

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

FEB/MAR 2021



Record overcrowding levels in rentals

£3.5 billion cladding budget is insufficient



Rent arrears surge in PRS

Evictions ban extended again

Grenfell Inquiry resumes



One size does *not* fit all

John Mellor of Glidevale Protect explains why specification matters in roofing membrane and ventilation products.



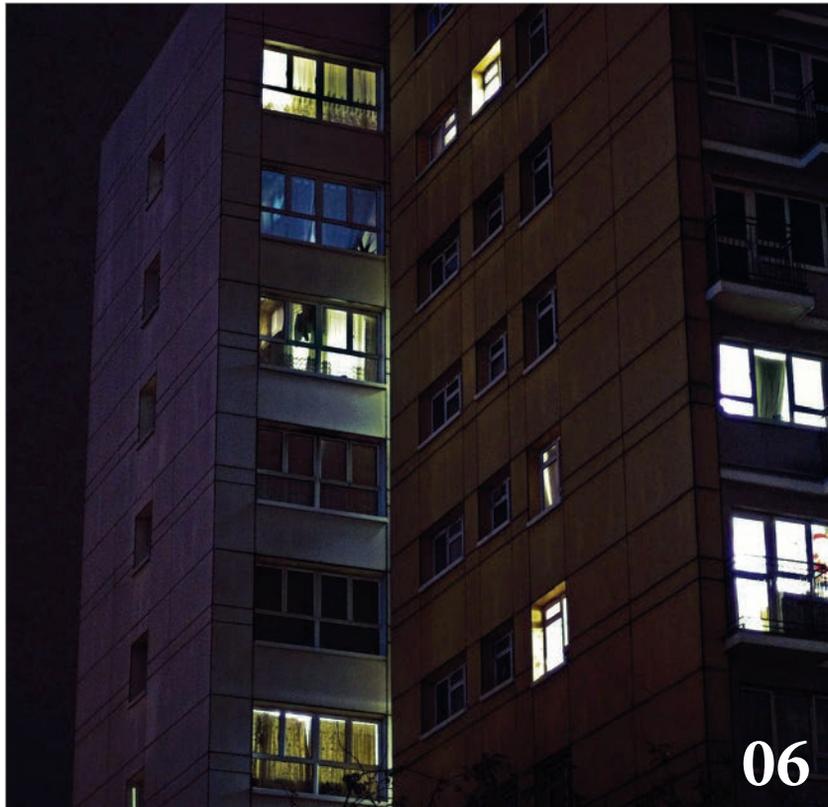
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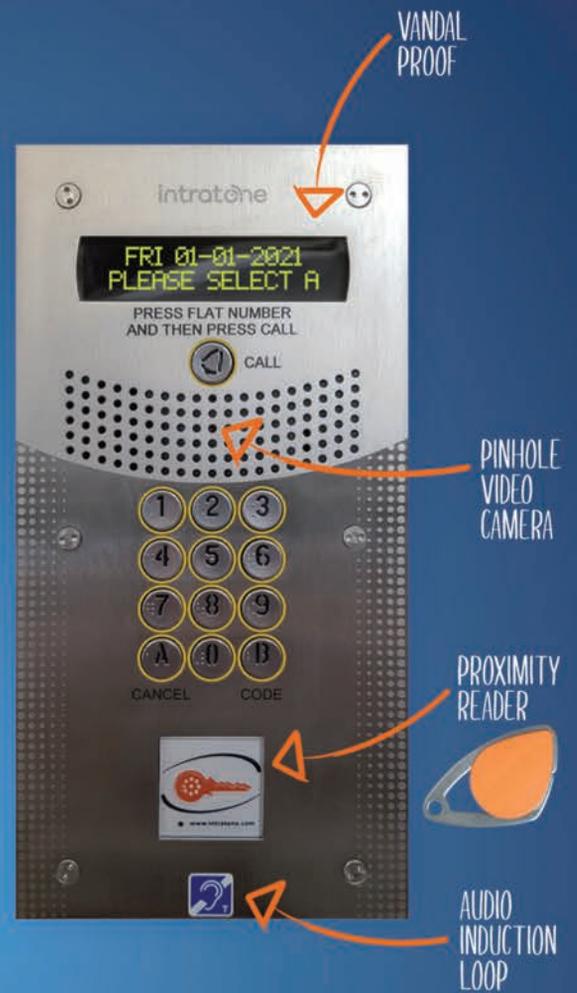
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News Editor:
Patrick Mooney
patrick@netmagmedia.eu

Publisher:
Anthony Parker

Features Editor:
Jack Wooler

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Mikey Pooley

Production Assistants:
Georgia Musson
Kim Musson

Account Manager:
Sheehan Edmonds

Sales Executives:
Nathan Hunt
Steve Smith

PR Executives:
Suzanne Easter
Kim Friend

**Audience Development
Manager:**
Jane Spice

Managing Director:
Simon Reed



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

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

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

Press Releases:
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

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Editor's comment

Commitment to fixing severe housing problems required



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

The extension of the ban on evicting tenants is to be warmly welcomed, BUT and it's a very big but, it is essential this is not seen as a solution to the current problem of rising levels of rent arrears particularly in the private sector. The evictions ban needs to be accompanied by financial support for both tenants and landlords to ensure there is a robust and long-term solution to a very difficult problem that's been kicked down the road for far too long. Deferring a problem is very different to solving it. A variety of recent surveys estimated the rent arrears of private sector tenants in England at levels of upto £800 million. This is big money by any standard of measurement. Even if private landlords were to recover most of this money in the near future (which in itself is highly doubtful), the absence of this money now from landlords' bank accounts is an enormous financial hit to them. If a landlord has established a small portfolio of rental properties using a business loan or a series of buy to rent mortgages, then the landlord will struggle to make the necessary loan re-payments without the rent on those properties being paid. This alone could result in many thousands of rental properties being sold and many more tenants losing their homes in the coming months. In both Wales and Scotland, the devolved administrations have come up with various support packages including a series of cash backed grants and loan schemes for landlords and tenants, which will avoid a cliff edge when the eviction ban ends. We urgently need to avoid putting huge pressures on councils' homelessness services, which are already creaking under unprecedentedly high workloads.

A SHINING EXAMPLE OF HOPE

But this is not an insurmountable problem and over the course of the past 11 months, the Government has shown what can be achieved when it decides to mobilise its resources and take on a leadership role. Working in partnership with local authorities, homelessness charities and even hotel chains, the Government has averted a potential health crisis among thousands of rough sleepers, during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. The success of the 'Everyone In' programme to tackle street homelessness and rough sleeping from late March last year (and to safeguard rough sleepers from the pandemic) meant that 33,000 people were supported, with nearly 10,000 people moved into emergency accommodation and 23,000 moved into longer-term accommodation. According to the National Audit Office this programme prevented 20,000 COVID-19 infections and saved 266 lives upto the end of November. What makes this all the more remarkable is that at the beginning of the programme, officials thought they were going to be dealing with only about 4,000 rough sleepers – or one eighth of the number covered in the NAO report. Many of these hotels are now being turned into emergency quarantine accommodation for travellers from abroad as the Government continues to grapple with the pandemic, but it must not abandon the homeless people already assisted, or they risk undoing all of the fantastic work done so far.

ACTION URGENTLY NEEDED ON OVERCROWDING

Something the Government should also be addressing as a matter of urgency is improving the condition of housing, particularly the homes of lower income groups. Data released from the English Housing Survey shows that just before the pandemic hit in March last year, some 830,000 households in England were living in overcrowded, mostly rented properties. That was 200,000 more than the number of overcrowded homes a decade ago and it now stands at its highest level since records began 25 years ago. Many of these homes also suffer from problems with damp and mould. According to research by the Health Foundation, overcrowded housing has helped to spread Covid-19 in England and may have increased the number of deaths among tenants. People living in cramped conditions have been more exposed to the virus and were less able to reduce their risk of infection as their homes were so small and often lacked gardens or access to open space. Overcrowding was also a key reason why poor people and those from ethnic minorities in particular have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Researchers concluded that overcrowding, as well as problems such as damp and insecure tenancies, led to a rise in physical and mental health illness. Comprehensive strategies as well as cash are badly needed to solve these problems. This has been exemplified in the Government's response to the Grenfell fire and the building safety crisis. Despite allocating £3.5 billion for cladding removal work on high-rise blocks, Ministers discover this is seen as inadequate as they have yet to signpost solutions to the wider set of fire safety problems blighting so many homes, including those in low-rise blocks.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

John Mellor of Glidevale Protect explains why specification matters in roofing membrane and ventilation products.

Photo © Matthew Nichol

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Cramped and overcrowded housing helped fuel spread of Covid

Overcrowded housing has helped to spread Covid-19 in England and may have increased the number of deaths, according to research by the Health Foundation, an independent charity and think tank working to improve the nation's health and the standard of health care.

People living in cramped conditions have been more exposed to the coronavirus and were less able to reduce their risk of infection because their homes were so small, the thinktank found. Overcrowding was a key reason why poorer people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds in particular had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, it said.

Health Foundation researchers also concluded that overcrowding, together with other housing problems such as damp and insecure tenancies, had led to a rise in physical and mental health illness.

"Since March many of us have spent a lot more time at home. For many, the quality of their home has made their experience of the pandemic even worse than it needed to be," said Adam Tinson, a senior analyst at the foundation.

"While some have weathered lockdown in large homes with gardens and plenty of living space, others have struggled in overcrowded and unsafe conditions. Overcrowding is associated with the spread of Covid-19, making self-isolation more difficult and allowing the

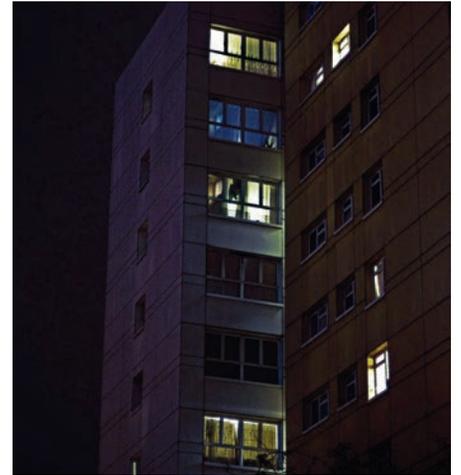
virus to spread through more people if one becomes infected."

Data from the English Housing Survey for 2019/20 was released in December showing that just before the pandemic hit in March last year, 830,000 households in England were living in overcrowded, mostly rented properties. That was 200,000 more than the number of overcrowded homes a decade earlier. Many of these homes also suffered from problems with damp and mould.

"People's housing environments have affected their ability to shield themselves and others from Covid-19. People have been encouraged to stay in their homes as much as possible, but within-household transmission has played a serious role in the spread of the virus," the analysis says.

"Overcrowding, which has been increasing in the years prior to the pandemic, makes it harder to self-isolate and shield, and may have contributed to higher death rates in poorer areas." He added that 8 per cent of households with the lowest income lived in overcrowded homes, compared with fewer than 1 per cent of those with the highest earnings.

Similarly, "Ethnic minority households are five times more likely to be overcrowded than white households, illustrating just one of the ways in which existing housing disparities are combining with the pandemic to further widen inequalities in health."



People being forced to spend more time in overcrowded homes during the various lockdowns has also caused or worsened mental health problems, especially those suffering distress.

"This analysis shows that mental ill-health has been a particular issue for those in overcrowded households during the pandemic, especially in the first lockdown. The chronic lack of affordable housing options, combined with years of reductions in support for housing costs, have led us to this point," said Tinson.

Grenfell Inquiry resumes on Zoom with shocking revelations

The public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire resumed its hearings after being suspended amid the national lockdown, but with a similar message 'maximising profits took precedence over safety'.

Internal communications from within Arconic revealed that staff were aware the ACM cladding panels attached to the tower were dangerous and a fire hazard for at least six years beforehand, but fire safety test results were hidden from customers or their use was manipulated, as the company strove to significantly increase its market share.

The inquiry heard the company sought to "keep secret" differences between the polyethylene panels (the type used on Grenfell) and its more fire-retardant version. It was shown a report from a 2004 fire test in a French laboratory of the panels that had to be stopped after 850 seconds because it was emitting too much heat.

Debbie French, the UK sales manager for Arconic from 2007 to 2014, told the inquiry she estimated fire-resistant Reynobond would have cost about €28,000-€30,000 more to install on Grenfell Tower than the polyethylene (PE) version that was ultimately used.

Claude Wehrle, Arconic's technical manager, ordered staff not to release to customers information about the difference between the polyethylene-filled panels and the fire-retardant version. Ms French said she had never been told about the failure but agreed it was a "very serious omission". And yet it was the PE panels that were used by Arconic in the UK "by default".

Wehrle is one of three current or former Arconic staff refusing to give evidence to the inquiry. He and the other two employees are likely to be empty chaired. The inquiry was adjourned in early December and had been due to resume on 11 January, but its resumption (via Zoom) was delayed until early February.

Last year the inquiry heard more than 400 hours of evidence, from 53 witnesses. Some witnesses claimed they did not have a full grasp of the building regulations relating to the tower's refurbishment, even though having this knowledge was an integral part of their job.

The inquiry heard how 17 companies worked on the refurbishment project through a complex

web of contracting and subcontracting arrangements. Lead counsel Richard Millett accused some witnesses of taking part in a "merry go-round of buck passing" while some staff of Celotex and Kingspan admitted that their marketing material was misleading.

It was also revealed that in the aftermath of the fire, when investigators looked at the cladding and how it had been installed on Grenfell Tower, they found a catalogue of errors. For example many of the cavity barriers, intended to stop fire spreading were poorly fitted or installed in the wrong place. Some were even attached back to front, which stopping them from working.

In December it emerged that Government ministers have been called to give evidence to the inquiry, which could see several senior politicians being cross-examined about their actions before and after the fire. Key figures have already been asked to provide written statements and some will face detailed questioning in public. No doubt there be a focus on the failure to implement recommendations from the coroner, following the Lakeland House fire.

It is clear there will be a lot more twists and turns before the inquiry eventually concludes, but hopefully we will emerge at the end of it with a stronger and safer regime for the construction and maintenance of residential buildings.

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New watchdog set up to ban dangerous building materials

Over three and half years after the shocking loss of life in the Grenfell Tower fire, the Government is finally to set up a regulatory body charged with banning dangerous building materials and prosecuting the companies making them.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said the new regulator for construction products was prompted by evidence at the public inquiry into the tragedy, which revealed “dishonest practice by some manufacturers” and “deliberate attempts to game the system and rig the results of safety tests”.

Not surprisingly the move was criticised as coming too late, irrelevant to current safety problems and because of its focus on future

building, it will not help the many thousands of people currently trapped in hundreds of unsafe residential buildings which they are unable to sell.

The new watchdog is to be part of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (which already exists) where it is expected “to encourage and enforce compliance”. Offences could be punished with fines or imprisonment, for up to three months at present.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said the regulator would have “strong enforcement powers including the ability to conduct its own product-testing when investigating concerns”. The Government is also exploring ways to exclude companies that “have played the system” from future contracts funded with taxpayer money.

A spokesman for MHCLG said the new regulator would start work “in due course” and “in shadow form” before going fully functional with its new powers after the Building Safety Bill was passed. No date was given for this, but it is expected to happen during the course of this year. It will work with the Building Safety Regulator and Trading Standards to encourage and enforce compliance.

Among its critics are the UK Cladding Action Group and Grenfell United, which represents bereaved and survivors from the fire. A representative of the latter said: “A new regulator doesn’t fix what is out there already. It’s been three and a half years and the Government still hasn’t come up with a plan to get dangerous materials off homes.

Dangerous cladding removal from tower blocks drags on

Privately owned residential tower blocks are lagging behind the social sector in the race to remove dangerous ACM cladding from the nation’s homes, some three and a half years after the fatal Grenfell Tower fire.

The latest Government data release in mid February shows that while all high-rise blocks in the social housing and student rental sectors had either begun or completed ACM remediation work, there are 35 private high rises, six hotels and one publicly owned building where remediation work has yet to begin.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has taken the unusual step of ‘naming’ 14 companies which own ACM clad tower blocks, where work has not started in an effort to shame them into action. Campaigners, charities and MPs are demanding more needs to be done in speeding up the removal timetable and providing

help, particularly for shared owners and leaseholders who are stuck in properties they cannot sell.

Following the Grenfell fire, a total of 461 high-rise residential buildings and publicly owned buildings were found to have the same or similar ACM cladding systems as Grenfell and unlikely to meet Building Regulations. Since then a massive programme of remediation work has taken place with all 156 social sector high-rise blocks now free of the cladding (144), or where work is still underway (12).

The picture in the private sector is not as positive, where 213 high-rise buildings were identified with ACM cladding systems unlikely to meet Building Regulations and just 74 of these buildings have completed all remediation works, leaving 139 yet to be remediated. Of these, 104 have started remediation, but there are still 35 buildings

where no work has begun.

There are approximately 11,600 to 14,000 individual flats and apartments in private sector tower blocks where work is still underway or they are occupied and work has yet to start, leaving them at risk of another fire.

There were 54 high-rise student accommodation buildings identified with ACM cladding systems unlikely to meet Building Regulations. Of these, 46 have completed remediation while work has started on the other eight buildings.

Robert Jenrick said: “The stats show that, despite the pandemic, significant progress has continued to have been made with remediation work either complete or onsite on around 95 per cent of buildings. This is a big step forwards. While there is still more to do, we are helping make the highest-risk buildings with dangerous cladding safer, more quickly.”

Nottingham landlord sentenced over dangerous property

A Nottingham private landlord, who failed to improve his rental property, leaving his tenants in dangerous conditions has found it cost him over £1,000.

Haroon Karim, from Bramcote in Nottingham, pleaded guilty to two offences under the Housing Act 2004, section 72(3) and (6) failing to comply with Housing of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) licence conditions and section 30(1) and (3) failing to comply with an Improvement Notice. Nottingham Magistrates Court ordered Mr Karim to pay a fine and legal costs totalling £1001.42

Nottingham City Council’s Safer Housing inspectors visited the property where they found a number of category 1 and 2 hazards. These included

dangerous stairs, structural collapse, excessive cold, damp, mould, fire hazards, issues with food safety and sanitation and drainage.

Mr Karim was served an Improvement Notice, which he failed to comply with, exposing the tenants of this property to these hazards for an unacceptable level of time. In addition, there was a breach of the HMO licence conditions in that the landlord had failed to provide adequate amenities within the kitchen that were suitable for the number of the tenants living in the property.

This included failing to provide a microwave oven or an additional cooker; failing to provide an adequate number of electrical sockets and failing to provide sufficient amenities for food preparation

and washing up by not providing an additional sink or dishwasher.

Councillor Linda Woodings, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Heritage, said: “The work of Nottingham City Council’s Safer Housing team is vital to improving the conditions of homes in the private rented sector, so when we inspect a property and find serious defaults – we expect them to be fixed so tenants can live in a safe home.

“We will only take legal action as a last resort, if a landlord doesn’t work with us to improve their property. Most landlords are good landlords, but there are some, like Mr Karim, who give others a bad name. I would urge tenants to contact us if they have issues with their home, that aren’t being sorted.”

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Extra £3.5bn for removing unsafe cladding derided as being too little and too late

The long awaited Government announcement on how it will resolve the cladding scandal were almost immediately criticised for not being enough, for taking too long and for focussing solely on cladding – while ignoring other serious safety concerns such as fire stops and water sprinklers, as well as failing to address soaring insurance costs and the inability of residents to sell their homes.

In promising an extra £3.5bn to remove unsafe cladding from high-rise buildings over 18 metres high in England "at no cost to residents", Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said it was the "largest ever Government investment" in building safety.

It is estimated that around 274,000 flats have been fitted with dangerous cladding, according to the Association of Residential Managing Agents, affecting more than 650,000 people. That figure is likely to reach into the millions when those living in lower-rise structures where problems have also emerged are taken into account.

But even before Jenrick sat down his Conservative colleague Stephen McPartland, was tweeting his disappointments: "I am listening to the announcement with my head in my hands. Wondering how he can have got this so wrong. It is a betrayal of millions of leaseholders. It is not good enough. It is shocking incompetence. It is clear the PM has to step in now" and "The statement is all smoke and mirrors. He is very careful to just state cladding. No mention of fire safety defects, Waking Watches or Excessive Insurance Premiums which are often the main costs for millions."

The £3.5bn is on top of the £1.6bn funding that was announced for the removal of unsafe cladding last year, but Ministers have come under increasing to step up their help for the many thousands of residents in affected blocks, many of them leaseholders.

The Grenfell Tower fire took place over three and half years ago and since then there have been at least two other significant fires in residential blocks below 18m in England. Grenfell also exposed a wider range of building safety issues including poorly fitted fire breaks, a lack of water sprinklers, poor quality fire doors, confused policies over evacuating residents or advising them to stay in their homes, the use of inappropriate materials and a host of other problems.

ARBITRARY DIVISIONS

Jenrick told the Commons that leaseholders in high-rise buildings above 18m, or with six storeys or more, would face no costs for cladding works, while those living in shorter buildings would have access to low interest loans with their contributions capped at no more than an extra £50 a month for removing unsafe cladding. He said the risk was "significantly lower" for the estimated half a million residents of lower-rise blocks of flats.

He said the scheme's costs would not be funded exclusively by taxpayers and a new levy would be placed on the developers of future high-rise buildings. Jenrick described the action as an "unprecedented intervention" without which building owners would simply

pass on the costs of remediation work to leaseholders.

However, Labour's shadow housing secretary, Thangam Debbonaire, called the proposals "an injustice" that would "pile financial misery" on homeowners. She said there were many questions left unanswered, including on "skyrocketing" insurance costs, homes potentially remaining "unsellable", and the amount leaseholders would be expected to pay.

The "arbitrary 18m height limit" could "mean the difference between a safe home and financial ruin", she said. Labour is instead calling for an independent taskforce to be established to take the matter out of politicians' hands and ensure funds are distributed fairly.

Grenfell United, the bereaved families and survivors' group, also said the measures failed to "deal with this mess once and for all". "Residents living in unsafe homes will go to bed tonight worrying if their building will qualify or be left out once again," a spokesperson said. "And bereaved and survivors of Grenfell will lie awake fearful that what happened to us could still happen again."

"Residents shouldn't be forced into loans and new debt just because of the height of their building. It's completely unfair to pile more financial strain on leaseholders for a problem that has been caused by developers and the construction industry. The industry needs to be held fully responsible for what they have done – small levy doesn't cut it."

Decrease in number of social lettings

The number of lettings to social rent homes fell again last year and is now almost 25 per cent below its peak of six years ago, as more use was made of the higher 'affordable rents' regime which charities and campaigners claim are too expensive for low income households.

This trend may be about to change as a small but growing number of housing associations are reversing their use of affordable rents, and are letting all their properties on the lower social rents. These include L&Q and Housing 21.

In total there were 306,000 new social housing lettings in the year to April 2020, a decrease of 2.5 per cent or 8,000 lets from the previous year. This continues the fall from the

peak of 396,000 new social housing lettings in 2013/14 (a 23 per cent decrease) after a temporary flattening last year. This was driven by social rent tenancies, which make up the majority of new lets, while use of Affordable Rent products rose.

Overall, new social housing lettings decreased by 17 per cent while stock increased by 3 per cent over the past decade. 59 per cent of new social housing lettings in 2019/20 were to tenants not in social housing immediately prior. Other facts of note on last year's lettings, are:

- There were 1.15 million households on local authority waiting lists at 31 March 2020, a slight

decrease of 1 per cent from 1.16 million in 2018/19;

- Over half of households (58 per cent) with a new social letting in 2019/20 were on the waiting list in that area for less than a year;
- 18 per cent of new lettings in 2019/20 were to statutory homeless households;
- Lifetime tenancies comprised nearly three-quarters of new social lettings in 2019/20, mostly let by councils;
- Employment in lead tenants of new General Needs lettings steadily increased from 32 to 40 per cent between 2008/09 and 2019/20;
- In Supported Housing, lead tenants unable to work due to long term illness or disability increased from 17 to 23 per cent over the same period; and
- Households in a new social letting in 2019/20 paid an average rent of £81 per week.



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Continuing overcrowding problem revealed in latest property survey report

The latest report from the English Housing Survey has revealed that overcrowding is at its highest ever recorded rates in both the social rented and the private rented sectors.

The overall rate of overcrowding in England in 2019/20 was 4 per cent, with approximately 829,000 households living in overcrowded conditions – up from 3 per cent, or 682,000 households in 2016/17, but this masks big differences between different tenure types.

Overcrowding affects 9 per cent of social renters (344,000 households) and 7 per cent of private renters (302,000), but only 1 per cent of owner occupiers (183,000 households).

In the social rented sector, overcrowding has increased from 8 per cent in 2017/18 to its current rate of 9 per cent of households, the highest it has been since 1995/96 when data collection began. Overcrowding has increased in the private rented sector, from 6 per cent in 2017/18 to 7 per cent in 2019/20, also the highest it has been since 1995/96.

The number and proportion of overcrowded households in the owner occupied sector has remained relatively stable over the last 20 years. Conversely under-occupation rates (having two or more spare bedrooms) has increased for owner occupiers and declined for renters.

Between 1999/00 and 2019/20 the proportion of owner occupiers living in under-occupied accommodation increased from 43 to 52 per cent. Over the same time period, under-occupation in the social rented sector decreased from 12 to 10 per cent and in the private rented sector from 19 to 15 per cent.

RESIDENTS WELL BEING

The report also found that in general terms, social renters have lower levels of well-being and are more likely to be lonely than home owners and private renters.

Personal well-being remained relatively high in 2019/20 and the average life satisfaction score was 7.7 (out of ten), although this varied by tenure and social renters scored lower across all well-being measures. Social renters also had higher levels of anxiety, scoring 3.2 (out of ten) compared with 2.9 for private renters and 2.5 for owner occupiers.

Overall, 6 per cent of heads of households reported that they were lonely often or always. This varied by tenure with social renters more likely to report that they were often or always lonely (12 per cent compared with 4 per cent of owner occupiers and 5 per cent of private renters). On average, owner occupied homes are larger and are more likely to have outside space than rented homes.

PROPERTY AMENITIES

The average usable floor area of all dwellings in 2019 was 95 square metres but significant differences exist across different tenure types.

Homes in the social sector tended to be smaller (at 66 sq m) than homes in the private rented sector (76 sq m), while owner occupied homes (at 108 sq m) were, on average, much larger than rented homes.

The majority (83 per cent) of dwellings in England had a private plot (for the sole use of the dwelling) and a further 16 per cent had a plot shared with other dwellings. The remaining 1 per cent did not have a plot at all. This varied widely by tenure.

Shared plots were most prevalent in the social sector: 37 per cent of social homes had a shared plot, compared with 28 per cent of homes in the private rented sector and 6 per cent of owner occupied homes.

Most owner occupied dwellings had a private plot - 93 per cent compared with 67 per cent of private rented homes and 62 per cent of social rented homes. A larger proportion of homes in the private rented sector did not have access to a plot (5 per cent compared with 1 per cent of social homes and 0.5 per cent of owner occupied homes).

HOUSING QUALITY

However, the social housing sector scores better when looking at quality as there is a lower proportion of non-decent homes in the social rented sector than in the private rented and owner occupied sectors. In 2019, 12 per cent of dwellings in the social rented sector failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard, a much lower rate of failures than in the other sectors: private rented (23 per cent) and owner occupied (16 per cent).

Over the last decade, the proportion of homes with HHSRS Category 1 hazards has declined across all tenures. In 2019, 10 per cent of the housing stock had a HHSRS Category 1 hazard, down from 21 per cent in 2009. Such hazards are more prevalent in the private rented sector (13 per cent) than the owner occupied (10 per cent) or social rented sectors (5 per cent).

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, down from 28 per cent in 2009 to 13 per cent in 2019. The energy efficiency of the English housing stock has continued to improve.

RENTS AND AFFORDABILITY

In 2019/20, the average rent (excluding service charges) for households in the social sector was £103 compared with £201 per week in the private rented sector, a significant difference of £98 per week. Not surprisingly social and private rents are higher in London than outside of the capital.

In 2019/20, the average private rent in London was £342 per week, more than twice the average rent outside London (£159 per week). Between 2017/18 and 2019/20 there was a £30 increase in



private rent in London, from £312 to £342 per week. Social renters in London paid, on average, £138 per week compared with £95 per week outside of London.

On average, those buying their home with a mortgage spent 18 per cent of their household income on mortgage payments, whereas rent payments were 27 per cent for social renters and 32 per cent of household income for private renters. Excluding Housing Benefit, the average proportion of income spent on rent was 34 per cent for social renters and 37 per cent for private renters.

In 2019/20, 3 per cent of private renters reported being in rent arrears at the time of interview, and 5 per cent reported that they had fallen behind with rent payments in the 12 months prior. Social renters were more likely to report being in rent arrears: 11 per cent reported that they were currently in arrears, and 11 per cent reported that they had fallen behind with payments in the 12 months prior to the interview.

In 2019/20, 27 per cent of private renters and 27 per cent of social renters reported finding it either fairly or very difficult to afford their rent. Social renters were more likely than private renters to report finding it very difficult to afford their rent (9 per cent of social renters and 7 per cent of private renters).

In 2019/20, 45 per cent of households in England had no savings. Social renters were most likely to report having no savings (80 per cent), followed by private renters (60 per cent) and owner occupiers (32 per cent). Among owner occupiers, 40 per cent of mortgagors had no savings compared with 25 per cent of outright owners.

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England's housing stock in numbers

The most recent annual report from the English Housing Survey tells us there are 24.4 million dwellings in England, including both occupied and vacant homes. Of these, 15.6 million (64 per cent) are owner occupied, 4.7 million (19 per cent) are privately rented, while 1.6 million (7 per cent) are rented from local authorities and 2.5 million (10 per cent) from housing associations.

The age of these properties varies by tenure with the private rented sector having the highest proportion of older dwellings built before 1919, at 23 per cent compared with just 6 per cent in the social rented sector.

In the social sector, most of the council housing was built between 1945 and 1980, 72 per cent compared with 47 per cent of HA homes. Just 11 per cent of the council stock was built after 1980, compared with 38 per cent of HA homes.

The majority of private sector dwellings are houses and bungalows (84 per cent compared with 56 per cent of social sector stock). There are very few detached houses in the social sector (under 1 per cent), and more purpose built high-rise flats (36 per cent, compared to 11 per cent in the private sector).

In 2019, high-rise purpose built flats made up 2 per cent of the country's stock (499,000 dwellings). Such flats are more prevalent in the council sector (9 per cent) than HAs (3 per cent) stock. In the private sector, 1 per cent of owner occupied dwellings and 4 per cent of dwellings in the private rented sector are high-rise purpose built flats.

The private rented sector has a comparatively high proportion of converted flats (12 per cent compared with 3 per cent of social rented and 2 per cent of owner occupied stock) while the social rented sector has a comparatively high proportion of low-rise purpose built flats (36 per cent compared with 25 per cent of private rented and 6 per cent of owner occupied stock),

DWELLING SIZES AND CONDITIONS

The average usable floor area of dwellings in 2019 was 95 square metres. Homes in the social sector tend to be smaller (66m) than homes in the private rented sector (76m). Owner occupied homes (108m) are, on average, larger than social and private rented homes.

Nine per cent of dwellings in the social rented sector had a usable floor area of 90 square metres or over, in contrast with 21 per cent of homes in the private rented sector and 54 per cent of owner occupied homes.

For a dwelling to be considered 'decent' under the Decent Homes Standard it must:

- meet the statutory minimum standard for housing (the Housing Health and Safety System (HHSRS) since April 2006), homes which contain a Category 1 hazard under the HHSRS are considered non-decent;

- provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort;
- be in a reasonable state of repair; and
- have reasonably modern facilities and services.

In 2019, a total of 4.1 million homes or 17 per cent failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard, down from 6.7 million homes or 30 per cent in 2009.

Among owner occupied homes, 16 per cent failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2019.

Statistics published for council housing shows the number and proportion of non-decent local authority homes has increased slightly, with councils reporting that 5 per cent of their homes did not meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2020, compared to 4 per cent in 2019.

The HHSRS is a risk-based assessment that identifies hazards in dwellings and evaluates their potential effects on the health and safety of occupants and their visitors, particularly vulnerable people. The most serious hazards are called Category 1 hazards and where these exist in a home, it fails to meet the statutory minimum standard for housing in England.

In 2019, 10 per cent of the housing stock had a HHSRS Category 1 hazard, down from 21 per cent in 2009. Such hazards are more prevalent in the private rented sector (13 per cent) than owner occupied housing stock (10 per cent) and the social rented sector (5 per cent).

DAMPNESS AND MOULD

In 2019, 820,000 homes (3 per cent) had problems with damp, down from 2.6 million (13 per cent) of homes in 1996. The incidence of damp has declined in the past decade, down from 8 per cent in 2009 to 3 per cent in 2019, but the rate of decline has slowed markedly since 2011.

In 2019, 2 per cent of homes had problems with condensation and mould, while 1 per cent are affected by rising damp and a further 1 per cent by penetrating damp.

Damp problems are more prevalent in the rented sectors. Some 7 per cent of private rented dwellings have some type of damp problem, compared with 4 per cent of social rented dwellings and 2 per cent of owner occupied homes.

Private rented dwellings are, on average, older and therefore more likely to have defects to the damp proof course, roof covering, gutters, or down pipes, which could lead to problems with rising or penetrating damp affecting at least one room in the property.

SMOKE ALARMS

In 2019/20, 91 per cent of households had at least one working smoke alarm. The proportion of households with working smoke alarms varies according to tenure type. Social tenants are the most likely to have at least one working smoke alarm (96 per cent), compared with 91 per cent of owner occupiers, and 89 per cent of private renters.

Between 2014/15 and 2019/20, the proportion of

Damp problems are more prevalent in the rented sectors. Some 7 per cent of private rented dwellings have some type of damp problem, compared with 4 per cent of social rented dwellings and 2 per cent of owner occupied homes



households with a working smoke alarm increased from 88 to 91 per cent. This increase was seen across all tenures. Between 2018/19 and 2019/20 there was an increase in the proportion of social rented homes with a working smoke alarm from 95 to 96 per cent.

While the proportion of homes with smoke alarms has increased in recent years, over a fifth of households (22 per cent) reported that they had never tested their smoke alarm.

In 2019/20, 31 per cent of private renters and 26 per cent of social renters reported that they had never tested their smoke alarm, higher than the proportion of owner occupiers who had never tested their smoke alarm (19 per cent).

In 2019, 44 per cent of all dwellings had a carbon monoxide alarm, up from 42 per cent in 2018. Dwellings with a solid fuel burning appliance, such as a coal fire or wood burning stove, were more likely (52 per cent) to have a carbon monoxide alarm than dwellings with no solid fuel appliance (43 per cent).

From October 2015, private sector landlords have been required to install a carbon monoxide alarm in any room containing a solid fuel burning appliance. They were also required to ensure the alarm was working at the beginning of each new tenancy. In 2019, 47 per cent of private rented sector dwellings with a solid fuel appliance had a carbon monoxide alarm.

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Energy efficiency of housing continues to improve

The energy efficiency of England's housing stock continues to improve as the Government strives to meet its international obligations to reduce energy consumption. In 2019, the average SAP rating of English dwellings was 65 points, up from 45 points in 1996 and 63 in 2018.

The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP rating) is used to monitor the energy efficiency of homes. It is an index based on calculating annual space and water heating costs for a standard heating regime and is expressed on a scale of 1 (highly inefficient) to 100 (highly efficient, with 100 representing zero energy costs).

In 2019, the social housing sector had an average SAP rating of 69, higher than the private rented sector with an average rating of 64. The social sector was more energy efficient than the private sector, in part due to its wider use of solid wall insulation, but also because of dwelling type.

The social sector contains a higher proportion of flats compared to the private sector, and these have less exposed surface area (external walls and roofs) through which heat can be lost, than detached or semi-detached houses.

The proportion of dwellings in the highest SAP energy efficiency rating (EER) bands A to C increased considerably between 2009 and 2019, from 12 per cent to 40 per cent. Over the same period, the proportion of dwellings in the lowest F and G bands fell from 12 to 3 per cent. In 2019, the majority of dwellings (85 per cent) were in EER bands C or D, compared with 56 per cent in 2009.

In the social rented sector, the majority of dwellings (61 per cent) were in EER bands A to C, compared with 38 per cent of private rented sector dwellings and 36 per cent of owner occupied dwellings.

IMPROVING ENERGY EFFICIENCY

There are two key methods of increasing the energy efficiency of existing dwellings – upgrading the dwelling's heating system or increasing the insulation.

Between 1996 and 2019, the proportion of homes with central heating increased (from 80 to 93 per

cent) while the proportion of homes with room heaters as their main heating source – the least cost-effective and most inefficient method of heating – decreased from 12 to 3 per cent. The proportion of homes with storage heaters also decreased over this period from 8 to 5 per cent.

In 2019, owner occupiers and councils had the highest proportion of homes with central heating (both 95 per cent); private rented (86 per cent) and HAs had the lowest (89 per cent). The proportion of dwellings in the private rented sector with fixed room heaters was higher than in other tenures (6 per cent compared to 2 per cent in both the owner occupied and social rented sectors).

Condensing boilers are generally the most efficient boiler type and since the mid-2000s they have been mandatory for new and replacement boilers. The proportion of dwellings with condensing or condensing combination boilers has increased considerably since 2001, rising from just 2 per cent of homes in 2001 to 74 per cent in 2019.

Older, less energy efficient boiler types are more prevalent in the private rented sector. In 2019, 13 per cent of owner occupied dwellings and 9 per cent of private rented dwellings had a standard boiler, compared with just 3 per cent of social sector dwellings.

The second main method of increasing a dwelling's energy performance is by increasing insulation. Standard insulation measures include cavity or solid wall insulation, loft insulation and double glazing.

In 2019, 86 per cent of homes in England had full double glazing, up from 73 per cent in 2009. Half (50 per cent) had cavity or solid wall insulation (up from 39 per cent in 2009) and 39 per cent had 200mm or more of loft insulation (up from 24 per cent in 2009).

The increase in wall insulation across the nation's housing stock was mostly driven by an increase in the prevalence of insulated cavity walls. Taking dwellings with predominantly cavity or solid walls separately, 68 per cent of dwellings with predominantly cavity walls had insulation installed, compared with only 11 per cent of dwellings with predominantly solid walls.



Among dwellings with solid walls, the social rented sector had a higher proportion with solid wall insulation (28 per cent) than the private sector (8 per cent).

Among dwellings with cavity walls, the private rented sector had a lower proportion of dwellings with cavity insulation (56 per cent) than the other tenures (for example, 70 per cent of owner occupied dwellings and 72 per cent of social rented sector dwellings).

SMART METERS

The rollout of smart meters is an essential national infrastructure upgrade that will make the country's energy system more efficient and flexible, helping to deliver on the Government's target of net zero emissions by 2050.

In 2019, 30 per cent of dwellings with mains electricity had an electricity smart meter and 28 per cent of dwellings with mains gas supply had a gas one, up from 22 per cent and 21 per cent respectively in 2018.

The proportion of homes with smart meters increased across all tenures. As in previous years, a lower proportion of homes in the private rented sector had smart meters than owner occupied or social homes.

For example, 21 per cent of homes in the private rented sector had an electricity smart meter in 2019, compared with 32 per cent of owner occupied and social rented homes. A similar pattern was observed for gas smart meters.

Council house Right to Buy sales stall

Right to Buy sales of council homes have fallen by 43 per cent in the latest figures released by the Government, falling to their lowest level since 2013.

English councils sold 1,548 homes to tenants exercising their Right to Buy between July and September 2020, compared with 2,727 in the same quarter in 2019. Councils received £137.2m from these sales, representing a drop of 40 per cent from

the same quarter in the previous year.

Although the July to September period coincided with the housing market being re-opened after the initial Covid lockdown and house sales freeze, councils were still expected to comply with legally binding timescales for selling properties to tenants exercising their statutory rights.

Replacement starts on site and acquisitions of

homes (to replace sold properties) also fell when compared with activity figures for 2019, falling from 1,404 to 714 in the same quarter for 2020. Back in 2012, the Government said properties sold under the RTB would be replaced on a like for like basis, but replacements are lagging some 10,000 behind sales in the past eight years.

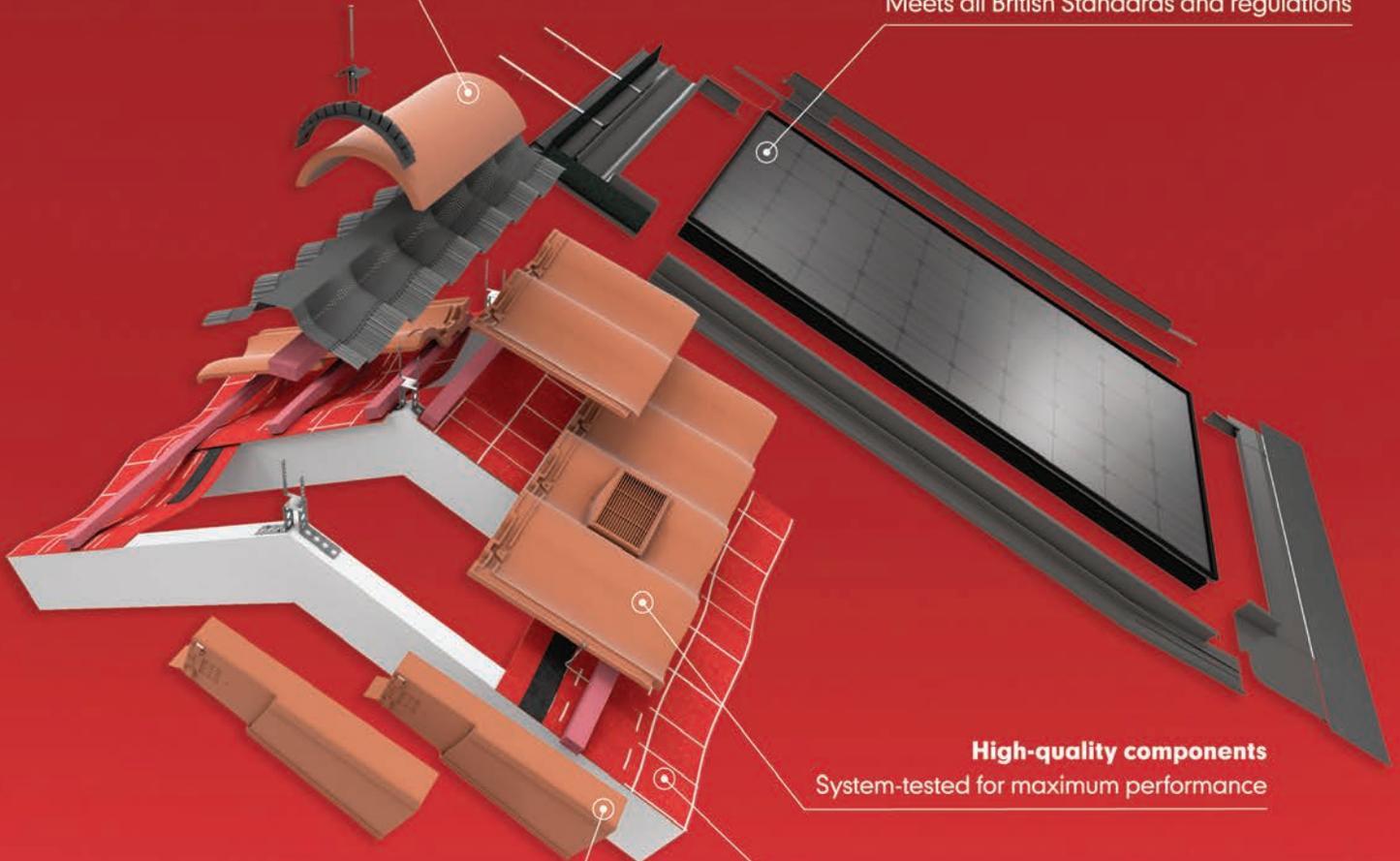
The average receipt per council home sold in the July to September quarter was £88,657, the second highest average receipt since records started in 2012/13 and six per cent greater than the second quarter in 2019.

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Huge increase in children living in temporary accommodation in last decade

The number of children living in temporary accommodation has risen by more than 75 per cent since 2010, despite the Government's repeated claims to be tackling homelessness and child poverty.

Figures from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government show the number of children without a permanent home rose from 72,590 in the second quarter of 2010 to 128,200 in the first quarter of 2020.

The latest figures also reveal that the number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 83 per cent over the past decade. This trend is supported by figures from a survey by Centrepoint, which found that 73 per cent of youth homelessness charities expect an increase in the numbers of young people sleeping rough.

Less than a third (31 per cent) of the 57 organisations surveyed by the charity thought there was sufficient support available for rough sleepers in their area, while only one in five thought there was sufficient support for young people forced to sleep rough.

Helen Barnard, director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) said: "These figures show there was an unacceptable rise in the number of families experiencing homelessness even before Covid-19

hit, and we know the pandemic has hit private renters hard."

"Polling by JRF has found millions of people anxious about paying their rent over winter, with 700,000 households already in arrears," she added. "Renters are running out of options, and without action we could see a wave of evictions and a surge in homelessness, putting even more pressure on temporary accommodation services at a time when the health risks of overcrowding are clear. As we head further towards an unemployment crisis that has yet to peak, the government should act to keep as many people as possible in their homes."

The charity is calling for a targeted package of Government support to address high rent arrears.

Paul Noblet, from Centrepoint, said: "The Government has committed significant investment to tackle homelessness, but this survey suggests this will be a winter like no other when it comes to providing the much-needed accommodation to keep rough sleepers safe. As temperatures fall, central government must guarantee that every part of the country has the necessary funds to guarantee that no one is placed in unsafe accommodation or put at risk by Covid-19.

"Key to achieving this is making sure that funding is made available not just to support older,



The number of children living in temporary accommodation has risen by more than 75 per cent since 2010

entrenched rough sleepers but younger people too. With more and more under-25s facing time sleeping on the streets it's vital that the government ringfences funding for age-appropriate accommodation so those young people can be kept safe this winter."

London council left homeless family for 'too long' in B&B

Two schoolchildren were left sharing a bed in a B&B hotel for more than a year by Redbridge council in East London, according to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman's investigation found the living conditions the children were subject to in the bed and breakfast accommodation had a significant impact on the family. The two children's schooling was badly affected - they had to share a bed and suffered disrupted sleep because of the night-time noise, and there was no room for them to do their schoolwork.

The family was placed in the B&B in the Redbridge area by another London borough. The other council decided the family was intentionally homeless because the mother had refused a damp and mouldy flat, which would have exacerbated both her and her children's respiratory conditions.

Instead of making its own decision on whether the family was intentionally homeless, Redbridge accepted the other council's decision and decided it did not have a duty to house the family under the Housing Act.

The council then placed the family in the B&B for more than a year under the Children Act.

However, the Ombudsman's investigation found the council could not show it assessed the harm caused to the family by staying in the B&B for such a long period, or that it made regular reviews of their situation.

During this time, the council offered the family options including a studio flat - where the three would have had to sleep, eat and do homework in the same room - or accommodation away from the borough in the north or Midlands. The woman rejected the first because it would be too small, and the second because her older child was due to take GCSE exams in a local school, and she had no network of support outside the capital. The council decided it no longer had any duties to the family as the mother had rejected these options.

Because the family's living conditions were so poor, the woman suffered increased anxiety, stress and panic attacks. The ombudsman found the council did not make allowances for her poor mental health when it dealt with her, and instead misinterpreted her behaviour as 'being difficult' and blamed her situation on her lack of co-operation.

Michael King, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, said: "Councils should balance the impact of being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation against the affect this might have on children, regardless of which Act the council is housing them under. In this case two children were left for far too long in poor accommodation. This left them - in their own words - 'stuck in a cycle of instability' and unable to fulfil their potential in school.

"I hope the council's acceptance that it could have done more to support the woman, given her understandable anxiety and depression, will lead to it dealing with people in difficult situations with more empathy in future."

In this case the council agreed to apologise to the woman and pay her £3,900. This is made up of £250 a month for leaving her family in unsuitable accommodation for 14 months, £250 for the distress caused by the council failing to consider the effect her anxiety and depression had on her actions or the difficulties she had communicating because of her dyslexia, and a further £150 for her time and trouble caused by the council's delays dealing with her complaint.

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Government gives councils extra rough sleeper support

The Government is giving an extra £10 million to councils to find accommodation for rough sleepers throughout the lockdown period and ensure they are registered with a GP.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick said: "Our ongoing 'Everyone In' initiative is widely regarded as one of the most successful of its kind in the world, ensuring 33,000 people are safe in accommodation. We are now going further and focusing on GP registration of rough sleepers.

The £10m is being used to accommodate those living on the streets this winter but also to assist a drive in getting the homeless population registered with a GP.

The Government has said this will ensure more people can be protected from the Covid-19 virus and receive vaccinations in line with the Government's priority groups.

During the first lockdown from March last year, the Government launched its 'Everyone In' programme aimed at securing accommodation for all rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 33,000 people were supported, with nearly 10,000 people moved into emergency accommodation and 23,000 moved into longer-term accommodation.

"What is very welcome here is the two-pronged approach: a continued commitment to getting everyone into safe accommodation but also now making sure people are registered with a GP so they can quickly access the vaccines.

"We know through our services that people facing homelessness often are not registered with a doctor's surgery. Addressing this issue will be a life-saving intervention and a step towards ensuring people who are homeless are protected in the longer term."

Steve Douglas, Chief Executive of homelessness charity St Mungo's, said: "We and other homelessness charities called on Government to provide an urgent and decisive response to support those sleeping rough who now face the double threat of severely cold weather and a continued health emergency."



Study finds officials hugely underestimated number of rough sleepers requiring help, but support saved 260 lives

The Government's emergency support programme for rough sleepers helped more than 30,000 people during the pandemic – eight times the number thought to exist by officials.

The 'Everyone In' scheme to find accommodation for rough sleepers was rapidly set up in late March 2020, in the early days of the crisis. It has been hailed as one of the main successes in the Government's response and this assessment has been confirmed by a Whitehall spending watchdog.

The National Audit Office found 33,139 people were helped between March and November last year, whereas officials at the Housing Ministry were relying on a survey which had identified just 4,266 rough sleepers.

The Everyone In campaign required local authorities to immediately house rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping to protect their health and stop wider transmission of Covid-19. A wide range of emergency accommodation was found at short notice, including thousands of empty hotel rooms.

The NAO say that local authorities expect to spend around £170m by the end of March this year on rehousing rough sleepers, with the programme paid for by Government grants, existing

homelessness funding streams and councils own resources. Roughly 23,000 people have been found long-term accommodation.

Meg Hillier who chairs the Public Accounts Committee, welcomed the success of the Everyone In scheme but warned the Government it must now find a new strategy if it is to achieve its goal of ending rough sleeping by 2024.

"MHCLG, local authorities and the voluntary sector all rose to the challenge. Their staff went the extra mile and may have saved hundreds of lives. But MHCLG can't rest on its laurels and it was caught off guard by just how many people needed help. Now rough sleeping is on the rise again, and the pandemic is far from over," she said.

Covid-19 claimed relatively few lives among the rough sleeping population in England during the first wave. The NAO report found there were 16 deaths among homeless people linked to the virus upto June last year, but overall an estimated 266 deaths were avoided.

An MHCLG spokesperson said: "Our ongoing Everyone In programme has protected thousands of rough sleepers from Covid-19, so we are pleased the National Audit Office recognises its achievement."

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Extra financial help offered for Waking Watch costs

A £30 million fund for fire alarms has been set up to help end the scandal of excessive waking watch costs, as part of a support programme for thousands of residents in high-rise buildings.

The new Waking Watch Relief Fund will pay for the installation of fire alarm systems in high-rise buildings with cladding, removing or reducing the need for costly interim safety measures such as 'waking watch'.

The National Fire Chiefs Council have been stating that building owners should move to install common fire alarm systems as quickly as possible to reduce or remove dependence on waking watches.

The new steps will ease the worries of leaseholders, shared owners and tenants who may have faced high costs for interim safety measures by providing financial support. They should also deliver a better, long term fire safety system in their buildings.

Some buildings have already installed these systems due to the significant savings this offers, with residents in those buildings, who on average were paying £137 per month for a waking watch, expected to collectively save over £3 million per month.

The same research showed the wide range in costs faced by residents and evidence of disproportionate charges, as a result of which the Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick wrote to Trading Standards asking them to use their powers to investigate.

A six-month extension to the deadline for building owners to complete their applications to the £1 billion Building Safety Fund was also announced by Mr Jenrick, with a new deadline for submissions of 30 June 2021.

This should mean that hundreds more buildings will be remediated and thousands of leasehold residents will be protected from huge demands for removal costs.

Mr Jenrick said: "I've heard first-hand from residents of the misery that rip-off waking watch costs have been bringing to them. We have prioritised the removal of unsafe ACM cladding throughout the pandemic and I expect around 95 per cent of remediation work will have been completed or underway by the end of December."

National Fire Chiefs Council Chair, Roy Wilsher said: "We welcome this new Waking Watch Relief Fund, which will help to reduce the financial



burden for some leaseholders having to fund the costs of waking watches. It has been our firm and long held expectation that building owners should move to install common fire alarms as quickly as possible and this funding is a positive step."

The measures are seen as part of the Government's commitment to improve the safety of buildings across the country, which will be enshrined in law through the Building Safety Bill in 2021.

The Government is adamant that the building industry must contribute towards the costs of making the affected homes safe, to set right decades of unsafe practices.



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Evictions ban extended again but lack of financial package draws criticisms

The ban on evicting tenants during the Covid pandemic has been extended until the end of March, but important differences remain in the approaches being taken by national governments across the UK.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick bowed to pressure by extending the ban in England from the 22nd February to the financial year end - bringing the country into line with Wales and Scotland, but he resisted calls to introduce any additional financial support in the form of grants and/or low cost loans for private sector tenants and landlords.

The ban on evictions being carried out in all but the most serious cases of tenancy breaches (such as antisocial behaviour) will have been in place for a year. During this time rent arrears have soared and landlords, charities and campaign groups have united to criticise Jenrick for his one-sided approach.

The National Residential Landlords Association chief executive, Ben Beadle warned the announcement was storing up future problems. He said 800,000 private renters have built up arrears since the ban came into force, which they would struggle to ever pay off.

“It will eventually lead to them having to leave their home and face serious damage to their credit scores,” he said. “A package of hardship loans and grants is needed as a matter of urgency. To expect landlords and tenants simply to muddle through without further support is a strategy that has passed its sell-by date.”

The success of the eviction ban has been challenged by research done for The Guardian and Observer newspapers, which revealed that at least 70,000 households have lost their homes during the pandemic. They claim that tens of thousands of other households are facing a similar fate.

Using Freedom of Information requests to local authorities supplemented by official Whitehall figures, the newspapers found that 207,543 households approached their local council for help with homelessness or the threat of homelessness between the start of April and the end of November 2020. Of these, 50,561 were “owed the prevention duty”, meaning they were judged to be threatened with homelessness, while 70,309 were “owed the relief duty”, meaning they were already homeless.

Under the ban, bailiffs in England are blocked from enforcing possessions but unlike the original ban (between March and September last year) possession hearings and court orders can still take place with landlords required to give six-month notice periods and the courts prioritising egregious cases, such as antisocial behaviour, illegal occupation or for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Jenrick said: “We have taken unprecedented action to support renters during the pandemic, including introducing a six-month notice period and financial support to help those struggling to pay their rent.

“By extending the ban on the enforcement of evictions by bailiffs, in all but the most serious cases, we are ensuring renters remain protected during this difficult time. Our measures strike the right balance between protecting tenants and enabling landlords to exercise their right to justice.”

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Warning of 'rents crisis' as up to 840,000 private tenants could be in serious arrears

More than 800,000 private tenants in England and Wales could be behind on their rent, with young people and the self-employed most likely to have missed payments, research for a private landlords group has found.

The National Residential Landlords Association is warning of a "rent debt crisis" and has called for swift and effective action from the Government to help struggling tenants. This stark warning is backed up by figures from the advisory group Citizens Advice who estimate that at least 500,000 private tenants are behind on their rent payments with an estimated £360 million owed to their landlords.

A survey for the NRLA found 7 per cent of renters had built up arrears as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a figure that equates to 840,000 people across England and Wales. The average arrears were between £251 and £500, but some tenants reported they owed their landlord more than £1,000.

Renters aged between 18 and 24 were twice as likely to have fallen behind as the general population of tenants, and the self-employed were most likely to be struggling, with 17 per cent saying they had built up debts to their landlord.

The NRLA also found that 56 per cent of landlords lost rental income as a result of the pandemic, with 12 per cent having lost more than 20 per cent of their rental income. 22 per cent lost more than £5,000 and 59 per cent had lost more than £1,000, with 36 per cent saying the losses are continuing to increase.

Homeowners and landlords have been able to ask for payment holidays, but tenants have had to negotiate with property owners on an individual basis. Some landlords have been flexible over payments, and some have reduced rents for struggling tenants, but they have not been obliged to take any action.

Citizens Advice says that it helped someone every two minutes in December with an issue to do with their private tenancy. It added the average



Renters aged between 18 and 24 were twice as likely to have fallen behind as the general population of tenants, and the self-employed were most likely to be struggling, with 17 per cent saying they had built up debts to their landlord

amount of rent owed by tenants is £730 and one in four private renters in arrears have been threatened with eviction or cancellation of contract by their landlord.

Ben Beadle, Chief Executive of the NRLA, said: "Our research highlights in stark terms the rent debt crisis now engulfing the rental market. The vast majority of landlords have done everything possible to support tenants affected due to Covid-19, but expecting them to muddle through without further support is hurting tenants as well as landlords."

He added: "Ministers need to accept that simply banning repossessions does nothing to keep tenants

in their homes long-term. In fact, it will achieve the complete opposite as in kicking the can down the road it just means larger debts pile up, creating a bigger problem for tenants and for landlords. To sustain tenancies, the Government needs to provide an urgent financial package to get rent debts paid off."

Citizens Advice made a similar call for targeted financial support for people in England with rent arrears. It says the Government should consider a system of grants and Government-backed loans, comparable to schemes in Scotland and Wales, to help tenants pay back their rent arrears sustainably and stay in their homes.

No increase in regulator's fees from April

Social landlords in England have been informed that they will not be facing an increase in their fees payable to the regulator in the next financial year.

The Regulator of Social Housing has written to all registered providers saying the annual fee for next year will not be higher than £5.37 per unit. It

currently charges £5.42 per unit, to all social landlords with a minimum of 1,000 homes.

Landlords with fewer than 1,000 homes are charged a flat annual fee of £300 and this is also being frozen for next year. Regulatory fees were first introduced in 2017.

The regulator's Finance and Corporate Services

Director Richard Peden, explained the background to the decision, as: "This is in recognition both of the above inflation fee increase this year (20/21) and the resource pressures that providers face responding to the COVID-19 pandemic."

He added: "We will publish our annual fees statement in due course once we have received confirmation of our Grant in Aid budget from Government and will provide further guidance on fee per unit levels once statistical data returns have been fully analysed."

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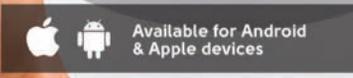
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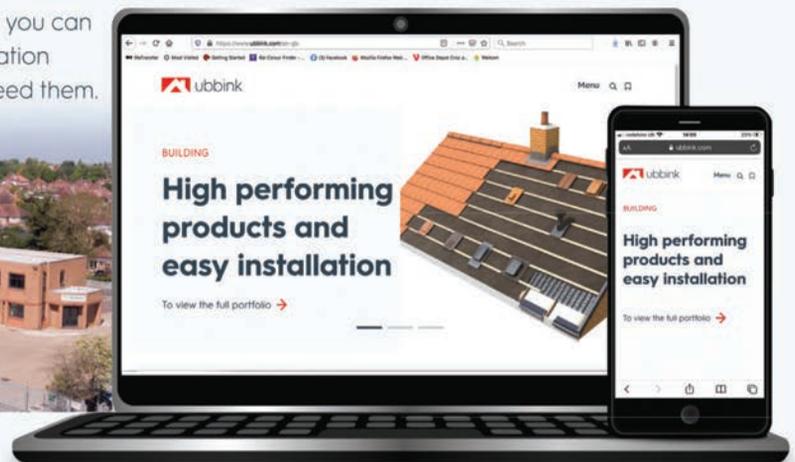
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The advantages of electric heating

Bill Walters of The Electric Heating Company explores how advances in technology and new energy efficiency standards mean there's never been a better time to invest in electric heating.

Electric heating is continually becoming an increasingly viable option for heating social and private rent properties throughout the UK. New Government legislation has heralded a change in how SAP determines a property's ERP Rating – to almost the same as gas. This change allows widespread use of electric radiators and electric boilers, which are widely understood as having low installation costs, no flue requirement, low maintenance, rapid heat up times and high efficiency.

The Government has also announced its intention to ban the installation of gas boilers in new build properties by 2025, and as such electric heating is shaping up to be a popular choice for the future of home heating within the UK.

With this in mind, below are some of the advantages that electric heating systems can offer to landlords and housing associations alike.

COST

Electric heating systems typically have a lower upfront installation cost than gas, oil or LPG systems.

Some may claim that the initial cost savings are offset in the long run by the higher cost per unit of electricity versus the cost per unit of gas, however price projections indicate that the cost of gas is expected to increase and the production of gas is expected to decrease. As the cost of gas rises, the cost of low carbon alternatives like electric is reducing as government support strengthens to meet climate change targets.

Electric heating systems are also said to last 50 per cent longer than oil or gas boilers. This is largely due to electric heating systems such as electric radiators or electric boilers including no internal moving parts, which massively reduces the risk of a breakdown or wear and tear in comparison to other heating alternatives. There is also no mandatory annual service, which is an average cost saving of up to £100 per year.

EFFICIENCY

Electric heating systems are 100 per cent efficient at the point of use. If you pay for 1kW of electricity, you will benefit from 1kW of heat.

This is much higher than alternatives which can lose heat through flues etc. When paired with solar PV panels, efficiency of electric heating systems improves, and the carbon dioxide produced reduces.

SAFETY

Electric radiators and electric boilers are safer than alternative heating solutions as electric heating systems do not burn fuel internally to generate heat, which means there's none of the associated safety risks such as carbon monoxide poisoning or explosions.

Plus, an electric boiler or radiator is completely silent in operation.

EASE OF INSTALLATION

Electric heating systems are often very easy to install, as there is absolutely no need for any pipework.

All that is required is a connection to the electrical circuit, which means that the Electric Radiators can be installed almost anywhere in your home, and with minimal disruption in comparison to standard wet system radiators.

All electric boilers have no flue requirement, which means that electric boilers can be installed anywhere throughout the home without any restriction on building work or design.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY STANDARDS

The drive for increased energy efficiency across all domestic heating types and associated products is continuous.

New Regulations were introduced on the 1st January 2018 affecting "the ecodesign requirements for local space heaters." Derived from an EU Commission Regulation transposed into UK Law under the Energy Related Products Regulations (ERP), this new regulation is often referred to as 'LOT 20' and requires any new local space heating system installed from this date onwards to be compliant with set energy efficiency standards.

The aim of LOT 20 is to reduce the energy consumption in our homes through accurate management and control of electric heating appliances and minimise wasted energy. To meet the objectives of LOT 20, better use of intelligent timers, controls and sensors must be made. Standard on/off heating appliances without such controls are no longer compliant and manufacturers and distributors are no longer able to sell these.

Any new local space heating system installed since 1 January 2018 must be compliant with the new LOT 20 performance standards. The legislation is not retrospective, so existing systems in place are not affected. All heaters must also meet a minimum seasonal space heating energy efficiency requirement. To be LOT 20 compliant, heaters will in general need to include 3 key features:

- 24/7 time and temperature control, either built in or through wireless/WIFI APP
- Electronic thermostatic control for accurate room temperature measurement
- Open window/door recognition so the heater can reduce usage if the user leaves a door or window open reducing the room temperature rapidly

DEMAND

Over the last 18 months there has been a significant increase in the demand for electric heating solutions as LOT 20 compliant products continue to offer full controllability, ease of operation and, with the correct electricity tariff, continue to be affordable to run.

With the advances in smart technology, which is ideally suited to electric products, and the development of time of use tariffs, the benefits of electric heating for social Landlords and their tenants are only increasing.

Bill Walters is director of The Electric Heating Company Ltd

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RadiWarm Economy+ is a cost-effective entry range. The standalone silica sand-filled radiators have an in-built controller and, like the main range, are energy efficient and maintenance free. Not currently LOT 20 compliant. RadiWarm radiators are manufactured by Heights (UK) Ltd, a respected Yorkshire company.

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Tackling condensation and mould

Vent-Axia has put its Lo-Carbon PoziDry Pro™ Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) to the test in a real home environment. The PoziDry Pro was installed in a three-bed home which suffered from an ongoing condensation and mould problem. Air quality data from before and after the PIV installation showed a sharp decline in both total volatile organic compound (VOC) levels and mould VOC levels after the system was installed, whilst also successfully tackling condensation and mould. After the PoziDry Pro was installed in the home, the total VOC levels (a general indicator of IAQ) dropped by 40 per cent while mould VOC levels (an assessment of the actively growing mould in a home) dropped by 67 per cent.

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New downflow fan heaters

Consort Claudgen have launched two new downflow fan heaters suitable for bathrooms or kitchens. Both provide rapid warmth and adjustable heat output of 1kW or 2kW at installation.

The DF2 Heatflow has a pull cord switch that operates on a 30-minute run-back timer which can be deactivated before the timer expires. The DF2SL Heatflow has a variable thermostat and requires a separately purchased wireless controller to operate. It is compatible with Consort's SL run-back timers and advanced wireless controllers offering a longer heating period as well as more efficient heat control.

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Concealing fire sprinkler system pipework simply and effectively

With HA and local authority landlords implementing major fire protection upgrade programmes, including the ongoing retro-fitting of fire sprinkler systems, for many contractors Encasement's Versa pipe boxing is proving to be the ideal solution for concealing sprinkler pipework.

For retro-fitted projects, fire sprinkler pipework is usually surface mounted, as it can't be hidden in cavities and voids easily or economically. As, the main advantage of surface mounting is the speed and simplicity of installation, it's important that the pipe boxing chosen to conceal it is also quick and easy, to help save time and money on-site.

Versa 5 and Versa 8 'L' shaped fire sprinkler boxing is manufactured from 5mm or 8mm thick plywood in a range of sizes and also includes dedicated accessories, such as internal and external corners, which help create an integrated and uniform finish, whilst speeding the sprinkler installation.

Encasement's experience of working with contractors on countless social housing projects where pipework needs to be concealed, has indicated that Versa pipe and fire sprinkler boxing can be fitted in less than half the



time of site made alternatives. Also, as it's pre-finished with durable white melamine, there's no painting required on site, which saves further time and cost.

For HAs, local authorities and their contractors, this time saving helps ensure that



fire safety upgrades can be completed within shorter timescales while simultaneously minimising the disruption for tenants while work is carried out.

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As well as helping to save energy by providing some of the lowest U-values available to the UK market, Senior Architectural Systems' patented range of thermally-efficient PURe® aluminium windows and doors are also proving popular with specifiers looking to reduce long-term maintenance costs. Robust, durable and with an expected life cycle in excess of 40 years, Senior's PURe® aluminium windows and doors benefit from an enhanced PUR thermal barrier which can achieve exceptional low U-values. Owing to the inherent strength of the aluminium frame, the system offers a cost-effective alternative to using energy efficient triple-glazing which, when used in high-traffic environments.



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Reducing drainage noise

Adam Cafer of Polypipe Building Services discusses how sound pollution can be reduced, especially in tall building drainage systems.

With one third of the UK workforce currently working from home, issues such as noise pollution from building service systems will be brought into sharper focus – especially for the growing number of people who live in residential blocks in our major towns and cities.

Modern multi-storey buildings contain a large amount of plumbing fixtures and pipework, and if installed unsatisfactorily the noise of water and wastewater passing through pipes can cause excessive noise for tenants.

There are a number of modern design solutions and product systems available however to help minimise the effect of noise from building drainage systems, without compromising on maximising available floor space to rent, or the robust quality of the products employed.

MEETING THE REGULATIONS

Part E of the English Building Regulations state that airborne sound transfer between flats must be reduced by at least 43-45 decibels through the separating wall or floor. A level of 20dBA is an acceptable sleeping room ambience, and 80dBA is the level of ordinary traffic, so it is important to specify above the UK standard at the design stage of a development.

While there are no explicit standards that specify the acoustic performance of soil and waste pipes, it is important to adopt a holistic approach when considering the acoustic issues faced by tenants living in tall buildings.

Selecting the correct products when installing a complete drainage system with its related components – and tackling the source of

potential noise problems during installation – will help to prevent long-term issues.

Acoustic soil and waste systems are one solution, able to effectively dampen both airborne noise and sound transmitted through the building structure.

Acoustic systems lagged with a minimum of 25mm mineral wool and fitted with acoustic, rubber-lined brackets will reduce the risk of pipes vibrating as water flows through. A triple layer pipe system with specially developed co-polymer polypropylene layers can be used in conjunction with flexible and vibration-resistant joints, support clips and fire collars. The sandwich of a high density sound-reducing material between two layers of polypropylene tackles both wall-borne and air-borne noise.

There are also a number of modern drainage systems which are not designed exclusively for acoustic control but achieve it as a secondary benefit. Many of these systems, which help to ensure low-noise environments, can be installed during the build or retrofitted into tall buildings.

COPING WITH PRESSURE

A Positive Air Pressure Attenuation system with an air admittance valve provides a drainage ventilation system that helps control nuisance air pressure regimes which otherwise would establish themselves within the soil and waste system as water building, often from great heights.

The positive pressure reduction device is used to mitigate the effects of positive air pressure fluctuations in the drainage pipework system, such as when a WC is flushed on an upper floor.



A Positive Air Pressure Attenuation system with an air admittance valve provides a drainage ventilation system that helps control nuisance air pressure regimes which otherwise would establish themselves within the soil and waste system as water building, often from great heights

As water descends down the single stack drainage system, it creates a negative pressure that if interrupted, or is approaching a change of direction, causes the negative pressure to change to a positive pressure which then travels back up the pipe and can create knocking or jolting noises as it passes through the drainage system.

The positive air pressure reduction device acts as an attenuator tackling positive air pressure fluctuations, and the air admittance valve tackles negative air pressure fluctuations. Therefore by installing these two components into a single stack it is possible to significantly reduce pressure fluctuations, and eliminate the requirement for secondary ventilation.

Designing the secondary vent pipework out of the system saves material and labour, creates space in the living area, reduces core drilling of the slab and means no venting through the roof, thus reducing the risk of leaks.

Controlling the air fluctuations also has the added benefit of considerably reducing the noise created throughout the system whenever water from WCs, baths, showers, sinks and kitchen appliances is released.

Together, the positive air pressure reduction device and the air attenuator form a highly effective alternative solution for controlling the air fluctuations and the noise pollution within the single stack drainage system and soil stack, thereby protecting the water trap seals of appliances within the building.

HOLISTIC SOLUTIONS

Employing a single stack system allows for the use of less pipework, while maximising the available floor space within the building structure.

As the quality standard of residential tall buildings rises, it is important to look for holistic solutions designed to reduce acoustic disturbances.

If you liaise with an experienced and reputable manufacturer, you will be able to receive technical and specification guidance, ensuring a high-quality, properly engineered installation.

Adam Cafer is Advantage technical manager at Polypipe Building Services

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One size does *not* fit all

John Mellor of Glidevale Protect explains why specification matters in roofing membrane and ventilation products.

Specifying pitched roofing underlays for new build or refurbishment projects is often a confusing subject with so many options available on the market, each offering a variety of technical attributes and performance credentials.

Required in virtually all tile and slate pitched roof construction, an underlay should be designed as a true hidden protector, operating as the secondary line of defence to the roof tiles, offering weather defence against wind driven rain or snow, and wind uplift resistance to the loading pressures applied to the structure in accordance with BS 5534. However, with the roofing underlay often specified in isolation, the integral link between the type of membrane specified and the controlled ventilation strategy that needs to be employed to manage condensation risk is often forgotten.

Roofing underlays and ventilation must work simultaneously to deliver a full solution that provides a watertight structure and avoids condensation build-up within the roofspace, ultimately leading to a healthy indoor living environment. The choice of underlay for any pitched roof impacts the amount of ventilation required to eliminate harmful condensation, so selecting a manufacturer well versed in offering the appropriate guidance along with an array of solutions is paramount.

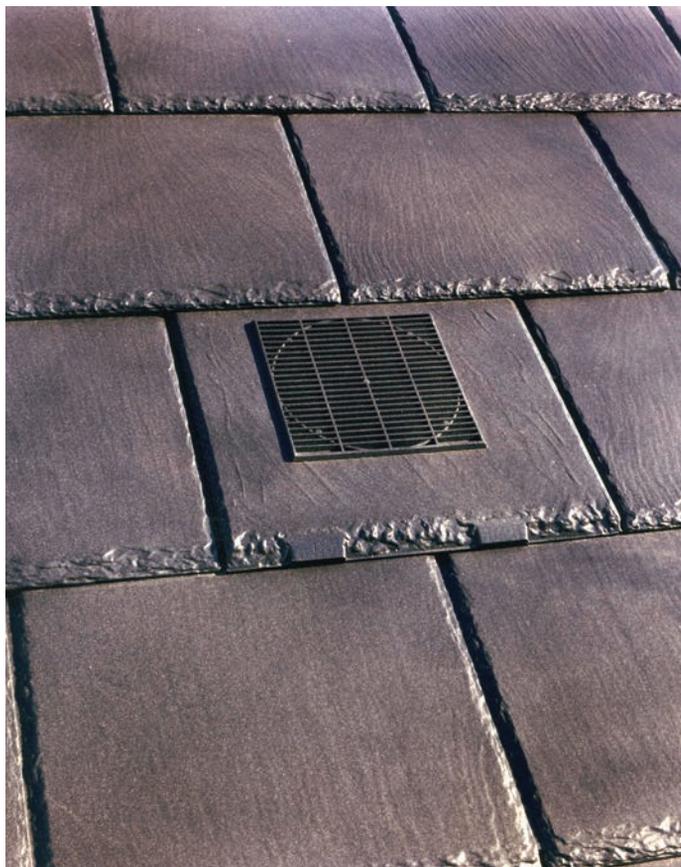
Choice is the all-important factor here rather than a 'one size fits all'

approach, with the membrane an integral component as part of the overall solution. Even if there are cost restraints for the overall roof package, using the cheapest membrane without factoring in additional ventilation requirements may result in problems and expensive structural repairs. Getting it right first time means homes can be future-proofed, maintaining their property values and ensuring reduced maintenance costs.

VENTILATION AND STANDARDS

The need to ventilate within housing has never been more important. With the onset of climate change and the ongoing commitment by the UK Government to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero by 2050, energy efficiency is top of the agenda with Building Regulations set to become more onerous by lowering U-value notional targets.

As well as updates to Building Regulations Approved Document Part L (conservation of fuel and power) and Part F (ventilation), as recently announced by the Government after the initial consultation process, changes are also expected in 2021 to BS 5250, the code of practice for control of condensation in buildings. Uplift improvements to these regulations in 2021 form the transition to the Future Homes Standard, set to vastly improve energy efficiency in new build properties, which will be introduced by 2025. Additionally, the recent new



Glidevale in-line tile ventilator

The need to ventilate within housing has never been more important. With the onset of climate change and the ongoing commitment by the UK Government to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero by 2050, energy efficiency is top of the agenda with Building Regulations set to become more onerous by lowering U-value notional targets



Protect A1 T3 Plus vapour impermeable (type HR) roofing underlay

charter for social housing residents, launched by the Government, commits to reviewing the current Decent Homes Standard to support the decarbonisation of social homes. This means, as homes are designed with a fabric first approach and therefore increased airtightness, it is vital to balance this with the correct ventilation strategy, protecting against the excessive build-up of moisture and pollutants. This includes the roof, where it is key to have an appropriate combination of underlay and ventilation provision, particularly if the loft is a liveable space.

MEMBRANE CATEGORIES

So, with the undoubted importance of ensuring ventilation is provided into dwellings, what different categories of membrane are available, and how does this impact on the ventilation requirements for each, whether cold or warm roof?

Starting with vapour permeable or low resistance (type LR) products, two types of underlays are available in today’s market. Firstly, the traditional LR product is airtight but allows water vapour to disperse into the atmosphere. For a cold roof solution on a dwelling sized roof, BS 5250 recommends the combination of a vapour permeable, airtight underlay with high-level ventilation of 5000mm²/m through tile or ridge vents, whether a well-sealed or normal ceiling is in place (for both). Alternatively, where there is a well-sealed ceiling, a ventilation provision of only 3000mm²/m at low level is required - however, for re-roofing projects where a normal ceiling is in place that is not likely to be airtight, ventilation at low level should be increased to 7000mm²/m. In warm roof construction, where the loft area has been designed for a habitable space and thus the insulation is laid at rafter level, the use of an airtight and vapour permeable underlay will not require any additional ventilation, subject to a well-sealed ceiling and an air and vapour control layer (AVCL) being installed on the warm side of the insulation. If there is doubt about the ability to provide an effectively sealed ceiling and an AVCL at specification stage, further ventilation should be planned into the design and the chosen manufacturer should provide suitable guidance.

The second type of LR underlay is both air and vapour permeable, allowing ventilation to be delivered into the roofspace due to its special meltblown technology designed within the membrane core. This ensures airflow through the material and allows vapour to escape, helping control the risk of condensation. For these product types, specifications should be made for underlays which are also hydrophobically treated in order to repel water to offer added protection. While an air-permeable underlay may involve higher initial material costs, this is offset by no additional requirement to ventilate, saving time and labour on installation. Whether a cold or warm roof, air and vapour permeable membranes can be used without additional ventilation. This is accepted by the NHBC in their Technical Requirements R3 Document related to cold roof construction. The only exceptions are where the underlay is installed on closed jointed sarking board or if an airtight roof covering is used, such as metal tiles or fibre cement slates. In this case, it would be necessary to ventilate the batten space with 25mm counter battens. The chosen manufacturer should always recommend a well-sealed ceiling and separate AVCL is used, where achievable.

The third category of pitched roofing underlays is vapour impermeable or high resistance (type HR) membranes which are also airtight, where the diffusion of water vapour is prevented from travelling through the material. Designed to overcome the disadvantages of traditional type 1F felts, type HR membranes are generally the most cost-effective when viewed in isolation of just the membrane, however this must be balanced against the requirement for additional high and low-level ventilation for both a cold and warm roof. This extra ventilation provision is imperative to avoid the risk of interstitial condensation forming on the underside of the underlay. As an example, for dwelling sized cold roofs with pitches over 15 degrees, a minimum of 10,000mm²/m of ventilation is required at low level, in addition to 5,000mm²/m at high level. The chosen manufacturer should provide relevant ventilation guidance on a project specific basis.

With the undoubted synergy between roofing underlay choice and ventilation, it is vital that a manufacturer is selected who can advise on the full solution, ensuring the roof is future proofed.

John Mellor is senior product manager at Glidevale Protect.



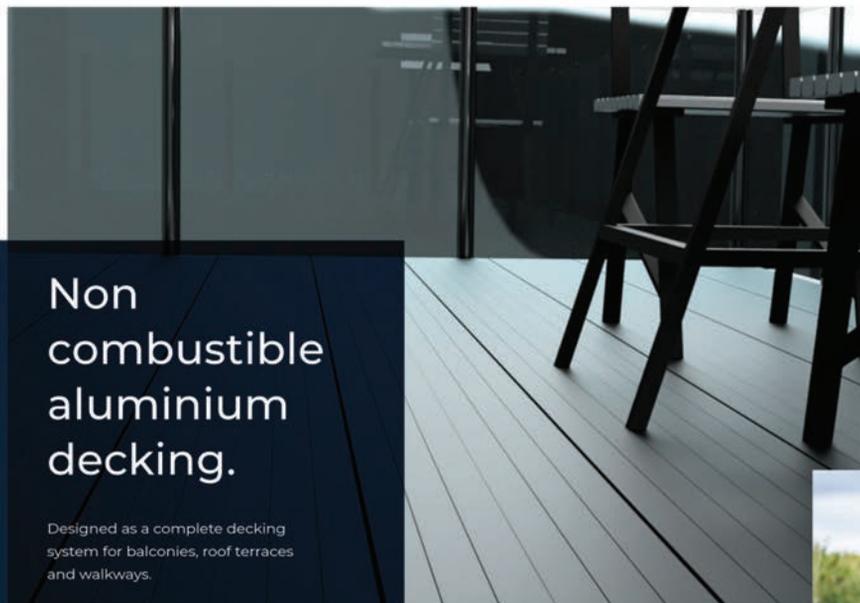
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Why specify recycled plastic?

Sarah Mitchell of Goplastic explores how and why landlords and social housing providers should utilise recycled plastic in their projects.

The world's annual consumption of plastic materials has increased from around 5 million tonnes in the 1950s to nearly 100 million tonnes today. European production accounts for about 57 million tonnes of this total amount.

The amount of plastic waste generated annually in the UK is estimated to be nearly 5 million tonnes, half of which comes from packaging (Source: House of Commons Briefing Paper on Plastic Waste, 2020).

Most families throw away about 40kg of plastic per year, which could otherwise be recycled. Much of this ends up in the waste stream affecting our rivers, oceans and wildlife.

Certainly there are some first use plastics which are beneficial to our communities; improving food hygiene and reducing package weight, which in turn reduces carbon emissions during transport of goods. However, other categories of first use plastics have already been banned. These items, such as drinking straws and drink stirrers can be replaced with alternative materials that are degradable.

Currently over 6.6 million tons of plastic are used globally in the recycling industry, but there is a long way to go. The UK government's current strategy is to work toward all plastics produced being either recyclable, reusable or compostable by the year 2025.

The UK has had a system of producer responsibility for packaging in place since 1997. This has helped to drive recycling of packaging waste from 25 per cent, 20 years ago to 64.7 per cent in 2016. This system is currently being overhauled to incorporate new measures such as incentives to encourage producers to design and use packaging that can be recycled. The new system aims to produce greater clarity on materials, or types of plastic that can be recycled and those that can't, by introducing mandatory labelling on all packaging to indicate if it is recyclable or not.

With methods of collecting and sorting plastics for recycling also improved, there is one final part of the loop to close. What to do with the plastic collected? The recycling industry, with the aid of constantly improving technology, have been developing products to give plastic a 'second

life' and is becoming a force for the introduction of recycled plastic into many major industries. Currently over 6.6 million tons of plastic are used globally in the recycling industry, but there is a long way to go

life' and is becoming a force for the introduction of recycled plastic into many major industries.

WHY SPECIFY RECYCLED PLASTIC PRODUCTS?

Recycled plastic has historically been considered 'functional', but with design teams on board, this material is now considered a first choice, and its benefits often outweigh the more traditional choices of timber and steel.

The splinter-free, rot-proof, maintenance-free and durable nature of this product, means that there is no need for cyclical maintenance or major replacement programmes.

WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), gives an estimated lifespan for recycled plastic of 40 years. This results in a considerable economic benefit.



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...into a smart and manageable bin bay

In addition, using recycled products can help organisations meet their sustainable obligations in the built environment. Schools are often part of recycling programmes and purchasing recycled plastic products helps students make sense of the recycling ethos. Here are just a few more beneficial properties of recycled plastic products:

- Maintenance free
- Economic
- Extremely robust
- Will not rot
- Splinter free

The Zero Maintenance Alternative to Wood





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- 100% maintenance-free
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The UK government's current strategy is to work toward all plastics produced being either recyclable, reusable or compostable by the year 2025

- Does not absorb water or bacteria
- Hygienic - easy to clean
- Graffiti resistant
- Difficult to burn
- Toxin free
- UV resistant

CASE STUDY

It's long been reported that bin bay areas in communal housing and shared developments can prove to be problematic for tenants and landlords alike. The volume of recyclable materials can lead to residential apartment buildings and blocks of flats having several different bins for each household. These bins have to be placed outside, on or near the premises. Access and health issues can arise if bins and their storage areas aren't kept under control.

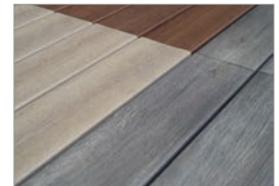
It is entirely apt for recycled plastic to be used in the improvement of recycling areas; what better than bin bays manufactured from louvered recycled plastic panels? The durable nature of the recycled plastic means the bays can withstand bins crashing into them. The louvered panels allow air to circulate, preventing a build-up of bad odours.

The Meir Estate in Stoke on Trent (Stoke City Housing) has specified this type of system for the past 6 years. They've installed 33 bin bay areas, using 560 metres of recycled plastic bin bay panels, a whopping 36,000 kgs of recycled plastic, which may otherwise have ended up in landfill.

Sarah Mitchell is director at Goplastic Ltd.

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Premium Kedeck, our most wood-like decking, is made from mixed waste plastic that would otherwise be destined for landfill or the ocean. The plastic used in the manufacturing process of Kedeck makes it some of the most durable decking on the market. No need for annual painting, staining, oiling or maintenance of any kind. Kedeck is completely impervious to water, frost, insects, fungi and algae. Kedeck is available in traditional Oak and Mahogany colours or if you'd prefer, a more modern Anthracite Grey. Colours are UV protected against fading too. 100 per cent eco-friendly, recycled plastic decking that won't rot, splinter or crack. Visit the Kedel website for more information.



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New Jackets, Work Trousers & Topwear

With a focus on comfort, performance and sustainability in its new products, the 2021 digital catalogue has all you need to know about **Snickers Workwear**, including new products that now use REPREVE, the world's number one brand of recycled performance fibre. There's also new AllroundWork Topwear with the cooling 37.5° moisture transportation fabric, as well as upgraded FLEXIWork Stretch Trousers with extra functionality and durability. By popular demand, there's also a stretchy hi-vis Work Jacket with great comfort and flexibility for high-performance work and high visibility in low-light conditions.



www.snickersworkwear.com/page/product_guide_media

Is drinking water harming your tenants? Take the lead on LEAD

Awareness of the potential health problems caused by lead in the water supply, particularly in infants and children is growing. Houses built before 1970 would have been constructed with lead water supply pipes and if still in place can be causing developmental harm to young occupants.

Although the use of lead in plumbing has been banned in the UK for more than 50 years, there are still many properties where a risk of lead contamination of water is a risk. In some areas of the UK up to a third of these older properties are still receiving their water through these original lead pipes.¹

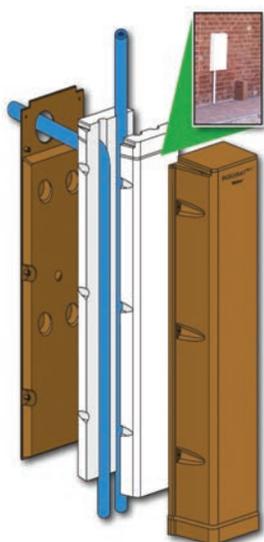
In properties with lead supply pipes, the only totally secure method to reduce lead levels in the water supply is to replace the original supply with modern plastic pipe. These new materials can also provide the additional benefits of improving flow rates and reducing pipe noise.

Traditionally, any lead replacement program requires major excavations outside a property and causes huge disruption within. Resulting in mess and disturbance to householders over several days. This disruption has often been the cause of users' reluctance to have the work undertaken.

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Unlike traditional methods, INSUDUCT® allows the new water service to be routed up the external face of the building and connected to the internal plumbing above ground level, whether this is the ground floor or upper storey. In multi-occupancy properties INSUDUCT® allows multiple supply pipes



to be installed, as it is designed to provide frost protection for up to three 32mm OD water pipes installed to the exterior of the building.

INSUDUCT only requires one simple core drilled hole through the wall, at an appropriate point to connect with the internal plumbing. This enables most water supply replacements to be completed within a couple of hours, without the traditional mess and disruption to the householders or occupiers. The improvement in work efficiency and reduction on the impact to occupants is a win for both contractor and customer. There is also little impact to the exterior appearance of the property, as the INSUDUCT system provides a neat, clean finish to the job.

Groundbreaker products are designed to provide long lasting and effective thermal protection to water pipes and fittings outside the thermal envelope of a building. They offer frost protection for 3 days or more with temperatures as low as -15°C, temperatures we rarely reach in the UK - even with today's erratic climate! Carefully fabricated to provide long lasting and effective thermal protection to water pipes and fittings in external situations, the products exceed British Standard 5422 and all relevant Water Regulations for frost protection and is on the "approved list" of most UK water companies.

Steve Leigh, developer of the range and Managing Director of Groundbreaker, has over 40 years' experience in the Water Industry. "We've been putting pipes in holes in the ground to protect them from frost for decades, he explained. "Although it works, today's new materials allow for a much better solution. Keeping pipes on the surface reduces the

risk of leaks developing and allows for easy repair and maintenance. It's just a much better method of working."

This isn't just Steve's opinion in 2018 Groundbreaker were recognised by the HBF (Home Builders Federation) as the Utility Company of the Year for their innovative range that meets the highest standards in both product specification and leak free installation design.



Lead Water Supply replacement has become a priority for water companies across the UK. Systems such as Groundbreaker can overcome user reluctance and provide a time and cost-efficient method of water supply pipe replacement.

For more information and applications, why not sign up for our occasional newsletter for up to date industry information and product news via email or online?

01379 741993 www.groundbreaker.co.uk

¹ <https://www.lovemoney.com/news/19726/the-most-common-home-insurance-claims>

Gas safety in 2021

Joe Beesley of CORGI explores how landlords can stay on the right side of gas safety regulations.

In 2020, a new problem significantly exacerbated the age-old problem of access to residents' homes to perform gas safety checks and repairs and maintenance; namely, the global Coronavirus pandemic.

Central to all gas safety regimes is accessing residents' homes – this is a perpetual problem for all social landlords. It is a time-consuming, costly annual process, yet essential for resident's safety and a regulatory requirement as per the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) (Amendment) Regulations 2018.

The above regulations state that landlords are responsible for making sure that gas fittings and flues are maintained in good order, and gas appliances and flues are checked for safety once in a period of 12 months. Landlords must also keep a record of the safety checks until two further gas safety checks have been carried out, and for at least two years for appliance/s removed from the premises. Landlords must issue the latest certificate to existing tenants and any new tenants before they move in.

It is vital that landlords adhere to these rules. According to the HSE, about 14 people die every year from carbon monoxide poisoning. This is caused by gas appliances and flues which have not been properly installed or maintained. Many others also suffer significant long term ill health. When gas does not burn properly, as with other fuels such as coal, wood or oil, excess carbon monoxide is produced, which is poisonous and named the silent killer.

The regulation is clear, and yet access to do these safety checks is an ongoing problem for social landlords; this problem has been magnified beyond all expectations by the current global coronavirus pandemic. Quite simply, influenced by Government messaging, residents have been reluctant to let gas engineers into their homes, and understandably so.

In May 2020, independent research of nearly 100 hundred social landlords, representing approximately 1.9 million homes, stated that just under one third of respondents were accessing below 60 per cent of their properties. A further quarter of respondents reported that their access rates were 60-79 per cent. This left 45 per cent of respondents with access rates of 80-100 per cent - considerably below pre-pandemic times.

SOLUTIONS

So, how did landlords navigate this unprecedented dilemma of adhering to the law and simultaneously try to protect staff and residents from Coronavirus, when faced with such low access rates?

As with most problems – communication and thinking differently have been key to attempting to solve the access issue. Landlords have looked at doing things differently:

- Developing new ways of working, e.g. triage repairs over the phone
- Changing the approach to access to one of explanation and reassurance
- Where access is not possible, engineers have taken CO alarms/smoke detectors to tenants and instructed where to locate them, while standing outside the home
- With an elderly tenant base, sending a sensitive letter asking tenants to phone in to make their appointment has delivered increased access
- Admin teams have phoned the day before access (used to be a text), increasing access
- Visible PPE and sensitive dialogue by the Engineer with the resident

The pandemic has undoubtedly resulted in increased admin; keeping track of access, the reasons for the increased non-access, re-booking appointments etc. This has put a strain on both workforce and systems to record all this additional information and maintain a sufficient audit trail.

HSE requires that landlords take 'all reasonable steps' to ensure the annual safety check is carried out. This may involve giving written notice to a tenant requesting access, and explaining the reason. Keep a record of any action in



case a tenant refuses access; landlords have to demonstrate what steps have been taken.

Undoubtedly, accurate data and fit for purpose technology have helped social landlords to cope in these unprecedented times, not to mention incredible teamwork.

RISKS

It is estimated that within any 8-week period, there will be approximately 666,667 regulatory routine gas safety checks. These are all opportunities to spread the virus. Social housing landlords have questioned if that is a risk worth taking when their housing stock is among the safest housing in the UK compared to the private sector.

Social housing stock:

- Is serviced regularly and safety checked annually
- Has regular replacement programmes and timely repairs
- Boilers are circa 6 years old and in good condition
- Many properties have carbon monoxide alarms

Many landlords questioned the HSE wisdom to continue to insist on meeting the demands of Regulations 36. Other landlords supported the HSE decision – believing that the benefits do outweigh the risk as well as avoiding backlogs.

The HSE and the Regulator of Social Housing assure landlords that if all reasonable steps have been taken to comply with the law and that records can be presented to demonstrate this, then no action will be taken.

WHAT CONSTITUTES 'ALL REASONABLE STEPS'?

As most of the UK entered 2021 in lockdown, there is no doubt that landlords are in a much better position than they were in Spring 20. Collectively, the

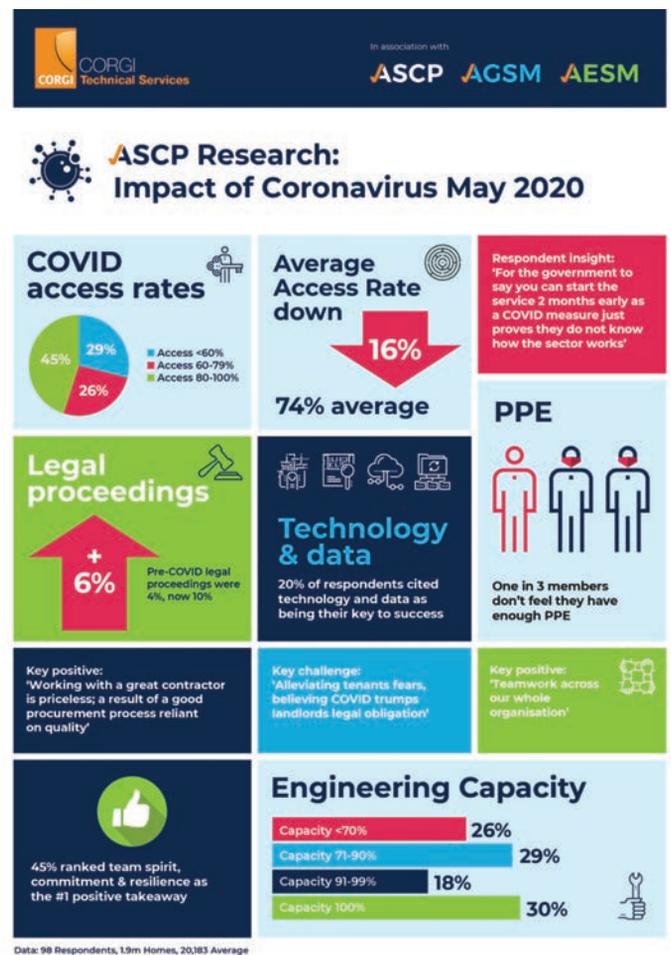
Whatever challenges a landlord faces in terms of gas safety, there are three areas that are pivotal in meeting regulatory demands: accurate data, fit for purpose systems and processes, and of course, effective communication – both within the organisation, with residents and with contractors

sector has much more knowledge and shared experience of how to access properties safely and allay residents' fears. It is believed that access will not drop as low as it did in the initial lockdown.

Still, landlords need to ensure they have the systems in place to record what servicing and parts replacement is required, at the manufacturers specified time intervals. If these are not conducted and/or not recorded correctly this can cause major issues. For instance, if a problem subsequently arises and the landlord is required to demonstrate ongoing maintenance to an external body, or there is a change of contractor part way through a servicing regime, there will be inadequate records to determine what stage of their service interval appliances are in.

Whatever challenges a landlord faces in terms of gas safety, there are three areas that are pivotal in meeting regulatory demands: accurate data, fit for purpose systems and processes, and of course, effective communication – both within the organisation, with residents and with contractors. Gas engineers must also be highly trained and supported to do their jobs safely.

Joe Beesley is technical safety manager at CORGI Technical Services.



New Year, new look. Same secure choice for fire safety

Sentry Doors, the fast-growing provider of fire safety doors to the social housing sector, is reflecting significant investment with a fresh new brand and website, showcasing its bespoke and fully compliant FD30 and FD60 fire safety door sets. Established in 1989 to offer a reliable solution to fire door safety the company has recently celebrated its 30-year anniversary and is going from strength to strength. With an established team, a catalogue of certification, and a product and service offering built on quality, the brand is well positioned as the supplier of choice for timber fire door sets. In celebration of this rich heritage and signifying strategic growth plans, the company is pleased and excited to announce a resigned and refreshed brand identity. The company is constantly developing their door sets to meet the very latest design and safety standards, so felt it only necessary to update the brand image too. This refreshed identity is being launched alongside a dynamic, redeveloped website which is designed to make it as easy as possible for customers to navigate through the extensive product range to find the fully certified timber fire door set they are looking for. This redeveloped website will include regular case studies, blogs, a virtual factory tour with many new features to be announced. Managing Director Ty Aziz sees this as an important step in celebrating the success of the business and preparing for future growth plans: "Sentry doors has built a strong reputation and even stronger customer relationships, and this is a vital step in solidifying this."

www.sentrydoors.co.uk



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Leeds improving the safety and wellbeing of residents with leading IoT provider HomeLINK

HomeLINK have been awarded a 12-month project with Leeds City Council in a move towards improving the safety and wellbeing of their residents with IoT (Internet of Things) technology.

The £500k investment from GovTech Catalyst for the district will see the deployment of up to 1,000 environment sensors such as temperature, humidity and CO₂ (Carbon Dioxide) in up to 1,000 of its homes. Approximately 50 of these properties will also include further smart technology, like the Aico SmartLINK Gateway, for the remote monitoring and management of fire and Carbon Monoxide alarm systems. Aico's SmartLINK Gateway 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 to improve efficiency, reduce costs, aid with forecasting and compliance and enable smart asset management.

Luke Loveridge, CEO of HomeLINK, comments: "We're thrilled to be working in partnership with Leeds City Council, the University of York and the University of Leeds on the next phase of this £500k GovTech challenge. Leeds is ambitious, forward thinking and at the cutting edge of the smart city agenda. Providing enough homes that are efficient, safe and supports people's health and wellbeing is of critical importance; especially as people have been spending significantly more time indoors recently. With a deployment of up to 1,000 smart homes, we will test and develop new maintenance and wellbeing services for social housing residents. I'm glad that we are part of a partnership that has the experience and technology to support Leeds in this journey."

This project, in partnership with the University of Leeds and the University of York, follows as

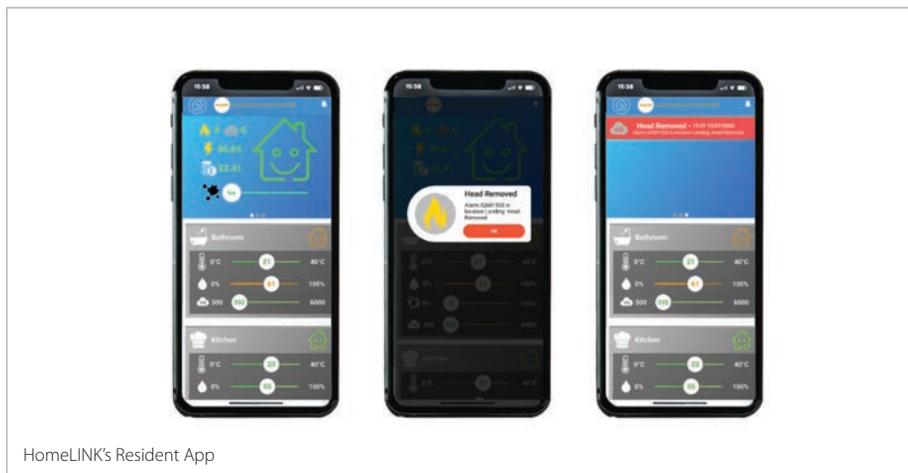


Phase Two from an earlier deployment in six properties. The initial phase included interviews, feedback and collaboration with over 100 residents, resulting in clear objectives for the second phase: integration of property management systems, mapping processes and the development of a resident app. The resident app is a vital component of the project as Phase One identified that by providing residents with their own data and suggested actions they could take reduced the risk of condensation, damp and mould. This project also had significant positive impact on relationships and engagement with residents, with all residents keen to participate in Phase Two.

"Housing is a recognised public health issue with

research evidence showing that poor housing presents a risk to both physical and mental health and wellbeing. This is why this project is really important and we're keen to work with innovative partners like Leeds City Council and HomeLINK." comments Dr Maria Horne, Associate Professor in Community and Public Health at the University of Leeds. Stephen Blackburn, Data and Innovation Manager for Leeds City Council states: "It's great to be able to continue working with HomeLINK on Phase Two of this government-funded GovTech Catalyst project. We're keen to promote Leeds as an innovative city where new technology can be tested and trialled. This project offers us a great opportunity to better understand how new technology and data insight can help us further improve the service we deliver our tenants."

The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York is one of Europe's leading centres for interdisciplinary housing and social policy research, with interests on housing and social justice, housing and later life and the operation of housing markets. Dr Alison Wallace, Research Fellow at the University of York comments of the project "Housing is a key determinant of people's health, so to work with HomeLINK, housing staff and tenants to explore the potential of IoT technologies to improve landlords and tenants responses to indicators of poor internal housing conditions is an exciting opportunity."



HomeLINK's Resident App

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Tel: 028 3836 4400
www.kingspanenv.com

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

Roofing

A Proctor Group
Tel: 01250 872261
www.proctorgroup.com

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

Ubbink
Tel: 01604 433000
www.ubbink.co.uk

Scaffolding & Safety Equipment

Layher Ltd
Tel: 01462 475100
www.layher.co.uk

Smoke & Fire Protection

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

BAFE
Tel: 844 335 0897
www.bafe.org.uk

Envirograf
Tel: 01304 842 555
www.envirograf.com

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

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

SE Controls
Tel: 01543 443060
www.secontrols.com

Whitesales
Tel: 01483 271371
www.whitesales.co.uk

Yeoman Shield
Tel: 0113 279 58 54
www.yeomanshield.com

Software Providers

Kirona
Tel: 01625 585511
www.kirona.com

Street Furniture

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

Tiling & Sealants

British Ceramic Tiles
Tel: 01626 834774
www.britishceramictile.com

Water Hygiene & Sanitation

Vexo International Ltd
Tel: 0207 953 1154
www.vexo-int.com

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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Connect your GLM 120 C with MeasureOn to make use if advanced documentation possibilities: Picture mode, Quick sketch, Detailed floor plans, Wall view and Area calculation



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$\alpha = \pm 60^\circ$

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Use the camera as viewfinder to see the target from a distance. The 5MP camera and zoom function allows for precision over large distances up to 120 m, outdoors and in complex surroundings



ZOOM