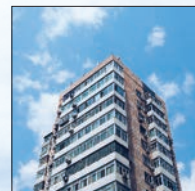


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

OCT/NOV 2019



Over 8.4 million
in housing need

Fire safety
costs threaten
new builds

Households in TA
hits 12 year high

Sprinkler height
consultation
underway



R&M spend falls
by £434 million



Choosing a warranty provider

Dean Stritch of LABC Warranty describes what to look for when choosing a warranty provider for residential and commercial projects. See report inside



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Editor's comment

Dear housing minister, please focus on safety and affordability



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

It has been a dramatic few months in terms of health and safety with hundreds of homes being destroyed or badly damaged as fire ripped through the timber cladding and balconies of several housing schemes. It is to our eternal relief that no lives were lost, but based on the accounts of residents who fled their homes with little but the clothes they were wearing, this was perhaps more down to good luck than it was to effective alarms, or to fire retardant design and fire fighting equipment. The horrific scenes of people's homes and possessions being destroyed by fires running out of control played out on our TV and computer screens. But will this jolt our politicians into action? More than two years have passed since the Grenfell Tower fire, but meaningful actions to protect and safeguard our lives and our homes have yet to be implemented. A new Prime Minister has taken over in Downing Street and he has appointed yet another Secretary of State and lower ranking ministers to develop and implement housing policies. Fairness suggests that we should give them some time to get to grips with their new portfolios, but the revolving door of ministerial appointments turns so frequently that surely we do not have the luxury of observing such niceties.

HORRIBLE HOUSING HEADLINES

This view is reinforced when we read some of the media headlines of the past few weeks which show just how badly broken and dysfunctional our housing market is at present. Consider the following headlines:

- More than 8.4 million people in England are living in unsuitable housing
- Highest level of people living in temporary accommodation since 2007
- Long term empty houses on the rise
- Multi billion fire safety costs threatens new building in London

Now if you were the new Housing Minister (the 9th in the last nine years) don't you think you would want to address that situation and at the very least recognise these issues as your highest priorities. It therefore came as a huge surprise that in the first speech given by Esther McVey, as the new Housing Minister, she made virtually no mention of rented housing or the growing concerns over fire safety. Speaking at the RESI 2019 conference in Newport, Ms McVey instead focussed almost entirely on how the Government is trying to encourage house building and home ownership. The only initiative and new money she promised to deliver was in giving 37 councils a share of a £2 million pot to crackdown on illegal housing developments in the Green Belt. This is intended to be spent on employing enforcement officers, new technology and paying legal costs – but £50,000 to each council won't buy very much.

A MATTER OF PRIORITIES

Then at the Conservative party conference a fortnight later, the Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick announced plans to give new and existing tenants a right to shared ownership, buying an initial 10 per cent share in their rented home followed by further shares, as small as one per cent. This is surely a huge distraction and could complicate further housebuilding by social landlords, with the reaction of lenders an unknown factor. I am not saying this work is unimportant. But the decision to focus on these matters is very revealing about housing priorities – Saving the Green Belt and extending the right to buy, or safeguarding the lives of millions by ensuring we are all living in safe homes? When you compare it to the Brexit advertising campaign which is seeing £100 million being spent on ensuring we are all aware there is a possibility of the UK exiting the EU at the end of October, you understand how far housing has slipped down the political agenda. Then the new Chancellor of the Exchequer (who previously held the housing brief in cabinet) overlooked housing in his recent spending promises, you realise the writing was already on the wall. The National Housing Federation has done us an enormous service in recent times – it has highlighted the scale of the problem facing millions of people and only a few weeks ago it revealed a costed blueprint to solve the problem. This is not an easy fix, so the NHF drew up a 10-year plan which invests in the present and in the future. It focusses on improving our living conditions and in creating jobs, as well as taking people out of poverty. These all strike me as hugely important issues and on my bucket list they all come above protecting the Green Belt or extending the right to buy. Surely our Government should focus on delivering the housing we so badly need and we can live safely in.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Dean Stritch of LABC Warranty describes what to look for when choosing a warranty provider for residential and commercial projects. Image: Fallow Park, Staffordshire, by Jessup

See page 33

Housing crisis affects an estimated 8.4 million in England



The full extent of the housing crisis blighting England has been laid bare by new research showing that an estimated 8.4 million people are living in an unaffordable, insecure or unsuitable home. This is equivalent to one in seven of the population.

The National Housing Federation research, carried out by Heriot-Watt University, found the housing crisis is adversely affecting all ages across every part of the country. The researchers found:

- 3.6 million people are living in an overcrowded home;
- 2.5 million are unable to afford their rent or mortgage;
- 2.5 million are in "hidden households" they cannot afford to move out of, including house shares, adults living with their parents, or people living with an ex-partner;
- 1.7 million are in unsuitable housing such as older people stuck in homes they cannot get around and families in properties which have no outside space;
- 1.4 million are in poor quality homes; and
- 400,000 are homeless or at risk of homelessness - including people sleeping rough, living in homeless shelters, temporary accommodation or sofa-surfing.

The figures are higher than some official statistics and some people may have more than one of these housing problems, the federation said. Their members provide roughly 2.5 million homes for more than six million people.

Researchers at Heriot-Watt used data from the annual Understanding Society survey of 40,000 people by the University of Essex, which was then scaled up to reflect England's total population of nearly 56 million.

The south region is the one which is worst affected with 2.6 million suffering from one or more of the identified problems, which affects 2.2 million in the north, 2.1 million in London and 1.6 million in the Midlands.

The report also estimated that around 3.6 million people (living in 2.1 million households) could only afford to live decently if they were in social housing - almost double the number on the Government's official social housing waiting list.

CHEAPER HOMES NEEDED

Social housing rents are on average 50 per cent cheaper than from private landlords, tenancies are generally more secure and many properties are designed specifically for older people with mobility issues, the federation said.

It said the country needs 340,000 new homes every year, including 145,000 social homes, to meet the housing demand. It has produced a costed plan to deliver this for an investment of £12.8bn a year for the next ten years.

Kate Henderson, Chief Executive at the National Housing Federation, called for "a return to the proper funding for social housing". She said the research revealed the full enormity of the housing crisis. "Clearly, it is the single biggest domestic issue we face."

"From Cornwall to Cumbria, millions of people are being pushed into debt and poverty because rent is too expensive, children can't study because they have no space in their overcrowded homes, and many older or disabled people are struggling to move around their own home because it's unsuitable," she said.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said in 2018 the Government built more homes than in all but one of the last 31 years.

"Since 2010 we've delivered 430,000 affordable homes and to protect renters we've cracked down on rogue landlords, banned unfair fees and capped deposits, saving at least £240m a year - helping to ensure access to safe and secure housing for millions," said the spokesman.

Responding for Labour, the former housing minister John Healey said that "deep cuts to housing investment since 2010 mean the country is now building 30,000 fewer social rented homes each year than we were with Labour."

He claimed a Labour government would build a million low-cost homes over ten years, "give renters the rights they deserve and end rough sleeping within five years".

People were considered to be living in overcrowded homes if a child had to share their bedroom with two or more children, sleep in the same room as their parents, or share with a teenager who was not the same sex as them.

Homes where an adult had to share their bedroom with someone other than a partner were also considered overcrowded.

Households in temporary accommodation at highest level since 2007

Nearly 85,000 households were being accommodated by English councils in B&B hotels and hostels at the end of March – the highest level in over a decade and a year after a piece of flagship legislation to combat it came into force.

The 84,740 households in temporary accommodation includes 126,020 children, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said. Two thirds of the total, some 56,280 of the households are in London.

This is the highest number of households in temporary accommodation since mid-2007 and compares with a low of 48,010 in 2010.

The figures includes 810 households who have been in B&B hotels for longer than the six-week statutory limit, but at least this is 50 households below the 860 figure at the end of the previous quarter.

The number of households considered to be newly homeless rose by more than 3,000 in the first three months of 2019, the Government's statistics show. Between January and March, some 32,740 households were assessed as being homeless, up 11.2 per cent from 29,430 in the previous quarter.

The most common reason for loss of their last settled home was friends or family no longer willing or able to accommodate them, while the second largest category was the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed new duties on councils to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness. It has been in force for more than a year, but two thirds of councils have said they cannot afford to comply with it.

A RURAL PROBLEM TOO

In addition the number of households classified as homeless in rural areas has almost doubled over the past year, according to an analysis by the Campaign to Protect Rural England. It said 173,584 families were on waiting lists for social housing in areas where councils built just 1,336 homes for social rent in 2018.

Back in 2017, the Local Government Association was reporting that a chronic shortage of affordable housing was forcing cash-strapped councils to spend more than £2 million a day on temporary accommodation for homeless families. At that time, 75,000 households were placed in TA – 10,000 fewer than now. The ongoing use of TA is estimated to have cost councils over £5bn in the past five years.

The Government took a fairly bullish response to the release of the figures. "The Homelessness Reduction Act is the most ambitious change to homelessness legislation in decades," said Luke Hall, the Minister for Homelessness.

"Figures show that progress is being made. The act is helping people earlier, so they are not having to experience homelessness in the first place. There is still more to do though, which is why we have committed a record investment to ending homelessness and rough sleeping for good."

The department said another £54m would be spent in 2020-21 to help reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, a 13 per cent increase on the current year.

HOUSEHOLD MADE HOMELESS EVERY FOUR MINUTES

However, this did not prevent further criticism from the housing charity Shelter, who said one household has become homeless every four minutes in England in the last year, and it called on the Government to invest in a new generation of social homes.

"During a year where Brexit negotiations have totally dominated the political agenda, catastrophic numbers of people have become homeless," said Shelter's chief executive, Polly Neate.

"Cripplingly expensive private rents, frozen housing benefits and lengthy waiting lists for social homes are pushing people to the sharp edge of a housing emergency, which won't go away without genuinely affordable homes.

The charity Crisis said it welcomed the success of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in



Nearly 85,000 households were being accommodated by English councils in B&B hotels and hostels at the end of March

preventing nearly 60,000 households from becoming homeless in England, but called on the Government to address the causes of the issue.

"We know we can do better," said Jon Sparkes, the chief executive of Crisis. "The HRA has great potential, but it can only go so far when people are being pushed to the brink, struggling to meet the cost of housing. The Government needs to tackle the root causes of this issue, investing in building more social housing and restoring local housing allowance, so that it covers the true cost of renting."

Crisis said more than 7,000 households currently lived in B&Bs and were unable to access safe and secure accommodation. "Our clients tell us of damaged and even dangerous conditions, where they lack basic cooking and laundry facilities and face the constant pressure eviction at short notice. No one should have to live like this," Sparkes said.

Events

National Landlord Investment Shows
05 November, London
www.landlordinvestmentshow.co.uk

Homes UK
27 - 28 November, London
www.homesevent.co.uk/home

Customer Experience Conference and Exhibition
05 February 2020, London

Futurebuild
03-05 March 2020, London
www.futurebuild.co.uk

Tpas Awards
27 March 2020, Manchester
www.tpasawards.org.uk

Social Housing Finance Conference
07 May 2020, London
www.socialhousing.co.uk/shfc

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Capital's biggest HAs estimate fire safety costs at almost £7bn

A group of the largest housing associations in London has estimated the total cost of fire safety works to their residential stock in the capital at an eye-watering £6.87bn.

The G15 group says that combined they own 1,145 buildings over 18 metres in height with external wall systems of some kind. They have complained about unclear advice from the Government, which they say has created uncertainty for both landlords and residents.

Since the Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, a number of HAs including Hyde, Southern Housing Group and L&Q have reported spending significant sums in making their buildings safe.

Now they are saying that further investigatory works are “pointing to potentially systemic issues in the construction of tall buildings”

They claim the sums involved in making their buildings safe to live in are challenging the financial viability of landlords, builders and the insurers, with more Government support badly needed.

The enormously high costs of safety works are also undermining the efforts of HAs wishing to build more affordable homes in London and the south-east, whether for rent or for outright sale, or shared ownership.

Helen Evans, chair of the G15 and chief executive of Network Homes, said: “The G15 is absolutely committed to ensuring our homes are safe for the people who live in them. We want to work with Government to ensure the current guidance is being interpreted as intended, both by building owners and other stakeholders. There are a significant number of affected buildings, so we need a collaborative and planned response across the sector.”

The National Housing Federation is supporting the G15 in calling on the Government to establish a building safety fund to pay for essential safety works so social landlords can carry these out as quickly as possible. The recently announced spending plans by the Government failed to include any significant new investment in social housing.

Slow progress in removing Grenfell-style ACM cladding revealed

More than 160 residential tower blocks covered in aluminium composite cladding have yet to see any removal work begin on them, despite more than two years having passed since the Grenfell Tower fire.

The slow rate of progress is frustrating tenants, landlords, campaigners and politicians alike as the Government's latest building safety bulletin shows that 145 privately owned residential blocks and 18 social housing blocks are still fully clad in ACM with remediation works yet to begin.

Ministers have said they expect the removal of all ACM cladding from private high-rise blocks to be completed by June 2020. They have also threatened private sector owners and landlords that enforcement action will be taken if they fail to take action by then, although this is being given less prominence since the change of Prime Minister.

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government spokesperson said: “It is unacceptable that residents are still having to live in buildings with unsafe ACM cladding.

“Progress has been far too slow and due to inaction from some building owners we are committing £600m to speed up the pace of remediation.

NO MORE EXCUSES

“There are no more excuses. The private sector remediation fund means building owners can get on with making their buildings safe as quickly as possible. Our message remains clear that building owners must now get on with this crucial work.” Of 158 social housing blocks with ACM cladding, 18 have yet to see work start, 83 have work in progress and 57 have had all cladding removal work completed. Social housing landlords have been

Of the 56 student blocks to have ACM, 33 had now seen work completed, while 17 have yet to see work start. Only two out of 29 hotels have seen work completed, while two of nine publicly owned buildings have seen their cladding fully removed

given until the end of this year to remove the ACM cladding from their high-rise blocks.

Of the 179 private residential blocks with ACM cladding, only 13 blocks have had the removal works completed, while works are still in progress at 21 blocks. Work has yet to start on removing cladding from 145 private blocks.

The latest bulletin also revealed that ACM clad blocks are continuing to be found, with three private blocks being recently added to the numbers. In early May, the Government announced it would set up a £200m fund to pay for the removal of cladding from private residential blocks where work had stalled. The fund will remain open until the end of the year.

Of the 56 student blocks to have ACM, 33 had now seen work completed, while 17 have yet to see work start. Only two out of 29 hotels have seen work completed, while two of nine publicly owned buildings have seen their cladding fully removed.

Hyde spends £17m on fixing Grenfell-type property faults

One of the country's largest social landlords, Hyde has reported that it spent almost £17 million in its last full year on fixing faults identified during fire safety checks.

The association owns 50,000 homes, many of them in London and in its latest annual report, it says it carried out the most invasive fire risk assessments on every one of its buildings over 18 metres in height. These involved entering residents' flats and checking inside the walls.

Hyde said it removed dangerous cladding from nine buildings and published building safety information on its website for all buildings of 30 metres or taller. It is now in the process of rectifying defects identified both in communal areas and within individual homes.

Hyde's post-tax surplus rose to £110.2m from £28m in the previous year, on the back of increasing property sales. Turnover in the year to March 2019 jumped to £450.2m, a 33 per cent rise on last year's £339.6m.



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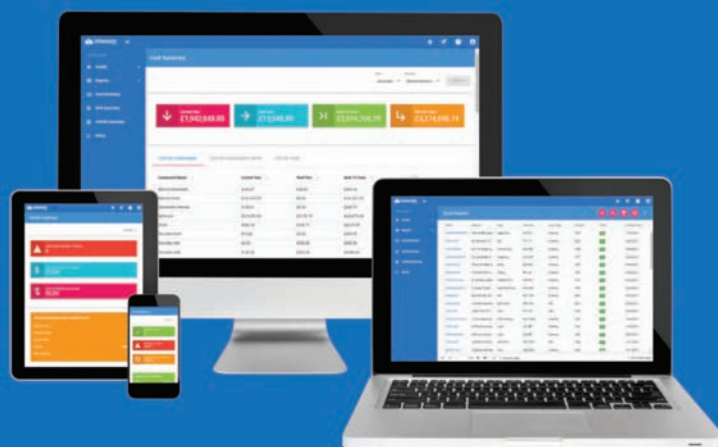
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Government launches 'shared ownership' right to buy for HA tenants

The Government has revealed it wants to give housing association tenants the right to buy shares in their homes under proposals outlined at the Conservative Party Conference.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick announced that tenants should have the right to purchase a share of their property – starting at a minimum of 10 per cent and able to increase in further amounts of as little as one per cent, up to outright ownership.

It is understood the new shared ownership right to buy will be made automatic for all newly built rental homes, with a voluntary arrangement being sought for existing HA tenants. This could apply to as many as 2.6 million households.

Mr Jenrick said: "I want to ensure that residents living in new housing association homes are given the opportunity of climbing onto the property ladder by giving them the right to shared ownership of their homes.

"As Conservatives, we know that owning a home is not just about the four walls around you, it's about investing in your family, saving for the future and putting down roots in a community. We are on the side of hard-working people who want the sense of security that comes with homeownership."

The announcement did not go down well with social housing spokespeople, who said it distracted from the pressing need for new affordable housing and warned that it could make building social homes more difficult, particularly if lenders reacted badly to it.

NOT A NEW IDEA

The possibility of extending the right to buy through a shared ownership scheme has been around for about 30 years, with various possible schemes being explored but this is the first time such advanced plans have been mooted.



Kate Henderson, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation, said: "Housing associations share the Government's commitment to help more families into home ownership. Over the next five years, we will support record numbers into shared ownership working in partnership with local and national government."

"We are concerned that these proposals could make it harder for associations to build new social rent homes. Our priority will be to ensure that any changes allow us to safeguard the country's existing social rent homes but also to continue to build these homes for future generations."

"With homelessness at the highest level in ten years - we need more than ever to protect our existing homes for social rent, and to build more of them."

She added "Lenders to the social housing sector view and value shared ownership homes differently to social rent homes. This announcement could affect not just the sector's existing loans, but also the

"With homelessness at the highest level in ten years - we need more than ever to protect our existing homes for social rent, and to build more of them."

Kate Henderson, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation

amount the sector can borrow in the future to build new homes."

"Before the Government proceeds with these proposed changes, it is absolutely critical they take the time to understand how the sector's lenders may react and how this may impact on our ability to build new social rent homes."

Waiting for Universal Credit fuels poverty and food bank use

Ministers have been asked to overhaul the Universal Credit system after fresh claims that the built-in five week wait for payments is causing poverty and increased food bank use.

The main food bank charity, the Trussell Trust, are claiming the automatic delay before benefits are made could have a rapid, devastating and long-lasting impact on claimants' finances, housing security and mental health.

The Trust said claimants who are unable to cope without income during the waiting period faced destitution. They were unable to afford food, frequently went without meals, failed to pay utility bills, ran up rent arrears and risked eviction.

Universal Credit bundles together six working-

age benefits into one monthly payment. It was originally due to be fully operational in 2017 but the current deadline is 2023, when about 7 million people will depend on it.

Food bank use has soared by a third in areas where universal credit had operated for a year, it said, drawing on data from 414 food banks. Demand for food parcels increased by 40 per cent where universal credit had been in place for at least 18 months, and 48 per cent where it had been established for at least two years.

The research cited the case of a man with severe mental illness, who did not eat for nine days after being left with no income after claiming universal credit. His health had declined to the point where

he "didn't feel well enough to leave the house to get a food bank voucher".

Repayable advance loans issued to claimants to tide them over simply created long-term difficulties for claimants as they paid them back, in effect leaving them "deciding between hardship now or later".

"Universal credit should be there to anchor any of us against the tides of poverty. But the five-week wait fatally undermines this principle, pushing people into debt, homelessness and destitution," said Trussell Trust chief executive Emma Revie.

The Trust called for a significant reduction in the five-week wait to ensure claimants were paid much sooner.

Housing body says poor people are being denied access to social homes

Rules and processes designed to decide who gets access to social housing could be failing people in the greatest need, according to new research from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

In 'Rethinking Allocations', CIH policy and practice officer Faye Greaves found that faced with not enough genuinely affordable homes, councils and housing associations are forced to ration the shrinking stock of housing they have – and this is excluding some very vulnerable people.

As a result some poor prospective tenants not being offered housing because they are seen as likely to run up big rent arrear debts. Others are rejected when social landlords identified they had unmet mental health or addiction problems, often because of cuts to local NHS and housing support services. Individuals with unmet support needs are seen as “too high a risk to tenancy sustainment”.

Ms Greaves said: “For decades, we have failed to build enough homes, and our welfare safety net is no longer fit for purpose. More and more people are turning to local authorities and housing associations for help to access social housing.

“But that leaves housing providers having to find a balance between people in acute need, local priorities and their need to develop sustainable tenancies. What we found is that relying solely on processes can end up having the opposite effect to that intended.”

EXTRA FACTORS

The report, which was sponsored by South Liverpool Homes, recommends that local authorities should ensure applicants' unique circumstances and housing histories are considered when making decisions about whether someone can

access a list and what priority they are given. It also recommends:

- Housing providers should consider making a proportion of their properties part- or fully-furnished;
- Providers should review their lettable standard to explore ways to improve the marketing of properties, particularly in areas of low demand; and
- Local authorities and housing associations should work in partnership to strengthen the role of nominations agreements in how they balance competing objectives.

CIH chief executive Terrie Alafat said: “This is an important and timely piece of work. It may seem obvious to put people at the heart of deciding about something so essential as their home, but the pressures that housing providers face can lead to them relying on processes alone. This report is a reminder of the risks of that and gives good examples of how to avoid them.”

GOVERNMENT ACTION POINTS

South Liverpool Homes chair Steve Jennings said: “The housing crisis has produced an increasingly complex challenge for those charged with allocating local authority and housing association homes. As a sector we must remember we are dealing with people who need a home, so we must put them at the heart of any process to allocate the ones we own and manage.” The report also calls on the Government to:

- Include affordability in the statutory ‘reasonable preference’ groups;



- Develop a single code of guidance for local authorities on the allocation of social housing in England;
- Work with local authorities and housing associations to develop toolkits that supports the delivery of support-focussed pre-tenancy processes and the development, monitoring and review of nominations agreements;
- Make a significant investment in a ten-year programme for social house building, as recommended by CIH, Shelter, Crisis and the National Housing Federation;
- Suspend the Right to Buy to prevent further loss of social rented homes and allow councils to retain receipts from Right to Buy sales; and
- Restore local housing allowance to cover the most affordable third of rents, so more people have the financial support they need to afford a decent home in the private rented sector.

RTB sales fall to their lowest level in six years

The number of council homes sold to tenants under the statutory Right to Buy scheme has fallen to its lowest level for six years according to Government statistics.

Councils sold 2,313 homes under the scheme in the three months from April to June this year, representing a seven per cent fall on the same quarter last year and the lowest number of sales in the first quarter since 2012/13 when 2,181 homes were sold.

However, this is still ten times the figure for sales recorded in the final quarter of 2008/09 when just

277 council homes were bought by tenants shortly after the economic crash and the start of austerity.

The first quarter drop continued the recent decline in sales, as councils sold 2,612 homes to sitting tenants in the previous quarter, between January and March 2019. During the last six years sales peaked at 3,470 in the third quarter of 2016/17.

The figures released show that councils received £194.7m in receipts from the sales, also a seven per cent fall on the same quarter of last year. The average receipt per property was £84,200.

On a more positive note councils started work on or acquired 1,290 new homes, up 38 per cent on the same quarter last year. This is traditionally a slow quarter for starts and acquisitions with this year's total being the highest first quarter figure since 2012/13.

This builds on last year's improved performance when English councils directly built 2,560 homes in

2018/19 - the highest figure since 1992/3 when they built 2,580 homes.

But councils have only been able to replace about a fifth of the homes sold since 2011/12 and this is impacting hugely on their ability to provide housing for homeless and vulnerable families.

In all almost two million former council homes have been sold to tenants since the scheme was introduced in the early 1980s. As many as 40 per cent of these are now understood to be owned by private landlords, with large numbers being let back to councils for housing low income tenants in at higher rents with housing benefit picking up the bill.

Currently councils only retain a third of RTB receipts with the rest kept by the Treasury. The Local Government Association has campaigned for councils to be able to keep 100 per cent of RTB receipts and to set discounts locally.

Big fall in number of vulnerable people sleeping rough is linked to Government initiative

The Government is claiming it's Rough Sleeping Initiative is having a significant impact on reducing the numbers of vulnerable people sleeping rough on the country's streets.

New analysis (which was independently peer reviewed by Bryson Purdon Social Research, an independent research partnership) found the numbers of people sleeping rough is around a third lower than predicted if the initiative had not been in place.

The Rough Sleeping Initiative – a cornerstone of the Government's ambitious Rough Sleeping Strategy – has provided £76 million to 246 councils across the country to date, supporting rough sleepers in their area off the streets and into secure accommodation where they can get the help they need to rebuild their lives.

The report published in mid September showed that the initiative has reduced the number of vulnerable people sleeping rough by 32 per cent, compared to the number it would have been had the initiative not been in place.

The analysis estimates the impact of the initiative from its launch in March 2018 until autumn that year and takes account of a range of factors, including whether councils submitted estimates or counts in the official annual rough sleeping statistics, the weather on the night the data was collected, and local housing and labour market conditions, to zero in on the effects of the initiative.

Welcoming the findings, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick said: "Since becoming Communities Secretary, I have been able to see first-hand the outstanding work taking place under the Rough Sleeping Initiative every single day to transform the lives of society's most vulnerable – and these



figures are proof that our strategy to end rough sleeping is working.

"But we must keep that momentum up, which is why we have committed a record investment to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the months ahead – ensuring progress continues to be made and people are given the help they need to turn their lives around.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer recently announced £422 million of funding to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping – up £54 million from £368 million in 2019 to 2020.

The Communities Secretary and the Chancellor have also announced a further £10 million to boost life-saving support for rough sleepers during the cold winter weather and has called on councils to come forward and bid for the funding now in order to step-up

preparations in time for the winter months.

Last year, funding provided by Government during the coldest weather meant thousands of vulnerable rough sleepers spent the night in safe and warm accommodation, rather than on the streets.

In August last year, the Government unveiled its Rough Sleeping Strategy – backed by £100 million – which sets out the next steps towards ending rough sleeping for good.

In order to reach as many rough sleepers as possible, £1 million of the Cold Weather Fund will be available to providers and services that are not commissioned by local authorities. This element of the fund will be administered by Homeless Link, who will ensure interventions are effective in supporting as many people as possible off the streets.

Number of homeless deaths at highest level

A record number of homeless people died last year on the streets or in emergency shelters and hostels according to official figures from the Office for National Statistics.

An estimated 726 homeless people died in England and Wales in 2018, up from 597 deaths in the previous year. Data on the deaths of homeless people has only been collected and reported on centrally since 2013, when the figure was 482.

Most of the deaths in 2018 were among men,

accounting for 641 of the estimated deaths and 88 per cent of the total. The average age at death was 45 years for men and 43 for women, both figures are well below those for the general population, which is 76 years (for men) and 81 years (for women).

Two in five deaths of homeless people were related to drug poisoning in 2018 (294 estimated deaths), and the number of deaths from this cause has increased by 55 per cent since 2017.

London and the north-west had the highest numbers of deaths in 2018, with 148 (20 per cent) and 103 (14 per cent) estimated deaths of homeless people respectively. Cities and large urban areas dominated the list of places recording most deaths, with Birmingham accounting for 23 deaths, Newcastle with 20, Manchester 19, Bristol 17 and Liverpool for 16.

Jon Sparkes, from the charity Crisis, said it was

"heart-breaking" that people were dying homeless. "It's crucial that governments urgently expand the safeguarding system used to investigate the deaths of vulnerable adults to include everyone who has died while street homeless so we can help prevent more people from dying needlessly."

Polly Neate, from the housing charity Shelter, said: "You can't solve homelessness without homes, so we are calling on all parties to commit to building the social homes we need to form the bedrock of a more humane housing system."

A spokesman for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the figures were a "sombre reminder" there was "still much more to do to tackle homelessness and end rough sleeping for good". He added that the Government was spending £1.2bn to tackle all forms of homelessness.



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Stable financial position despite weak sales reported for social housing sector

The latest quarterly survey from the Regulator of Social Housing shows that the sector's overall strong financial position has been maintained despite weakening sales performance and concerns over increased safety costs.

The regulator found the HA sector has access to £20.4bn in undrawn facilities and agreed new finance of £1.4bn in the quarter. The report covers the period 1 April to 30 June 2019 and includes forecasts up to 30 June 2020.

Investment in new housing supply was £3.1bn in the quarter to June 2019 with 3,275 Affordable Home Ownership (AHO) homes and 1,193 market sale homes completed. This is expected to increase with a £16.1bn investment forecast over the 12 months to June 2020.

Based on responses from 218 private registered providers (PRPs), who own or manage 1,000 homes or more, it provides a regular source of information regarding the financial health of providers, in particular with regard to their liquidity position. The other main findings this quarter include:

- Cash balances total £5.3bn – this is forecast to reduce to £3.4bn over the next 12 months to fund planned capital expenditure;
- Total sales receipts were £1.1bn generating surpluses of £0.3bn. However, current asset sales receipts were more than 40 per cent below forecast at £0.7bn reflecting both fewer completions than forecast and market conditions, particularly in London and the South East;
- There was a two per cent increase in the number of unsold AHO homes to 7,031 (the highest level in ten years) and unsold market sale properties increased by seven per cent to 2,073 (the highest level recorded since 2014). This is partly due to more homes for sale and AHO being built (completions being 17 per cent higher than the same



quarter last year) but also reflects wider market conditions;

- The number of AHO homes unsold for more than six months saw an increase of 56 per cent to 2,133. Conversely, market sale properties unsold for more than six months reduced by 13 per cent to 554; and
- The sector's spending on capitalised major repairs in the quarter at around £400m was 20 per cent below forecast, attributable to delays in starting new contracts for works and the re-profiling of programmed works.

Fiona MacGregor, Chief Executive of the Regulator of Social Housing said: "The latest quarterly survey results indicate that the sector continues to be in a

strong position in terms of liquidity, but weakening in the housing sales market is beginning to have an impact, particularly in London and the South East. Providers should consider market conditions carefully when making decisions about development commitments.

"The findings underline the need for Boards to manage their resources and have robust contingency plans in place to ensure that their financial viability is maintained under a range of economic assumptions. We also expect Boards to ensure they have clear information that they are investing so that properties are in a good state of repair and meet statutory health and safety requirements."

Grenfell Tower inquiry – first phase report to be published

The outcome of the first phase of the inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire will be published at the end of October.

The report is expected to limit itself to the events that occurred on the night of 14 June 2017 when 72 people died. The second phase of the inquiry, which is due to start early in 2020 will focus on the circumstances and causes of the disaster.

During phase one, the inquiry sat for 123 days of hearings between May and December last year, it

heard from over 140 witnesses and received over 500,000 documents relevant to both phases.

To date, the Inquiry has disclosed over 49,344 documents relating to phase two and this process will continue in tranches throughout the remainder of 2019.

The inquiry chairman, Sir Martin Moore-Bick has written to the Prime Minister and all of the core participants (including the survivors and family members of the deceased) to update them on

progress. The Prime Minister confirmed that he would like the phase one report to be laid before Parliament and published before the end of October.

A copy of the report will be provided to all core participants and their legal representatives at least 36 hours before its publication. The report will be laid in Parliament and published on the inquiry website on Wednesday 30 October 2019.

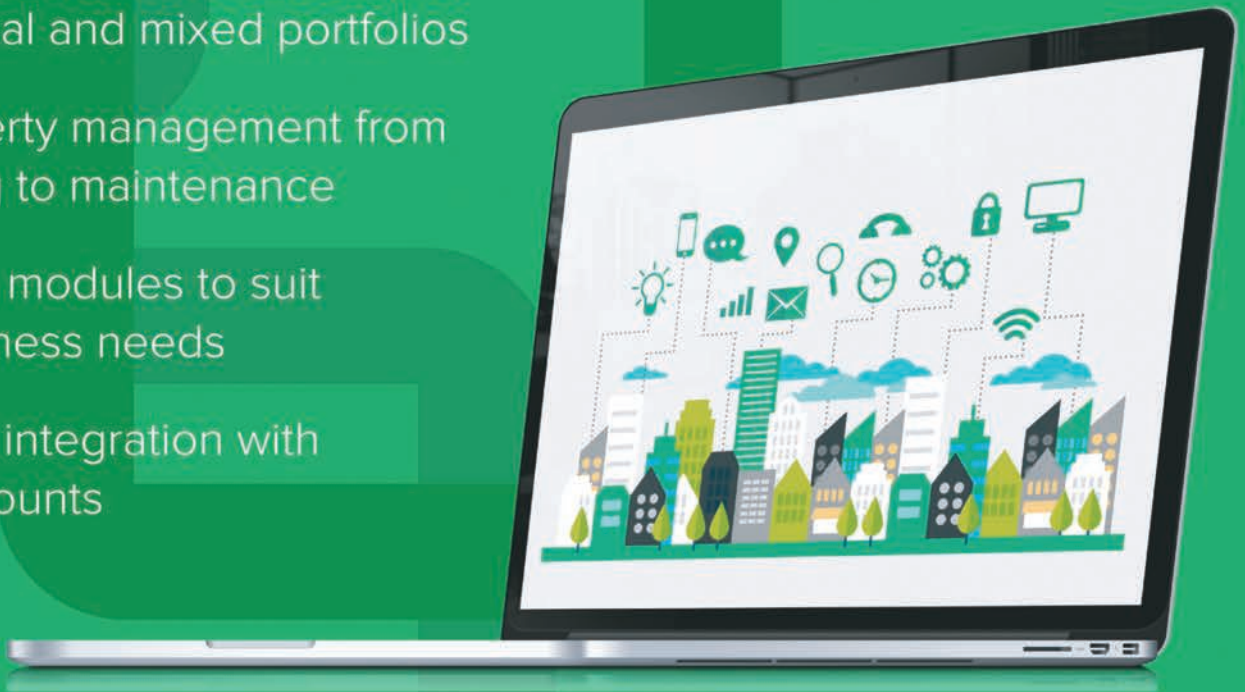
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Kent council tackles drug dealing at properties as it cracks down on anti-social behaviour

Ashford Borough Council has successfully applied for court orders at three separate properties which have all been associated with persistent drug use and anti-social behaviour.

It is the first time that the council has brought three cases in one day and is a sign that the authority is determined to keep up the pressure against people who use council properties for illegal purposes.

Folkestone Magistrates Court approved applications relating to 2 Kenbrook in Kennington and also at 11 Croft Road and 13 Croft Road near Willesborough.

The court imposed a three-month partial closure order on the properties at 2 Kenbrook and 13 Croft Road. This means that no-one, apart from the tenants, council staff, health and care professionals, and police officers, are allowed to enter these two properties until Wednesday 11 December 2019.

A full closure order was handed down on the 11 Croft Road flat, which means that no-one is allowed to enter the one-bedroom property for three months until 11 December. Doors and windows at the ground floor flat have been secured to prevent unauthorised entry. The council applied for a full closure order because it was felt that the tenant had been more complicit in the illegal activities taking place there.

Ashford Council secured the orders under the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and brought the proceedings supported by Kent Police. The court heard that all three properties had attracted complaints to police and the council by neighbours worried about drug taking and dealing, together with anti-social behaviour and noise at unsociable hours.

Council officers have been working closely with Kent Police and neighbours in a bid to tackle persistent problems associated with these



properties, leading to the court hearing in Folkestone.

Referring to a number of previous court cases when the council successfully applied for closure orders at properties blighted by drug abuse, Councillor Bill Barrett, portfolio holder for housing at Ashford, said: "This underlines that we have a zero tolerance approach towards this sort of behaviour.

"These three properties have been the root of persistent problems and nuisance to residents with people visiting at all hours, drug dealing, littering and causing noise and intimidation. These issues make people's lives a misery and we hope the work undertaken to gather a case for these orders will reassure our communities that we do not tolerate it and we will respond with appropriate action."

Inspector Jason Atkinson of Kent Police said: "We hope this improves life for the residents who have

I hope these closure orders empower the public to let the local authority and police know what is going on in their neighbourhoods

Inspector Jason Atkinson of Kent Police

felt the negative effects of this anti-social behaviour. Kent Police and Ashford Borough Council work hard to ensure the safety of local communities and protect those who are vulnerable. I hope these closure orders empower the public to let the local authority and police know what is going on in their neighbourhoods."

Regulator acts against Kent councils over safety failings

The Regulator of Social Housing has found that four councils in Kent had breached the Home Standard over a number of health and safety issues found throughout their homes.

The RSH issued Regulatory Judgements against Thanet, Dover, Canterbury and Folkestone & Hythe councils in September, who all manage their housing through the East Kent Housing Arms-Length Management Organisation.

It said the four councils, who self-referred themselves to the regulator after an internal audit

raised concerns, had left tenants at risk of serious detriment as a result of failing to meet statutory health and safety requirements across a range of areas namely gas safety, fire safety, electrical safety, water safety and lift safety.

Following an investigation, the RSH deemed the four Kent councils to have breached the Home Standard on health and safety grounds, "taking into account the seriousness of the issues, and the duration for which tenants were potentially exposed to risk, and the number of tenants potentially

affected".

The regulator acknowledged that through East Kent Housing, the four councils have put programmes in place to rectify the failings. EKH was established in 2011 and is the only ALMO that manages homes on behalf of multiple councils.

The regulator wrote to all stock owning councils in May reminding them of their health and safety obligations towards their tenants after Arun and Gateshead councils were found to have breached the Home Standard.



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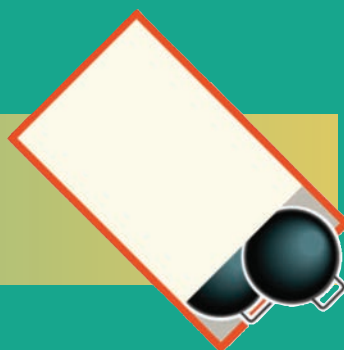
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A third of claimants left 'with only £100 a month to live on'

The freeze on welfare benefits has left more than a third of claimants with less than £100 a month to live on after they have paid rent and essential bills for food, gas and electricity, according to the Citizens Advice service.

Rates for benefits such as Universal Credit, tax credits and local housing allowance have been frozen since April 2016. This has saved the Government many billions of pounds, but it has inflicted a six per cent cut on claimants' incomes.

Universal Credit claimants have been particularly badly affected, with more than half reporting they had gone without essentials such as food and toiletries. Almost the same proportion say they had lost sleep over their dire finances.

Disabled people and those with children were most likely to have gone without essentials, with nearly half of both groups reporting that this had happened to them at least once in the past 12 months.

Citizens Advice called on the Government to end the freeze on benefit rates and reduce the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment. Although the freeze is scheduled to end next April, this has not yet been confirmed.

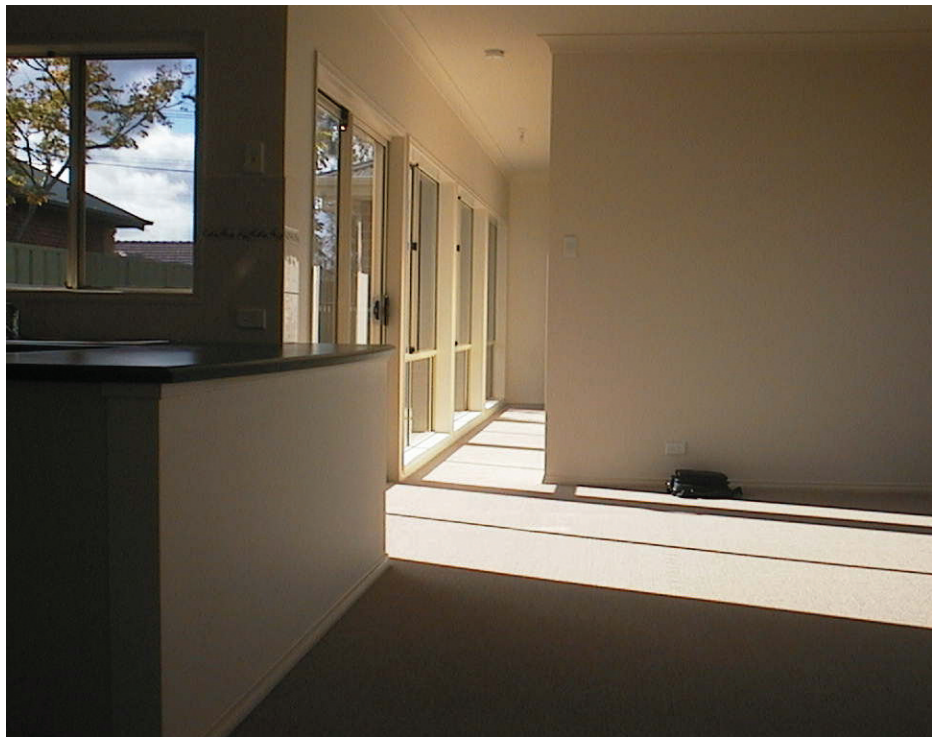
Gillian Guy, the chief executive of Citizens Advice, said: "The benefits system is designed to help people with their finances in times of need, but too often our frontline staff and volunteers see a different story.

"We've found people are losing sleep and unable to afford essential things like food and housing while receiving universal credit. It is totally unacceptable that our benefits system is not providing the financial safety net that people need."

The average low-income couple with children would be £200 a year worse off this year as a result of the benefit freeze and poorer single parents £250 a year worse off, the Resolution Foundation has estimated.

A Government spokesperson said: "Tackling poverty will always be a priority for this government. There are no current plans to extend or maintain the benefit freeze after March 2020. Income inequality and absolute poverty are lower than in 2010, but we know some families need more support, which is why we continue to spend £95bn a year on working-age benefits.

"Universal credit is supporting more than two million people and it's working for the vast majority. Advance payments provide money urgently for people if they need it and there are measures in place to ensure repayments are affordable."



Number of empty homes rises by 11,000 properties nationally

The number of empty homes across the country rose significantly last year, increasing by more than five per cent as nearly 11,000 long-term empty homes were added to the total.

The rate of increase was double the rise in 2017. All regions experienced rising numbers of empty homes in 2018, except the North East where the number fell by one per cent. Despite this the highest regional percentage of empty homes is still in the North East where one in every 72 homes is long-term empty.

There are now more than 216,000 long-term empty homes in the whole of England. The largest regional number of empty homes, at 39,769, is in the North West. Properties which have been empty for more than six months are included in these figures.

Will McMahon, the director of Action on Empty Homes, said: "With homeless numbers at their highest levels in over a decade, it makes no sense to leave hundreds of thousands of homes standing long-term empty."

Two thirds of England's local authorities saw numbers rise - in half of these the rise was over 10 per cent and in more than one in ten authorities the rise was 30 per cent or more.

Empty homes are found in all council tax bands but are particularly prevalent in the lowest (band A). Nationally, nearly 90,000 long-term empty homes are in the bottom council tax band, while

There are now more than 216,000 long-term empty homes in the whole of England. The largest regional number of empty homes, at 39,769, is in the North West

only 1,933 are in the top council tax band, which is less than one per cent of the total.

The top two Council Tax bands account for less than four per cent of empties, whereas the bottom two bands are 60 per cent. This underlines that long-term empties are more likely to be smaller and lower value properties. Where these are concentrated, local housing markets can become distorted.

In addition there are also 252,000 second or holiday homes with no permanent resident. There are 54 areas where at least one home in 50 is a second home.

Council officers report that many 'second homes' are unused, some approaching dereliction; and many are owned by absentee owners who hold multiple second homes unused.

Government consults on reducing sprinkler height threshold for high-rise blocks

Ministers have launched a consultation on proposals to reduce the height of new high-rise blocks of flats where water sprinkler systems need to be installed as a legal requirement.

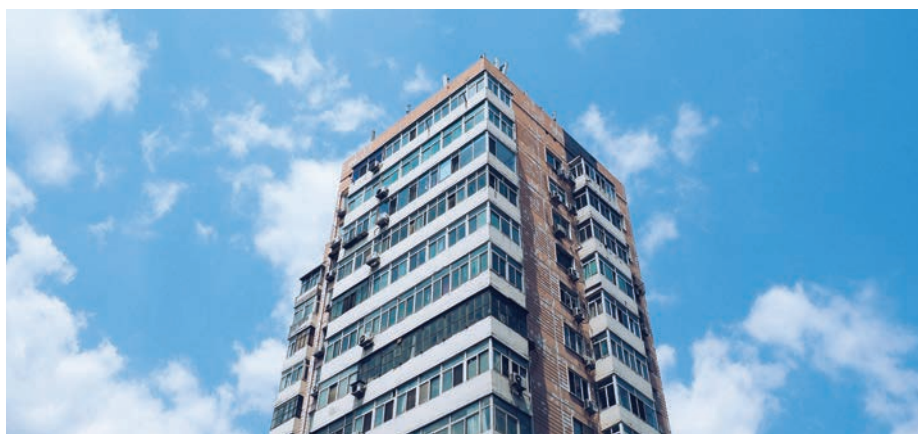
The consultation closes on 28 November. It is also seeking views on proposals to improve way-finding signage within blocks of flats and to install evacuation alert systems for use by fire and rescue services. This follows problems encountered by tenants and firefighters during the Grenfell Tower fire.

The changes would make sprinklers compulsory in all new residential buildings of 18 metres or taller, down from the current 30 metre trigger height. Ministers said the move would make thousands of homes safer, estimating that 1,970 extra new builds would have sprinklers installed over 10 years at an annual cost of between £27m and £38m.

The Housing Ministry also said it is establishing a new Protection Board to carry out safety checks on all high-risk residential buildings in England by 2021. Up to £10m a year is being made available to fund the new body, which will act on an interim basis until a new building safety regulator is established in line with proposals in the Hackitt Review.

The Protection Board will investigate whether building owners are acting on official safety advice and putting interim measures in place for high-rises with unsafe aluminium composite material cladding. It will base its work on cladding data collected by councils.

The new Housing Secretary of State Robert



Jenrick said: “Residents’ safety is our utmost priority and we are making vital improvements to ensure buildings are safe. I have listened to concerns on sprinklers from residents and building owners and our proposals are an important step forward in shaping the future building safety standards.”

“The new Protection Board will make sure building owners don’t flout the rules, as well as ensuring fire safety risks in other buildings are being addressed.”

According to analysis of recently proposed changes to building regulations, most respondents wanted sprinklers to be installed in all housing for vulnerable people, regardless of height. Some respondents also suggested lowering the height threshold to 11 metres rather than 18 metres.

Many people suggested that 11 metres would be a more appropriate threshold for other safety restrictions, such as the ban on combustible

Residents’ safety is our utmost priority and we are making vital improvements to ensure buildings are safe

Housing Secretary of State Robert Jenrick

materials. Most people who responded to the review wanted the ban on combustible materials to be strengthened.

They argued that it should not be limited to buildings over 18 metres in height but should also take other risk factors into account and should apply to specialised housing, care homes and hospitals regardless of height.

CIH Scotland welcomes energy efficiency regulations for the private sector

The Scottish Government is preparing to introduce a minimum energy efficiency standard for privately rented homes of EPC band E at change of tenancy from April 2020 and EPC band D at change of tenancy from April 2022.

A consultation on Regulations and guidance to support the new requirements included details on proposed exemptions for landlords where

permission to carry out work has been refused and where the cost of the work required to meet the minimum standard would exceed £5,000 for EPC band E with a further £5,000 cost cap applying to meet EPC band D.

Under the proposals, local authorities would be responsible for ensuring compliance with minimum standards and landlords failing to meet the standards could face financial penalties of up to £5,000.

Ashley Campbell, Policy and Practice Manager at CIH Scotland said: “We welcome the introduction of minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector.

“People should be able to expect to live in a warm, energy efficient home regardless of what tenure they are living in. Improving the energy efficiency of all of our homes will help to reduce fuel poverty and work towards meeting ambitious

climate change targets. However, we do have some concerns.

“If the regulations are to be successful, the Scottish Government must undertake a proactive communication campaign to ensure that landlords and tenants understand the new requirements. It is also essential that landlords have the support they need to comply including advice and information on what work needs to be done to their property and financial support such as low-cost loans if required.

“Robust monitoring and enforcement will also be key to ensuring compliance and it is unlikely that local authorities will be able to undertake this function without additional resources. We want to make sure that any new regulations are applied equally and fairly and that landlords who choose not to follow the rules are identified and dealt with accordingly.”

Wates celebrates extension of its Birmingham housing repairs contract

Housing contractor Wates Living Space is celebrating a multi-million pound extension to its repairs and maintenance work to 31,000 homes for Birmingham City Council.

Over the past three years, its work for the council has included 338,578 housing repairs completed, 89,829 gas services, 17,401 electrical tests and inspections and the refurbishment of 4,867 void properties. It has also spent £84.6m with local small businesses, a further £2.9m with Social Enterprises and has invested over £870,000 in training for local people.

The contract extension will see this work continue until the Spring of 2022. The company has achieved an average customer satisfaction score of 99.8 per cent, while also becoming winner of the UK Housing Awards 2018 for 'Outstanding Approach to Repairs and Housing Maintenance'.

As part of the contract extension, Wates has made a pledge to build on its investment in education, training and employment in Birmingham. To date this has included 1,788 weeks of training and employment for local people and an investment of over £27,000 in supporting education, including career workshops at Erdington Skills Centre.

Wates Living Space's work on behalf of the council included a flagship project to refurbish the 20-storey Barry Jackson Tower in Aston, which opened this year as a pioneering initiative to offer temporary accommodation to the city's homeless people.

David Morgan, Managing Director of Wates Property Services, commented: "The success of our work for Birmingham City Council can be seen in the scale and quality of our housing repairs and



maintenance across the city, and particularly in the consistently high customer satisfaction scores our teams have achieved.

"The true impact of this work, however, is evident in the extent of the positive impact we have made to the lives of local people. The team in Birmingham have worked tirelessly to

find ways in which they can make a difference, whether this is in supporting students, training job-seekers or in volunteering time to help local good causes. I am extremely proud of what has been achieved and very much look forward to seeing this great work continue in the coming years."

Report finds direct payments effective in curbing rent arrears

Private landlords are calling for payments of housing benefit to be made directly to them as the best way of preventing rent arrears and evictions.

A report from the Smith Institute, commissioned by Southwark Council has found that direct payments of benefit to landlords (rather than to tenants) contributed most to reductions in rent arrears.

The report shows there has been a noticeable decrease in the levels of arrears for those claiming Universal Credit in 2018, compared with those transitioning to Universal Credit in 2016, with tenants owing less than two weeks' rent on average as opposed to six.

It notes that "it is the earlier and increased use of Alternative Payment Arrangements, rather than

other reforms, which have contributed most to reductions in arrears levels".

The findings support the Residential Landlord Association's call that tenants in receipt of Universal Credit should have the right to choose whether the housing element is paid directly to their landlord, rather than into their bank account.

RLA policy director David Smith said: "Our own research finds that over half of landlords with tenants on Universal Credit have seen them fall into rent arrears in the last year.

"This report demonstrates that arrears are lower under direct payments to landlords and supports our call for the Government to give all tenants on Universal Credit the ability to choose to have the housing element paid directly to their landlord.

"Many tenants feel more comfortable with managing their finances knowing that their rent is paid and it should be up to them to be free to make that decision".

Currently, landlords can apply for an Alternative Payment Arrangement, but only after two months of rent arrears have built up. The RLA has been campaigning for tenants who are in receipt of Universal Credit to have the right to choose whether the housing element is paid directly to their landlord.

Research published for the RLA in August found that 54 per cent of those private landlords who have let to tenants on Universal Credit in the past 12 months have seen them fall into rent arrears. They also found that it took landlords an average of almost 8.5 weeks for an APA to be arranged.

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Nationwide Windows hosts informative fire door seminar for social housing professionals

To coincide with the launch of its latest product, Nationwide Windows held informative CPD-accredited seminars on fire doors at the Draycote Hotel in Rugby on 18 and 19 September.

‘The future of fire doors’ was one of a series of seminars Nationwide was hosting ahead of new legislation coming in to force on 1 November, which will mean all external fire doors must be tested against new European Standard BS EN 1634 (part 1 for fire, part 3 for smoke) in order to be CE Marked.

The seminar saw a range of talks including the latest on relevant legislation, where the sector faces problems, the importance of third party certification, the latest solutions and products and of course, the impact of both Brexit and the Grenfell Tower tragedy and subsequent Hackitt review.

Speakers included Russell Day, CEO of the Association of Composite Door Manufacturers (ACDM), Chris Costall, compliance director at Nationwide Windows, managing director Dave Gomersall and technical director Dave Walker of Fire Door Systems (FDS), and Peter Barker, technical manager at Warringtonfire.

Day kicked off proceedings with an update on the composite fire door industry, the effects Grenfell has had on the industry and the complexity of testing and compliance for manufacturers. When discussing Grenfell, he explained what measures and tests were undertaken on several composite doors by the Metropolitan Police and Ministry of Housing, Communities, & Local Government (MHCLG), supported by the ACDM, and what the findings – and subsequent potential solutions – of these were.

Both sides of a total of 22 composite fire doors, from eight manufacturers, were tested by the MHCLG (the full report on these can be found on the MHCLG website). Despite inconsistencies in the

results, when referred to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) they said the risk posed by composite doors remains low. The “major risk” in their opinion, explained Day, was fire door self-closing devices that had not been properly maintained, and in some cases had been removed completely – a pertinent point for housing stock managers to take note of.

Day also discussed third party certification of fire doors, which is not currently required by Building Regulations, saying the ACDM is encouraging its members to obtain this regardless – something Barker went on to discuss in more detail later. Day stressed the importance of assessments being based on primary test evidence. “We must base them on what we know about how that door will perform under fire,” he said. Finally, he discussed the importance of introducing a competency scheme for composite fire door installers.

Next was Costall’s talk on what manufacturers can do to help the social housing industry, focusing on the introduction of digital solutions. He began by explaining the measures Nationwide has taken since Grenfell to ensure its products are safe and fully compliant, including a breakdown of all the tests it put its doors and components through.

He then detailed the digital solutions now on offer, specifically the inclusion of a QR code on each product which provides invaluable information for both housing managers and tenants, including links to certifications, specific product details, evidence of CE Marks, and user and maintenance guides for residents. Moving forward, he detailed utilising third party software to simplify the process and reduce the time required to manage and maintain fire doors.

FDS’ Gomersall and Walker then took to the stage with a presentation on the new GRP fire door

being launched by Nationwide that they developed, with a video showcasing the rigorous testing procedure it’s been put through in order to meet the new legislation requirements. They explained the thinking behind certain decisions and details that went into the design.

Warringtonfire’s Barker finished the talks with a discussion on third party certification and how Brexit could affect things – for example a no-deal Brexit would mean a switch from CE Marking to UKCA Marking, though requirements would remain the same. He also discussed BM TRADA’s certification schemes process, as well as the importance of correct installation. “There’s no point having a good product if it’s not installed correctly,” he said.

Barker finished by discussing maintenance certification schemes, noting an important point for housing managers that while certifications are – at the moment – still a voluntary service, the maintenance of fire equipment is not. “It’s a legal duty placed on the responsible person to make sure their fire safety provisions have been maintained correctly,” he said. Certification schemes therefore provide the confidence that specified products will continue to perform as required, he explained.

The day ended with an innovative Q&A session – attendees had been requested to download an app at the start of the day which allowed them to anonymously ask questions on topics and points raised throughout the course of the day. Host Michelle Orpe gathered speakers on stage to go through submitted questions, which included further queries about Brexit’s impacts – attendees were reassured that in general the standards to adhere to should be unaffected – and more details on the products, systems and certification schemes mentioned throughout the day.

Blazes beset timber clad housing blocks

The social housing sector’s confidence in the safety of its residential stock has been badly shaken after a number of fires destroyed or badly damaged a number of developments over the course of the Summer months.

Two years on from the Grenfell Tower fire, it has been a huge relief to tenants, leaseholders, landlords and their staff that there has been no loss of life in the fires. But fleeing your home, at any time of day or night has proven to be a traumatic experience. A common feature has been the focus on the use of

timber as a material either in the main construction, or as cladding on the walls and balconies of the buildings.

Most of the fires have been in the capital, starting in June on a sunny Sunday morning when Samuel Garside House in Barking, east London was badly damaged. More recently fires broke out at blocks in Sutton and Hackney, on either side of London as timber clad buildings went up in flames.

Back in early August, fire ravaged through the Beechmere retirement and care home in Crewe,

Cheshire. The complex was home to 150 elderly people and had only been opened ten years earlier. Also in Hackney, the council announced it was decanting 41 households from Bridport House in order to replace “incorrect insulation” on the block. It was opened in 2011 and had won several design awards. But reflecting the more cautious and risk averse environment now pervading, the council decided to take a safety first approach. While the Government has been consulting on what is the right height to insist on the fitting of water sprinklers in new buildings, there surely needs to be a more thorough review of safety measures in all buildings. This cannot be limited to just newly built blocks of flats.



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Present and former Housing Ombudsmen in the news

Boris Johnson's former deputy mayor for housing in London, Richard Blakeway, has started work as the new Housing Ombudsman taking over from Andrea Keenoy, who had been in the role on a temporary basis.

Mr Blakeway joins the ombudsman at the start of its new three-year strategy, which aims to make "a difference on individual complaints and across the sector". He said: "This is an exciting time to be joining the ombudsman service. I am keen to build on our work to strengthen our service and create a positive culture around redress."

The Housing Ombudsman Service looks at complaints about housing organisations, addressing disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of

social landlords and any private landlords who are signed up to the service.

Last year's Social Housing Green Paper suggested the Government was looking at ways of making it easier for residents to access the ombudsman. However, expectations have fallen since Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May as Prime Minister.

FORMER OMBUDSMAN APPOINTED HA'S NEW CHAIR

South-west based Aster housing group has appointed a former housing ombudsman Dr Mike Biles as its new chair. He took over as head of the board on 1 October, replacing Andrew Jackson.

Dr Biles was ombudsman for 13 years until 2014. He has been a board member at Aster for four years and acted as senior independent director since last year, having previously chaired the group's audit committee. Aster will appoint a new senior independent director later this month.

Aster operates across the south of England where it owns and manages 30,000 properties. It had a turnover of £212m for 2018/19 according to its recently published financial results.

Shortly before assuming the chair's role Dr Biles said: "Aster has a clear vision of everyone having a home and a well-understood strategy that aims to increase the volume of high-quality, affordable houses across a range of tenures."

Housing contractor Kier reveals £245m loss

Giant housing contractor Kier has announced a £245m annual loss after enduring "a difficult year" which saw its revenues fall and significant losses on a number of its contracts.

The firm completes repairs and maintenance work for landlords across the social housing sector. Its losses for the year to 30 June 2019 compare with profits of £106m in the previous year. Overall its revenue fell three per cent to £4.12bn.

Although the company reported an "increased demand" for fire safety work in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, it reported that its housing maintenance arm had been hit by councils taking work back in-house.

Kier is selling its housebuilding arm and is also looking to offload its facilities management business and environmental services arms to concentrate on construction and civil engineering.

Chief executive Andrew Davies, said: "Kier experienced a difficult year, resulting in a disappointing financial performance. However, we are building firm foundations for the future: we have a new management team in place, we have defined our strategic priorities and we are taking decisive actions to deliver them."

Kier also announced that its chairman, Philip Cox, will step down once a replacement has been found.

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Could rent caps be the new battleground over private lettings?

A barrage of new rules and tougher regulation has rained down on the private rented sector in the past couple of years, but could this be overshadowed by a much bigger conflict over the introduction of rent controls?

Private landlords have long campaigned against the re-introduction of rent controls saying it would drive many of them out of the letting business and would ultimately make the housing crisis worse by reducing the number of properties available for rent and driving up demand.

Over the Summer, reforms to prevent revenge evictions dominated the headlines. Then in July the Government launched a consultation on opening up access to the rogue landlords' database, allowing tenants and prospective tenants to check on landlords and letting agents. This exercise ends in mid October.

But a new report could raise temperatures among landlords. It is calling for Manchester's leaders to be given powers to cap private rents as increasing numbers of the city's population are struggling to find a home they can afford. It claims that house prices in the city have risen fourfold in the last 20 years.

A DEVOLUTION DEAL FOR MANCHESTER

The report says that rents in the city centre now top £1,000 a month and that across the wider Greater Manchester region younger renters in particular are struggling with affordability. It says 48 per cent have had to cut back on essentials to cover their housing costs, compared with 33 per cent across England. The city is also struggling with rising levels of homelessness.

As part of a new devolution deal for Greater Manchester, the report's authors say politicians need powers to establish "rent pressure zones" – a form of rent capping – to tackle the city's housing problem.

Already operational in Scotland, zoning enables a local authority to cap private rents in high-demand areas, to ensure that certain neighbourhoods do not become the preserve of the wealthy.

The report is based on research from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce commissioned by One Manchester, a major social landlord in the city. The RSA says there needs to be help for workers in the city's gig economy, such as Deliveroo riders and Uber drivers, who struggle to obtain mortgages or even pass rental checks.

HOUSING PRESSURES GROWING

Manchester has a larger private rented sector than the national average and the city council has a social housing waiting list of 13,000 households. In Greater Manchester some 92,000 social homes have been lost through the Right to Buy since 1980. This has put more pressure on the city's rental sector.

Average house prices in the city are 6.6 times



average incomes. This is less than the English average of eight times, which is skewed by London, where, at the most extreme, house prices are more than 20 times average incomes.

But an average house in Manchester now costs £175,000 compared with £36,500 in 1995, meaning costs have more than quadrupled in 24 years.

The report also encourages Greater Manchester to implement minimum standards for access to private or neighbourhood outside space such as gardens, balconies and roof gardens.

CAPITAL COMPARISONS

These steps are similar to the extra powers which the London Mayor Sadiq Khan has been calling for to tackle the capital's housing affordability crisis and to provide him with the sort of tools already available to the mayors of cities like Berlin and New York. In the German capital, which has recently announced a five-year rent freeze, rents are controlled both within and between tenancies.

In a blueprint for the overhaul of London's rental sector, Mayor Khan has already identified a series of devolved powers that he wants. These are expected to feature prominently in his campaign for re-election next year. They include:

- A universal register of landlords to access valuable data as well as enforce standards.
- Establishing a London private rent commission to design and implement an effective system of rent control.
- Implementing rent stabilisation measures such as caps on rent increases while the commission does its work.

The average private rent for a one-bedroom home in London is now more than the average for a three-bed home in every other region of England. The proportion of Londoners who are renting privately has risen from just 11 per cent in 1990 to 26 per cent last year.

ELECTION PLEDGES

With the prospect of a general election growing, it is

worth noting that Labour's 2017 manifesto included a pledge to "introduce controls on rent rises" and to consider giving the London Mayor additional powers, given the particular pressures in the capital.

If such measures are repeated, they are likely to prove more popular with the capital's electors than Jeremy Corbyn's statements about extending the right to buy, to tenants in the private rented sector.

Neither of these are likely to be delivered by a future Conservative government, so it remains to be seen if they ever find their way onto the statute book but the odds have to be stacked against them.

What is more open, is whether the additional powers will be granted to Manchester or any other city regions which already have some devolution from Whitehall. In Scotland where councils can apply "rent pressure zones", it has the consequence that rent rises in the private sector can be limited to no more than the inflation rate.

WILL THE DATABASE GROW

It remains to be seen if Prime Minister Johnson proceeds with making changes to the rogue landlords' database. The consultation exercise was launched by former Communities Secretary James Brokenshire, who is no longer in office. The closing date for responses was 12 October.

Back in July, Brokenshire said: "This database has the potential to ensure that poor-quality homes across the country are improved and the worst landlords are banned. Landlords should be in no doubt that they must provide decent homes or face the consequences."

Earlier this year freedom of information requests found that only four landlords had been added to it. Brokenshire said he expected about 600 of the worst landlords to be added to the list. We wait to see if tenants will be able to look up their landlords and letting agents by name on the database to check their track records, for any sex and drugs offences as well as failing to provide proper accommodation.

We will also wait to see if Manchester's leaders (and the London Mayor) are given powers to cap private rents in their cities.

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A unique event for a diverse sector

With a new home for the 2019 edition, HOMES UK will provide the UK's residential property sector with the opportunity to connect, learn and do business over an action-packed two days



HOMES UK is an unrivalled event that will look at the entire ecosystem of both home building and maintenance for every type of accommodation in the UK, from affordable to market sale and the rapidly growing build to rent, student, co-living and retirement sectors.

It's the only event of its kind to unite so many residential players, driving collaboration and discussion, and providing a showcase for the latest solutions necessary to deliver a diverse and high-quality supply of new homes to address the UK crisis.

HOMES UK also consistently attracts the largest concentrated audience of senior decision-makers (70 per cent of attendees have budgetary responsibility), making it a fantastic platform for doing business.

ALL OF THE ACTION IN ONE PLACE

The show floor is set to host over 200 exhibitors, showcasing innovative products and services designed for HOMES UK's key market. Meanwhile, the extensive conference programme will run over seven varied theatres covering everything from sustainability, design quality and regeneration, to planning reform, Brexit and the sector's future workforce.

Bringing together a programme that covers every type of residential accommodation is no mean feat, but the show's creators have curated the best of your sector's expertise and achievements through over 70 hours of high-calibre content.

Although now in its eighth year, the ethos of HOMES UK hasn't changed – keeping the design, build and management of great quality homes in thriving communities at its heart. The programme will provide insight on complex challenges while also offering practical advice and success stories led by peers.

Choose from topics spanning the entire lifecycle of residential development and asset management. This year, you'll find industry heavyweights and rising stars alongside even the odd celebrity, making HOMES UK an event not to be missed. Conference highlights include:

- How should we reform the planning system?
- Brexit or bust? What's next for the residential market?
- Design quality: Building better, not just building more
- Hackitt 18 months on: What still needs to change?
- Regeneration: How do we drive quality community engagement?
- Homes for an ageing population: At crisis point?
- Sustainability and the carbon zero challenge
- Health and wellbeing in our homes and towns

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- Learn from proven case studies on what is working in the sector – the organisers have spent hours researching the answers to your biggest





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- Keep up-to-date with product innovations and sector announcements at the show's biggest-ever exhibition of 250 suppliers.

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2019?

- A focus on rapidly growing markets like build to rent, student accommodation, intergenerational and co-living – keep up with trends or research expansion opportunities.
- Reimagine what housing looks like at the Home of 2030 charette led by the Ministry of Building Innovation & Education (MOBIE). Generate ideas by collaborating with students and sector leaders.
- New TECH theatre dedicated to digital innovation and customer experience – a one-stop shop to help progress your digital journey.

Public sector and not-for-profit employees can register for a free visitor pass (a £165+VAT per day ticket fee applies to private sector and for-profit attendees) and start planning their content schedule. You can tell HOMES UK what you're most looking forward to by joining the conversation on Twitter @HomesEvent. The show looks forward to welcoming you to the ExCeL later this year to explore the #futureofliving.

Visit homesevent.co.uk/register to complete your registration and secure your ticket

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The skills shortage – training the next generation

National Housing Maintenance Forum (NHMF) advisor Andrew Burke outlines the organisation's mission to improve property performance and promote best practice to the next generation of asset managers as they begin their careers in social housing



As one of the social housing sector's leading sources of good practice in the field of maintenance and asset management, the NHMF has always had a clear remit to help social landlords be efficient, effective and economic in complying with their health and safety requirements. However, with the challenges our members are experiencing in recruiting skilled staff into the sector, we cannot ignore the increasing need to provide easily accessible training tools for new staff to ensure they have access to key resources relating to best practice, legislation and compliance.

Those of us working in repairs and maintenance will be all too aware that the UK's housing stock relies on a competent workforce. Many of our members have experienced first-hand the rising skills shortage caused by multiple factors

including the potential impact of Brexit on our migrant workforce, a decline in the number of apprenticeships and an ageing workforce. According to the latest FMB State of Trade survey, the skills shortage is continuing to have a significant impact on the industry with 64 per cent of construction employers struggling to hire bricklayers and 59 per cent struggling to hire carpenters. Looking ahead, the skills gap is having a knock-on effect on driving up wages and materials costs with the Farmer Review predicting the construction labour force will decline by 20-25 per cent within a decade and the CITB forecasting that average construction employment is expected to grow at just 0.6 per cent per year between 2017-2021 as a result of a record low level of new entrants joining the sector to replace the 700,000 retiring workers.



Taking all these factors into consideration, the need to provide rigorous training in best practice and compliance for those working in repairs and maintenance is imperative. With a commitment to providing up to date, free resources to asset managers and contractors across the social housing sector, the NHMF has always recognised that cultivating new talent is key to our combined success.

Advice on best practice should be a key part of their induction process. Landlords wanting to train new staff in their own compliance priorities and procedures can access the free best practice resources on our website which provide a useful starting point for any organisation looking to review its policy or agree compliance priorities with senior management teams. This is becoming increasingly important as the government implements the recommendations from the Hackitt Review in its 'Building a Safer Future' proposals. This aspect of asset management and maintenance has become more important and is likely to remain so with increasing scrutiny by the Regulator of Social Housing. It will no

longer be sufficient for social landlords to have ticked all the boxes. They will need to demonstrate that they have assessed the risks for their residents and that they are actively managing and reducing those risks.

We also encourage new starters to make full use of our best practice guidelines so they can review their organisation's current practice and propose possible improvements or make use of any free resources that could be used as part of their annual CPD training.

As an organisation, the NHMF is committed to supporting training and development and ensuring we recognise success across the industry. Our annual conference in January will be exploring this in more detail with the aim of providing innovative solutions to tackle the challenges associated with the ongoing skills shortage. We actively encourage a collaborative approach to common problems so we can all learn from others' success and share examples of good practice. The NHMF Awards in Birmingham includes a 'Best Apprentice Scheme' category to reward organisations who have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to nurturing in-house skills. In addition, we continue to provide training sessions and seminars throughout the year to support both clients and contractors to continue learning.

As clients and contractors explore new ways to address the skills shortage, the need to focus on how we can all develop strategies to harness new talent is likely to remain a hot topic. Whatever the future holds, we have a collective remit to attract, train and retain staff and it is clear that this should be at the heart of all our agendas.

The NHMF hosts a range of events throughout the year including the NHMF Maintenance Conference and Awards in Birmingham from 21-22 January 2020. Visit www.nhmf.co.uk for more information



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Intratone appoints new Country Manager

Intratone has appointed Victor D'Allancé as its new UK Country Manager to spearhead the company's continued growth with the aim of becoming a market leader within four years. Previously Victor headed up the UK subsidiary of Devialet, a technology startup manufacturing high-end speakers, for three years. Before that, he spent four years in the investment banking division of BNP Paribas in Moscow and London. Victor has been instrumental in setting up the UK office in Chiswick, which will be officially opened during a launch party on 17th October. He has also been recruiting for the sales, finance and marketing teams to ensure the UK subsidiary is fully functioning.



020 8037 9012 www.intratone.uk.com

Northern Housing Consortium Selection

KMS are pleased to announce that they have been appointed on the Northern Housing Property Safety & Security Framework for Residential Access Control and its SimpleKey Web solution. The Framework is the commercial arm of the Northern Housing Consortium which was established as a result of a procurement exercise that covers a range of areas including the design, supply, install, certification and maintenance of CCTV, Door Entry & Access Control, Intruder Alarms and Lightning Protection Systems. KMS will be working closely with the Consortium over the coming months and will be attending their events to give members access to our team, face to face.



01494 531099 www.kms.uk.net

PoziDry Compact Pro named as a finalist

Vent-Axia is delighted to announce that its ground-breaking Lo-Carbon PoziDry Compact Pro Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) unit has been announced as a finalist at The Electrical Industry Awards 2019. This innovative product combats condensation in mould even in the smallest of homes and has been shortlisted in the 'Residential/Domestic Product of the Year' category at these prestigious awards. The PoziDry Compact Pro boasts quick and simple installation for contractors. Featuring a removable inner cartridge, the PoziDry Compact Pro's foam back plate weighs just 130g ensuring there is no need for installers to lift a heavy metal box above head height to mark drilling holes.



0844 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com

Airtech advises landlords

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recently issued draft guidelines relating to Indoor Air Quality (IAQ). In the consultation document NICE encourages landlords to be aware of the air quality in their residents' homes, a subject that is becoming an increasingly vital issue in the UK. With other 30 years' experience helping landlords tackle condensation and mould **Airtech** is well placed to offer advice and solutions to help landlords make changes to their indoor air quality strategy. Airtech has range of services and solutions to help landlords avoid disrepair cases and improve IAQ. Airtech's patented market-leading ventilation technology provides resident comfort and efficient ventilation.



01823 690 292 www.airtechsolutions.co.uk

Condensation and mould awareness

EnviroVent, one of the UK's leading ventilation manufacturers, is offering Condensation and Mould Awareness free workshops to help housing associations and local authorities to be better equipped to deal with these issues.

Through the workshops, EnviroVent aims to help social housing providers to reduce the burden on their maintenance teams during the colder months when problems with condensation and mould are more likely to occur.

The workshops provide attendees with an in-depth insight into what causes condensation and mould and how to improve indoor air quality in tenants' homes.



0345 27 27 810 www.envirovent.com

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Drimaster-Eco is a highly effective, low-cost energy-efficient retrofit solution is the go-to product for Housing Associations who want a long-term solution that is easy to install in existing homes.

www.nuaire.co.uk/condensation

Estate customised with Kooltherm

A new build estate of bespoke modular houses is benefitting from the outstanding thermal performance of **Kingspan Kooltherm K110 Plus Soffit Board**. Swan Housing Association is aiming to reduce the operational CO₂ emissions of each of its properties to 2.6 tonnes per year by 2021. With this commitment in mind, the Kingspan Kooltherm K110 Plus Soffit Board was specified for use in the houses with recessed entrances, in order to effectively insulate the spaces above. This outstanding thermal performance allowed the target U-value to be met with a slim thickness of insulation, ensuring the aesthetic integrity of Pollard Thomas Edwards' contemporary designs could be maintained.



Image: Swan Housing Association

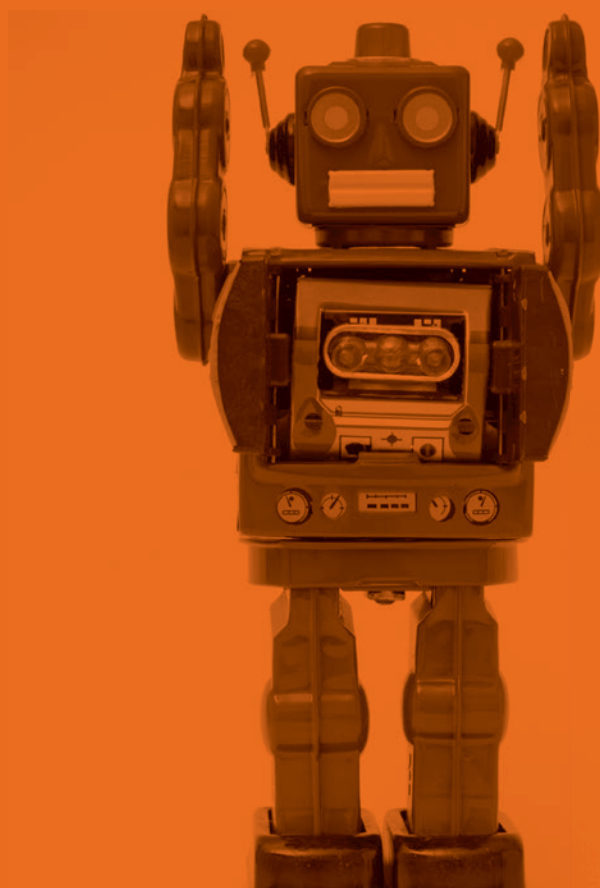
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Fallow Park, Staffordshire, by Jessup

Choosing a warranty provider

Dean Stritch of LABC Warranty describes what to look for when choosing a warranty provider for residential and commercial projects

How do you choose a warranty provider? With a range of options on the market, what is the difference, and how do you choose the cover that is right for your development? LABC Warranty provides the following top tips on how to choose.

THE COVER

Not all structural warranty policies provide the same level of cover.

While some differences may be subtle, others can be more dramatic and potentially leave you unprotected in certain situations. The level of excess or financial limits also vary from provider to provider. Obviously the best way to completely understand any insurance policy is to read it in full, but here are some useful questions that you might want to ask at the start to help narrow down your search:

- What is the policy excess?
- Is water ingress excluded from cover?
- What is the financial limit for each house or unit?
- Is there an overall policy limit?
- Does the policy include a defects insurance period (more on this later)?

THE INSURER

Most structural warranty companies provide insurance policies underwritten by insurers rather than underwriting the policy themselves. This means that any claims will be paid by the insurer backing the policy.

Structural warranties are for a 10-year period. Given this length of time it is

even more important to ensure that the insurer you choose will continue to trade for the duration of the policy. This may seem straightforward, but how can you know whether an insurer is reliable and secure? One useful indicator is to ask who the insurer is behind the policy and request their financial rating. The stronger the rating, the more likely they are judged to be able to meet their financial obligations, including potential claims.

LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE

When you are working with a builder or sub-contractor, do you choose to work with the company with a proven track record, or someone completely new to the industry?

We're guessing you would go with the more experienced operator, so why would your insurance provider be any different? Providing 10-year structural warranties means that it takes at least 10 years for a provider to have any customers that have been through the entire process. To be sure you are dealing with an experienced company you might want to ask the following:

- How many years have they have been providing structural warranties?
- Are they a member of the Consumer Code for Home Builders?
- Are they accepted by mortgage lenders?

RISK MANAGEMENT & TECHNICAL SUPPORT

When you are buying an insurance product, it is important to remember that the warranty provider will be working alongside you for the duration of the project. Therefore, you should find out exactly how they will operate on your

site(s) and the implications this may have on your projects:

- Do they employ their own surveyors?
- Do they have clear technical standards?
- What technical support can they provide to assist during the project?

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Just as risk management and technical support is important to the build process, the warranty provider's customer service will affect your day-to-day experience, including the issuing of your certificates at the end of the project. Ask the provider:

- Will you have a dedicated point of contact or account manager?
- How quickly can you expect a response to your query?
- How do you receive your certificates after completion?
- How will you track and measure site performance (online or paper exercise)?
- Will you be provided with any homeowner feedback as part of the service?

VALUE

Yes, margins can be tight, but rather than putting cost or price first, it is worth considering what you are getting for your money. Before you make a decision based solely on price, make sure you are happy with the answers provided to the above questions. Remember too the peace of mind a good structural warranty offers and reputational protection.

WORKING WITH MODERN METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION

With developers and builders using different methods of construction, not just bricks and mortar, it is worth knowing how your warranty provider works with this type of project. Have a look at their customers' work and see what kind of projects they are covering. Better still, do they work with an accreditation scheme that allows build products and systems to be pre-approved for warranty cover, with any conditions clearly shown.

Dean Stritch is national sales manager at LABC Warranty



WHAT IS A STRUCTURAL WARRANTY AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

A structural warranty covers latent defects – in other words, issues with the building's construction that cannot reasonably be foreseen. It is an insurance policy that ensures any major damage caused by structural defects in the design, workmanship or components of a building, are put right in the first 10 years from build completion. Generally, a structural warranty is split into two periods of time:

- Defects Insurance Period – typically the first one or two years of a policy, this period is the time in which the builder is responsible for rectifying any defects deemed to be a failure to comply with the warranty provider's standards.
- Structural Insurance Period – generally eight years following the Defects Insurance Period during which time the warranty provider is responsible for dealing directly with claims. Providing the claim is valid, the provider should then organise any necessary repair work, or pay for such repairs.

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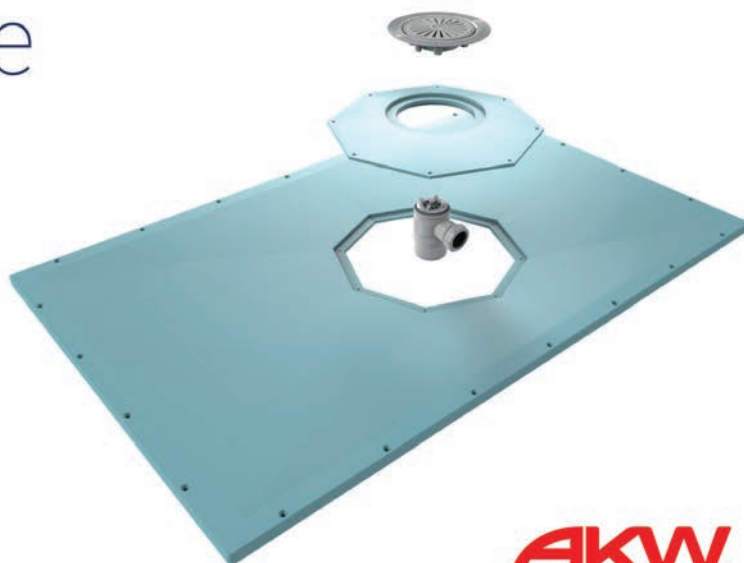
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Adapt to changing market needs

Robin Tuffley of Closomat discusses why it's so important for landlords to make their homes – particularly bathrooms – accessible for all and what changes can be made

The rental housing market – private and social – is experiencing significant change: not only are more people now renting, the demographic is shifting too. The bathroom is one key area where landlords can ensure their properties address those market changes.

We are all well aware there we need more houses, and more people are renting – the figure in the PRS sector has risen from 2.8 million to 4.5 million in a decade. In social housing, the demand for homes for older people is 10 times higher than current availability.

Set alongside that, more older people are now renting than in the past – the 45-54 year age group represents 16 per cent of the market, compared to 11 per cent just a few years ago. Our disabled population is also growing – people are living longer, and needing more alterations to their home to enable them to remain in it; people who were either born with a disability or became disabled through life-changing incident are similarly living longer as a result of medical advances.

It's about a move from affordable homes to accessible homes, homes that enable people of all ages and abilities to live in an appropriate environment: adapting to provide a lifetime home. Indeed, a YouGov poll found that 75 per cent of people felt all new homes should be built to be accessible to all ages and abilities, so it is something the market wants.

What few people are aware of is that, with existing properties, subject to certain qualifying criteria, the landlord can apply for Government funding under the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to undertake that adaptive work. Up to £30,000 may be available. There are moves afoot to simplify this whole process, and reduce or remove one of the current qualification of five or more years' residence in the property.

Research shows that if someone needs alterations to their home to continue to live as independently as possible, the bathroom is the room most frequently adapted. Alongside that, there have been two important documents published in recent months that affect the rental housing market.

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists' 'Adaptations Without Delay' provides a new framework to transfer the focus of adaptations to a person-centred outcome, to simplify and re-prioritise the process to enable more timely, proportionate solutions. Changes such as installing a level access shower could now be classed as a simple, straightforward alteration whereas historically it was viewed as a major adaptation, depending on the specific environment.

Further, an all-party parliamentary group inquiry into decent and accessible homes is highlighting the importance of universal design in housing provision. It states "many older people do not like the idea of being stuck with poorly designed and unappealing aids and equipment. One approach... is to take a universal design approach towards products and services to make them suitable and appealing to all age groups".

Fixtures such as wash and dry toilets are a perfect example of how those issues can be addressed. As a fitting, they are becoming more mainstream, and aspirational. A wash and dry toilet gives enhanced cleanliness and hygiene over





wiping with toilet paper, and can be operated by almost anyone, independently, irrespective of age or ability. A wash and dry toilet is the enabling, universal design answer to something we all do, on average eight times a day, and something that is very private and personal.

It is not hard to refurbish a bathroom to be inclusive and accessible. It may not have to be done as a specific capital project, as many of the tweaks to make a bathroom suitable for all ages and abilities, accessible, can be done as part of a routine maintenance programme.

One of the simplest 'fixes' is use of colour. Colour not only influences the ambience, but can be used effectively to differentiate certain fixtures and fittings.

Replace a shower tray with a level access shower, or even remove the shower enclosure completely and create a wetroom. Thermostatic controls and lever taps give any user easier access and enhanced safety.

Location also really matters with fittings in a bathroom. Position the WC away from a parallel wall: a Lifetime Homes criterion. Thus, it can be used

Research shows that if someone needs alterations to their home to continue to live as independently as possible, the bathroom is the room most frequently adapted

easily by someone in a wheelchair or who uses a frame, in that they can access it from either side, or a carer has space to assist if necessary. If the bathroom is being adapted and refurbished for a specific tenant who has disabilities, a wash and dry toilet may be a sensible option in enabling them to continue to live there for as long as possible, with reduced or no care intervention. As outlined above, the capital cost of such a fixture can be covered under a DFG, so a smart, aspirational upgrade may not even impact on the refurbishment budget.

Hang the washbasin within reach of the WC without excessive reaching. It can then double as a support – assuming the supporting wall and fixings are appropriately load-bearing.

The capability to install a hoist is another Lifetime Homes criteria, and is a change being made with increasing frequency with our increasingly obese society. Where space is at a premium, a ceiling track hoist optimises useable floor space. Versions are available with discreet gantry legs, so if the ceiling is not appropriately load-bearing, there is still a solution. The key in design and installation of an overhead hoist system is that it can reach every necessary point of the room! It sounds obvious, but structural obstacles or placement of fixtures may limit its movability.

These few hints will help refurbish a bathroom to be suitable for as broad a range of tenants and their families as possible. That increases its suitability for occupants. And increases its rental appeal.

Robin Tuffley is marketing manager at Closomat

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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Glass alignment made simple with CRL

With the trend for minimalistic architecture going strong, many designs involve a frameless glass balustrade system that doesn't require a handrail to meet the legal loading requirements, and that is easy to adjust. To help achieve this, architectural hardware specialist CRL has launched two new adjustable glass balustrade systems.

Ideal for residential projects and small commercial applications, CRL Spig-Lite Pro is a fully adjustable glass balustrade system with a unique clamping design that removes the need to hold the glass with locking pins. The elongated holes allow for easy adjustment of the glass panels, ensuring the top edge of the glass is equal when a handrail is not required.



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New augmented reality app released

Stelrad has released a new App to help those specifying Stelrad radiators to envisage them in a real life setting. The augmented reality App is free and can be downloaded from your Apple and Android App store. Users will also be interested to see that Stelrad has added more of its sector leading radiator products for domestic and commercial buildings – and they are now available to incorporate in designs.



Details can be found on the Stelrad website or you can call for further information. You can also follow Stelrad on Twitter @Stelrad or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/StelradLimited.

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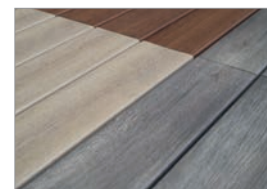


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A better future for all?

Keith Plummer of Ubbink discusses why the launch of BS 8612 was necessary and how it has impacted the industry and made dry verge systems a reliable roofing solution



British Standards launched BS 8612: Dry-Fixed Ridge, Hip and Verge Systems to raise and control manufacturing quality levels last year, and its implementation has seen products be redeveloped and improved by manufacturers to comply with the new standards and tests.

The industry must carry the responsibility to ensure all manufacturers produce quality products – in return specifiers select quality products, merchants supply quality products, contractors fit quality products and house owners can be assured their roof complies and will function correctly. The time is well overdue where legislation and performance stand up and be counted!

British Standard BS 5250: Control of Condensation in Building and BS 5534: Slating and Tiling have been in place for years to ensure professional and consistent building conditions are adhered to. BS 5534 was last reviewed and updated four years ago after the industry and experts deemed mortar bedding for ridge and hip less trustworthy, with a shorter lifespan than newer technologies. In turn, BS 5534 was revised stating that all ridge and hip tiles had to be mechanically fixed even when mortar had been used to improve the fix.

BS 5250 and BS 5534:2014 were very clear on how and where the products needed to be installed to meet the requirements, however what wasn't available was a British Standard to test the products and their durability. With more harsh and adverse weather conditions hitting the UK each year, some systems were failing which resulted in delays on sites and returns to builds to fix systems that

Dry verge systems have become increasingly popular as they allow not only additional securing points for the roof tiles, but replace the need for mortar

had become loose or totally disengaged due to the high winds and snow loads.

Over the last few years in particular, dry verge systems have become increasingly popular as they allow not only additional securing points for the roof tiles, but replace the need for mortar, meeting current regulations. But with the increase of products in the market it has become more and more difficult to specify a durable system, as often the products look alike with similar features, but have hidden compromises to reduce cost.

Early examples of dry verge systems had inherited well-known and common issues such as poor quality raw material being used, resulting in units warping (PVC is a non-runner and polypropylene without certain additives will not perform), and just not being resilient enough. Units were also being secured either to the end of an extended cut tile batten or directly to the barge board,



resulting in a less secure fix. The introduction of a face fixing batten bracket is a key point and improves the fix dramatically. If there was no barge board for the starter unit to be installed to, the contractor was forced to come up with other ways of securing the eaves unit – one way was with the use of some wire threaded through the unit and secured to a nail or screw to the fascia board.

Once the system was installed these issues were not clearly visible, so were 'out of sight, out of mind' until the bad weather hit and failings became more obvious causing problems for contractors, and specifiers. The most common visible issue that stood out was the allowance of rainwater to either drip or run

BS 8612 has provided reassurance that if Standards are met and manufacturer's instructions are followed, there should not be a need for a return to make repairs

down the gable wall of the property, leaving an unsightly staining.

Industry experts soon realised that the increase in verge products on the market not adhering to any standard was proving difficult – specifiers didn't know they were selecting a trustworthy quality system with longevity. This is where the start of BS 8612 came into fruition, with all the common factors of dry-fix installs being discussed and how these should and could be overcome to improve current builds. This gives all parties involved in the selection process, from contractors to end users, the confidence that what is being used on a project is up to a certain level of expectation and not a weak solution.

The British Standard BS 8612 is set out to ensure that dry fix roofing products pass the physical demands like vertical load for wind uplift (verge), rain drainage (verge) as well as an accelerated colour fast test, for aesthetics. The full independent range of tests are carried out by the experts at the Building Research Establishment (BRE) in Watford (although some larger companies may have the facilities to run their own) and are calibrated to indicate which of the products can be installed within the correct wind zones, as long as the full system has been used and installed as per the manufacturer's instructions.

The testing procedures have given a greater confidence in the products, regardless of who made them, for the specifier, installer and developer. They have provided the knowledge and reassurance that if Standards are met and manufacturer's instructions are followed, there should not be a need for a return to make repairs.

Keith Plummer is technical manager at Ubbink

Keeping dry...

By Ian Weakford, Sales & Marketing Director @ Hambleside Danelaw

With the increasing unpredictability of British weather, particularly in winter, ensure you- and the properties you manage- stay dry.

Extreme winters have challenged roofing product manufacturers to develop solutions to reduce the impact of the weather, particularly wind. It causes slates and tiles to dislodge, underlays to vibrate, and can lead to rain ingress. Even winds as 'low' as 20mph can cause damage.

In most situations there is therefore a requirement to use dry, rather than 'wet', fix solutions, so that the roof details, particularly ridges and hips, remain intact, and therefore weatherproof, regardless of the extremes of winter weather. Because the fixing method is dry, remedial work can be carried out almost regardless of the weather; 'wet' methods, such as mortar, by contrast need a degree of decent weather for the mortar to cure before being subjected to load.

The realisation of the practicality and durability of dry fix solutions has seen a growth in their popularity. This in turn has led to a growth in the number of mechanically-fixed products available, with a corresponding diversity of quality and performance. It is a case of 'you get what you pay for': products with a higher unit cost are usually manufactured and tested to higher quality standards, so can be expected to be easier to use, and to perform better. Thus the perceived higher

cost can actually result in a saving, in that the product will withstand the loads, remain in place, and reduce repairs. To put it into perspective, storm Doris in 2017 saw a 300 per cent increase in the cost of insurance claims from wind damage.

Inevitably, in line with these market force changes, a British Standard has been introduced. BS8612:2018 Dry Fixed Ridge, Hip and Verge Systems for Slating & Tiling: Specification aims to create minimum performance & durability standards for dry fix products used in these areas.

But making a roof weatherproof has to be balanced alongside allowing the roof to "breathe", to avoid any interstitial condensation. Debate continues to rage about the best way to achieve this, with the arguments primarily focusing around the underlay. Should it be airtight or permeable? Because it is a topic so debatable, our view is always to follow a 'belt and braces' approach: vapour permeable underlay AND ventilation. Current Regulations require the ridge to be mechanically fixed, so the small, additional material cost is more than outweighed by the cost of fixing a roof riddled with damp and rot from condensation.

A roof does need to breathe, so ventilation openings will need to be provided anyway. Some argue that air permeable membranes are more effective in allowing the dissipation of moisture, but their use needs to be considered in the increased tile fixing specification as there will be



greater load on the tiles- another reason to rely on mechanical fix rather than 'wet' which is so dependant on the quality of the mix, the quality of application and the weather.

As with dry fix products, membranes too vary in quality and price, and again, you get what you pay for. With the recent years of high winds, the UK has now been zoned by wind uplift. Most membranes are not certified for use in all zones, unless particular attention is paid to the fixing method i.e. restraining battens or taped joints.

To be sure your roofs will perform, the best solution is to check your spec. with the manufacturer, and be sure you read the small print, to understand any limitations of use, and to ensure the roofing contractor quotes for and installs what you have specified.

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Centurion improves ratchet straps offering

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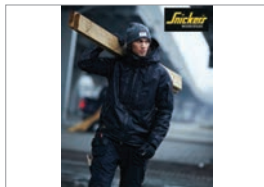
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L-R: Insulation technicians George Roberts, Dalan Johnson and Martin Adaskiewicz from Aran Services together with Glidevale's Technical Officer Thomas Brookes

Glidevale helps Aran Services to combat roofspace condensation

Insulation technicians from energy efficiency and property improvement firm Aran Services have been brushing up their skills in fitting Glidevale roof tile ventilators. Working with local authorities and housing associations across the UK to make homes more energy efficient, Aran is installing Glidevale roof tile ventilators for a number of social housing providers' refurbishment programmes. Where additional insulation is installed during roofing insulation upgrades, ventilation requirements change and should conform to standards set out in BS 5250. When retrofitting, tile and slate ventilators are the easiest way to provide controlled ventilation and combat harmful condensation that would otherwise form within the roofspace. "We are pleased to add Glidevale tile ventilation to our range of improvements that we are able to offer homes and businesses nationwide", said Alan Phillips, Aran Contracts Manager. As part of its service to Aran, Glidevale's Technical Team has undertaken site surveys and given guidance across various housing developments, to ascertain the type of tile vents required for the different roofs. Other complimentary technical services offered by Glidevale include regulations guidance, toolbox talks, CPDs, site take offs, plot by plot delivery, CAD detailing and U-value calculations.

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Robotics – the future of housing

Rob Bryan of Vantage discusses harnessing the power of robotic process automation in social housing

Housing associations are fast finding how to harness artificial intelligence to streamline processes and reduce costs. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is evolving as the new go-to tool in the bid to improve customer experience and unlock staff time.

RPA offers a new way to create efficiency in asset management, where the sector has seen R&M spend reducing and improvements in contract management and internal maintenance service operations. This is an idea tool to drive further efficiencies without compromising on service.

WHAT IS RPA?

RPA is where you automate business tasks using software “robots” that imitate the operations and processes traditionally performed by people. It’s particularly suited to high volume activities in an organisation, that don’t require human decision-making or qualitative appraisal thinking. The software robots mimic the tasks completed by humans using existing systems and applications in your organisation. They have the ability to interpret, trigger responses and communicate with systems. The technology is being used widely in other industries, particularly in HR and manufacturing.

RPA IN HOUSING?

RPA is ideally suited to the housing sector, particularly in business areas such as asset management, finance, HR and contact centres.

As the sector is in a continuous state of flux, merging and amalgamating, there is a perfect opportunity to review what processes and systems can be transformed by new technologies. Many providers find themselves in a situation with multiple software systems and processes that need to be knitted together or having to select one set of systems over the other. Introducing RPA at this stage will enable you to think more widely about how to select systems based on customer need and business process driven decision making.

The advice is to start by identifying well-defined, simple, high volume, repeatable processes for automation. For example, accounts reconciliation, payroll and accounts payable are all tasks that can be automated. The robot can

take an invoice that is emailed to you, open the email, open the attachment, scan the invoice document for key information, add that to your system, cross reference with purchase order numbers and process it for payment.

RPA IN ASSET MANAGEMENT

RPA is ideally suited within property management functions in areas such as asset management, compliance, repairs, servicing and maintenance.

Even organisations who are in the midst of a wider transformation programme can benefit as RPA offers interim solutions, improving processes that free up staff time to work on the wider transformation work. There is no need to put a hold on all improvements while you wait for new systems to be implemented, which can often take years to embed. RPA can be up and running within a matter of weeks with relatively low investment.

Our clients are currently exploring processes to onboard new tenants, including streamlining mortgage applications, creating new tenancy records and integration with housing management systems and council systems. Many of these processes are completed manually, with frequent errors occurring. Similarly, compliance functions have seen the benefits of robotics, reducing the need to manually key in information or tag fire safety and electrical certificates.

Russell Thompson, executive director of property services at Thirteen Group explains more: “Like many housing associations Thirteen are constantly looking at ways of improving customer experience, value for money and our customer offer. The use of AI and Robotic Process Automation will provide a new approach that can provide efficiency and savings in everyday tasks allowing staff then to concentrate on the overall customer experience.

“We are already considering the uses within our property management functions, in areas such as asset management, facilities management, repairs, servicing and maintenance. The associated benefits are efficiency and consistency of our approach, realigning our people resources to improving our customer experience and offer, data analytics and trends that can help predicting breakdowns, repair cycles and therefore moving from a reactive approach to a more proactive approach.”

WHAT BENEFITS CAN YOU EXPECT FROM USING RPA?

As you would expect, automation offers many benefits, but it's not just about operational efficiency. It also helps contribute to a happier workforce, that is focused on higher value tasks, that are not only more satisfying but add more value to your organisation. A happier workforce is more likely to stay at an organisation, retaining talent in the company and creating a culture where people want to come and work. As employees are freed up from the mundane tasks such as processing invoices, they are able to work directly with customers, helping them find homes, engaging them in tenant involvement schemes and solving property issues.

The benefits of an RPA strategy include improved accuracy, reduced data entry and process errors, and a much-reduced processing time. The automation process can be running 24/7 in the background and requires minimal intervention.

David Bolton, property services director at Yorkshire Housing looked to the future: "As the sector continues on its journey of transformation and innovation, technologies such as these will become even more central in the future to how we operate as businesses and crucially provide services to our customers and allow them to interact with us."

PREPARING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RPA

As with any business change, it is vital to prepare and review processes before introducing new technology. Many digital projects fail to reap the intended benefits due to poor planning.

Housing providers must have the right implementation strategy in place in order to see the benefits that RPA can offer. The key to success lies in aligning automation with your change programmes and getting the buy in from the teams involved. What is particularly appealing with this technology is the ability to hit the ground running at a fairly low cost and see it in action before making further investment or committing to any roll out plan.

Many clients start with discovery days, mapping out which processes are ripe for automating, and which need reviewing and improving before automation



can be considered. Often, processes are not streamlined and have many stages which are unnecessary and repetitive.

We have discovered that an organisation that is open to robotic process automation benefits from a culture shift whereby staff feel empowered to challenge the status quo and offer up solutions for improvements.

Rob Bryan is operations director at Vantage

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Norbord's Engineered wood panels product guide is the perfect companion for specifiers, architects and tradespeople. Whatever the project, they will be able to find a panel for it in the handy A5 booklet. The product guide contains all the information needed on panels in the SterlingOSB Zero®, CaberBoard® and CaberWood MDF® portfolios, including detailed technical product data and installation advice. In addition to this, Norbord's booklet highlights different applications, including roofing, flooring, walling, timber frames, hoarding, shopfitting, and furniture among others such as moulding and packing.



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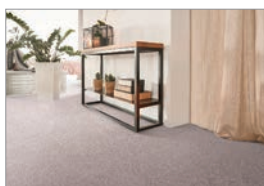
Simpson Strong-Tie introduces all-new catalogue of connectors

Construction connector manufacturer Simpson Strong-Tie has released their all-new 2020 catalogue; a comprehensive product guide which showcases the company's most recent innovations and product line extensions. Alongside the UK's largest collection of connectors for timber and masonry construction, sit numerous new products, including the GPC, Gable Panel Connector, a high movement timber frame tie, decorative and a heavy duty post bases, an adjustable mini hanger, purlin anchor, twisted restraint strap and a 4mm reinforced angle bracket. The catalogue also contains comprehensive technical data, performance characteristics, safe working loads, plus easy to follow installation instructions. Managing Director, Malcolm Paulson explains: "It's been a busy time for Simpson Strong-Tie, we've really pushed the boat out to increase our core product range, engineered to stand the test of time. With our new enhanced product lines, along with our rapid made-to-order service, we really can say that if we don't have it – you don't need it". Available now in print on request, and online in the Resources / Literature section at www.strongtie.co.uk.

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Launch of 'Exquisite' collection

Designer Contracts has introduced a new carpet collection to its extensive portfolio of floorcoverings. Exquisite is a two ply, soft pile carpet constructed from 100 per cent polypropylene with a soft fleece backing. Suitable for heavy domestic use, it is the ideal choice for families looking for a durable, yet luxurious carpet for their property. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: "Carpet is still the number one choice of flooring within the home, and with this in mind; Exquisite has been designed to meet the needs of homeowners looking for something super-soft and comfortable underfoot. It also provides the all-important, easy-to-care-for properties that so many families require."



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Electrical safety: ready for a step change

Chris Edwards, CORGI Technical Services' Electrical Technical Safety Manager, shares his views on the electrical industry and why he's keen to highlight effective management, the importance of a 'ground up' approach to competence, and drive positive change

Ensuring electrical safety is managed effectively has been a drum that CORGI has been banging for some time. Whereas the gas sector has stringent legislation in place under the Gas Safety Installation & Use (Amendment) Regulation 2018, which requires gas safety checks and maintenance to be tested annually, in comparison electrical procedures are often less clear and rely on organisations being made aware of the need to put safety and compliance procedures in place, to ensure resident safety. That's despite electrical fires making up over 50 per cent of fire incidents in England.

In reality, the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act clearly states that providers must conduct their undertakings in such a way that third parties, which includes tenants, are not exposed to risk. Recently there has been increased focus on electrical safety, which is a welcomed change. This focus highlights the importance of registered providers who set their own policies and procedures to clearly show the arrangements they have put in place to reduce risk.

GAINING A FULLER PICTURE OF ELECTRICAL SAFETY

In social housing there is still a need for greater awareness of electrical safety across the board, both from residents themselves, right up to director level. It's a topic that prompted CORGI and the Association of Electrical Safety Managers

(AESM) to host a roundtable event with the ECA this year, to gain a fuller picture of electrical safety.

Feedback at the roundtable provided an insight into the sector's desire for clarity: "We need a clear definition of competence for electrical work," said one roundtable member. "For each discipline, we need to determine what the correct level of knowledge, experience and qualifications are for a specific piece of work, for example between domestic and commercial work."

We also saw team culture identified as another critical element of competence. Effective communication between teams, contractors and a call for board members to play an active role in encouraging safety procedures were both raised as ways towards reducing risk and improving working practices.

TRAINING: ADOPTING A GROUND-UP APPROACH

In the past, senior members of staff extended their electrical safety knowledge to a broader team. However, at CORGI we've seen first-hand the benefits of a 'ground-up' approach.

Kim Morris, CORGI's head of training and membership, expresses the importance perfectly, saying: "If you're committed to training all of your team, then you're making a clear statement that you're also committed to the safety of

your tenants. It's great to see that organisations are now starting to train frontline staff in electrical safety, as well as gas safety and compliance. They are often the future of the business and it means that a safety culture is developed across the board from the outset."

Organisation-wide training means that people or departments aren't working in silos, which can so often be the case. For individuals who interact with residents, or visit properties, having a basic understanding of electrical safety should be a core part of team training. Understanding the principles of electrical safety, common hazards, landlord responsibilities and the need to work with residents to achieve compliance should be viewed as a must-have, not a nice-to-have. Ultimately, understanding these basic teachings can often prevent something minor developing into a major risk exposure.

THE VALUE OF SAFETY

The roundtable event also highlighted another 'hot' topic – the value placed on safety and how the "drive for cheapest price" is becoming increasingly common. One attendee noted that EICRs are being undertaken for as little as £40 – effectively pricing out operatives trying to uphold standards of quality and safety. This focus on cost, at the expense of quality, raises broader concerns regarding the safety of residents.

Pricing practices across the entire supply chain need to be carefully mapped and understood. The same concept applies to electrical training and competence – a migration to the cheapest options is unlikely to deliver competent electricians and potentially puts the safety of residents at risk in the long term.

As mentioned previously, basic electrical safety principles should be viewed as a must for frontline team members. Gaining a nationally recognised qualification in electrical management, such as the CORGI Level 4 VRQ Certificate in Electrical Safety Management in Social Housing, is imperative when you're in a position of safety management.

Qualifications such as these have been designed for managers in social housing, who have responsibility for the safety of electrical appliances and

installations in their tenants' properties. They build an understanding of electrical dangers, landlord responsibilities and legislation, in particular the Electricity at Work Regulations, IET Wiring Regulations and the Health & Safety at Work Act, underpinning what the organisation stands for and the policies they have in place.

The point of effective training extends to electricians themselves. One attendee at the roundtable observed: "if electricians do a bad job, there is a risk to life. But for some reason, we are not regulating them... anyone can call themselves an electrician."

These are just a few examples of challenges in our sector, and illustrate just why CORGI and the AESM are keen to continue raising the profile of electrical safety at all levels, shining a light on key industry issues and promoting the importance of peer and group mentoring to develop and support electrical safety standards.

INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT

It's important to use all tools available to the sector when you're looking to drive forward significant change in electrical safety management, and technology is beginning to play a key role in effective compliance management. Traditionally, the process of checking and analysing EICRs has been carried out manually on a representative sample. Now it is possible to check 100 per cent of certificates in a matter of minutes and report back on the level of compliance, giving you full visibility of any issues that require attention.

Local authorities and organisations have quoted savings of over 50 per cent in compliance management costs, releasing valuable human resources to focus on the remedial process and delivering efficiencies in property management, including electrical checks.

It's only by adopting innovative approaches such as these that the electrical sector can move forward, equipping individuals working within electrical safety with the tools they need to make a significant step change.

Chris Edwards is CORGI technical services' electrical technical safety manager

Fire sprinkler systems – Cover your investment

Residential fire safety, particularly in multi-storey buildings and tower blocks is a key focus for housing associations and local authorities as the retro-fitting of fire sprinkler systems now an essential part of a multi-million pound investment in fire protection upgrades.

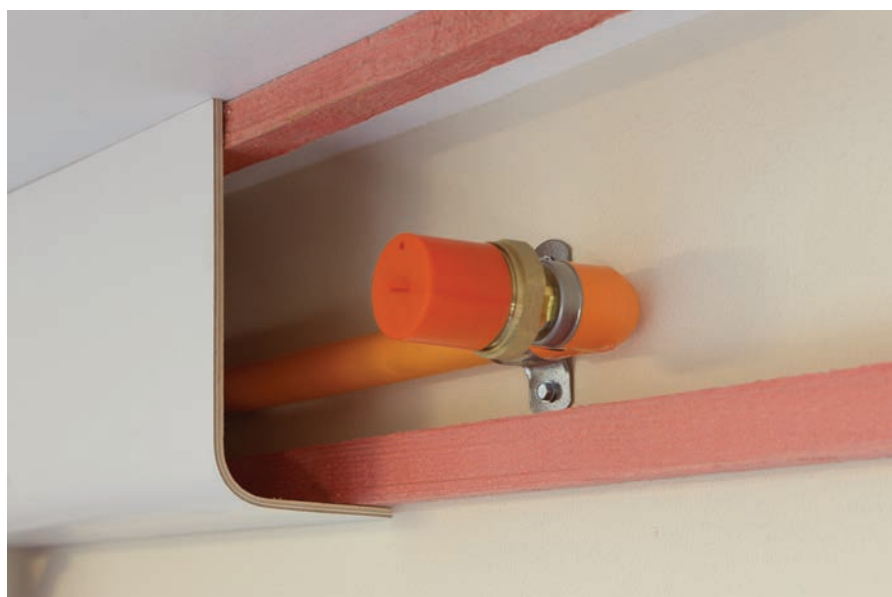
With many HAs and LAs making significant contributions to the cost of this package of improvements, questions regarding 'best value' and 'cost effectiveness' must be considered while ensuring that quality and safety are not compromised.

As sprinkler system pipework usually needs to be surface mounted when retro-fitting in flats and communal areas within existing residential blocks, it is important that pipework and sprinkler heads are concealed to provide a more aesthetic finish and conceal the system's components while acting as a visible barrier to potential tampering.

Versa fire sprinkler boxing is manufactured from preformed 5mm thick, FSC® 'Chain of Custody' certified material and are available in a range of sizes to meet specific project requirements and pipework configurations.

An 8mm thick FSC® option is also available and the range also includes dedicated accessories, such as internal and external corners to help create an integrated finish to the sprinkler installation.

From our experience of working with contractors on countless social housing projects,



Versa can typically be fitted in less than half the time of site made alternatives. Potentially the most important advantage is that costs can be reduced, by cutting the time spent during the installation without compromising the quality or integrity of the installation.

The focus is rightfully on improving fire safety in high-rise residential buildings, and

Versa can make a contribution to that process in terms of effectiveness, ease of installation and economics by helping conceal sprinkler pipework and 'covering' the significant investment in sprinkler systems.

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CO and smoke alarms – separating fact from fiction

Although most people recognise the importance of smoke and CO alarms, some widespread myths have gained a foothold in consumer understanding of home safety. Adrian Keats at Honeywell's home safety business debunks the common examples of misinformation that housing associations are often confronted with.

According to regulation, landlords must install a smoke alarm on every floor of each property, along with a CO alarm in rooms containing a solid fuel burning appliance. Despite the dangers of non-compliance and the ability of these systems to potentially save lives, there is still a shocking level of misinformation. Here we take a look at three of the most common myths and separate facts from fiction.

FICTION: SMOKE ALARMS CAN BE FALSELY TRIGGERED OFF BY HOUSEHOLD FUMES FROM COOKING

Fact: Some smoke alarms use an older type of technology called ionisation, which is the culprit for the pervasive belief that all alarms are triggered by household fumes such as burnt toast. In actuality, modern optical alarms, unlike ionisation units, are much less susceptible to these types of nuisance alarms.

What's more, by installing heat alarms designed for areas such as kitchens, nuisance alerts from cooking fumes can be avoided. These alarms detect fires which produce little smoke but plenty of heat such as those caused by a chip pan on fire.

FICTION: CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING IS ONLY CAUSED BY A FAULTY BOILER, SO IF A NEW ONE HAS BEEN INSTALLED, YOU'RE SAFE

Fact: Many people think that if they have just bought a new boiler, or indeed had their existing

one serviced, then they're safe from the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

While this does reduce the risk, it does not eliminate it as boilers can break down or the flues become blocked at any time between service dates. Similarly, though the chance of a brand new boiler leaking CO is relatively slim, it is still possible, so all boilers should have a CO alarm provided alongside them when they are fitted.

Of course, these are not the only household appliances that can emit carbon monoxide. All fuel burning appliances such as gas cookers, heaters, coal fires and woodburners can cause a leak and create danger for the homeowner. What's more, CO can also leak into a home from a faulty appliance in a neighbouring property, which a resident would have no control over.

Therefore, it's important that any homes or apartments with these provisions are fitted with working alarms within the property, no matter the age of their appliances.

FICTION: I'VE BOUGHT MY OWN ALARM SO DON'T NEED ANYTHING ELSE INSTALLED IN MY HOME

Fact: Landlords have to install units that are kitemarked to the relevant standards, which for CO alarms, is EN50291. This is particularly important as these stringent legislative standards cover a wide range of performance and durability measures, and lay out the means, and extent of testing for things such as sensor reaction times, temperature resistance and minimum alarm volume levels. These benchmarks help to safeguard residents by ensuring that problems can be detected quickly and efficiently, giving households more time to react in the case of a leak. So whilst a tenant may have their own means of CO detection, it may not provide an adequate level of protection.



Also, despite regulations stipulating the installation of a CO alarm only in rooms with a solid fuel burning appliance, ideally, a CO alarm should be placed in every room housing a fuel burning appliance. And for complete safety, an alarm in any bedrooms which may be above these, too. The alarms can be interconnected, meaning all alarms will sound once an activation has occurred.

In larger properties where residents are unlikely to hear sounds from the other end of their home, a network of linked heat, smoke and CO alarms ensures that occupants can be alerted to a potential danger even if they are far away from the source of the activation.

Another feature which may be missing from a resident's own purchase is the ability to view key data on an alarm and its status from an app on a mobile device. This function makes it easier for landlords to monitor details such as battery levels or recent activations.

Although the benefits of fire and CO protection systems may be obvious, it is worth clarifying any concerns tenants may have due to misconceptions. Not only would this help keep them safe, but also help to build trust.

For more information on the full range of Honeywell smoke, heat and CO alarms, please visit the company's website.

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Eliminating Legionella

Simon Dooner of Legionella Control offers his guide to Legionella in social housing, including the responsibilities of landlords and how best to prevent it causing an issue



Legionella bacteria are present in natural water sources. It can also find its way into manmade water systems such as those found in social housing. Low levels are not dangerous, but if the bacteria are permitted to multiply and spread, it raises the chance of people becoming infected with Legionnaires' disease.

Legionnaires' disease causes inflammation of the lungs and is a very serious form of pneumonia which can prove fatal. Legionella bacteria are responsible for triggering this infection.

In every instance where the disease occurs, the affected person has inhaled droplets of the contaminated water supply. This occurs in mist or spray form.

HEALTH & SAFETY EXECUTIVE'S APPROVED CODE OF PRACTICE L8

Every landlord must ensure their properties are safe for use. This includes assessing the safety of the water systems used in their buildings. Social housing must be fit for purpose and pose no danger to those staying there.

The Health & Safety Executive's ACOP L8 provides guidance on what landlords should do to ensure they meet all legal requirements regarding the control of Legionella bacteria. This includes conducting a risk assessment and reviewing that assessment regularly to ensure it still stands. Any changes to the water systems or to the property would require a review to determine whether the risk assessment should be changed in any way.

Every landlord must ensure their properties are safe for use, and this includes assessing the safety of the water systems used in their buildings

HOW IMPORTANT IS GOOD MANAGEMENT OF A WATER SYSTEM?

Very important. If the water systems are not properly managed, Legionella bacteria may be given the opportunity to spread through the system and grow to unsafe levels. All properties are different – some may require more upkeep and maintenance than others. By considering all elements of the water system in the risk assessment, appropriate steps can be taken to ensure its ongoing safety. Some landlords will request legionella services from an outside firm. However, they still remain responsible for the maintenance and safety of the property.

CAN LANDLORDS PERFORM THEIR OWN LEGIONELLA RISK ASSESSMENTS?

Yes, landlords can do their own Legionella risk assessments, although many may choose to hire an expert, and there are many good reasons for this. Competency



in conducting the assessment is an important requirement of the Health & Safety Executive.

HOW OFTEN IS WATER TESTING REQUIRED?

In many situations, the risk assessment may deem the dangers from Legionella and Legionnaires’ disease to be very low. In such cases, no water testing would be needed. However, in other scenarios, legionella testing can perform a vital role in helping to confirm that the water systems are safe and levels of bacteria

Landlords should also notify residents of the importance of regular flushing and cleaning of taps and showers, if they are included within the rooms or the property

in the system are under control. It can, of course, also highlight whether a problem may exist.

IS THERE A NEED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND ADVICE TO TENANTS?

Yes, it is always wise to inform tenants of the various controls that are in place to protect them from the dangers of exposure to Legionella bacteria. For example, if the temperature of the boiler system is set at 60°C to prevent the growth of Legionella bacteria, tenants should be made aware they should never change the temperature.

Landlords should also notify residents of the importance of regular flushing and cleaning of taps and showers, if they are included within the rooms or the property. Regular flushing, cleaning, descaling and disinfection of all showerheads and other water outlets will help to ensure the risk levels are reduced, especially if the water outlets are used only occasionally or the tenant has been away for some time.

IN CONCLUSION

Protecting people from the dangers of Legionella bacteria and Legionnaires’ disease is a legal requirement for all UK businesses, including landlords. The Health & Safety Executive’s ACOP L8 and guidance HSG274 give excellent guidance, and are highly recommended. Maintaining safe water supplies in social housing is a legal responsibility.

Simon Dooner is director at Legionella Control

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