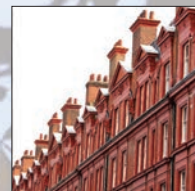


# HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

FEB/MAR 2020



New safety  
regime  
announced

Grenfell inquiry  
resumes amid  
controversy



Ombudsman  
slams councils

Maintenance  
costs soar







## **Digital Property Monitoring as a Service Protects Assets and Protects Tenants**

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19

## Features

### 25 Efficiency: Heating & Renewable Energy Connecting the dots

Rupert Kazlauciusas of Zehnder Group UK discusses how technology such as AI assisted ventilation can tackle some of the housing sector's chronic issues

### 29 Maintenance & Refurbishment: Drainage, Plumbing & Water Management Reducing costly repeat drainage issues

Chris Nelson of Metro Rod discusses the importance of efficient maintenance of drainage to reduce costly repeat visits

### 33 Maintenance & Refurbishment: Roofing & Cladding Flat roof refurbishment: why choose liquids?

Victoria Ramwell of Kemper System discusses the key considerations of flat roof refurbishment in housing projects

### 39 Safety & Regulation: Boiler & Gas Safety Be proactive about gas safety

Bob Kerr of the Gas Safe Register reminds readers of the legal requirements associated with gas installation and maintenance, and highlights contractor management in the housing sector as vitally important to ensuring registration, competence and monitoring

# Feb/Mar 20 Contents

## In this issue of HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

Industry News .....	04 - 17
Futurebuild Show Preview .....	19
Directory .....	43



33

## Products

Efficiency	
Air Quality & Ventilation .....	24
Heating & Renewable Energy .....	25
Maintenance & Refurbishment	
Bathroom Refurbishment .....	28
Doors, Windows & Glazing .....	32
Drainage, Plumbing & Water Management .....	29
Landscaping & External Finishes .....	32
Plant, Tools & Workwear .....	30
Roofing & Cladding .....	33
Safety & Regulation	
Boiler & Gas Safety .....	38
Security & Tenant Safety .....	37
Smoke & Fire Protection .....	35
Technology	
Software & Apps .....	41

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## Editor's comment



Patrick Mooney,  
News Editor

# Better late than never

The year has begun with a flurry of official announcements, new policies and consultations affecting the safety of housing across the length and breadth of the country. These are intended to allow millions of people to live safely in their homes and to sleep easily in their beds. So far, so good and not before time, I hear you say.

It is over two and half years since the terrible tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire, which took away 72 lives in a wholly man-made disaster that could so easily have been avoided. The public inquiry into the disaster has just resumed and will run for at least another 18 months, delaying the prospect of criminal trials until 2022 at the earliest.

The inquiry got off to something of a rocky start. Firstly one of the two experts appointed to assist the inquiry's chairman had to resign over a perceived conflict of interest on the eve of the inquiry resuming. Their appointment had damaged the confidence of the survivors and relatives of the deceased. But worse was to come.

On the first day of the inquiry we heard from its chief lawyer that many of the firms involved in the refurbishment (the corporate core participants) were "taking part in a merry go round of buck passing." We then heard a succession of expensive lawyers represent the corporates in a series of convoluted summaries and finger pointing.

## BLAME GAME

All the firms wanted to defend themselves and avoid taking responsibility for the spread of the fire in June 2017. It was the worst type of blame game being played out in front of survivors and relatives of the deceased. Matters then got even worse when a number of witnesses demanded immunity from prosecution, in order to give their evidence.

In the past year there has been a spate of fires in a number of relatively new (or recently refurbished) residential buildings. The buildings all appear to have been built and in some cases clad in a variety of materials. None of them were clad in the same ACM panels as Grenfell Tower, amply demonstrating that the building safety problem is far more widespread.

Fortunately no-one died in these fires, but collectively they highlighted a growing concern over the safety of large residential buildings, flaws in building regulations and questionable or downright shoddy practices in the construction sector. The new safety regulator cannot start its work soon enough and it will need to demonstrate it has sharp teeth early on.

The programme to remove ACM panels from high-rise tower blocks has been progressing too slowly for comfort. Deadlines have come and gone and a frustrated Housing Secretary has been driven to threaten lackadaisical building owners with naming and shaming. Meanwhile campaigners have been lobbying for other types of panels to be added to the banned list of products and materials, which currently cover thousands of buildings and not just blocks of flats. They are all around us, on hospitals, schools, hotels, offices, shopping centres and the list goes on and on. It's all very worrying.

## A GENERATIONAL CHANGE

So when Robert Jenrick announced the biggest overhaul in building safety for a generation, it was very welcome news albeit a bit late. Many of the changes now being proposed are to be the subject of consultation exercises. Dates for the implementation of any changes are unknown but we can be sure they are some way off. If any changes are made this calendar year, it will be a huge surprise. This is important because it means tens or hundreds of thousands of residents will be living with the stress and worry for a long time to come.

We should also be demanding more action to curb the rising tide of homelessness. It currently stands at record levels with thousands of families placed in temporary housing and countless millions of pounds being paid to the owners of bed and breakfast hotels. These are not suitable places to be bringing up children and yet this is where more than 127,000 young people are currently 'housed'.

The chancellor could do something about this in the budget, by increasing Local Housing Allowance rates (rather than just unfreezing them from April); giving councils the funds for a surge in the building of new and affordable homes; and giving a boost to the construction sector by providing the resources for a comprehensive building safety programme - to replace all unsafe cladding and insulation systems, replacing defective fire doors and installing water sprinkler systems where they are needed. It would be a good start and late is better than never.

Patrick Mooney



## On the cover...

Window and door manufacturer Shelforce is Birmingham City Council's chosen manufacturer of choice for local authority building projects. Image courtesy of Shelforce.

See page 22



# Government confirms end of Local Housing Allowance freeze

**A**round 900,000 people across the UK could see their Housing Benefit payments rise from April, after the Government confirmed its decision to lift the freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates.

The freeze has been in place since 2016 but the decision means that LHA rates will rise by inflation from April. Most claimants will see the amount of housing benefit they receive rise by about £10 per month.

Housing charities and campaigners welcomed the lifting of the freeze but were vocal in attacking the decision not to backdate it, or to restore the direct link between LHA and local rent levels.

An unexpected source of some criticism was the Residential Landlords Association. Its policy manager, John Stewart said: "The benefit level needs to reflect the realities of the level of rents locally. A rise of 1.5 per cent is not going to be much help to a tenant struggling to afford the rent.

"If it really wants to help tenants, the Government should restore the direct link between rent levels and the LHA instead of a paltry flat rate increase."

## LINK TO CHEAP RENTS

Between 2016 and now, private sector rents have increased at a minimum of five per cent a year making it ever more difficult for people on low incomes to find accommodation they can afford.

LHA was introduced in 2008 and originally it was used to calculate housing benefit payments for welfare claimants living in privately rented housing.

Until 2016 it was linked to the cost of cheapest 30 per cent of private rents in an area.

But that direct link was broken in 2016 by the decision to freeze LHA rates, along with many other welfare benefits.

According to Chartered Institute of Housing research published year, in two-thirds of Scotland, four-fifths of Wales and an unbelievable 97 per cent of England LHA covered only the cheapest 20 per cent of private rented homes. In some places LHA would not cover rents on even the cheapest properties.

This has also meant tenants faced shortfalls of hundreds, even thousands, of pounds a year in their rent. This has forced them into making difficult decisions over whether they pay for necessities like food, heating or their rent.

It also contributed to a significant increase in reliance on foodbanks and a growth in evictions and homelessness. Single people under 25 have been hit particularly hard, because they are only entitled to LHA to cover the rent on a bedroom in a shared home.

## DROP IN THE OCEAN

Jon Sparkes, chief executive of the charity Crisis said: "It's extremely disappointing to see the Government's decision to only raise housing benefit in line with inflation, following years of cuts. It is just a drop in the ocean to what we know families need.

"Right now across the country, people are battling to keep their head above water by going without food or missing a crucial bill payment just to be able to pay their rent. No one should be forced

to live like this, especially when we know we have the means to fix it.

"Our research shows that by investing in housing benefit, so it covers the true cost of rents, the Government could lift more than 35,000 children out of poverty.

"Ultimately, making sure that everyone has a safe and secure home benefits us all. This is a missed opportunity for the government to put their money where their mouth is and provide struggling families with a life line. It's vital that the Government restores housing benefit to cover the cheapest third of rents."

## DECISION DEFENDED

The Government defended its decision with Minister for Welfare Delivery, Will Quince, saying: "The Government is levelling up opportunity across the UK, and this will be a welcome increase for around 900,000 people as we provide more money to help pay for housing.

"We are committed to tackling all forms of homelessness - ending the freeze on housing benefits is just one part of achieving this. We have announced an additional £263 million to help councils provide better support to homeless people, and importantly, prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place."

He added that since 2011, the Government has provided local authorities with over £1 billion in Discretionary Housing Payments to protect the most vulnerable claimants. An additional £40 million was also made available for next year's Discretionary Housing Payment fund to help affordability in the private rented sector.

The freeze has been in place since 2016 but the decision means that LHA rates will rise by inflation from April



# No one taking the blame for Grenfell Tower tragedy

The public inquiry into the Grenfell tragedy has resumed but it quickly became evident that none of the many designers, contractors and consultants were willing to shoulder responsibility for mistakes that allowed a fire to engulf the building more than 30 months ago. This is despite emails showing people knew the planned cladding system would fail in the event of a fire.

In opening statements the inquiry's chief lawyer criticised many of the core participants for "taking part in a merry go round of buck passing." Richard Millett QC, said each one claimed what happened was "someone else's fault".

A notable exception was the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, who owned the tower block but were also responsible for building control oversight of the tower's refurbishment. They admitted their building control service should never have signed off the work as compliant with building regulations.

The council funded the refurbishment work to the tower. It was savings in the project's budget that lead to changes in the cladding panels being made from inflammable materials and replaced with combustible panels, which had a flammable polyethylene core. Survivors of the fire were critical of the council, saying their apology did not go far enough.

Further shocks awaited the families (and the inquiry chairman) when some of the witnesses who were involved in the refurbishment project threatened to withhold evidence unless they received assurances that their testimony would not be used to mount criminal prosecutions against

them. They said they would only speak openly if the Attorney General gave an undertaking that nothing they said would be used against them.

## FINGER POINTING

The second phase of the inquiry has been organised into eight modules and these are expected to last at least 18 months. The first week after its resumption was dominated by opening statements from legal representatives of the various firms involved in the tower's refurbishment, completed a year before the fire broke out in June 2017 killing 72 people.

Several of the firms' legal representatives pointed the finger squarely at Arconic, makers of the highly flammable Reynobond cladding panels. They said the company's brochure "gave no indication Reynobond was not suitable for high-rise residential blocks" and boasted of "complete versatility in external applications".

They refuted Arconic's claim that it should have been obvious to anybody involved in construction that its product was not of limited combustibility. They also said safety concerns were raised in internal Arconic emails in 2011 and 2016, when an Arconic employee Claude Wehrle said the Grenfell cladding was "dangerous on (the) facades" and should be replaced.

However, Arconic differentiated between their different cladding products. One of the panel types was identified as being 'fire retardant' by use of the initials ACM FR rather than ACM PE. It was the latter product that was used on Grenfell. They also claimed it was the responsibility of designers, builders and installers to check that the products used

were suitable for their intended purpose.

## DIVISIONS

The legal representative for Celotex mounted a vigorous defence of the company and its reputation, directly challenging claims put forward by Studio E, Rydon and Harley Facades. Celotex said it was known in advance of the fire that their insulation materials (RS5000) should not have been used in the way they were at Grenfell.

Emails disclosed by Celotex to the inquiry appeared to show that staff at various firms involved in the refurbishment project, were aware two years before the tragedy that the cladding and insulation systems used at Grenfell would fail in the event of an external fire.

A clear rift has developed between the manufacturers of the cladding and insulation products used at Grenfell and the various designers, contractors and installers.

The former claim their products were not marketed as being inflammable and it was the responsibility of the latter firms to check on whether the combined cladding and insulation systems were safe and appropriate to use together on the basis of tests. The firms reject this, saying they relied on the manufacturers to make and supply safe products.

Earlier the inquiry's image of impartiality took an enormous dent when one of the independent experts (engineer Benita Mehra) appointed to assist the inquiry chairman, had to resign just days before it restarted due to concerns over a conflict of interest involving Arconic, who made the ACM panels used for the tower's cladding.

## Government must fund removal of Grenfell-style cladding from all buildings

Housing bodies are demanding the Government extends its financial package for removing Grenfell-style aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding, so it applies to all buildings regardless of their height.

It follows the publication of new safety advice warning that Category 3 ACM with an unmodified polyethylene filler "presents a significant fire hazard" on buildings of any height and that action to remove it should be taken as soon as possible.

Previous advice said that cladding only needed to be replaced on high-rise buildings, over 18m in

height. Ministers also published a consultation exercise on extending the ban on combustible materials in the external walls of new buildings from 18m to 11m. It is also expected to cut the height at which water sprinklers are required in new residential buildings from 30m, down to 11m.

In welcoming the proposals, Lord Gary Porter, spokesman for building safety at the Local Government Association, said councils will be looking to central government to pick up the bill for any extra work now required. His comments were echoed and supported by spokesmen at other

housing bodies.

Darren Rodwell, executive member for housing and planning at London Councils, said a move to fund the remediation of buildings under 18m would be "equitable and consistent" with its approach for ACM buildings over 18m.

Victoria Moffett, head of building and fire safety programmes at the National Housing Federation, welcomed the decision to remove Category 3 ACM from all buildings, but said the same principle around funding needed to apply to those under 18m.



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Raising Standards. Protecting Homeowners

# Government confirms 'no fault' evictions to be scrapped

The Government has announced plans to introduce a Renters' Reform Bill, which it says will introduce a package of reforms to deliver a fairer and more effective rental market in the private sector.

However, landlords have warned of a possible mass sell-off of homes that could spark a rent crisis, as demand outstrips supply, forcing rents up at a much faster rate and locking many low-income people out of the market.

Alternatively many tenants and prospective tenants will only be able to afford the worst quality and sub-standard homes let by rogue landlords. The main elements of the Bill will be:

- Abolishing the use of 'no fault' evictions by removing Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 and reforming the grounds for possession;
- Giving landlords more rights to gain possession of their property through the courts where there is a legitimate need for them to do so by reforming current legislation. Court processes will also be speeded up allowing landlords to get their property back quicker and easier;
- Introducing a new lifetime deposit so that tenants do not need to save for a new deposit every time they move house; and
- Continuing to develop and implement measures to wider access and expand the scope of the database of rogue landlords and property agents giving greater powers to drive improvements in standards, and empowering tenants to make an informed choice about who they rent from.

Section 21 evictions are associated with the rapid increase in homelessness seen in the past decade. All of the main political parties were committed to

it being scrapped during the recent general election campaign.

The Residential Landlords Association has repeatedly warned ministers they must make sure landlords have confidence in the repossession system after Section 21 is scrapped or there could be a mass sell-off of properties by landlords.

The RLA says that any new system brought in to replace Section 21 must ensure landlords can swiftly and effectively repossess properties in legitimate circumstances, such as for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.

## CLEAR AND COMPREHENSIVE GROUNDS

The RLA wants a new framework to provide clear and comprehensive grounds on which landlords can repossess, with guarantees about the timeframes involved and measures to prevent abuses by problem tenants.

There are also calls for a dedicated housing court to ensure there is easy and quick access to justice where there are conflicts between landlords and tenants.

David Smith, RLA policy director said: "We accept the need to protect tenants from abuse, but it is crucial that plans to reform the way repossessions can take place are got right if the Government is to avoid a rental housing crisis.

"Unless the new system is fair to good landlords as well as tenants, those same landlords who we need to support simply will not have the confidence to provide the rented homes that are needed to meet the demand."

Almost 6,500 landlords and agents were surveyed by the RLA last year in the wake of the announcement about Section 21 being scrapped,



with half saying they would sell some or all of their rental homes.

Another key finding was that Section 21 is used to repossess property where the tenant is at fault, with many landlords using it in cases of rent arrears and antisocial behaviour, as they lack confidence in the Section 8 process.

The research found that 83 per cent of landlords who had used Section 21 had done so due to rent arrears, while over half had relied on it when their tenants were behaving antisocially.

## Beefed up measures to improve building safety standards

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has announced a raft of new measures to improve building safety and ensure residents can feel safe in their homes in the future.

More than two and half years since the Grenfell fire and just ahead of the public inquiry resuming, the Government committed itself to delivering the biggest change in building safety 'for a generation'. Among the measures announced are:

- The new Building Safety Regulator will be established within the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Dame Judith Hackitt will chair its Board;
- Government has clarified and consolidated advice for building owners, including proposals to extend the cladding ban, as well as updates on fire doors and water sprinkler systems;

- Owners of tower blocks who have not taken action to make their buildings safe will be named from February; and
- Response to Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry published

Jenrick warned the slow pace of improving building safety standards will not be tolerated, while oversight of the design, construction and occupation of high-risk buildings will be performed by a new regulator established as part of the HSE.

Where the owners of tower blocks have no clear plan for remediation, to remove unsafe Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding, the Government says it will work with local authorities to support them in their enforcement options.

Jenrick confirmed he will consult on extending

the ban on combustible materials to buildings below 18 metres and will seek views on how risks are assessed within existing buildings to inform future policy.

The Government has also set out further details of the upcoming Fire Safety Bill being introduced to Parliament. This will clarify the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, 'the Fire Safety Order', requiring residential building owners to fully consider and mitigate the risks of any external wall systems and front doors to individual flats.

A call for evidence will also be published, seeking views on the assessment of risks within existing buildings. This important will help to gather ideas and lead to research which will provide a firm evidence base to guide decisions for both existing buildings and future regulatory regimes.



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## **SAMUEL HEATH**

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# Overcrowding in social rented sector hits historic high point

Among the many positives contained in the latest findings from the English Housing Survey was the surprise news that overcrowding in the social and private rented sectors has dramatically increased.

In 2018/19, eight per cent of all social renters lived in overcrowded properties, up from five per cent in 1998/99. Over the same period, the number of private renters living in overcrowded accommodation doubled from three to six per cent. Overcrowding now affects 600,000 households in the rented sectors. Among owner-occupiers, just one per cent are in overcrowded homes.

Conversely over the same 20-year period the proportion of owner occupiers living in under-occupied homes (having two or more spare bedrooms) jumped from 42 to 52 per cent. Meanwhile under-occupation in the social rented sector decreased from 12 to 8 per cent and in the private rented sector from 20 to 14 per cent.

The latest state of the nation's housing report also highlighted many improvements. However, the rate of improvement appears to have stalled in recent years and is in danger of flatlining in various areas unless new initiatives can kick start a fresh round of improvements.

The energy efficiency of English homes has increased considerably over the last 20 years, but has slowed markedly in recent years. Newly built properties are clearly being built with higher levels of insulation included, sometimes with unforeseen problems of overheating.

In 2018, the average SAP rating of English dwellings edged up to 63 points, from 62 in 2017. This increase was evident in all tenures apart from housing association dwellings where there was no significant increase.

The proportion of dwellings in the highest SAP energy efficiency rating (EER) bands A to C

increased considerably between 2008 and 2018, from nine to 34 per cent. Over the same period, the proportion of dwellings in the lowest F and G bands fell from 14 to four per cent.

Owner-occupiers and residents living in newer houses or high-rise flats were more likely to report overheating. In 2018, seven per cent of residents reported that at least one part of their home got uncomfortably hot. Owner-occupiers (at eight per cent) were more likely to report overheating than social renters (six per cent).

Residents in homes built prior to 1965 were less likely to report that their home got uncomfortably hot (six per cent) compared to those in homes built after 1990 (nine per cent). Residents in high rise flats were more likely to report that at least part of their home got uncomfortably hot (12 per cent), compared with those in low rise flats and terraced houses or semi-detached houses (all seven per cent).

Over the last decade, the proportion of non-decent homes has fallen. In 2008, 33 per cent of the country's entire housing stock was classified as non-decent, but by 2018 this had fallen to 18 per cent. Non-decent rates stood at 12 per cent in the social rented sector, 17 per cent among owner occupied homes and 25 per cent of private rented homes.

## FEWER HAZARDS AND FEWER COUNCIL HOMES

Across all tenures, the proportion of homes with HHSRS Category 1 hazards has declined over the past decade. In 2018, 11 per cent of the housing stock had a HHSRS Category 1 hazard, down from 23 per cent in 2008. Such hazards are more prevalent in the private rented sector (14 per cent) than the owner occupied housing stock (11) and the social rented sector (five).

While the private rented sector had the highest proportion of homes with a Category 1 hazard,

there was a notable decrease in the proportion of stock with such hazards, from 31 per cent in 2008 to 14 per cent in 2018.

Over the last decade, the proportion of non-decent homes has declined.

In 2008, 33% of the stock was non-decent. This has fallen to 18% in 2018.

Rates of tenure in housing have flat-lined with owner-occupation unchanged for the sixth year in a row, at 64 per cent (an estimated 15 million households in England), while private rented accounted for 4.6 million or 19 per cent of households and the social rented sector stood at 4 million or 17 per cent.

However, the composition of the social rented sector has changed in recent years. In 2008/09, 2 million households rented from housing associations and 1.9 million from local authorities. By 2018/19, 2.4 million rented from housing associations 1.6 million from local authorities.

One significant change is among younger adults. After more than a decade of decline, the proportion of 25-34 year olds in owner occupation has increased and there are now almost equal proportions of 25-34 year olds living in the private rented and owner occupied sectors at 41 per cent in each.

Between 2003/04 and 2013/14, the proportion of 25-34 year olds in owner occupation decreased from 59 to 36 per cent, before recently increasing to 41. Meanwhile, the proportion of 25-34 year olds in the private rented sector declined from its peak at 48 per cent in 2013/14 to 41 in 2018/19.

In a sign of the times, the proportion of homes with smart meters has increased. In 2018, 22 per cent of dwellings with mains electricity had an electricity smart meter and 21 per cent of dwellings with mains gas supply had a gas one, up from 15 and 14 respectively in 2017.

## Growing numbers of private landlords plan to sell off homes

More than a third of private landlords are planning to cut the number of homes they rent out or exit the market altogether according to a new survey of over 2,000 landlords.

Almost 34 per cent of landlords have indicated they intend to reduce their investment in the market – a 30 per cent increase over the previous twelve months, according to the research conducted by the Residential Landlords Association.

Just 12 per cent of landlords are looking to expand the number of homes they rent out down from 14 per cent a year ago.

A forecast fall in supply could happen despite the Royal Institution for Chartered Surveyors warning

that the demand for private rented homes is outstripping supply and remains strong.

45 per cent of landlords told the RLA that the Stamp Duty Levy on additional properties had been a deterrent to further investment in property. Professor David Miles, a former member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, has also warned: "aspiring first-time buyers are hardly helped by squeezing the supply of rental property and driving rents up."

The RLA is now calling on the Government to scrap the Stamp Duty Levy (where landlords provide homes adding to the net supply of housing) in the forthcoming March budget.

"This should include developing new build

properties, bringing empty homes back into use and converting larger properties into smaller, more affordable units of accommodation.

David Smith, RLA policy director, said: "This is yet more, clear evidence of the sell-off of private rented housing largely due to the Government's extra tax on new rental homes. It is ridiculous that when the country needs all the extra housing it can get, it penalises good landlords who invest in new homes.

"With a new government and a budget due, we need a shift in policy to one that supports investment because otherwise there will be a growing supply crisis in the private rented sector as demand continues to rise."

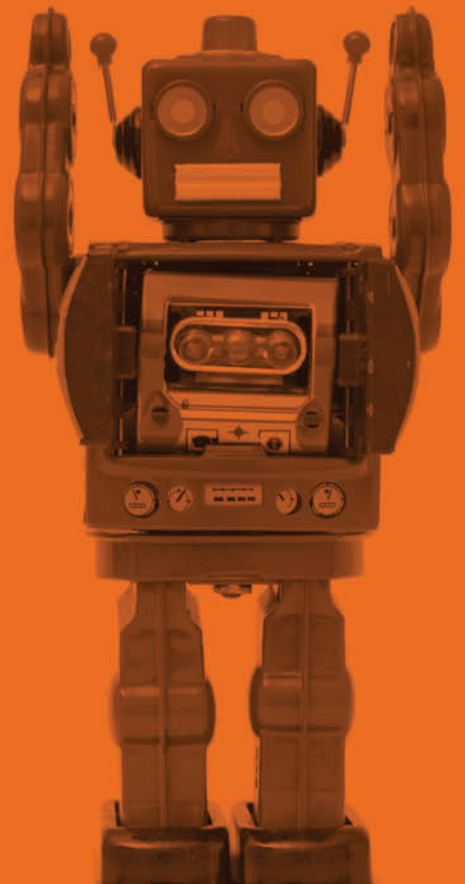




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# Ombudsman criticises councils over poor housing benefit practices

Councils are failing vulnerable people and families, putting them at risk of rent arrears and eviction through mistakes in how they process housing benefit claims according to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman upheld over three-quarters (78 per cent) of the complaints made to it last year about housing benefit processing problems, well above the average for the rest of its casework (58 per cent).

Housing benefit was due to be phased out in 2017 following the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). But delays in implementing UC has meant its full roll-out across the country has been delayed until at least 2023 and some 3.6 million people on low incomes are still receiving housing benefit.

The Ombudsman has released a report outlining the common problems identified in the cases investigated. Supplemented with a number of case studies, the report highlights problems with some councils' understanding of their duties towards claimants and the processes they must follow.

As a result of mistakes made by council staff, it found claimants were running up large debts, being asked to pay back overpayments made directly to landlords, denied reviews and appeals, and put through long periods of stress. Other issues uncovered included:

- A backlog of over 500 appeals against benefit decisions at one council, some dating back two years;
- A tenant being charged rent for a two bed home, instead of the one bed property they occupied; and



- Tenants being evicted while their appeals against a decision had yet to be concluded.

## IMPACT ON THE VULNERABLE

Nigel Ellis, Chief Executive at the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, said "The cases we highlight show the very real impact of what can happen when councils do not deliver housing benefit properly. Some of our most vulnerable families are refused a fair hearing by having their rights to appeal their council's decision taken away.

"Although Universal Credit is being rolled out across the country, this is not happening as quickly as anticipated; councils still need to ensure they administer benefits properly until the new system is in place in their area.

"We are issuing this report to provide guidance and good practice advice to help those who administer housing benefits to avoid the pitfalls and common problems."

Responding to the report, Richard Watts Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "The Ombudsman

has rightly identified the importance of ensuring the best possible accuracy within the housing benefit system, and ensuring councils respond fairly and effectively when mistakes occur. The report highlights important learning for councils and government to take forward to improve fairness and accuracy within the benefits system.

"The funding that councils receive to administer housing benefit falls short of the true costs of administration. Councils have also faced considerable and ongoing pressures and uncertainty due to welfare reforms and changes to the timescales for implementing Universal Credit, which have stretched councils' revenues and benefits services.

"It is vital that Government recognises the ongoing role of councils in administering housing benefit, and in supporting claimants provides appropriate, timely funding to councils to deliver this role. Doing so ensures that councils are able to provide the fairest, most accurate service that they can."

## Pregnant homeless woman left to sleep on floor by London council

A pregnant woman, who approached Tower Hamlets council for help when she was made homeless, was left in an unfurnished flat, miles from her support network, the Local Government Ombudsman has found.

The woman was left in the flat for three months and did not even have a bed until she was awarded a grant a month into the tenancy. She eventually moved into private rented accommodation three months after approaching the council.

The woman complained to the Ombudsman, and during its investigation the council agreed to pay the woman a discretionary housing payment to cover the shortfall in her rent until January 2020, and to refund the deposit she paid for her private rental accommodation.

In a damning report the Ombudsman criticises

the council for not doing enough to prevent the woman's homelessness when it had a chance, as it delayed both assessing her and issuing her with a personalised housing plan.

The council then failed to review the assessment when her circumstances changed and delayed providing her with interim accommodation. It did not consider the suitability of the interim accommodation it provided in another London borough, or reconsider it when she asked it to due to the distance from her support network and maternity hospital.

The investigation also found the council also did not do enough to help the woman find accommodation, including delaying properly considering what financial support it could offer her, and making inquiries to consider

whether it owed her the full housing duty.

Michael King, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, said: "In this case the woman was left in unsuitable temporary accommodation for three months, causing her unnecessary distress and anxiety at a time when she was most vulnerable.

"I welcome the efforts the council made during our investigation to help the woman and hope its commitment to learn from its errors will help ensure other people are not affected in the same way in future.

"We are issuing this report in part because it highlights to other councils the duties they have under the new homelessness prevention laws, and the steps they can take to learn from the errors we have highlighted."

The Ombudsman recommended the council apologise and pay the woman £1,000 to recognise the time she spent living in unsuitable accommodation. The council has agreed to consider its service resources and changes it needs to make to work in line with the law.



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# Thousands of flats still in dangerously clad blocks of flats as removal deadline is missed

Ninety-one tower blocks in the social housing sector with approximately 7,000 flats remain clad in the dangerous ‘Grenfell-style’ ACM panels, after the end of year deadline for its removal was missed. There are many more thousands of flats covered in other flammable materials for which there are no removal plans.

Remediation work has started on 77 of the 91 blocks, but work has yet to start on the remaining 14 blocks in the social sector although remediation work plans exist for 13 of them. A plan for removal of Aluminium Composite Material panels from the last block is still being drawn up.

Clearly irritated by the slow progress being made, the Government has written to the owners of social and private sector tower blocks, threatening to name and shame them, where they have yet to remove and replace ACM cladding. The housing secretary Robert Jenrick told the Commons that “inaction must have consequences”.

So far cladding removal and remediation work has been completed on 68 of the 159 blocks owned and managed by councils and housing associations. This has made just over 4,500 flats safe, equivalent to 41 per cent.

Some £400million was made available by the Government to fund the removal work, with allocations agreed for 144 of the blocks. An application is expected for one other block, while the remaining 14 are having the remediation work funded through the landlords’ own resources and legal action.

The position is much worse in the private sector where 174 blocks are yet to have the ACM panels removed. These buildings account for approximately 12,400 to 16,800 flats. Works have been completed at just 23 tower blocks, where between 2,000 and 2,600 flats have been made safe, or less than 19 per cent.

Of the 174 blocks still awaiting remediation, 31 have started remediation – an increase of four from the end of November. Latest intelligence is that there are six buildings that are known to be vacant, having started remediation or with an intent to remediate or remediation plans in place.

143 blocks are awaiting remediation work to start or for plans to be drawn up before works can commence. These blocks account for between 12,400 and 16,800 flats. Across the social and private sectors, at least 19,000 flats (and possibly as many as 24,000 flats) are still clad in the unsafe ACM panels and materials similar to those used on Grenfell Tower.

## HUGE UNCERTAINTY

Some two and a half years after the Grenfell disaster, there are even 24 private sector residential buildings where the ‘cladding status’ is still to be confirmed although the Housing Ministry claims to have been in contact with all owners.

Funding has been agreed with the Government to help pay for the removal of ACM cladding from just four private sector blocks, from the £200million budget set aside for this work. It seems highly unlikely that the June deadline (set by Ministers) for

completing the removal work will be met.

There also remains questions over the removal of other cladding panel materials – some of which were involved in fires during 2019 – and whether any funding will be made available to pay for other fire safety works, such as installing water sprinkler systems. Determining the liability for removal costs is proving to be a hugely contentious issue.

The G15 group of large housing associations based in and around London has estimated that the full cost of removing non-ACM cladding from its blocks in the capital could be as much as £6.9billion.

One of the G15, Network Homes has warned its 4,000 leaseholders they are “on notice” for bills of up to £100,000 each to pay for the removal of non-ACM cladding unless the Government steps in to help. The HA admitted the figure was at the “high end” of its estimations,

Also in the capital, Wandsworth Council has had a legal application to force all its 2,500 leaseholders in high-rise blocks to pay to fit sprinklers struck out by a tribunal. The council was seeking a ruling which would have allowed it to force leaseholders to pay between £3,000 and £4,000 to retrofit sprinkler systems in residential blocks of 10 storeys or more.

The tribunal found the council was not entitled to ask for a ‘blanket determination’ of leaseholder rights. It said that if the council wishes to fit the sprinkler systems then it must consider each block of flats individually and could make an application to the tribunal on a block-by-block basis at a later date.

## New electrical safety rules for rental properties

New rules for carrying out electrical safety checks every five years in private sector tenancies are being introduced from July this year, with fines of up to £30,000 for non-compliance.

Checks will initially be required for all new tenancies let from July 1 this year and they will then be rolled out to all existing tenancies from April 2021. They also require pre-tenancy and five yearly checks of all fixed appliances and wiring in properties. The new regulations were laid before Parliament in mid January.

The Residential Landlords Association has welcomed moves to make rental homes safer for tenants, but has voiced concerns over the timescale, with landlords having just five months to comply.

Once the electrical installation has been tested, the landlord needs to receive a written report from the inspector, with the results and next inspection date.

They must then:

- Give a copy of the report to tenants within 28 days
- Give a copy to the local authority, if it asks for one, within seven days
- Keep a copy and give it to the person carrying out the next inspection.

For new tenancies, the landlord must:

- Give the tenant a copy of the most recent report before they move in
- Give a copy of the most recent report to any prospective new tenant who asks for it in writing, within 28 days

If improvement work is needed it must be carried out within 28 days, or a timeframe recommended by the inspector, which could be shorter. The landlord must then get written confirmation the

work has been done, a copy of which needs to be given to each tenant along with the original report.

If the tenants of the property refuse access, the landlord will not be considered to have breached this duty.

If a landlord breaches the requirements – and where the work is not urgent the local council will serve a ‘remedial notice’ on the landlord. Once this is served the landlord will have 28 days to make the improvements or will be given 21 days to object.

If the landlord does not make the necessary improvements, the council can access the property with the tenant’s permission to do the work, although landlords can appeal.

The local authority must tell the landlord but will be able to recover their costs from them. They can also do this where urgent works are needed but have not been carried out.





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# HA maintenance costs soar, driving operating surpluses down

Increased expenditure on repairs and maintenance by housing associations, driven by a sharper focus on health and safety after the Grenfell Tower fire has been revealed in the sector's global accounts for 2018/19.

The global accounts published by England's Regulator of Social Housing, shows that the overall operating surplus on social housing lettings fell six per cent to £4.7bn, following a two per cent fall to £5bn in the previous year.

The fall in operating surpluses for 2018/19 was largely driven by significant increases in repairs and maintenance - with a £118m (six per cent) increase in routine maintenance costs and a £111m (13 per cent) rise in planned maintenance spending. Management costs also rose while rental income flatlined.

Total repairs and maintenance spending on existing stock was £5.5bn, compared with £5.2bn in 2017/18. However, it is unclear how much of the increase is due to extra works and how much was caused by cost inflation on materials and labour.

This should become clearer in late January when the regulator is expected to publish the findings of its analysis of metrics and benchmarking of costs. But it is expected there will be a growing focus on value for money from Ministers and the Regulator ahead of the March budget. HAs with higher than average costs for management and maintenance can



also expect greater scrutiny.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of the RSH, said: "Although the accounts show the sector is performing strongly overall, we have seen a reduction in margins, on both rental properties and those built for sale, and in overall surplus."

"This highlights that boards must remain vigilant by continuing to monitor and manage the potential risks facing them." She added that the sector "continues to maintain its financial position, while increasing investment in new and existing homes".

Management and service charge costs rose by similar amounts to maintenance spending, up £118m (six per cent) and £88m (five per cent)

respectively. Meanwhile rental income was stable, as the centrally imposed social housing rent cut entered its third year.

The sector's overall operating margin fell for the second consecutive year from 28 per cent in 2017/18 to 25 per cent last year, with margins tightening for social housing lettings, shared ownership sales and market sales.

Housing associations raised a record £13.5bn in debt finance in 2018/19, up from £10bn the previous year. The sector invested £12.1bn in building new homes across all tenures last year, up 12 per cent - with investment in for-sale tenures soaring 40 per cent from £2.8bn to £3.9bn.

## Overhaul of tenancy agreement to include an end to pet bans

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has called on landlords to make it easier for responsible tenants to keep well-behaved pets in their homes as he announced an overhaul of the model tenancy contracts.

It is understood that only around seven per cent of private landlords advertise their properties as suitable for pets, meaning many people struggle to find a home suitable for themselves and their pets or they have been forced to give up their pets all together.

The model tenancy contract for renters, to be published later this year can be used as the basis of lease agreements. It will be revised to remove restrictions on well-behaved pets while ensuring that landlords' properties are protected from damage by badly behaved pets.

The Government is clear there should be a balance with responsible pet owners not being penalised and landlords being more flexible in their approach. Total bans on renters with pets should

only be implemented where there is good reason, such as in smaller properties or flats where owning a pet could be impractical.

Robert Jenrick said: "Pets bring a huge amount of joy and comfort to people's lives, helping their owner's through difficult times and improving their mental and physical wellbeing. It's a shame that thousands of animal-loving tenants and their children can't experience this because they rent their homes instead of owning property."

"So, I'm overhauling our model tenancy contract to encourage more landlords to consider opening their doors to responsible pet owners. We will be listening to tenants and landlords to see what more we can do to tackle this issue in a way that is fair to both."

The Government claims this is part of its mission to improve life for tenants, recognising that more people are renting and for longer periods. The tenancy agreement overhaul comes on top of banning unfair letting fees and capping tenancy



deposits, saving tenants across England an estimated £240 million a year.

In the Queen's Speech it confirmed its commitment to scrapping 'no fault' Section 21 evictions. Next it is planning to bring forward bills to update the relationship between tenants and landlords, expand access to and use of the rogue landlords register and database, as well as introducing a Lifetime Deposit scheme, to make moving between properties easier and cheaper.



# Government rejects renewal of Liverpool's citywide licensing scheme

**P**lans to renew a citywide selective licensing scheme for the private rented sector in Liverpool have been controversially rejected by the Government following campaigning by a major landlords' organisation.

Liverpool City Council had proposed renewing its licensing scheme for another five years, with the current scheme due to end on 31st March 2020. This would require landlords to licence all their rental properties in the city. Government approval is needed where licensing schemes cover more than 20 per cent of a council area.

In Liverpool the private rented sector accounts for up to half of the housing in some areas and covers 55,000 properties in total. The council claims the decision will severely hamper its efforts to drive up standards in the sector and keep vulnerable tenants safe, particularly in relation to fire safety.

The council says 70 per cent of inspected properties in Liverpool have been found to be in breach of their licence conditions since the scheme was launched in 2015, uncovering serious hazards such as fire, electrical safety and excess cold.

The council has carried out over 37,000 compliance actions, issued more than 2,500 legal and fixed penalty notices and prosecuted almost 250 landlords. Liverpool claims it has been responsible for 389 per cent of the 460 per cent national increase in prosecutions of private landlords between 2012 and 2018.

But the Residential Landlords Association opposed the council's plans, saying the need for licensing was not evidenced in all areas of the city. It claimed most 'breaches' were for administrative errors; that where hazards had been identified these were limited to a number of wards where the council should focus its actions; that the proposed £100 increase in the cost of a licence was not justified and financial burdens on landlords meant they were already planning rent increases.



The council has now demanded more information on how the Government's decision was reached. It could legally challenge the decision if it remains dis-satisfied with the response it receives. Its anger could only have been made worse by a decision just a week later to renew a similar five-year scheme in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, which operates in 18 of the council's 20 wards. The east London council has obtained 94 prosecutions.

## DECISION CHALLENGED

Mayor of Liverpool Joe Anderson said: "This decision is not only ill-thought through and short-sighted, it also puts the lives of some of our most vulnerable tenants at risk. It flies in the face of the Government's tough talk on housing standards, particularly around fire safety in rented properties.

"Over the last five years our officers have come across people whose landlords are happy to take their rent while allowing them to live in appalling conditions with unsafe electrics, gas supply and no fire doors to protect them in the event that a blaze breaks out.

"The Landlord Licensing scheme has enabled us to create a team to be able to hit the streets every

day and carry out inspections of properties and bring rogue landlords to book. It is not just about raising housing standards – it is about protecting and saving lives."

However, the Government's decision was welcomed by RLA policy manager John Stewart, who said: "Liverpool's application for a second new citywide scheme was doomed to failure. A much more focussed approach is required, and we welcome the rejection of the citywide scheme.

"The RLA made it clear that the council's evidence failed to justify a citywide scheme on the basis of low demand. The council's own statistics showed increasing house prices and lower void periods across many areas of the city.

"In addition, the operation of the current selective licensing scheme left much to be desired, with long waits for licences and a focus on minor, often administrative breaches, rather than tackling the worst property management and conditions.

The council ran a consultation exercise on its proposals before submitting its application last year. It said it had received the backing of Merseyside Police, Mersey Fire and Rescue Service and the majority of residents who responded to the consultation.

## Wales bans use of combustible cladding on all new high-rise buildings

The use of combustible cladding on the external walls of all new high-rise buildings in Wales has been banned from mid January 2020.

The ban applies to combustible cladding on all new residential buildings (flats, student accommodation and care homes) and hospitals over 18 metres in height. The ban covers the entire height of the building and will apply to the complete wall assembly and certain attachments to the external wall, including balconies and solar panels.

The ban will also apply to existing buildings where relevant building work is being carried out

which falls within the scope of the Building Regulations, unless the building works have started on-site or an initial notice, building notice or full plans have been deposited and work has started on site within a period of eight weeks.

However, firefighters said the ban was not the outright ban on combustible cladding that they had been calling for. The Fire Brigades Union has been calling for such bans to apply to all buildings, not just those over 18 metres high, and for ban to be extended to the use of all flammable materials.

Welsh Housing Minister, Julie James said: "Our

homes should be the safest of places. The action I have taken will help ensure we make people safer in their homes, and leaves no room for doubt as to what is suitable for use on external walls of relevant buildings 18m or more in height.

"In Wales, we have a proud track record of achieving high standards of fire safety. We have a record low number of dwelling fires, and in 2016, we became the first country in the world to make it compulsory for all new and converted homes to have sprinklers installed.

"But we know there is still much more we need to do to ensure that there is greater clarity across the life cycle of a building as to the roles and responsibilities of those designing, constructing and managing buildings. I intend to publish a White Paper in 2020 setting out the detail of my plans."



SAME HOUSE, DIFFERENT HOME.





# Be the catalyst for change

Futurebuild 2020 is heading to the London Excel in March this year, aiming to unite construction professionals across the sector to create real change

From recent demonstrations to Government declarations, according to the event organisers at Futurebuild 2020, the message is clear – the industry needs to work together if it is to succeed against the climate change challenges we all face.

Against this backdrop, Futurebuild 2020 (3–5 March, ExCeL London) aims to inspire housing professionals to join fellow industry leaders and innovators to be the catalyst for change, and deliver a more sustainable built environment.

## SETTING THE AGENDA

The Futurebuild conference returns, and will follow a three-day progression for 2020. With a central theme of responding to the climate and ecological crisis, the Arena will host debate and discussion led by politicians, academics and industry shapers.

Some of the organisers' highlighted sessions include: 'The future is regenerative' chaired by Peter Murray, Chair of New London Architecture (3 March), which will explore how design and construction needs a circular rethink. On day two (4 March), London Mayoral Candidate Rory Stewart will sit on a panel looking at 'Carbon neutral cities of the future,' and examine the pathway to healthier, more resilient cities.

While conference discussions will focus on the biggest issues facing the built environment at a macro level, the six Keynote Stages will look at the specific challenges impacting Buildings, Offsite, Energy, Interiors, Resourceful Materials and Critical Infrastructure. This programme of solution-driven sessions hopes to share the latest thinking and research, to educate, inform and inspire visitors to make a positive change.

Each day, the six stages will host a focused keynote presentation by a recognised expert in their field. This and other sessions will look at tangible solutions and approaches which will make a real difference to practice and performance.

The Buildings Keynote stage will focus on the latest thinking and initiatives in building quality and performance, key sessions include 'The Future Homes Standard 2025 – when, what, how?' The session taking place on the third day (5 March) will be chaired by Lynne Sullivan, co-founding partner of sustainableBYdesign.

## BEYOND THE STAGES

Around each Keynote Stage will be an exhibition of brands offering solutions to the challenges discussed in the companion knowledge programme. It will reportedly feature some of the largest headline brands in the sector, alongside SMEs and start-up organisations, creating a dedicated platform to connect these companies with forward-thinking specifiers and buyers.

Brands and organisations that are leading the charge when it comes to innovation will be recognised through a dedicated Innovation Trail. A guided route is structured to enable visitors to learn more about the latest thinking from Futurebuild's Innovation Partners, including ACO Technologies, Smart Systems, CEMEX, Steico and Hadley Group.

The Buildings section has also been expanded to include two new showcases. The Whole House Retrofit Zone and the Digital Impact Zone will host industry-leading brands.



## THE GAME CHANGERS ARE BACK

Futurebuild 2020 will see the return of the Big Innovation Pitch. Hosted in conjunction with technical partner BRE, the competition will identify and celebrate novel new approaches to some of the biggest challenges facing us all.

Entrants will present their ideas on each of the six Keynote Stages on day one, before shortlisted entries go head-to-head in the Arena on day two. A panel of judges will determine the overall winning idea, which will be incorporated into BRE Academy Training and showcased in the BRE Innovation Park.

Martin Hurn, event director of Futurebuild, commented: "The responsibility for tackling the climate emergency lies in all of our hands and we must collaborate in order to find solutions to secure our future. Futurebuild 2020 provides the perfect platform for forward-thinking decision makers across the built environment to come together and play a key part in driving positive change.

"We understand that taking time out of work to attend events can be a challenge, which is why we will make sure that visitors can really get involved across a number of levels, from the world class knowledge programme in the Arena and on the Keynote Stages, to the showcase of the latest innovations across the exhibition. Innovation to us is more than just futuristic concepts, it's about sharing the latest thinking and ideas, processes and solutions, products and materials. All of these things coming together under one roof at Futurebuild 2020 will inspire people to do things differently and create real change."

For more information about Futurebuild 2020, the home of innovation, visit [www.futurebuild.co.uk](http://www.futurebuild.co.uk)

# Tackling climate change will force us to make huge lifestyle changes

Household domestic energy use currently accounts for roughly 29 per cent of the UK's total energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. Radically reducing this figure is vital if the country is to achieve its goals of cutting emissions to 51 per cent of 1990 levels by 2025 and to reach net zero by 2050.

Indeed the hardest part of getting to zero emissions could be in changing how we heat our homes and end our addiction to natural gas.

Since the mass installation of central heating into UK homes began in the 1960s and 70s, more than 85 per cent of homes with central heating are connected to the gas grid. This accounts for the largest single use of energy in the UK.

## DASH FOR GAS

The dash for gas coincided with the discovery of huge natural gas desposits in the North Sea and its perception as a clean fuel in comparison to coal and oil.

Industrial disputes in the coal sector and uncertainty over the supply of oil due to conflicts in the Middle East as well as worries over the safety of nuclear reactors simply added to the attraction of gas.

Our understanding of gas as a carbon-based fuel, whose use is massively contributing to climate change, has changed the dynamic and we now recognise the urgent need to wean ourselves off it – but sooner rather than later.

Replacing gas with renewable energy sources such as electricity from wind, solar, hydro and biomass projects is the priority.

## CONVERSION PLANS?

According to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy we could convert all our domestic heating over to electric heat pumps. These heat pumps are three times more energy efficient per degree of heat produced than current gas boilers, but they are not without their drawbacks.

Such a move would double our use of electricity and at present there is not sufficient supply capacity to cope. In addition, residents will need educating about how to use heat pump systems as they should be left running permanently, otherwise they take time to gather heat, making them less effective in dealing with sudden winter cold snaps.

The ambient temperature produced by heat pumps is also below most people's comfort levels, unless their home is very well insulated, so in energy inefficient homes they may need to be supplemented by other forms of low-carbon heating.

Using batteries for safely storing electricity at home or converting heating systems from natural

gas to hydrogen could be the next big developments in the domestic market, but both technologies are still at the experimental stage.

## GOING GREEN

Good news is emerging on the supply side as the UK's renewable sector outpaced fossil fuel plants on 137 days in 2019 to help the country's energy system record its greenest year to date.

Indeed renewable energy grew by 9 per cent last year and was the UK's largest electricity source in four of the last 12 months.

But changing where our energy comes from is only part of the answer – albeit it is a very important one.

We also need to stop the growing demand for energy, reduce our use of power where possible and take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Planting millions of trees will contribute to this, but it is not the answer on its own.

## REDUCING POWER USE

Improving the energy efficiency of our homes and of the appliances we use on a daily basis will be key to delivering the necessary cuts in emissions.

Our housing stock is relatively old and inefficient in its use of energy – only a quarter of our current homes have been built in the last 40 years. We will be relying on homes built between 1900 and 1950 for many decades to come.

Meanwhile progress in insulating our housing stock has slowed down rapidly since 2012, with rates of loft insulation (down 90 per cent per annum) and cavity wall insulation (down 60 per cent per annum). Only solid wall insulation has been increasing, but this is from a very low number.

While modern homes are more energy efficient, the drive to push higher efficiency standards has stalled – partly to help the building industry to recover from the recession of 2008-10 following the worldwide banking crash.

Then in 2015, the Government scrapped plans to make new homes zero-carbon from 2016 on cost grounds.

## NEW INITIATIVES

To get the rate of home insulation measures going again, the Climate Change Committee has pointed out that new policies are needed.

The CCC says the most expensive part of the transition to zero carbon will be the modification of 28 million home heating systems. Of the estimated £1trillion that getting to net zero may cost, half (£500bn) of this will go towards refitting domestic heating.

While it may be possible to convert social housing with mandated Government initiatives, it will require a clever combination of carrots and sticks to persuade owner-occupiers

and private landlords to replace their gas central heating systems.

The Government's recent election manifesto offered very little guidance to what it has in mind for the private rented sector, so it will be fascinating to see what policy direction it eventually takes. The Budget planned for 11 March may provide some clues.

## MEANWHILE...

From April 2020, more private landlords will need to meet the new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) regulations, which requires rented homes to have a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of E.

Landlords with properties that do not meet the regulations must carry out energy efficiency measures on their homes, up to a cap of £3,500 a property.

If they fail to upgrade their properties and rent out homes with an EPC rating of F or G, they are liable to fines up to a maximum of £5,000.

The rules were first introduced in 2018, but at the time they only covered new tenancies and renewals. From April, they will apply to all existing tenancies. This could affect upto an estimated 200,000 rented properties.

Responsibility for monitoring landlords' compliance with the new rules and prosecuting any offenders is still a bit vague but will most likely fall on to local authority enforcement staff.

Central government is not interested in taking on this role, but council staff have told me in recent weeks that they will struggle to provide sufficient resources for this task.

## POLICY DIRECTION CHANGES

The Housing Secretary's first 'big' announcement of the New Year was telling us which councils will receive a share of the new £4million fund to crack down on criminal landlords and letting agents.

Among the councils to benefit from the funding is the London Borough of Greenwich, for trialling new technology to identify particularly cold homes to ensure private renters are warm over the winter period. But the vast majority of winning bids are designed to improve property standards.

Surely this is a time when the Government should be showing off its Green credentials by demonstrating the action it will take to turn our housing stock into energy efficient homes.

We have not suffered anything like the terrible and devastating fires in Australia or the flooding in Indonesia, but it is only a few weeks since thousands of homes in Yorkshire and across the Midlands were submerged by floodwaters and rendered uninhabitable. We need action now to avoid such episodes from happening every year.



## Mapei's Ultralite Range has been shortlisted for a TTS Award

Mapei is pleased to announce that the Ultralite range has been shortlisted as a top 20 finalist in the Tomorrow's Tile & Stone Awards 2020. The awards look to celebrate the best products and innovations in the tiling industry.

Mapei's range of Ultralite adhesives offers innovative, lightweight cementitious adhesives that are unique in their kind. The adhesives are ideal for bonding all types of ceramic, mosaic and natural stone, as well as thin porcelain tiles. They are particularly versatile with characteristics that make the work of installers simpler and quicker; providing more coverage per unit leads to faster installations and less mixing times.

Due to their special formulation, installation becomes less tiring – this is due to the glass micro-spheres or natural aggregates contained in the adhesive that help make trowelling easier. Supplied in lighter bags (15kg) with a practical hand grip for easier handling, Ultralite adhesives provide up to 80 per cent higher yield compared to other adhesives with the same classification.



Also part of the range, Ultralite D2 is a ready to use and water resistant adhesive with high yield for ceramic wall tiling; it boasts excellent coverage, and is very easy to apply.

Voting for the Awards are now open, and the readers of Tomorrow's Tile & Stone have until March 13th to select their winner via the website.

For more information on the Ultralite range, visit the website or email [ukmarketing@mapei.co.uk](mailto:ukmarketing@mapei.co.uk) to book a place on one of our Ceramic Tiling training courses.

0121 508 6970  
[www.mapei.co.uk](http://www.mapei.co.uk)

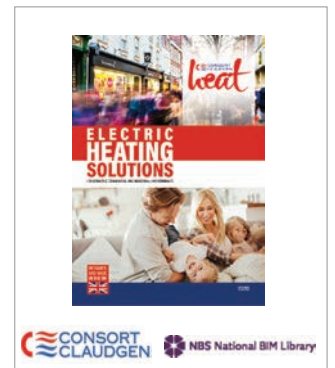
## Consort launches new electric heating brochure plus updates to BIM library

Consort Claudgen have launched their latest Heat brochure which includes a host of new heaters and heating controls in their product range.

The 48-page brochure features motion-activated and waterproof run-back time controllers, new heaters in the electronic 7-day timer range and advanced wireless controllers which are now compatible with Consort's RX and SL heaters. All of these are detailed in the brochure along with the established panel and fan heaters, convectors, LST heaters, air curtains, downflows and towel rails.

Consort have also added new BIM objects of low surface temperature heaters to their BIM library which consists of panel and fan heaters, recessed ceiling heaters and air curtains. All of these objects are available to download from Consort Claudgen's website or the NBS National BIM Library. The BIM objects featured in the NBS National BIM Library include technical details such as dimensions, ratings, insulation standard classes and electrical specifications to aid architects and specifiers in their design process.

[www.consortepl.com](http://www.consortepl.com) [www.consortepl.com/bim-modelling](http://www.consortepl.com/bim-modelling)



## Adapting ventilation to the real needs

The role of a ventilation system is to ensure good indoor air quality, replacing polluted air with fresh air and to fight against mould and condensation.

Aereco demand-controlled ventilation (DCV) system adapts according to the occupants and therefore guarantee energy and money savings, while providing an optimal indoor air quality. DCV systems consider different factors such as Humidity, Presence and CO<sub>2</sub> levels and adapt the ventilation based on demand. Aereco will deliver demonstrations of their ventilation solutions for Retrofit from stand D93 at Futurebuild 2020.



02476 307 736 [www.aereco.co.uk](http://www.aereco.co.uk)

## Longfloor launch game-changer for industry

At this year's Concrete Show on 25<sup>th</sup> March, Longfloor will launch a game-changing development for the construction industry, a revolutionary approach in the way liquid cement screeds are applied, a global first which will fundamentally enhance the way liquid cement screeds are used.



Darren Williams, Longfloor General Manager said: "We are very excited to announce an industry first at this year's Concrete Show. The future is grey!" Please come along and see us on stand 60 to find out more about this game-changer for the industry.

01629 540 284 [www.longfloor.co.uk](http://www.longfloor.co.uk)

# Aluminium or PVCu – which is best for your Local Authority project?

Leading window and door manufacturer Shelforce is Birmingham City Council's chosen manufacturer of choice for local authority building projects, specialising in social housing, education and the new build sector. With extensive experience in delivering window projects on time and in budget, Shelforce's Business Manager Howard Trotter tackles one of the age-old debates when it comes to windows – which are better for your local authority project, aluminium or PVCu windows?

When a debate is as longstanding as which material is better when it comes to windows, aluminium or PVCu, it's usually a sign that it's almost impossible to answer.

Historically, aluminium was the material of choice for windows in the 60s and 70s, but due to poor thermal efficiency and quality, PVCu took over the mantle and has proved the most popular choice for window frames since the 80s thanks to its affordability.

Aluminium windows, however, have come a long way over the past decade in terms of affordability, durability, and thermal efficiency.

While aluminium is a firm favourite with architects and commercial entities, housing associations tend to lean more towards PVCu.

But what it really comes down to is budget and the kind of project being undertaken.

## STRONG, STYLISH AND SLEEK

The surge in popularity of aluminium windows can be traced to the stylish look they offer, with sleeker frames and slimmer sightlines creating a clean and modern look.

Slimmer window frames allow for a bigger pane of glass meaning a better view and more natural light coming in.

Aluminium is fantastic for curtain walling, shop fronts and commercial entrances due to its durability and strength, while it's also the best product for achieving stringent wind load calculations.

Thanks to advances in technology, aluminium windows are now among the best-insulated on the market due to an innovative polyamide thermal break within the frame which prevents too much heat from being conducted.

And because aluminium is a highly durable metal that doesn't rust, the frames are practically maintenance-free and can last up to 45 years.

## SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES – AND STILL GOOD VALUE

The popularity of PVCu windows is down to their affordability thanks to material costs and being much quicker to manufacture.



But there have also been significant advances in the PVCu market with respect to design and PVCu systems have been introduced that replicate both aluminium colours and sight lines, as well as more traditional finishes, such as flush sashes for traditional timber alternatives.

Thanks to the new PVCu designs and colour options, more cost-effective solutions to aluminium are available which now provide the aesthetics called for by architects.

PVCu is also resistant to rot which means they require little maintenance and provides good insulation ability, while a PVCu window has a lifespan of 35 years and as a hugely sustainable material it can be recycled 10 times, meaning PVCu can offer up to 350 years of service.

Multi-chambered PVCu frame profiles can also help reduce noise and are also warp-free, which means there will be no distortion in the frame which can seriously reduce the effectiveness of the seal.

## APPLICATION IS EVERYTHING

It's clear that aluminium windows have developed over the past 10 years but there will always be a place for PVCu thanks to its affordability and the significant advances in the PVCu market.

But as to which one is better, it comes down to application.

For curtain walling or wide span projects, aluminium should be favourite. When it comes to affordable housing, however, PVCu is the material to consider.

Founded in 1839, Shelforce has been involved in a whole host of local authority building projects including, most recently, Birmingham Council's first ever 'ModPod' and a revamp of a 20-storey tower block in Aston to help homeless families. For more information please contact Shelforce.

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



# Casings for social housing – undercover work

**T**he range of pipe boxing and casing solutions for social housing from Encasement Ltd continues to be in high demand with the growth in fire sprinkler installation; central heating upgrades and distributed heating system refurbishment projects all using the company's specialised products.

Pre-formed plywood casings have been the preferred solution for social housing RMI for decades and with over 30 years manufacturing experience in the sector, Encasement estimates that more than 100,000 kilometres of its pipe-boxing have already been installed in social housing sites throughout the UK.

The company's pipe boxing, boiler casings and fire sprinkler boxing are continually specified by HAs, LAs and their contractors for concealing interior pipework, while its 'Arma' range of tough, lightweight aluminium casings are increasingly specified to conceal and protect exterior services, such as gas supply pipes, electrical cabling and distributed heating pipework.

Encasement was one of the first manufacturers and suppliers of decorative casings to achieve the FSC® Chain of Custody Certification from the Forestry Stewardship Council in 2010 and since then, the company has offered an FSC® certified option on its full range of pre-formed plywood casings to comply with customers' sustainable procurement policies.

The company's Riva, Versa 5 and Versa 8 ranges of pipe and fire sprinkler boxing products, together with its boiler pipe casing range, are pre-finished in white melamine so that they can be fitted quickly and easily, which removes the need for on site painting and helps save time and money on site.

Martin Taylor, Encasement's Managing Director, explained: "From our experience of working with contractors on countless social housing projects where pipework needs to be concealed,



Versa fire sprinkler boxing

we know that pipe and fire sprinkler boxing can be fitted in less than half the time of site made alternatives."

For housing associations, local authorities and their contractors, this time saving provides a number of benefits. It helps ensure that heating systems, boilers and fire safety upgrades can be completed within shorter timescales. This minimises disruption for tenants and can also have a positive impact on improving maintenance and tenant satisfaction KPI's.

Potentially the most important advantage is that the time taken to complete the projects can be reduced without compromising the quality or integrity of the installation, which can also help reduce costs.

"From day one, we set out to manufacture and supply the most comprehensive range of pipe boxing and casing products for the social housing sector and we now offer more than 200 different products, profiles and sizes within our standard range, continued Martin Taylor."

He added: "Our Versa range of pre-formed pipe boxing has rapidly become a key solution for concealing retro-fitted fire sprinkler pipework in flats and communal areas, whilst the launch of our flame retardant Versa 'FR' boxing was a first for the market. Versa FR is also pre-finished in white, while our Arma aluminium casings can be specified and manufactured in any RAL colour."

01733 266 889 [www.encasement.co.uk](http://www.encasement.co.uk)



Riva pipe boxing



Boiler pipework casing

## Minibems appoints IoT specialist Nigel Pugh as CTO

Minibems is delighted to announce the appointment of Nigel Pugh as CTO, who brings a wealth of expertise and experience to the role including the development of the Hive home platform. Nigel is a specialist in IoT solutions for the smart home sector and a welcome addition to the rapidly expanding Minibems team. Nigel has over 20 years' experience in the software industry, which he brings to the Minibems role, leading development teams for UBS, Betfair & Canonical. Leading the hardware and software development functions, he has responsibility for delivering the technology road map and ensuring the Minibems platform offers class-leading customer experience, security, reliability and energy savings. Nigel brings real computing and software DNA combined with a sharp commercial brain to the role. Nigel commented: "Joining Minibems is the sort of opportunity and challenge I relish. There is massive scope for the company to scale and deliver a major step change to the way energy is used and valued". This appointment further strengthens the growing team at Minibems, who are at the cutting edge of applying IoT technology to building performance, delivering a unique and comprehensive heat network management service that enables clients to save energy, reduce carbon emissions and alleviate fuel poverty. With innovation and efficiency at the heart of everything we, Minibems is advancing heat networks.

020 3411 4170 [www.minibems.com](http://www.minibems.com)



## Designer Contracts supports ChildLine

Designer Contracts, one of the UK's largest flooring contractors, has sponsored the services of leading children's charity, ChildLine for one day. It is the second time the company has supported the charity, which needs £30,000 each day to operate its counselling services, helping thousands of young people up to the age of 19 throughout the UK. Said Designer Contracts md, Peter Kelsey: "We were delighted to offer our support for the second year running. There are around 800 young people calling in to the charity in any one day, desperately seeking advice and assistance, so the generosity of the public is essential for it to operate effectively."



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

## Vent-Axia announced as six-times finalist

Ventilation experts Vent-Axia has shown its design leadership in tackling the problems of poor indoor air quality (IAQ) in the home with three products being shortlisted in two categories each at the prestigious H&V News Awards. This impressive shortlisting success is for Vent-Axia's PoziDry Compact Pro, the Vent-Axia PureAir Sense and the Silent Fan which have all been named as finalists in both the 'Air Movement Product of the Year' and the 'Domestic Ventilation Product of the Year' categories. This multiple shortlisting in the H&V News Awards confirms Vent-Axia's leading position in the ventilation market and its commitment in helping provide good IAQ for its customers.



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# Connecting the dots

Rupert Kazlaucius of Zehnder Group UK discusses how technology such as AI assisted ventilation can tackle some of the housing sector's chronic issues

**W**hat connects net zero targets, smart devices, social housing, the UK's housing crisis and healthy homes? All these jigsaw pieces slot together to create a picture of the chronic issues facing the UK's homes and the new technologies that may help offer the solutions needed.

## NET ZERO & SMART HOMES

"I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is." – Greta Thunberg.

The recent report, 'Net Zero', pledged to reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions to create a net zero economy by 2050.

Its implications include a rapid expansion of renewable and low carbon power generation to allow activities, such as heating, to be electrified.

Switching homes to low carbon heating will cost £15bn each year, requiring large-scale deployment of heat pumps, district heating and hydrogen technologies. And, it also needs us to expand energy efficiency in homes.

Help may be at hand in the unlikely disguise of AI.

There are already 57 per cent of our homes using at least one smart device. And it's not just lights and entertainment that is getting smarter – smart heating could play a role in the net zero drive.

Smart thermostats offer greater energy savings and efficiencies of up to 19 per cent, by switching off the heating as the desired temperature is reached or by allowing your mobile to turn the heating off and on remotely.

But, the future could be even smarter.

Heating devices directly connected into supply data could store energy to use

at times when demand on the National Grid is high. Automated algorithms will allow devices to know that, when it's windy, the grid has greener and cheaper energy.

## SOCIAL HOUSING, ENERGY EFFICIENCY & HEALTHY HOMES

"Social housing providers are doing better than the private landlords or the home ownership sector, accounting for 17 per cent of homes but only 10 per cent of carbon emissions. In new homes and in retro-fitting, this sector has led the way. Social housing can raise the bar and set the standards for all housing provision." – Lord Best, president of the Sustainable Energy Association (SEA).

Sounds good? But here's his colleague: "There are significant obstacles we face for social housing to lead the way in reaching net zero: stable and consistent policy together with funding support is required." – Lesley Rudd, chief executive of the SEA.

It may be that the obstacles run deeper than this.

Ventilation is very much the missing link that can connect the dots between net zero targets, smart devices, social housing, the UK's housing crisis and healthy homes.





The ambitious target of providing 300,000 new homes by the mid-2020s to address the chronic housing shortage in England represents a great opportunity to introduce best practice for energy-efficient homes.

But, the proportion of homes that social housing will provide currently stands at just 3 per cent.

Homeless charity Shelter has already done its sums: at least three million new social homes are needed in the next 20 years. And Kate Henderson, chief executive of the NHF, concurs that 'relying on private developers is fatally flawed. Without investment in affordable housing, it isn't possible to build enough homes to ensure everyone has somewhere stable and affordable to live.'

Complicating this already complex situation is the pressure that's being applied for homes to be affordable, energy-efficient, and also healthy.

We've seen how targets for net zero and ending the housing shortage need

investment in social housing. We've also seen how smart devices offer a solution to achieving energy efficiency.

But, we must now consider why more affordable, energy efficient homes will fail to connect all the dots. They run the risk of failing to provide long-term solutions to our need to protect the environment and to provide a safe environment to live in.

The state of our housing's effects on our health was laid bare by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Healthy Homes and Buildings. Contemporary building design and renovation is found to be seriously wanting – and most times it's a sole focus on providing 'energy efficiency' that is the culprit.

In 'sealed' environments, without adequate ventilation, occupants are at risk of overheating and health risks from poor indoor air quality.

Poor IAQ caused by toxins and chemicals is estimated to annually cost the UK 204,000 healthy life years. Due to climate change, urban concentration and incentivisation to focus on energy efficiency alone, there has been an increase in the overall temperature of our homes.

The committee insists that "the Government should end the practice of improving energy efficiency without due consideration to the consequences for health."

But, flicking through the 300-page report on achieving net zero, you'll find overheating mentioned once (p242) and ventilation glossed over as part of a list just four times (p33, p195, p201 and p272).

## VENTILATION

Ventilation is very much the missing link that can connect the dots between net zero targets, smart devices, social housing, the UK's housing crisis and healthy homes.

And you won't be surprised to learn that AI-enabled ventilation is already very much a reality.

*Rupert Kazlaucius is technical product manager - MVHR at Zehnder Group UK Limited*

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



## PoziDry Compact Pro shortlisted at awards

Social housing ventilation experts Vent-Axia are delighted to reveal that they have been named as a finalist at the prestigious EEM Building Communities Awards 2020. Shortlisted in the Innovative Product category, the company's PoziDry Compact Pro offers a totally new way of thinking about Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) and is the ideal solution for combating condensation and mould in problem properties without a loft. Ultra small and light, the unit can fit in the smallest of spaces and a removable inner cartridge makes installation and maintenance a breeze. Award winners will be announced on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at the black-tie event, which will take place at the Athena in Leicester.

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



## Vent-Axia supports landmark report

Ventilation manufacturer Vent-Axia welcomes the latest joint report by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the Royal College of Physicians on the health impact of indoor air quality (IAQ) on children and young people. "At Vent-Axia we are committed to improving indoor air quality and so public health" explains Jenny Smith, Head of Marketing at Vent-Axia. Since 1936 Vent-Axia has been working hard to provide ventilation solutions to improve IAQ for households. Vent-Axia's Sentinel Kinetic mechanical ventilation with heat recovery system boasts an impressive 94 per cent heat recovery. For further information on all products and services, please contact Vent-Axia.

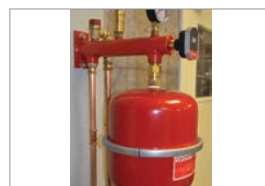
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## Flexconsole Plus gets accolades

One of Flamco's established products is receiving accolades up and down the country. The Flexconsole Plus contains a mounting bracket for an expansion vessel, a Flexvent auto air vent, a Prescor pressure relief valve and a pressure gauge. A regular installer says: "For me it's a no brainer and one of the best bits of kit I've come across. Clearly it makes installation easier and quicker when you can combine an expansion vessel, a PRV and a pressure gauge in one hit. One of the key advantages is that the expansion vessel can be removed to service without draining down the system water." The Flexconsole Plus provides a secure mounting bracket that saves installers and customers time and money.

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# Reducing costly repeat drainage issues

Chris Nelson of Metro Rod discusses the importance of efficient maintenance of drainage to reduce costly repeat visits



**B**locked drains are a common issue in housing, and can lead to significant costs for providers and local authorities – as well as unhappy tenants. With the UK spending over £100m unblocking drains each year, it is clear that those looking after large numbers of properties need to put in place plans to minimise issues.

The problem is made worse by a lack of accurate information and reporting on the causes of blockages. This is leading to an increased number of repeat call outs to properties to deal with the same or similar issues, creating significant and unnecessary extra costs for providers.

## THE RIGHT DRAINAGE COMPANY

When appointing a drainage company to deal with and prevent blockages, there are a number of considerations to keep in mind. Firstly, it is important to ensure that the provider has experience dealing with private housing properties; this ensures that the company understands the challenges and common issues that occur. On top of providing the highest quality service in a discreet manner, it is also vital to get an assurance that engineers have received thorough training, are DBS checked, and will be courteous to tenants.

In order to save costs and reduce the number of repeat issues, it is also crucial to ensure that the drainage provider has analytics software capable of creating

detailed reports on drainage issues. This means that when an engineer visits a housing property to investigate a potential blockage, the information can be relayed to both the main depot and the housing provider, detailing exactly what is causing the blockage and how it will be solved.

## USING ANALYTICS TO REDUCE COSTS

Each time an issue is logged by an engineer at a property, all the data from the report can be recorded onto a drainage management system. This allows the drainage company to produce a full picture of any particular properties or streets where issues are reoccurring.

While these repeat visits to the same properties would usually result in significant costs, by using the data collected from previous visits, the drainage company identify recurring issues. From here, it will be able to advise on the most suitable course of action to ensure the causes of the issues are treated in the most efficient way.

## COMMON CAUSES OF REPEAT BLOCKAGES

Tenant behaviour is a common cause of repeat blockages, and items that shouldn't end up down the drain causing issues are a regular occurrence. Alongside an increasing amount of fat, grease and oil being poured down



kitchen plugholes, tenants are also disposing of items such as wet wipes, food and sanitary products down the drain.

Despite some products being labelled as 'flushable', this simply means that given enough force, they will flush – but it is unlikely that these items will biodegrade. Instead, when grease and food cools in the drainage system it congeals with these non-flushable items to form solid waste, or fatbergs, in the system, resulting in time-consuming and costly blockages.

This type of blockage is easily and efficiently identified by the latest CCTV equipment, and will be initially removed using high pressure water jetting which propels water at high speeds to clean surfaces and materials. For certain properties, electro-mechanical cleaning will be a more suitable option. This involves the use of a motorised tool which rotates a cable to clear the blockage, providing a handheld option. For larger blockages, combination tanker vehicles can be used to clear the issue.

Using the data obtained, it is possible to keep a record of properties where the problem is reoccurring. This means that rather than re-attending the same issue on a monthly basis, the underlying cause of the drainage is identified, allowing the drainage company to develop a plan of pre-planned drainage maintenance (PPM). This helps to ensure the problem is rectified, creating long-term cost savings for those managing the maintenance of housing developments. For instance, fatbergs forming can be avoided by installing a grease trapping unit which will prevent the grease from entering the system and sticking to the pipes.

#### FREED UP BUDGETS ELSEWHERE

Ensuring the correct maintenance of drainage is a crucial responsibility for providers. By appointing a drainage company that has state of the art reporting software, providers can keep costly repeat drainage problems to a minimum. Investigating and dealing with the cause of the issue rather than providing a quick fix will not only free up budget to be spent elsewhere, but also significantly improve tenant satisfaction.

*Chris Nelson is senior technical manager at Metro Rod*

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# Flat roof refurbishment: why choose liquids?

Victoria Ramwell of Kemper System discusses the key considerations of flat roof refurbishment in housing projects

**T**he refurbishment of any housing complex requires adequate planning to ensure budget and time constraints are adhered to – not to mention the safety implications and potential disruption for residents.

With many projects needing to accommodate a high number of residents in-situ during repair works, it's important to devise a strategy that is careful to avoid any unnecessary disturbance without compromising the specification of products or installation quality.

And, for many contractors working in collaboration with a housing association or local authority, certain design elements will need to be taken into consideration during specification. This is why, in many cases, cold-applied liquid waterproofing is often the preferred choice for housing refurbishments.

## SOUND SPECIFICATION

A key benefit of specifying a liquid waterproofing solution is its versatility. Many, if not all liquid solutions can be applied not only to a roofing area, but also balconies and walkways. It can also be used within a built-up roof system such as a green or blue roof, and offer easy application around areas which have lots of outlets such as air conditioning and ventilation units or plant.

This versatility is why liquids are one of the fastest growing solutions in the flat roofing sector. Within a housing setting, versatility is key as there can be a number of complex application areas which cold-applied liquids can tackle with ease as they are roller applied with minimal equipment needed onsite.

If specifying a liquid system, take the time to research which one is most suitable for your project. Consider requirements such as compliance with Building Regulations, for example fire resistance, or specific performance characteristics, including the compatibility of the surfaces to be waterproofed, ability to withstand substrate movement, and resistance to damage from anticipated load levels or trafficking.

Independent product accreditation is used to effectively communicate conformity and suitability, so it is advisable to research the manufacturer's current product certification. An example is BBA certification, but there are others.

## BEWARE OF SPECIFICATION SWITCHING

As we know, specification switching can sometimes happen during housing projects because of budget or time constraints. Maintaining the specification on a project is often difficult, yet, the implications of not doing so can cause a single product or even an entire system to fail – therefore raising liability issues.

Consider the client's needs as well as the long-term performance requirements for the job. A specifier will often choose a system they have used before and work with the same contractors. However, the main contractor and their preferred sub-contractors may then propose to use alternative products to the specifier.

Specifying a complete system from a single-source supplier offers peace of mind. The products specified will be matched for their compatibility, and come with the appropriate guarantees and warranties. Where liquid waterproofing and warm roof systems are concerned, switching just one element of a specification can not only create problems onsite during installation, but may also affect U-value and fire performance, alter the roof design, increase condensation risk and compromise the suitability of individual products. The entire project could be put at risk.



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Rather than looking at component cost cutting, the right system choice needs to be made for the end client, and to protect the credibility and reputation of the roofing contractor. The long-term benefits of specifying a complete and proven product system is priceless.

## INSTALLATION BENEFITS

Aside from easy application, liquid waterproofing can be the ideal solution for a housing refurbishment because of its quick curing times.



In many circumstances, residents will be in-situ when the refurbishment works are undertaken, meaning minimal disruption is required. Cold applied liquid waterproofing often offers fast curing times to ensure renovations can be completed quickly, on time and within budget.

Solvent-free, non-odour waterproofing solutions are also on offer – ideal in circumstances where residents remain in-situ or live close-by.

Large expanses of sheeting materials on a roof area are not practical in many housing refurbishments, and could offer health and safety issues depending on the location of the site. High-rise housing apartments for example could be subject to high winds on the roof area, and access to the roof could be restricted or unsafe for operatives that might be carrying lots of materials.

No hot works are required as part of cold-applied liquid waterproofing systems, further reducing potential health and safety risks, and no wait time between applications of resin. And because liquid waterproofing is seamless,

once cured, the system forms an elastomeric waterproof membrane that cannot delaminate, is UV stable, and creates a sturdy bond directly to the substrate.

**SUSTAINABLE REFURBISHMENT**

Many local councils and housing associations face a similar dilemma when undergoing housing refurbishment work – how to successfully renovate buildings of the past to provide homes for the future.

Plans developed and products specified must offer a durable, long-term solution, as well as address the immediate challenges onsite.

There are many benefits of choosing a cold-applied liquid waterproofing system for flat roof repairs, and with quality application, this can ensure a sustainable refurbishment to serve a community for many years to come.

*Victoria Ramwell is UK marketing manager at Kemper System*

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It is ideal for use on flat roofs, leadwork, slate, asbestos cement, all metals, bituminous surfaces, asphalt, flashings, chimney stacks, glasshouses, PVC, concrete and brick – providing excellent protection. Acrypol+ also has the added benefit of being easy to apply, even in damp weather conditions, while still providing a long-term waterproofing solution.

For more information on Acrypol+ or any other product within the Acrypol range please visit the Acrypol website or contact your local sales representative.

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## 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.

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**RAISING THE STANDARDS IN LIGHTWEIGHT ROOFING**

# A New Year's Revolution: Aico launches groundbreaking SmartLINK Gateway technology

Aico, the market leader in domestic Fire and Carbon Monoxide protection, has launched the SmartLINK Gateway, the Ei1000G. This is a first in asset management and compliance, providing full visibility and remote whole system monitoring of Aico Fire and Carbon Monoxide alarm systems.

Stemming from their ethos of innovation, Aico has launched the SmartLINK Gateway to provide a groundbreaking solution for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to have access to real time data insight into the status of the Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarm systems across their entire housing stock. Using its built-in GSM data connection, the Ei1000G utilises Aico's next generation of wireless technology to report events including fire/CO activations and alarm head removals as they happen to the SmartLINK cloud portal, for full visibility and remote monitoring.

The development of the Aico SmartLINK Gateway has been greatly influenced by RSLs and their teams, through extensive feedback and rigorous trials that have significantly shaped the final product; Aico designed this alarm management system to assure tenant safety at any time. As the pinnacle of Aico's technology, this pioneering product facilitates the safety of tenants at all times and aids with compliance across housing stock, ensuring ease of monitoring for RSLs and clear, actionable intelligence.



Fife Council served as a trial site for the SmartLINK Gateway, Lead Officer Jim Macdonald commented "In a building that relies on residents for access, we can monitor alarm systems remotely to make sure everything is working correctly, and the tenants are kept safe. The main benefit of this product would be saving time and money while getting an immediate response, rather than going through the normal procedures. We have always

found that Aico is very adaptable in working with clients, such as ourselves, to make sure the products are fit for purpose."

Aico have always been at the forefront of Radio Frequency (RF) technology and are now leading the way in revolutionising this technology with real-time data monitoring. By using in-built GSM data connection and RF interconnection to interface with Aico alarms and accessories, easy installation and reliable connection is assured, meaning full visibility of connected RF systems. Although designed for SmartLINK, the Ei1000G is backwards compatible and therefore will also give visibility to RadioLINK+ systems. Events are reported directly as they happen via the online portal, which gives accessible intelligence that can be actioned, reported on and documented.

The Ei1000G SmartLINK Gateway aims to improve efficiency, reduce costs, aid with forecasting and compliance and enable smart asset management. This groundbreaking technology gives a proactive approach to fault-finding, defining any trends in alarm activations and maintenance requirements while drastically minimising the issue of property access. The SmartLINK Gateway will revolutionise the way in which alarm systems are managed, paving the way to a solution-focused approach to asset management.



01691 664100 [www.aico.co.uk](http://www.aico.co.uk)



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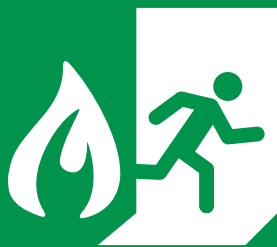
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# Be proactive about gas safety

Bob Kerr of the Gas Safe Register reminds readers of the legal requirements associated with gas installation and maintenance, and highlights contractor management in the housing sector as vitally important to ensuring registration, competence and monitoring



**A**mong the array of tasks and duties that sit with those responsible for the management and maintenance of housing, there are few as important as ensuring all gas appliances and installations are safe, serviced, and compliant with all relevant regulations.

As a result of the current systems and processes in place, and improvements in technology, the number of high-profile incidents involving gas in homes remains relatively small (the figure generally declining further over time). Nonetheless, the impact of gas-related incidents – fires, explosions, carbon monoxide exposure, and similar – can be catastrophic, and as such, no-one can afford to be complacent.

The gas industry is highly-regulated, with comprehensive and well-established systems and processes in place to support and protect both those working directly with gas, as well as the wider general public. These regulations ensure duties are clear, and that compliance is straightforward to evidence.

There is one overarching piece of legislation that governs all activity in the industry: The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) (Amendment) Regulations. (GSIUR). These regulations have been in place for many years, with the latest amendment coming into force on 6 April 2018.

This Approved Code of Practice gives advice and guidance on how to meet the requirements of GSIUR and the amending regulations. This guidance is for anyone that may have a duty under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998, including those who install, service, maintain and/or repair

gas appliances and other gas fittings. Through abiding by these regulations, the UK has been able to continuously improve the standard of its workmanship, helping to ensure consumers are kept safe in their homes.

The most important part of safety assurance is the basic requirement within regulations to ensure appliances are regularly inspected and maintained. Appliances that undergo regular inspection and maintenance are not only more efficient, they are ultimately safer than those left unserviced.

Having regular maintenance schedules in place in homes is a proactive way of ensuring appliance and consumer safety protocols are adhered to, helping to keep consumers safe and provide them with peace of mind. This role is undertaken by the Gas Safe Register – the official gas safety registration body for the UK.

The Gas Safe Register ensures independent businesses and tradesmen that deal with gas appliances and/or installations adhere to the official regulations and standards. Much of our focus is on ensuring that those undertaking gas work are applying the proper competencies they claim to hold, and therefore that the work they are carrying out is to the required standards.

Many housing associations and other similar organisations do not undertake this work themselves, meaning we often also seek assurances that organisations have effective systems and processes in place for contractor management. Desk-based audits of processes and procedures are an essential component of our work. This includes auditing those managing large quantities of housing stock,



Having regular maintenance schedules in place in homes is a proactive way of ensuring appliance and consumer safety protocols are adhered to, helping to keep consumers safe and provide them with peace of mind

as well as assessing businesses own internal competency assessment frameworks.

Another key part of our role is to inspect gas work. The nature of our risk-based inspection algorithm means we target our resources towards those who present a higher risk. High risk cases are instances where, for example, we have evidence of prior work from an engineer or business failing to be to meet the correct standards, or a tradesman or organisation is newly registered, and therefore we do not yet have evidence to demonstrate that they are working safely.

The Gas Safe Register also provides support to registered engineers in the form of a technical helpline. Operated by highly experienced staff (who are themselves registered engineers), the helpline is there to support registered engineers in their decision-making.

The Gas Safe Register has a robust regulatory and legislative framework, along with clear processes, appropriate support, and a culture of continuous improvement when it comes to gas safety — this is what we call The Gas Safe Way. Our ambition is that any work carried out The Gas Safe Way is automatically viewed as safe, competent and trusted, both by those working in the industry and the general public.

Bob Kerr is gas services director at the Gas Safe Register

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## Bin blazes are hot topic

Social landlords designing in waste and recycling facilities for housing schemes must ensure wheeled bin stations are 6m or more from property to comply with CFPA guidance.

Whether the brief is a redevelopment or new build, Fire Risk Assessors working for social landlords should plan a minimum distance between bins and residential property.

The regularity of fires caused by wheeled bin fires spreading to domestic property makes this a hot topic.

metroSTOR's range of fire-resistant bin stores and expert advice can help specifiers.

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## App provides a solution in your pocket

Airtech has launched its 'Airtech Solutions' app to help social housing providers, landlords, installers, and households find the answer to their condensation, mould and radon problems. The app provides users with access to the Airtech brochure, product datasheets, guides and safety datasheets on the go, with all content downloadable to a phone or tablet so it's accessible even when there is no internet access. The Airtech Solutions app can be downloaded on a smart phone or tablet, on either iOS or Android platforms. In addition, when a social housing provider or maintenance team visits a property with an issue they can easily book a survey online on the Airtech website via the app.

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# HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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**SmartLINK**® A Revolution In Tenant Safety