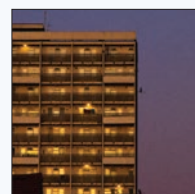


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

DEC/JAN 2022



Ombudsman
demands zero
tolerance of damp
and mould

Private rents rising at
13-year high

New health & safety
measures launched



Landlords breach
Home Standard over
H&S failings

Tenants 'need
protection' from
illegal acts



Fireproof balconies

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Editor's comment

Ombudsman sets out to raise housing standards



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

The Ombudsman has set social landlords a stiff challenge - to change their whole approach to a significant problem like the damp and mould that exists in many of their tenanted properties AND to stop simply blaming the residents' lifestyles for creating the problem through a build up of condensation. Given the high rate of complaints about damp properties that reach the Ombudsman and their high profile in the ITN news broadcasts on national television earlier this year, it is hardly surprising that the Ombudsman selected this issue for his first thematic and in depth investigation. Living a normal family life in the 2020s produces large quantities of water vapour, whether this is through cooking food, bathing/showering or washing and drying clothes. The properties we live in should have suitable ventilation facilities, as well as decent insulation and heating. If there is a problem due to damp in a property, then the first investigations and tests done by surveyors or repairs inspectors should be a comprehensive assessment to pinpoint the causes and possible solutions, rather than one which looks to pin the blame on the occupants and avoid spending money on a lasting solution. In addition, problems in one property should not be seen in isolation. Staff should be asking themselves if it is likely the same problem exists now, or if they will in the future, in neighbouring properties of a similar design and construction. If properties have been built without adequate means of drying and ventilation, then who is really to blame - the designer and builder, or the customer who is given the choice of 'take it, or leave it'? Of course it's not a real choice because under most letting systems, those most in need of housing will only get a single offer. At the same time we continue to build the smallest homes in Europe and many properties lack the space for drying clothes so it really is no surprise that we have problems.

I do however, have some sympathy for social landlords because they have been set a near impossible task. How do you improve your existing housing stock with fewer and fewer resources, while at the same time responding to the shortage of affordable housing? In the last 30 to 40 years or so, there has been a strong and growing emphasis on building new homes. This has been given even more emphasis by the loss of affordable housing through the Right to Buy, which has taken around 2 million homes 'out of the system'. Promises that each sold property would be replaced by a new one have rung hollow as councils and housing associations have been denied the resources necessary to replace RTB sales on a one to one basis. The reality has been more like one new home for every seven sold. Instead the staff in council housing departments have (by default) ended up as the gatekeepers of diminishing resources, which they have struggled to do successfully. The Local Government Association is warning Ministers that council waiting lists currently have 1.2 million households on them and on average each household will have to wait 5 years before they are housed. That sounds terrible enough - but they have also warned Ministers that due to pressures 'in the system', some of them related to Covid, they expect the combined waiting list to mushroom to 2.1 million households by next year. So it should not really come as a surprise that MPs on the Housing Select Committee have decided to launch an inquiry into how the social housing sector works and how it is regulated.

The current regulator of social housing is clearly not pro-active enough, its primary focus remains on financial viability and the governance of housing associations; the quality of customer services remains in a very distant third place and it has no real interest in council housing. There have been some recent high profile judgements of tenants' health and wellbeing being put at risk by their landlords, but these are invariably the result of landlords making self-referrals to the regulator. They have in effect blown the whistle on themselves, which is not the basis for a sustainable regulatory system that aims to guarantee a decent level of service. It remains to be seen if possible changes to the regulatory system will deliver the changes in culture and service outcomes which tenants deserve. The issues on which landlords have been reporting on themselves have been failings in not complying with legal and/or regulatory responsibilities for essential health and safety work. Four years on from the Grenfell Tower fire, it is unbelievable that fire risk assessments are still not being completed as required. Electrical safety tests are not being completed in all properties, checks for the existence of asbestos in tenants' homes are not always reliable and the presence of legionella bacteria in water tanks is being missed. These gaps in health and safety work are happening right now and they are endangering countless numbers of lives. The regulatory system is broken and I wish Clive Betts, the chair of the Select Committee, all the best in coming up with a better and fairer system for delivering a decent, fair and modern social housing sector that provides homes we would all be happy to live in.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Fire safety in residential multi-occupancy buildings is a key issue of our times. We spoke to Richard Izzard of AliDeck to find out more about successful fire safety remediation of balconies.

See page 23

Government provides extra £66 million to support rough sleepers over winter

An additional £66 million is being made available to provide safe and warm accommodation for rough sleepers over the winter, as well as treatment services for drug and alcohol dependency.

This is part of the Government's on-going drive to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament in 2024, backed by £640 million invested each year.

The support will help rough sleepers off the streets at a time of year when they face falling temperatures and give them an opportunity to turn their lives around by ending the cycle of addiction.

Building on the success of the 'Everyone In' initiative, which supported 37,000 vulnerable people into longer-term accommodation during the pandemic, this support will continue to help rough sleepers off the streets. Supported schemes include the following:

- More than 60 councils have been allocated a share of the up to £52 million Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant scheme for specialist support services for rough sleepers and those at risk, including one-to-one support and mentoring;
- Voluntary, faith and community groups have been awarded grants from the £3.8 million Homelessness Transformation Fund to transform shared accommodation into COVID-secure, self-contained accommodation, giving rough sleepers safe places to stay; and
- Up to 3,500 rough sleepers will be provided with emergency accommodation, with areas most in need of support to tackle rough sleeping invited to bid for funding from the £10 million Winter Pressures Fund.

Rough sleeping has already reduced by over a third and the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, Eddie Hughes MP said: "Rough sleepers are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and we must help them off the streets and end the plight of rough sleeping once and for all.

"That means providing somewhere safe and warm for them to stay, and this funding will be a lifeline for thousands as the temperature drops this winter.

We are also helping those trapped in drug and alcohol addiction and giving them the stability they need to turn their lives around."

The new support package builds on the £202 million for councils to continue to help people off the streets, funding 14,500 bed spaces for rough sleepers and 2,700 specialist support staff. This is on top of £112 million invested last year.

Those at risk of eviction are also being helped through the £310 million Homelessness Prevention Grant, with councils providing financial support or



Up to 3,500 rough sleepers will be provided with emergency accommodation, with areas most in need of support to tackle rough sleeping invited to bid for funding from the £10 million Winter Pressures Fund

helping households find new homes. A £16 million pilot is also helping end the cycle of homelessness and hospital admissions by providing temporary accommodation, care and support for rough sleepers leaving hospital. Programmes and projects to benefit from the announcement include:

- Leeds: funding a street-based psychologist, who refers rough sleepers to mental health and substance misuse services and a drop-in clinic in the city centre which also provides specialist support.
- Westminster: funding the Westminster Rough Sleepers Drug and Alcohol Service, ensuring rough sleepers can access treatment programmes. Support is also provided for rough sleepers to access education, employment, or training once they have completed treatment.

- Southampton: more staff are supporting those with complex needs and substance misuse issues and a clinical psychologist is making sure that those with mental health issues get the support they need.
- Cambridge: funding a local charity working in partnership with the council to provide 20-bed self-contained rooms for a safe place this winter and route off the streets.
- London: funding the All People All Places project that will provide support for 50 people in the winter months.

The Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant is entering its second year and is already supporting people sleeping rough in 43 council areas to access structured drug and alcohol treatment including counselling, detox and rehab services.

Social landlords challenged to 'up their game' and take a proactive approach to resolving damp and mould problems within their housing stock

The Housing Ombudsman is calling on all housing landlords to take a completely fresh, zero tolerance approach to resolving the twin problems of damp and mould that blight the lives of so many tenants across the country.

After undertaking a major thematic study to investigate the causes behind so many complaints about damp and mould from social housing tenants, the Ombudsman concluded that many landlords over rely on residents to report and monitor problems, while at the same time they accept or tolerate working cultures within their organisations which fail to take decisive responsibility for ensuring problems are dealt with and complaints are resolved.

Recognising that damp and mould feature disproportionately in the complaints received, the Ombudsman was prompted to undertake a special investigation, part of which featured a sector wide call for evidence between April and June this year.

They received reports on 523 cases of damp and mould, 464 from member landlords and the remainder from the private sector. Following analysis of the cases, the Ombudsman has produced a hard hitting report which uses a series of case studies and has made 26 recommendations for action, mostly directed towards senior management.

This 'Spotlight' report, challenges the sector to make meaningful changes to how it manages its stock, how it deals with complaints and how it communicates with its customers.

Coincidentally (or not) damp and mould also featured in many of the poor property conditions investigated by ITN earlier in the year, which often saw tenants' health and mental well-being damaged by problems which persisted for years, often with tenants' lifestyles being blamed for causing condensation.

THE CAUSES OF DAMP AND MOULD

The Ombudsman found that while condensation was often a cause of damp and mould in properties, there were often more important factors, in particular: lack of ventilation; water leaks; and structural faults.

It has promised to follow up on this report next year, so all social landlords should read and digest the contents of the report and look to implement changes and learning based on its contents and recommendations. Any that do not and continue to be the basis of tenants complaints can surely expect

harsh treatment from the Ombudsman in future.

The Ombudsman recognises the report covers a lot of issues and landlords will need time to consider their response. But he warns "We will be monitoring landlord performance in this area and will actively consider where further systemic investigations may be required in the future to address service improvements with individual landlords.

"We will also consider whether we need to do further work in relation to possible contributory factors to damp and mould such as roof leaks, retrofitting or the managed decline of stock."

A review of the Ombudsman's casebook indicates that complaints in relation to damp and mould problems share many of the following characteristics:

- They are often complex
- Issues may be long running
- Poor communications
- Lack of clarity about repairs and timescales
- Lack of confidence by residents in the initial diagnosis
- High level of distress and disruption for the resident
- Health and wellbeing are frequently cited and
- Problems are not fixed and reoccur.

It now wants more landlords to take a pro-active approach to dealing with these issues, with a shared and common understanding fostered among staff that reduces the risk of silo working.

Richard Blakeway said: "Where we have found maladministration, it is often because the landlord missed opportunities to identify and address problems earlier in an individual case. This lesson can be applied across all the homes for which the landlord has responsibility.

TENANTS ARE NOT TO BLAME

While its investigations did not find causation in terms of health conditions, the Ombudsman accepts that residents living in homes with damp and mould may be more likely to have respiratory problems, allergies, asthma and other conditions that affect their immune systems.

"This, set against the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the potential seriousness of this issue for residents," the report states. The Ombudsman found the failure rate for landlords was often down to inaction, excessive delays or poor

Richard Blakeway said it is "clear that a strategic response to damp and mould is required, particularly in the context of decarbonisation"

communication. In one case study, a tenant had to wait five years to have their complaint about damp resolved.

Along with casework, the Ombudsman heard from tenants, who said they were frustrated, felt like they were not being heard, and that their landlords were not taking their repair reports or complaints seriously.

Though the report recognises the challenges facing landlords, including overcrowding, poverty, the age and design of homes, it says they should avoid inferring residents are to blame due to "lifestyle", "when it is often not solely their issue, and take responsibility for resolving problems".

Richard Blakeway said it is "clear that a strategic response to damp and mould is required, particularly in the context of decarbonisation". The report concludes by encouraging senior leaders and governing bodies to ask the following points:

- Do we have a proactive, zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould and a comprehensive, consolidated policy or framework for responding to these cases? Are we considering damp and mould as part of our net zero strategy?
- How effective and timely are we at responding to and resolving reports and complaints concerning damp and mould? How do we know we are providing meaningful information and support to our residents?
- How do we identify and manage complex cases, complex situations and/or those involving legal disrepair claims? Are we promoting our complaints processes enough and does our approach allow the complaints process to continue alongside pre-action claims?
- What is our organisational culture with respect to learning? Are we making the most of our complaint data and case studies to learn and improve?



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£65 million support package for vulnerable renters

Vulnerable tenants struggling to pay their rent this winter will be helped by a £65 million support package announced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

But the Government is being warned that the financial support is insufficient. Chris Norris, policy director for the National Residential Landlords Association, said: "It is great news that those households worst hit by Covid- may be able to access financial support. However, £65 million does not fully reflect the scale of the problem. NRLA analysis has put the figure of Covid rent debts at over £300 million."

In addition the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have estimated that 3.8 million households on low incomes are in arrears with household bills, of which 950,000 are thought to be in rent arrears, 1.4 million are behind on council tax bills and 1.4 million are behind on electricity and gas bills.

The new package of Government support is in addition to payments of £310 million already made to councils this year through the Homelessness Prevention Grant. £140 million is also available through Discretionary Housing Payments, which can be used to prevent evictions and help people find a new home.

The new funding package will be given to councils in England to support low-income earners in rent arrears – helping to prevent homelessness and support families get back on their feet.

It is for councils to determine the best way to support each household on a case-by-case basis. Payments are likely to be made directly to tenants' existing landlords, or to a new landlord if the money is being used to support a household to find a new home.

The new funding comes on top of the £500 million Household Support Fund, announced by the Government in September and is helping vulnerable households across the country with the cost of food, energy, water and other essentials. At least 50 per cent of the funding is reserved for households with children.

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes MP said: "We have taken action throughout the pandemic to support the most vulnerable families, and it is vital we continue to provide support as we enter the winter months. This new funding will support families that are struggling and help to get them back on their feet as we begin to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic."

Return of inspections flagged up in overhaul of social housing regulation

Over ten years since housing inspections were last carried out, the social housing regulator has raised the possibility of them returning as part of a new focus on services to tenants. Ahead of a formal consultation being launched in December, the regulator has set out ideas for how it would focus on a new set of consumer standards. This follows a stormy year for the social housing sector, with high profile service failings being broadcast on national television news and the Ombudsman being more active and openly critical of landlords.

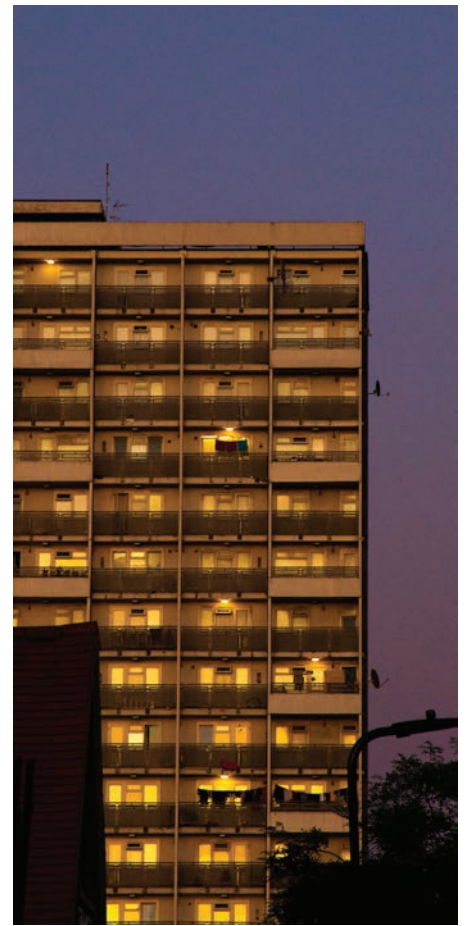
In a short 16 page document, 'Reshaping consumer regulation', the regulator says it will use the same underlying principles as it uses for economic regulation, but will assess landlords' services against six themes of: safety, quality, neighbourhood, transparency, engagement & accountability, and tenancies.

With a nod back to the previous inspection regime conducted by the Audit Commission (prior to its abolition in 2010) the regulator says its focus will be on outcomes, but added that it will not be prescriptive and will focus on organisational rather than individual issues. This suggests there will be no return to the Key Lines of Enquiry, which effectively set detailed standards for landlords and assessing the quality of their services. There is no mention of the star rating system previous used to score landlord inspections.

The actual powers and responsibilities of the regulator and the way it carries these out still depend on Parliamentary approval, so it is likely to be at least 18 to 24 months before any new regulatory regime comes into force.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of the regulator, said: "We are pleased to share an overview of our early thinking about how we will reshape consumer regulation and implement the changes set out in the Social Housing White Paper. We look forward to working with social housing tenants, landlords and other stakeholders as we develop our thinking further.

"However, delivering all this will take time. Boards and councillors responsible for



social housing should not wait for new consumer regulation to look at how they can improve their landlord services and their engagement with tenants."

The regulator set out some details of the methods it proposes to use for monitoring landlords performance against the consumer standards. These are:

- Consumer inspections – either as part of a planned programme of gathering assurance, or where we are responding to information that standards are not being met;
- Reactive engagement – responsive follow-up on information that indicates a potential breach of the standards (similar to how we currently operate consumer regulation);
- Desktop reviews – reviewing information about landlords' performance from the tenant satisfaction measures and a range of other sources; and
- Data returns – we already collect a wide range of information from landlords as part of our economic regulation, and we are considering the data that we might need for our consumer regulation in future to focus our engagement.

It is unclear how much direct involvement tenants will have in the regulatory systems and processes, or if the inspections will be similar to the short-notice inspections developed just prior to the Audit Commission's abolition, which was one of the early actions of the Coalition Government led by David Cameron.

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One in 10 households stuck on housing waiting lists for more than five years

One in 10 households currently on councils' housing waiting lists in England have been stuck on them for more than five years while they try to secure suitable accommodation.

This statistic is included in a report from the Local Government Association, the Association of Retained Council Housing and National Federation of ALMOs.

The LGA have backed this up with a prediction that housing waiting lists could nearly double, from the current number of 1.2 million households to almost 2.1 million next year, as various Covid related support schemes come to an end.

The Building Post-Pandemic Prosperity report, which sets out the case for building 100,000 new social rent homes a year, revealed that waiting lists in high-priority areas for the Government's levelling-up agenda are 56 per cent longer than those in low-priority areas.

The Government has pledged to tackle inequality and 'level-up' the most deprived areas across the UK. But the report claims that construction output has been very badly hit over the past 20 months and will take a long time to recover. It predicts that by 2023 this will have reduced new house building by 100,000.

The report called on the Chancellor to use the Spending Review to give councils the "powers and funding" to build 100,000 social rent homes each year. It also claims:

- Poor-quality homes cost the NHS £2bn a year;
- GPs see 430,000 patients with mental health issues relating to their housing conditions a year, costing the NHS at least £12.9m;
- Building 100,000 new homes could deliver carbon emission reductions worth £600m; and
- Households living in greener homes could each save £500 per year.

Councillor David Renard, the LGA's housing spokesman, said: "There is a desperate need to build more social housing in this country, which should be a central part of the Government's ambition to level up and build back better following the pandemic. Now is the time to reverse the decline in council housing over the past few decades.

"The benefits are clear – a programme of 100,000 social homes a year would shorten council housing waiting lists, reduce homelessness and cut carbon emissions, while delivering a multibillion long-term boost to the economy."

Select Committee launches inquiry into the regulation of social housing in England



The Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee has launched an inquiry into the quality and regulation of social housing in England.

The Select Committee will examine concerns about the quality of social housing, with a focus on the ability of the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman to identify and address problems. The inquiry will also focus on the proposals in the Government's social housing White Paper aimed at improving the regulatory regime.

The Committee's call for evidence was issued in mid November, with a closing date of 21 December for submissions ahead of a series of public evidence hearings which are likely to begin in early 2022.

Clive Betts, Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, said: "Social housing plays a vital role in giving people a secure and affordable home, offering those in social housing protection from the rising costs and insecurity of private renting.

"Beyond the need for action to tackle the lack of social housing in England, questions also need to be asked about the quality of existing social housing and how the complaints of residents can be better handled and resolved.

"Stories of dilapidated social housing and tales of housing associations failing to respond to residents' complaints call into question the effectiveness of the existing regulatory regime and how far the Government's White Paper proposals go to help ensure tenants are treated properly and fairly. In our inquiry, we want to explore concerns around the quality of social housing and whether the current regime for the regulation of social housing is fit for purpose."

The Committee's inquiry will also explore the financial pressures on social housing providers,

amid concerns from some that the costs of building-safety work and retrofitting properties to make them more energy efficient are affecting their ability to improve the quality of their social housing stock. In particular, the inquiry is seeking answers to the following questions:

- How widespread and serious are the concerns about the quality of social housing?
- What is the impact on social housing providers' resources, and therefore their ability to maintain and improve their housing stock, of the need to remediate building safety risks and retrofit their homes to make them more energy efficient?
- Is the current regime for regulating social housing fit for purpose?
- How clearly defined are the roles of the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman?
- Does the current regime allow tenants to effectively resolve issues?
- Do the regulator and ombudsman have sufficient powers to take action against providers?
- Will the reforms proposed in the social housing White Paper improve the regime and what progress has been made on implementing those reforms?
- What changes, if any, should the Government make to the Decent Homes Standard?
- Should the Decent Homes Standard be amended to include energy efficiency and other means of mitigating climate change, and if so how?
- Should all providers of social housing, not just councils, be required to register with the regulator?
- What challenges does the diversification of social housing providers pose for the regulatory system?



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Covid enforced changes in service delivery and the slowing of maintenance and building works boosted the finances of Housing Associations last year

Analysis of social landlords’ financial statements for last year shows their operating margins improved as a result of slower rates of expenditure, due to the impact of lockdowns on maintenance and construction work.

The average overall operating margin for HAs improved during 2020/21 to 24.4 per cent, from a 2019/20 average of 23.6 per cent. Operating margins for social housing lettings grew from 26.5 to 26.8 per cent over the same period.

The findings from data analyst Housemark are based on the published 2020/21 financial statements of over 200 housing associations, including all registered providers with over 5,000 properties. The analysis has revealed:

- Increases in margins relate primarily to decreases in expenditure linked to delays to major works programmes during the pandemic, as well as decreases in some management cost sub-categories;
- The headline social housing cost per unit decreased from a 2019/20 average of £3,664 to a 2020/21 average of £3,565 – a drop of around 2.8 per cent;
- The decrease in overall unit costs is driven primarily by a 16 per cent drop in major works capital spend per unit, as major and cyclical programmes during the pandemic were paused or delayed;
- Around 40 per cent of housing associations recorded drops in management expenditure, relating to precipitous falls in certain corporate cost lines. Notably expenditure in areas such as

- recruitment fees, legal fees, consultancy, and premises utilities was severely muted during the pandemic;
- Reinvestment in new homes fell on average from 7.4 per cent to 5.9 as development programmes were delayed. New supply still increased by an average of 1.2 per cent, but this is down from 1.6 per cent in the previous year; and
 - Gearing decreased slightly across the sector and interest cover (EBITDA MRI) improved in line with better margins.

SHIFT TO DIGITAL SERVICES

Although the 2020/21 figures have been largely driven by the decisions taken during the pandemic, when coupled with Housemark’s covid impact metrics and monthly pulse data – which collectively covers 20 months of both pandemic performance and recovery progress “it is apparent that the strongest performing providers have pivoted service delivery and spend towards increased resident engagement and digitalisation.”

This increased focus has led to an acceleration of digital first strategies with top performers now reporting that approximately 50 per cent of all customer contact is being delivered through digital channels, versus a pre pandemic sector average of around 20 per cent.

Commenting on this, a Housemark spokesman said: “As spend levels recover, those landlords delivering a more efficient, agile service are more likely to be able to unlock greater capacity to tackle the complex challenges the sector faces.”

Overall, social housing cost per unit increased by

As major works programmes return to speed and landlords continue to invest in both building safety and decarbonisation of existing stock, unit costs are expected to increase

around £500 between 2017/18 and 2019/20 as landlords invested significantly in building safety. Operating margins today remain well below their 2017/18 average of 26.4 per cent, reflecting the multiple operating environment priorities.

As major works programmes return to speed and landlords continue to invest in both building safety and decarbonisation of existing stock, unit costs are expected to increase further in 2021/22 applying further pressure on operating margins.

Pressure is likely to be exacerbated by wider factors such as the increasing cost of materials and labour. Expenditure on information technology is also climbing as landlords continue to invest in systems integration, data quality, real-time reporting, and digital channel shift, although many landlords are prioritising this investment to help unlock further financial capacity to tackle the current challenges the sector faces.

2020/21	LOWER QUARTILE	MEDIAN	UPPER QUARTILE
Operating margin overall (%)	18.7	24.4	28.8
Operating margin – social housing lettings (%)	22.5	26.8	32.6
Headline social housing cost per unit (£)	3,170	3,565	4,272
Gearing (%)	30.1	42.6	52.1
EBITDA MRI (%)	150	189	254
Units developed as a % of units owned	0.6	1.2	2
Reinvestment (%)	4	5.9	8.2
Return on capital employed (%)	2.5	3.3	4.1

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Rent increases hit 13-year high as demand for private lets in major cities doubles

Rents in the private sector are increasing at their highest rate since 2008 as demand for properties in major cities has doubled and for the first time in over a year rents are also rising in the capital.

Property website Zoopla has released its latest Rental Market Report, showing that the overall demand for rental homes is 43 per cent above the five-year average, while the number of properties available to let is 43 per cent lower than usual. Demand in major cities such as Leeds, Manchester, and Edinburgh doubled in the three months to the end of September, compared with the earlier part of the year.

This imbalance is driving rents up. Outside of London the average private rent is now £809 a month, six per cent higher than a year ago. Indeed rents have risen by three per cent in just the last quarter. The fast rate of growth is being driven by a return of workers to city centres (as fewer people work from home) and students have gone to universities this Autumn.

The good news for renters is that despite the increase in rents, affordability has remained largely unchanged thanks to rising pay, with rents accounting for an average of 37 per cent of a single tenant's monthly income.

Gráinne Gilmore, head of research at Zoopla, said: "Households looking for the flexibility of rental accommodation, especially students and city workers, are back in the market after consecutive lockdowns affected demand levels in major cities."

It can also be explained in part by renters opting for larger and more expensive properties as part of the pandemic-induced search for more space.

The South West saw the biggest jump in rental growth at 9 per cent, due to its popularity as a place to live, followed by regions where renting remains most affordable, namely Wales, where rents have



risen 7.7 per cent year-on-year and the East Midlands at 6.9 per cent.

MISMATCH BETWEEN DEMAND AND SUPPLY

Rent increases are running well ahead of the five-year average in many of the UK's largest cities, with Bristol seeing the strongest rise of 8.4 per cent, while Nottingham was not far behind at 8.3 per cent, and Glasgow was in third place at 7.2 per cent.

Even in London, rents, which had fallen for 15 months in a row, are rising again, increasing by 1.6 per cent in the year to the end of September as offices reopened and city life resumed. Despite this bounce back, rents in the capital are still 5 per cent lower than they were at the start of the pandemic, following significant falls during the past 18 months.

There is also a lack of supply of available properties due to a combination of long-term factors which have caused landlords to exit the sector. These included the 3 per cent stamp duty surcharge on additional properties and the post-lockdown spike in demand. The net result is a fast-paced market with homes taking an average of

just 15 days to rent across the UK.

Tenants looking for a new home to rent have two issues to contend with, namely intense competition and rising rents. Zoopla advises people they may find somewhere with a lower rent if they are prepared to compromise on property type, such as opting for a flat rather than a house, or choosing a less central location.

Looking ahead Zoopla is predicting that the shortage of homes available to rent looks set to continue due to lower levels of investment by landlords, while demand is expected to remain strong as the employment market remains relatively robust and there is still pent-up demand, particularly for homes in city centres. The mismatch between supply and demand will continue to push up rents.

Dan Wilson Craw, Deputy Director of campaign group Generation Rent, said the new report was "terrible news" for anyone trying to move right now. "We have been hearing from renters who have lost bidding wars for homes, or failed affordability checks, so are being priced out of their areas," he said.

Poor housing harms health of 20 per cent of tenants in England

Poor housing is harming the health of one in five tenants in England, with mould, damp and cold the main triggers of sickness, a survey by the housing charity Shelter has revealed.

Approximately 1.9 million households could be suffering physical and mental problems as a result of poor housing conditions as well as uncertainty caused by struggles to pay their rent and repeated evictions, polling of over 3,000 private tenants suggests. A quarter of all tenants said they were adversely affected by damp and mould and by

being unable to heat their homes. They were three times more likely to say housing was harming their health than those without the problems.

The study also detailed how almost one in four tenants said their housing situation had left them feeling "stressed and anxious" since the start of the pandemic.

Renters affected by mould and heating problems are three times more likely to say their home is harming their health, according to the survey results:

- Affected by mould - 46%;
- Unaffected by mould - 14%;
- Affected by heating problems - 44%; and
- Unaffected by heating problems - 15%.

"The cost of poor housing is spilling out into overwhelmed GP surgeries, mental health services, and hours lost from work," said Shelter's chief executive, Polly Neate.

"The new housing secretary must get a grip on the housing crisis and tackle a major cause of ill health. Listening to the calls flooding into our helpline there is no doubt that health and housing go hand in hand. Yet, millions of renters are living in homes that make them sick because they are mouldy, cold, unaffordable and grossly insecure."

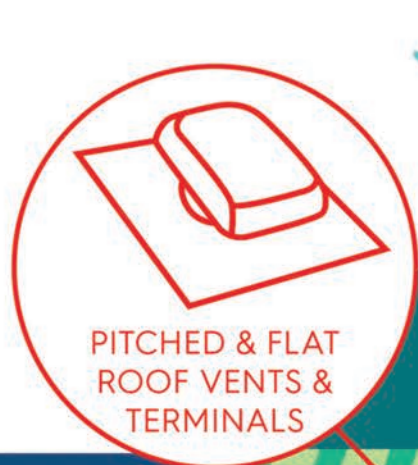
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Students paying upto 26 per cent more in rent while at uni

The cost of renting for the average student has increased by 8 per cent over the last five years, but this climbs to as much as 26 per cent in some regions.

Currently, the average student in Britain pays out £132 per week in rent, although in London, it is as high as £152 per week - the most expensive of all British regions.

However, when analysing the cost of renting for students over the last five years, research by Manor Interiors shows that London is one of just two regions to see the cost paid per week actually fall.



In 2017, the average London student paid £182 per week in rent but this has since fallen to £152 per week - a 16 per cent drop.

Scotland has also seen the cost of renting fall for students, with a 2 per cent fall meaning they now pay an average of £127 per week.

But every other area of Britain has seen the average level of student rent increase. The East Midlands has seen the largest increase, with students now paying £129 per week - a 26 per cent increase in just five years. The North West and Yorkshire and the Humber have also seen student rental costs increase by more than 20 per cent since 2017.

The South West, Wales and South East have all seen double-digit increases of between 16 and 11 per cent, with the North East (9), West Midlands (7) and East of England (3) also seeing increases, albeit of a smaller size.

CEO of Manor Interiors, Farhan Malik, commented: "An extra £11 a week might not seem that significant but every penny counts when you're a student and over the course of a year, they are now paying a considerably higher price in rent compared to just five years ago."



Failure to tackle criminal landlords is laid bare by research

Two thirds of English councils have failed to prosecute any landlords for offences related to standards in or the management of private rented housing over the last three years.

The National Residential Landlords Association is warning that this failure to take action against the criminal minority brings the whole sector into disrepute and risks undermining further reform of the sector.

The NRLA obtained the data via Freedom of Information Act requests from 283 local authorities across England. In the three years between 2018/2019 and 2020/21, 67 per cent had not successfully prosecuted a single landlord for offences related to standards in or the management of private rented housing. A further 10 per cent had secured just one successful prosecution.

Overall, just 20 councils were responsible for 77 per cent of all successful prosecutions. The three councils with the highest number of prosecutions (Southwark, Birmingham and Hull) were responsible for 38 per cent of all such action across England. Of these, Birmingham and Hull did not have a local landlord licensing scheme in place.

Among those councils responding, just 937 successful prosecutions of criminal landlords had taken place over the past three years. This is despite Government estimates in 2015 that there may be around 10,500 rogue landlords in operation.

The new data follows research published earlier this year by the NRLA showing that over the same three years, 53 per cent of English councils had issued no civil penalties against private landlords.

While the Government has pledged to publish a White Paper on reform of the private rented sector

next year, the NRLA is warning that a failure to enforce the wide range of powers already available to tackle criminal and rogue landlords will critically undermine further reform.

The NRLA is calling on the Government to provide councils with the multi-year funding needed to ensure they are properly resourced to take action against criminal landlords. According to research by Unchecked UK the amount spent on housing standards by local authorities in England fell by 45 per cent between 2009 and 2019.

This must, the NRLA argues, happen alongside a requirement for councils to publish details of formal and informal enforcement activity against private landlords on an annual basis. This is vital to ensuring that they can be held to account for efforts to tackle criminal and rogue landlords.

Ben Beadle, Chief Executive of the NRLA, said: "The vast majority of responsible landlords are sick and tired of a failure to root out the minority who bring the sector into disrepute. The problem is not a lack of powers, but a failure by councils to enforce them properly.

"While ensuring councils have the resources they need is vital, so too is the need for them to be more transparent about the levels of enforcement they are taking. In short, local authorities need to prioritise activity to find and root out criminal landlords, ensuring it is they who meet the costs of such efforts.

"Our research illustrates also that there is no clear link between the existence of a landlord licensing scheme and levels of prosecutions. Councils again need to be open with tenants and landlords about how such schemes are ensuring standards are met in rental housing."

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Council breaches regulator's Home Standard over safety failings

Norwich City Council was found to have breached the Home Standard after it referred itself to the social housing regulator, having discovered a series of failings in its safety programmes of work across its housing stock.

Shortcomings in the council's statutory cyclical works in relation to fire, electrical, asbestos and water safety meant that tenants in many of the city's 17,000 council homes were at risk of harm. At one stage almost 900 electrical safety assessments (due every 5 years) were overdue and up to 500 Legionella Risk Assessments were outstanding. Some of the properties affected were high-risk buildings such as sheltered housing schemes for the elderly.

On discovering the problem, the council appointed an independent expert to conduct detailed safety checks across all the work areas, then put together an urgent work programme to

complete all checks, risk assessments and follow-up work that was needed. It then advised the Regulator of Social Housing about these matters and the council's plans to put things right. This is almost identical to the situation that developed at Croydon Council earlier this year.

The regulator found that the city council failed to meet statutory health and safety requirements in relation to fire, electrical, asbestos and water safety. Of the fire risk assessments that were overdue, some were for a small number of high-risk buildings and sheltered schemes, with the Council "unable to provide information on outstanding FRA remedial actions".

The same situation applied to legionella testing. In addition the Council could not provide any data on whether communal or domestic asbestos surveys were overdue, how many or by how long. "Taking

all of this information into account, the regulator concluded that Norwich City Council breached the Home Standard and, as consequence, there was the potential for serious detriment to tenants," the judgement said.

A programme of corrective work has already started, while the regulator was "assured" the council had taken "immediate and appropriate action to mitigate the risks to tenants while the programme is being delivered". The regulator said it would not take statutory action at this stage because it had assurances that the situation was being remedied. The council said most of the outstanding work will be completed by the end of this calendar year, although some of the asbestos work will continue into 2022.

Alan Waters, leader of the council, said: "I want to apologise to our residents for not meeting all our responsibilities as a landlord. The safety of our residents is, and should always be, at the top of our agenda. We have written to residents in all 17,000 council homes as we want to be open about the issues we have uncovered and explain the steps we are taking to resolve them."

Ombudsman rules two large HAs guilty of maladministration

Two of the country's largest social housing providers have been found guilty of maladministration by the Ombudsman, after it launched investigations into long running complaints made by tenants.

A finding of maladministration was made against Clarion Housing Group for failing to fix an electrical issue before lockdown and then taking no action throughout, "despite being aware of a damaged electricity cable in the property which meant the resident was without the use of a bedroom for seven months".

The ombudsman found "potentially dangerous" electrical issues were first reported at the property in November 2019. The property was passed as

satisfactory in error when the electricians at the property should have been deemed "unsatisfactory". Clarion was ordered to pay compensation of £1,400.

The tenant reported sockets were not working correctly and despite several visits by contractors, the problems were not rectified. The tenant was unable to use one bedroom for seven months because it had no electricity.

In a separate case, The Guinness Partnership was judged to have delivered poor complaint-handling when it failed to consider where a resident should stay during repairs to a blocked drain at their property.

"That would have avoided the resident's inconvenience and expense," the ombudsman

found. Guinness was ordered to either refund the £1,280 in rent that the resident had paid to his parents for staying with them, or refund him the rent paid for his flat while he was absent.

Guinness was also ordered to pay £700 in compensation for the "inconvenience, insufficient response to the resident's complaints and his request for compensation, replacing an earlier, lower offer".

Richard Blakeway, housing ombudsman, said: "Our approach to openness through publishing decisions promotes accountability, learning and awareness of the difference complaints can make. They help to illustrate what we find reasonable when considering what is fair in all the circumstances."

Private landlords forced to rely on savings to cover lost rental income

The majority of private landlords helping tenants out during the pandemic by cutting their rent absorbed the losses from their own savings according to new research.

The research conducted by BVA/BDRC for the National Residential Landlords Association shows that 61 per cent of those landlords who, in the second quarter of the year, had offered at least one tenant a rent-free or deferred rent period absorbed the losses from their savings.

With YouGov figures suggesting that 61 per cent of landlords rent out just one property,

and 34 per cent are retired with rental income representing all or part of their pension, the NRLA is warning that reliance on landlord savings is not sustainable in supporting tenants facing rent problems.

Government data shows that in April-May this year, seven per cent of tenants in England, almost 800,000, were behind with their rent. This was more than double the number who said they were in arrears in 2019/20, before lockdown measures started. Responding to the findings, Ben Beadle, Chief Executive of the National

Residential Landlords Association said:

"These figures show the extent to which landlords have worked to sustain tenancies as a result of the pandemic, many at the expense of their retirement savings. But this cannot continue indefinitely.

"After months of calling on the Government to help tenants who through no fault of theirs got behind with their rent, we have welcomed the funding now made available to help those affected to pay off COVID rent debts.

"It is now vital that councils ensure tenants who need it can access the funding swiftly. Without this, landlords will be left between a rock and a hard place either expected to sustain rent arrears they cannot afford or to repossess their properties, neither of which we want to see."

Disrepair challenges, the Housing Ombudsman Reports and the Net Zero journey



Certifying the health of a building will confirm the structural condition but, we need to ensure any defined improvements support the decarbonisation of housing stock in the UK.

An example is the drive to insulate homes throughout the country. And, we should not dismiss the significant number of previous properties that had the installation reversed due to unforeseen outcomes.

The challenges landlords and residents face when

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Housemark has launched the social housing sector's first suite of comparable building safety metrics

A suite of eight safety compliance measures specifically designed for social housing and covering the essential services of gas, electrics, fire, asbestos, water and lifts, has been launched by Housemark, the sector's leading data collector and analyst.

The measures have been developed as part of a specialist research group of more than 200 social landlords and sector experts including Building a safer future, the Chartered Institute of Housing, G15, Electrical Safety First and the National Federation of ALMOs.

Headline findings from their analysis of data collected for 2020/21 from housing associations, includes:

- Compliance is high across the sector but the underlying data often requires human intervention to make calculations, increasing the risk of data accuracy;
- Safety specialists and governing bodies are looking for comparable safety metrics to support assurance;
- Landlords use an average of five different IT systems to monitor building safety, only 1 in 8 use a single system, this complexity creates inefficiency and data quality challenges; and
- Most landlords are using existing lines of communication to inform residents about building safety. Few reported proactive conversations with residents – 39% said they had



raised awareness through personal visits and only 1 in 4 reported formal discussions with resident representatives about safety, highlighting this critical issue for the sector.

Talking about the new measures, Housemark Chief Executive Laurice Ponting said: "Nothing is more important than the safety of residents and historically we have seen that what gets measured gets managed. As the leading data and insight company for the UK housing sector, Housemark has worked with customers and other sector leaders in this crucial area, to provide the support and guidance proactive providers want.

"Using existing regulation and sector expertise, we have created a standardised way to monitor and measure building safety and eight new measures

will be available in April 2022 for our customers to make like-for-like comparisons. This will put their performance in context to understand where they are now and where they need to drive improvements. Our research has also highlighted sector trends and barriers to tackling this key priority, enabling customers to use insight to make evidence-based decisions."

Among a series of action points emerging from the analysis, Housemark is recommending that social landlords work on changing their internal culture to focus more on safety; that value engineering (looking for savings) is reduced and quality and safety are upgraded; the sector works towards standardisation (making true comparisons easier) and more emphasis is placed on the sharing of best practice.

45 per cent of private renters have been victims of illegal acts by their landlord or letting agent

The campaigning housing charity Shelter has warned the Government that its planned Renters' Reform Bill must help private tenants fight back against illegal behaviour.

Over two-fifths of England's private renting adults – equivalent to 3.7 million people – have been the victim of illegal behaviour from a landlord or letting agent, research from Shelter has revealed.

An in-depth YouGov study of 3,500 private tenants revealed the most common illegal behaviour they faced is a landlord or letting agent entering their home without giving notice or a chance to give permission – a quarter of respondents had experienced this, equivalent to 2.1 million people.

Safety and standards were also a concern, as 22 per cent of tenants (1.8 million people)

said essential safety or household appliances like smoke alarms, central heating or water supplies were not working when they moved into a property.

Despite tenancy deposits often costing people thousands of pounds, 18 per cent of tenants (1.5 million people) said their landlord or letting agent had broken the law by failing to secure their deposit in an approved Government Deposit Protection Scheme.

Even more worryingly, nearly one in ten (9 per cent) private tenants (731,000 people) said they have been assaulted, threatened or harassed by their landlord or letting agent.

Shelter is now calling on the Government to keep its promise to provide greater protections for

renters. The housing charity has warned that the upcoming, landmark Renters' Reform Bill must include a National Landlord Register to ensure landlords fulfil their legal obligations, help regulate the private rental sector, and give renters the power to enforce their rights against law-breaking behaviour.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "Home is everything. Yet millions of private renters across the country don't feel safe or secure in theirs because of landlords and agents who flout the law. People should not have to put up with broken safety alarms, strangers bursting into their homes unannounced or the threat of harassment and violence.

"Enough is enough. Nobody is above the law and renters are tired of being powerless to enforce their rights. The Government has promised voters a fairer private renting system that punishes illegal behaviour by landlords and letting agents. To deliver on this promise, its Renters' Reform Bill must include a National Landlord Register that makes landlords fully accountable and helps drive up standards across private renting."

Aico receives a Royal visit

Aico were honoured to receive Her Royal Highness Princess Anne to their headquarters on Friday 8th October, in recognition of their impact as a prominent business in Shropshire.

Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal arrived at Aico headquarters in Oswestry, Shropshire and was met by Aico's Managing Director Neal Hooper, alongside local dignitaries Mandy Thorn, Deputy Lieutenant of Shropshire, Councillor Vince Hunt, Chairman of Shropshire Council, Owen Paterson, North Shropshire MP, Councillor Mark Jones, Mayor of Oswestry and Ruth Jones, Mayoress of Oswestry.

Neal Hooper then commenced an in-depth tour of Aico's building and facilities, providing Her Royal Highness with an insight into the company's history, their pioneering innovations

within home life safety and their award-winning Corporate Social Responsibility programme. Each of Aico's four bespoke Mobile Training and Demonstration Units were on display, as The Princess Royal was informed of how the company's ethos of education, quality, service



and innovation drives all that they do; enabling the delivery of their mission statement as the leaders in home life safety, promoting best practice and engaging with communities to deliver safer homes.

After meeting with all Aico | HomeLINK colleagues and discussing the significant work the company does for the UK housing sector, as well as the support they afford the local and wider



community, Her Royal Highness was presented with a gift – a horse headcollar adorned with an Aico monogram. Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal concluded the visit with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque that will reside in Aico's dramatic atrium.

Managing Director of Aico Neal Hooper commented "At Aico, we are committed to providing the highest quality in all that we do and this is evident in our passionate people, continued innovation, exceptional service and unrivalled support. Our philosophy has provided a foundation for growth, constantly driving forwards, seeking novel ways of doing things which has proved to be the essence of our approach to Corporate Social Responsibility. To receive this recognition from Her Royal Highness is nothing short of an absolute honour, we are privileged to have been able to share Aico's ethos with The Princess Royal."

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Why energy efficient appliances are great for landlords



It is no secret that homes in the rental sector are more likely to contain old and inefficient appliances for tenants due to cost saving.

But in today's environmentally conscious times, the quality, age and efficiency of an appliance can have a detrimental effect on the potential tenant's decision to rent.

Over the years utility costs and energy efficiency ratings have become increasingly more important to tenants as they consider the monthly running costs of a property. Investing in high quality, energy efficient appliances will not only increase a property's desirability but can provide many long-term benefits to both the owner and tenant.

QUALITY AND PRODUCT LIFESPAN

From the initial design phase, through to production and aftercare, quality is at the forefront and this shapes development of Hoover laundry appliances. Hoover strive to create appliances with long-lasting performance and high efficiency through the careful selection of high-quality parts and new innovative technologies.

Hoover has introduced the new-generation Eco-Power Inverter Motor to their A energy rated,

Hoover H-WASH 500 washing machines to provide 4x the durability and 60% more efficiency for consumers. The brushless motor reduces vibrations to extend the machines lifespan by adapting the washing action to the load. By reducing the vibrations, the user will experience excellent results for longer and with lower energy consumption.

EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

As well as high quality parts improving the lifespan and efficiency of an appliance, there are also many programmes that the consumer can use to aid efficiency and make life simpler. For example, the auto care cycle uses an advanced algorithm to auto calculate the most suitable programme by adapting detergent, water, temperature, and cycle time to provide the most efficient wash; saving time, energy, and money for the user.

The Care Dose feature, available on selected models, makes adding detergent and softener simple. This self-dosage feature allows the user to pre-fill up to 21 cycles of detergent and softener at one time to ensure there's no wasted detergent, whilst making day-to-day tasks a lot simpler.

The built in Active Care technology intelligently analyses your wash, creating the perfect mix of water and detergent in the drum. That mix penetrates the fibres more deeply, delivering 20% better washing results when compared to a standard machine. This allows the user to achieve exceptional results on tough stains such as grass, ketchup and chocolate without double washing.

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Hoover laundry appliances available to purchase through AO Business.

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www.ao-business.com/l/washing_machines-hoover/1-6/1/

Fireproof balconies

Fire safety in residential multi-occupancy buildings is a key issue of our times. We spoke to Richard Izzard of AliDeck to find out more about successful fire safety remediation of balconies.

Leaseholders and building owners up and down the country have been caught in an incredibly frustrating and difficult situation across the last several years. In the aftermath of the Grenfell fire, mortgage lenders became increasingly reluctant to provide loans on properties in high-rise buildings.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Building Societies Association (BSA), and UK Finance came together to develop the External Wall Fire Review scheme (and its EWS1 survey form) to provide an industry-led solution. Sadly, the scheme was derailed almost immediately following launch when the Government amended its building safety guidance in the Consolidated Advice Note of January 2020.

Since then, leaseholders and prospective buyers have faced demands from lenders for completed and passing EWS1 forms for multi-occupancy buildings of any height. The result of this has been nothing less than chaos, with lead times for surveys often estimated in years rather than months.

COMBUSTIBLE BALCONIES

While many buildings have failed EWS1 for the presence of flammable wall cladding, a surprisingly large number of buildings have failed due only to combustible materials on balconies. Timber or composite decking is very common, being used on new-build balconies across the UK until only quite recently, so the scale of this particular problem is vast.

For buildings that fail EWS1, the only solution is to fully remediate all fire safety issues, replacing combustible materials with non-combustible alternatives to remove or minimise fire risk.

“We have conversations with leaseholders every day about their failed EWS1. Almost always, they are somewhat confused about the situation as, sadly, there is still significant obscurity surrounding the whole issue,” says Richard.

For homeowners that live in a building that has failed EWS1 due to the balconies, their key question is, “How can I resolve this?” Unfortunately, individual leaseholders in a block are unable to independently remediate their own balconies to resolve the problem.

“The EWS1 failure applies to the entire building,” explained Richard. “A passing survey will not be achieved until all fire safety defects in the whole block are remediated.”

While this is often frustrating news for individual leaseholders to receive, the upshot of it is that by remediating entire buildings in one fell swoop a positive outcome is much more assuredly achievable.

NON-COMBUSTIBLE REQUIREMENTS

Building regulations, amended in 2018, now require all materials in the external envelope of multi-occupancy buildings to be non-combustible, rated A2-s1, d0 at minimum. Specifying materials with this EuroClass A Rating for fire performance is an instant route to compliance with regulations and resolves concerns for EWS1-failed balconies.

With aluminium decking acting as an easy-to-install direct replacement for timber or composite decking, the logistics of refurbishing even large buildings with many decked areas are relatively straightforward.

While it can still represent major work, particularly for high-rise developments with many dozens of balconies, the fact that the issues in balconies are easily accessible rather than being concealed within the wall system of the building does mean that the works can be completed quickly.



LOOKING AHEAD

Many thousands of homeowners have been impacted by the turmoil in housing through this year and 2020, trapped in unmortgageable properties and often facing large remediation bills. This intolerable situation has been raised in Parliament time and again, with politicians of all hues demanding urgent resolution. The difficult fact has been, though, that until new guidance from the government is provided, lenders will continue to practice caution regarding risk.

Finally though, real change is imminently due with the publication of PAS 9980. Due to be published in December, PAS 9980 is a “publicly available specification” developed by the British Standards Institution at the request of the government. This code of practice is intended to achieve a standardised approach to all aspects of fire risk appraisal and assessment in external wall construction to provide clarity for all stakeholders.

Michael Gove MP, as new Housing Minister, has declared that the January 2020 Consolidated Advice Note shall be withdrawn “by Christmas”, replaced by PAS 9980. It has been touted as the end of EWS1 but many stakeholders have expressed doubts.

“The danger is that one set of rules is simply being replaced by another and it is not yet clear that the fundamental concerns that lenders in particular have will be answered by this,” said Richard. “The draft of PAS 9980 that was issued during consultation earlier this year contained a lot of important details to move further towards a fire safe future and I remain optimistic, but I do suspect that banks will continue to push for proof that buildings are unlikely to require remediation before lending.”

This is the key point to understand regarding EWS1; the scheme was never intended to prove that a building was safe, only that it was unlikely to require costly remediation in the future that might devalue the property or cause the homeowner to default on their mortgage.

The Consolidated Advice Note caused problems because it was worded in such a way that made it legally unambiguous that combustible materials in the external envelope of any building should be removed and replaced. It remains to be seen if PAS 9980 will help banks feel more confident about the risk profile of unremediated multi-occupancy buildings.

“As ever, the surest route to fire safety is to remove combustible materials and replace them with non-combustible alternatives,” concluded Richard.

Richard Izzard is managing director of AliDeck

Airtech urging everyone to take action

Airtech Solutions, the condensation, mould and radon specialists, supported UK Radon Awareness Week (1-7 November 2021) by encouraging everyone to not delay and to take action. Run by the UK Radon Association, this year's theme for UK Radon Awareness Week was 'Don't Delay'. In support of Radon Awareness Week, Airtech advised households, private landlords, social housing landlords and employers, 'Don't Delay' learn more about radon and its health effects and carry out a radon test in your home and workplace to help protect families and employees. Airtech offers a complete solution to help protect properties from the risks caused by radon gas with 30 years of experience in radon prevention.

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Vent-Axia welcomes damp and mould report

Leading British ventilation manufacturer, Vent-Axia is committed to improving public health by improving indoor air quality (IAQ) through ventilation, so welcomes the Housing Ombudsman's report 'Spotlight on Damp and Mould. It's not lifestyle'. The report calls for landlords to take a 'zero-tolerance' approach to damp and mould as well as considering proactive actions to identify homes that have or may be at risk of developing problems rather than waiting for residents to report issues. Lena Hebestreit, Marketing Manager at Vent-Axia said: "We have a long history of working with social housing landlords on improving ventilation for their residents to help tackle damp and mould in the home".

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F. Ball crowned for 25th time

F. Ball and Co. Ltd. has reaffirmed its status as leading manufacturer of adhesives for floorcoverings, after being named 'Adhesives Manufacturer of the Year' for a 25th consecutive year at the CFJ/CFA Flooring Industry Awards 2021. Each year, F. Ball invests heavily in research and development to enhance its range to help flooring professionals meet increasing customer expectations, facilitated by on-site laboratories at its Staffordshire headquarters. Most recently, advancements in adhesives technology have enabled F. Ball to create a fast-track, fibre-reinforced, vinyl adhesive for Luxury Vinyl Tiles (LVTs), Styccobond F58 PLUS.

01538 361 633 www.f-ball.com



Accreditation for The Window Company

Specialist commercial installer The Window Company (Contracts) has achieved PAS2030 accreditation, which is a requirement for installing windows and doors funded by any of the government's energy efficiency schemes targeting retrofit projects. With only around 5% of UK window and door installers estimated to hold PAS2030, the company has joined a fairly exclusive club. As a direct result of achieving PAS2030, the Chelmsford based company has already secured a contract with Engie to replace windows and doors in properties in Fenland and Tonbridge and Malling as part of the Clarion East Decarbonisation scheme.

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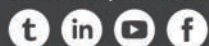
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Installing trust

Adrian Pavey of Nationwide Windows and Doors argues that social housing professionals need to think about more than just the final product.

It's easy for installation companies who work in the private sector to have a tunnel-vision approach of focusing solely on the final product and how it impacts the building or home it is being fitted into.

For those working with local authorities and housing associations, however, there are many more things to consider.

Everyone working in the social housing sector has a responsibility to improve not just the homes they work on, but also the community in which they work, and leave a positive impact on those in that community.

These things are not separate, though.

IMPROVING HOMES

Refurbishment, upgrade and repair work in people's homes carries additional complexities than when working on newbuild or empty properties. Safety and making tenants feel comfortable is so important in the work we do; they are trusting you to come into their home, so there needs to be that level of respect.

These differences between occupied and empty homes were addressed for the first time during the COVID briefings in 2020, where guidance for tradespeople working in homes was first introduced, showing that in order to make tenants happy it's vital that they feel safe.

TENANT SATISFACTION

One of the main KPIs for local authorities is tenant satisfaction, and placing a greater emphasis on the service plays a huge role in this.

When tenants are having work carried out in the home, the local authority is being represented by the supplier, which means they need to know that they will provide an excellent service to leave tenants happy with the work being carried out. If they're happy with how their windows and doors are fitted, for example, they will have a much more positive feeling towards their housing provider.

They don't need to know the detailed regulations, but they will want the windows to help save money on their bills and keep them safer, as well as being fitted by installers who are polite and friendly.

IMPROVING HOUSING

In recent years, there has been lots of pressure on local authorities and housing associations to increase the performance of housing.

Environmental and safety regulations have meant social housing providers need to be more conscious of their impact on the planet and need to be building



Having happier tenants leads to a greater level of trust

homes which are efficient and secure. Arguably, the best way to improve the efficiency of housing is through windows and doors, and there are many options available to help improve a home's performance.

Fire safety performance is also vital, and this too can be improved through doors. After Grenfell, much more stringent safety standards were put in place, and we were at the forefront of this.

In either case, local authorities are often under pressure to conform with new regulations first, and as these are constantly changing, it's important to work with a supplier who is investing in innovation for better products to improve homes.

SUPPORT

It's important to also give back to the communities in which we work. The best way to do this is to support local charities and community schemes who give directly back to the people of that community.

Companies can often just tick boxes when it comes to regulations and meeting certain standards, but committing to making a genuine difference to people's lives is something which is very important, especially to those working in social housing, where community is everything.

RESPONSIBILITY

Social housing poses many different challenges to local authorities, housing associations and suppliers. The number of different areas which they need to focus on is much greater and there is a responsibility for everyone to improve their communities as well as homes.

Community is at the centre of everything that local authorities do, so it can't be neglected. In order to improve tenant satisfaction, it's vital that everyone is dedicated to improving communities, housing and homes.

Adrian Pavey is commercial director at Nationwide Windows and Doors.



Put cladding to the test

As members of the Centre for Window and Cladding Technology (CWCT), Aneira Beament of Ash & Lacy discusses standard test methods for rainscreen cladding systems.

In recent years, the construction industry has stepped up its scrutiny of testing, quality, certification and accreditation of products and systems; particularly within the external facades market.

Safety is paramount within our built environment and is firmly planted at the front of industry professionals' minds when they are investigating and specifying materials. However, when presented with an extensive list of applicable British and European standards for compliance, it can be difficult to know exactly what to look for and how to compare the performance of similar products.

In this article, we focus on CWCT testing, a well-established test standard widely used in the rainscreen cladding industry.

WHAT DOES CWCT TESTING ASSESS?

CWCT standard test methods for building envelopes determine the level of serviceability of a facade or rainscreen cladding system when subjected to typical climatic levels of water, air and solid object impact.

The final classifications derived from the results depend on factors such as the maximum air pressure reached or the severity of damage after an impact. CWCT tests must be undertaken at specialist UKAS accredited laboratories or centres, which are experienced in the detailed requirements of the test setup and processes and are regularly audited by representatives from CWCT to ensure compliance to the prescribed standards.

KEY PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

A full CWCT test for rainscreen systems is made up of 4 key test methodologies. Wind load testing looks at resistance to wind load and is divided into two basic elements – serviceability testing and safety testing. Separate positive and negative wind load test pressures can be applied if the design wind load has different positive and negative magnitudes, this is particularly appropriate when testing bespoke cladding systems.

Serviceability wind load testing, where a component or sample of the cladding is subjected to both positive and negative pressure differentials equal to the design wind load (nominally 2400 pascals), to ensure that when the 1-in-50-year wind load occurs, the cladding system or component neither fails (by moving too much – this assessment is usually deflection limited) nor ceases to be weathertight.

The deflection of parts of the component or system are monitored and compared to pre-defined limits. An excessive deflection may lead to damage to fixtures and fittings, failure of joints, or may simply be unnerving for the occupants of the building.

Safety wind load testing, where the objective is to determine whether the cladding has a factor of safety beyond the design wind load (nominally 3600 pascals). This test is usually only performed for flexible cladding systems, where stress limits may be exceeded and permanent deformation occurs. The test sample is subjected to positive and negative application of 50% above the design wind load. A limit is placed on the residual deformation of the cladding system. It is important that fixings are capable of passing this test, as the cladding should not fail structurally during this test. The wind load tests are structural, and are related to issues of health and safety, and so must be performed to the full wind load (and beyond for safety).

Typically, a lower deflection or deformation figure indicates superior performance.

Dynamic water tightness testing; determining a suitable test pressure for watertightness testing is complex as the watertightness test is not undertaken at the design wind pressure - the positive wind pressure. A particular issue is that a



short-term gust has little relevance to water penetration - the quantity of water that can be blown into an opening in a few seconds is very small, and unlikely to cause problems. It is sensible to use standard values, so for this reason watertightness is typically assessed at 300 or 600Pa. Remember, ventilated rainscreens in isolation are not intended to be fully watertight, but it is important that any water penetration is able to drain out at the base of the cavity and that no water permeates to the backing wall.

This test requires an impactor to be suspended in front of the test rig. The impactor is then raised and allowed to swing in a pendulum manner so that it strikes the test sample. The severity of the test is given in terms of the impact energy which is given by the relationship: $E = mgh$, where: E is the Impact energy in J (or Nm) m is the mass of the impactor in kg g is the acceleration due to gravity in ms^{-2} h is the height through which the impactor falls. The impact performance of a cladding panel may be influenced by many factors including the flexibility of the support structure.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Read the report in detail, don't assume that because it's tested it covers all eventualities
- Look for the tested spans or rail centres – this will be the maximum permissible span capability for the system. You can reduce the rail centres, but cannot increase them.
- If the CWCT test is relevant to a panel system, check with the manufacturer to confirm the largest panel size that can be supplied. It is not necessarily the largest panel size tested.
- Check to see if larger panel sizes are reliant on additional stiffening or bracing to achieve wind load/deflection performance criteria.
- Engineering calculations can be used to extrapolate the test data to alternative panel sizes and layouts. Ensure that any engineering calculations are undertaken by qualified individuals carrying PI insurance.
- Certain performance criteria (such as impact resistance) is graded rather than awarded a pass or fail. Make sure that the grade achieved during the test is suitable for the intended building use, location and height.

Aneira Beament is group head of marketing at Ash & Lacy

Panasonic joins the SFHA

Panasonic is delighted to announce that it has become a Sector Associate of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) to assist the region in achieving its challenging targets of lowering carbon emissions. As part of this partnership, Panasonic will share with the association its extensive R&D knowledge and experience of low carbon heating solutions through training, seminars, webinars, spec design and support services of its low carbon solutions such as air source heat pumps. Darren Reis, Regional Manager for Panasonic in Scotland said: "Panasonic as a company is hugely passionate about the environment and I believe we can help the region meet its low carbon targets".

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ESi launches 6 Series Heating Controls

ESi Controls has launched its new, top of the range, 6 Series WiFi Programmable Room Thermostat, offering the latest in heating control for homes and commercial premises. Fully OpenTherm compatible, this new range of controls allows full control via the room thermostat or via a mobile phone or tablet, with a range of features to impress even the most demanding specifier, installer or homeowner. It includes Optimum Start/Stop, Domestic Hot Water (DHW) setpoint, Hot Water time and temperature control when working in conjunction with a wireless cylinder thermostat, full 7 day, 5/2 day or 24 hour programming options, a boost facility, a helpful Holiday Mode and is an ERP Class 5 Product.

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Prioritising air quality

John Moss of EnviroVent looks at the issue of ventilation in social housing and how we may be failing a generation by not addressing it properly.

Now the lockdown restrictions have been removed, employees, school pupils and social housing professionals are going about their business as normally as possible, while exercising caution to minimise COVID-19 risks. However, one positive outcome of the lockdown is that the issue of indoor air quality and ventilation is, in some quarters, being given greater priority.

One of the key research findings of studies carried out by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) was that poor ventilation in confined indoor spaces is associated with increased transmission of respiratory infections, such as COVID-19. Further to this, in the journal 'Science', scientists and engineers point out that while governments have regulations on the safety of food, sanitation and drinking water, there is much less regulation when it comes to pathogens in the air.

Professor Cath Noakes, an environmental engineer at the University of Leeds, said "Air quality is invisible to us so we ignore it, yet it affects us day in, day out, carrying respiratory diseases which affects the probability of people getting infections...spread of infection has not usually been a priority in building design."

NATURAL VERSUS MECHANICAL

Latest government guidance to social housing providers on restricting the spread of the virus is that indoor environments – especially communal areas in flats and care homes – should be ventilated as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission, by diluting internal air with fresh outside air.

The guidance states that extractor fans with outside vents should be used, or windows should be opened to allow natural ventilation. However, mechanical ventilation has been found to be much more effective than natural ventilation in a recent study S&P UK, called 'The importance of good ventilation (before, during and after a global pandemic): Analysis model of the airborne transmission risk.'

The study set out to answer the question of whether natural ventilation – opening windows – is enough to mitigate infection risk from COVID-19 or is a mechanical ventilation system required? The study looked at three different cases: a classroom, a bar and an office. It revealed that the COVID-19 transmission risk is reduced by half when using mechanical ventilation compared with opening windows to create natural ventilation. In addition, the study points out that opening windows as a means of ventilation is not realistic in many cases, as it can cause issues with security, as well as with introducing into the home unfiltered, potentially polluted air from outdoors.

The report highlights that natural ventilation may vary hugely from 0 to more than 10 ACH (air changes per hour) under specific conditions. Therefore, mechanical ventilation allows a building owner to set the ventilation rates accurately according to the requirements of British Standards. It showed that the ventilation requirements set by British Standards can reduce by half the infection risk when compared to relying on opening windows. If a lower infection risk is desired, the installation must then deliver higher ventilation rates than those defined by the standard. The issue is that the standards were not devised in the context of a global pandemic with the associated risk of airborne transmission.

Interestingly, the classroom study revealed that mechanical ventilation delivered ventilation rates according to the standards and managed to eliminate most of the viral concentration during a playground break (30 minutes) as well as completely removing the infectious particles during a two hour-long lunch break. In comparison, in a natural ventilation scenario, open windows are not



capable of completely removing the concentration of virus during any of the breaks.

The results show the importance of adequate ventilation and reinforce the advantages of mechanical ventilation systems. In particular, mechanical ventilation allows for higher ventilation rates than natural ventilation (in most cases), which leads to a lower infection risk.

Although the study was on classrooms and commercial locations, it just goes to show the benefits of mechanical ventilation in reducing and eliminating transmission risks in any situation, such as in homes or shared residences, compared to natural ventilation.

As an industry we are gearing up to meet the current and future needs of social housing providers who will be tasked with ensuring that public housing is sufficiently ventilated to protect occupants from disease and ill health.

In fact, some housing associations have been aware of the health benefits of integrating mechanical ventilation within their housing stock for many years now. They recognise how it helps to reduce the burden on their maintenance departments in the winter months with issues of condensation and mould growth in homes, as a result of poor ventilation, leading to exacerbation of health complaints, such as asthma.

PIV SYSTEMS

Whole house Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) systems can easily be retrofitted into houses or apartments. They supply fresh filtered air into the home to ventilate the whole property. This method delivers air into the home which dilutes, displaces and replaces high humidity levels, which not only controls condensation but also improves indoor air quality. PIV is most commonly fitted into renovated and retrofitted properties and good quality, compliant installation is essential.

As we are in the middle of the heating season, it is likely that many social housing providers will be dealing with issues of condensation and mould growth in tenants' homes. Addressing home ventilation by having a retrofit PIV system fitted can make a huge difference, not only to a property but to its occupants. It means a reduced risk of virus transmission, improvements to respiratory conditions, such as asthma – which are often due to humid environments creating mould growth – and less damage to the fabric of the property; all of which make ventilation well worth prioritising.

John Moss is sales director of Home at EnviroVent

Stelrad CPDs now available online

Stelrad Radiators popular CIBSE and RIBA accredited CPD programmes are still available for face-to-face presentations, but they are now also available conveniently online. The Covid pandemic has seen a switch to working from home for many traditional consumers for CPDs and want flexibility to complete their learning at their own convenience at a time to suit them. You can simply go to the Stelrad website at www.stelrad.com/cpd-online-training/ open the programme at your convenience, digest the information and take the test at the end of the presentation and submit your answers. If you've passed, Stelrad send a certificate for you to add the CPD points to your running total for your professional body.

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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.

01646 692172 www.consortepl.com

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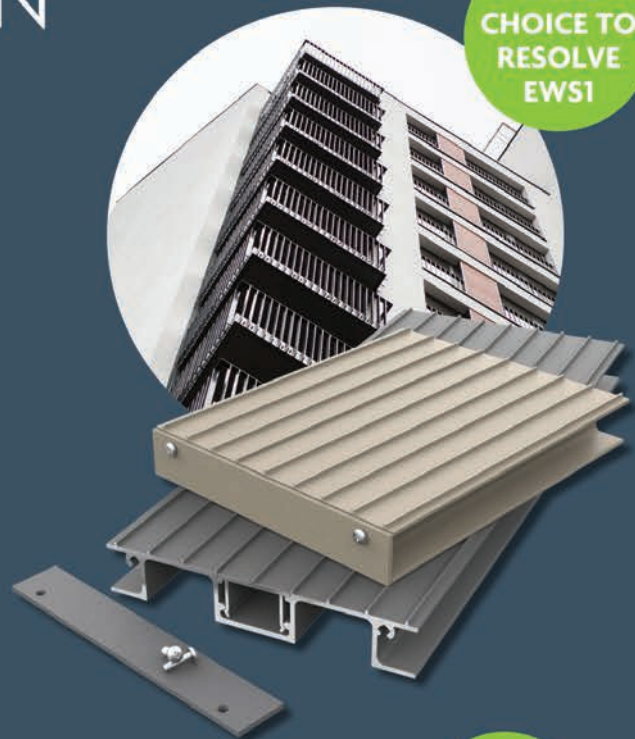
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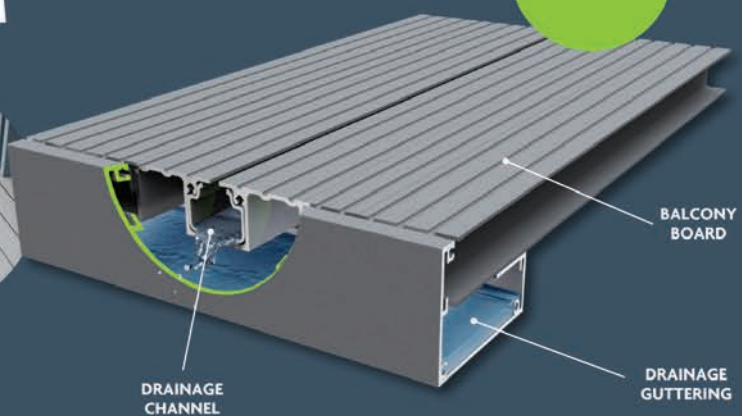
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Bond It yet again leads the way in providing users of their products with excellent reference tools. The new app, launched this month, provides quick and easy locating of technical data sheets, declarations of conformity, safety data sheets and application 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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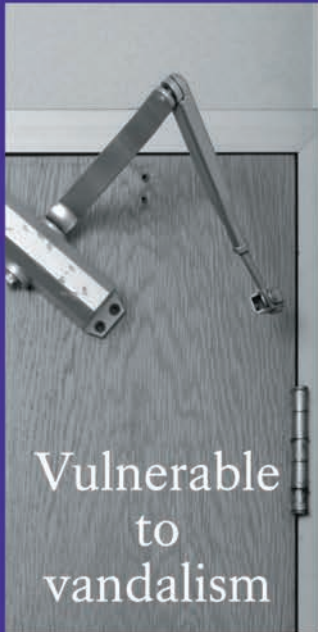


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The importance of boiler specification

Martyn Bridges of Worcester Bosch outlines the future of safety and sustainability in the boiler market.

Over the last 20 to 30 years, boilers have become extremely safe appliances to have in your home, particularly since the advent of Condensing boilers, which have eliminated open flue boilers from the market.

All boilers in the UK today, with a few exceptions, are room-sealed. This means that the combustion products are sealed from the room and have no chance of re-entering, which of course wasn't the case with old style open flue appliances. The only chance of any recycling or re-entering of flue gases into a property is if the flue terminal is too close to a window or air vent, or if the flue attached to the boiler has not been connected correctly, or has been damaged.

In the first instance, it is important to state that UK appliances are very safe. We know this because there are 24 million homes with a boiler installed and evidence of problems are extremely rare.

Notwithstanding, there is still a requirement from the Health and Safety Executive that every landlord's tenant property has a gas safety check undertaken on an annual basis. This echoes some countries in Europe which require this across the board, but in the UK, it is only the landlord-tenant situation where this is a legal requirement. And unfortunately, as much as the industry has campaigned, it is still not a necessity in an owner-occupier situation, which is quite bizarre as the owner-occupier uses exactly the same appliance as a landlord-tenant property. So why is one stricter than the other in terms of requirements? Logically, both property tenures should be subjected to a gas safety check annually. The gas safety check would normally entail a boiler service, although it is not a necessity, just a recommendation. However, where an engineer is available and conducts the gas safety check, it would make sense to service the boiler following manufacturer's instructions, while taking a flue analysis of the appliance products of combustion to make sure all is running smoothly.

It is a requirement to check the flue termination position, to check nothing has changed since the last service. From time to time things like extensions built to a property without extending the flue appear. In addition to this, checking that no trees or foliage are growing around the flue terminal is important. While not a safety requirement, it is a sensible precaution to check the quality of the system water running through the radiators. To make this easier, nowadays there are some digital tools which enable you to check the strength and efficacy of system water.

Not only is safety a principle and prime concern when it comes to boilers, but these kinds of tests will also help to avoid disruption to the heating operation. The last thing you want is to have a tenant contact you with no heating and hot water when it is possible this could be prevented by a proactive service and replacement of consumable parts which manufacturer's instructions may request even though the boiler is working.

Some manufacturers suggest changing certain SEALS or components, which would mean it is incumbent upon the landlord to have the appliances serviced annually.

When it comes down to boilers, reliability and safety is paramount, with another consideration being that continuity of use is paramount to reliability.

There are things that can be done to prevent frozen condensate pipes, for example, if there are externally run condensate discharge pipes from any of the



installations, it would make more sense to either reroute them, if possible, into an internal termination or at the very least insulate or use another type of anti-freeze product to avoid this from happening.

It makes sense that if anyone still has standard efficiency boilers installed within any of their properties then they would be at least sixteen years old by now. Now is the time, from an environmental and performance perspective, to replace them with new condensing boilers which can be anything up to 15-20% more efficient, as well as kinder to the environment.

Martyn Bridges is director of technical communication and product management at Worcester Bosch

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