

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

OCT/NOV 2021



Big jump in
Ombudsman's
casework

High demand for
private rentals

Calls to drop £20
a week cut in UC



Gas safety &
repairs failures

Rogue landlords
not being tackled

Enhancing intercom access

Melissa Lloyd-Williams of Intratone
explores how access control technology
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Editor's comment

When will the message on tenancy standards get through?



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

When ITV News bulletins shone a light on some terrible conditions in the social housing sector, the viewers could have been forgiven for thinking these were exceptional cases affecting a very small minority of tenants, who were unfortunate in having unresponsive and uncaring landlords. The National Housing Federation who are the trade body for housing associations, mounted a stout defence of their members saying the small number of cases featured in the television bulletins were not typical, while reiterating the point that nevertheless they were still unacceptable. But move the dial on a few months and the Housing Ombudsman, which deals with complaints and queries from social housing tenants, has reported that in the three months, April to June this year, there was a 21 per cent jump in calls to his service from tenants seeking help with getting their complaints resolved. That is a staggering rate of increase and it suggests the sort of problems covered by the ITV investigators were not just "one offs" and they are more commonplace than the NHF suggested. It also shows that more and more tenants are becoming disengaged from and disenchanted with their landlords' complaints systems, processes and timescales. Too often these are bureaucratic, lengthy and stacked against the customer. Staff and organisations are not very good at holding their hands up and admitting that they have messed up and should have done a lot better. It's so much easier to close ranks, defend yourself and your colleagues while hiding behind a complicated procedure. Any normal person would rail against this!

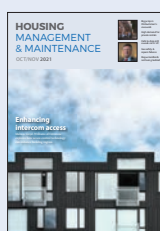
THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE

It is just over 11 years since the Coalition Government (remember them?) led by David Cameron ignited a bonfire of regulations and abolished the Audit Commission, who had been carrying out inspections of publicly funded services, including social housing. It also established a benign regulator, with a "hands off" approach to social landlords and their services. Social landlords were allowed to regulate themselves and tenants were expected to somehow become armchair auditors and whistleblowers, alerting the regulator to failures in service delivery. In the intervening period it is hard to argue that standards of rental properties and landlord services have improved. They have for some lucky tenants, but not for all. Hard evidence is difficult to come by but the anecdotal evidence is stacking up and it points downwards. It was just over 4 years ago that we had the awful tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire, but this was not an isolated incident and we have had fires in residential blocks both before Grenfell and subsequently. The Government is responding with various pieces of legislation focused on health and safety – ironically, the very type of regulation that was removed by Cameron, Osborne and Pickles – but it has arguably left behind a bigger, more intractable problem. That of the culture which exists across social housing and is endemic within many social landlords, which has left many thousands of tenants complaining about the stigma they feel because they cannot afford to buy their own home and as a consequence they live in accommodation rented from a council or housing association, being treated as second class citizens.

CULTURE CHANGE

So how can the culture of a sector providing homes and services to more than 4 million households be changed? There is little point relying on a system of fines for misdemeanours and bad behaviour. Penalising a corporate body or business will simply result in fewer resources being spent on tenant services. Fines or penalties in a service setting could of course be levied on key individuals – the directors of housing, the HA board members, the councillors in decision-making roles. One or two high profile examples would surely make the whole sector to sit up and take notice! But better still would be establishing a scheme or system in which all social landlords guaranteed to deliver certain standards of property (at a rent, a letting standard and future maintenance) and service levels, where those involved in decision making had to be trained and accredited (or they were barred from office), where landlords were subject to regular inspections and where tenants were included in all stages of the process from setting standards, accreditation and the triggering of short notice inspections of their landlord, or of a specific failing service. The power in the relationship needs to change and without this, I do not think the stigma issue will ever go away. This does not mean turning every social landlord into a co-operative (although that is an interesting idea), it means making it more of a true partnership where a tenancy agreement (or contract) actually stands for something and is not a badge of dishonour. Something similar could also be extended to private tenants and shared-owners if the social housing model worked.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Melissa Lloyd-Williams of Intratone explores how access control technology can enhance building accessibility. See page 48.

Photo by Nate Watson on Unsplash.com

100 organisations sign letter urging PM not to cut Universal Credit

100 organisations across the housing and charity sectors have joined efforts in urging the Prime Minister to not go ahead with the planned £20-a-week cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit in October. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has co-ordinated the Open Letter to Boris Johnson. Their research has found the following:

- 140 constituencies would see more than one in four of all families (with or without children) affected, including 36 Conservative seats;
- On average 21 per cent of all working-age families (with or without children) in Great Britain will experience a £1,040-a-year cut to their incomes on 6 October; and
- Over 400 constituencies are set to see over one in three working-age families with children hit by the cut.

The Government raised Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by £20 a week back in March 2020, but ministers at the Department of Work & Pensions have always claimed this was a temporary uplift. This was recently confirmed by Theresa Coffey, the DWP Secretary of State.

If it proceeds the cut will particularly impact on low income tenants and could undermine the cashflows of both social and private landlords, driving thousands of tenants further into rent arrears and at risk of eviction.

JRF say if the planned reduction takes place from 6 October, this will impose the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since the foundation of the modern welfare state.

“Our analysis has shown that 6 million low-income families will lose £1,040 from their annual income, creating serious financial hardship and leave 500,000 people to be swept into poverty - including 200,000 children. Families with children will be disproportionately impacted and worryingly, 6 in 10 of all single-parent families in the UK will be impacted.”

WIDESPREAD OPPOSITION

Politicians of all parties have warned against this cut and called for the investment to be made permanent, including Labour and SNP leadership, all six previous Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions since 2010, the Work and Pensions Committee, the Lords Economic Affairs Committee, the Conservative Northern Research Group and the Conservative One Nation Caucus.

As well as familiar names such as Oxfam, Save the Children, and the Trussell Trust, the signatories include the National Housing Federation, PlaceShapers, the Northern Housing Consortium, Shelter, Crisis, Business in the Community – a charity founded by the Prince of Wales – the Royal

College of Paediatricians and Child Health, and the Tory thinktank Bright Blue.

The letter comes as separate academic research revealed 63 per cent of people supported the £20 increase during the pandemic, and 50 per cent supported making it permanent, suggesting public support for retention remains strong.

Ben Baumberg Geiger, the joint leader of the project and a social policy lecturer at the University of Kent, said: “It would be easy to conclude that despite Covid-19, the public has little appetite for a more generous welfare system – but this would be wrong.

“Before the pandemic, attitudes had become more pro-welfare than the UK has seen in 20-30 years, and support for more generous benefits is even higher if this is linked to Covid-19. Public attitudes depend on how politicians talk about welfare, which means that the impact of Covid-19 on welfare attitudes and policies is all to play for.”

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER

THE RT HON BORIS JOHNSON MP,
PRIME MINISTER,
10 DOWNING STREET,
LONDON,
SW1A 2AA

“Dear Prime Minister, We are writing to collectively urge you not to go ahead with the planned £20-a-week cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit at the beginning of October.

Many of us provide frontline support in communities up and down our country and see first-hand the importance of our social security system. Life is full of crises that we cannot plan for, such as job loss or illness, and periods of lower earnings or caring responsibilities. We all need the security and stability of a strong lifeline, not just during a national crisis, but every day.

Imposing what is effectively the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since World War II will pile unnecessary financial pressure on around 5.5 million families, both in and out of work.

At the start of the pandemic, the Chancellor rightly said that he was introducing the £20 increase to “strengthen the safety net” – a tacit admission that a decade of cuts and freezes had left it unfit to provide the support families need. We all strongly supported this crucial improvement in support.

We are at risk of repeating the same mistakes that were made after the last economic crisis, where our country’s recovery was too often not felt by people on the lowest incomes. The erosion of social security support was one of the main drivers of the rise in in-work and child poverty, and contributed to a soaring need for food banks, rising debt and worsening health inequalities.

We deeply regret that the Department for Work & Pensions has not published its assessment on the impact of cutting Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit. However, the latest independent analysis from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) shows it risks plunging 500,000 people into poverty, including 200,000 children. It will take the main rate of out of work support down to its lowest levels in real terms since around 1990.

This is not a question of having to choose between a recovery based on getting people into jobs or investing in social security, in fact most families impacted by this cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit are already in work. The reality of the UK labour market means that to improve living standards, we need to both improve job quality and strengthen the social security system. We also must never lose sight of the need to provide adequate support to families who are not able to work so they can meet their needs with dignity.

Six former Conservative Work & Pensions Secretaries believe previous cuts to social security spending went too far and oppose this cut, and your own Conservative MPs are warning that it will have deep and far-reaching effects in their constituencies.

Recent analysis from JRF shows that 413 parliamentary constituencies across Great Britain will see over a third of working-age families with children hit by the planned cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit on 6 October 2021. Of these 413 constituencies, 191 are Conservative – 53 of which were newly won at the last general election or in a subsequent by-election.

This looming cut would fundamentally undermine the Government’s mission to level up. Citizens Advice has identified that people are one and a half times more likely to claim Universal Credit in places the Government has prioritised for levelling up investment. They also found for every £1 that could be invested from the Levelling Up Fund in England, £1.80 would be taken from these local economies if the Government presses ahead.

Furthermore, it is unacceptable that legacy benefits, such as Employment and Support Allowance, Jobseeker’s Allowance and Income Support, continue to be excluded from this crucial improvement in support, mostly impacting people who are sick, disabled or carers.

We are rapidly approaching a national crossroads which will reveal the true depth of the Government’s commitment to improving the lives of families on the lowest incomes.

We all want a social security system that supports families to escape poverty rather than pulling them deeper into it. However, this cut risks causing immense, immediate, and avoidable hardship. A strong social security system is a crucial first step to building back better. We strongly urge you to make the right decision.”

Complaints to Housing Ombudsman jump by over 20 per cent

Growing tenant dis-satisfaction with social landlords is revealed in the Housing Ombudsman's latest Insight report covering April to June 2021, which revealed a 21 per cent increase in the volume of enquiries and complaints received compared to the previous quarter.

The Housing Ombudsman's report covering the first quarter of 2021 shows it received 7,276 enquiries and complaints from tenants between April and June, up from 6,010 between January and March 2021.

This period coincided with a series of features broadcast by ITN News on shocking conditions experienced by residents on some social housing estates managed by both councils and housing associations. Long running disrepair cases, unhealthy living conditions and poor services all featured in the broadcasts.

Perhaps even more alarming, the Ombudsman's figures show that compared to the same quarter in 2020, the volume had risen by a staggering 230 per cent. The Ombudsman explained that between April and June 2020 his service experienced a reduction in work due to the Covid-19 lockdown coming into place.

There was a drop of 41 per cent in the enquiries and complaints received then compared to 2019. Over the course of 2020/21 the numbers picked up and then exceeded the previous year's figures for each quarter.

COMMON CAUSES OF MALADMINISTRATION

The Insight report also provides data for the South East and South West regions, together with six case studies concerning landlords in those areas. The most common reason for maladministration in the South West was complaint handling at 43 per cent, whereas in the South East property condition at 33 per cent was highest rated issue.

The report also contains a number of cases on anti-social behaviour, the third highest category of complaint in both regions, with a range of findings following investigations by the Ombudsman service. These point towards the Ombudsman being the organisation most likely to hold social landlords to account for service delivery failings.

The Social Housing Regulator in England has caused bafflement by treating some of the landlords featured in the ITN news features differently despite strong similarities in their cases. For instance it cleared Clarion of breaching its standards but found Croydon Council guilty of a breach. Reasons for the different findings by the regulator remain unclear.

Another large social landlord, L&Q was recently featured in a critical report by The Observer newspaper. Tenants on a west London housing estate managed by L&Q claim their health is being affected by damp, mould and vermin because their



The Housing Ombudsman's report covering the first quarter of 2021 shows it received 7,276 enquiries and complaints from tenants between April and June, up from 6,010 between January and March 2021

complaints have been ignored by their landlord, one of the country's largest housing associations, since 2018.

Sector commentators voiced concerns that senior executives and boards of housing associations have been focusing too much in recent years on building new homes at the expense of improving services to tenants. This is despite the appalling travesty of the Grenfell Tower fire some four years ago and the ensuing focus on listening to tenants.

RAISING AWARENESS

The Insight report will feature in the next Meet the Ombudsman event being hosted by Cornwall Council, giving residents in the area an opportunity to ask questions direct. These events are part of increasing engagement with residents to help raise awareness and understanding of our service.

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman, said: "This period has seen a further increase in complaints. There are several factors driving this including heightened awareness of the complaints process, and we expect a higher volume of casework to continue.

"As well as providing insight on the individual complaints we have received, these reports have an important role in sharing lessons from those more widely across the sector. Using this collective learning can help to resolve issues at a more local and earlier stage, for the benefit of both residents and landlords.

"Two cases involve anti-social behaviour and reinforce the need for action to be taken promptly whilst updating the resident as they are often living under stress. Our report also examines the role of mediation where there may still be a realistic prospect of resolving a complaint without carrying out a full investigation as it can help to restore a more trusting landlord-resident relationship."

The quarterly Insight reports are part of our continuing progress towards being a more open and transparent service and promoting positive change by sharing knowledge and learning from our casework. All issues are available on our website.

For further information on our Meet the Ombudsman events including how landlords can register interest in hosting an event, see our Meet the Ombudsman page.



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Ombudsman's online casebook shares more learning for the sector

Recent decisions by the Housing Ombudsman include cases concerning cladding and a shared owner wanting to sell her property, plus an issue resolved through mediation and a complaint about repairs and damage to property. The latest batch of decisions includes:

A finding of maladministration about L&Q for its handling of a shared owner's request for information to enable her to complete the sale of her property including information on the building's cladding. Although the landlord had taken some appropriate steps it failed to provide information that it could reasonably have been expected to provide and, given the resident's difficult situation, it should have taken her individual circumstances into account when making its decision. The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to apologise, pay £400 compensation, provide the outstanding information and consider any other actions it could take to assist the resident. The investigation found the landlord did not have a reverse staircasing policy and it was ordered to reconsider its position on reverse staircasing in exceptional circumstances. The landlord has now produced a policy on reverse staircasing;

A case concerning the level of compensation Peabody offered following a resident's complaint about its handling of a leak where the Ombudsman used its mediation process to resolve the dispute. The landlord had acknowledged its shortcomings in delivering the service and offered compensation totalling £2,223.89. The resident was not satisfied with the resolution and wanted the landlord to also cover the full cost of carpet installation at £1,200. Both the landlord and resident agreed to engage in the mediation process where they were assisted in reaching an agreement without the need for a formal investigation. The landlord agreed to pay an additional £600 for the cost of the carpet replacement; and

In a case about Birmingham City Council the Ombudsman found there was no maladministration for the resident's reports about repairs or damage to property as the landlord had taken appropriate steps to identify the repairs it was responsible for and arranged works. It had also given the resident a compensation form to make a financial claim. There was service failure as the landlord's final response on the complaint was not comprehensive and it had not kept records of its repair actions. In addition to ordering the landlord to pay compensation and update the resident on any

outstanding work, the Ombudsman recommended the landlord review its repairs and complaints record keeping, and its complaint handling in line with good practice and the Ombudsman's own published Complaint Handling Code.

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman, said: "Our online casebook continues to grow providing valuable insight and learning for the sector, in addition to our range of reports highlighting lessons on specific issues for landlords.

"Two of the cases included here refer to our thematic Spotlight reports. One of the three key actions in our Spotlight report on Dealing with cladding complaints was the need to address residents' individual circumstances and, where appropriate, to exercise discretion as with other complaints. I welcome that, in complying with our order, the landlord in this case has introduced a reverse staircasing policy.

"In our Spotlight report on Complaints about repairs we emphasised the importance of addressing all issues raised in a complaint and the need for clear, accurate and easily accessible record keeping. I would encourage landlords to make use of all the resources available on our website and benefit from lessons learned that we share across the sector."

Gas safety and repairs feature in Ombudsman decisions

Issues ranging from gas safety, repairs and anti-social behaviour were among a batch of critical decisions against social landlords to be published by the Housing Ombudsman.

The decisions are published by the Ombudsman service on their website, where they provide an ever-expanding resource to promote learning, fairness and accountability in the sector and demonstrate the difference complaints can make for individual residents and wider benefit.

They illustrate the type of outcomes following an investigation which, as well as maladministration, includes where no maladministration was found or where something has gone wrong but the landlord has provided appropriate redress. The online casebook has now expanded to over 500 individual decisions. Included in the latest batch of decisions to be published are:

A finding of maladministration about Notting Hill Genesis for its response to a resident's safety concerns about her boiler. An issue was identified that would have been long-standing but the boiler had passed previous gas safety checks. The landlord had not investigated the discrepancy. Given the

potential seriousness of the matter, the Ombudsman ordered that an independent investigation should be carried out to establish what went wrong and to identify any service improvements to prevent a similar situation happening again. The landlord was also ordered to carry out a case review to verify that its (and its gas contractor's) policies, procedures and working practices in regard to gas safety are fit for purpose;

A case about anti-social behaviour where no maladministration was found in Sovereign Housing Association's handling of the complaint but did recommend that it reviews its records management processes and systems, in addition to meeting with the resident to discuss any ongoing issues with noise transference; and

A case concerning ForHousing's handling of roof repairs and the resident's complaint. The Ombudsman found the landlord made reasonable redress for the failures in its handling of the roof repairs. It also found service failure for the complaint handling as the landlord did not convey its understanding towards the resident and the distress it caused her in its stage one response. It recommended that the landlord review

its repair procedures and acknowledged learning from the complaint to prevent similar failings happening again.

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman, said: "Our decisions promote fairness and accountability, and demonstrate the difference complaints can make. The group of cases highlighted show how we have sought to prevent issues reoccurring through a range of orders and recommendations. This includes a serious case involving gas safety, where the landlord responded constructively to our ordering an independent review following our investigation.

"I would encourage landlords to regularly use our decisions to help improve services and complaint handling. It also helps residents in understanding the issues we can consider and the decisions we make." New decisions are published every two weeks on the Ombudsman's website and the landlord in each case is identified. They are published three months after the decision date. As well as its decisions, the Ombudsman also publishes performance data reports on individual landlords as part of its drive to increase transparency across the social housing sector.



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Pandemic uncertainty pushes more tenants towards wanting long term tenancies

Research from build to rent specialists Ascend Properties, has highlighted the important role of the sector in meeting the needs of the modern-day tenant, as an overwhelming majority say they want longer tenancies.

The survey of over a thousand UK tenants commissioned by Ascend found that 93 per cent of those asked think that tenancies longer than 12 months should be more widely available within the UK rental market.

Some 81 per cent also stated that the pandemic and the turbulent rental landscape that emerged, as a result, have made them more likely to rent a property for longer than 12 months.

The driving factor behind tenant demand for longer-term tenancy agreements is the security they provide, with many having no choice but to move on at the end of the year should their landlord choose not to renew.

However, wider lifestyle choices also ranked high, with the opportunity to make a rental home feel more like their actual home placing as the second most influential reason.

The ability to better plan for the future also provides great appeal, with the ability to lay a stronger foundation within their personal life also ranking high. Other appealing factors included a greater sense of being part of the community and a more stable foundation for their professional life.

Managing Director of Ascend Properties, Ged McPartlin, commented: "It's clear to see why the build to rent sector is growing so rapidly as it clearly appeals to the needs of the modern-day tenant far more so than a traditional rental property.

"The ability to rent the same home for a far longer period of time is an integral part of this lifestyle shift and it's clear that it not only offers a greater sense of security, but also the opportunity to lay strong roots within a particular area without having to opt for the route of homeownership.

"Whether the Government will do more to offer long term tenancies across the board remains to be seen, but certainly for the time being, the build to rent sector continues to pick up the slack and provide the rental accommodation that residents want, rather than having little other choice but to inhabit."



Failure to tackle rogue landlords is putting tenants at risk

The Government needs to address a chronic failure to tackle rogue landlords who put tenants at risk, according to one of the biggest organisations representing private landlords.

With the Government pledged to publish a White Paper setting out proposed reforms for the private rented sector in England, the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) is warning that every measure in it will fail without robust action to root out rogue and criminal landlords.

Publishing its own shadow white paper for the sector, the NRLA points to figures previously cited by the Government which show that just 43 landlords are currently listed on the database of rogue landlords in England. This is despite Ministers' previous suggestion that up to 10,500 rogue landlords may be operating in the PRS.

Previous research by the NRLA reveals that the number of statutory provisions applying to England has risen by 40 per cent over the last decade to 168 pieces of legislation.

The NRLA says the conclusions demonstrate that local authorities' inability to enforce existing legislation, as opposed to a lack of powers, is the key problem in this area.

Figures released by Unchecked UK suggest that between 2009 and 2019 the amount spent on Local Authority Environmental Health Officers in England and Wales fell by around a third.

The NRLA is calling on the Government to conduct a full assessment of the ability of councils to enforce the wide range of powers already available to tackle rogue and criminal landlords. However, central government needs to provide upfront, multi-year funding to help local authorities to build the capacity to tackle bad practice.

NO FAULT REPOSSESSIONS

The proposals are among a number being put forward by the NRLA as the Government develops its plans for the sector, including the ending of Section 21, so called 'no fault' reposessions.

In calling for changes that work for both responsible landlords and tenants, the NRLA is proposing a system that provides a set of clear and comprehensive rights for landlords. This would give landlords the ability to take back possession of properties but would balance these additional rights with robust protections for tenants.

It is also calling for a new landlord/tenant dispute body, similar to the employment body ACAS, to enable landlords and tenants to reach agreement without the need to go to court. Where cases do end up in court they must be dealt with more efficiently, making use of video technology wherever possible. At present it can take around a year for a legitimate repossession claim to reach a conclusion.

Ben Beadle, Chief Executive of the National Residential Landlords Association, said: "We need to address the chronic failure to take action against rogue and criminal landlords. It puts tenants at risk and undermines the reputation of the overwhelming majority of landlords who play by the rules. As Ministers develop their plans for the sector, they need to be clear whether any of what they propose will be properly enforced.

"More broadly, it is vital that the forthcoming White Paper strikes a fair balance between the needs of both tenants and landlords. It is in that spirit that we continue to work with the Government and others to develop workable policies that protect tenants from bad landlords whilst ensuring good landlords have the confidence to provide the homes to rent the country desperately needs."

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England's leaky homes are a greater threat to climate than all of its cars

England's homes produce more carbon emissions every year than is produced by all of the country's cars, according to new research from the National Housing Federation. The representative body for HAs is calling on the Government to put £3.8bn into the retrofit of social housing at the upcoming Spending Review.

The research calculates for the first time that England's 25m homes – which produce 58.5m tonnes of CO₂ every year – emitting the equivalent of the average annual use of 28m cars. There are 27m million cars in use in England, emitting 56 million tonnes of CO₂ annually.

The emissions from homes are so high due to a combination of gas central heating and poor insulation, meaning heat easily leaks out of homes which then require even more gas to keep them warm enough. This means the average family or household in England is currently producing more CO₂ every year just by living in their home than they are by driving.

The findings highlight why it is critical that making the country's homes more energy efficient needs to be prioritised in order to meet the government's ambitious net zero by 2050 target, and ultimately lead the way in the deep cuts to carbon emissions urgently needed if we are to stabilize the rising temperatures, extreme heatwaves, droughts and flooding seen around the world this year.

However, many people are unaware of the issue or unable to make their homes greener. Recent research, for example, found that three in every five (60 per cent) homeowners do not think their home

energy use has much of an impact on carbon emissions. More than one in four homeowners (28 per cent) have no plans to make "eco-upgrades" to their homes in the next ten years.

INVEST IN RETROFITTING

The NHF is calling on the Government to put £3.8bn into the retrofit of social housing at the upcoming Spending Review. Social housing landlords can make their homes energy efficient at scale and have the necessary systems set up and ready to act. Unlike private landlords and homeowners they can retrofit whole streets, estates and even neighborhoods simultaneously.

In 2019 alone more than 100,000 social homes had their energy efficiency improved, but Government funding would enable housing associations to go further, getting the two million homes they own and manage to EPC C by 2030 and setting them up to go on to be fully carbon neutral. Achieving carbon neutrality for these homes would be the equivalent of taking 1.8m cars off the road indefinitely – the equivalent of all of the cars in Manchester and Birmingham combined.

Kate Henderson, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation, said: "For too long the impact of housing on climate change has been overlooked. While we've become more conscious of the vehicles we drive, the amount we recycle and what we eat, these shocking new figures must now force us to recognise the enormous role our draughty homes are having. If we don't start making serious progress on decarbonising and retrofitting our homes, we



won't achieve the government's target of net-zero by 2050.

"It's critical that we act now. Housing associations are already planning to invest billions in retrofitting their homes, but we can't do it alone. With support from the Government there's a clear opportunity here to retrofit millions of homes at scale and pace. That's why it's vital the Government delivers on its pledge of £3.8bn for retrofitting social homes in the Spending Review this year. We can then work together to help the country lead the way in climate friendly, net-zero housing."

Landlords are failing tenants with cheap, dated and unhygienic furnishings

An expert in build-to-rent furnishing solutions, has found the majority of UK tenants moving into furnished rentals are living with furniture that is unfit for purpose, often being cheap and of poor quality.

For many tenants, a furnished rental property is the preferable option as it saves a great deal of hassle on moving day, while others simply do not own much furniture in the first place.

Previous research by Manor Interiors found that 66 per cent of tenants would pay more to

secure a well-furnished rental property, although the quality of the furniture was also an important factor.

However, it seems landlords are letting themselves down in this respect, as Manor Interiors has now revealed that 59 per cent of tenants found the items in their furnished rental property simply were not fit for purpose.

When asked what the predominant reason was, 26 per cent stated that the furniture supplied was cheap and of poor quality. Old and dated furniture (at 23 per cent) was the next biggest issue with furnished rental home furniture, while the third biggest gripe for tenants (20 per cent) was the fact that the furniture was dirty or unhygienic - a worrying revelation in COVID times.

Some found that the furniture in their rental property was in disrepair, while comfort was also an issue for others. Thankfully, furniture that was dangerous and could cause injury was the least most prominent issue, although some tenants still found it to be the case, which is unacceptable.

CEO of Manor Interiors, Farhan Malik, commented: "The modern-day tenant craves convenience and a furnished property will provide great appeal to the majority, who simply don't want the arduous task of moving heavy furniture items in and out of rental properties every time they move.

"However, in this day and age and with rents as high as they are, they also expect a certain level of quality and so it's simply not enough to fill a rental property with inadequate items of furniture. Unfortunately for most tenants, they won't notice these furniture shortfalls until they have moved in and this can see them left with items that simply aren't fit for purpose for the duration of their tenancy.

"It doesn't matter if you own one buy-to-let, an extensive portfolio, or you're looking to furnish a full build-to-rent development, quality, bespoke furniture can be secured for less than you might think. Any furnishing company worth their salt will be able to furnish or provide replacement items, within 24 to 48 hours and so there's no excuse to leave a tenant high and dry."

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Private landlords urged to prepare for stricter energy laws

Property owners and landlords need to start preparing now for the arrival of stricter energy performance laws in the coming years or risk major disruption, cost increases and other business threats.

The private rented market is the second biggest sector in country and it is estimated that up to 3 million properties would fail to meet required standards for letting properties to tenants. Failing to make improvements could force landlords to leave properties empty, while they try to find contractors and materials in what will be a very competitive market.

Leeds-based building consultancy, C80 Solutions, is urging landlords to get ahead of their rivals in the rental sector.

With thousands of properties likely to need significant energy performance upgrades, C80 Solutions believes that many landlords and building owners would benefit from an early assessment of their expected requirements to ensure they manage the necessary investments and meet the new standards in time.

The Government's Minimum Energy Performance of Buildings Bill was introduced earlier this month and will be debated by MPs in the autumn, paving the way for legislation which will require all private rented sector homes to be Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band C by 2028. The Government has also outlined targets which will have major implications for owner occupiers, mortgage lenders and commercial lettings.

Harry Hinchliffe, Energy Consultant and BREEAM Assessor at C80 Solutions, said: "The bill is a key driver in the commitments set out in the Energy White Paper and subsequent policy statements. It will have a widespread impact



"Recent studies have suggested that around 2.9m homes will need to improve to meet the proposed change"

Dan Chadwick, Energy & Sustainability Consultant at C80 Solutions

on the UK's property sector, affecting a large percentage of people and businesses with a property investment.

"Its objectives include non-domestic commercial lettings to achieve EPC band B by 2030 and homes to be EPC band C by 2035 where practicable, cost effective and affordable. It will also affect financial services as mortgage lenders will be required to ensure an EPC band C average for their portfolios by 2030."

Dan Chadwick, Energy & Sustainability Consultant at C80 Solutions, said: "Recent studies have suggested that around 2.9m homes will need to improve to meet the proposed changes, with an estimated average cost of £9,872 per home and a total cost of £29 billion across the sector. Although the legislation needs to follow the usual process of parliamentary scrutiny, the bill is seen as an essential step in achieving carbon net zero – there is

a clear direction of travel towards a much higher standard of energy efficiency and it's unlikely to meet much resistance from MPs, especially in the context of the latest alarming reports about the climate emergency.

He added: "An increase in minimum EPC from E to C is a substantial rise. With that in mind, many individuals and organisations would be wise to start the process of examining their properties and estates. For some, early planning could be vital in phasing the work and the costs required to achieve 100 per cent compliance."

C80 Solutions provides expertise encompassing all aspects of Building Regulations and environmental performance, including energy, air tightness, sound testing, environmental noise and thermal modelling. Its services support construction across both the commercial and domestic sectors.

Materials supply crisis continues to curtail builders' recovery

Building and property maintenance firms are facing enormous challenges as they attempt to recover from the pandemic with a long-lasting crisis in the price and availability of vital building materials now facing them.

Brian Berry, Chief Executive of the Federation of Master Builders, said: "Builders throughout the UK,

particularly smaller firms, are struggling to recover from the pandemic as a result of the continued materials crisis. For some time now, demand for building materials has been outstripping supply, with this month's data representing the second-fastest rate for input cost inflation since recording began.

He continued: "The FMB's latest membership survey revealed the prevalence of this crisis within the sector, with 98 per cent of FMB members experiencing price increases for building materials. It's vital that transparent allocation and pricing policies are implemented to help enable SMEs to have continued and stable access to materials. The Government should also re-evaluate their position with regard to issuing temporary visas for EU HGV drivers, to better enable the delivery of materials."

The supply chain for most imported materials

and goods had already been badly affected by unprecedented demand levels in North America, China and across Asian markets. The blockage of the Suez Canal earlier in the year added to problems and unusual weather patterns across the globe have seen forest fires, flooding and hundreds of thousands of homes damaged.

Berry continued: "Notwithstanding the wider economic impact risked by consumers choosing not to undertake building projects as a result of delays, there is also a real risk that the current environment is exploitable by cowboy builders. Builders are working hard to stick to agreed timelines, but consumers must be cautious about promises to complete jobs quickly and cheaply. All too often these will be too good to be true, and could well leave households at the mercy of unscrupulous cowboy builders."

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HA in Stoke non-compliant after failing to complete fire safety work

A small housing association has been given a non-compliant governance rating and was found to have breached the Home Standard after an investigation by the social housing regulator uncovered a failure to carry out fire safety work and other problems with the board's oversight.

The Regulator of Social Housing downgraded Empowering People Inspiring Communities (EPIC) to a rating of G3/V2 and announced that the 1,400-home housing association had breached the Home Standard. The downgrade came just eight months after it received the highest possible rating of G1/V1 in December last year.

The regulator said it acted after identifying concerns with EPIC's health and safety compliance. Routine enquiries made following the return of its quarterly survey showed that EPIC had been aware it needed to carry out "significant" fire safety work for a number of years but had failed to do so.

Fire risk assessments in 2013 and 2018 had identified that EPIC needed to install fire doors in a significant number of blocks of flats, but this work was not completed.

EPIC was also alerted by the fire service in 2019 that new fire doors needed to be installed in its flats, while further fire risk assessments carried out in 2020/21 again highlighted the risk, as well as the need for EPIC to improve its fire alarms and compartmentation. Overall EPIC had almost 500 fire safety remedial actions classified as high risk and overdue.

The regulator also found that more than 100 domestic properties did not have an electrical inspection within the past 10 years, while EPIC had also not carried out asbestos surveys for a number of properties.

EPIC was now completing the fire remediation work, but was found to have breached the Home



EPIC had been aware it needed to carry out "significant" fire safety work for a number of years but had failed to do so

Standard due to "the seriousness of the issues, the durations for which tenants were potentially exposed to risk, and the number of tenants potentially affected".

The regulator also said it downgraded EPIC to G3 as the board has "failed to provide challenge to the executive and has not maintained adequate oversight of its activities, particularly in relation to its health and safety obligations".

The regulator's judgement said "the fact that it was the regulator, not EPIC's board, that discovered the potential breach is an indication of significant weaknesses in EPIC's business planning, risk management and financial reporting processes".

The regulator also highlighted the board's recent

decision to approve the purchase of 170 homes from another registered provider when EPIC's growth strategy only allows for the acquisition of 50 homes per year.

The regulator has "appointed external advisors to provide support and help identify the causes of the presenting issues" and said EPIC has "indicated its commitment to putting things right".

On financial viability, EPIC was downgraded from V1 to V2, meaning it is still compliant but "needs to manage material risks to ensure continued compliance". The risks mainly relate to "significant one-off expenditure relating to fire safety works", which will impact EPIC's ability to respond to adverse events until 2023/24.

Housing minister slammed after swerving building safety

Housing Minister Christopher Pincher failed to mention the building safety crisis affecting thousands of leaseholders and landlords across the country when giving a speech to the Chartered Institute of Housing's annual conference.

The pre-recorded speech was given to delegates on day one of the housing sector's biggest conference of the year. Instead Mr Pincher focussed entirely on the new Affordable Homes Programme, decarbonisation and upcoming planning reforms.

After the speech, various figures criticised the Minister for failing to mention building safety or the Social Housing White Paper. Eamon McGoldrick, of the National Federation of

ALMOs, said it was "really strange" there was no reference to building safety as the Fire Safety Bill had recently passed and the Building Safety Bill was currently progressing.

Kate Henderson, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, commented on the omission: "It's the biggest challenge we face. It's a non-negotiable issue for us. The safety of residents is our number one priority. We didn't hear enough about the consumer – our residents, who are at the heart of everything we do."

James Prestwich, director of policy and external affairs at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said there was a lot in the speech about houses and homes, but not enough about the people living in them. "I would have liked to have heard more about

tenants and about residents across all tenures," he said.

Instead Mr Pincher highlighted the investment being put into affordable housing by the Government, saying the new Affordable Homes Programme would fund 32,000 new social rent homes, double the number when compared with the last programme. He said consultation on planning reforms had produced 44,000 responses.

But speaking after the speech, Mr McGoldrick criticised the Government for focusing "too much on supply and cherry blossoms", in reference to Mr Pincher's promise that the Government would alter the National Planning Policy Framework to create "cherry blossom streets" similar to those seen on Champs-Élysées in Paris.

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Large HA criticised for failing residents over several years

Tenants on a west London housing estate claim that problems with damp, mould and vermin in their homes are being ignored by their social landlord three years after they were first reported.

The Observer newspaper initially covered problems on the estate in 2018 and recently conducted a follow-up investigation. It was told by tenants that L&Q is still failing to address reports of unsafe and insanitary accommodation. A resident of one block, Antaine O'Brian was quoted as saying he and fellow residents have spent six years trying to resolve problems of damp and rotting windows.

"Rainwater drips on to the electricity meter cupboard, some residents are scared to open their windows for fear the frame will fall out, as has happened already, none of the flats have adequate central heating and the basement is so overrun with vermin that rubbish collectors refuse to enter the bin area," he said. "L&Q promised renovations would begin in 2018 and then in 2019, but nothing happened and the place is falling apart."

The Observer also highlighted the case of a domestic abuse survivor who said she contemplated suicide after three years of leaks and mould in her

The Observer also highlighted the case of a domestic abuse survivor who said she contemplated suicide after three years of leaks and mould in her own L&Q flat. She says the association ignored her requests to be rehoused even after her bathroom ceiling collapsed due to leaks from a flat above

own L&Q flat. She says the association ignored her requests to be rehoused even after her bathroom ceiling collapsed due to leaks from a flat above.

In July L&Q agreed to find her a new home after The Observer intervened, and she was offered compensation for her damaged possessions. A spokesman said the woman's experience had been "unacceptable" and it was launching an investigation into the repairs service's failings.

L&Q has devised a five-year plan to tackle customer service failings and aims to invest £1.9 billion in its housing stock. It will include a wide range of improvements, including works to maintain Decent Homes standards, major internal

and external works, estate improvements, fire safety and energy works to reduce carbon emissions.

It has also created a new housing management division overseen by Gerri Scott and an L&Q tenant will be appointed to a newly launched resident services board to ensure tenants' concerns are heard.

Gerri Scott, Group Director of Customer Services at L&Q, said: "This programme puts much needed investment into L&Q's homes and will be driven and overseen by our Residents Services Board. They will advocate on behalf of all residents to ensure that the programme delivers to timescale, is value for money and high quality."

North East England on the verge of a rental market boom

Nationwide buy-to-let specialist Sequire Property Investment, believes the North East is on the verge of a rental market boom, with investment in the Tees Valley helping to drive tenant demand in the area.

The North East is fast becoming the focus for housing investment having previously sat in the shadows of the North West. House prices in the region have climbed considerably in the last year, up 11.8 per cent which is the second-highest rate of growth of all regions.

Nissan recently revealed its Sunderland car factory would create 400 jobs in the area, while the redevelopment of Teesside's Redcar Steelworks is expected to bring a further 18,000 jobs, creating the UK's largest Freeport in the process.

This incoming investment is already showing signs of stimulating the local property market according to figures released by Sequire Property Investment, which show rental demand in the North East is currently at 42 per cent, higher than both the North West (40 per cent) and England as a whole (39 per cent).

Within the Tees Valley area, in particular, Darlington is home to the highest level of rental demand at 52 per cent, with Redcar and Cleveland

"We've seen more and more investors within the buy-to-let space opt to invest outside of London due to the more favourable yields on offer and, as a result, the North West has been performing very well in recent years.

Daniel Jackson, Sales Director at Sequire Property Investment

(46 per cent) also seeing tenant demand for rental homes sit well above the regional average.

Middlesbrough is the least in demand at 21 per cent, but is providing potential for further growth.

Further analysis of the rental market by Sequire Property Investment also shows that these areas present a very good opportunity for buy-to-let investors due to varying levels of rental stock availability to meet current and growing demand.

Across both Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton on Tees, just 16 per cent of all dwellings sit within the private rental sector, coming in below the national average of 19 per cent. Hartlepool is also home to a below-average level of rental homes at 18 per cent, while Middlesbrough (20 per cent) and Darlington (21 per cent) sit marginally higher.

Sales Director at Sequire Property Investment, Daniel Jackson, commented: "We've seen more and more investors within the buy-to-let space opt to invest outside of London due to the more favourable yields on offer and, as a result, the North West has been performing very well in recent years.

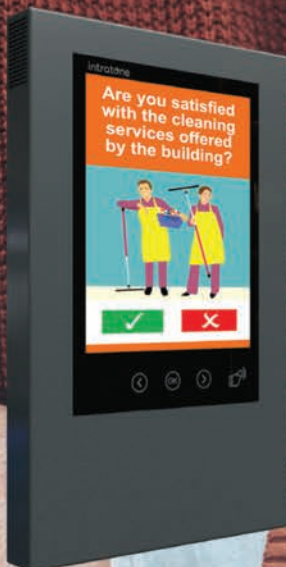
"The focus certainly seems to be shifting to the North East as the next area of substantial growth and investors are eying the potential returns that may come due to substantial projects like the redevelopment of the Redcar Steelworks. Firm foundations of a strong rental market are already in place across the Tees Valley area, but when you also factor in the potential shortage of existing stock in some areas, it presents a great opportunity for those considering an investment into the buy-to-let sector."

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INDUSTRY VIEWFINDER

Delivering better fire safety

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite disasters such as the Lakanal House fire in 2009, the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, the widespread condemnation of poor practices that have followed each of these, or the promises that such horrors will never again be allowed to happen, fires in housing continue to occur, and continue to prove deadly.

Even as the Grenfell Inquiry progresses at the time of writing – four years after the tragedy occurred, and after more promises have been made – there are still tower blocks across the country whose owners are yet to start removing the aluminium composite material cladding identified as dangerous.

One of the few silver linings of late is that landlords and tenants are arguably more aware of the risks than ever, and strict standards – such as the Building Safety Bill going through parliament – are being introduced to provide residents and homeowners with more rights, power and protections, and overhaul regulations to help keep buildings safe and compliant.

Right now however, Housing, Management and Maintenance's research of housing professionals has shown that there are still huge risks present in the industry. Our survey revealed that 1 in 5 (22%) potentially lethal failed fire risks assessments take from three months to a year to be addressed, and that a shocking 16% of respondents have been put in a position where it would be uncomfortable to report fire safety issues or malpractice to a superior or relevant authority.

On a more positive note, the research indicated a widely agreed, achievable solution that can demonstrably lower fire risk in the first place: ensuring that landlords and housing associations can clearly identify the most up to date fire safety products, install and maintain them in the correct manner, and use them to the best of their ability.

While this may seem like a simple solution to a deadly problem, however, there are many barriers to the adoption of such technologies, and not all products are created equally – with 85% of our respondents arguing that 'better' fire safety products can significantly reduce fire risk.

Some of the major barriers to adopting such products listed by our respondents were varied – with cost being the highest, followed by a lack of Government support, as well as a lack of trust in product manufacturers following the Grenfell disaster – with a third (35%) of respondents reporting that it fairly or very negatively impacted this trust.

This research study aims to explore what landlords and housing professionals believe makes a product 'better', how they believe fire risk can be best reduced, what brings greatest risk of fire to their properties, why they believe these risks remain, and the fire safety products they are most trusting of.

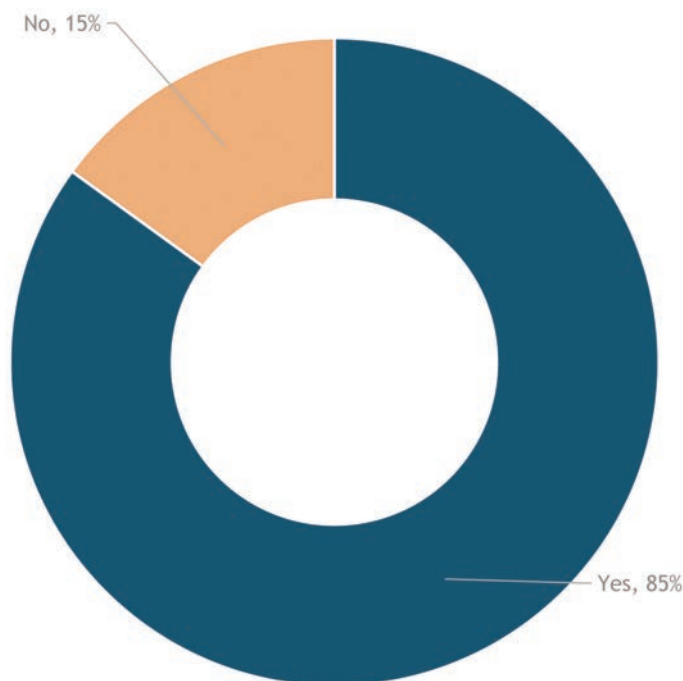
INTRODUCTION

FIRE FATALITIES

Despite the UK's long history of fire safety legislation – reaching from the first act in England that regulated construction of buildings and roads with the aim of fire prevention, passed shortly after the Great Fire of London of 1666, to the first set of national building standards introduced in 1965, to the Building Safety Bill currently going through Parliament – fires in UK housing are no thing of the past.

Deadly fires have continued to occur in recent years – with an estimated 200 house-fire deaths recorded every year in the UK.

In 2009, six people died in a tower block fire inside Lakanal House in South London, with widespread industry outcries, inquiries concluding that there was unsafe renovation work and the council had failed to inspect the building correctly, and claims from those involved that it could never happen again.



"In your experience, do 'better' fire safety products significantly reduce risk?"

Deadly fires have continued to occur in recent years – with an estimated 200 house-fire deaths recorded every year in the UK

Then, in 2017, seventy-two people were killed at Grenfell Tower, in West London, one of the UK's worst modern disasters. The ongoing Grenfell Inquiry was created to investigate the circumstances behind the fire, and has so far seen evidence of 'woefully inadequate' smoke ventilation, mis-specified and arguably mis-sold cladding, unheard residents, poor escape plans, and much more, with calls from across the country echoing the same sentiments that followed Lakanal House: this can never happen again.

THE HACKITT REVIEW

There are of course many failings behind such disasters and their continuation – and they have not gone unnoticed.

Post-Grenfell, the Government commissioned an independent review of the building regulations and fire safety. Named the Hackitt Review – after its leader, Dame Judith Hackitt – the 50-recommendation report examined fire safety in housing, including the regulatory system around its design, construction and maintenance, issues around compliance and enforcement, and international regulation and expertise in this area.



The recommendations included suggestions that the roles and responsibilities of those procuring, designing, constructing and maintaining buildings are unclear, that regulations and guidance are ambiguous and inconsistent, competence across the system is ‘patchy’, and the voices of residents often go unheard.

According to our research, housing professionals have been broadly positive about these recommendations. While a modest majority (63%) of our respondents said they have been following the Hackitt Review, 82% of those who had agreed that the proposed measures go far enough, with one respondent calling it “a restart for the industry,” and another that “it’s comprehensive given what can realistically be achieved.”

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

One such area that can be ‘realistically achieved,’ and in which Hackitt made multiple suggestions for, was in the specification of fire safety products. In her review, Hackitt argued that some “treat the minimum standards in the Approved Documents as a high bar to be negotiated down,” and that the sector “must begin thinking about buildings as a system so that we can consider the different layers of protection that may be required to make that building safe on a case-by-case basis.”

She underlined that “products used throughout the life cycle of a building have a critical impact on its safety” – pointing the finger of responsibility not just at the builders of such properties, but at those maintaining them. Landlords and housing associations can therefore address their responsibility head-on by exceeding the minimum standards wherever possible, and using ‘better’ products to provide such essential functions – or at the very least not cutting corners. It must first be made clear however what makes a ‘better product’, what products or other failures are causing the fires in the first place, and how quickly these issues are identified and addressed.

FIRE RISK IDENTIFICATION

In the UK, there are approximately 37,000 house fires a year, which, as indicated earlier, include 200 fire-related deaths; the majority of the latter occurring within the home between 10pm and 6pm, when residents are asleep. The nocturnal nature of these fires is largely attributed to a lack of awareness – with your sense of smell decreasing to almost nothing when asleep – and as

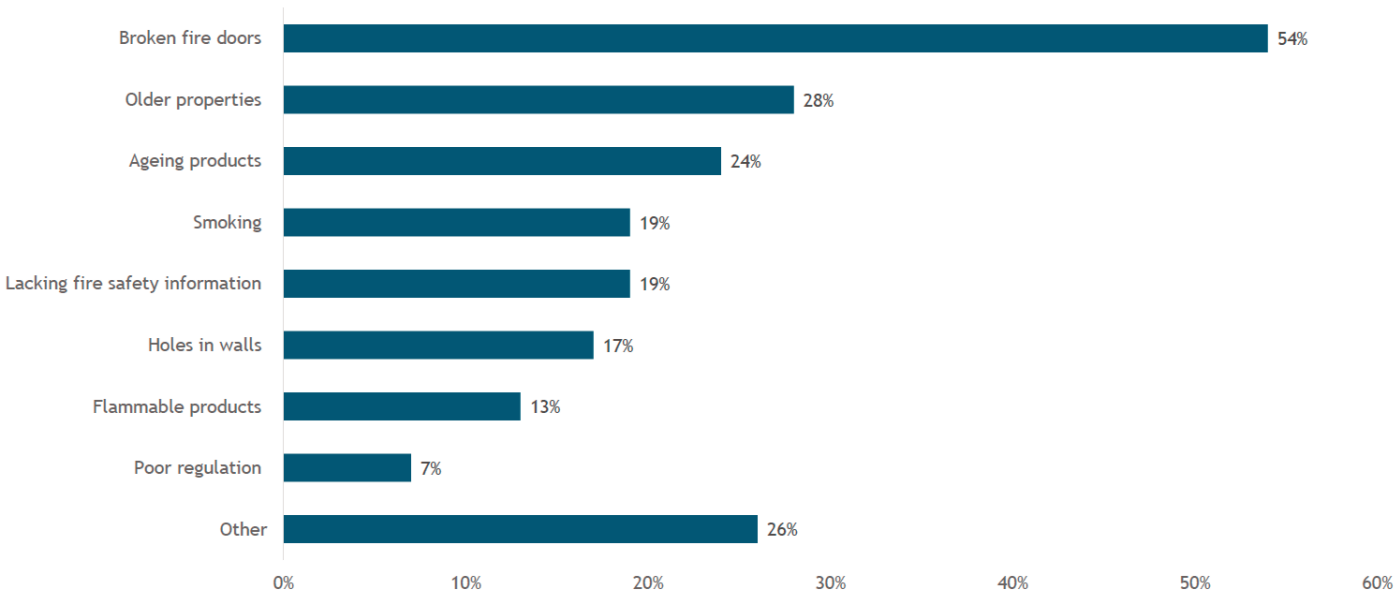
With a clearly delineated route to identifying fire risk in housing, the questions remain, who is responsible for addressing these issues, and why do these risks remain present?

such, fire safety products can be the only barrier here between life and death, making the identification of any potential faults in these products vital. Since October 2006, Fire Risk Assessments have been a legal requirement under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, with regular fire risk assessments now being an essential tool in identifying any gaps in these barriers, and highlighting where fire is most likely to occur, and what can be done to prevent it.

The vast majority of our respondents reported that regular fire assessments are conducted on each property under their company’s remit, with 7% doing so every month, 4% every three months, 12% every six, and 59% every year. There were however 13% that only do so every two years or more, and a shocking – though small – 4% who’s properties never undergo fire risk assessments. Of those who did conduct assessments, when asked how often these assessments passed, the average was 77.98% (answering between less than 10% and 100%). While this may seem fairly high, it means that 1 in 5 assessments highlighted a potentially fatal risk, again indicating their importance. While there were a range of issues – some focussed on tenant negligence such as candles and smoking, for example – the majority of the causes of these failures were issues with poor or older products and properties. Broken fire doors was the most common cause of failure among our respondents, at 54%, followed by older properties (28%), ageing products (24%), smoking (19%), lacking fire safety information (19%), holes in walls (17%), flammable products (13%), and poor regulation (7%).

ACTION

With a clearly delineated route to identifying fire risk in housing, the questions remain, who is responsible for addressing these issues, and why do these risks remain present?



“What are the main causes of fire risk assessment failures?”

Catching near misses

Only 1 in 4 fires are known to UK Fire & Rescue Services

FireAngel Connected highlights the unrecorded 3 fires in our communities and when paired with **Predict™** provides live data driven referrals, supporting active intervention to reduce the probability of future fire incidents.



○ Security

○ Environmental

○ Carbon Monoxide

○ Fire

FireAngel CONNECTED

Find out how we can reduce fire risk in your local community at fireangel.co.uk/connected

Our survey indicated that confusion around responsibility affects the continuation of such risks, with a clear lack of clarity present. When asked who the main onus should be on for rental accommodation fire safety, 49% said it should be landlords, with building owners just behind at 35%, builders at 2%, and local councils at 2%, with other responses including ‘all of the above’.

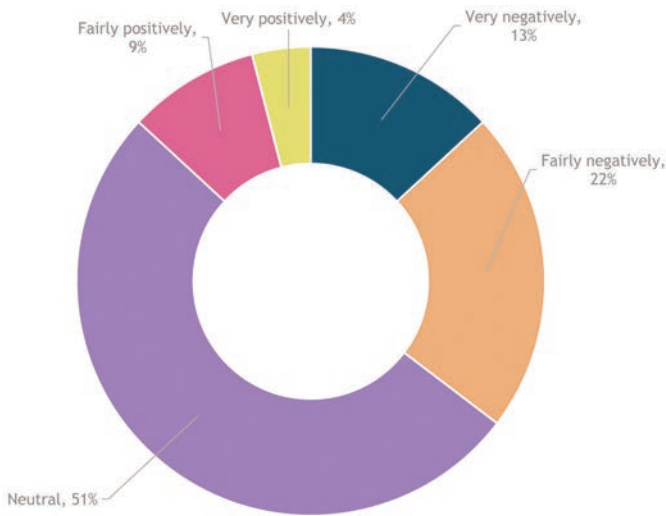
It is arguable also that this contributes to the relatively slow response time in addressing any highlighted failings in fire risk assessments. According to our respondents, it takes an average of 42.6 days to address such failures – leaving the average tenant vulnerable to potentially deadly fires for over a month.

When asked what they believe are the main reasons these risks remain present, the most frequent ‘significant reason’ listed in our survey, at a small majority (53%), was costs – with the above finger-pointing likely to cause issues with who foots the bill. This was followed by a wide range of significant reasons, including flammable products (46%), a lack of Government support (45%), tenants (41%), poorly maintained stock, (38%), lack of council funding (35%), cheap products (34%), uninformed tenants (28%), poor legislation (28%), malicious tenants (26%) and landlord malpractice (24%).

One area noted – which negates any potential remedial work post fire risk assessments – are barriers to reporting risks in the first place, with 15% of our respondents listing it as a significant reason. Similarly, as indicated earlier, when asked whether respondents had ever been put in a position where it would be uncomfortable to report fire safety issues, 16% said they had been at some point, with 15% of those still in such a position, and 11% of those who hadn’t, knowing someone who had. While these represent a small portion of our respondents, the consequences of a single unreported fire risk can be dire.

Another cause of continued risk mentioned was ‘untrustworthy manufacturers’, with 15% of respondents believing it to be a significant reason.

Trust in manufacturers has been reported to fall post-Grenfell, but this was not a view shared by all in our research. A minor majority (51%) reported that the disaster had not made them feel anything at all about product manufacturers, and 9% and 4% even noted that their trust had been fairly or very positively impacted by the event, respectively. There were however 22% of respondents for whom it fairly negatively impacted their trust in manufacturers, and 13% negatively – with respondents explaining that manufacturers must simply produce “better,” “more high quality products,” “be honest,” and conduct “robust testing.”



“In the years following Grenfell disaster, how has your trust in product manufacturers been affected?”

A recurring theme in our survey, it is clear that one of the stronger solutions to preventing fire risk in the first place is to use ‘better’ products – which as above were argued to produce significantly reduced fire risk by 85% of our respondents.

It is not always easy, however, to identify what makes a product ‘better.’

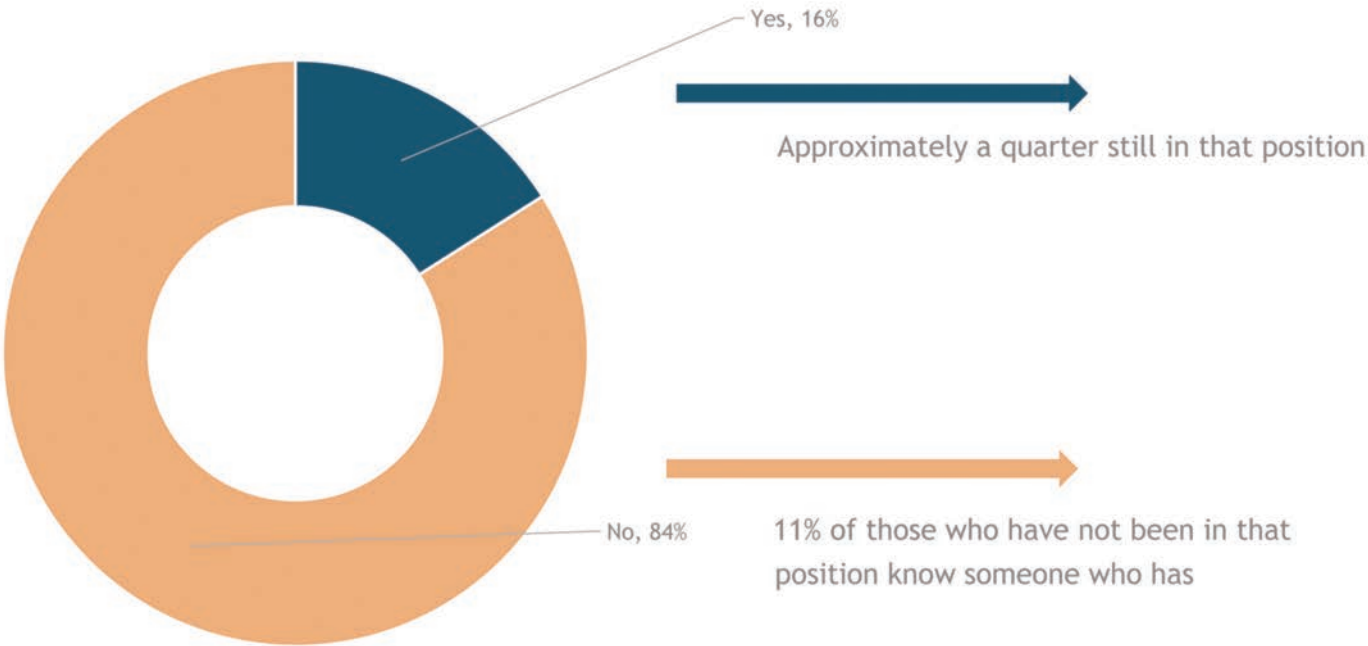
SPECIFICATION

‘BETTER’ PRODUCTS

Fire safety products are not created equally, and definitions of a ‘better’ product varied somewhat between our respondents – though some constants were agreed across the vast majority.

Reliability was one near-constant, with 91% of respondents agreeing it defines a ‘better’ fire safety product.

For over half of respondents, durability (72%), detailed information (61%),



“In your career, have you ever been put in a position where it would be uncomfortable to report fire safety issues or malpractice to a superior or relevant authority, or that your voice would not be heard in the matter?”

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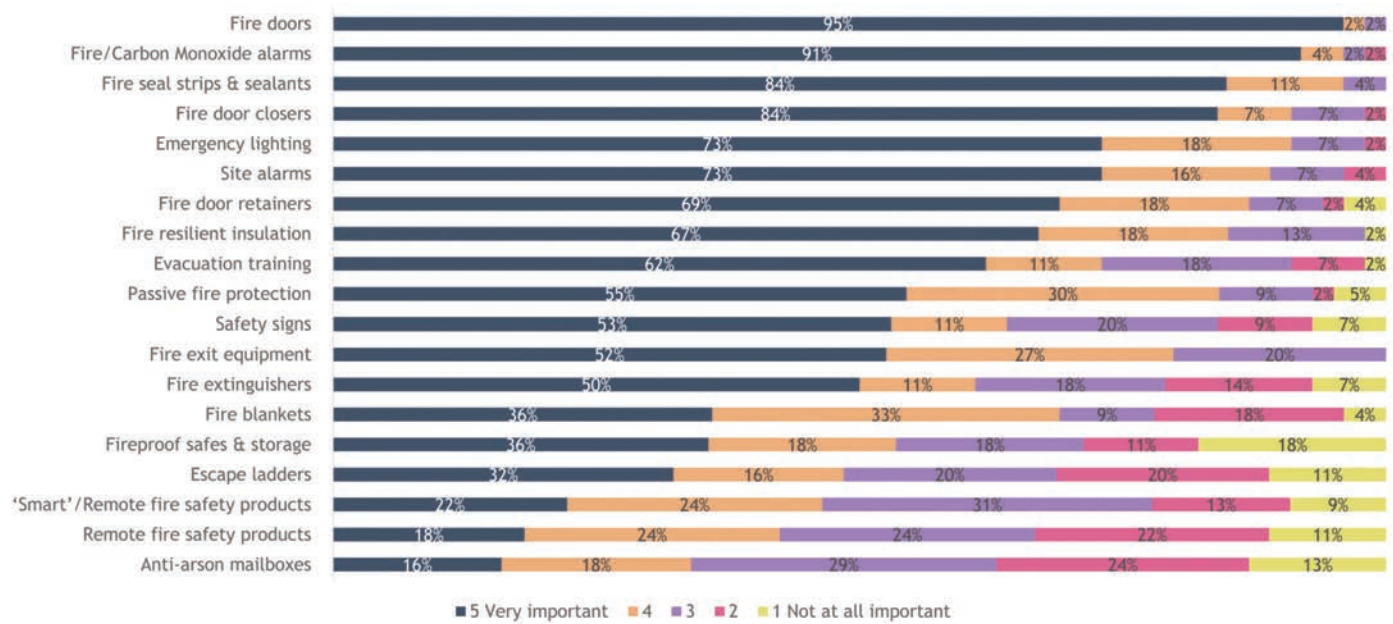
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“How important do you believe the following fire safety products are? Please select one per row using scale, where 1 is ‘not at all important’ and 5 is ‘very important’”

ease of use (59%), and a trusted brand (59%) defined ‘better’ products.

Following these, in descending order, were installation guides (48%), manufacturer-led installers (41%), recommendations (39%), and remote access (28%).

One area where respondents were at odds with each other was on cost – with 20% arguing that higher costs was one definition, and 20% saying lower costs fulfilled this.

THE STAGES OF A FIRE

Just as there are variations in quality, there are also a range of different styles of fire safety products, all catering for fire protection at different stages of a fire’s development.

With each providing a different function to help save residents, our research showed a range of trust in these differing product types.

PREVENTION

Unless a fire is very small, it is advised that residents evacuate a building to a place of safety and call the fire brigade. Where such small fires do occur, however, fire blankets and extinguishers are able to restrict the development of a fire and quell it in its early stages.

When asked how important fire extinguishers are from not at all important to very, 7% regarded fire extinguishers as not at all, 14% as not important, 18% neutral, 11% quite important and 50% very important.

Arguably less popular, fire blankets were rated at 4% not at all important, 18% not important, 9% neutral, 33% quite important, and 36% very important.

ALARM

Where fires have already gotten out of control, speedy escape is essential.

A home can be consumed by flames in less than four minutes, and small fires can get out of control in under 30 seconds. With time this tight, it is essential that residents are alerted to danger as quickly as possible to action their escape.

Affordable and easy to maintain and install, fire alarms are proven to be best placed to achieve this, with research showing that the number of fatalities from domestic fires has dropped as smoke alarm ownership has increased.

When asked how important fire alarms were, our respondents included the product among the most important, with 0% saying they were not at all important, 2% not very, 2% neutral, 4% quite important, and the vast majority

A home can be consumed by flames in less than four minutes, and small fires can get out of control in under 30 seconds. With time this tight, it is essential that residents are alerted to danger as quickly as possible to action their escape

(91%) believing them to be very important.

EXIT

Once alerted, residents must then exit the building. They will likely be disoriented – especially at night, when the fire is most likely to occur – and distressed. In this state, any obstruction can prove deadly.

In order to make escape as smooth as possible, emergency lighting and fire safety signage can provide essential visibility and clarity.

None of our respondents believed emergency lighting to be not at all important, with 2% quite, 7% neutral, 18% quite, and 73% very important.

Slightly less popular, safety signs were rated by 7% as not at all important, 9% not very important, 20% neutral, 11% quite important, and 53% very important.

Lastly, 0% listed fire exit equipment as not at all important, 0% as not very important, 20% neutral, 27% quite important, and 52% very important.

PASSIVE PROTECTION

While residents make their escape, it is important that a home is able to prevent the spread of fire by itself, and buy them valuable time.

Passive fire protection is a vital component of any fire strategy, built into the structure of a home and able to limit the spread of fire and smoke by containing it in a single room, and protecting escape routes and the building’s structure.

Most passive fire protection products are ‘fire resisting’ – whether insulation, doors, beams or columns, such products are able to withstand fire for certain periods of time, resisting heat conduction, the passage of smoke and hot gases, and structural collapse.

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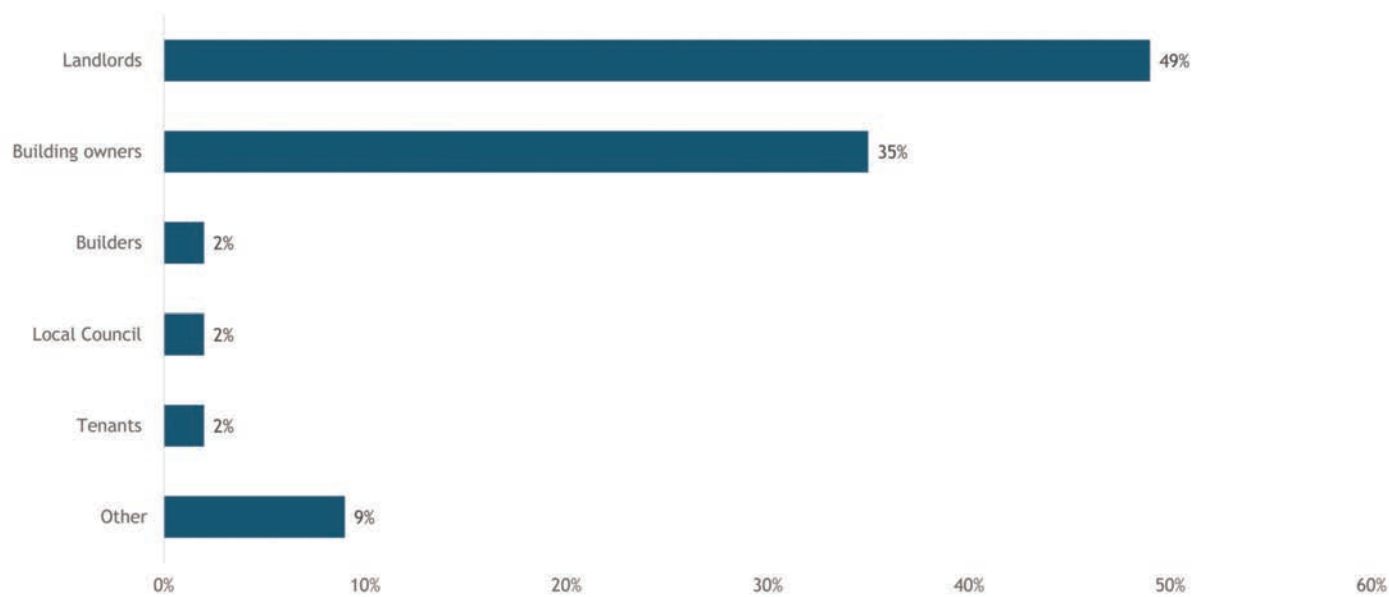


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“Who do you think the main onus should be on rental accommodation fire safety?”

When it came to the importance of this category, fire doors were the most popular among our respondents; 0% said they were not at all important, 0% not very, 2% neutral, 2% quite important, and 95% very important.

Fire resilient insulation was seen as not at all important by 2% of our respondents, with 0% reporting it as not important, 13% neutral, 18% quite important and 67% very important.

Passive protection as a whole fell slightly behind this, with 5% not at all important, 2% not very, 9% neutral, 30% quite important and 55% very important.

DATA

Finally, once residents are safe – having been quickly notified, their escape routes being clear, and the fire then being quelled – there is still much housing professionals can learn from the event.

Connected fire safety technologies have the potential to collect data on fires seamlessly and effortlessly, and when utilised correctly can shoulder some of the responsibility of fire safety.

The data that such technologies gather can then be analyzed for trends and patterns, and AI can even offer predictive analysis based on these trends, with the results getting more accurate as more data is received.

Remote fire safety products were not seen as important as those above. 9% believe them to be not at all important, 13% not important, 31% neutral, 24% quite important, and 22% very important.

One issue that they were considered useful in addressing however was a lack of reporting of fire safety issues, with 74% agreeing that automated products can help here.

CONCLUSION

Despite tragedy after tragedy, deadly fires have continued to occur in UK housing.

While stricter standards are incoming, there are still fundamental issues that the housing sector needs to address around reporting and the speed of

remedial works.

One solution that our respondents argued can significantly reduce fire risk, however, are ‘better’ fire safety products.

Fire safety products themselves have a long pedigree, and have undergone huge changes, refinements and legislation since their inception, but it is clear that even today all products are not made equally.

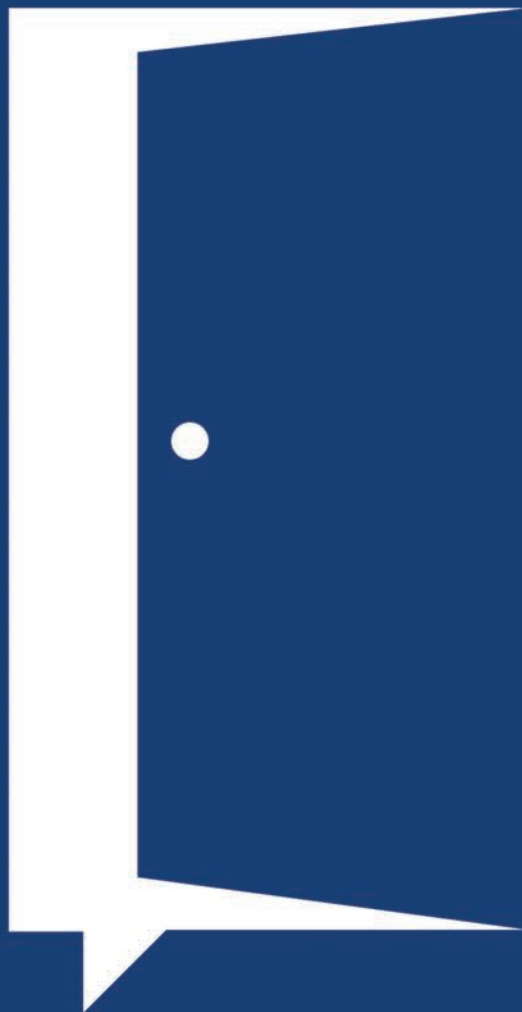
Throughout their history, such products have succeeded and failed alike, and their quality and suitability are key. Where such products are ‘better’ – defined by our respondents with terms such as ‘reliability’ or ‘durability’ – they are able to save lives, prevent fires from getting out of hand, warn tenants when they do, guide their exit, and provide them with essential time.

With flammable products being one of the most common reasons fire risks remained present in housing among our respondents, and the cost of replacing such products being the most common listed, it is clear the issue of product quality is inherently tied to risk, but housing professionals are struggling to afford vital works.

Whatever the costs, however, the right tools to save lives are available and essential; it’s up to housing professionals to ensure the correct ones are specified, installed and maintained, and history has shown time and again the severe consequences of failure.

FOR A FULL VERSION OF THIS SURVEY PLEASE VISIT WWW.HOUSINGMMONLINE.CO.UK WHERE YOU CAN DOWNLOAD THE WHITE PAPER

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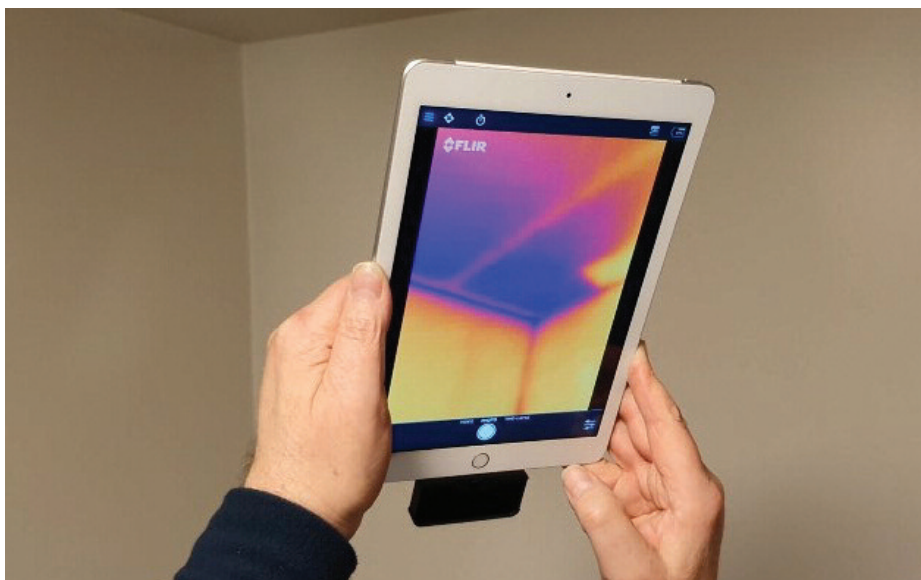


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Your invitation to a CPD event to learn more of the Property MOT® and its unique capabilities

David Bly, Director of Cornerstone Professional Services (UK) Ltd, the company behind the development and introduction of the Property MOT® system explains why social housing providers are being encouraged to attend the CPD event.



“Cornerstone have been appointed by Housing Associations and Local Authorities across the UK to independently investigate the defined causes of reported damp, condensation and mould in their tenanted properties. And, when we analysed our circa 3000 surveys to date, it was clear that 90% of the homes were dry and in a healthy condition such that, the reported issue was most likely borne out of everyday atmospheric moisture management. Our clients have regularly commented on how we have initially determined the reason and, given credible advice going forward but, moreover how an impending Disrepair claim has subsequently been withdrawn. Our self-imposed task was to establish a platform that can be embraced by Housing Association and Local Authority staff to undertake the same surveying process with a difference, our continued technical support.

Hence, the Property MOT® was developed to acquire and assess relevant information that can lead to a defined outcome. The unique training enables qualified staff to obtain pertinent data and, ultimately recognise its importance and impact as a collective.

Submitting data to a SMART Knowledge portal serves to not only Certify the Health of

a home but, deliver SMART Knowledge in a readily-accessible format enabling recordable and immediate proactive guidance available for tenants”.

To learn more about this exciting opportunity, how it can certify the health of a home and

empower your workforce, contact David at Cornerstone today to secure the CPD seminar booking for you and your team.

023 9200 9270
propertymot@cornerstone-ltd.co.uk

Property MOT® CPD Seminar

With currently four MOT services available each with defined data and certifiable outcomes, the CPD seminar will impart a wealth of information aligned to each element of the Property MOT® and the expected certified outcomes in a clear and understandable manner prior to any financial commitment. We will also impart details of sought-after future MOT surveys including Carbon Footprint MOT®, Drone MOT® and Void MOT®.

Property MOT® Certifying Structural Health

The fight against Mould and Condensation in properties

Damp, condensation and mould are symptoms of a property's health. With SMART knowledge and reputation, the Property MOT® can identify the cause of any symptoms, meet any disrepair head on and provide a clear path forward for the structure.

Key benefits

Property MOT provides historical data of structural health, provides trends with stock types and provides a clear decision making tool.

Landlords

- ◆ Certify the Health of a dwelling
- ◆ Defence mechanism for legal challenges
- ◆ Access to and provision of SMART Knowledge

Letting Agencies

HOMES STAND NO H432



23-24 NOVEMBER | LONDON EXCEL

The future of living

HOMES UK is returning to the London Excel on 23-24th of November 2021, intended to provide a safe and timely opportunity for the housing sector to collaborate and plan for a post-Pandemic future.



From discussing how to revive housebuilding to establishing a 'new normal' for property management and supporting tenants through the recovery, HOMES UK is an exciting free learning and networking opportunity for housing professionals.

HOMES UK is set to offer a rare opportunity to connect with professionals from across the entire housing ecosystem. Visitors will be able to attend roundtable discussions, interact with over hundreds of exhibitors, and network on a 1-2-1 basis with thousands of sector peers.

A comprehensive keynote programme will feature five essential themes and over 40 sessions to choose from. Hear updates and guidance from Government speakers, alongside renowned experts, peer-led case studies and international speakers.

Visitors will also be able to interact with the best of the sector's supply chain on the showfloor and explore new products, innovations and keep up-to-date with key sector announcements.

THEMES

HOMES UK will feature one keynote stage covering five essential sector themes, including: safety, sustainability, residential development, procurement and digital innovation.

With over 60 hours of content to choose from, attendees can build a personalised itinerary tailored to their priorities to make the most of the two days. The programme will be set across multiple stages, each offering a different take on the sector's challenges.

The Future of Living stage, for example, will discuss political and economic analysis, residential development and construction, affordability, land, planning and placemaking, development funding, MMC and

construction innovation, homelessness, and sector-wide collaboration and partnership working.

Offering a different angle, the Safer Futures stage will focus on building quality and safety, fire safety, tenant engagement, asset management, repairs and maintenance, and the Fitness for Human Habitation Act.

The Sustainable Futures stage will look at issues around climate change and reaching net zero, as well as healthy homes and places, post-Covid recovery and tenant support, efficiency and value for money, and ageing populations.

At the Digital Futures stage, attendees can learn about digital transformation, customer experience, mobile, flexible and remote working, data quality and management, IoT, smart homes and cities, and cyber security.

Finally, brought to the show by its sponsors Fusion21, the Buy Smarter Procurement stage will host discussions on current themes with key speakers from Zero Carbon and Building Safety Reform to find out how tenants can help influence procurement, as well as showcasing the latest procurement trends insights.

REGISTER FOR YOUR FREE TICKET

HOMES UK is free to attend for housing associations, local authorities, the public sector, housebuilders, master developers, funders, architects, planners and BTR landlords, student accommodation, retirement living and extra-care providers.

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www.homesevent.co.uk

Visit Aico at Homes 2021

Aico, an Ei Company, are the European Market Leader in Home Life Safety, pioneering new technologies and offering high quality alarms, developed and manufactured in Ireland. All Aico alarms meet UK standards and offer a variety of sensor types to guarantee protection for every home, the cornerstone of which is delivering education, quality, service and innovation. In 2020, Aico expanded their Connected Home offering with the acquisition of leading Internet of Things (IoT) solutions provider, HomeLINK. HomeLINK are a multi-award-winning high-tech software team within Aico that leverage cutting edge home

integration and analytic technologies to address the needs of social landlords and their residents.

Aico offer unparalleled support, from the twenty-three Regional Specification Managers covering the whole of the UK and the expert in-house technical support team to their free of charge, Fire Industry Association accredited training scheme, Expert Installer. Expert Installer provides Electrical Contractors with all of the information that they require to select, site, install and maintain Aico alarms to the highest quality. It also ensures that attendees are up to date with the latest legislation and requirements.

Corporate Social Responsibility is a key focus for Aico; in 2018 Aico launched their 'Aico in the Community' initiative to help schools, colleges, charities and community organisations achieve their goals to help create safer communities and build sustainable futures. Aico does this through the core areas of Education, Business Enterprise, Volunteering, Charity and Environmental Impact.

Aico works in partnership with the UK Housing sector to provide a platform for thought leadership and discussion, in order to promote good practice in home life safety, engage with communities and create safer homes. Understanding the various pressures within the sector, from NetZero to Building a Safer Future agendas, as well as the importance of meeting regulatory compliance, Aico are continually seeking to future-proof their services to improve



the health and wellbeing of residents and the homes they live in. The analytics of data from homes has become fundamental to delivering change and meeting service requirements.

Aico are exhibiting at Homes 2021, visit them on Stand H352 to find out more about their revolutionary SmartLINK Gateway; providing access to real-time data insight into Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide alarm systems across entire housing stock as well as their brand-new innovative HomeLINK Environmental Sensors which add another dimension to resident safety while helping landlords to meet their strategic goals, creating safer, healthier homes.

01691 664 100 www.aico.co.uk



HOMES STAND NO H352

Pipe Dreams – Pendock pipe boxing for social housing

The Pendock Profiles range of pipe boxing and casing solutions is one of the most comprehensive available for social housing projects. Each product is designed for a specific purpose, but they are also versatile enough to be used on a range of pipe boxing applications.

Incorporating the MXF, MX and TK pipe boxing, dedicated to concealing all types of unsightly interior pipework, alongside BC boiler casings, CH channel boxing and the strong CHM and MXM metal boxing for external use, the range covers everything that's required.

Except for CHM / MXM metal boxing, all products are manufactured from pre-formed plywood and are supplied pre-finished in durable melamine. This removes the need for time consuming on-site fabrication or painting, which saves time and money, as Pendock boxing can typically be fitted in under half the time of site-made alternatives.

The widespread use of Pendock MXF fire sprinkler boxing has helped speed sprinkler system installations on high-rise and low-rise residential fire safety improvement projects, as they're quick and easy to fit, using screws, battens and dedicated accessories to conceal surface mounted pipework.

Concealing boiler pipework, valves, regulators and filters is equally simple with the BC range of boiler pipe casings, which are designed to be free standing. Four casing options are available, including jointed designs which can be supplied



either factory assembled or as components for on-site assembly. A joint-less one-piece casing is also available, together with a bespoke option, where the casings are manufactured by Pendock to the exact boiler and project specifications supplied by the contractor.

Where exterior pipework needs concealing or protecting, from possible damage theft or vandal-

ism, CHM and MXM metal pipe boxing is engineered to enclose building services and other utilities, such as district heating schemes, where external cabling and distributed heating system pipework need to be covered.

01952 580 590
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Titon Shortlisted in H&V News Awards

Titon is extremely proud to announce that it is once again finalists in the 2021 H&V News Awards. The innovative Titon Ultimate® dMEV and Titon FireSafe® Air Brick products have been shortlisted in the 'Domestic Ventilation Product of the Year' category. The Titon Ultimate® dMEV is an ultra quiet low profile fan, which is suitable for new build or refurbishment projects. With its one fan fits all solution, it is ideal for bathrooms, kitchens and utility room applications and is one of the quietest solutions and best performing dMEV fan on the market. It was been specifically designed to exceed ventilation demands, but meet current and proposed legislation. The Titon FireSafe® Air Brick is a non-combustible compact inlet/outlet grille suitable for new and refurbished houses and apartments. Designed with architects, mechanical engineers, contractors and local authorities in mind, the product can easily be built into external walls during construction. The range consists of short and long versions and can easily be connected to both 204x60 and 220x90 rectangular ducting. The H&V News Awards 2021 have been celebrating the achievements of the HVAC industry for 27 years. The awards ceremony will take place later this year at the Hilton Park Lane in London on November 11th. Please visit awards.hvnplus.co.uk/2021shortlist to find out more information on the awards and view other finalists

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Helping landlords meet their duty of care

Airtech can help landlords meet their duty of care by offering comprehensive property surveys to identify condensation, damp and mould problems and recommendations to solve the issues; mould removal treatment and redecoration, and a full ventilation installation service for both responsive and planned maintenance. The treatment and mould removal are backed by a unique three-year guarantee that the mould will not return. Airtech can offer landlords the correct solution for individual properties. This can range from the Air+ Loft Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) and Air+ Wall PIV units to the environment sensing bathroom and kitchen fans, such as the SA25 SELV, the SA60 SELV and the SA64.



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Tackling the problem of energy theft

In the battle against energy theft, a vital weapon is metering. Traditional analogue electricity meters tend to be read so infrequently that the information is of limited value – and that assumes meter readers are granted access to the meter, which is unlikely if it has been tampered with. These problems can be solved cost-effectively by Deer Technology's LimpetReader. This clever, battery-powered opto-electronic device attaches to the meter's faceplate with optical tape or adhesive. There is no need to dismantle the meter or interrupt the supply. Installation takes around 10 minutes and the meter's register remains visible should a visual read be necessary.



hello@deertechnology.com

PoziDry Compact Pro combats mould

Leading British ventilation manufacturer Vent-Axia has supplied its Lo-Carbon PoziDry Compact Pro to successfully tackle persistent condensation and mould in a social housing property. The housing association selected the PoziDry Compact Pro for a flat which had mould in the bedroom and living room. The unit was chosen since it is the ideal solution for combating condensation and mould in problem properties without a loft. The unit was installed in the flat's cloakroom and has successfully eliminated the on-going condensation and mould problem. This is not only protecting the building's structure but will also positively impact the inhabitant's health by improving their indoor air quality.



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From sophisticated users who want the latest wifi controlled options, to elderly or vulnerable people who need the simplest of controls to cope with their heating system – it's vital that there's a full range of complexity available in today's heating controls marketplace. As well as offering Boiler Plus compliant units, ESI is one of the leading members of the OpenTherm Association in the UK, offering access to the OpenTherm protocol. OpenTherm is a non-manufacturer dependent system of communication between modulating HVAC appliances and room thermostats. OpenTherm allows 3rd party control manufacturers to create a wide range of simple control solutions for boilers.



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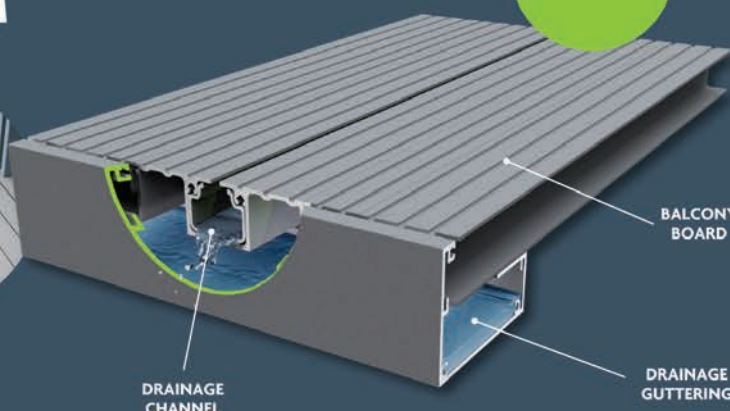
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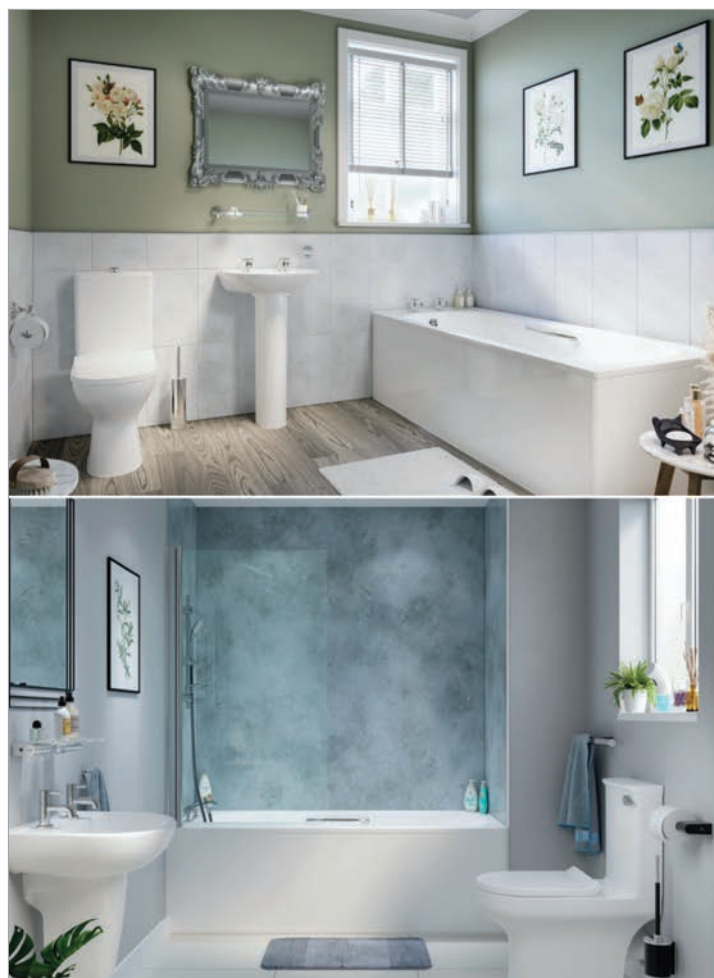
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Paint – more than just aesthetics

Dawn Scott of Dulux Trade explains why painting and decorating is the ideal way to keep maintenance costs down while boosting the wellbeing of tenants.

The effect that colour has on an individual's mood has been recognised and well documented for a number of years. But with the pandemic forcing people to stay at home – and the issue of mental health becoming an even more important topic of discussion – the role interior design plays in supporting wellbeing has been brought to the fore.

Carefully selecting colours for the home and workplace can greatly improve the mood of occupants to ensure they are at their happiest. The pride people feel every time they walk into their newly decorated home can make all the difference.

But designing for 21st-century living is not always straightforward. There are several factors to consider when creating welcoming and positive spaces for your residents; such as sustainability, the growth of stress related issues, mental and physical health, the ageing population, identity, and our relationship with technology.

Colour is an underutilised way to add an extra dimension to great building design, which goes far beyond aesthetics; colour can maximise user experience for each building's unique purpose.

As well as this, it's also a relatively inexpensive solution. Redecorating is a great way to keep maintenance costs down for facilities managers, developers and landlords, while simultaneously boosting the wellbeing of residents.

But, to truly make a difference to the wellbeing of occupants and residents, it's crucial that the design is centred around the people that will be using the space.

MEETING SPECIFIC NEEDS

As an example, when designing for elderly tenants or spaces for people living with dementia, the environment must support their specific needs. Using evidence-based colour palettes and colour schemes can really help. Colours that have been selected and combined to enable colour and contrast of critical

Colour is an underutilised way to add an extra dimension to great building design, which goes far beyond aesthetics; colour can maximise user experience for each building’s unique purpose

surfaces can help patients to navigate their settings in care environments – while a well-considered palette can reinforce a sense of dignity, instil positive personal connections and provide stimulation within the space.

In the private housing sector, renter demand for high-quality, sustainable homes that support wellbeing has increased significantly over the past few years and the use of appropriate products within these types of properties is likely to attract higher interest from tenants, investors and house hunters.

Thankfully, achieving these improvements to support the wellbeing of residents and occupants doesn’t always mean vast structural change – and the substantial costs that come with it. Technological advancements in recent years have resulted in significant progress in developing finishes that are designed to last. Applying paint with durable finishes can lower costs substantially by extending maintenance cycles.

In social housing, paint products with durable finishes are especially useful for high-traffic areas, such as hallways, corridors, stairwells and communal spaces. The uniformation means there is no need for repainting, as scuffs and marks can simply be wiped away - which is also much more sustainable. For multi-occupancy buildings, products with antibacterial properties can help stop the spread of germs and bacteria on interior walls within communal areas.

Housing professionals should also look out for low or minimal Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) products. VOCs are chemicals used in the production of a wide range of products that vaporise and are emitted into the



air. They are often found in building materials, such as paint, waxes and varnishes. In high concentrations, particularly indoors, VOCs can cause adverse health effects. Fortunately, the development of VOC-free and low-VOC paint has come on leaps and bounds over the past few years.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE


There is still more work to be done to explore how colour and design can support health and wellbeing in a number of areas, from social and private housing to offices, healthcare settings and schools.

If we continue to dedicate time and resources to further this agenda, however, the positive impact we could have on the lives of millions of people across the UK is tremendous.

Dawn Scott is commercial colour consultant at Dulux Trade


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Bond It yet again leads the way in providing users of their products with excellent reference tools. The new app, launched this month, provides quick and easy locating of technical data sheets, declarations of conformity, safety data sheets and application advice relating to their whole product range. A free, quick and easy reference guide providing key information on all **Bond It** products: pack images, product descriptions, application instructions and technical documentation. A must have on-the-job tool for professionals and DIY enthusiasts alike. QR code scanning direct from product packaging makes the information you need even more accessible. Download the app today.

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Consort Claudgen downflow fan heaters

Consort Claudgen has 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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Doors fit for a new world!

Residents deserve unquestionable comfort and safety in the post pandemic era, as do the professionals responsible for providing it. Many things have changed over the past eighteen or more months since our world was turned upside down. However, perhaps it's also true to say that some things such as expectations and fundamental living principles have just been re-evaluated and prioritised into what's important for personal well-being. For tenants and residents living in affordable homes; whether rented or part owned, that can often be distilled into a not unreasonable must have list, which includes: fire safety and security, comfortable and durable surroundings, which demonstrate



contemporary design and all of which has real environmental credentials.

As a key product in every home, interior timber doors should always exemplify these criteria, without short-cuts, compromise, or half-measures. Being a leading manufacturer and supplier to Housing Associations, Local Authorities, social landlords and affordable homes developers, Vicaima door and doorset solutions ensure buyers and specifiers can meet not only tenant expectations, but also to satisfy their many regulatory and practical concerns at the same time.

Among the many challenges presented in the social housing market and indeed elsewhere, is a lack of skilled labour and for that matter resources in general, when it comes to the installation of doors on site. This is often compounded by the reluctance of many to move beyond the somewhat antiquated 20th century practice of face finishing doors in situ, with its inherent lack of continuity, added expense and drain on time. Fortunately, Vicaima's extensive range of cost effective, designer led, fully finished products alleviate this concern. However, it does not stop there. With the supply of complete doorsets (door and frame), which not only speed up the installation time; but also ensure compliance with appropriate regulations, insuring much of the uncertainty is removed.

Vicaima have always been at the forefront of regulatory and performance measures, with



complete tested and certified product solutions, offering transparency and peace of mind for all. These include Q-Mark authenticated dual scope FD30S/FD60S fire and SBD security doorsets; combining fire and acoustic rated solutions with durability and testing to PAS 24: 2016/BS 6375-2 + 3; all with a 10-year guarantee. What's more, given that all Vicaima products are manufactured to ISO 14001 standards and are FSC certified, you can be sure that the need to protect our planet is as important as the need to provide doors that are fit for affordable living today.

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When is a fire door not a fire door?

Well, the simple answer is 'when the door closer isn't working'. If a door closer has been damaged by vandalism or tampering, the fire door will not perform the function for which it is designed and specified, namely keeping the door closed. Unlike surface-mounted door closers, Powermatic from Samuel Heath is completely concealed when the door is closed. Not only does this enable the specifier to retain the aesthetics of a door and interior, but it also reduces the opportunity for the door closer to be vandalised, tampered with or removed, ensuring that the fire door continues to perform reliably. Together with maintenance-free service and closing speed and latching action which can be adjusted without removal from the door, this can result in a reduced maintenance burden for building owners and managers. Powermatic also boasts a plethora of performance accreditations, including UKCA marking, fire testing on half- and one-hour fire doors, opening forces that comply with BS8300 and the ability to enable doors to meet the requirements of Approved Document M. It is also the only Certifire jamb-mounted door closer.

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Letter perfect

Richard Morris of UAP discusses the security and safety implications of letter plate specification.



Much of our correspondence may be paperless these days, but homes still need a letterplate where letters, circulars and newspapers can be posted. Located prominently on the front door of a house or an apartment, the wrong choice of letterplate can be an eyesore, but that's not the only issue with specification. Letter plates can also present a security risk, fire safety issue or problems with access and Disability Act compliance, which is why it's important to understand the potential specification pitfalls and what to look for when selecting a product.

OVERCOMING VULNERABILITIES

Historically, letter plates have been the most vulnerable part of a door, enabling thieves to 'fish' through the aperture to retrieve keys from hallways and gain access to properties. Often, homeowners don't understand the risks of leaving keys conveniently placed on a console table in the hall or a hook near the door until a thief has fished for them to gain access to their property or steal their car.

Stricter compliance for letterplate design has been in place since the TS008 standard was introduced in 2016, effectively preventing key fishing and manipulation of the thumbturn cylinder. TS008 letterplate fixings also have to be capable of withstanding 1.2kN (122.366kgs) of force application, held for ten seconds at each end of the letter plate. This helps in preventing an intruder gaining unrestricted access to the aperture.

Security is not the only risk, however. Fire safety is also an important consideration and, in multi-occupancy buildings, containing a fire within the property where it started, rather than allowing it to spread throughout the building, is just as important as preventing fire from spreading from common areas into individual homes. That's why fire doors are required as the front doors to individual apartments within multi-occupancy buildings, or for doors that lead onto shared balcony walkways. For these environments, not only is TS008 compliance required to ensure security, but the letterplate must also provide a fire rating equal to the rating of the door. And, of course, it must still allow items defined in the postal services standard BS EN 13724: 2013 to completely pass through the aperture without being damaged.

DESIGN CHALLENGES

The challenge for companies developing TS008 compliant letter plates has been that the additional design features required to make letterplates safer and more secure in order to meet the standard have often resulted in practical and aesthetic issues.

Many social housing properties have narrow hallways, for example, and the standard response of designing letter plates with a bulky cowl on the interior side of the door sometimes makes it impossible to fully open the door. This causes issues with Equality Act compliance, because it restricts the clear opening

and raises safety issues around egress and evacuation. Even when the door can fully open, a bulky cowl may cause damage to wall surfaces due to repeated collisions. This sometimes results in the occupier – or even the installer – removing the cowl, which can compromise security and fire safety.

COMPLIANCE WITH SECURITY AND AESTHETICS

Letterplates fitted at many residential properties may need to be TS008 for PAS 24:2016 compliance and Document Q approval, which leaves specifiers with the challenge of finding a compliant letterplate that is not bulky. A key design feature to look out for is a pivoting stay mechanism, which enables a reduced internal flap projection from the door surface, giving a less intrusive feel to the door and enabling the door to open fully without the risk of any damage to the interior wall.

It is also advisable to select a TS008 letterplate with no fixings to the exterior door because this further enhances security by preventing anyone from unscrewing the outer section from the door.

Long-term performance is important, so test data that proves smooth operation over a number of years is also a feature to look out for. And, of course, aesthetics matter too, a range with a variety of colours and finishes to match existing decor is advisable too.

SAFER SOLUTIONS

It is now four years since the Grenfell Tower fire, and the tragedy has had far-reaching consequences, including a positive impact on due diligence when selecting building products, particularly for use in social housing.

Effective protection from the spread of fire from either side of the door is an essential feature of any letterplate installed in a fire door. Although a letterplate may not seem to be a safety product because safety is not its primary function, as an integral element of a fire door, it should have undergone rigorous in-house and third-party testing.

TS008 letter plates designed for use in fire doors are manufactured with intumescent material in their construction, which expands to create a fire



barrier equal to the performance of the required fire door. Only Certifire approved TS008 letterplates can be fitted to timber fire doors with no further testing. For composite or steel fire doors, the letterplate must be tested as part of a complete door configuration.

PERFORMANCE MATTERS

It's easy to mistake a letterplate as a simple piece of hardware that frames an aperture for post, but it plays a critical role in preventing that aperture from becoming a risk to security and fire safety. Aesthetics are always important, but, when it comes to safety and security, it's performance that really matters.

Richard Morris is the national new business manager at UAP

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The importance of fire doors and inspections

A fire door is an engineered safety device that is a crucial part of the passive fire protection of every commercial, public and multiple occupancy building. A fire door acts just as any other door in normal service, in a fire it takes on a critical role – to save lives and protect property. It does this by holding back the spread of fire and smoke through a building for a designated period, giving time for building occupants to escape. In 2006, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 came into force in England and Wales; transferring the responsibility for Fire Safety from the fire authorities to whoever has day-to-day control of building premises – this is known as the ‘Responsible Person’. This person must take steps to reduce the risk from fire; consider how to contain a fire should one break out and ensure people can escape safely. Lorient welcomes the new Building Safety Bill, which will drastically overhaul building regulations in England and Wales. Lorient offers a professional and expert fire door inspection service. Lorient Fire Door Inspectors are fully qualified under the Fire Door Inspection Scheme (FDIS); and have been assessed by Warringtonfire, an independent third party.

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01707 394 444 www.sika.co.uk/passivefire

False fire alarm fatigue

Alarm fatigue occurs when a person becomes desensitised to an alarm due to repeated false alarms and as a result, fails to react appropriately in an emergency – having potentially fatal effects. False fire alarms allow for a laissez-faire attitude towards evacuations, however, they can be prevented. Recommended in BS 5839-1:2017, manual call points can be fitted with a protective cover preventing false alarms. Safety Technology International manufacture a range of protective covers, from integral covers to outdoor and sounder models; there are variations to suit all applications. These covers are specifically designed to prevent false alarms whether accidental or malicious.



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Intelligent temperature monitoring

Richard Braid of Cisterniser and Keraflo discusses the pivotal role that Intelligent Temperature Monitoring Units (TMUs) are now playing in the water management arena.

Lockdowns across the UK have posed a demanding challenge for us all, but it is now abundantly clear that planning to return to something approaching “business as usual” presents innumerable challenges for anyone involved in recommissioning / repurposing buildings, or those who look after building occupants. These challenges are especially evident when it comes to the water systems in buildings.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, many buildings had to close to protect public health and reduce the spread of the virus. But now, as businesses and organisations start to get back to normal as restrictions are lifted, it is important to ensure that public health continues to be protected.

Legionella is one of the most prominent health risks here, with the bacteria developing in water systems that have not been used during the lockdown periods, or that have been underutilised due to lower and flexing building demand. As such, buildings should have a risk assessment and a Water Safety Plan in place.

All aspects of a buildings’ water systems need to be reviewed before re-opening fully or in part. In some cases, these reviews will be carried out by teams of people on the ground. But for some more forward-thinking organisations, this critical work is being carried out by state-of-the-art cloud driven solutions, including Remote Temperature Monitoring, which is being deployed in numerous commercial, housing and healthcare facilities across the UK.

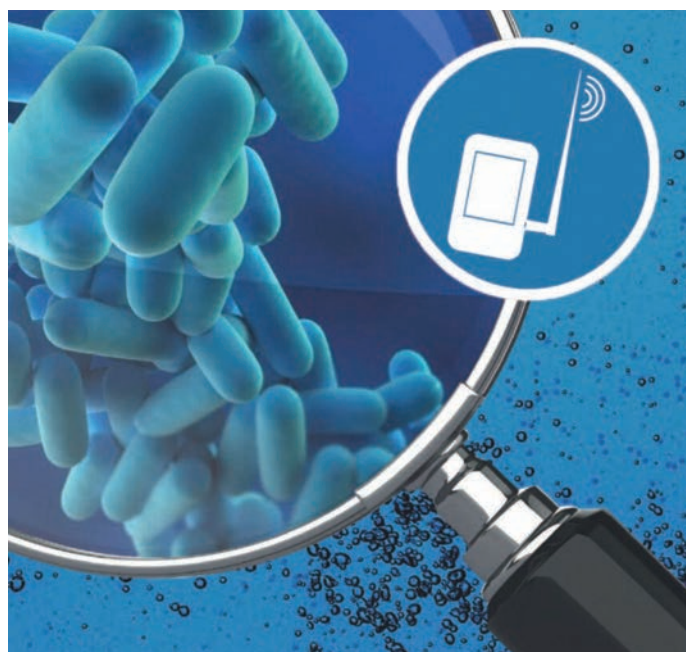
TMU WATER MONITORING

Intelligent Temperature Monitoring Units (TMUs) are able to deliver automatic wireless monitoring, providing real-time temperature readings on a computer screen, in order to track and monitor hot and cold water temperatures in pipework systems which are critical to risk assessments.

A connected TMU can be retrofittable, and is typically fitted onto water outlet pipework, distribution pipework including risers, calorifiers, cold water storage tanks and many other sentinel points across a building’s water system.

Each TMU takes a reading every ten seconds and then sends temperature and flow event data to a cloud-based portal on an hourly basis. Recorded data includes maximum, minimum and average temperatures. The sensor also records any flow events, such as outlets being utilised. The data readings are analysed by the device’s inbuilt software, batched and sent up back to the cloud, and then on to the user’s preferred interface, which might be a phone, tablet or PC. The powerful data delivered by installed TMUs can help to show where sections of a building’s water system have remained safe and are operating to specified parameters (and therefore do not need excessive flushing) and flag areas that may require specific attention.

In premises where TMUs have been installed, constant real-time IoT monitoring will show if flushing has been carried out correctly and appropriate hot and cold temperatures are being reached. Over-stretched technical resources can then be deployed selectively to address defined issues that may be identified. Building owners, FMs and Estates Facilities Management teams can both benefit greatly from increased visibility, as well as added peace of mind that they are doing the best possible to reduce legionella risk.



THE POWER OF DATA

The combination of cloud-based data storage and analysis technology with robust, specialist hardware for remote sensing and monitoring of water temperatures and outlet usage can ease the burden on time and labour, save money and eliminate the potential for human error. However, it’s the power of the data where the system truly comes into its own.

Connected systems can offer previously inaccessible information in real time, and for those who want to really maximise use of the data, reports can be set up to indicate how water is (or isn’t) being used in specific rooms and extrapolating this one step further, can profile user behaviour and deploy optimal resource solutions.

For example, if a report shows that most of the activations of a particular TMV are early in the morning or early evening, this may give an estates manager a good idea on when to send cleaners in or schedule water quality sampling at appropriate times. Automatic temperature monitoring facilities not only detect temperatures which could lead to Legionella colonisation, but also those that might pose a scalding risk, or, conversely, a risk of pipes freezing. It can also help users identify under-used outlets or, for example, taps or showers left running.

Despite its critical function, water management has traditionally been perceived as a problem-child, approached in a fragmented and sometimes inconsistent way across the sector. It’s time this changes for good.

Richard Braid is managing director of Cisterniser and Keraflo

Enhancing intercom access

Melissa Lloyd-Williams of Intratone explores how access control technology can enhance building accessibility.

Accessibility continues to be an important issue for housing professionals. Affordable housing and private property managers alike, help tenants – with a wide variety of needs and requirements – carry out everyday tasks and live more independently. There are, however, still significant gaps in building accessibility across the country. According to figures, 91% of all UK homes do not provide even the lowest level of accessibility to make a residence ‘visitable’, requiring urgent action from the housing industry.

One way of effectively enhancing accessibility is through access control. Intercoms with the latest wireless technology make entry into residences seamless and intuitive for residents and their guests – while also preventing unwanted visitors from gaining entry. For those with visual and hearing impairments, as well as the elderly, harnessing the latest accessible technology is particularly beneficial too. But which features should housing professionals be looking for from their intercom systems? Here, we look at several key accessibility features and how they can help enhance both the tenant and visitor experience.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FEATURES

Audio induction loops are a helpful addition to intercoms, as they wirelessly transmit sound from the device in question to a person’s hearing aid. Visitors with hearing impairments can therefore communicate more easily when they visit tenants in the building. Those who have a hearing aid simply change it to the ‘T’ (Telecoil) setting to pick up the audio signal from the intercom. Users with compatible hearing aids can therefore cut out unwanted background noise – and improve audio communication quickly and easily too – without needing a receiver or a handset.

Meanwhile, the latest intercom keypads are designed to help make visiting tenants easier for the visually impaired. Devices with backlighting, for example, help users to locate and maintain visual attention, particularly in comparison with more muted varieties. Intercoms featuring yellow rings around the buttons also provide a sharper contrast for those with reduced vision – while the inclusion of Braille enables them to understand and ‘read’ which button is which. Plus, hands-free proximity readers are also a great addition to panels too – giving residents the ability to gain entry without the need to manually touch their key fob to the intercom. Another user-friendly feature is direct dialling. Scrolling intercoms mean visitors must search manually through every single entry on an intercom panel to find the right flat. However, systems with direct dialling functionality allow the user to simply push a button to get through to the tenant in question and call them directly. For this reason, direct dial intercoms are the perfect addition to large blocks with many more individual units than standard scrolling intercoms.

ADDED BENEFITS

The latest intercom systems not only help the visual and hearing impaired, but wireless access control technology also brings benefits for the UK’s ageing population. People are living longer lives; in 2016 there were 1.6 million people aged 85 and over, and by mid-2041 this number is expected to double to 3.2 million. Improving accessibility will be key to helping these people lead safe and independent lives for longer – whether they choose to stay at home or move to sheltered housing or residential care.

The latest intercom systems are powered by GSM – the ‘Global System for Mobile Communications’ – or the same technology that powers mobile phone calls. A completely wireless, digital system, GSM makes clunky plastic handsets and traditional wired intercoms redundant. Perfect for elderly residents or those with mobility issues, GSM-based devices allow tenants to answer the door



wherever they are via their preferred digital devices – with an unlimited range. Plus, for those older residents who perhaps don’t own a mobile phone, they can set the system up on a landline instead – allowing them to bypass the app to approve the entry of visitors.

However, this isn’t the only reason why GSM technology is beneficial for everyone. They can also be connected to secure online, remote management systems – allowing housing and property managers to oversee all access to the building from their own office or place of work. This means that administration tasks, such as editing key fob details and granting entry for contractors, can be done remotely and with just a few clicks of a mouse. It’s the perfect system for helping tenants quickly and easily, without the need for a site visit or encroaching on their independence.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR EVERYONE

As the population ages and as resident needs become more diverse, accessibility will only continue to grow in importance for housing professionals. Prioritising accessible features on intercoms is a straightforward and low-cost way for housing professionals to embrace inclusivity and make the tenant experience as seamless as possible for everyone.

Whether it’s ensuring that your keypads have Braille incorporated on buttons or updating your system with powerful wireless GSM technology, there are a myriad of ways to improve ease of entry for residents. Embrace new access control technology today and ensure that your residences are future proofed and accessible for years to come.

Melissa Lloyd-Williams is marketing manager at Intratone

Building confidence in IoT

Dane Ralston of iOpt explores how housing professionals can utilise the Internet of Things (IoT), and how to overcome the barriers to its adoption.



When discussing the barriers to making the Internet of Things (IoT) a 'business as usual' tool in housing, the necessity to educate the sector and reduce the fear of the unknown crops up constantly.

In a world already steeped in anxiety and stress, it's not surprising that the Internet of Things (IoT) is worrying and misunderstood for many, and there's nothing like good first-hand scaremongering to fuel un-informed and irrational decision-making when it comes to technology.

Below are some of the main sticking points as to why IoT is not yet fully normalised or trusted by the wider community, and how to overcome them.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Many people, from tenants to CEOs, don't know enough about the many benefits and innovative opportunities that IoT brings. Therefore, it's vital for those within the industry who work with IoT to continually spread their knowledge.

Many have concerns that IoT technologies aren't always secure or GDPR compliant, for example – this isn't the case. Unlike many myths out there, IoT isn't in place to spy on anyone. In fact, IoT is in place to increase sustainability and help asset managers understand the internal environment within their properties to directly benefit their tenant's wellbeing.

As with any technology, IoT could be exploited by those with less than positive ambitions, but we also need to understand that the technology companies that have developed these systems also work relentlessly to protect their products and their end users. Without this, their investments are worthless to either themselves or their clients.

CAPABILITIES

Many believe that IoT is simply for maintenance driven data. But it is far more expansive than this. With the increased connectivity enabled by cloud

computing, such solutions can effectively gather massive datasets from distributed devices and internal and external information systems. While previous research has focused on data streams from IoT devices, few studies have been published on correlating this data for interpretability and action.

Of course, IoT generates and gathers a lot of data, but it is in deriving insights and then actioning these that is the key to success. The collection of user-specific data achieved by using smart devices helps organisations to understand the expectations and behaviour of tenants better, and offers better business opportunities due to the streamlining that IoT offers.

One of the biggest benefits seen for customers here is the ability to automate mundane, low value-add, repetitive tasks that take up a lot of time – time that could be better spent elsewhere. As an example, visits to resolve condensation complaints can typically be reduced by 60-70% when utilising IoT technologies.

IoT is a complex ecosystem of intricate elements, including sensors, gateways, servers, and platforms for accessing information. However, with the correct IoT architecture layers in place, IoT can provide a simple solution to a complex problem. It's already making an impact, and is about to get even more significant.

CYBERCRIME

Protection from cybercrime is at the core of IoT security. Cybersecurity is a constant slog, watching and waiting while device architects and hackers seek to stay ahead of each other. Consumers want to know that their devices are secure, and that modern security protocols and standards are being implemented.

Ultimately, tenants need to be brought along on this journey. It's easy enough to express to them the benefits of such systems, but it's also important to convince them that its providers are all taking the security of that data seriously – and to that extent, actions speak louder than words.

While there is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question, there are several practices that can help improve the security of IoT devices and meet market demands.

One example is in enabling secure network communications. Network connectivity is at the heart of IoT, but the network could also be an exposed medium for malicious attackers to compromise devices. The best providers will offer secure end-to-end architecture – from the IoT sensor to cloud level application servers – alongside industry standard encryption algorithms and secure data transport mechanisms at each stage.

Additionally, software updates are imperative. End users understand that vulnerabilities arise, and security patches and firmware updates are a part of using IoT technology. Updates are generally released to implement new features, fix bugs uncovered by debugging or user reports, and address security vulnerabilities.

STAY ABREAST WITH BEST PRACTISES

Staying up to date with the latest developments in legislation related to IoT is vital to remaining secure. The industry is growing rapidly, so developers of IoT devices must stay up to date with the latest IoT legislation and stay ahead of the curve when it comes to implementing best practices.

Governments and enterprises are taking notice and stepping up to create IoT security and data governance solutions standards. That's good news because establishing clear-cut standards for IoT now will provide a solid foundation for future innovation.

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

State-of-the-art sensors can prevent mould issues while always understanding the indoor air quality to avoid severe issues like moisture build-up and even fuel poverty.

With fuel costs set to double in the next ten years we may not be able to guarantee reduced costs, but we can help them from spiralling out of control.

THE PROOF IS IN THE EVIDENCE

The implementation of IoT can provide innumerable benefits to asset managers, from real-time data that allows them to take preventative measures, to the protection of some of society's most vulnerable.

This technology has a very significant and positive future in housing, but we need to bring everyone with us, because everyone can benefit.

Dane Ralston is the managing director of iOpt

Creating healthy homes: Aico launch new Environmental Sensors



Introducing an exciting innovation in home life safety from market leaders Aico, their brand-new HomeLINK Environmental Sensors.

Designed to create better maintained, healthier, energy efficient homes, Aico's Environmental Sensors are discreet and secure, placed throughout the home to monitor temperature, humidity and Carbon Dioxide (CO₂).

Available in two models; the Ei1020 measures temperature and humidity while the Ei1025 measures temperature, humidity and CO₂, the Environmental Sensors provide actionable insights into conditions such as mould risk, draught risk, excess cold, heat loss and indoor air quality.

Sustainability is part of Aico's core ethos and they are passionate about supporting the drive to reduce carbon footprint throughout the industry. Insights from the new Environmental Sensors on indoor environmental conditions allow for preventative measures and proactive maintenance, enabling landlords to adhere to requirements outlined in Standards and Legislation, such as the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 and the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing, as well as supporting reaching net-zero targets.

Seamlessly integrating with Aico's revolutionary Ei1000G SmartLINK Gateway, the Environmental Sensors overcome many challenges, from compliance and carbon footprint to mould risk and fuel poverty. The SmartLINK Gateway extracts the data from Environmental Sensors and provides a central hub for data from both Fire and Carbon Monoxide alarm systems and Environmental Sensors. Advanced Machine Learning technology

constantly interprets the data to provide clear, actionable insights which are available via the HomeLINK dashboard.

The HomeLINK dashboard provides detailed property and portfolio views and is designed for multiple user roles. With data from Environmental Sensors and connected Fire and Carbon Monoxide alarm systems segmented by high, medium and low risk, top-level data can be viewed on the main dashboard, while deeper insights can be accessed to tackle problems, maintain compliance and enable preventative strategies within housing stock. With all data in one place, landlords can benefit from increased efficiency and improved asset management.

As resident engagement is a crucial focus for Aico, they have developed the HomeLINK Resident App, specifically designed for the Environmental Sensors, in order to empower residents. Through the HomeLINK Resident App, residents are provided with personalised, user friendly data and insight into their home health through an overall rating, temperature, humidity and CO₂ data and handy advice on the measures they can take to improve the quality of their home, including alarm testing notifications.

Aico's Managing Director, Neal Hooper comments: "As the European leader in home life safety, it is vital that we innovate to drive the UK housing industry forwards, meeting the needs of our customers in novel ways, aligning with sustainability and net zero targets, with resident engagement and wellbeing at the fore. This is exactly what our HomeLINK Environmental

Sensors will do. Alongside our SmartLINK Gateway, our Environmental Sensors will support in the advancement of the connected home, providing a wealth of benefits to landlords and residents alike."

Chris Jones, Chief Executive Officer of HomeLINK says of the launch: "Prior to our acquisition by Aico, HomeLINK had huge demand for Environmental Sensors due to the obvious and sizeable compliance and maintenance business case they presented. As Aico's first smart home product outside of smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms, these sensors represent a large milestone. Having already connected 65,000 devices in UK social housing, and with backorders of several thousand of the new sensors, it is clear that Internet of Things technologies have truly taken hold in the sector."

The brand-new Environmental Sensors, HomeLINK dashboard and Resident App adds another dimension to resident safety while helping landlords to meet their strategic goals, creating safer, healthier homes.

01691 664100

www.aico.co.uk/HomeLINK

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