

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

DEC/JAN 2020



Critical Grenfell inquiry report published

Benefits freeze to end

Homelessness costs top £1bn

Cladding removal delays affect thousands

Ombudsman fees to increase



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News Editor:
Patrick Mooney
patrick@netmagmedia.eu

Publisher:
Anthony Parker

Assistant Editor:
Roseanne Field

Studio Manager:
Mikey Pooley

Production Assistants:
Georgia Musson
Kim Musson

Account Managers:
Sheehan Edmonds
Paul Field

Sales Executives:
Nathan Hunt
Steve Smith

PR Executives:
Suzanne Easter
Kim Friend

Audience Development Manager:
Jane Spice

Managing Director:
Simon Reed



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

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

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

Press Releases:
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

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Editor's comment

Learning the lessons from our mistakes and putting things right must be top priorities for 2020



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

As the year 2019 draws to a close, it is amazing that matters relating to the Grenfell Tower fire continue to dominate so much of the housing agenda and the news headlines, despite the tragedy happening 30 months ago. In truth this is likely to remain the case for the next 30 months as well. Sir Martin Moore-Bick's long awaited report from the first phase of the inquiry was more critical than many expected. It is positive that the Prime Minister accepted all of Sir Martin's recommendations, but more importantly there now needs to be a clear timetable for legislation, proper scrutiny and new funding put in place. The lasting legacy of Grenfell has to be meaningful structural and behavioural changes that prevent a similar disaster from happening again. If the recommendations of the Lakanal House coroner had been accepted and acted upon, then it is highly likely the Grenfell disaster would never have happened. The deregulatory and 'anti health & safety' climate set by the Cameron Government created the environment in which a slipshod focus on safety regulations developed, where cutting corners became accepted practice and cutting costs a primary objective.

DEREGULATION COSTS LIVES

It meant many people lost sight of the fact that regulations (and specifically those relating to health and safety) are there for a very good reason – they protect us and save people's lives. They do not exist because people enjoy red tape and paperwork. What made matters worse was that the culling of regulations coincided with swingeing public sector expenditure cuts following the 2008/09 financial crash. Many health and safety posts were cut and we were urged to just get on with it. From working in the housing sector in recent decades, it's been clear that the development of new homes has nearly always been considered more exciting and interesting than the rather mundane world of housing management and maintenance. Except of course it is the repairs and maintenance service that is far more important to the vast majority of landlords' customers – be they tenants or leaseholders. It is the regular servicing, routine checking and repair work that makes a bigger difference to far more people's lives than the lucky few who get a newly built flat or house. Ensuring that the lift works when a button is pressed and the boiler provides heating and hot water when we need it, has a huge impact on all of us. This is continually pointed out in customer satisfaction surveys, but collectively we seem strangely reluctant to acknowledge this. We usually carry on behaving much the same as before, but perhaps with a few tweaks here and there. Perhaps 2020 will be the year when this changes.

LOOKING FORWARD TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE

The various changes being promoted by Sir Martin, Dame Judith Hackitt (as the adviser to the new building safety regulator) and Richard Blakeway (in his new position as the Housing Ombudsman), are all very different, but they also overlap with each other in that they are looking to improve services to residents and to make us more safe in our homes. I wish them the best of luck in pushing through higher service standards and changes in working practices. If successful these should result in more customer-focussed services, delivered to a higher quality and where saving pennies or pounds in the short-term is not regarded as the ultimate driver. Of course getting things right in the first place often leads to savings in the longer-term. We also need to be mindful of the unintended consequences of our actions and decisions. We need to be careful that in focussing on improving the safety of our existing housing, that we do not prevent sufficient new housing from being built to accommodate the growing numbers of homeless families. Money needs to be spent on solving both of these problems. As we wait for the second phase of the Grenfell inquiry to start next month, it is both worrying and frustrating to know that there are still tens of tower blocks covered in ACM cladding and many more high-rise blocks clad in other potentially dangerous materials. We cannot continue to just accept this situation, nor should we accept the confusion over 'stay put' or a managed evacuation, or the uncertainty over the effectiveness of water sprinklers and in what circumstances they are a necessity or a luxury. Surely 2020 will be the year when these and other essential safety questions are answered, solutions devised and work programmes put in place. In closing can I wish all readers and advertisers a Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

An exemplar for a new, progressive era of public housing design in London utilises high-quality materials – including Nordic Brown Light copper cladding – as part of its tenure-blind strategy.

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See page 30

Damning inquiry report into Grenfell Tower finally published

Flawed leadership at the top of the London Fire Brigade, delays in ordering an evacuation and the flammable cladding used to wrap the building in, were all strongly criticised in a damning report from the Grenfell Tower public inquiry.

The lengthy report sets out what happened on the night of 14 June 2017 when 72 people died in a fire that consumed the 24-storey tower block. It was the country's biggest loss of life since the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989 and came just eight years after a similar fire at Lakanal House in South East London, from which the warning signs were not acted upon.

The first phase report was initially expected to be published about 18 months ago. Survivors and relatives of the victims voiced their support for the unexpectedly hard-hitting tone of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's report, but also expressed their frustration at the limited criticism of the tower block's owners and managers.

Sir Martin has made 46 wide-ranging recommendations in his report to ensure the future safety of high-rise residents and the Prime Minister has already said the Government accepts all of them. Sir Martin also signposted areas he will investigate further in phase two, such as the merits of water sprinklers.

The second phase of the inquiry is due to start in January next year and it will focus on the wider circumstances of the fire, including the design of the building and its refurbishment in 2014-16. However, Sir Martin has already concluded that the external walls of the building failed to comply with the relevant building regulations "in that they did not adequately resist the spread of fire... on the contrary, they actively promoted it."

FLAWED RESPONSE

The report was particularly critical of the LFB's lack of preparation and planning for such a large-scale fire and the inadequate training given to its frontline staff (firefighters, 999 control room staff and incident commanders), as well as deficiencies in its equipment, procedures and communications.

In particular the report highlighted that the Fire Brigade lacked relevant and accurate information about the tower block and its various attributes, as well as details of the refurbishment. The LFB's communications systems and liaison protocols and equipment were considered inadequate. The emergency services collectively struggled with the enormity of the tragedy.

Sir Martin was very critical of the LFB's commissioner Dany Cotton for her apparent insensitivity towards the victims when giving her evidence to the inquiry and for the brigade's significant systemic failings. Ms Cotton is due to retire next year and has resisted calls for her to resign. She also challenged Sir Martin's conclusion

that an earlier evacuation of the building could have saved many lives.

Matt Wrack, the general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union said the running order for the inquiry was the wrong way around and the causes of the fire should have been examined first. Many survivors of the Grenfell fire also spoke movingly in support of frontline firefighters, who they said put their own lives at risk to help the tower's residents.

The Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick urged all building owners to act now and not to wait for legislation

WIDESPREAD PROBLEMS

When the House of Commons held an emergency debate on the day the inquiry report was published, the local Kensington MP Emma Dent Coad named a series of politicians and company bosses involved in the refurbishment project, who she said were directly responsible for a variety of contributory factors to the disaster.

Other MPs contributing to the debate spoke critically about the stay put policy, the failure to learn lessons from the Lakanal House fire and the large number of residential buildings still covered in various types of flammable cladding. They said not enough money was being made available to make all residential tower blocks safe in the social and private sectors. This was leaving tens of thousands exposed to huge risks and stuck in a financial limbo.

The Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick urged all building owners to act now (before they were named and shamed) and not to wait for legislation. He also said finances would be made available for the report's recommendations to be implemented in full and that policies like 'stay put' and the retrofitting of sprinklers would be thoroughly reviewed. He confirmed that nine households made homeless by the Grenfell fire were still awaiting permanent rehousing.

John Healey, the Shadow Housing Secretary highlighted that Dame Judith Hackitt reported on fire safety and construction issues some 18 months ago but still no legislation was in place, and that Grenfell Tower residents had been raising safety concerns in the months before the fire but they had been ignored.

HARD HITTING

According to the report, a catastrophic failure of 'compartmentation' meant the fire and smoke spread rapidly up and around the building. Many fire stops were either missing, incomplete or

mispositioned, while some fire doors failed and others had been propped open.

This rendered the 'stay put' policy unviable. But by the time an evacuation was ordered, the tower's single staircase was filled with impenetrable smoke. "Fewer people would have died if the order to evacuate had been given by 02.00," said Sir Martin.

Among the many issues highlighted in the inquiry's report were:

- A lack of training in how to "recognise the need for an evacuation or how to organise one";
- Incident commanders "of relatively junior rank" being unable to change strategy;
- Control room officers lacked training on when to advise callers to evacuate;
- An assumption that crews would reach callers, resulting in "assurances which were not well founded";
- Communication between the control room and those on the ground being "improvised, uncertain and prone to error"; and
- A lack of an organised way to share information within the control room, meaning officers had "no overall picture of the speed or pattern of fire spread".

LEGISLATION PROMISED

Sir Martin said the principal reason the fire spread so quickly "up, down and around the building was the presence of the aluminium composite material (ACM) rainscreen panels with polyethylene cores, which acted as a source of fuel for the growing fire".

He said the rapid spread of the fire across the tower was "profoundly shocking" and he ruled the refurbishment breached building regulations. This will increase the pressure on the companies involved in the works ahead of the inquiry's second phase.

When he opened the Commons debate, the Prime Minister told MPs "I can confirm that where Sir Martin recommends responsibility for fire safety be taken on by central government, we will legislate accordingly. We plan to accept in principle all of the recommendations that Sir Martin makes."

Watched by relatives, survivors and campaigners from the public gallery, Boris Johnson said he would "not allow the lessons of this tragedy to fall through the cracks". Paying tribute to the Grenfell community, he added: "To them I say once again that the truth will out and justice will be done, and that Grenfell Tower and the people who called it home will never be forgotten."

But there remains frustration among the Grenfell community that this first part of the inquiry did not focus more on those who made the cladding and oversaw the refurbishment of the tower. That will only happen in the second phase of the inquiry next year and then the survivors have got even longer to wait for the Metropolitan Police investigation to finish.

Refurbishment of Grenfell Tower breached Building Regulations

A shocking finding from the Grenfell inquiry was that as a result of the £10 million refurbishment completed just months before the fire, the high-rise tower block was not compliant with Building Regulations.

Sir Martin Moore-Bick said the main reason for the spread of the fire were the cladding panels, manufactured by Arconic, “with polyethylene cores, which had high calorific value, melted and acted as a source of fuel for the growing fire”. He found the external walls “did not resist the spread of fire, they promoted it.”

The unexpected finding from phase one of the inquiry was that ACM cladding panels with a polyethylene core were the major cause of the fire spreading upwards through the cladding and then horizontally via the architectural crown, fuelled by other combustibles. This matter was not expected to feature until phase two of the inquiry.

The design of the refurbishment, overseen by Studio E Architects, as well as the insulation materials made by Celotex and Kingspan, also contributed, he said. This is despite the refurbishment works being visited on multiple occasions and signed off by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea’s building control department.

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This matter will be looked at in greater detail during the second phase of the inquiry, when Sir Martin is expected to focus specifically on the design, the materials used and the construction methods employed in more detail.

Sir Martin said the council’s emergency plan for dealing with such a serious incident depended on information provided by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation, whose own emergency plan was 15 years out of date.

Neither plan reflected changes to the building after its 2014-16 refurbishment, which had changed the layout of parts of the building. There were no procedures for evacuating disabled residents, many

of who were housed on the upper floors and there were delays in the fire brigade being provided with information by both the council and the TMO.

The residents and survivors group Grenfell United, say that the council and TMO still “have serious questions to answer ... as do each of the corporates involved including Arconic, Celotex and Rydon among others ... [it] adds to our determination to see criminal charges brought against those responsible for turning our homes into a ‘death trap’”.

They added: “All of this will be further investigated, but for now the report is a vindication of the experiences of survivors on the night.”

Fire at student block raises further cladding safety fears

Concerns about the safety of high-pressure laminate cladding have intensified after fire ravaged a six-storey block of student accommodation in Bolton town centre.

HPL cladding is believed to be used on thousands of homes and it has already been the subject of intensive lobbying by tenants, landlords, homeowners and fire safety experts, who want it removed from all residential buildings.

So far the Government has focussed its efforts on getting aluminium composite material cladding (the type used on Grenfell Tower) removed and it has resisted calls to extend its financial assistance to removing other forms of cladding. Instead it has

urged property owners to ensure their properties are safe.

Although all of the residents of The Cube building in Bolton managed to escape the fire, the way the fire spread quickly up and around the exterior of the building was very reminiscent of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Dozens of students were evacuated in the Bolton fire with just two people requiring treatment from paramedics at the scene. Some 40 fire engines and appliances and around 200 firefighters from across Greater Manchester attended at the height of the blaze.

Earlier this year experts, led by Roy Wilsher, chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council, said that following fire tests it had become clear that many

Dozens of students were evacuated in the Bolton fire with just two people requiring treatment from paramedics at the scene. Some 40 fire engines and appliances and around 200 firefighters from across Greater Manchester attended at the height of the blaze

HPL panels were “very unlikely to adequately resist the spread of fire”.

“Building owners with these systems should immediately take action,” the fire safety panel said. “Action to remediate unsafe HPL should be carried out as soon as possible.”



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Over half a million people could be living in unsellable flats

A possible six hundred thousand people are living in high-rise properties deemed to be unsafe or unsellable due to a lack of Government action and unclear advice over cladding safety, according to the Labour Party.

Analysis by the main opposition party says there are up to 600,000 people living in blocks over 18 m high, many of whom are struggling to sell their homes because they cannot confirm the safety of their buildings' cladding.

Following the Grenfell Tower fire and the focus on cladding and external walls, property owners were advised to test the materials to ensure they complied with building regulations. This has left leaseholders who own the individual flats within blocks, in some sort of limbo as they are unable to force the freeholders to have the tests done.

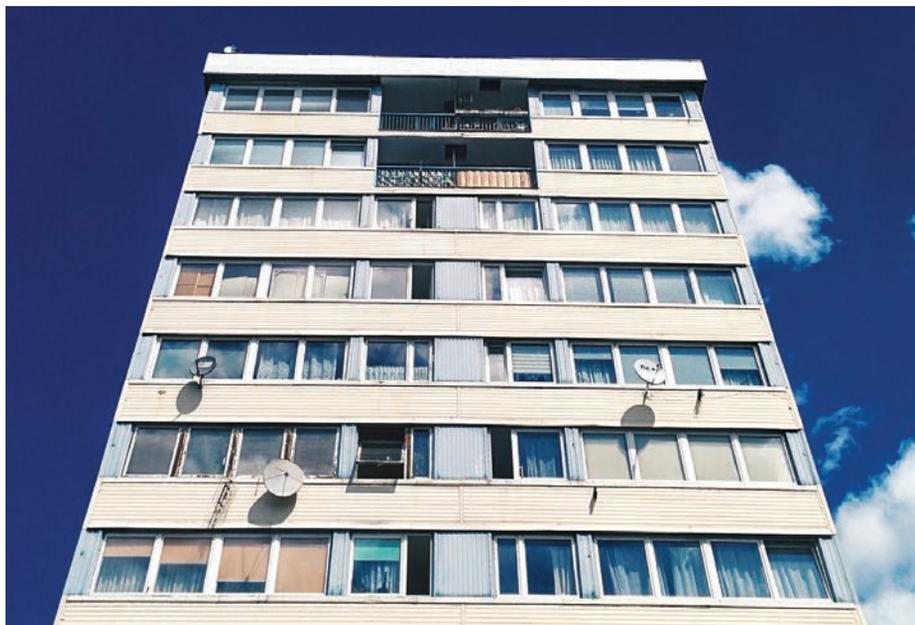
A shortage of skilled surveyors and a cautious approach from construction experts and lenders is seeing property values significantly downgraded. There are reports of many flats having a technical valuation rating of zero due to the uncertainties.

Labour's analysis of the numbers affected is based on English Housing Survey data, showing the number of households living in private tower blocks above 18m, combined with official data on average household sizes.

The research was released on the same day as the Grenfell Inquiry phase one report was published. This recommends that the owners and managers of every high-rise building are required to provide details of external walls and the materials used to the local fire service.

Shadow housing secretary John Healey said: "More than two years on from Grenfell, concerned residents in blocks around the country are still stuck in limbo, unsure whether or not their home is safe and unable to sell"

"The Government must act to test suspect cladding, publish the results and force private block owners to remove and replace all cladding found to be unsafe."



Stay put policy being reviewed after heavy criticism

One of the most significant outcomes of the Grenfell Tower inquiry phase one report has been the chairman's demand to end the automatic 'stay put' policy for all high-rise blocks.

Sir Martin Moore-Bick told Ministers to develop national guidelines for the total or partial evacuation of towers and to make it illegal for owners and managers of high-rise buildings not to draw up such evacuation plans. He also wants urgent inspections of fire doors in all multi-occupancy, residential properties and regular inspections at least every three months thereafter.

The Government said it was considering all of the report's proposals and it announced a cross-departmental steering group to review 'stay put' policies and to assess what to do if evacuation was needed.

Sir Martin said people died at Grenfell because the 'stay put' policy was not lifted earlier. He added that the concept had "become an article of faith within the London Fire Brigade so powerful that to depart from it was ... unthinkable".

The policy is heavily dependent on compartmentation working (it is meant to give at least one hour's protection from the spread of fire) and when that failed, he said an evacuation should have been implemented. Tragically there was no contingency plan for the evacuation of Grenfell.

He was scathing in his criticism of London Fire Brigade commissioner, Dany Cotton, who said in her evidence: "It's all very well saying 'get everybody out', but then how do you get them all out?" Sir Martin said this

demonstrated that the LFB had never sought to answer that question.

EVACUATION GUIDELINES

Although senior members of the LFB had seen a presentation on high-rise fires in different places around the world, experienced commanders had no training in the dangers of combustible cladding. In addition the risk database for the building "contained almost no information of any use" and the information it did contain dated from 2009, some five years before the refurbishment started.

Sir Martin said the new guidelines should include ways to protect fire exit routes and procedures for evacuating people who are unable to use the stairs or may require assistance, such as disabled people, older people and young children. This should include personal emergency evacuation plans prepared for all residents with reduced mobility or cognition.

He also said all tower blocks should be fitted with speakers or sirens to alert residents to get out and fire brigades should undergo training for evacuations. The London fire brigade said it had not carried out an evacuation drill on any residential tower since Grenfell.

Fire experts question the suitability of immediate evacuation in tower blocks with a single-staircase and where resources do not exist to provide rescue lifts or other vital equipment to assist with moving otherwise immobile people. At Grenfell some firefighters had to lend their breathing apparatus kits to the residents because they did not have specialist evacuation equipment such as smoke hoods.

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New homes plan to replace derelict garages

Derelict garage sites across Walsall in the West Midlands could soon be transformed into new and energy efficient housing developments, after whg revealed its modular homes vision.

Social landlord whg currently houses over 40,000 people in 21,000 properties, across 18 local authority areas in the Midlands. It has identified more than 200 unused sites in Walsall that could be brought back into use as new housing by using innovative technology.

As part of its vision whg will build the homes offsite before transporting them to their final destination and craning them into position. The HA has so far submitted 13 planning applications to Walsall Council, all consisting of three bed semi-detached homes, with more in the pipeline. Five applications have already been approved.

Paul Nicol, Director at whg, said: "As part of the transfer of housing stock from the council 16 years ago, we inherited a large number of garage sites. Many of these are unused, and attract anti-social behaviour and flytipping.

"These sites have always been unsuitable to build on due to access problems, and the cost of building houses in such low quantities using traditional construction methods. By building houses offsite we are able to overcome these barriers, and create high quality, energy efficient homes that can be simply dropped into position with minimal disruption."

"These new homes will help transform neighbourhoods and address the shortage of affordable family homes in the borough by using brownfield sites"

Building the homes offsite allows whg to build homes at a greater pace, with reduced costs, helping it reach its target of constructing around 3,000 new homes in the next five years. whg is exploring the potential of modular homes after it was awarded a £750,000 grant from Innovate UK to fund a two year research and development project into offsite housing construction.

Working in collaboration with industry experts, whg is developing a prototype that can be rolled out across its new development sites. The homes will be designed as lifetime homes which can be adapted to suit the needs of different generations and lifestyles. Their innovative construction technique means they will be cheap to heat, which will help tackle fuel poverty.



Coalition formed to tackle 'ticking timebomb' of inaccessible housing

A new coalition of ten housing organisations and charities has called on the next government to ensure that all new homes built are accessible and adaptable for an ageing population.

Campaigners predict a 'dangerous shortage' of suitable homes in the years to come, with only one new accessible home due to be built for every 15 people over the age of 65 by 2030. Ensuring homes are built to a higher standard of accessibility will ensure millions of homes will not need expensive adaptations in the future.

Poor housing for the over-55s already costs the NHS an estimated £624 million a year, mainly as a result of excess cold hazards and falls. Without effective action this situation will only get worse, with costs forecast to reach £1 billion per year by 2041.

Only seven per cent of our existing homes can be visited by someone in a wheelchair. Recent research shows that less than half of local housebuilding plans in England included provision for accessible homes. Meanwhile the number of households headed by someone aged 65 and over has increased by more than a million since 2010/11.

The coalition, Housing Made for Everyone (HoME), includes Age UK, the Royal Institute of British Architects, Habinteg, Disability Rights UK, the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

OPEN LETTER

It has published an open letter calling on the next government to take greater action to secure housing suitable for an ageing population and people living with disabilities.

The letter reads: "Without action, we face an ever-mounting bill, with councils spending greater

sums on trying to adapt homes retrospectively and the costs to our health and social care systems spiralling. The cost to individuals is no less damaging. Now is the time to ensure that everyone's right to a safe and accessible home is met, today and in the years to come."

The HoME coalition has launched a charter to transform new housing, which includes recommendations for central and local government, estate agents, and developers. The seven steps include a higher regulatory baseline for accessibility of all new homes; better data on the availability of accessible homes; and bold policies on planning for accessible housing from councils.

Anna Dixon, the chief executive at the Centre for Ageing Better, which is part of the coalition, said: "We face a dangerous shortage of homes that are accessible and adaptable.

"While it's not inevitable, the likelihood is that most of us will experience disability or difficulties with activities of daily living at some point in our later life. And with more of us living for longer, this dire lack of accessible homes represents a ticking timebomb."

Responding to the launch of the coalition, Councillor Darren Rodwell, the Local Government Association's housing spokesperson, said: "To tackle the shortage of suitable homes for older and disabled people, councils need greater planning powers and resources to hold developers to account, ensuring that they build the right homes in the right places needed by different groups within the local community.

"Accessibility features and home adaptations are also vital to help keep people safe and independent in their homes and prevent avoidable admissions to hospital and care homes. Every £1 spent on housing adaptations are worth more than £2 in care savings and quality of life gains."

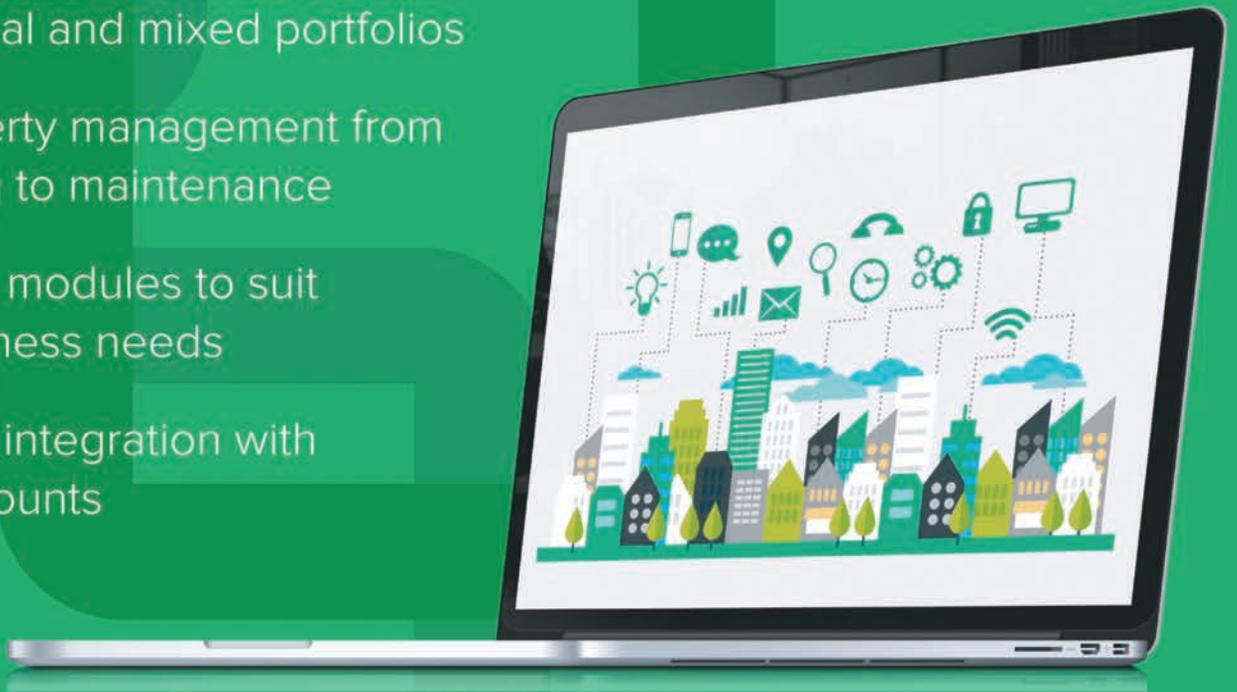
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Ombudsman consults on faster service with tougher powers

The new ombudsman has been consulting the social housing sector on plans to improve his organisation's service and to spark big changes in customer service for tenants.

It would be fair to say that Richard Blakeway was a controversial choice for the Housing Ombudsman post earlier in the year, but he has quickly set about delivering a step change in how it operates and can stimulate service improvements in landlords.

At the forefront of his proposals are three major principles:

- decision-making is speeded up;
- complaints can be used to initiate wider investigations of a landlord, into such issues as systemic failures; and
- the ombudsman service needs to be more

accessible, open and transparent so that it can promote more sector-wide learning.

From April 2020 he will introduce a new operating model designed to speed up the handling of complaints. The average processing time was 8 months in 2017/18, this was cut to 6.7 months last year and has a new target of achieving 3-4 months in 2021/22. If successful, the service will have halved processing times within five years, while also dealing with much higher numbers of complaint referrals.

Mr Blakeway says despite improvements in processing timescales in recent years, this is still the single issue they are challenged on the most. He emphasised the need to maintain the quality of

decision-making at the same time as increasing the speed of making determinations.

To achieve this he requires more resources – to be paid for by an increase in the subscription fee to £2.16 per home for the next two years – and for landlords to respond to information requests from the ombudsman more quickly and more fully than they do at present.

TRIGGER FOR WIDER INVESTIGATIONS

As individual complaints and how they are dealt with by a service provider can sometimes point to wider problems within a social landlord, Mr Blakeway says that his staff should be able to use the information gathered from their investigations, to probe more deeply and assess whether a failure is indicative of a systemic issue.

Where this does highlight a bigger failing within the landlord, than the ombudsman should refer the matter to the Regulator of Social Housing, in order to maintain a clear distinction between the two bodies and their respective roles.

In order to share the learning from their work with social landlords and tenants, the ombudsman is also planning to publish more data on the complaints they are receiving, their processing performance, the decisions being made and any actual or emerging trends.

The proposals include a quicker 15 working day response time for social landlords to reply to inquiries from the ombudsman and for a new findings category of 'severe maladministration', where something worse than a normal service failure or maladministration had happened.

Consultation on the ombudsman's proposals are due to close this month, with the new Business Plan 2020/21 exercise closing on 6 December and consultation on the new ombudsman scheme running until 20 December.

Mr Blakeway said: "Together these documents mark an important stage in developing our service to provide faster, effective redress for the five million households who can benefit from our service. Our role has never been more important and I believe our plans will deliver a step change in the service and bring benefits to residents and landlords. We value feedback and would very much welcome comments on these two consultations."

Government adviser to new Building Safety Regulator named

Dame Judith Hackitt will provide independent advice to the Government on how best to establish the powerful new Building Safety Regulator and avoid a similar disaster as the Grenfell Tower fire.

The appointment follows Dame Judith's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety, in which the Government committed to take forward all of her recommendations and go further, by forming a new national Building Safety Regulator.

The regulator will oversee the design and management of buildings, with a strong focus on ensuring the new regime for higher-risk buildings is enforced effectively and robustly. It will also have

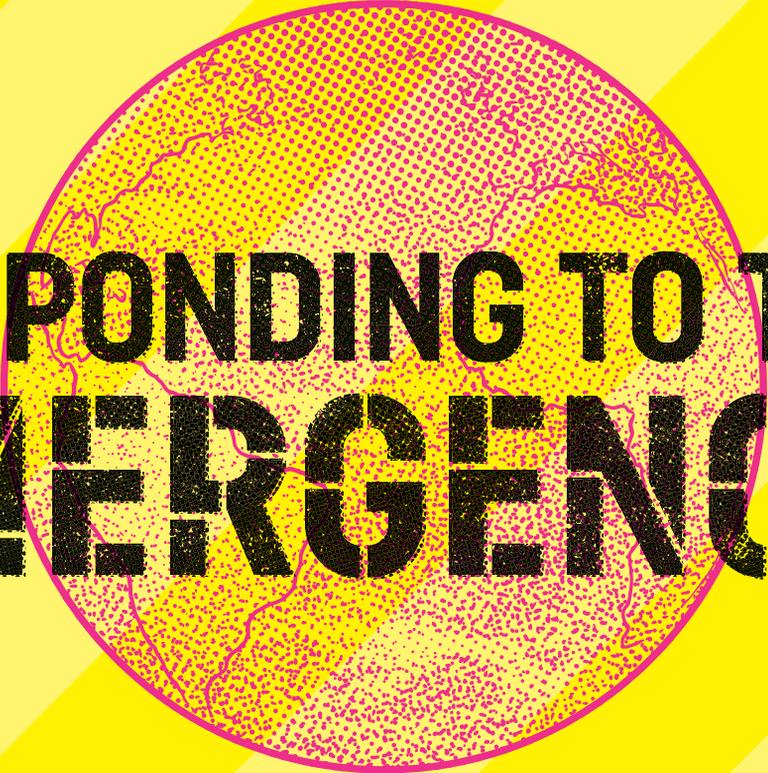
the power to apply criminal sanctions to building owners who do not obey the new regime.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said: "I am grateful that Dame Judith has agreed to advise my department on the new Building Safety Regulator. Her expertise will be essential to forming a strong regulator with teeth to ensure all residents are safe, and feel safe, in their homes both now and in the future."

The Government published the consultation on its reforms, Building a Safer Future, in June 2019 and is currently analysing the responses. The proposed new legislation will ensure building owners and developers prioritise residents' safety

over profit and will:

- provide clearer accountability for, and stronger duties on, those responsible for the safety of high-rise buildings throughout design, construction and occupation;
- give residents a stronger voice in the system, ensuring their concerns are never ignored and they fully understand how they can contribute to maintaining safety in their buildings;
- strengthen enforcement and sanctions to deter non-compliance with the new regime in order to hold the right people to account; and
- require that developers of new build homes must belong to a New Homes Ombudsman.



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Cladding removal deadline 'expected' to be met, despite delays



Government Ministers expect all Grenfell style ACM cladding panels to be removed from social housing high-rise tower blocks by the 31 December deadline despite the current slow rate of progress.

The deadline was originally set by the former Housing Secretary James Brokenshire back in the summer, but has more recently been confirmed by a spokesman at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The private sector is expected to complete the removal work by June 2020 – which will be three years after the Grenfell fire.

There may be some permitted “exceptional cases” where buildings miss the end of year deadline because they include complexities, such as being unusually shaped and requiring additional time and work.

In the latest update it was reported that ACM cladding had yet to be removed and replaced on 98 social housing high rises. Work had started but was

not completed on 83 blocks, work had yet to begin on 13 buildings and plans are still being developed for the remaining two. These figures are actually slightly worse than those reported during October and it is hard to see how the end of year target will be met.

There are 169 private sector high rises where ACM cladding has yet to be removed - 25 have started remediation; 77 have a remediation plan in place but works have not started; 66 have responded with an intent to remediate and are developing plans; and just one building has an unclear remediation plan. There are a further 11 private sector high-rise buildings where the status of the cladding has yet to be confirmed.

A total of 61 social housing high rise blocks with ACM cladding have had all remediation works completed, including sign off from building control. The figure for private sector completions is just 15 buildings.

The buildings yet to be remediated account for approximately 7,600 flats and maisonettes in the social housing sector and between 13,300 and 17,100 in the private sector. There are 18 student accommodation buildings yet to complete remediation works and 26 hotels similarly affected.

No deadlines have yet been set for the removal of other forms of combustible cladding panels, which campaigners have also been lobbying for. They claim other forms of cladding are every bit as dangerous as those made from aluminium composite materials.

During the initial debate in the House of Commons on the Grenfell Inquiry phase one report, the Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick urged all owners of affected tower blocks to proceed with remediation works, or to risk being named and shamed.

The Government has provided a £400m fund for remediation work in the social housing sector and £200m for remediation work in the private sector.

Homelessness cost councils over £1bn last year

Analysis of Government figures by the housing charity Shelter has revealed the amount being spent by councils on temporary accommodation for homeless households in England rose to over £1bn last year.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: “These figures are a shocking, yet entirely preventable consequence of our housing emergency.” She called on the next government to commit to building at least 90,000 new social homes a year over the next parliament. The figures also show:

- Councils spent £1.1 billion on temporary accommodation for homeless households between April 2018 and March 2019;
- This represents an increase of nine per cent in the last year and 78 per cent over the last five years;
- More than 30 per cent of the total (£344 million) was spent on emergency B&Bs, which are some of the worst places for families with children to live;
- Spending on B&Bs has increased by a staggering 111 per cent in the last five years, largely due to a shortage of affordable accommodation meaning councils have no choice but to use emergency B&Bs; and
- The amount councils spent from their own budgets on temporary accommodation has increased by 123 per cent in the last five years, while central government grants for social housebuilding have been cut.

Polly Neate, added: “If consecutive governments had built the genuinely affordable social homes that are needed, fewer people would be homeless, and we would not be wasting vast sums on unsuitable temporary accommodation.

“What’s even more shameful is that so much of this public money is lining the pockets of unscrupulous private landlords, who can charge desperate councils extortionate rates for grim B&Bs, because there’s nowhere else for families to go. No family should have to live in a tiny room where there’s nowhere to even cook a meal, or any safe space for their children to play.”

Meanwhile the charity Centrepoint has estimated that more than 22,000 young people, aged 16 to 24, will be homeless or at risk of homelessness over the course of the Winter and are unlikely to feature in official statistics, such as those quoted above.

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End of benefit freeze announced as food bank use surges

The benefits freeze is due to end in April, bringing an end to one of the most contentious austerity policies brought in by the Coalition Government over four years ago, but the announcement coincided with a huge increase in food bank use.

Universal Credit will rise by 1.7 per cent, in line with inflation, and the state pension will increase by 3.9 per cent, the Department for Work and Pensions announced. It said the end to the freeze, which was introduced by the former chancellor George Osborne, would cost the public purse £5bn a year.

But many organisations and charities working in the housing sector have said the move will fail to improve the financial predicament of many claimants and is unlikely to prevent thousands of evictions due to rent arrears. Rents in both the private and social sectors have risen during the benefits freeze.

The scale of the problem is amply demonstrated in the growing reliance on food banks. The main provider of these is the Trussell Trust and they have released a report 'State of Hunger' which shows at the start of the decade they ran just 57 food banks, whereas now it is 424. For 86 per cent of the people using food banks, their main source of income is state benefits, usually Universal Credit.

The trust said it distributed a record 823,145 food parcels between April and September 2019, including 301,653 that went to children. This was a 23 per cent increase on the same period last year, representing the steepest rise the charity has seen since its network of food banks was fully established five years ago.

DESTITUTE HOUSEHOLDS

One in 50 households across the country made use



of a food bank in 2018/19 and 94 per cent of the people using them were "destitute" meaning they cannot afford to eat regularly, be clothed or clean. Almost three quarters of people who use food banks live in households struggling with ill health or disability. One in ten have a learning disability.

Seven in ten households who use food banks live in rented properties, mostly in social housing. Most of the remaining households were homeless, living in emergency or temporary accommodation, staying at a family or friends' house or sleeping rough. Home-owners constituted only four per cent of the households referred to food banks.

The top three reasons given by people needing emergency food assistance were insufficient benefit income, at 36 per cent, followed by delays in benefit payments at 18 per cent and changes to benefit at 16 per cent.

The Resolution Foundation said the unfreezing benefits announcement was a missed opportunity. Its senior economic analyst Adam Corlett said: "The freeze was always due to end next year.

Confirmation that working-age benefits will only keep pace with rising prices means there will be no increase in living standards and those in need of extra support will continue to be left behind.

"With child poverty at risk of hitting record highs, this is a missed opportunity to provide a much-needed boost for low to middle-income families."

Sam Lister, policy and practice officer at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said: "The last time benefits were up-rated fully by inflation was 2012. If the freeze ends they will still only be worth 91 per cent of their 2012 value. A loss of £377 a year for a jobseeker that's equal to going over a month without anything for living expenses."

HA secures its largest partnership deal for 455 homes

Bromford has entered into a multi-million pound partnership with a national housebuilder to deliver hundreds of affordable homes in Gloucestershire.

The association has secured a deal with Taylor Wimpey to build 455 homes at Innsworth, in Gloucestershire. It represents Bromford's biggest deal of this kind to date. The homes will be a mixture of one to four-bedroom houses and flats for rent and shared ownership. They are part of a larger development of 1,300 homes being built on the site along with infrastructure, a business park, and a primary school.

Bromford's executive director of new homes Martyn Blackman said: "We're delighted to confirm this partnership with Taylor Wimpey which is the

biggest in our history and strengthens our already excellent relationship with them.

"We're committed to investing in building new homes to help meet the rising demand for affordable homes. We're already one of the biggest builders of affordable homes in the country and aim to build on this to deliver 14,000 new homes by 2028.

"To meet this goal we will be seeking further opportunities to work together with housebuilders on projects like this one with Taylor Wimpey, as well as increasing the number of new homes we develop ourselves."

James McLoughlin, business development lead at Bromford, added: "We're excited to be working with

Taylor Wimpey to provide affordable housing for hundreds of local families. Gloucestershire is an important area for us and the addition of these homes will help to tackle the housing crisis here.

"House prices across the county are more than ten times average earnings, which is increasingly pricing many out of the housing market and increasing the demand for affordable homes."

The deal between Bromford and Taylor Wimpey is the latest in a string of partnerships between the two organisations, who are already working to deliver more than 340 affordable homes at other sites. The first homes at Innsworth are due to be completed in 2020-21, with the rest completed in phases up to 2029.



South London council breaches the Home Standard

Lambeth Council has been found to have breached the Home Standard over a series of longstanding failings with regard to asbestos, fire and gas safety which potentially exposed a significant number of tenants to the risk of serious harm.

The social housing regulator said the council, which owns and manages around 22,500 homes, did not have an effective system in place to allow it to manage the risk of tenant safety and meet its statutory health and safety responsibilities across a range of areas.

Historic information showed an overall weak position in terms of landlord health and safety compliance. The regulator noted significant changes had recently taken place at Lambeth with a change in senior leadership, a restructure of the compliance function and increased resources.

Its judgement said: "There is evidence of an increased pace in the work being delivered to

address the issues although there is still work to do, particularly on implementing a robust system to deliver, monitor and oversee the management of health and safety compliance.

"Taking into account the breadth and scale of the failure with particular regard to fire, asbestos and gas safety, and the longstanding nature of the issues, the Regulator has determined that it is proportionate to find a breach of the Home standard in this case."

The regulator said over a number of years there were a significant number of overdue remedial actions arising from Fire Risk Assessments, including some considered 'intolerable' or 'substantial'. For asbestos, over 180 surveys of communal areas had not been carried out. These included high and medium risk properties. Asbestos surveys for some of these properties had been outstanding for a number of years.

For gas safety, the regulator found that over 40 properties were without valid safety certificates for

up to 24 months. It said the council have made significant improvements in ensuring all properties have a valid gas safety certificate and the other failings in fire risk assessments and asbestos surveys had also been addressed.

This case follows a similar finding against Runnymede Borough Council in Surrey, which was also found to have caused a risk of serious detriment to its tenants because of breaches over fire and electrical safety.

The regulator said the council failed to complete urgent or high priority action arising from fire risk assessments at two properties, a 17-storey tower block and a sheltered housing scheme. The fire safety remedial work needed at the tower block was identified in two successive fire risk assessments last year, while at the sheltered housing property, the action was identified in a fire risk assessment done in 2017.

On the electrical breaches, the regulator said the council had no evidence of when testing was last carried out for 162 properties. In addition, the council's records showed the electricians in 794 properties were not tested in the past 10 years.

The regulator concluded that Runnymede Council did not have an effective system in place to allow it to meet its statutory health & safety responsibilities in fire and electrical safety. It also found the council could not provide evidence of how many of its properties met the Decent Homes Standard.

Biggest council landlord warns of possible repair cutbacks

The country's biggest local authority landlord has warned that an estimated £93 million bill for fire safety works will force it to cut spending on repairs and maintenance work to its housing stock.

Birmingham City Council owns around 62,000 homes, including 213 high-rise tower blocks.

None of them are covered in Grenfell-style ACM cladding.

But as a result of the Hackitt Review and the publication of Advice Note 14, the council said it is potentially looking at spending huge sums on a variety of fire safety measures, including £31m on water sprinklers, £28m on replacement balcony and

window infill sections and £34m on fire doors.

Repeated requests have been made by the council to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and the Treasury asking for money to help with the cost of fire safety works, but to date Ministers had failed to respond positively.

"We simply cannot afford to continue to put in place adequate safety measures and maintain current levels of necessary repairs," said Sharon Thompson, the city's cabinet member for homes and neighbourhoods. "We need support from Government," she added.

Extra funds to help councils crack down on criminal landlords

The Government has made an additional £3.8 million available for councils to tackle criminal landlords in the remainder of the current financial year.

The money is to support projects which take effective and targeted action against criminal landlords, support good landlords in fulfilling their responsibilities and empower tenants to make good use of their rights. Local authorities had until 1 December to submit their bids and the successful schemes need to spend their allocation by 31 March 2020.

Ministers said they want to further encourage new or targeted short-term initiatives which stimulate new thinking and further encourage innovative and targeted approaches in the private rented sector, enabling the majority of good landlords to continue to provide safe and decent homes for their tenants.

Richard Lambert, CEO of the National Landlords Association, said: "We welcome the news that more funding will be made available for councils in England to crack down on landlords who break the law and provide inadequate services to tenants.

"That being said, the offer of £3.8 million to be spread across around 100 of the 343 local authorities is simply not enough. Local authorities need far more substantial and consistent support and funding to be able to enforce properly in the PRS and rid the sector of the criminals operating within it."

Last year some £2.4 million was shared among 56 projects and supported work in 100 councils which together are home to over a million households living in the private rented sector.



It helped the councils to uncover hundreds of poor-quality homes.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said: "It's unacceptable that a small minority of unscrupulous landlords appear to be breaking the law and providing homes which fall short of the standards that tenants rightly expect.

"This funding helps councils to capitalise on their strengthened powers, last year being used to train hundreds of inspection officers and create new technologies to make sure inspectors spend their time taking action to improve the sector, not stuck behind a desk."

Last year, Burnley received over £60,000 to carry

out proactive inspections of rented homes in the area, allowing them to reach vulnerable tenants who are less likely to report a problem to their council.

The council found and fixed over 100 hazards across the properties they inspected. In some cases the funding helped tenants who were trapped in properties which posted a serious risk to their safety – meaning they could be rehoused in quality accommodation.

MHCLG expects councils to share best practice of enforcement action and examples of inventive approaches that can be adopted in councils nationwide to drive quality and stamp out bad landlords.

Regulations affecting private landlords up by a third

The number of laws creating an obligation on private landlords has increased by 32 per cent since 2010 according to new analysis undertaken by a leading landlords organisation.

The Residential Landlords Association claims the total number of regulations affecting landlords has increased to 156, up from 118 when the Conservative-led coalition government first came to power.

The RLA is warning the increase in legislation has not led to an improvement in enforcement action against criminal landlords and many councils are failing to properly use the powers they already have.

Previous research by the RLA found that in 2017/18, two thirds of councils had not commenced any prosecutions against private

landlords. In the same year, 89 per cent of councils told the RLA they had not used new powers to issue Civil Penalties of up to £30,000 against private landlords for a range of offences. Over half, 53 per cent, did not have a policy in place to properly use the power.

Against a rising tide of regulation and poor levels of enforcement the RLA called on all political parties to commit to improving enforcement of the powers already available rather than introduce new legislation which councils will be unable to use to root out the crooks.

In its manifesto for the General Election the RLA proposed scrapping licensing schemes which serve only to penalise good landlords while enabling the criminals to operate under the radar.

Instead, councils should use the wide range of

data already available to them, including council tax, benefits, tenancy deposit and electoral roll information to identify landlords. This needs to be backed up by central government providing a multi-year funding settlement to properly resource enforcement.

David Smith, policy director for the RLA said: "Removing criminal landlords from the sector will only be achieved if councils have the resources and the will to properly use the wide range of powers they already have.

"Piling more regulations onto the sector which will continue not to be properly enforced is meaningless and serves only to put off good landlords from providing the homes to rent we need. It is time for smarter enforcement, not more regulation."

New rough sleepers in the capital jumps 50 per cent in a year

The number of people recorded as sleeping rough in London for the first time has risen sharply by 50 per cent, according to figures from the Greater London Authority.

Some 3,985 individuals were recorded as sleeping rough in the capital in the second quarter of 2018/19. Of this total, just over half (2,069) were sleeping rough for the first time, representing a 50 per cent increase on the same period in 2017/18. The total number of people sleeping rough rose by 28 per cent over the same period.

The number of people living on the streets in London was 438 in the second quarter of 2018/19, an increase of 29 per cent on the figure of 340 in 2017/18.

The majority of the rough sleepers recorded were non-UK nationals at 52 per cent, while women accounted for 18 per cent of the total.

The figures are based on the GLA-commissioned Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database, which is managed by the homelessness charity St Mungo's.

Howard Sinclair, chief executive of St Mungo's, said: "There is a rough sleeping crisis on our streets – not just in London, but across the country. This is a national scandal. Around half are non-UK nationals and are unlikely to have access to benefits,



housing or healthcare so are left desperate and destitute.

"We also know more people are dying whilst homeless and that council funding cuts and welfare

reform have reduced the help available for people in this desperate situation. This is down to the failure of successive governments to tackle the systemic causes of homelessness."

Specialist HA installs sprinklers in its tall buildings

One of the country's largest providers of retirement and extra care housing has installed water sprinklers in all six of its residential buildings over six storeys high.

Housing 21 owns and manages around 21,000 properties in 150 local authority areas. It said it acted after putting fire safety at the top of its agenda. The water sprinkler installations were done as part of a programme of works to help contain fires and to stop them spreading.

The group said it will be reviewing its fire alarm "zoning" within buildings and carrying out the most intrusive Type 4 fire risk assessment surveys during the course of the current year.

None of the six buildings fitted with sprinklers had cladding which was identified as being "at risk", according to the association. Housing 21 said in its annual report that it had spent £9.9m on property improvements during 2018/19.

As part of a new strategic plan, Housing 21 is

The water sprinkler installations were done as part of a programme of works to help contain fires and to stop them spreading

aiming to build 2,100 extra care homes and 210 new retirement homes by March 2022. The Government is consulting on a recommendation that sprinklers be made compulsory in all new residential buildings of 18 metres or taller, down from the current requirement of 30 metres or higher.

Rydon secures £100m redevelopment of West London estate

Ealing Council has awarded a £100m estate regeneration project to Rydon, the contractor who were the lead company on the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower.

The contract will see the demolition of the 264-home High Lane estate, in Hanwell, and its replacement with a mixed tenure development of 450 new homes. The estate is due to be redeveloped

in three phases between 2021 and 2027.

A spokesman for Ealing Council said Rydon was selected as a partner for the project in April 2017 after a three-stage competitive procurement process. It then signed a principal development agreement with Rydon in October 2019.

They stressed that the plans for High Lane will meet all current fire safety standards and there can

be no comparison made with the construction methods or materials at Grenfell Tower. Residents have been fully informed throughout the process that Rydon is the developer on the project.

However, the spokesman added that the agreement "grants us the right to step in if for any reason Rydon cannot fulfil their contractual obligations on the project".

Hot under the collar: What rights do landlords have?



The recent news story about a London landlord who boxed off a thermostat in one of their residential rental properties has raised questions surrounding what landlords are entitled to do when it comes to utilities. Actions such as blocking off thermostats could be seen to infringe a tenant's rights; however, the issue is not clear cut. So, what rights do landlords have when it comes to controlling their property?

'Utilities-included' contracts are exactly what they say on the tin, contracts that include utilities such as gas and electricity. Often used by landlords with multiple-occupancy homes, they lessen administration time and keep things simple. Unfortunately, they can be abused by tenants leaving the heating on round the clock. Once this happens, it is difficult to recover control, both financially and with the tenants themselves.

This is a fairly common occurrence, as some residential tenants may sometimes lose a sense of responsibility when it comes to utilities. They don't necessarily see the size of the bills they create and so may not consider the financial consequences for the landlord.

It goes without saying that this can negatively impact landlords financially, as the money they receive in rental payments doesn't cover the costs of the bills. The overuse of heating can also affect the energy efficiency of a property, causing damage to the environment as well as the landlord's pockets. These sorts of actions happen frequently in multiple tenancy households, with some people wanting different heating levels to others.

In order to avoid these issues, for new tenants, landlords can create contracts that contain a reasonable usage clause. Similar to data contracts

for mobile phones, this would mean the tenant would pay extra if they exceeded the usage stated. For contracts already in place however, it is more difficult to impose controls. It may even be necessary to introduce a quid-pro-quo system, which offers lower rent costs or other benefits to tenants who hand over control of the utilities to their landlord.

Now that landlords are able to track heating use in real-time through smart meters and smart thermostats, it has become far easier to see when overuse is happening and how often. Landlords usually reserve access rights to their property to allow them to deal with emergencies and carry out inspections, meaning they could intervene with the utilities at any time. Should excessive overuse be a regular occurrence, a landlord may well consider taking steps to install certain measures during an inspection, much like the landlord who blocked off a tenant's thermostat.

Although such actions might not necessarily infringe the rights of the tenant in principle, the consequences could do. Every tenant has a right to the quiet enjoyment of a property, i.e. without interference from the landlord. As a result, having a landlord stop a person from using their home as they wish could be seen as a breach of this right.

In addition, if the landlord fails to adjust the heat appropriately for the tenants, this could also class as an infringement. The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act, which was introduced in March 2019, states that extreme heat or cold are classed as hazards. Should a tenant consider themselves 'forced' to live in such conditions, they will be able to seek redress from March 2020 as part of this Act.

Therefore, now could be a risky time for landlords to take control of utilities. If they do, they have practically gained themselves a second job, as constant monitoring may be necessary to avoid having claims brought against them.

Landlords must also ask themselves whether taking physical action is worth the increased level of administration, especially if they have multiple properties. For those with deeper pockets, it may be possible to engage a managing agent to monitor utilities usage, however, for the majority of residential landlords, this could be a little extreme.

Not only could taking control of utilities cost time, it could also cost reputation. Being known as an overly-controlling landlord is unlikely to bring in new tenants, with most expecting to be able to decide the temperature of their home. A drop in business then leads to a drop in money, creating a host of unintended consequences for the landlord.

If a landlord does decide to bring in measures to control utilities, they must communicate this to the tenant and provide adequate justification. After all, springing a blocking measure onto a tenant is never going to be received well.

For landlords who view taking physical control of utilities as the only way to solve overuse, it is vital that they consider the extra administrative responsibilities they will be acquiring. It may also be wise to seek advice from an expert in landlord and tenant rights to ensure the actions being taken are legal. If this isn't done, it is possible that the landlord will find themselves in hot water.

James Fownes, partner in the property disputes team at law firm, Shakespeare Martineau

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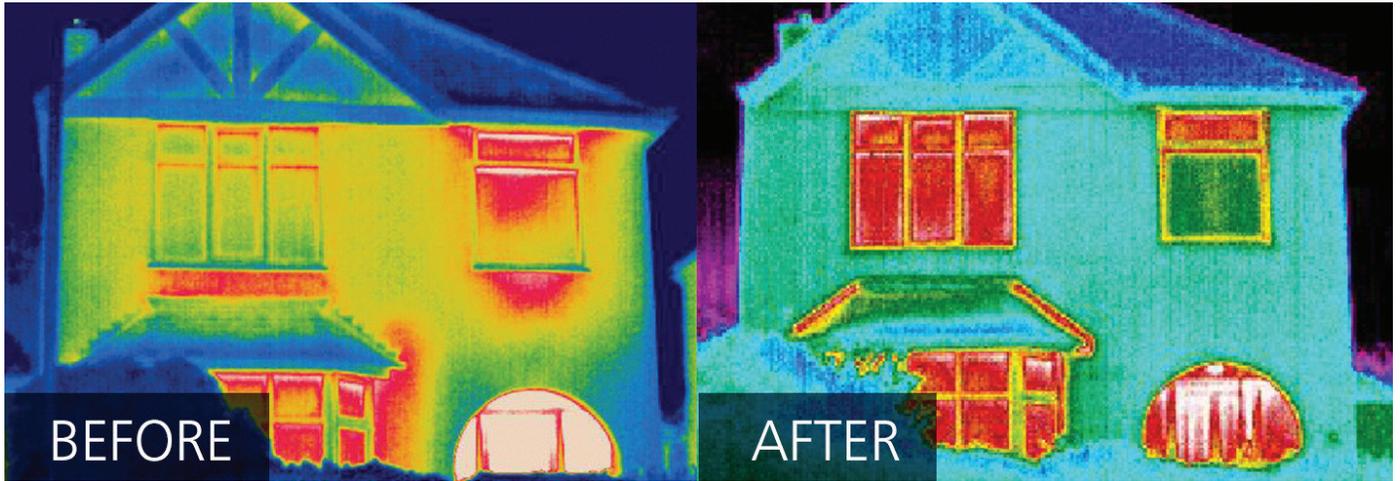
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Landlords - The 2020 deadline is looming



From April 2018, it became unlawful for landlords of privately rented properties (both domestic and non-domestic) in England and Wales to grant a new tenancy to a new or existing tenant on a property with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating below E. These regulations will apply to ALL privately rented domestic properties from 1st April 2020 and for non-domestic properties from 1st April 2023.

Landlords of domestic properties could be fined up to £5000 for each property that fails to meet the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES), while for commercial properties penalties are linked to the rateable value and are likely to be considerably more (although in both cases there are exemptions for specific situations). Some landlords may still not be aware of the looming deadline or what they should do about it.

According to the Government, up to 25 per cent of properties have an E rating or below. The Government has already indicated that it may raise the minimum standard further over the next decade. There are many measures landlords can take to improve energy efficiency. Wall insulation is very effective but not all properties have the option of cavity wall insulation and in these cases external wall insulation (EWI) may provide a solution.

Eurobrick offers two EWI systems. The backer panels used for X-Clad and V-Clad are excellent insulators and have proven to save energy and reduce heating bills. Both panels have a BRE Green Guide Rating of A and can be supplied in a range of thicknesses up to 100mm to help meet the energy saving targets of a project. X-Clad has been independently certified by the British Board of Agrément (BBA) and is LABC (Local Authority Building Control) registered.

These systems have a brick finish and can be retrofitted directly to an existing masonry wall. As the vernacular building material of a large proportion of building stock, using a brick slip EWI system preserves the brick finish whilst enhancing

the thermal performance of the building.

This house in Wilford, Nottingham, was poorly insulated and as you can see from the thermal images, it was losing a significant amount of heat through the walls. After installation of Eurobrick's X-Clad system you can see a definite improvement in the heat loss. The owners of the house went on to say that they benefitted from reducing their energy bills by one third following the installation, as well as reducing condensation significantly and providing an overall improved living environment.

The first step is to obtain an up-to-date energy performance certificate, to assess the level of

improvement required. Landlords will then be able to work out what measures are needed and how this can be funded. Improvements to rental properties do not just benefit the tenants, for landlords it is an investment and there are benefits to be gained from a well maintained, energy efficient property. These regulations have made these improvements inevitable, so it makes sense for landlords to act now and get the most out of their properties on the rental market.

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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.

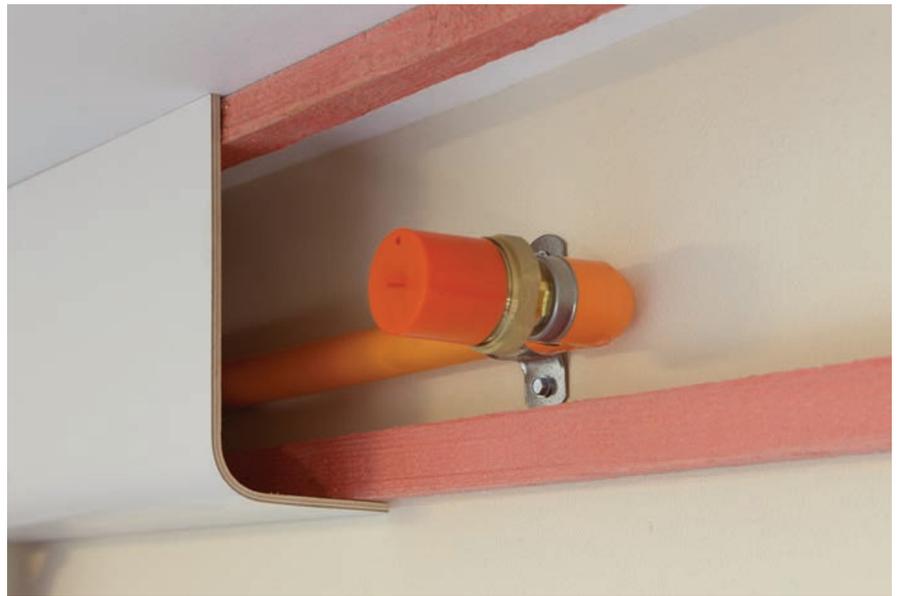
With many HAs and LAs making significant contributions to the cost of this package of improvements, questions regarding 'best value' and 'cost effectiveness' must be considered while ensuring that quality and safety are not compromised.

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.

01733 266 889
www.encasement.co.uk

Helifix showcase vast range of repair techniques at London Build 2019

Helifix exhibited at London Build on the 27th & 28th November 2019, displaying a vast range of products and repair techniques, illustrating the variety of faults that Helifix products can repair. The in-house technical sales team and external Technical Business Managers were on hand to discuss specific projects and explain why Helifix repairs are often a more sustainable option.

Helifix products and their concealed, non-disruptive, installation techniques play an important role in preserving our built environment, from housing and offices to bridges and listed buildings.

The sales and technical teams have considerable experience and technical expertise to discuss your project-specific requirements and answer any questions you may have. To speak to a member of the team call Helifix or email.

020 8735 5200 sales@helifix.co.uk



Airtech raises awareness on Radon

Airtech, the ventilation specialists, supported UK Radon Awareness Week in November. Run by the UK Radon Association, this year the campaign focused on recent research from Public Health England (PHE) and University College London (UCL) that reveals that home energy efficiency measures, such as double glazing and insulation, are linked to increasing indoor radon levels. Airtech, offers social housing providers a complete solution to help protect residents from the risks caused by radon gas in the home. Airtech has 30 years of experience in radon prevention and can offer a full range of products and services, from radon testing to full remediation of housing stock.



01823 690 292 www.airtechsolutions.co.uk

Airtech launches new website

Airtech has launched its new website offering a clean, fresh, simple and attractive design, the site is packed with useful free resources to provide registered providers, contractors, landlords, direct labour organisations and residents, solutions to overcome condensation, mould and radon. Boasting new added functionality which makes navigating simple, the website offers visitors a guided route to find their individual solution for an enriched user experience. Airtech's website has moved away from traditional ventilation websites that lists social housing ventilation products and services. Instead this new journey-led, solutions-based website is a sophisticated engaging resource.



01823 690 292 www.airtechsolutions.co.uk

Helping remain in control of your heating

As the every-day home becomes ever better connected to the homeowner, ESI Controls is releasing a new Wi-Fi controlled thermostat, enabling the homeowner not only to gain greater control of their heating, but to be able to do so, wherever they are.



The very latest RTP6 in a stylish choice of colours, provides a clear interface for the user to remotely control heating and water programs, all from one simple app on their phone or mobile device.

In addition, these exceptional heating controls come with a 3-year warranty.
01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

Classic style meets modern innovation

A new build home has embraced a 'best of both worlds' philosophy by combining traditional aesthetics with the exceptional fabric performance provided by the Kingspan TEK Building System. Constructed with innovative SIPs from the Kingspan TEK Building System, the house enjoys excellent thermal performance, making it both comfortable and efficient. Kingspan TEK Building System panels comprise a highly insulated core sandwiched between two layers of Oriented Strand Board type 3 (OSB/3) and can deliver U-values as low as 0.17 W/m²K without the need for additional insulated liners, providing exceptional out-of-the-box fabric performance for this new home.



01544 387 384 www.kingspantek.co.uk

Kingspan introduces QuadCore Roofboard

Kingspan Insulation is raising roof performance to new heights with Kingspan QuadCore 426 Roofboard, an innovative flat roof insulation board delivering excellent thermal and fire performance, enhanced environmental credentials, and backed by an extended warranty. Kingspan QuadCore 426 is the first insulation board



to feature Kingspan's advanced Quadcore technology. The high-performance, fibre-free, rigid neo-thermoset insulant delivers a thermal conductivity of 0.021 W/mK. This can allow roof U-values to be met with slim, light constructions. Kingspan QuadCore 426 is also compatible with most mechanically fixed single-ply waterproofing systems and green roof systems.

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

Study shows soffit savings with Kingspan

New research from quantity surveyors, Rider Levett Bucknall, has shown that the physical properties, specifically the enhanced thermal performance, of Kingspan Kooltherm K110 FM Soffit Board can allow installers to fit an additional 5.25m² of insulation every thirty minutes when compared with the closest competitor, rock mineral fibre. This analysis showed that the thermal conductivity of Kingspan Kooltherm K110 FM Soffit Board (0.018 W/mK) was the lowest on the market, 11 per cent better than the next best material and 89 per cent better than rock mineral fibre. This means that a compliant construction can be achieved with a slimmer thickness of insulation.



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Unintended consequences

Penny Jones of Domus Ventilation looks at how improvements in the energy efficiency of dwellings has led to poor indoor air quality, and why mechanical ventilation is the way forward

Over recent years we've done a good job of improving the energy efficiency of new build homes, with a focus on sealing the building envelope to prevent wasteful heat leakage. And it's worked remarkably well; so much so, that we've created airtight homes that, in some circumstances, over heat and trap the stale, humid air indoors along with the pollutants. But what we've failed to do is match the improvement in energy efficiency with the provision of ventilation.

As well as making for an uncomfortable home environment, poor ventilation can directly affect the health of residents. Poor indoor air quality (IAQ) has known links to allergies, asthma, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease and even dementia.

'Why not just open a window or two if you need ventilation' is a common refrain, but in cooler or damp weather that's not ideal, nor is it enough in warmer summer months. That's where continuous mechanical ventilation systems steps in.

As well as making for an uncomfortable home environment, poor ventilation can directly affect the health of residents

CONTINUOUS MECHANICAL VENTILATION

Building Regulations Approved Document F details the different types of ventilation suited to a domestic property starting from a System 1 which is Intermittent Extract Ventilation, but for whole house continuous mechanical ventilation systems you are looking at a choice between a System 3 Continuous Mechanical Extract Ventilation (MEV) or a System 4 Continuous Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR).

An MEV system actively extracts air from 'wet rooms' (kitchens, bathrooms, utility spaces) via ducting to a central ventilation unit which further ducts to an

HRXD

DOMUS
VENTILATION



In the UK we spend around 90 per cent of our time indoors and around 16 hours a day on average at home; we wouldn't accept drinking poor quality water from our taps at home, so why should we accept breathing poor quality air?

exhaust point. The systems are typically dual speed, providing low speed continuous trickle ventilation and high-speed boost flow. Replacement fresh air is drawn into the property via background ventilators located in the habitable rooms and through air leakage.

Unlike MEV, MVHR systems combine supply and extract ventilation in one system. They work on the principle of extracting and re-using waste heat from wet rooms. MVHR systems efficiently pre-warm the fresh air drawn into the building with waste stale air using a heat exchanger; up to 95 per cent of waste heat can be recovered by this mechanism. The filtered, pre-warmed air is then distributed around the home, effectively meeting part of the heating load in energy efficient dwellings.

WAVING THE FLAG FOR MEV

There's no doubt about it, MVHR systems provide effective ventilation, are energy efficient, extremely effective at reducing the risk of condensation and cold air draughts and, with their built-in air filters, are particularly useful in more polluted urban areas. They are the champions of domestic ventilation! But MVHR systems also come with a higher price tag than their counterparts and are considerably more complex to install and commission. MEV systems, which are more affordable and straight forward, are often a more practical solution. MEV still provides excellent ventilation, but the capital costs are lower, they are easier and therefore more economical to install and operating costs are low.

On the installation side, MEV systems require less ducting because air is being drawn one way only: out. With an MVHR system there is a further set of

ducting to take the air from the unit into rooms. This also has a direct impact on the level of commissioning required. Commissioning involves marrying the unit's performance to the actual airflow passing through the valves situated throughout the property. As MEV systems have extract valves only this is a relatively straightforward process, unlike MVHR systems which must balance the extract and supply rates.

The MEV units themselves are smaller and lighter than those of MVHR and can therefore be easily wall mounted rather than in a loft. In fact, Domus Ventilation's CMX-S MEV unit, for example, is just 125 mm deep, making it shallow enough to fit in a ceiling void.

MEV systems are also very easy to use – more of a fit and forget scenario than MVHR systems which require maintenance, including regular filter changes. In the case of our own CMX-S MEV system, the optional speed and user controls enable simple operation and control for the homeowner, making them less likely to experience difficulties. Models are also available with an integral humidistat which identifies changes in humidity and automatically adjusts the air flow of the unit accordingly. With access to properties often an issue in social housing, MEV systems are often a more appealing option here.

Both MEV and MVHR systems are most suitable for new properties rather than retrofit (although that is an option in some circumstances), but MVHR systems really do require a more airtight property where virtually all of the air flow can pass through the heat exchanger, if they are to perform efficiently.

Interestingly, with inner cities obviously having higher pollution levels, MVHR systems are seen as more suitable because of the filter element, but in apartment blocks it is often the case that only the first four floors are fitted with MVHR and the remaining with MEV as polluted air is heavier and therefore stays closer to the ground.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The issue of IAQ is finally making it onto the political agenda, which is positive news. After all, in the UK we spend around 90 per cent of our time indoors and around 16 hours a day on average at home; we wouldn't accept drinking poor quality water from our taps at home, so why should we accept breathing poor quality air?

Penny Jones is product & marketing manager at Domus Ventilation

Titon launches its powerful MVHR unit

Titon has added the energy efficient HRV20 HE Q Plus to its range of MVHR products. The new model has been designed to offer increased airflows of up to 178 l/s (640m³/h), making it the most powerful MVHR unit Titon has ever produced. The HRV20 HE Q Plus has been specifically designed to enhance SAP performance via Appendix Q, by combining extremely low power consumption and a heat exchanger capable of achieving efficiencies of 92 per cent. As a result, units can easily be fitted as part of a ventilation system inside larger apartments or dwellings. The HRV20 HE Q Plus is available in two models – the Eco HMB and the Eco B.



0800 970 4190 www.titon.com/uk

Titon launches new Low Profile MEV

Titon has added the new CME3 Q Plus to its range of continuous mechanical extract units, developed to meet the requirements of System 3 in accordance with Part F of the Building Regulations. The combination of aesthetic smooth lines and impressive airflow makes it ideal for ceiling installation in flats and apartments. Its compact profile allows it to be fitted in airing cupboards, storage cupboards or loft spaces. Having round circular ports makes it ideal for refurbishment or replacement of existing older units. Lee Caulfield, Sales Director of Titon's Ventilation Systems Division, said: "The new CME3 Q Plus is ideal for the continuous extract of stale, damp and polluted air to the outside environment"



0800 970 4190 www.titon.com/uk

Replace pumps for energy efficiency gains

Wilco offers the new generation of the Wilo-Yonos PICO series small circulators to the UK market. A range of new features has been added to this popular circulator primarily for residential homes and properties, for heating systems and air conditioning equipment. The compactness of Wilo-Yonos PICO has been dramatically improved to make it easy to install. Front access to motor screws and the Wilo connector position, contribute to the adaptability of the pump in any installation. Importantly, new ease of use functions make maintenance far easier for the installer. Manual restart is a response to a specific request from the market, as is the new constant speed mode.



01283 523000 www.wilo.co.uk

New generation expansion vessels

Flamco has launched the new Flexcon range of new generation expansion tanks with a huge 15 year warranty.



The Flexcon benefits from a new and unique plastic membrane and offers raw materials and energy savings. Flamco offers the new membrane for expansion vessels from 2 to 80 litres in size.

This new innovation makes expansion vessels much more sustainable in terms of environmental performance and durability, while maintaining high quality. Head to Flamco's website for more information.

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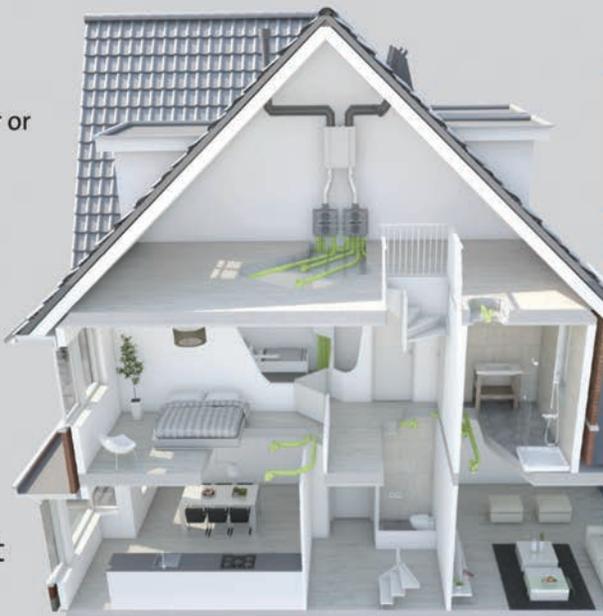


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Windows & doors sustainability – it's time for action

Chris Coxon of Eurocell discusses the important issue of sustainability in the fenestration sector and how improvements can be made

Ever since the documentary series Blue Planet was broadcast by the BBC, the public has become increasingly aware of the impact that human activity is having on the planet. And while Blue Planet may have brought this to the forefront of people's minds, over the past 18 months there has been accelerating demand for more action to be taken on everything from plastic waste through to conservation efforts and taking steps to fight climate change.

The upshot of all this – and why it should matter to the construction and housing sector – is that the public are now demanding that more be done to tackle sustainability throughout society. And no sector, including fenestration, can afford to ignore this.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

The construction industry is notorious for its waste, with 32 per cent of total waste in landfill coming from the sector; of the 420 million tonnes of materials used by the industry each year, 120 million tonnes end up as waste in landfill. However, the sector is beginning to realise that now is the time for change, with a number of progressive businesses in the sector making strides in the fields of waste management and recycling.

Building products manufacturers have a huge role to play in the amount of waste that does – or equally doesn't – end up on the landfill heap. With approximately seven million windows replaced in the UK alone each year, the fenestration sector has the potential to have a huge impact on this – and for the better!

80 per cent of the seven million windows replaced in the UK each year are made from PVCu. And while plastic can be a dirty word in some cases, in recent years the fenestration industry has proved that PVCu isn't just recyclable in theory – it can be done, and is being done, in practice.

Take our business for example – over the past 10 years Eurocell has invested approximately £10m in developing PVCu recycling capabilities and its state-of-the-art recycling plant, which has saved well over 60,000 tonnes of end-of-life PVCu ending up in landfill. We've also manufactured eight product ranges from recycled PVCu.

And it's not just Eurocell that is making strides in this field – there are other likeminded businesses that are investing in similar processes, which can only be a good thing for the sector.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT

Let's get back to the science. There is a misconception among many that PVCu, like many plastics, is non-recyclable, when actually it is a construction material that can have its lifetime significantly extended to help reduce waste. But how? As a result of scientific behaviour changes, such as the impact modifier compounds, for the first four to five times PVCu is recycled, it actually gets stronger by up to 6 per cent.

This means that PVCu can be re-processed and re-used to manufacture products of equal quality, creating an 'upstream' recycling process. This recycling process is one that every PVCu product can go through up to 10 times, meaning that the lifespan of the average PVCu product can be extended from 35 years to 350, as stated by the BRE.

PROMOTING INDUSTRY WIDE-CHANGE

However, while we know that the building material can be – and is being – recycled widely, how can change be promoted more widely across the industry?



With approximately seven million windows replaced in the UK alone each year, the fenestration sector has the potential to have a huge impact on this

Everyone from building products manufacturers and construction firms, to policy makers and installers have their part to pay in making a change.

At Eurocell, for example, we've put in place a logistics operation to enable us to collect units for recycling. This includes a free pick-up service that utilises our existing fleet to return end-of-life frames to our recycling plant in Derbyshire. Installers are also able to drop off their used frames at two drop off centres across the country.

We're also investing heavily in educating the industry on the work we're doing. We recently launched an eBook, 'Sorting It: A guide to PVC-U Sustainability - Separating fact from fiction' which dispels some of the myths around PVCu and explains the science behind its sustainability credentials.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Of course, there's always more that can – and should – be done, which is why we're constantly working towards improving our recycling and sustainability credentials. As well as making practical changes to our business, we're also trying to get the conversation around sustainable construction moving. Ultimately if we talk less and act more the construction sector will be well positioned to make a dent in its overall waste and show it means business when it comes to sustainability.

Chris Coxon is head of marketing at Eurocell

Innovative public housing with Nordic Copper

An exemplar for a new, progressive era of public housing design in London utilises high-quality materials – including Nordic Brown Light copper cladding – as part of its tenure-blind strategy.

Branch Place provides the first replacement homes in the second phase of the Colville Estate Masterplan designed by Karakusevic Carson Architects, part of Hackney Council's innovative



Images © Peter Landers

housebuilding programme, delivering hundreds of much-needed Council homes for local people through a pioneering model of financial cross-subsidy. The project provides 116 mixed-tenure homes alongside new public routes, play spaces and landscaping.

The two buildings of Branch Place are crafted from a considered palette of high-quality tenure-blind materials including brickwork, timber and Nordic Brown Light pre-oxidised copper. A copper mansard roof, installed by Full Metal Jacket, to the building next to Regent's Canal reflects the roofscape of neighbouring historic warehouse buildings and marks an entrance to Branch Place and the new Colville neighbourhood.

Nordic Brown Light is part of an extensive range of architectural copper surfaces and alloys from Aurubis with an unrivalled lifespan counted in hundreds of years, no maintenance and full recyclability. With a melting point of 1083°C and 'A1 (non-combustible material)' fire classification to EN 13501-1, copper is suitable for cladding tall buildings, using appropriate constructions. Low thermal movement makes it appropriate for any locations and it is non-toxic and safe to handle and work. Its inherent antimicrobial qualities make it ideal for touch surfaces internally as well.

The Aurubis architectural range includes Nordic Standard 'mill finish' and Nordic Brown pre-oxidised copper, with lighter or darker shades of brown. The extensive Nordic Blue, Nordic



Green and Nordic Turquoise ranges have been developed with properties and colours based on the same brochantite mineralogy found in natural patinas all over the world, and offer various 'Living' surfaces. Copper alloys include Nordic Bronze, Nordic Brass and the innovative Nordic Royal with a rich golden through-colour.

01875 812 144 www.nordiccopper.com



Concealment enhances tenant safety

British designed and manufactured, Powermatic controlled, concealed door closers from Samuel Heath are gaining increasing popularity for use on fire doors in high-rise flats, apartments and HMOs.

The door closers carry the CE mark and have been independently tested and proved to meet the requirements for FD60 and FD30 fire doors under BS EN 1634-1.

Totally concealed when the door is closed, Powermatic door closers are less susceptible to damage from vandalism or tampering. This gives them a significant advantage over surface mounted door closers when it comes to reliability of the fire door and maintenance costs, making them the right choice for both tenants and social landlords.

Unlike other jamb-mounted devices, Powermatic door closers facilitate a door's compliance with the accessibility requirements of Approved Document M, are the only Certifire jamb-mounted door closer and do not have to be removed from the door to be adjusted.

0121 766 4200 www.concealeddoorclosers.com

Hands on at The Window Company

Award winning commercial installer **The Window Company (Contracts)** proudly boasts that it has the best trained workforce in the industry. So determined is it to set the very highest installation standards in the industry that it has put together a CPD for clients to help them get the most from every window and door installer they work with. The first client to benefit from the CPD was Moat. Project managers and clerks of works took part in a workshop to learn about the latest regulations and best practice guidelines. They were then given a window and door set up created by The Window Company (Contracts) with 10 typical installation errors deliberately included and were challenged to identify them all.



01245 268120 www.thewinco.co.uk

Profile 22 Optima Windows

Profile 22 Optima windows were specified in the development of 26 one and two bedroom apartments in a retirement development in Upper Norwood, London. The window specification required a U value of 1.4 w/m²k on all windows and Secured by Design accreditation on ground floor and easily accessible first floor windows. Acoustic glazing was also required because Lewis House is situated on a busy road so traffic noise needed to be minimised. Visually, the local authority had requested a grey exterior to give a modern appearance and provide a close match to aluminium. Installer, Newview used Profile 22's Optima 70mm casement windows with 28mm Low E sealed glass units.



www.profile22.co.uk

Dursilite: The impressive coatings range from Mapei

It's out with the old and in with the new... Mapei's Dursilite coatings range offers a fresh array of paint colours, ideal for all types of new build and improvement projects. The water-based paint is suitable for use on different types of internal surfaces as well as partially covered external surfaces protected against direct sunlight and rain. Dursilite creates an attractive finish with a smooth, velvety, matt surface.

With its special formulation, Dursilite is particularly suitable for painting all types of cementitious, lime and gypsum substrates which require an excellent permeability to water vapour, and a high degree of long lasting protection.

Dursilite, supplied in 5kg and 20kg plastic drums, can be applied with a brush, roller or by spray on a dry coat of Malech primer or Dursilite Base Coat primer. Typical application comprises of at least two coats, with a recoat time at around six to 12 hours in accordance with the humidity and temperature of the environment, and in any case, when the previous coat is completely dry. With excellent coverage, it also has a high whiteness level for internal walls, and is the ideal solution for repainting.

For long-lasting protection, high washability and low dirt pick-up level, this Mapei offering is available in a wide range of colours, created using the ColorMap® automatic colouring system.



Dursilite Gloss



Dursilite Base Coat



Dursilite Gloss

For more information about our Dursilite range, or to request one of our new coatings brochures, visit the website or call us today.

0121 508 6970 www.mapei.co.uk



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.

01827 255 600 www.strongtie.co.uk



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Case study confirms that SuDS cost less

The trade association Interpave has published a new case study which demonstrates that sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) – including concrete block permeable paving – should cost less than conventional piped drainage, both initially and in terms of maintenance.

Interpave’s new case study revisits the SuDS scheme at Lamb Drove in Cambourne, Cambridgeshire. This scheme demonstrates the use of as many SuDS techniques as possible,

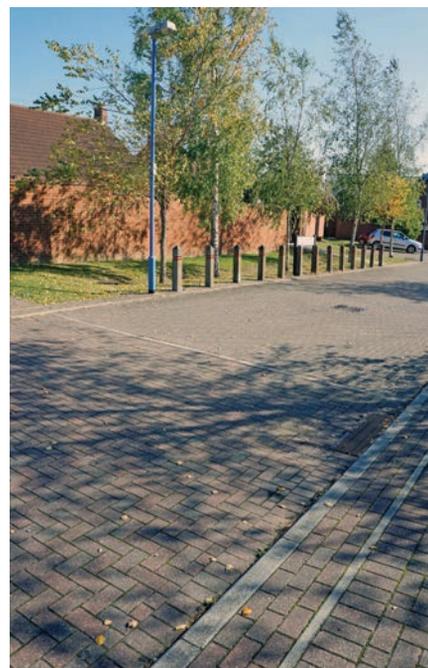


including concrete block permeable paving, used in combination to form an effective management train. The Monitoring Project measured the performance of the SuDS over time, compared with that of a conventional piped drainage system on another nearby development, similar in size and density.

Overall, both capital and maintenance costs – and therefore whole-of-life costs – associated with the Study Site were much lower than those for the conventional piped drainage system Control Site. The Monitoring Report noted capital cost savings of £314 per home and also suggested 20-25 per cent lower maintenance costs than traditional drainage on the Control Site. Having said that, further potential cost savings were also noted.

In addition, monitoring of pollutants, biodiversity and resident satisfaction is testament to the SuDS, notably concrete block permeable paving delivering a gradual flow of treated water to open SuDS features further down the management train. The Monitoring Report also confirms that: “The permeable pavement infiltration study specifically illustrates the robustness of the performance of this feature to limited maintenance. The infiltration capacity of the permeable pavement is able to adequately cope with the highest recorded rainfall intensity at the Study Site.”

Interpave’s new case study on this Monitoring project, including photos showing how the scheme has developed over time, is now

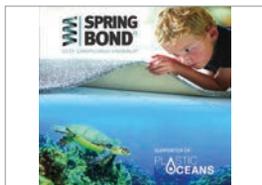


available to download from Interpave’s website www.paving.org.uk – an essential resource covering all aspects of design with precast concrete paving, including an inspirational project gallery and case studies, supported by background information for all design stages, as well as for CPD.

0116 232 5170 www.paving.org.uk

Eco-engineered underlay

Designer Contracts has launched a brand new, sustainable underlay made from recycled plastic bottles. An eco-friendly alternative to PU foam, felt and rubber underlay, SpringBond is manufactured in the UK and made from 85 per cent recycled fibres. Designer Contracts worked closely with the manufacturers to exclusively develop the underlay product for the new build market. It is available in 7 mm and 9 mm thicknesses and is fully recyclable at the end of its life. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: “We are excited by this brand-new product, which demonstrates our passion and commitment to the environment.”



01246 854577 www.designercontracts.com

Snickers new hoodies & sweatshirts

The new range of Hoodies and Sweatshirts for craftsmen and women are probably the most comfortable we’ve ever designed. The ‘Full Zip’ or ‘Overhead’ Sweatshirt and Hoodie choices are ideally combined with Snickers’ First and Second Layer Undergarments and can comfortably be worn under a jacket on chilly days. Street-smart and great for on-site or leisure activities there’s a range of styles and colour options to choose from. They’re made from a cosy, durable polycotton fabric for extra ruggedness and have a soft-brushed finish on the inside for extra comfort plus handwarmer pockets at the front. They also feature an unmistakable Snickers logo and are ideal for company profiling.



www.snickersworkwear.co.uk

Introducing Blind Studio

Designer Contracts has launched Blind Studio. Introduced to showcase the variety of blind designs and styles that the company can produce for new home buyers, Blind Studio is packed with fabric swatches and ideas for venetian, roller, vertical and perfect fit options – all housed in one concise sample book. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: “The Blind Studio sample book has been introduced to provide a one-stop-shop solution and is also a stylish addition to a show home marketing suite.” As well as flooring, the company provides curtains and blinds, furniture and lighting, and a showhome and contract-focused interior design services division.



01246 854577 www.designercontracts.com

Langley collaborates with NBS

Langley Waterproofing Systems Ltd has partnered with NBS to deliver 10 of its roofing systems as structured data available for architects, specifiers, designers and engineers to use. According to a recent NBS Construction Technology report, 90 per cent of respondents agreed that digitisation will significantly impact on their work. Respondents predicted that technology would change methods of communication as well as the necessary collaboration across the supply chain. Due to the growing use of digital tools within construction processes, it was key for Langley to make its BIM objects and product specifications widely accessible and easily incorporated into models and specifications.



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Avoiding floor failure

Failing to undertake proper subfloor preparation before the application of new floorcoverings can result in an unsightly finish or even complete floor failure, leading to costly remedial work. Fortunately this can be avoided by adhering to a few basic principles of subfloor preparation as Stephen Boulton of F. Ball and Co. explains

Although it should be standard practice, there is still a lack of awareness regarding the need to undertake certain procedures before installing floorcoverings and how often this results in lost time and unforeseen expenditure. This includes the need to guard against excess subfloor moisture – the leading cause of subfloor failure. Ensuring a long lasting, visually attractive finish involves following a few other basic steps, including making sure the subfloor is in a suitable condition before work begins, applying a levelling compound to ensure a perfectly smooth base for the receipt of floorcoverings and remembering to prime beforehand.

SUBFLOOR PREPARATION

The first step in any flooring installation is making sure the subfloor is suitably sound and smooth. If the subfloor is a newly-installed screed, contractors will need to ensure that any laitance, the crust of cement and fine aggregates that forms on the surface of the screed as it dries, is ground off. The normal method of removing laitance is using a rotary sanding or abrading machine.

If the project is part of a refurbishment, the condition of the subfloor will need to be assessed once old floorcoverings have been removed. It may be discovered that the subfloor is cracked or damaged, in which case extra preparation will be required. In most cases, cracks as deep as 50 mm can be filled with a floor repair compound.

Subfloors may also be contaminated with oil, grease or other chemicals, necessitating mechanical preparation by grinding or abrading before applying other floor preparation products. Old adhesive residues will need to be removed

by mechanical means unless a levelling compound that is suitable for use over old adhesive residues will be used.

MOISTURE TEST

Contractors need to be particularly aware of the problems posed by excess subfloor moisture in the base. Whether the result of rising damp or residual construction moisture, unmanaged subfloor moisture can attack adhesives and floorcoverings, possibly causing complete floor failure.

For these reasons, F. Ball and Co. recommends that a moisture test is conducted to determine subfloor relative humidity (RH) levels as part of any flooring installation.

The only method of measuring subfloor RH levels with certainty, and in compliance with British Standards, is to use a calibrated digital hygrometer. Where a moisture test indicates that subfloor RH levels are above 75 per cent (65 per cent if a wood floorcovering will be installed), a moisture management solution will be required to suppress excess subfloor moisture levels and prevent floor failure.

DEALING WITH DAMP

The application of a waterproof surface membrane is the usual solution for effectively controlling damp. The best-performing epoxy waterproof surface membranes will isolate excess subfloor moisture where relative humidity values are up to 98 per cent, with a single coat application, which will fully cure in as little as three hours.

Whether the result of rising damp or residual construction moisture, unmanaged subfloor moisture can attack adhesives and floorcoverings, possibly causing complete floor failure

Quicker, two-coat systems are available that will create an effective barrier against residual construction moisture where relative humidity values are up to 95 per cent. The first coat cures in 15-20 minutes, and a further 30 minutes curing time is required for the second coat.

LEVELLING COMPOUND SELECTION

Once satisfied that the subfloor is dry, or an appropriate moisture management solution is in place, they can proceed with preparing the subfloor for the installation of new floorcoverings.

General-purpose levelling compounds are available for many situations, as well as products with a wide variety of specialist applications. When contractors are working to tight timescales, the fastest-drying levelling compounds on the market will be walk-on hard from just 30 minutes and ready to receive floorcoverings in as little as 45 minutes after application. Flexible levelling compounds that are fibre-reinforced are recommended over flexible subfloors, such as steel and plywood, to cope with the natural movement in these subfloors. Levelling compounds with high compressive strength should be used where floors will be subject to heavy loads or high foot traffic, while calcium sulphate-based levelling compounds provide optimum compatibility with calcium sulphate screeds.

In most cases it will be essential to prime a surface before applying a levelling compound. This promotes the optimum performance characteristics of the levelling compound and, when used over absorbent subfloors, such as concrete,



prevents moisture being drawn from the levelling compound, which can cause it to dry too quickly and result in floor failure. For time saving purposes, levelling compounds are available that can be applied directly over old adhesive residues without the need to prime beforehand.

COMPATIBILITY CHECK

Once the levelling compound has cured, contractors can proceed to installing floorcoverings using an appropriate adhesive. At this stage, the compatibility of particular floorcoverings and adhesives should be checked to further ensure against floor failure. To do this, contractors should consult the adhesive manufacturer's Recommended Adhesives Guide or see the floorcovering manufacturers' instructions.

Stephen Boulton is technical service manager at F. Ball and Co.



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The importance of IoT

Dane Ralston of iOpt explores how educating tenants in using the latest IoT technology can significantly improve their health, in addition to maintaining the internal health of the property and limiting the amount of maintenance and repairs required

It's a sad fact that too many households in the UK cannot afford to keep their homes warm and dry. In Scotland, where we are based, recent statistics released by the Scottish Government show that 845,000 households (35 per cent of the population) are living in fuel poverty, with levels far higher in rural areas at 50 per cent. The report also highlights the fact that these households tend to suffer from, or are put at risk of, poor health and wellbeing outcomes and lower education attainment.

Fuel poverty in Scotland has remained at the same level for a decade now, having more than doubled since 2003. In addition, figures from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) confirm that fuel poverty is more of an issue for those living in social housing.

Unfortunately, when tenants do not keep their homes warm and dry, it tends to open up a vicious circle of ever decreasing well-being inside a property – both in terms of the property itself and its occupants. Tenants are often completely unaware that the property they are living in can in fact be damaging to their health. For example, there is now clear evidence to show a connection

between damp and mouldy homes and the emergence of asthma attacks in young children. A major new study was recently published in the journal 'Indoor Air' from researchers at the University of Otago in Wellington (UOW), New Zealand, which proved this to be the case. It has been widely known that damp and mould can make asthma worse for people already living with the condition, but this is one of the first studies to prove mould could be causing asthma to develop.

Hearing how mould and damp can affect a child's health so significantly is shocking, but it is not uncommon to hear of people living with damp and mould in their properties. With changes in Building Regulations coming into force over the next couple of years we believe it will eventually become compulsory for all new build properties to have CO₂ sensors in bedrooms.

The implementation of regulations like this will go some way to improving the health of tenants in the UK, but there is still a long way to go. We know that the Scottish Government is committed to tackling fuel poverty and making homes warmer and more energy efficient through the development of the

Scottish Fuel Poverty Bill. This seeks to achieve a target of no more than 5 per cent of Scottish Households in fuel poverty by 2040.

In order to achieve this target, we believe harnessing the power of the latest IoT technology will be absolutely instrumental. It will help asset managers have more visibility of the condition of their properties, enable the monitoring of them remotely, and as a result, nip potential issues concerning tenant health in the bud before they become significant. At the same time, the technology will cut down on the amount of maintenance visits required. Being able to tackle issues such as a damp and mould as early as possible means that tenants' quality of life as well as the value of the asset can improve.

IoT technology also gives tenants the opportunity to take responsibility for the condition of their properties by providing them with advice and understanding of how their homes are performing. This, in turn, provides peace of mind for tenants knowing properties are being monitored effectively and potential problems, including those which may impact their health, will be picked up before they become significant issues.

In many ways, installing IoT technology within residential properties is a no brainer. It increases the efficiency of managing properties. With more demands placed on asset managers in terms of housing regulations, coupled with ever decreasing resource, IoT is a very scalable and relatively inexpensive way of managing properties and all that entails. It enables asset managers to spend more time working with their tenants as opposed to constantly firefighting and visiting their properties. It also helps to prioritise tasks and allocate resources appropriately.

Due to the cost point to date, a scaled roll out of IoT projects relating to residential property hasn't been feasible. However, new technology coming through such as LoRaWAN has made this much more viable. I suspect in future, IoT based property services will look more like a one stop shop. We will find individual sensors will have more systems in them that can be turned off and on based on the needs of the tenants. They will be far more integrated with existing systems, and will make the workflow smoother, which in turn will make asset management teams more efficient. The technology involved will ultimately get



IoT will help asset managers have more visibility of the condition of their properties, enabling the monitoring of them remotely

cheaper, making this a much more feasible option to asset managers. Coupled with this will be an educational process that will take place with tenants to enable them to understand the systems used, so they will be able to work the technology themselves to their ultimate benefit.

Dane Ralston is founder and MD of iOpt

Langley implements site safe survey

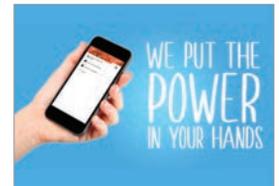
Building owners can be liable not only for the safety of their own employees but also those up and down the supply chain. HSE reported the highest percentage of fatal injuries of workers was falls from height (26 per cent) in 2018. To this end, **Langley Waterproofing Systems** has developed its Safe Survey Policy, to provide its clients with peace of mind that any Langley employee that has been tasked with accessing their roof, has the necessary skills, knowledge, training and experience to carry out such works safely. Carrying out roof surveys is inherently hazardous, and Langley recognises its primary duty is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its employees on-site.



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The future of property access technology

Leading residential property access specialists, **Intratone**, highlighted its range of smart intercom systems at this year's Homes UK exhibition in London. Visitors experienced first-hand how Intratone's innovative wireless technology saves housing associations and property managers both time and money, while being safe in the knowledge that their property is secure. UK Country Manager, Victor D'Allancé, comments: "When it comes to property access, we know that security is a top priority. That's why we developed our smart wireless door entry systems". Find out more about Intratone's range of smart property access solutions that were on show by visiting the company's website.



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New Aico Product Selector arrives

Aico, a market leader in residential Fire and Carbon Monoxide protection, has launched Issue 10 of its popular Product Selector. The new version features the same ring bound format as the previous edition, for ease of use, and all the key features that customers value, with the added enhancement of tabs to help customers find what they are looking for with greater ease. Aico's extensive product range and ever-growing list of sophisticated, ground-breaking features, are covered in the new Product Guide, along with an easy reference product list including descriptions. The Product Guide also lists Aico's Regional Specification Managers, who are available to offer guidance and support.



www.aico.co.uk/technical-support/guides-publications/#navigation

C-TEC launches new fire alarm kit

Leading life-safety systems manufacturer, **C-TEC**, has launched Hush ActiV, an innovative new BS 5839-6 Grade C domestic fire alarm kit. Designed to increase the level of fire protection in flats, apartments and high-rise residential buildings, each kit contains everything you need to create a LD2 standalone conventional fire alarm system in an individual dwelling – easily and very cost-effectively. A key feature of Hush ActiV is its accessibility. Residents are provided with easy-to-use detection, alarm, silencing and test facilities at light-switch level so they can test their own devices, be alerted to system faults and hush any false alarms. Please visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyET4p-Kcng



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Access all areas

Adrian Sunter of Terry Lifts discusses why it's so crucial the UK's housing stock is adapted to suit the needs of everyone and what options are available to housing associations

On 5 November, a new coalition of housing organisations published an open letter calling on the Government “to take urgent action to tackle the growing shortage of accessible homes in the UK.”

The organisation, Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) includes Age UK, the National Housing Federation (NHF), the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Disability Rights UK and Habinteg Housing Association. The letter requests greater action to secure housing suitable for all and highlights a “serious shortage of homes which are safe and suitable for older and disabled people...”

“Currently too many people live in homes that limit their independence – only 7 per cent of homes in England are accessible, meaning 93 per cent of homes lack the basic features that make them even ‘visitible’ by disabled people.”

The letter also addressed the UK's ageing population and how, as we get older and experience mobility issues and difficulties with daily activities, we will all be affected by a lack of suitable housing.

The latest projections (2018) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that in 50 years' time there are likely to be an additional 8.6 million people aged 65 and over. The 85+ age group is the fastest growing and is set to double to 3.2 million by mid-2041 and treble by 2066, equating to 7 per cent of the UK population.

In the social rented sector, 27 per cent of households are headed by a person aged 65 or over (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) 2019).

The impact of inadequate, unsuitable housing is felt widely. “The costs of poor housing to the NHS is estimated to be £1.4bn per annum; of which nearly half (£624m) is attributed to poor housing among older adults,” (House of Commons, 2018).

THE NEEDS OF A NATION

64 per cent of over-55s say that bungalows or single-storey ground floor properties are their preferred housing for retirement (House of Commons 2018) yet, only 2,579 new bungalows were built in 2017/18 compared to 28,831 in 1986/87 (NHBC, 2018). Prior to its dissolution in November, the Conservative Government was also blasted in a report by the National Audit Office for failing to build any of the 200,000 starter homes promised in 2015.

With such a lacklustre response to the needs of the UK population it appears that the current housing crisis is not only set to continue but is in danger of morphing into something far more damaging for future generations. It's no longer just about building enough houses rather building more of the right type of houses, a sentiment shared by the HoME coalition: “We urge you to make the accessible, adaptable design standard set out in Building Regulations, Volume 1, M4 Category 2 the mandatory baseline for all new homes, and where need can be demonstrated for M4 Category 3 (wheelchair user dwellings) the next Government should make it easier to introduce relevant planning policies.” The letter was published prior to the Dissolution of Parliament just after midnight on Wednesday 6 November.

However, until there is radical reform in the way the UK designs and builds its homes, there needs to be a short-term solution, one which addresses the immediate needs of the nation, such as access adaptations.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

A common area of adaptation is for movement between storeys, as detailed in Building Regulations, Volume 1, M4 Category 2.



Paragraph 2.23 provides guidance on allowing people to move between storeys and to allow a stair-lift to be fitted to the stairs from the entrance storey to the storey above or the storey below where this contains the bathroom.

While a widely recognised access solution, there are far more practical and efficient alternatives to a stairlift.

THROUGH THE FLOOR HOME LIFTS

Through the floor home lifts enable the elderly and disabled to enjoy the freedom of their home. Coming in all shapes and sizes, many home elevator systems cater for a wide range of mobility issues and accommodate all sorts of equipment, from wheelchairs to walking frames.

The needs of the individual/s and the size of the property will influence the specification of the home lift. A domestic lift system needs a suitable amount of headroom on each floor and will typically occupy a footprint between 800 x 1,150 mm and 1,600 x 1,525 mm. Planning permission is not required for the installation of a vertical lift system.

FIRE PROTECTION

A through the floor lift requires an opening to be created for the lift to pass through when travelling from floor to floor. This instantly breaks the fire integrity and removes the fire protection of the first-floor structure – potentially enabling a fire to move freely between floors.

To minimise risk, it is vital that an independently certificated through the floor lift is specified. Look for a product that complies with BS 5900:2012 (powered home lifts with partially enclosed carriers and no lift way enclosures) and is independently tested by an approved notified body. A compliant product will maintain the fire and smoke protection between floors, whether it is parked upstairs or downstairs.

FUNDING FOR LIFTS

It's worth noting that local authority and housing association residents are eligible for the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG). The amount of funding offered can vary up to 100 per cent of the cost. The DFG aims to ensure the disabled person has adequate facilities and access around the home. This includes installing a through the floor lift.

So, until there is sufficient response to HoME's appeal for change, it's critical that we continue to future-proof our existing housing stock. By adapting houses, and installing products like through the floor lifts, we can help people live better lives, stay in their own home for longer and access all areas.

Adrian Sunter is commercial director of Terry Lifts

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