changing quickly in the privately rented sector. Our social, care and housing policies need to catch up with quickly or we risk making an already difficult set of circumstances even worse.

A DIFFERENT CLIENTELE

At present households comprising people aged over 65 account for less than 10 per cent of all those living in the private rented sector, but their numbers are reportedly rising very fast.

A recent survey by the National Landlords Association found the number of retired people in the UK moving into the private rented sector increased by more than 200,000 over the last four years and it is on a sharp upward curve.

Meanwhile a cross party parliamentary group specialising in ageing and older people has just completed an inquiry into their housing and concluded that the number of older people renting in the private sector will soar in coming years. Sadly it also concludes that many of them will be living in properties that do not meet their needs.

"Many older people are already living in unsafe, unsuitable and unhealthy accommodation with little hope of being able to move somewhere better or improve their homes," said Rachael Maskell MP, who chairs the group.

"Unless we work to find tangible solutions, older people and some of the most vulnerable in society will continue to live in substandard and unsuitable accommodation, the implications of which could be devastating to their physical, mental and social wellbeing."

COSTLY POOR CONDITIONS

The cross-party group found that substandard housing is costing the NHS some £1.4bn every year with cold, damp and other hazards causing falls and exacerbating conditions such as heart disease, strokes, respiratory illnesses and arthritis as well as contributing to poor mental health among older people.



The English Housing Survey has repeatedly found property conditions to be worst in the private rented sector. About a quarter (27 per cent) of private rented homes failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2016/17. The comparative figure for the social rented sector was just 13 per cent.

Another cause for concern is that the energy efficiency and property insulation of PRS homes is much lower. In the most recently published results, the average SAP rating among private rented homes was 60, compared to 67 for social housing.

Much of the difference is explained by the private rented sector consisting of 'older' housing, which is generally less well insulated. This gap is narrowing slowly as a result of recently completed 'build to rent' housing schemes and the large stock of buy to let properties benefitting from double or triple glazing and higher levels of insulation.

FUTURE NEEDS

The cross party group of MPs and Lords recommended a national housing strategy to help to improve housing standards for this and future generations of older people.

Lady Greengross, a cross-bench peer said: "Unless we work on sustainable solutions, vulnerable older people will continue to live in substandard accommodation, the implications of which could be devastating to their physical, mental and social wellbeing."

This raises major issues over the accessibility and affordability of homes for rent, both now and in the future, for current and future generations. By accessibility we mean the ease with which we can enter and get around the inside of our homes. For an ageing population we do not want to see people trapped inside just one or two rooms of their home.

IMPROVEMENTS ARE REQUIRED

In 2016/17, almost a quarter of privately rented households (23 per cent) reported a household member with a long-term illness or disability.

Privately rented homes are also more likely to fail the statutory minimum standard for housing. In 2016, 15 per cent (750,000) of private

rented dwellings had at least one Category 1 hazard; this was a higher proportion than owner occupied (13 per cent) and social rented homes (six per cent).

This makes it all the more important for homes to be built or adapted with mobility issues in mind. For instance how easy is it to get a wheelchair through the doorways and between rooms.

While grants are available from local authorities to adapt properties for disabled people, these can be difficult to obtain, budgets are limited and the application process is often described as bureaucratic.

There are usually strict conditions to comply with and major changes, such as through floor lifts or installing wet rooms, can take a long time to organise and fit.

Many landlords do not want physical changes made to their properties, particularly if they believe these damage the value of their main assets and reduce the chances of them being sold at a later date.

RENTS ALSO NEED ADDRESSING

By affordability we mean the cost of living in a property, where the rent remains the biggest and most important outlay for tenants. On average, private tenants spend 34 per cent of their household income on rent, whereas social renters spend an average of 28 per cent on rent.

An increasing number of private tenants, both those in work or who are retired, claim benefits to top-up their incomes. Local Housing Allowance is relied upon by more than 1.2 million households in the private rented sector, but it has been frozen since 2016 and will continue to be frozen until at least 2020.

While problems in cities like London and Manchester are well documented, campaigners are now citing cases in Swindon and Newbury where only two per cent of one-bedroom flats available on the private rental market are now affordable, and in Northampton just three per cent. Fewer than one in 10 three-bedroom family homes are affordable in Ipswich, Milton Keynes, Rugby, Luton and Cambridge.

All of this adds up to a pretty dire state of affairs particularly for our older generation. If the rising numbers of older, or mature private tenants are to be housed in safe and suitable homes, then we need to take some fairly drastic actions to increase the supply of affordable and decent rented housing.

Otherwise we run the risk of older people continuing to live in substandard accommodation, the implications of which Lady Greengross warns us could be devastating to their physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Complaints to Ombudsman jump by 12 per cent

The Housing Ombudsman has revealed details of one of its busiest ever years with big increases in the numbers of complaints, general enquiries and cases referred to it for investigation.

With a much greater focus on tenants' safety and property conditions since the Grenfell Tower fire, it is no surprise that responsive repairs continue to be the largest category of complaint it receives.

Overall complaints were up by 12 per cent from 6,806 to 7,623. Repairs account for 39 per cent of the overall number, up slightly from 37 per cent in the previous year. Tenant behaviour at 15 per cent was the second largest reason for complaint and complaints handling at 10 per cent was third.

In its Annual Report and Accounts for 2018/19, the Ombudsman reports on strong performance throughout the year while at the same time dealing with significant increases in its workload.

The biggest increase was among cases coming within its remit for investigation (after completing landlords' complaints procedures) with the number of cases jumping by 26 per cent from 1,763 in 2017/18 to 2,217 in 2018/19. This is the largest increase in a single year since 2013/14 when its

remit expanded to include councils.

Enquiries went up by 14 per cent from 7,639 in 2017/18 to 8,671 in 2018/19. The average time for investigating and making determinations was reduced from 8 months to 6.7 months and was 5.9 months in the last quarter of the year. The percentage determined within 12 months was 99.8 per cent.

Of the 2,214 cases the ombudsman issued decisions on, 814 were determined in favour of landlords (meaning there was no mistake made) while 651 cases were found to involve maladministration and another 180 cases involved partial maladministration. 35 cases were withdrawn.

Andrea Keenoy, Interim Housing Ombudsman, said: "We have made great strides over the year in improving and developing our service, despite a substantial increase in case volumes. We have also succeeded in maintaining our positive customer feedback."

During 2018/19 the Ombudsman published its first 'Spotlight on' report looking at repairs complaints and advising landlords on how to learn from them to deliver a better customer service, as

With a much greater focus on tenants' safety and property conditions since the Grenfell Tower fire, it is no surprise that responsive repairs continue to be the largest category of complaint it receives

well as issuing the first special report on non-compliance with an order. The Ombudsman also increased the range of online tools to improve landlords' and residents' understanding of how to resolve disputes such as free online training and new videos.

There are 2,449 members of the Ombudsman service - 2,057 housing associations, 325 local authorities and 66 private landlords. Combined they represent over 5 million rented homes.



DML Expanded Metal Lathing – Hits 100,000 Sheets a year!

This summer, construction connector manufacturer Simpson Strong-Tie is celebrating the production of its one hundred thousandth 'DML' Expanded Metal Lathing sheet. The UK's most versatile, reinforcement mesh option, available in a sheet size of 2,400 x 700 x 0.40. The bead and mesh range from Simpson Strong-Tie is going from strength to strength, increasing in popularity as builders opt for a solution to suit a wider variety of applications. The DML is easy to install and comfortably capable for many internal and external purposes. UK Marketing Manager, Kyle Perry explains: "Our DML is something of a fan favourite; used as a general purpose reinforcement mesh, helping prevent cracking occur, when different materials meet. We can also provide this galvanised for internal use or stainless steel to fight those unforgiving weather conditions externally. Made in the UK at our head office and manufacturing facility in Tamworth, it's a marvel and a joy to watch the efficiency these are being made with by our very skilled team – making the DML an easy fit for most situations. The rate we're making them, we will be producing enough DML next year to go from our head office to Edinburgh, Scotland!" In stock and on the shelf now, helping you build safer, stronger structures.

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Designer Contracts wins big at awards

Designer Contracts has been named 'Take Back Partner of the Year' for the fourth time by Carpet Recycling UK (CRUK) at the annual awards and conference held at Edgbaston Stadium in Birmingham. Its national distribution manager, Glen Mitchell, who made a presentation to the conference about the company's recycling initiatives, was also named 'Recycling Champion of the Year'. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: "We are absolutely thrilled to be regarded so highly by Carpet Recycling UK for both our recycling efforts – and for Glenn who works tirelessly to ensure the systems are in place to divert over 250 tonnes of waste from landfill each year."

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Designer Contracts promotes team

Designer Contracts, one of the UK's largest flooring suppliers, has announced five senior promotions across the company. Lee Hassett, who recently joined the business as projects executive has been promoted to divisional director, taking control of four of the company's 15 regions. Regional managers, Jason Doyle from the North East region and Paul Slade from Thames Medway, have both been promoted to regional directors. Area managers, Kevin Hounsborne from the South Midlands region and Matt Timmins from the West Midlands, have been promoted to regional managers. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: "I'm delighted to have made five senior promotions across the business."

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UKCW: Your one stop shop

Short of time for learning and networking? Here's seven reasons not to miss UK Construction Week



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We all know we need to get out more. How else will we meet new people, learn new things, find new ideas and discover new products? Yet the pressure on our time is unrelenting. It can be difficult to justify time out of the office with all those deadlines looming and emails piling up.

The internet provides part of the answer, of course. But the smartest solution for busy local authority and housing association professionals is choosing days out that can be crammed with as much value as possible. By taking advantage of UK Construction Week (UKCW) you can tick off all the above at one event.

PRODUCTS, PRODUCTS EVERYWHERE

New products are always being developed to meet different and emerging needs. Staying up to date with all the latest technology is essential to find the right product for the job. So, if you need to source a new heat pump, find a new sustainable material, discover new roofing products or even new BIM software, then look no further than UKCW. With over 10,000 products being showcased at the event, it's the ideal marketplace to source your new product. With eight different sections ranging from build to timber and from surfaces to civils everything you need is right there under one roof. Build, for example, is sponsored by Easy-Trim, covers all aspects of roofing, cladding and insulation as well as doors, windows and glass.

THAT LUCKY ENCOUNTER

Year after year, visitors at UKCW say they won new work as a result of a planned meeting or a chance encounter at the show. People do business with people – and with 35,000 visitors set to attend UKCW, that is a lot of potential leads. Meeting face to face is the most engaging way to do business and UKCW can facilitate that. If you have spotted a business that you want to connect with contact them through the exhibitors' portal and arrange the meeting in advance. 4,000 business meetings were booked by UKCW visitors prior to the show last year, and exhibitors reported that they had generated 70,000 new business leads at the event. To help with meetings, there's a new business and networking lounge with free Wi-Fi.

GENUINE INNOVATION, NOT ANOTHER WIDGET

You could leave the future of the industry as a surprise. But where's the business sense in that? Disruptors are now present in many different markets, so this year UKCW is shining a spotlight on the serious change-makers in construction. To aid the search, a new Innovation Zone has been established in partnership with the Construction Innovation Hub (the Hub).

Another new addition for this year is the Innovation Station in partnership with On the Tools. This is a demonstration area specifically for power tools, with all the latest biscuit jointers and heavy-duty bench grinders from top trade

brands in action. Visitors can pick up tips from the experts on how to get the most from their range, try out the latest products, and cut a deal with the manufacturers as show discounts will apply.

YOUR PERSONAL INDUSTRY MBA

Condense your strategic business learning into one, two or three days of insights. UKCW brings together more than 300 expert speakers including Mark Farmer who is spearheading policy initiatives on MMC, Professor Birgitte Andersen of the Big Innovation Centre, Chandru Dissanayake, director of building safety reforms at MHCLG, Keith Waller, programme director at the Hub, Sarah Beale, chief executive of CITB and Sonia Zahiroddiny, BIM Strategy Manager for HS2. The UKCW main stage is the place to head to. It offers a programme of keynote talks and panel discussions on many of the big issues of the day around Government policy, digital innovation, modern methods of construction, sustainability, diversity, housebuilding, productivity and skills.

And if that's all a bit too high level, get stuck into the details at a wide range of workshops. This year there will be more than 150 hours of CPD content available. The programme will take on a different theme for each day of the show, tackling fire safety, health and wellbeing and sustainability. There are mini-theatres covering regeneration, MMC, digital construction, energy and HVAC, surfaces and materials, timber and the workplace. There's a new Careers Centre offering workshops on career progression, apprenticeships, staff retention, diversity, career change and new talent.

MMC MYTH BUSTING

Everyone knows that modern methods of construction (MMC) are back in vogue, but what is the reality this time? MMC is a strong theme at this year's UKCW. Full-scale builds will be erected onsite with live demos of MMC technology in action. Head to the MMC Hub for other digital demos and simulations too. Examples of the pre-manufactured structures at the show range from a modular care annex for the healthcare sector and a SIPS panel residential building, to a factory-finished modular bathroom pod for the high end hotel

sector, and offsite solutions for the education sector.

Exhibitors in the MMC Hub will be showcasing a range of products including timber, light gauge steel and concrete frames, modular volumetric systems, digitalisation of construction, 3D printing, products and services manufactured offsite, robotics, AR and VR, BIM, autonomous plant, equipment, drones and digital surveying.

AN EXPERIENCE NOT EASILY FORGOTTEN

To really understand another person, as the saying goes, you need to walk a mile in their shoes. So, when did you last get to run a building site? Make a beeline for the Coventry University stand and its site simulator, it's hailed as one of the most powerful experiences of any construction show. If you're feeling brave you can step into the site hut, take on the role of the site manager and get first-hand experience of what it's like to work on a busy project. Not for the faint hearted!

CELEBRATIONS & A BEER FESTIVAL

Everyone enjoys a good awards night and UKCW is no exception. The show hosts the UKCW Role Model of the year, the new Building Trades Awards with Fix Radio and the new UKCW Construction Awards. Plus, to encourage young people into construction the iBuiltThis competition is back and the winners will be announced at UKCW.

And if you're not involved in the celebrations, just unwind each day with a beer, some street food and a spot of music. The Fischer bar is in Hall 11 and the Rawlplug bar is in Hall 12. Don't forget the Beer Festival and of course the 'Rockaoke' on Wednesday night.

To register for your free tickets visit www.ukconstructionweek.com. For further information follow @UK_CW or search for the hashtag #UKCW2019

Glasgow tech start up iOpt wins global property competition

Tech start-up iOpt is the only Scottish company to win a global competition run by one of the UK's largest property management companies, Places for People, to find companies with technologies who can help facilitate better and more efficient management of building facilities and services.

Approximately 160 companies from around the world entered the competition to be part of The Innovation Lab, a programme developed by Places for People, to find tech talent which could transform the performance of their portfolio of over 195,000 homes in the UK. Glasgow based iOpt is among just 7 companies globally to be selected.

Established in 2016, iOpt uses data analytics, high tech sensors and the latest Internet of Things (IoT) technology to allow owners and managers of large rental property portfolios, such as social housing or build to rent investors, to monitor the internal environment of their assets from afar. iOpt's bespoke algorithms and machine learning techniques predict when and where issues such as mould growth will arise, allowing preventative intervention before repair costs or tenant health issues escalate.

info@ioptassets.com www.ioptassets.com



Dane Ralston, Managing Director

ISM wins major communications contract

Integrated Security Manufacturing (ISM), a leader in the design, development and manufacture of Intercom systems for major housing projects, has won a significant contract to install its new IP-based communications technology at 800 dwellings in the Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham. ISM's IP-Connect advanced digital technology comprises a range of easy to use outdoor panels and indoor monitors to provide Local Authority's and tenants with a next generation solution that will deliver unprecedented levels of management and control. Steve Smith, Managing Director of ISM, believes the contract is the largest Local Authority IP project of its kind.



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Tackling maintenance with technology

Mark Lowe of Pinacl Solutions discusses how housing associations can avoid costly disrepair claims with IoT technology

Claims for disrepair are on the rise, with some solicitors seeing disrepair claims doubled compared to last year. With the average disrepair claim ranging from £5,000 to £50,000, this is a real concern for many social housing providers.

A new act will see landlords, of both social and privately rented housing, be held accountable of the living conditions in their properties or risk facing legal action.

The Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act was given Royal Assent meaning it will be made an Act of Parliament, amending the Landlord and Tenants Act 1984.

Currently, social tenants have no means to compel their landlords to carry out work, while private tenants are required to rely on council environmental health teams. The new act will give tenants the right to take landlords to court if the property falls below legal standards and seek an injunction to carry out work and damages. The law doesn't introduce new standards but is a way to enforce those in the 1984 act, which includes damp caused by poor design and infestations.

In 2017, the Government introduced powers to local authorities to enable them to tackle landlords who let unfit properties. These powers include fixed financial penalties of up to £30,000 and banning orders.

Therefore, it is important for landlords to be aware of the living conditions inside their properties if they want to avoid legal action and hefty fines.

In a minority of cases, tenants are claiming as a last resort due to genuine disrepair, but the majority of claims begin with unscrupulous 'claim-farming' tactics, common in the personal injury sector but now increasing in other legal areas.

UTILISING TECHNOLOGY

So how are housing associations protecting themselves against these 'claim-farmers'? Technology can be the solution. There are many solutions that offer housing associations the ability to better manage their property health, but there are a few features that you need to look out for to ensure you are covered. New solutions allow housing associations to better document their housing management.

The introduction of 'house MOTs' is one such unique underpin – for example, Tempus, derived from Pinacl and mould causation specialists Cornerstone features the latter's proactive MOT system. This key survey process is similar to a health or vehicle MOT in that it is a recognised planned or periodic assessment. The MOT is designed to provide a moisture related survey of a structure whereby, following a detailed exterior and interior assessment with any advisories noted and acted upon, a Certificate of Condition can be issued.

Poor record keeping is the largest evidential failure and allows for easy picking for eagle-eyed lawyers. Look out for systems that allow you to automatically upload MOTs and Certificates of Condition, and provide the ability to keep date stamped notes about any work that has been undertaken or any communication that has been given to the tenant. This will prove essential to fight against disrepair claims.

A good solution will also offer the option for training and improving awareness on given issues – for example Cornerstone's expertise in mould and moisture mechanics means Tempus can provide access to experts and provide



In 2017, the Government introduced powers to local authorities to enable them to tackle landlords who let unfit properties



training for maintenance and property teams. It can also provide likely causes of problems depending on the readings that are predicted, and provide guidance on how the housing association or landlord can action, depending on the severity of the alarm.

We know from our research that around one in 10 properties have an urgent need for damp intervention which would require renovation running into tens of thousands of pounds if not detected early and acted upon. By implementing an intelligent property management system, this could help better manage your housing stock and notify your assets team to potentially problematic dwellings.

With an average family of four producing up to 14 litres of water vapour in just 24 hours, the likelihood of damp and mould is high if action isn't taken and



Up to 2 million renters have developed an illness as a result of living in an unfit property

with the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act in full force, landlords are at risk of costly legal battles, even if the tenant can be proven to be at fault.

A recent study found that out of tenants who reported damp and condensation to their landlord, only 49 per cent of cases were given help, with an average wait time of 84 days to rectify the issue. Consequently, up to 2 million renters have developed an illness as a result of living in an unfit property. However, the study also found that 20 per cent of tenants do not use the trickle vents in their double glazing, and 36 per cent admit to putting more clothes on instead of switching on the central heating, demonstrating it can indeed be tenant's behaviour that causes these issues.

Systems like Tempus record and monitor the factors that influence and drive mould, to produce data and factual alarms directly pertinent to the monitored property and adjusted to the prevailing seasonal external conditions.

The aim of remote monitoring and the associated software is to accurately report the internal conditions and, through careful consideration of the detailed influencing factors, predict resultant conditions in high risk areas in the property, such as behind furniture adjacent to north facing external walls. The system accurately reports and analyses the atmospheric conditions inside the property and aligns this data to conditions known to support and sustain mould development, with the system triggering alarms when such conditions persist.

An efficient and highly advanced system should take into account several different factors which drive mould growth within a property and how the nature of the construction, its location and the occupation influence these factors.

Mark Lowe is business development director at Pinacl Solutions



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Our investigative approach

Cornerstone recognize not all damp in structures is caused by building faults typically, plumbing leaks and water ingress etc. Occupational activities plus a lack of adequate ventilation can also introduce high levels of moisture into the property. The control of atmospheric moisture production and surface temperatures can often resolve a condensation issue therefore, correct diagnosis is essential to ensure the most appropriate remedial action can be taken. All our fact-based surveys are designed to provide professional and legal assurances

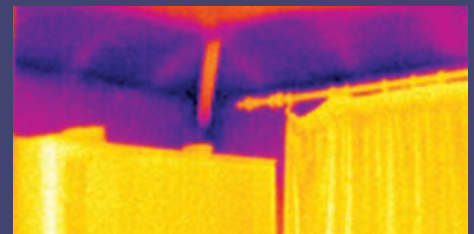
for a disrepair challenge. Typical data capture includes: remote humidity monitoring, structural moisture profiling, thermal imagery, current ventilation capabilities, internal observations, salts and gravimetric testing and any supporting structural defects.

Your damp investigation partner

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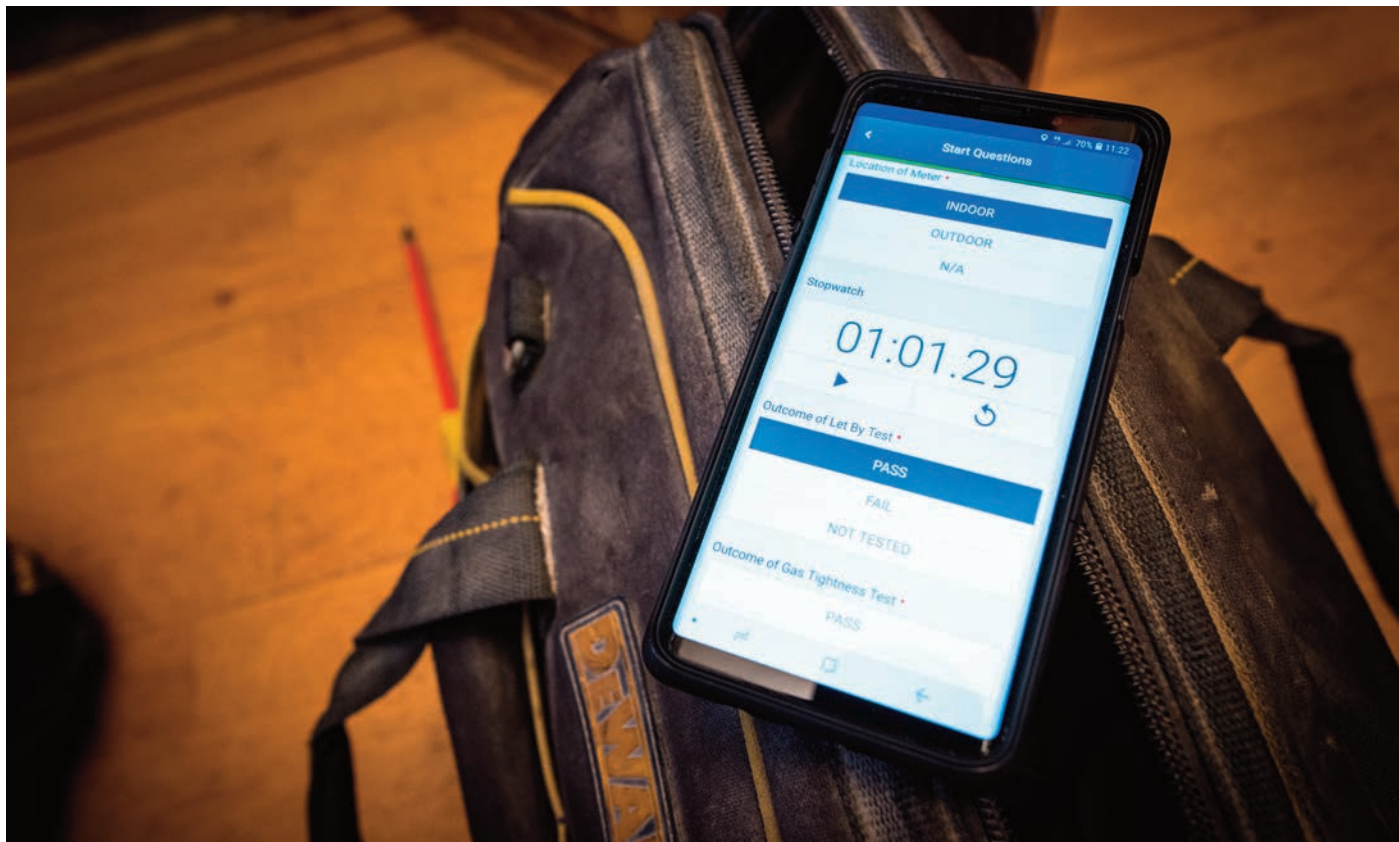
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The changing face of gas safety

Paul Durose of Gas Tag shines the spotlight on gas compliance and safety processes and what we can do better as an industry to improve



The importance of having visibility within your compliance processes can't be understated. When it comes to gas safety, a good starting point is looking at some of the main problems the sector faces. When the Gas Safe Register conducted a mass inspection on 142,000 properties and the appliances inside them, they worryingly discovered that one in six homes in the UK have a potentially dangerous gas appliance. This means that across the UK there could be roughly four million homes in danger from a faulty appliance.

There are many possible reasons for this widespread danger. One of the major considerations are the divided and flawed approaches to training of engineers across the industry. One thing Gas Tag has found while developing its solution was that rarely would the engineers carrying out the same job have the same processes or methods to complete the work. This could be because the industry is fragmented in the way we learn. Illustrating this point, there are various training schemes across the sector which deliver similar qualifications but have major discrepancies in learning time – some training courses last a couple of months where others can last a couple of years.

Another consideration is that every year an estimated 1.1 million illegal jobs are conducted by unqualified rogue gas fitters, leaving a dangerous trail of appliances behind them. One common question we get asked is how is this allowed to happen? There can be a number of reasons, but one of the primary reasons is that only one in three residents ask the engineer for proof of competency (Gas Safe ID card). This can be attributed to a lack of confidence to ask the visiting engineer for qualifications or due to a lack of knowledge, i.e the resident doesn't know they can ask for identification.

One thing from this research is abundantly clear, there must be a change in mindset and approach to the way we look after our home safety. All this research has been conducted for gas safety, but what about all of our other home safety and compliance obligations?

To tackle these accountability issues, organisations working within safety and compliance industries need to take a modern, technological approach to improve living conditions for all, not dissimilar to the approach the convenience focused sectors have taken. If you look at the type of technology we use on a daily basis to order retail products, taxis and takeaways such as Amazon, Uber or Deliveroo they all provide a level of transparency and accountability through every step of the journey from order to delivery.

It's beyond unusual that this type of accountability hasn't previously been transferred to compliance and safety. If you're a resident, how do you know that your property has been properly serviced by someone qualified? In this day and age, is a piece of paper which says your home is safe, really adequate? All we need to do is consider the improved technology and consumer standards we've all grown accustomed to and ask ourselves, do we know enough? Particularly when it's our home safety at stake.

We've all seen the success of the transparent services mentioned earlier, and now that we know how they can help, we shouldn't go backwards and accept older ways of working as standard. In gas safety terms, processes such as signing a piece of paper or keeping an electronic certificate with no real substance or detail behind it, need to evolve.

In the same way that the research from the Gas Safe Register demonstrates that residents who welcome tradespeople into their home need to become more aware, there is also a mission for new technology providers to inform the housing managers and contractors – who the residents trust for their gas safety – that our solutions can alleviate many of the issues our sector faces.

CASE STUDY

This is not just a view held by us. It's shared with many contractors we have been working with. Here is what experienced industry contractors and Gas Tag

Organisations working within safety and compliance industries need to take a modern, technological approach to improve living conditions

users Clairglow Heating have said: “With over 40 years of working in the central heating industry, Clairglow Heating has seen many advances and changes take place. Some have been positive and others not so! Ensuring that we keep up with innovations that help us to deliver a high quality service to our clients is both a challenge and a priority for our business. Gas Tag has been one innovation that we have embraced and not been disappointed by.”

“The Gas Tag system gives us the confidence that our boilers are being maintained correctly and thoroughly and access to the portal provides transparency to the work that has been carried out. The system is simple and easy to use for both engineers and administrators alike and provides a solid structure to the gas servicing process that ensures a consistent approach across the Company. The system is already helping to make us more accurate and the visibility that the systems gives us will undoubtedly help us to manage our engineers more effectively.”

“We look forward to seeing future developments and believe that this is one innovation that could truly help to shape the Gas Servicing Industry for the better.”

We have the opportunity now to use technology to give an unparalleled level of transparency of our industry to our customers. Residents are increasingly demanding transparency through technology in the services they use and with our industry embracing this approach, it can only serve to raise public confidence about the safety of the gas works conducted in their homes.

Paul Durose is founder & CEO of Gas Tag



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Reducing costs and improving safety

Andy Speake of Aico details the benefits multi-sensor alarms can bring social housing providers, particularly from a cost saving perspective

The first mains powered domestic multi-sensor was launched to the smoke alarm market in 2014 as a means of providing the best response to all fire types and reducing false alarms, making alarm specification and installation simpler in the process. Since then, a range of multi-sensors have entered the domestic market and have been growing rapidly in popularity, notably in the social housing sector.

WHAT IS IT?

A typical multi-sensor comprises both optical and heat sensors within the same alarm unit, although other variations do exist (Aico provides a multi-sensor designed for the kitchen with heat and carbon monoxide sensors, for example).

Multi-sensors differ in design and their ability to detect fires and identify false alarms can therefore vary. The most basic models can have limited cross evaluation of the sensor values, while some of the market's most sophisticated devices – in order to determine the nature of the potential fire – feature advanced algorithms to assess the variation in values from each sensor. Those more sophisticated devices are extremely effective at providing a quick response to both slow smouldering and fast flaming fires while remaining more impervious to kitchen fumes and contamination which are so often the cause of false alarms.

Research carried out by the Building Research Establishment (BRE), in conjunction with the Fire Industry Association, has highlighted the benefits of multi-sensors when it comes to reducing false alarms. The BRE 2018 Briefing Paper – 'The performance of Multi-Sensors in fire and false alarm tests' – reports on the findings of its testing of 35 different optical heat multi-sensors and estimates that potentially 38.1 per cent of observed false alarms could have been reduced if multi-sensors had been present.

Grove Community Housing Association in Northern Ireland replaced its existing smoke alarms with Aico multi-sensors and heat alarms in more than 80 per cent of its properties. Denis Bleakley, Grove Community Housing Association general manager, explains the decision: "We liked the Multi-Sensor technology to reduce false alarms for us and our tenants, which we found was backed up by BRE research." Since the new Aico alarms have been installed, Denis states that he has not had any false alarms reported.

COST IMPLICATIONS

Multi-sensors are more sophisticated than single sensor alarms and are priced accordingly – around 15 per cent more per unit. However, you are getting two alarm types in one and, with the more sophisticated models such as our own, there are complex algorithms interpreting the signals to get a better understanding of what is really happening in the immediate environment.

With multi-sensors, you are getting the best of both worlds: improved protection and reduced costs when you take into account the financial implications of reduced false alarms that multi-sensors bring.

Using our own extensive experience and market knowledge, along with insights from a range of Registered Social Landlords across the UK, we have run some figures and they make for interesting reading. Based on 10,000 properties where smoke alarms are fitted to the minimum category of protection, LD3, we estimate a potential saving of £101.5k on call out costs when compared to fitting an optical alarm. That saving more than doubles when alarms are fitted to the medium protection category LD2, which is increasingly being adopted following recent changes to BS 5839-6:2019 (the code of practice for the design,



Multi-sensors are more sophisticated than single sensor alarms and are priced accordingly – around 15 per cent more per unit

installation, commissioning and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems in domestic premises) and changes to Scottish Legislation.

Aico estimates that switching to quality multi-sensors can reduce call out rates by an incredible 90 per cent, resulting in a maintenance cost saving which offsets the initial higher purchase cost and still provides an overall saving. Social housing providers are very much in tune with this.

Watford Community Housing has installed Aico multi-sensors and accessories into two 16 storey tower blocks. David Wright, surveying manager at Watford Community Housing explains: "We believe the products deliver the

What should you look for to determine competence when choosing fire safety service providers?

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Promoting Quality in Fire Safety





The multi-sensor may only have been in the domestic market for a mere five years, but what an impact it has made during that short time! Social housing providers have been quick to realise the benefits in terms of improved tenant safety and a reduction in false alarms and overall costs

best in safety for our tenants. We are also aware of what is required from a maintenance point of view, helping us to minimise the time we spend in the properties. We were looking to address the issue of false alarms and we believe that the dual aspect of this product will help to reduce nuisance alarms.”

South Cambridgeshire District Council is also using Aico mains powered multi-sensors, along with heat and carbon monoxide alarms, in its 1,400 sheltered housing properties. “It is imperative to specify the right product for the right situation” states Eddie Spicer, M&E surveyor for the Council. “Obviously, cost is a major factor and with the introduction of the latest technologies in the multi-sensor, the lack of false alarms has paid dividends with lower call out rates and nuisance alarm activations.”

The multi-sensor may only have been in the domestic market for a mere five years, but what an impact it has made during that short time! Social housing providers have been quick to realise the benefits in terms of improved tenant safety and a reduction in false alarms and overall costs. With increasing evidence of the benefits of multi-sensors and the move to LD2 smoke alarm systems which require a higher level of protection, involving more alarms per property, the rise of the multi-sensor looks set to continue.

Andy Speake is national technical manager at Aico

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DANLERS manufacture a range of quality controls for switching a variety of HVAC loads – the switches are wall mounted, hard wired and easy to install. The Heater Boost Switches for Simply Saving Energy range automatically turns the load off after a selected time period has elapsed. Designed for use with immersion heaters and heated towel rails etc. Versions are available with different time settings plus options for switching air conditioning loads. PIR Thermostat Controls for Heating loads controls combine an adjustable room thermostat with a passive infra-red person detector. If somebody is present in the room, the heating unit is switched on to achieve the selected thermostat temperature.



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New Aico website, designed by customers

Aico, a market leader in residential Fire and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms in the UK, has launched a brand-new website – www.aico.co.uk – built around customer feedback, in order to enhance its customers' experience. Aico spent a significant period of time prior to designing the new site, speaking and listening to its customers about what currently works well for them and what they would like to see going forward. One of the key features of Aico's new website is being able to search for products via new, easy to use filters such as Series, Technology, Power Sources and any Accessories that may be needed, as well as a specific product search function.



enquiries@aico.co.uk www.aico.co.uk

Intratone reports most successful CIH 2019

Intratone has reported the CIH Housing, Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) Conference and Exhibition at Manchester Central, to be a fantastic event. The access control and door-entry specialist had a new-look stand near the front of the exhibition hall that reflected its fresh and modern branding that was explained in a short video. Members of the UK, French and German teams were on the stand and demonstrated to many visitors how Intratone's products and technologies bring a greater ease of use for housing associations or facilities managers and their residents. Intratone has booked a stand at CIH 2020 to showcase its latest innovations in access control and door entry systems.



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Aico used by social housing providers

Aico, one of the UK's market leaders in mains powered domestic Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms, is pleased to be supporting South Lakes Housing (SLH) with its 3000 Series Alarms to provide protection to tenants across a range of properties, including blocks of flats and twelve sheltered housing schemes. Top of the range 3000 Series Multi-Sensors are SLH's alarm of choice, including the Ei3024 Optical & Heat Multi-Sensor and the Ei3028 Heat & Carbon Monoxide Multi-Sensor which has been designed specifically for use in kitchens and provides tenants with protection from both Fire and Carbon Monoxide poisoning.



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Maintaining tenant safety and compliance

By Simon North – Service and Maintenance Division Manager with SE Controls



With the new 2019 edition of Building Regulations ADB coming into force on 30th August, it's evident that considerable progress has been made on improving residential safety and security, particularly within high-rise buildings since the Grenfell Tower fire. However, it's universally accepted that there is still more to be done.

In addition to the detailed review of construction industry regulations standards, much of the focus has rightfully been directed towards replacing potentially hazardous and non-compliant products, such as cladding, alongside the wider adoption of automatic fire suppression systems.

As building regulations already require residential buildings over three-storeys to be fitted with smoke control systems, which protect escape routes and keep them free from smoke, any move to supplement this protection with other safety technologies and solutions must be welcomed.

However, fire safety systems and their individual component parts are only as good as their maintenance regime. All too often, SE Controls engineers have been called to a property to undertake an inspection or review its smoke control systems only to discover there are issues that would directly impact on safety, impair escape and put lives at risk if a fire should occur.

It must be said, that in many cases, there is nothing inherently wrong with the design, installation and operational aspects of these systems, but their performance and reliability have been severely compromised purely by the lack of correct maintenance by skilled and, more importantly, qualified personnel.

FOCUSING ON SAFETY

At SE Controls, our business is focused on life safety smoke control systems that enable residents to exit a building in the event of a fire. These systems are often complex, and they must operate without fail when needed, so ongoing maintenance regimes are a critical aspect of ensuring 'failsafe' operation.

During the past two years, we have been approached by a growing number of housing



associations (HA) and local authorities (LA) to assess a wide range of existing smoke control installations in their properties to ensure they are operating correctly and are compliant within the scope of the current regulations.

Our findings in most cases were that the systems were malfunctioning and lives were placed at risk, as a consequence of a range of different maintenance related issues. A common factor in these assessments was that a 'fire contractor' had carried out the system's maintenance as part of a 'bundled' package.

COMPROMISING SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE

Whilst it is perfectly understandable that with ongoing budget pressures, HAs and LAs would want to save money by 'bundling' fire systems maintenance and smoke ventilation maintenance into an integrated multi-disciplined 'fire service and support' contract.

However, compliance to a contract does not infer compliance to legislation, which is an important distinction. Compliance to the contract covers off matters such as when PPM visits are scheduled and completed; how quickly reports are completed and number of call outs attended etc. These can be measured and are generally included in KPIs that compliance managers use to manage their contractors.

The procedures for maintaining smoke control products, equipment and systems is defined by a range of important specific legislation, yet it's quite common that compliance teams and compliance managers know very little about this vital legislation, which could compromise tenant safety.

Insufficient emphasis is placed on matters such as whether the attending engineer is trained and equipped to maintain the systems; whether the smoke ventilation system is fit for purpose and

keeping tenants safe or is the system compliant to the legal obligations that the building owner or managing agent is the responsible person for?

MEETING THE SAFETY STANDARDS

Under the scope of British Standards, including BS9991, BS9999 and BS7346 Part 8, together with Building Regulations ADB; the European EN12101 standard and best practice guidance documents from the Smoke Control Association, there are specific maintenance requirements and procedures for smoke ventilation systems that must be followed.

The penalties for not adhering to these safety standards can be significant, including the prosecution of companies, building owners, landlords and individuals responsible for building maintenance, resulting in punitive fines as well as custodial sentences.

SE Controls has already been directly involved in a significant number of projects to correct problems caused after general fire contractors have been employed, but were unable to maintain the smoke control system within the demands of these critical regulations.

Clearly, these could have been avoided if the specialised smoke ventilation maintenance contract was kept separate and handled by a specialist company with the necessary skills, experience and expertise.

There is no room for compromise, complacency or 'cutting-corners' where life safety is concerned. Meeting the regulations and maintaining systems to the required standards goes beyond compliance and is about responsibility, quality and safety in every stage of the process.

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Preventing false alarms

Barry Sargent of Nittan discusses how housing associations can significantly reduce the number of false alarms in their properties

While optical detectors remain dominant, true growth has come from multi-sensors as installers and specifiers realise the benefits to be had.

The typical fire alarm multi-sensor comprises optical smoke and heat sensors, although other variations exist. They vary dramatically in design, from basic models where there is limited cross evaluation of the sensor values, through to highly sophisticated devices featuring advanced algorithms to assess the variation in values from each sensor in order to determine the nature of the potential fire. Consequently, their ability to detect fires while discerning false alarm sources is a very mixed bag indeed.

THE BENEFITS

That said, most multi-sensors offer a number of benefits over single sensor detectors. There's the obvious time and cost benefits of being able to install one device in place of two and the aesthetics of only having one alarm on the ceiling. They can also make the job of alarm specification much easier. But top of the list, and the main reason for the ever-increasing popularity of the multi-sensor, is the reduction in false alarms.

Last year's Briefing Paper from the Building Research Establishment (BRE) - 'The performance of multi-sensors in fire and false alarm tests' - has provided concrete evidence of this. Following testing of 35 different optical heat multi-sensor detectors (representing the full range of those available in the marketplace at that time), the BRE estimates that potentially 38.1 per cent of observed false alarms could have been reduced if they had been present.

THE LIMITATIONS

The BRE Briefing Paper concludes: "this research has shown that, the use of multi-sensor technology has the potential to reduce certain types of commonly

encountered false alarms. However, the extent to which this can be realised depends on the particular implementation of features designed to improve false alarm immunity. It cannot be assumed that use of simply any multi-sensor detector will impact significantly on the occurrence of false alarms from every form of fire-like phenomena."

While offering improved performance over standard optical detectors, they do have limitations. In fact, the BRE research demonstrated that, although delayed somewhat, in all cases alarms were given from non-combustion materials such as steam, dust or aerosol. The delay might allow for any transient false alarm sources to disappear before the fire threshold is reached, but it does not entirely stop a false alarm in these instances. Furthermore, to ensure this delay, some multi-sensor detectors have been configured (or can be configured at installation) to be less sensitive which is a compromise that is not always acceptable or ideal.

SOLUTIONS WITH A DIFFERENCE

So, the multi-sensor doesn't provide the complete solution to false alarms and the quality and price vary dramatically. Still, they do perform better than single sensor alarms. But what if you could combine this principle of 'two is better than one' by adding another factor into the mix?

Dual optical heat multi-sensors, such as Nittan's EV-DPH Multi-Sensor, do exactly that by integrating a dual optical alarm technology with heat sensors to provide a very sensitive, but truly discriminatory device. The dual optical alarm technology is based on particle light scattering theory, but instead of just using the standard Infra Red light, found in optical alarms, it also employs blue LED to provide a more accurate measurement of particles within the chamber. Using a complex algorithm to calculate the ratio of these light sources, which operate at different wavelengths, the detector can determine the particle size and thus



Using a complex algorithm to calculate the ratio of these light sources, which operate at different wavelengths, the detector can determine the particle size and thus distinguish between smoke and non-combustion products such as steam, aerosols and dust

distinguish between smoke and non-combustion products such as steam, aerosols and dust. This is where most typical multi-sensors struggle.

Dual optical heat multi-sensors have the ability to reduce false alarms caused by all these mediums, without the need to lower the devices' sensitivity to actual combustion products. The technology has been further developed to make the detector more sensitive to flaming fires by shifting the alarm threshold level when the ratio of the two scattered light wavelengths indicate that the particle size present is similar to the smallest size defined as a smoke particle.

The benefits of multi-sensors are becoming better known, backed up by valid research and, with unit costs falling, are becoming all the more popular. However, assuming all multi-sensors will provide better detection and improved resistance to false alarms is not necessarily the case. Devices with dual optical sensors warrant a closer inspection and should be considered, especially where water vapour, or other non-combustible mediums, are an obvious false alarm factor.

Barry Sargent is product support manager at Nittan

Fire safety works could use up all the spare funds released under the HRA cap

Senior figures in the local government sector are warning that plans for building thousands of new council homes could be jeopardised by the high cost of fire safety works to council owned blocks of flats.

The positive impact of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap being abolished, could be wiped out if local authorities need to allocate more funds to improving fire safety.

The warning came at the CIH annual conference. Eamon McGoldrick, managing director of the national body representing ALMOs said. "Councils are going to have to potentially spend tens of millions of pounds on new safety measures.

"There is a worry that the HRA borrowing freedoms that have come our way will be spent on fire safety and new homes building will be scaled back or cancelled."

Mr McGoldrick also noted that groups such as Grenfell United had changed the dynamic of

housing within Government, and this is something he expected to continue.

Meanwhile Nick Walkley, chief executive of Homes England, expressed concerns over the quality of new housing, its impact on localities and whether there is the capacity and infrastructure to deliver on the target of 300,000 new homes a year.

He said: "There is a re-emergence of a debate on quality. There is a live debate on new build quality and what it means to live in great places. That is a significant change since three years ago.

He added: "I begin to worry about where the capability and capacity is, so that in the moment we got all the resources, we were asking what would we do? To get to this scale [300,000 homes per year], we have to move into large-scale development, which means new settlements, new city fringes, potentially whole new towns.

"There isn't a housing association in the land big enough to take on a large settlement by itself.



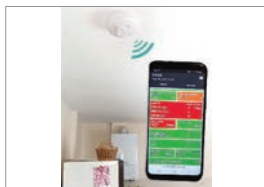
Infrastructure as we have learned through the Housing Infrastructure Fund is an awful lot more difficult than people expect."

In the same session, John Bibby, chief executive of the Association of Retained Council Housing, noted that the housing agenda had fundamentally changed in three years with the Government deciding to redirect its focus away from policies such as Right to Buy.

"If we are going to deliver a new generation of council housing, we need a revolution in how we do that. We are still waiting for the government to respond on the consultation on Right to Buy receipts. Is there a case in following the Scottish and Welsh and suspending Right to Buy altogether? Maybe there is a case to look at that."

Sheffield Council upgrades with Aico

Sheffield City Council has taken a decision to upgrade the fire alarm systems across its entire housing stock as part of a major electrical upgrade programme to keep customers safe. Phase 1 of this work will see over 20,000 properties upgraded from category LD3 to the higher level of protection, LD2, using Aico 3000 Series Alarms. Sheffield City Council is installing mains powered 3000 Series for this upgrade, using the Ei3024 and Ei3028 Multi-Sensors. The Ei3024 features Optical and Heat Sensors which constantly monitor and analyse smoke and heat levels providing the best response to all fire types and reduced false alarms.



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New ProtecWork protective clothing

ProtecWork is a new collection of protective working clothes and accessories from Snickers Workwear, which has developed out of over 40 years leading the workwear industry – and through close consultation with users and employers in the railway and energy sectors around Europe. The risk-protection properties of the clothing are integral components of the extensive range of Base-, Mid- and Top-Layer garments for men and women that combine well with the Snickers Workwear hallmarks of best-in-class durability, comfort, ergonomics and fit. The garments are manufactured from tailor-made fabrics designed to respond to the demands and risk factors of the conditions in which they're worn.



www.snickersworkwear.co.uk

CMS raises the standard sustainably at Ferguslie Park

Hundreds of homes at Ferguslie Park in Paisley have been upgraded sustainably with high performance PVCu windows and doors manufactured and installed by CMS Window Systems. The large-scale refurbishment project for Ferguslie Park Housing Association has seen 300 of the landlord's 803 properties transformed, in an area which – like many of the UK's economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods – has faced numerous challenges in recent years. Awarded the contract through Scotland Excel's competitive tendering framework, CMS was tasked with replacing windows and doors that had gone beyond the point of economic repair. One of Ferguslie Park HA's key aims was to ensure properties comply with the Scottish Government's Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESHS). This seeks to improve the energy efficiency of social housing in Scotland, helping to reduce energy consumption, fuel poverty and the emission of greenhouse gases. The project involved the manufacture and installation of a range of PVCu window types, plus external doors complete with sidescreens, finished with a Rosewood external woodgrain to the exterior and white inside the homes. CMS was also able to meet the brief for enhanced security through its PAS 24 tested and Secured by Design licensed windows and doors, providing tenants with extra peace of mind and helping to reduce crime overall. Based near Cumbernauld, CMS works with local authorities, housing associations, housebuilders, the building trade and commercial developers across the UK.

01324 841398 www.cmswindows.com



New Onyx safety shoes and boots

Combining maximum comfort and protection with a robust and durable design, Solid Gear's Onyx is available as a shoe or a boot and ideal for different types of on-site work. This EN-accredited footwear has a modern-looking style that integrates a seamless upper and Cordura reinforcements with a poured polyurethane midsole, a breathable footbed and strong rubber outsole for maximum grip on slippery and uneven surfaces. Metal-free protection comes from the fiberglass toecap and penetration board for extra personal safety. What's more, the unique BOA Closure System distributes the pressure of the fastened shoe evenly across your feet to ensure a glove-like fit all day.



www.solidgearfootwear.com

HB42 All-in-One launches in 400ml Eco-Foils

Hilton Banks has launched its best selling HB42 All-in-One Sealant and Adhesive in 400ml Eco-Foils, removing the environmental problem of disposing of the single use plastic cartridge, normally associated with these type of products. The new HB42 All-in-One 400ml Eco-Foils produce 95 per cent less waste than the single use tubes and users get 38 per cent more sealant than in the 290ml plastic tube. HB42 All-in-One seals, sticks and fills, is flexible up to 230 per cent, can be over-painted and works in the wet. It is low in VOCs and bonds to almost anything; it is also food safe, fully curing in 24 hours. The HB42 range is stocked nationwide.



www.hb42.co.uk

'Secret' funding to help adapt for disabled tenants

If you have long term tenants who need changes to the property to enable them to retain their independence, Government funding is available to cover the costs, says Closomat. The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is claimed to be one of the best kept secrets of the welfare system. It can provide up to £30,000^(a) towards the cost of undertaking changes to a property that are "necessary and appropriate", are "reasonable and can be done" to help someone live independently. The Government pot has almost doubled in five years: in the current financial year, £500m is available for DFGs via local authorities. What is also little known is that landlords- social and private- can apply on behalf of the tenant. Thus the cost of making physical and structural alterations to a property that a tenant requires can be covered in part or wholly by the funding, without expenditure by the landlord. Application forms are available from the local authority (usually the housing department). To facilitate landlords in optimising use of the resource, Closomat offers a comprehensive support package, including site survey, supply, install, commissioning, and subsequent service & maintenance. The CDM compliant package covers its range of shower toilets, toilet lifters, ceiling track hoists, height-adjustable washbasins and changing beds.

^(a) £30,000 in England, £25,000 in Northern Ireland, and £26,000 in Wales. Scotland the sum is totally at the Council's discretion.

0161 969 1199 www.closomat.com



The Blue Anchor has called last orders in Fishpool St, St Albans

A cold and draughty former pub switches to a warm and peaceful family home with Selectaglaze secondary glazing.

This Grade II Listed Blue Anchor Pub, built in the 17th century, was one of the last remaining public houses in the historic Fishpool Street. In 2017, Osprey Development's planning application was approved to convert The Blue Anchor into a two-storey four bedroomed home.

The restoration was designed by local architects, Briffa Phillips and supervised by building surveyors Kirsop and Co. The specialist team that undertook the work had many years' experience in older restorations, undertaking a painstaking job to bring back all the original character with a hint of modern amenity.

The conversion of the building was a success; however, it still required a solution for the thermally cold and inefficient single glazed primary windows throughout. Additionally, the other requirement was noise insulation from the busy thoroughfare. Due to the Listed status of the building, these windows could not be replaced.

Selectaglaze visited the Blue Anchor to make an initial assessment of all the windows that were required to be treated. Predominantly, the windows overlooking the front of the property were where secondary glazing was required. As one can imagine with a building as old as the Blue Anchor, it has a lot of quirks and irregularities, with the window reveals being far from square and true.



A total of 16 units on the first floor, ground floor and study have been treated thus far using a selection of three window styles. All the units installed are versatile and slimline framing systems, suitable for Heritage properties. The Series 10 horizontal sliding unit was required to provide easy access to some of the outer windows. The Series 20 was the perfect unit to install mimicking some of the traditional box sash windows. The Series 30 lift-out unit was applied

to the smaller windows in the building, offering a practical solution for treating windows which are rarely opened but require occasional access for cleaning or maintenance.

Selectaglaze is a leading specialist in secondary glazing, established in 1966 and Royal Warrant Holder since 2004.

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Getting glazing right

Zoe Williams of Selectaglaze discusses why housing managers and landlords should use secondary glazing and the specific considerations to bear in mind

There are many misconceptions about secondary glazing, also known as secondary double glazing, but well designed and carefully engineered systems are available that improve the performance of windows in almost any style of existing building as well as new build developments in need of significant noise insulation.

In the case of a listed building, there are often restrictions on what can and can't be replaced, with windows generally having to remain in their original state. The charm and character that period sash windows bring to the face of the building can be offset by an unpleasant environment for the user if left in a poor condition. With thin glass, rattling frames and poor sealing of the surrounds, the windows will be draughty, lose heat, increase energy consumption and allow noise to disturb the peace of an interior. Another factor to consider is the security that thin glazed windows provide – not a great deal. Secondary glazing is a very practical way of upgrading these architectural gems and, as it is regarded as a reversible adaptation, is almost always accepted by conservation officers.

SO HOW CAN SECONDARY GLAZING HELP?

It's warmer: over time buildings move, which can cause cracks and distortion of window frames leading to draughts and heat loss, often with significant differences in temperatures across a room. Installing Secondary glazing, fitted with high performance seals and designed to cover the whole of the external window frame, will reduce U-values by 40 – 50 per cent with standard

Installing secondary glazing is the most effective method of dealing with noise problems



glass and up to 65 per cent with a low emissivity glass. A significant reduction in draughts helps to even out the room temperature leading to a more comfortable environment.

It's quieter: installing secondary glazing is the most effective method of dealing with noise problems. The air gap created between the primary and secondary glazing is fundamental, as it decouples the panes of glass, limiting sympathetic resonance and hence the passage of sound. A reduction of 45 dB can be gained with a cavity of 100 mm and higher reductions are possible with deeper cavities and heavier glass.

It's safer: secondary glazing frames with accreditation to Secured by Design provide a good level of intruder resistance. Higher levels are achieved with products certified to Loss Prevention Standard LPS 1175. These offer similar protection to heavy gates and grilles.

WHICH SUPPLIER DO I USE?

There are many reputable secondary glazing suppliers with different systems – each has their own merits. However, when comparing and deciding which to use, some points to consider are:



- Does the supplier have test reports or figures to back of their claims of performance? With noise it is best to check the sample size tested. If relatively small, it is likely to pass a test, however it may not perform well when used in a large opening. With security, test certificates may be required by insurers
- How are the frames fixed? Ideally you want the secondary glazing fixed to a discreet timber sub frame as this will ensure all gaps that air can pass through are closed providing maximum benefit
- Operation of sliding sashes – does the secondary glazing allow full access to the primary windows when opened? Best practice is to install a system which

facilitates this to ensure the original windows can be easily reached for future maintenance and cleaning

- Can a sample be provided to see how it looks aesthetically? These will often be corner samples or carry size samples, which can be sat in the reveal to show the size of the sections and give an idea of the sightlines
- Do the systems need to be removed in summer months? If so, you then have the added issue of finding storage.

Zoe Williams is head of marketing at Selectaglaze



Door closer's fire credentials enhanced

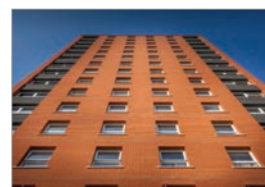
Samuel Heath's commitment to ensuring that its Powermatic controlled, concealed door closers provide the ultimate assurance in quality and performance has been further underlined with the successful completion of additional full-sized fire testing on both timber and steel fire doors at renowned testing 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.

0121 766 4200 www.concealeddoorclosers.com

Profile 22 transform housing project

Profile 22 Fully Reversible Windows were specified in the refurbishment of 15 tower blocks in Bristol. The legacy PVC-U windows, doors and curtain walling at 15 high and low-rise blocks needed to be replaced to improve thermal efficiency, security and aesthetics. An experienced company was required to carry out the complex, high profile, multi-phase works. The contract was awarded to longstanding Profile 22 Approved Window Manufacturer Emplas Window Systems, who recommended Profile 22's Optima system. The Optima system provides high security locking, child resistant safety catches and achieves a weather performance of 2400pa for wind, 1500pa for water and 600pa for air.

www.profile22.co.uk



Senior's PRe® range moves forward

Senior Architectural Systems has added further flexibility to its innovative PRe® range of ultra-low U-value aluminium windows with the development of a new parallel push option. Designed to offer balanced air flow and ventilation with maximum safety, the restricted opening of the PRe® parallel push aluminium windows make them ideally suited to a wide range of sectors including education, healthcare, and high-rise commercial and residential developments. Benefitting from a patented thermal barrier manufactured from expanded polyurethane foam, the PRe® parallel push aluminium window, like the rest of the range, offers exceptional low U-values and high thermal performance.

www.seniorarchitectural.co.uk/architectural-systems/pure-window



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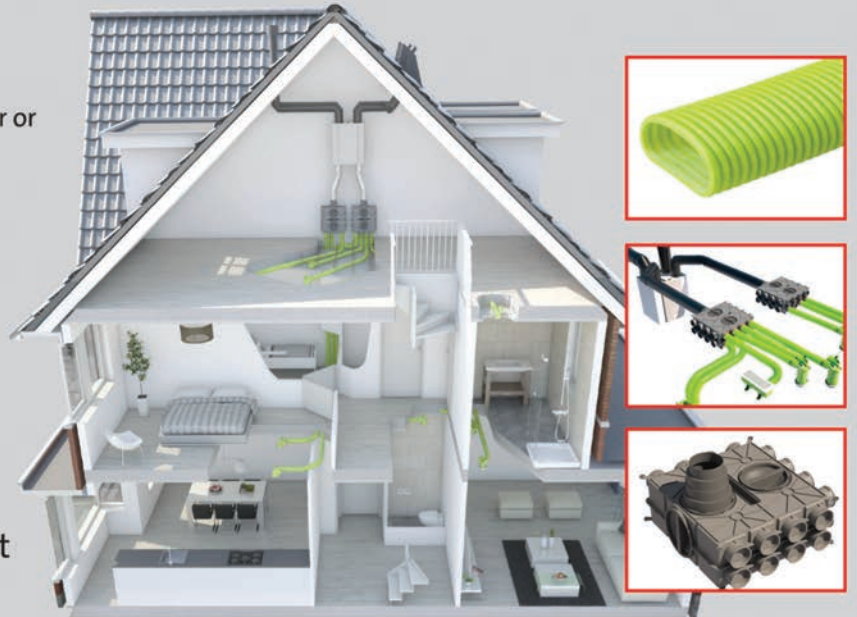
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EV ready homes

With Electric Vehicle (EV) and Plug-In Hybrid Vehicle (PHEV) sales going from strength-to-strength, growing numbers of housing developments in the UK are featuring EV charging units – and new developments may soon have to do so by law. Kieron Alsop of Rolec EV explains more



With year-on-year sales up yet again for both EVs and PHEVs, it is clear motorists are increasingly turning to an electric future – a sharp contrast to huge decreases in diesel vehicle sales.

The UK Government has pledged that by 2030, at least half of all new car sales, and up to 40 per cent of new van sales, will be PHEV or EV by 2030, as part of its 'Road to Zero' strategy.

By 2040 it plans to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars, and by 2050 it wants almost every car on the road to be zero emission.

A MIGRATION TO EVS

The migration to electric vehicles is a global phenomenon, with a report issued by the International Energy Agency stating that the number of EVs on the world's roads is likely to reach 13 million in the near future, with sales also

expected to soar 24 per cent every year, on average, through to 2030.

A recent survey confirmed that the UK needs to increase its EV charging network six-fold, and fast, to cope with the amount of EVs due to hit the nation's roads.

Both the UK Government and many of the world-leading vehicle manufacturers are investing heavily to promote the benefits of EVs, increasingly injecting billions of pounds to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles.

A rolling programme of implementing EV charging networks in cities, towns and villages is also being embarked upon by local authorities, with many new build planning applications already stipulating mandatory EV charging considerations as part of planning approval.

A good EV charging point, such as the Rolec WallPod, should be a versatile unit, designed to be compatible with all current PHEVs and EVs and offer smart



charging options. Housing associations, developers and local authorities need to ensure their charger of choice can comply with, and cater for, EV charging requirements on home builds.

GETTING ON BOARD

Rolec has vast experience manufacturing EV charging points for the housing sector. We recently supplied units for a Keepmoat Development in Doncaster featuring 600+ houses – all were fitted with an EV Ready Mode 2 charging unit, which also enables the end-user to easily upgrade to a Mode 3 EV fast charger at a later date, should they wish to.

Rolec has also supplied EV charging points to Barrett Homes, Kier, Taylor Wimpey, Redrow Homes, Bloor Homes, Fairview Homes, Cala Homes, Elan Homes, Bellway Homes, Orbit Homes and Persimmon Homes for both existing

A recent survey confirmed that the UK needs to increase its EV charging network six-fold, and fast, to cope with the amount of EVs due to hit the nation's roads

properties and new builds. These major construction companies are just a few integrating EV charging points into their projects to help future-proof their new build developments in order to meet greener commitments and modern-day end user requirements.

Kieron Alsop is managing director of Rolec EV

THE NEW RULES

The Department for Transport has launched a consultation which could see a government requirement for all new-build homes with a parking space to be fitted with an electric vehicle (EV) charging unit.

Record levels of ultra-low emission vehicles continue to hit the UK's roads. The latest data from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) shows year-on-year July sales figures for EVs almost tripled, while demand for hybrid electric cars also increased by 34 per cent.

After supporting the installation of around 100,000 domestic EV charge points through grants, the Government is now also considering bringing in requirements that all new private EV chargers use smart technology – with an aim to encourage off-peak charging, thereby keeping costs down for consumers.

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.



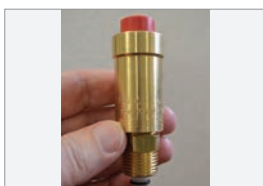
The ESi range offers 24 Hour/5/2 day and 7 day programming options for each channel. And these programmers also feature a "Landlord" option to encourage social housing and private tenants to allow access for annual maintenance.

Take a closer look at ESi's website.

01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

Flamco celebrates three millionth Flexvent

Leading HVAC component manufacturer Flamco is celebrating the sale of its three millionth Flexvent air vent valve in the UK and Ireland in the past ten years. Selling around 300,000 of these units a year, it's clear to see that these are essential components to keep on every heating installer, air conditioning installer and plumbers van. Most Flamco Flexvent types are supplied with a brass shut-off valve to facilitate simple installation and removal. When the float vent is unscrewed from the shut off valve, the valve will close automatically and the system will not need to be de-pressurised or drained. Under normal circumstances, the Flexvent float valve needs no maintenance at all.



www.youtube.com/user/flamcogroup www.flamcogroup.com/uk-en

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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SmartTalk® Pro – your online HIU engineer

Evinox take another step forward in 'Smart' heat interface unit technology development, with a new monitoring and diagnostics web portal – 'SmartTalk® Pro'. This provides contractors with remote access to each HIU on site using any web enabled device, and ensures any reported problems can be quickly and easily diagnosed – and often remedied – online, without the need for an engineer to attend site; saving time, increasing the first-time-fix rate and reducing defects liability costs related to the heat network.

As well as providing access to operational parameters and settings for HIU's, support engineers can even take control of the residents heating system, to update controller settings and resolve reported issues without an engineer ever having to get in a van!

SmartTalk® Pro comes bundled with every Evinox ModuSat HIU installation connected to a bus, ethernet or fibre optic communication network, and enables contractors and building operators to reduce the costs and risks associated with heat network installations.

An Established Heat Interface Unit Range Evinox's ModuSat heat interface units, are designed with quality, high efficiency and reliability at the forefront, and are fully tested – hydraulically, electrically and electronically before leaving the factory. The ModuSat XR-ECO Twin Plate Unit is also independently tested to the UK

Standard for HIUs from BESA, backing-up performance and efficiency claims; units come complete with smart room controls with optional energy display upgrade; feature inbuilt prepay technology and they can be commissioned and maintained remotely over the internet – a combination resulting in a truly Smart HIU range.

Don't just take Evinox's word for it – units are currently in operation in hundreds of developments across the UK, including landmark

projects such as Battersea Power Station, London City Island, and Wood Wharf at Canary Wharf.

Discover how Evinox Energy can deliver the best heating solution for your next new build or refurbishment heat interface unit project by visiting their website or contacting the company for further information.

info@evinox.co.uk
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Stelrad extends radiator ranges

Recent developments in the radiator marketplace have seen demand for specific radiator designs and sizes. Stelrad has responded almost instantly to customer demand by extending a number of its popular ranges and adding new sizes and types to meet the requirements. From 1st July, Stelrad has extended the Vita Compact range further and introduced the Vita and Softline Concord ranges as well as supplying the very popular Concord Vertical in a K2 version, to add to the traditionally available K1 version of this stunning radiator. Full details of the new extended product ranges can be found at Stelrad's website or you can call for further information.



0844 543 6200 www.stelrad.com

Kingspan TEK villas are ready for the sun

The Kingspan TEK Building System has been used to construct five luxury villas at the Porth Veor Manor Hotel near Newquay – providing the perfect seaside spot for holiday makers. The Kingspan TEK Building System of structural insulated panels (SIPs) was specified for the project for a variety of reasons, as Mike Burke from contractors Sip Hus, explained: "The design of the units, their location, size and performance requirements meant that the Kingspan TEK Building System was the best choice for the structural shells. The excellent thermal performance of the panels allowed us to maximise the internal spaces within the given footprint without having to compromise on thermal efficiency."



01544 387 384 www.kingspantek.co.uk

Insulation performance and daylighting

New research from building consultants, Peutz B.V., has revealed that by using higher performing insulation within rainscreen and cavity walls, it is possible to reduce construction thicknesses and achieve noticeable improvements in internal natural light levels. Its findings are explored in full in the updated Daylighting White Paper from Kingspan Insulation, available for download. The findings showed that in all scenarios, the constructions using Kingspan Kooltherm insulation achieved improved average daylight factors. In addition, all results with the Kingspan Kooltherm products exceeded the minimum daylighting criteria from BS 8206-2: 2008 for bedrooms and living rooms.



01544 387 384 www.kingspaninsulation.co.uk/daylighting

Kingspan adds glitz to apartments

Kingspan Kooltherm has been installed as part of the conversion and expansion of a former office building, adding luxury accommodation to Birmingham's historic Jewellery Quarter. To insulate the ceiling of the basement and an undercroft below the ground floor over 650m² of Kingspan Kooltherm K110 PLUS Soffit Board was specified. To insulate its external walls, 57.5 mm Kingspan Kooltherm K118 Insulated Plasterboard was installed. The product combines vapour control, 12.5 mm plasterboard and a premium performance insulation core in a single product. This allowed installers to rapidly fit the insulation and begin decorating the apartments.



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HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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www.housingmmonline.co.uk is a one-stop source for all the latest press releases providing any visitor with access to information about products and services that they may require for their project as well as news relevant to professionals in the social and private rented sectors.

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