

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

AUG/SEP 2022



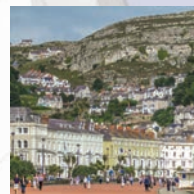
Ombudsman
focus on record
keeping

Leak repair took
eight years

Wales acts on
second homes

Croydon tackles
repair failures

Third of
private rentals
unaffordable



Revisiting fire safety

Following on from last year's study, our latest research aims to find out if the sector has improved when it comes to fire safety. See report inside





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With the HomeLINK Resident App, residents are provided with a healthy home rating, handy advice on how to improve the quality of their home, and Fire and CO alarm testing reminders.



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Editor's comment

Will Michael Gove leave a positive housing legacy despite his short term in office?



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

The housing world has got used to the merry-go-round of ministerial appointments but even the most seasoned professionals were taken aback by the wholesale changes precipitated by the Conservative Party's leadership crisis. At one point there was only one housing ministerial post filled as a result of resignations and the spectacular sacking of Michael Gove as the secretary of state. His departure had nothing to do with his performance in the job, nor for any policy differences with his boss, the Prime Minister.

But an awful lot of housing people were genuinely sorry to see Mr Gove depart after just 10 months in post. Irrespective of politics, there was a sense that here was a heavy hitter who was breaking the log jams in a number of key areas and getting on with getting things done! Policy and legislative blockages were being successfully navigated and for the first time in a number of years it looked like the person in the top job in housing was setting a clear course for at least the next few years. He was effective at his job and not prepared to allow builders to shirk their cladding removal responsibilities.

With Mr Gove's sudden and unexpected departure we are now left wondering how much of his To Do list will survive. His replacement in Greg Clarke is seen more as a steady pair of hands, who previously held the housing portfolio in cabinet for a year under Theresa May. But whether he survives the election of a new Prime Minister only time will tell. At least we probably won't have to wait very long to find out!

One other concern that emerged during the Conservative's leadership contest was the challenge made by several candidates to the targets set for removing carbon from our homes and how this will be paid for. Abandoning our Net Zero target became a clarion call, without it seemed, any understanding of how disruptive and far reaching such changes would have. One of the most effective measures we are already taking to reduce our carbon emissions, is improving the insulation of our homes – albeit not quickly enough. Insulation helps to prevent heat leaking out of our homes and should reduce our use of energy for heating, washing and cooking. During the deepest cost of living crisis in decades with even worse news expected soon on the energy cap increase this Autumn, it is bewildering that politicians running for the highest office in the land can undermine such efforts.

Only a few miles south of Westminster, changes are taking place in Croydon Council. This was the scene of one of the first housing disrepair reports from ITN News early last year and the terrible conditions that were exposed shocked the nation. Sadly further reports of failing services emerged in the following weeks and months at both councils and housing associations. For the last year people working in the social housing sector have been asking how such things could have happened. Croydon Council is completely reshaping how its repairs service is delivered and is consulting its tenants on a new Residents Charter. I wish them all the luck in making positive and tangible changes, Their tenants deserve better.

But of course for such changes to stand a chance of succeeding, the culture within the housing service needs to be pro-tenant and accountable, it also needs proper levels of resource being invested in it with staff given the tools they require and a confidence to act when they see things are not going right. The Housing Ombudsman is dealing with record levels of work and it is clear that the regulatory system of the past 12 years or so has failed to deliver modern and effective services. A White Paper focusing on how social housing services will be improved was launched just a few weeks before Mr Gove was sacked. Given the length of time it took between the Grenfell Tower fire and the publication of the proposed legislation, it is important that the momentum is not lost. I will be keeping a close eye on the new Secretary of State, as I am sure many others will be, to ensure the new law is delivered in the very near future.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Elaine Gilligan of K Systems argues why reversing the skills shortage could quicken the race to net-zero

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The properties and people in the rental sectors in numbers

Over a third of all households in England rent their homes from landlords, but tenants and their homes in the private and social housing sectors vary hugely in their characteristics, as revealed in the English Housing Survey.

The latest EHS report tells us the private rented sector has increased significantly in the past 20 years and is now home to just over 4.4 million households, nearly one fifth of all households in England.

In the social housing sector, housing association tenants make up 2.4 million households, while local authority tenants account for 1.6 million households. Councils are continuing to lose stock through right to buy sales and transfers to associations at a quicker rate than they can build replacements.

A greater proportion of more vulnerable groups live in the social housing sector compared to other tenures. This is likely due to social housing being allocated based on resident needs.

More than one quarter of social renters are aged 65 or over. Social renters on average are older (53 years on average) than private renters (41 years on average) and younger than owners (57 years on average).

Lone parent households with dependent children make up a higher proportion of the social rented sector than other tenures (18 per cent, compared to three per cent of owner occupied households and 11 per cent of private rented households).

HOUSEHOLD FINANCES

Social renters are less likely to have savings than private renters and owner occupiers.

In 2020/21, 69 per cent of social renters had no savings, compared to 19 per cent of owner occupiers and 45 per cent of private renters.

Social rented households with dependent children are least likely to have savings, with 85 per cent of lone parent households with dependent children and 87 per cent of couples with dependent children having no savings.

Average rent before housing support for all social renters is £102 a week, lower than for private renters. In 2020/21, 15 per cent of social renters were in arrears either currently or within the last year.

Rent costs £198 per week on average for private renters, significantly higher than rents for social renters.

Housing association tenants pay higher rent on average than local authority tenants (£107 per week compared to £94 per week).

On average, private renters spend 31 per cent of their income on their rent. Private renters in receipt of housing support spend around 40 per cent of their income on rent. Both these figures are higher than for mortgagors (18 per cent) and for social



On average, private renters spend 31 per cent of their income on their rent

renters (27 per cent). In 2020/21, 55 per cent of social rented households had at least one household member with a long-term illness or disability (2.2 million households). This contrasts with 28 per cent of owner occupied households, and 29 per cent of private rented households.

SATISFACTION RATES

The vast majority of private renters are satisfied with their current accommodation (80 per cent) and tenure (63 per cent), although this is still lower than the satisfaction rates among owner occupiers, (94 and 98 per cent).

Approximately 772,000 private rented households, or 17 per cent of all private renters, had considered making a complaint to their landlord or letting agency. Overall, more than three quarters (77 per cent) did make a complaint to their landlord or letting agency.

The most common reasons for not making a complaint were concern over retaliation by the landlord (15 per cent), concern that tenancies wouldn't be renewed (14 per cent) and the time and hassle it takes to complain (13 per cent).

In the last 12 months, 32 per cent of social renters had considered making a complaint. Compared to private renters, social renters are twice as likely to consider complaining. Older renters were less likely to consider complaining than younger renters.

Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance is lower among social renters (66 per cent) than private renters (75 per cent). The most common reasons for dissatisfaction with repairs and maintenance among social renters are the landlord being slow to complete repairs (29 per cent), the landlord not bothering to do the repairs

(26 per cent), and the work being of poor quality (17 per cent).

Social rented homes are more energy efficient than homes in the private sector. This is likely due to there being a higher proportion of flats (which have less exposed surface area and are therefore more efficient than houses or bungalows) and have better insulation.

In 2020, the social rented sector had the highest proportion of dwellings already at EER band C or above (65 per cent, compared to 41 in the private rented and 42 in the owner occupied sector).

Social rented homes are typically less likely to be poor quality, have a smaller proportion of serious safety hazards, and cost less to bring up to standard than homes in the private sector.

PROPERTY CONDITIONS

Compared to other tenures, social rented stock has the smallest proportion of occupied non-decent homes, at 11 per cent. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of occupied private rented homes (approx 970,000 properties) and 14 per cent of occupied owner occupied homes were non-decent in 2020.

In 2020, 5 per cent of social rented homes had a problem with damp, at 198,000 households. This is a higher proportion than owner occupied homes (2 per cent or 335,000 households), but much lower than the number of private rented homes (10 per cent or 409,000 households) with damp.

13 per cent of private rented dwellings had a Category 1 hazard, compared to 9 per cent in the owner occupied sector and 5 per cent in the social rented sector.

On average, it costs £5,457 to bring a non-decent social rented home up to the Decent Homes Standard. This is lower than costs to improve owner occupied homes (£7,852) and private rented homes (£8,475). Improving local authority homes costs more than housing association homes (£6,030 compared to £4,985).

On average, private renters had lived in their current accommodation for just over 4 years – this was a shorter period of time than for owner occupiers (16 years) and social renters (10.8 years). In terms of time spent in the sector, nearly three fifths had been in the PRS for more than 4 years.

Nearly three quarters of private renters said their last tenancy ended because they wanted to move. Fewer than a tenth said their landlord or agent asked them to leave.

The majority (73 per cent) of private renters left their last tenancy because they wanted to move, and 10 per cent said their tenancy ended because it was only for a fixed period. Fewer than one tenth (6 per cent) said they left their last tenancy because their landlord or agent asked them to leave.

Of those who were evicted, the main reason was because the landlord wanted to use or sell the property (63 per cent).

Over half of social housing residents have turned to credit or buy-now-pay-later services for essentials

Over half of social housing residents say they have used credit or a buy-now-pay-later service to cover an essential household cost such as a food shop or a bill in the last 12 months.

This is a key finding from the latest survey output from the Resident Voice Index (RVI) initiative. The survey of over 5,200 social housing residents on the impact of the cost of living crisis also revealed that nearly seven in 10 respondents worry all or most of the time about meeting normal monthly living expenses.

With tenants facing such difficult choices as a result of the cost of living crisis, it flags up the pressure that landlords will face in trying to minimise the expected growth in rent arrears, as well as their planning for next year's rent increase.

"The survey makes it clear that households are having to make tough choices," said Doug Sarney, Project Lead for the Resident Voice Index and Director at MRI Software. "Alongside over half of respondents reporting that they have had to use credit or deferred payment schemes to meet essential household costs, a further 20 per cent considered doing so. We are seeing a ticking time bomb for households on the edge of coping."

The Resident Voice Index is an independent project that anonymously gathers the views of social housing residents in the UK. Developed by MRI Software, a provider of software to the social housing sector and wider property market, the short RVI surveys are designed to provide policymakers

and housing providers with insights from residents about their neighbourhoods and communities.

The goal of the project is to ensure the voice of the resident is heard to improve the experiences of social housing residents. Other key results of the survey include:

- Almost nine in 10 of those under age 35 say they are using or considering using buy-now-pay-later or credit to pay for essential household costs;
- 82 per cent of those under 35 report being worried all the time or most of the time about meeting normal monthly living expenses;
- Only 4 per cent of all respondents say they rarely worry about money;
- Over half (56 per cent) of all respondents didn't know that help or support would be available to them if they faced a financial struggle; and
- Almost six in 10 (58 per cent) respondents do not feel that they have the power to influence their future financial situation.

One of the most significant indicators of the challenges being faced was the use of the word 'food' in the free-text input from the latest Resident Voice Index survey. Analysis of these answers reveals numerous examples of parents skipping meals to feed children, increased use of food banks and people eating only cold food to avoid using domestic energy.

A core theme that emerged from the results is that residents feel there is nothing more to

One of the most significant indicators of the challenges being faced was the use of the word 'food' in the free-text input from the latest Resident Voice Index survey

cut. Many respondents indicate that they are already living on tight budgets.

"This is not just an instance of forgoing holidays, trips out with the family or self-proclaimed luxuries," Sarney notes. "Instead, for a proportion of those who answered, it is applying increased pressure to already bare-bones living. For those of pension age or who are unable to work – for example, because of disability or raising children – earning more money is simply not an option."

Sarney concluded: "We anticipated the survey results to be hard hitting. However, we were not prepared for the high levels of desperation, extreme worry and hopelessness in the responses. References to catastrophic mental health slides and suicide were common in the free-text input of respondents. Our hope by sharing these accounts is to inspire anyone with the ability to enact change to do so."

Tenants feel at greater risk from fires in their homes than owner occupiers do

Most people feel safe in their home and do not fear that a fire will break out but twice as many private and social housing tenants fear a fire starting in their home than homeowners.

In the latest set of results from the English Housing Survey for 2020/21, some 87 per cent of households said they felt safe from fire in their home while eight per cent said that they neither agreed nor disagreed that they felt safe at home. But

one in 20 households (five per cent) said they felt unsafe in their home because they fear that a fire may break out.

Tenants were more likely than owner occupiers to agree that they did not feel safe at home because a fire may break out. In 2020-21, eight per cent of social renters and eight per cent of private renters agreed with the statement, compared to just four per cent of owner occupiers.

Respondents living in flats were more likely than respondents in houses and bungalows to feel unsafe in their homes due to fear of a fire breaking out. In 2020-21, 16 per cent of those in flats felt unsafe, compared to four per cent of those in houses and bungalows.

Not surprisingly respondents living in high rise blocks of flats reported the highest proportion of feeling unsafe at 26 per cent, compared to 10 per cent of those in low rise purpose-built flats. Figures for other types of dwellings were much lower. For example, two per cent of those in detached houses and five per cent of those in bungalows agreed they

did not feel safe at home because they feared a fire breaking out.

In 2020-21, there were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of respondents who felt unsafe because they feared a fire breaking out by age, aside from a difference between those aged 35-44 (seven per cent) and those aged 65 and over (three per cent). This is a different pattern than observed in 2019-20, and is likely due to the smaller sample in 2020-21

Those from an ethnic minority background were more likely than those from a White background to report feeling unsafe at home due to fear that a fire might break out, five per cent of White heads of households, compared to 13 per cent of ethnic minority HRPs. This is unchanged from 2019-20 and is likely due to the fact that those from an ethnic minority background are more likely to live in flats.

It is likely that all these findings are related. For example, those from an ethnic minority background are more likely to be renters and renters are more likely to live in flats.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO REQUEST A COMPLIMENTARY MOT ASSESSMENT

The certified assessment of tenanted properties is gathering pace with a number of housing clients seeing a clear difference with an MOT certifying the health of their properties. This new framework aids determining current and future stock conditions whilst upholding better decision making with noted issues resulting in a reduced 're-spend' by landlords.

David Bly, Director of Cornerstone Professional Services (UK) Ltd, the organization behind the Property MOT®, explains why Social Housing providers are requesting further details and sample MOT surveys aligned to this unique framework:



"The MOT survey demonstrates a user-friendly yet detailed algorithmic assessment of a structure alongside elements controlling the internal atmosphere with each assessment aligned to a property and its residents upholding bespoke outcomes. This approach aligns to the housing stock within the UK as a whole whereby a myriad of stock types, ages and periods plus geographical location and orientation can and do, affect the structural behaviour alongside the internal atmospheric management".

"In addition, recognizing the net zero journey is upon us, the assessment of each property includes its air permeability and appropriate measures to retain heat etc. That said, the current drive to 'Insulate Britain' cannot be a broad-brush affair rather an individual assessment to determine efficacy and anticipated outcomes such that, with a vastly differing structural type and age perspective across the UK, in the absence of specific assessment criteria, we will have to consider 'Ventilating Britain'."



With SMART Knowledge embedded in the MOT Application process, the best way to understand more about this opportunity and how your team could be more informed is by requesting complimentary MOT surveys for properties of your choice. This limited opportunity will allow you to learn more of your stock and how it is being utilized.

Almost a third of the private rental market is 'unaffordable'

Research from Ocasia, the specialist rental platform, reveals that based on current rental market values and the average household income, private rental properties in almost a third of postcodes are considered unaffordable.

The Office for National Statistics defines a rental property as unaffordable if the rent exceeds 30 per cent of the household's income.

Ocasia analysed the current cost of renting across each postcode in England and Wales, as well as the average household income, and found that 31 per cent of areas are classified as unaffordable based on the ONS definition.

Across England and Wales, the average annual rent is £12,763 and the average annual household income is £43,341. Therefore, rent accounts for 29 per cent of the average household income, meaning many may be pushing the boundaries of affordability within the sector.

Regionally, rent is most affordable in the North East where it consumes just 20 per cent of the average household income of £35,774. In Yorkshire & Humber, rent eats up 22 per cent of annual income followed by the East Midlands (23), North West (24), West Midlands (25), and Wales (26).

In the East, South East, and South West of England, average rent ranges from £12,000 - £15,000 and equates to 30 per cent of household income in each region. In London the average income is £54,194, but rent consumes 40 per cent of this with an average annual bill of £21,439.

Ocasia analysed the rental market across England and Wales at postcode level and found that 31 per cent of postcodes sit above the affordability threshold where rent accounts for more than 30 per cent of household income.

London is home to all ten of the most unaffordable places in the country with the worst offenders being SW1 (77 per cent), WC2 (74), and W2 (73). The least affordable area outside of the capital is the BN2 postcode area of Brighton and Hove where rent eats up 60 per cent of annual income.

The WR2 postcode in Worcester is the most affordable part of the rental market, where a year's rent costs just 15 per cent of the average household income of £41,900. This is followed by DN21 in Gainsborough and TS26 in Hartlepool (both also 15 per cent).

More than half of private landlords unable to recover pet damage costs



Results from a recent 'What's the damage?' online survey has shown that pet damage is extremely common in properties where landlords rent to tenants with pets and the repair costs are difficult to recover.

According to its findings, 85.3 per cent of landlords and agents have experienced pet damage in rental properties, with dogs and cats the most likely pets to have caused damage to a landlord's property.

Damage caused by pets is very closely followed by damage caused by adults, reported by 84.7 per cent of landlords with a further 54.9 per cent reporting damage caused by tenants' children. Estimates of damage amounting to over £1,000 was the most common answer to the value of damage caused by both pets and adults.

57 per cent of landlords and agents said they were unable to recover the costs of the damage caused by pets, while 29.7 per cent recovered costs from the standard rental deposit and 11.8 per cent recovered costs through a special pet deposit.

Only 0.5 per cent were able to reclaim through an insurance policy, although 65.5 per cent said this is the preferred solution to the problem of pet damage that would encourage more pet-friendly rentals. 45.9 per cent would like tenants to pay through the landlord for this insurance, while 19.6 per cent trust the tenant to hold this and claim themselves.

PETS IN LETS

30.5 per cent of landlords and agents said that they would prefer a separate pet deposit to be included as standard for lettings with pets. Finally, four per cent said that an additional element added to the standard deposit would encourage them to rent to

people with pets. The survey and research were undertaken as a joint project between lettings industry trade bodies Propertymark and the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) along with landlord website, LandlordZone and East Midlands-based pets charity AdvoCATS.

It followed publication of the White Paper, A fairer private rented sector, which has committed the Government to giving tenants 'the right to request a pet in their property, which the landlord must consider and cannot unreasonably refuse'. The Government has also confirmed it will amend the Tenant Fees Act 'so that landlords can request that their tenants buy pet insurance'.

The Heads for Tails! campaign is now seeking an addition to the List of Permitted Payments within the Tenant Fees Act, to give a landlord the option to either request a financially capped pet deposit or to stipulate that pet damage insurance must be held by any tenant wanting to keep a pet or pets. This is backed by over 40 organisations and more than 40 MPs and Peers.

James Wood, NRLA Policy Manager, said: "With many landlords unable to recover damage caused by pets, it is no surprise that landlords generally prefer to let to tenants without pets. Particularly those with smaller portfolios who are not able to absorb the losses caused by damage.

"If the Government is to increase the supply of pet-friendly homes, then it is vital that landlords and agents have confidence they can recover the cost of repairs. Amending the Tenant Fees Act to permit pet insurance or pet deposits would provide this confidence and give tenants with pets more options in the private rented sector."

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England's leaky homes costing poorer families £250 extra a year in wasted energy

Three million 'fuel poor' households will be paying an extra £250 a year on their energy bills because of poorly insulated homes according to new analysis by the Local Government Association.

The LGA said households are wasting a combined £770 million a year as expensive heat leaks through walls, roofs and windows of poorly insulated homes in England's 'fuel poor' households.

At its Annual Conference in Harrogate, the LGA called for a redoubling of efforts to insulate all fuel poor homes by 2030, saving millions from energy bills every year. They say that 2 million households in fuel poverty need additional help to implement energy efficiency measures lifting homes up to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating C by 2030.

Councils say additional help for these homes is crucial for hitting the Government's target to retrofit a total of 3.1 million fuel poor homes to EPC C standard by 2030 – at a required rate of almost 900 homes a day.

A quarter of all families are now looking to improve energy efficiency as bills have surged, but fuel poor households are the least likely to afford the measures and the most likely to be impacted by rising energy prices. Not only do poorly insulated buildings waste money, but they also increase carbon emissions and leave homes cold and damp.

By focusing on fuel poor households, the LGA said this ambition would save:

- Up to £770 million a year from household energy bills by 2030;
- £500 million in NHS spending a year; and



- 670,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide a year from 2030.

While the Government has implemented a support package to ease the cost-of-living crisis over the short term and has expanded the Energy Company Obligation, the LGA said further measures are needed to reduce the long-term demand for expensive energy. A further increase in the energy cap is expected to apply from this Autumn.

The LGA says councils are best placed to deliver programmes to help decarbonise England's buildings as they have the local knowledge, experience, trusted status, relationships with residents and the ability to forge local partnerships. The estimate the scheme would create 23,000 skilled jobs across the country.

Councillor David Renard, environment spokesperson for the LGA, said: "So many homes are leaking more and more money as energy prices increase. This will hit stretched household budgets hard and the public purse, while adding to the climate crisis.

"Investment now will save households further down the line, ease the cost-of-living crisis and mean families have added security and flexibility within their budgets.

"Ensuring homes are well insulated also means fewer people are at risk of the health risks associated with living in cold, damp conditions, and this is work we have to do as part of our drive to net zero. Councils are keen to help the Government deliver on this win-win policy and increase the number of buildings insulated by winter."

Tenants reveal most off-putting features of private sector rental homes and landlords

Research from Ocase, the specialist rental platform, has revealed the things tenants find the biggest turn off when it comes to searching for a rental home, as well as what they cannot stand about landlords.

Ocase surveyed over 1,000 current tenants asking them what they found the most off-putting about a rental property and a landlord.

Tenants rank nuisance neighbours as the number one red flag when looking to rent. A blanket ban on pets comes second, followed by a lack of parking. A lack of outdoor space along with being forbidden to redecorate or add personal touches to a property's décor complete the top five.

When surveyed on their thoughts and feelings

towards their landlords, tenants ranked their inability to maintain a rental property to a modern standard as the most off-putting. Landlords who failed to maintain safe living conditions were also out of favour along with those who consistently increase rents without reason.

Tenants also dislike landlords who disturbed them regularly by visiting the property for no real reason, as well as those that call time on the relationship without good warning or reason.

Sales and Marketing Director at Ocase, Jack Godby, commented: "The rental market can be a tough place to live at times and not only is it very expensive, but many tenants will be put off by out of

date or unsafe living conditions, restrictive tenancy rules and the insecurity and uncertainty that often comes with living in someone else's property.

"However, standards are improving and the industry is undergoing notable changes that focus on renting as a long term lifestyle choice, rather than a necessity due to the high cost of homeownership.

"This is particularly evident within the build-to-rent sector, which is providing a better quality of living coupled with greater security and flexibility to suit the needs of individual tenants. Of course, you may still fall foul of a nuisance neighbour but some things in life are unfortunately unavoidable."



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Government awards councils £20 million to tackle rogue landlords in supported housing

Unscrupulous landlords who exploit vulnerable residents by charging high rents for poor-quality accommodation and offering almost no help will be driven out of the supported housing market by a new £20 million improvement programme.

Supported housing provides accommodation alongside care, support, or supervision, helping vulnerable people across the country. In short term supported housing, residents may have experience of homelessness, mental health issues or domestic abuse, and schemes should provide them with the skills and confidence to enter longer-term independent accommodation.

Many people in supported housing receive good quality, tailored support to help them get their lives back on track by assisting them to access health services or mental health support, manage their finances, find employment and/or sustain a tenancy.

But there are instances of supported housing landlords providing unacceptable levels of support while charging extortionate rents. For example, there have been reports of landlords providing as little support as dropping off a box of cereal while claiming £250 per week in an area where the average rent is £80.

This will be stamped out with a package of measures that include:

- minimum standards for support provided to residents in order to help their progress towards living independently;
- new powers for local authorities to better manage their local supported housing market and ensure no individual falls through the cracks; and
- changes to Housing Benefit regulations to seek to define care, support, and supervision to improve quality across all specified supported housing provision.

Alongside this, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has invited councils to apply for funding from a £20 million Supported Housing Improvement Programme to drive up accommodation quality in some of the most affected areas.

This follows successful pilots which saw DLUHC work with 5 local authorities around England to improve supported housing in these areas. Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes said: “We want vulnerable residents living in supported housing to have safe, appropriate accommodation, which meets their needs and can help them move onto more independent living.

“I’m pleased to open our Supported Housing Improvement Programme for bids today. This will build on the momentum from our successful pilots, helping councils in the worst-affected areas to tackle bad quality and poor value for money in supported housing, while preserving good provision by responsible providers.”

From October 2020 to September 2021, DLUHC funded 5 local authorities (Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Hull and Bristol) to test interventions to raise standards of accommodation and support and improve local authority oversight of the local supported housing market.

The pilot authorities were able to drive up the quality of accommodation and support to residents. They also improved value for money through enhanced scrutiny of Housing Benefit claims to verify that costs were legitimate and reasonable.

The independent evaluation of the pilots was published in April 2022. It found that increasing local authority capacity and capability had a positive impact on their ability to improve quality and value for money in supported housing at a local level.

The prospectus provides detailed guidance that will assist local councils in considering whether and how to bid, and for those selected to go on to participate in the programme.

Criticism from private landlords as Government consults on growth of holiday lets

The Government has launched a review of the impact which holiday lets have on local residents and the housing market for both tenants and buyers amid claims that its current policies are driving landlords away from the private rented sector.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport are leading on the three-month review which began with an open call for evidence and is due to end in late September. It follows reports that increasing numbers of private rentals, particularly in tourist areas, are being converted into short-term holiday lets, damaging the supply and cost of rental properties for local residents.

The review will consider proposals for new regulations, such as introducing spot checks on rental properties to ensure they observe noise and antisocial behaviour rules and a mandatory self-certification scheme for new landlords.

Further measures the Government is considering include a registration ‘kitemark’ scheme with spot checks for compliance with rules on issues such as gas safety, a self-certification scheme for hosts to register with before they can operate, and better information or a single source of guidance setting out the legal requirements for providers.

Before he resigned, the former Housing Minister Stuart Andrew, said: “Holiday let sites like Airbnb have helped boost tourism across the country, but we need to make sure this doesn’t drive residents out of their communities. We are already taking action to tackle the issue of second and empty homes in some areas by empowering councils to charge up to double the rate of council tax.

“This review will give us a better understanding of how short term lets are affecting housing supply locally to make sure the tourism sector works for

both residents and visitors alike.”

In response to the review’s announcement Ben Beadle, Chief Executive of the National Residential Landlords Association, said: “The growth in holiday lets is a direct consequence of the Government’s attack on long-term rented housing.

“Tax policies actively discourage long-term investment in the private rented sector by landlords. With a Housing Secretary that wants to shrink the size of the sector, it is little wonder many landlords have jumped ship to the holiday lets market.

“As a result, for many in holiday hot spots finding a long-term home to rent is all but impossible. With demand for such housing at a record high, all it is doing is increasing rents when tenants can least afford it. The Government needs to end its anti-landlord attitude and develop pro-growth tax plans to help renters access the housing they need.”

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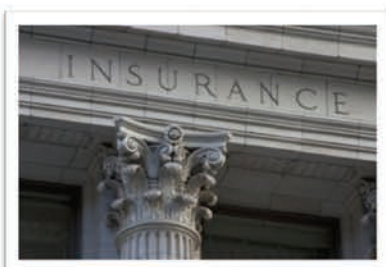
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Croydon Council aims to relaunch its housing service with a new Residents' Charter and improved delivery of repairs

A south London council is looking to drive improvements in its housing service with the adoption of a Residents' Charter and a revamped repairs operation, more than a year after being slammed for the terrible conditions on one of its estates.

Inhumane conditions on Croydon Council's Regina Road estate were exposed by an ITV news team in March last year and a subsequent investigation found that not even basic services were being provided to some tenants.

An internal water leak in a tower block had gone undiagnosed and unrepaired for several years, leaving tenants in four flats in damp, mouldy and unhygienic conditions. Other faults were uncovered in the block, with similar issues highlighted in other flatted blocks managed by the council.

The independent consultants found the council failed to deliver basic housing services, it lacked capacity and competence and staff showed a lack of care and respect for residents. The council's response came under intense public scrutiny and contributed to a change in political leadership at the council earlier this year, with the election of a Conservative Mayor.

The contract for delivering the repairs service is to be ended early, with new ten-year contracts to be let from next year. The council has decided to split the repairs service into a number of contracts to reduce its dependence on a single contractor and the repairs contact centre will be brought in-house

so the council has a direct relationship with tenants and can respond swiftly to any complaints.

Tenants boroughwide are being consulted on a draft Residents' Charter, which sets out clear expectations on how the council will treat all tenants: with respect, timely responses to complaints and the provision of safe homes that they are proud to live in.

REBUILDING TRUST

Tenants have been invited to comment on the draft charter, as well as how it can be delivered and monitored. An update on its development and planned implementation is expected to come back to the cabinet in the autumn.

The draft charter was developed by a group of tenants and leaseholders, endorsed by the Tenant and Leaseholders Panel, and recommended to the council's cabinet and Mayor by an independent Housing Improvement Board.

The new mayor, Jason Perry said: "I want to see real change in our housing services. Croydon urgently needs to rebuild trust and establish a proper relationship with our tenants. This will only happen once we provide them with a decent service and treat them with respect, and the Charter lays strong foundations for doing this.

"Procuring a new repairs service is one of the first big projects in which we can put the Charter into practice and work with our tenants and leaseholders to make this essential service better.

The new mayor, Jason Perry said: "I want to see real change in our housing services.

Croydon urgently needs to rebuild trust and establish a proper relationship with our tenants

I would like to thank those who have helped draft the Charter so far and encourage all our tenants and leaseholders to get involved in the consultation when it launches."

Les Parry, a member of the Tenants and Leaseholder Panel said: "I'm pleased to have been involved in the development of Croydon's Residents' Charter which sets expectations to raise standards in housing services. The Charter clearly sets out what is important to residents, and the good service that we rightly expect to receive."

Meanwhile Martin Wheatley, who chairs the independent Housing Improvement Board, said: "I was glad to see such strong commitment on all sides to ensuring the repairs procurement improves standards for tenants, and to the Tenants' Charter with respect for tenants at its heart."

Lack of transparency concerns raised over MPs' second home interests

MPs are three times more likely to own more than one residential property than the general public, research from Transparency International UK has revealed.

Parliamentary Estates calls for greater transparency over parliamentarians' financial interests plus greater scrutiny over conflicts

of interest and how they may influence important issues facing Britain, such as the housing crisis.

Analysis of parliamentary disclosures from September 2021 shows at least 312 residential properties owned by 177 MPs (27 per cent of all MPs), in addition to the homes that they, or close family members, live in. 113 MPs (17 per cent) hold a total of 261 properties generating 'significant' rental income, defined by parliamentary rules as £10,000 or more annually.

This contrasts sharply with the general population, with only nine per cent of households in England having reported they own at least one additional home.

Forty-three MPs (7 per cent) have some form of interest in property companies or businesses, such as shareholdings or directorships, with 19 of these MPs directly employed by a property-related business. One MP worked as an advisor for

a construction company, receiving £5,000 for 1.6 hours of advisory work.

The analysis revealed 43 per cent of Conservative Lords and MPs had declared property interests (269 out of a total of 619). This compares to 42 per cent of Liberal Democrat parliamentarians (40 out of a total 96) and 23 per cent of Labour Lords and MPs (86 out of a total 366).

For all MPs and peers, these property-related financial relationships ranged from owning a flat and renting it out to holding shares in a property finance company.

The report highlights areas where the current rules do not go far enough to address potential conflicts of interests. It recommends a series of changes that would place tighter controls on parliamentarians' second jobs, greater transparency over financial disclosures, and provide better training to ensure MPs and peers comply with the rules.

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Welsh councils to get new powers to set local limits on numbers of holiday homes

A package of measures to address the high numbers of second homes across large parts of Wales includes changes in planning laws, a statutory licencing scheme and proposals for changes in land transaction tax.

First Minister Mark Drakeford and leader of Plaid Cymru Adam Price have agreed the package in a programme of actions to help create thriving communities and to support people to afford a home, either to buy or rent, in their local area.

The Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru includes a commitment to tackle the issue of second homes, believed to number almost 24,000, with many standing empty for long periods.

The package of measures announced includes:

- Changes to planning regulations by the end of the summer. These will introduce three new planning use classes – a primary home, a second home and short-term holiday accommodation;
- Plans to introduce a statutory licensing scheme for all visitor accommodation, including short-term holiday lets, making it a requirement to obtain a license. This is intended to raise property and letting standards across the tourism industry; and
- Following a consultation about varying land transaction tax locally in areas with large numbers of second homes, work has started

with local authorities on developing a national framework so they can request increased land transaction tax rates for second homes and holiday lets to be applied in their local area.

Under the planning changes councils will be able to make amendments to the planning system to require planning permission for a change of use from one class to another. This will also introduce changes to national planning policy to give local authorities the ability to control the number of second homes and holiday lets in any community. These changes are expected to be in place by the end of the Summer.

The Welsh Government has already introduced a range of measures to address the issue of second homes, including giving councils the discretionary power to increase council tax premiums on second and empty homes by up to 300 per cent from next year and it has changed the rules on holiday lets so owners and operators make a fair contribution to their local communities.

First Minister Mark Drakeford said: “We are setting out the next steps in a radical programme to ensure everyone has the opportunity to afford to live in their local community – whether that’s buying or renting a home. We have a shared ambition for Wales to be a nation of thriving communities – a country where people do not have to leave to find good and rewarding work and a country which



people want to come to visit and to live.

“Tourism is vital to our economy but having too many holiday properties and second homes, which are empty for much of the year, does not make for healthy local communities and prices people out of the local housing market.

“There is no single, simple solution to these issues. Any action we take must be fair. We do not want to create any unintended consequences, which could destabilise the wider housing market or make it harder for people to rent or buy.”

Conservative local government spokesman Sam Rowlands, said: “I welcome increased responsibilities and opportunities for local authorities to support their communities, but I do worry this is just a top-down diktat from Labour and Plaid Cymru in Cardiff Bay.”

Two severe maladministration findings against Shepherds Bush Housing’s failings over a roof leak

The Housing Ombudsman has made two severe maladministration findings against Shepherds Bush Housing for failing to deal with a shared owner’s repeated reports of a roof leak over many years.

The Ombudsman says it took the landlord eight years to correctly identify the cause of the leak. When the resident made a formal complaint it took more than two years to reach the end of the landlord’s complaints process.

“Our investigation found that the landlord delayed in carrying out repair works, did not resolve the leak and did not provide redress to the resident which resolved the complaint satisfactorily.

“It had caused ongoing detriment to the resident for several years. The landlord apologised for the delays and had offered compensation but had not resolved the leak. It said it would revisit the compensation offer once the issue was resolved.”

The Ombudsman added there was also evidence of poor record keeping by the landlord, which

limited its ability to thoroughly investigate and consider whether the redress offered by the landlord was fair and put things right.

Following the investigation, the landlord’s learning from this case included changes to its complaint handling approach and improved communication with residents.

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman, said: “It is appalling and unacceptable that any resident should live with a serious problem with their home for eight years. The prolonged distress and disruption could have been avoided. We recognise that the landlord took some action. However, poor communication, lack of records and failure to take reasonable steps to put things right, undermined the landlord’s response and exacerbated the disruption experienced by the resident.

“The poor record keeping was deeply unsatisfactory and limited our ability to thoroughly investigate the complaint. By agreeing to revisit the

compensation offered once the issue was resolved, the landlord acknowledged that the compensation was not proportionate, however its response did not put matters right and works remained outstanding.

“Following our decision, I welcome the landlord’s response on its learning from this case and the changes being made to improve its service. I would encourage other landlords to consider the learning this case offers for their own services.”

A spokesperson for Shepherds Bush said: “We apologise unreservedly for the distress and inconvenience caused to the resident directly impacted by this incident. The case in question dates back a number of years and should have been resolved much sooner. Recently, our Executive Team have committed to completing a number of actions to ensure preventative measures are in place, in order to avoid a similar situation occurring again.”

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Ombudsman plans systemic investigation into record keeping at social landlords

Poor record keeping by social landlords featured in a batch of decisions published by the Housing Ombudsman earlier in the Summer, prompting it to plan a systemic investigation into the sector's record keeping practices.

Richard Blakeway said: "Strong record keeping practices are core to good services. The poor practice of some landlord services can be a direct result of poor information and intelligence and landlords need to be more alert to the risks.

"There will be few landlords we have investigated where, at some point, poor records and information have not resulted in maladministration. Inadequate record keeping has also been repeatedly identified in Spotlight reports, from cladding to damp, as a driver of poor service.

"This is a systemic, sector-wide issue. Governing bodies should be asking 'how good is our record keeping' and if the response is 'good' they should be troubled because it is possible the landlord may not know how bad it is.

Among the 'record keeping' decisions is the Ombudsman's first case to be published involving a joint investigation into two landlords and two sets of orders, using powers in its new Scheme.

The decisions, published every two weeks on the service's website, now total more than 2,000 and show the range of issues considered as well as the type of outcomes following an investigation. The landlord in each case is identified. Among the decisions published are:

- The first joint investigation published by the Ombudsman involving two landlords and two sets of orders for Plymouth Community Homes

(PCH) and Guinness (ref 202012435). This found that PCH gave misinformation about the residents' tenancy before and after a mutual exchange so they thought they had Preserved Right to Buy. It was due to an error on PCH's computer system which it was aware of and took ten years to correct, so may have caused problems to other PCH residents. Guinness had relied on the information but also made further errors in its communication with the residents.

- A finding of maladministration in an L&Q case (ref 201916247) for its record keeping and complaint handling. The landlord failed to keep robust records in a complaint about the end of a resident's tenancy and his deposit following a bereavement which led to additional distress and inconvenience. The landlord was ordered to review its record keeping processes and its staff training needs.
- A case concerning Stonewater (ref 201915252) and redress for reports of an inadequate water supply, rent arrears and its complaint handling. A finding of maladministration for the landlord's repeated failure to open a complaint over more than two years so there was no record to keep track of events, resulting in delays to the repairs and resolving the complaint. During this time the resident was effectively prevented from accessing the landlord's complaints procedure.
- A Dudley Council case (ref 202015427) concerning major works and a resident's request for additional information. The landlord acknowledged it had not notified leaseholders when it became apparent that the work would result in additional costs, for



which it apologised, and confirmed it had limited information available on the requirement to carry out the works in the first place as requested by the resident. The investigation found the landlord had offered a reasonable remedy for its acknowledged failures by reducing its charges and recommended that it review the case to identify where it can improve communication and record keeping with respect to major works carried out at leasehold properties, in particular ensuring that residents are notified of significant changes to plans and that supporting documents are retained for an appropriate length of time.

Social housing provider reduces carbon output by a third

One of the country's biggest social housing landlords has reduced the carbon footprint of its operations by a third since it established a baseline in 2018, and by almost seven per cent in the past year.

Orbit owns and manages over 45,000 affordable and social rent homes across the Midlands, East and South of England.

The reductions in emissions have been made possible by a series of measures including procurement of green electricity, an agile working policy and energy saving measures in the association's schemes and offices.

Orbit has made a firm commitment to achieving net zero carbon in its operations by 2030 and becoming net zero carbon in its homes and supply chain before 2050.

Alongside its net zero carbon commitments, Orbit published its Net Zero Carbon Roadmap last year, which sets out how the organisation will deliver its commitments across its operations, homes and supply chain.

The association also launched a new environmental sustainability qualification for its staff last year – the first in-house training of its kind in the social housing sector.

The course, Environmental Sustainability Skills

for Managers, was developed by the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) and will be tailored for Orbit and the social housing sector to provide learners with a working knowledge of Orbit's environmental management system.

David March, Environmental and Sustainability at Orbit, comments: "We are extremely proud of these results which demonstrate our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint and eventually becoming a net zero carbon organisation.

"Climate change is the biggest challenge facing us all and this reduction shows the part we are playing in lessening our environmental impact. All businesses have a responsibility to reduce their emissions and to contribute to a sustainable future, and we will continue to decrease our carbon footprint each year and become net zero carbon in our own operations by 2030."

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Peabody admit failings over deceased tenant

A housing association's tenant died at home and their body lay undiscovered for two and a half years while the landlord and various statutory organisations failed to "join the dots".

The remains of 61 year old Sheila Seleokane were eventually found in her flat in Peckham, south east London, when Police forced entry to the property to conduct a welfare check in February this year.

Staff from her landlord had reportedly made 89 attempts Ms Seleokane since August 2019 when she last paid her rent in person, but all attempts failed. Rent was subsequently paid directly from her Universal Credit account from March 2020, but her gas supply was cut off in June 2020 when attempts to carry out a gas service at the flat were unsuccessful.

The Police unsuccessfully attempted to access the flat in October 2020 but a control room officer told staff at Peabody that the tenant was "safe and well". Despite this residents and neighbours in the block

continued to raise concerns and made reports of smells in the flat's vicinity.

An investigation undertaken for Peabody has revealed that large patch sizes for neighbourhood wardens and a culture of silo working resulted in missed opportunities to intervene and establish what was happening. The resulting report has been published by the association.

Peabody Chief Executive, Ian McDermott said: "We are devastated at what has happened. We are so sorry for our part in this and apologise to Sheila, her family, and everyone living at Lord's Court.

"The report finds that in this case - while we followed processes and made 89 attempted contacts with Sheila - our teams worked in silos and operated independently of each other which meant that we didn't "join the dots" and realise something was wrong. When taking action in this case, we didn't ask the most fundamental question - is Sheila ok?"

"I am sorry that Sheila was so isolated, and we didn't see, and I'm sorry that we didn't support residents enough. We need to do better, and I am determined that we will."

Mr McDermott said tenants have a right to peaceful enjoyment of their home, and landlords do not have the right to enter someone's home without the police or going through a legal process. But by connecting all the information that was available, much more could have been done to support residents in raising concerns with the Police at an earlier stage.

He added that the association has already made changes to some policies and is actively addressing all the recommendations in the report. He added: "We are determined to be a more responsive, locally focused and connected organisation in the future. Our new ways of working will invest in customer-facing teams, break down silos, and put our values into practice."

Disputed rental deposit deductions totalled £27m in 2021

Disputes over deductions from tenancy deposits declined during 2021 but still amounted to an estimated £27 million, with disagreements over cleaning being the most contentious issue between landlords and tenants.

The latest figures show that over 4.5m tenancy deposits are currently protected across the UK rental market, up 2.3 per cent on the previous year. This means £4.6 billion is held in deposit protection schemes, up 1.1 per cent on the previous year.

The average amount being disputed fell from £793 to £784 in 2021, while the total number of disputes also declined by 12 per cent to 34,444 last year. This means the number of disputes as a percentage of all deposits held has dropped marginally, down from 0.9 per cent to 0.8 per cent.

Cleaning was by far the most contentious issue between landlords and tenants when it comes to disputes over deposit deductions, with damages to the property, redecoration costs, gardening and rent arrears also ranking high.

At an average cost of £1,005 per tenancy, the cost of a deposit may have fallen by 1.2 per cent year on year, but this is still a considerable sum and tenants are within their rights to challenge any deductions made, if they feel they are unfair.

Eddie Hooker, CEO of mydeposits and the Hamilton Fraser Group said: "It's only natural that a certain number of landlords and tenants won't see eye to eye when it comes to rental deposit deductions. On the one hand, the deposit held is a considerable sum of money while landlords

understandably expect their property to be returned in the same condition as it was let and to be paid the rent owed in full.

"The good news is that deposit deduction disputes are relatively few and far between and account for less than one per cent of all deposits held within authorised protection schemes. We've also seen a reduction in total disputes lodged, which suggest the rental sector has become a more harmonious place over the last year, or that tenancies post-pandemic are increasing in length, resulting in less end of tenancy issues. Either way, it looks as though the sector is heading in the right direction where tenant-landlord relationships are concerned."

Build-to-rent new build market share increases year on year

The latest rental sector insight by rental platform, Rentd, has revealed that the proportion of new-build completions coming via the build-to-rent sector has grown in the last year, now accounting for over 7 per cent of all new homes reaching the market.

Rentd analysed total new-build completions over the last year, what level of these completions are attributed to the rapidly growing build-to-rent sector and how this has changed year on year.

Last year, 7,123 new rental homes came via the

build-to-rent sector, a 25 per cent uplift on the volume of build-to-rent completions seen in 2020. This growth is some 7 per cent higher than the increase seen in total new-build completions during the same period.

As a result, build-to-rent completions accounted for 7.2 per cent of all new-build homes delivered last year, up from 6.8 per cent the previous year.

However, the sector's impact has been far greater in London. The 21,000 new homes delivered in the capital in 2021 account for 10 per cent of the UK

total. The 7,123 build-to-rent completions, on the other hand, account for just shy of half (48 per cent) of the national total.

As a result, build-to-rent completions accounted for 34 per cent of all new-build delivery across London in 2021, with this market share increasing from 29.2 per cent the year before.

This growth has been more muted elsewhere around the UK, with build-to-rent market share increasing from 4.1 per cent to 4.2 between 2020 and 2021.



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MPs demand that social housing sector ups its game

An influential group of MPs have strongly criticised social housing landlords for failing to maintain good standards in their housing stock, while simultaneously failing to treat their tenants respectfully.

The Levelling Up and Social Housing select committee launched an inquiry into the regulation of social housing in November 2021, in light of a series of media reports revealing appalling levels of disrepair in some social housing, and of the measures announced by the Government to raise standards in the sector, in particular through the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill.

While most of its criticisms and recommendations were aimed at social landlords, the committee also raised issues with Government policies and the work of the regulator. The Government has until late September to respond.

During the inquiry MPs invited social housing tenants to speak to them in an oral evidence session, ran a survey that received 628 responses and they visited two social housing sites where they held a roundtable with tenants.

Committee chairman Clive Betts said:

“During our inquiry we heard that some social housing has deteriorated to the point of being unfit for human habitation.

“On levels of disrepair, we conclude that most social housing in England is of a decent standard, but that the condition of some homes has deteriorated so far as to be unfit for human habitation. We also note with concern the extremely serious impact on the mental and physical health of those affected.”

The committee concluded that one of the principal causes of housing disrepair is the age and design of the social housing stock, aggravated by the lack of funding for regeneration and the lack of new social housing.

Mr Betts said: “The social housing sector must still take much of the responsibility for the condition of some social housing, as it is clear that some providers have contributed to disrepair by managing their housing badly. In particular, too many are guilty of:

- not responding quickly enough to requests for repairs or investigating the structural causes of disrepair;
- preferring quick fixes over proper remediation work;
- neglecting sites earmarked for regeneration; and
- relying too heavily on tenants to report problems, rather than proactively monitoring the condition of their stock.

MPs want the regulator, as part of its review of the consumer standards, to require providers to routinely audit the condition of their stock. In addition to complaining about the conditions of



Committee members said they believed the poor treatment of tenants can be attributed to a lack of respect for tenants arising from a stigma attached to being a social housing tenant, or to other forms of discrimination; the power imbalance between providers and tenants

their homes, some tenants also raised concerns about the quality of service they receive and how they are treated or spoken to by their provider.

Committee members said they believed the poor treatment of tenants can be attributed to a lack of respect for tenants arising from a stigma attached to being a social housing tenant, or to other forms of discrimination; the power imbalance between providers and tenants; and the commercialisation of the sector, which has distanced some providers from their tenants and from their original social mission.

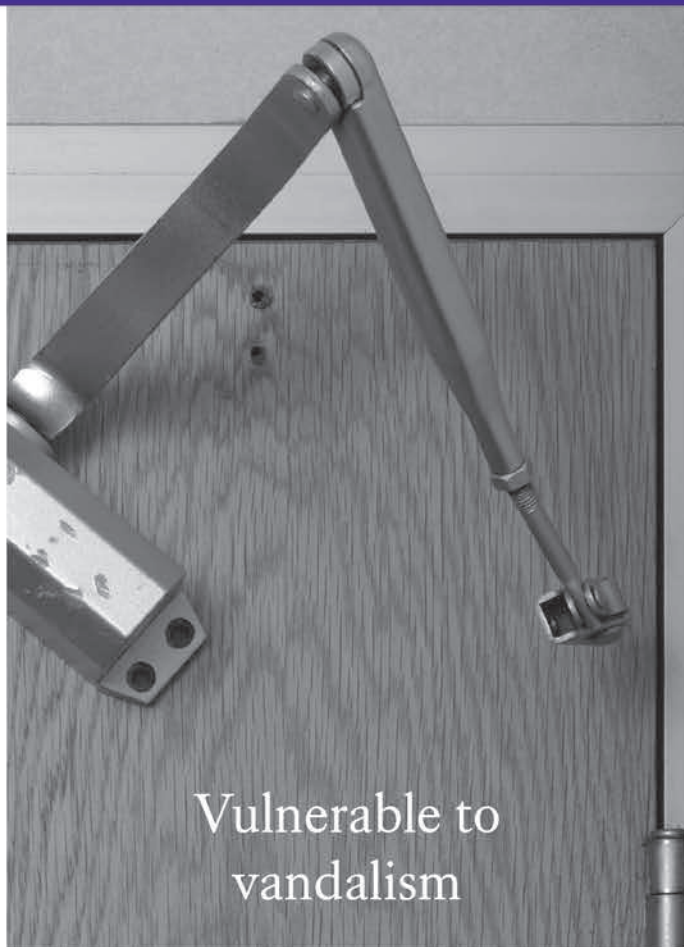
To reduce stigma and discrimination, the Committee wants social landlords to ensure their

boards and senior management teams better reflect the diversity of their communities, and for the regulator to incorporate this requirement into its revised consumer standards.

It is recommending that all landlords that have not already done so, to immediately review and where necessary improve their complaint handling processes. It also wants the Ombudsman to be given powers to award compensation up to £25,000.

MPs are also calling on the regulator to reconsider its interpretation of the duty to minimise interference and act proportionately, and to abandon the “systemic failure” test.

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Installation of aluminium decking boards delivers fire safety to block in London

Timber decking on balconies has been recognised as no longer fit for purpose. We spoke with Richard Izzard, managing director of AliDeck, about a recent fire-safety remediation project in London where aluminium decking provided a compliant solution.

With the monumental change in building regulations for multi-storey developments over recent years, new-build use of combustible materials such as timber or composite decking on balconies has fallen to zero.

However, there are countless existing buildings across the UK that have already had timber decking installed. Property managers and building owners have increasingly faced the prospect of undertaking fire safety remediation across their portfolio, and progress to a fire-safe future has been a challenge to achieve.

A good example of this challenge being met and overcome is a recently completed project in the heart of London, where balconies on a medium-rise building were in dire need of refurbishment. Not only a fire risk and causing concerns regarding EWS1, the timber decking was also generally very tired and unattractive.



Richard Izzard, managing director of AliDeck, said: "Our Approved Installer, Alu-Installations, completed the removal of the rotten timber decking and replaced the boards with our aluminium decking boards. At a stroke, this action resolved a highly visible eye-sore for the tenants and to passers-by in the street, and achieved the required level of fire-safety."

ALUMINIUM DECKING PROVES IDEAL REPLACEMENT FOR TIMBER

Timber decking has an expected lifespan of around 10 years, if looked after correctly. However, timber requires regular maintenance which, if missed, can lead to the wood quickly degrading and beginning to rot. Without regular reapplication of wood treatment or paint, timber decking loses its beauty quickly.

Timber also carries safety risks such as helping fire spread across external walls of buildings, especially so when balconies are stacked. AliDeck publish an annual Balcony Fires Report which consistently shows that most fires on balconies are caused by the careless disposal of smoking materials, along with a significant incidence of fire caused by barbecues on balconies.

"The building owner specified the use of our 30mm Senior Decking Board, which is A2 fire-rated and non-combustible, and chose the ridged form of the board for additional slip prevention," continued Richard. "Finished in RAL 7039 Quartz Grey, the



new aluminium boards transformed the balconies for the residents while also ensuring safety. A simple aluminium angle trim was used to conceal the board edges for the neatest end result.”



By carrying out these works and moving away from timber, this conscientious building owner has future-proofed their balconies and will avoid any subsequent costly remediation. The new aluminium decking has created a pleasant outdoor living space for the tenants while also creating additional value for the property.

PAS 9980, FRAEW, EWS1; AN ALPHABET SOUP OF PROBLEMS FOR PROPERTY MANAGERS

With PAS 9980 now in force all multi-storey, multi-occupancy buildings must undergo regular Fire Risk Assessments to External Walls (FRAEW). PAS 9980 is based around the risk of fire occurring but lenders and their surveyors are continuing to take a cautious approach on buildings of any height, but particularly so for buildings above 11m.

“The AliDeck System has received rigorous testing and is fire-rated to A2-s1, d0 and A2fl-s1 for full compliance. Consequently, our products are non-combustible, do not contribute to fire, and are a one-stop-shop guarantee that fire-safety remediation works on balconies will be successful,” concluded Richard.

The installation company on the project, Alu-Installations, have a great deal of experience of fire-safety remediation of combustible balconies and have been Approved Installers for AliDeck for several years. The peace-of-mind that comes from engaging trained professionals on these crucial and complex remediation projects must be highly valued, with a successful and hassle-free outcome all but assured.

If you would like to discuss your timber decking replacement requirements, please call the AliDeck team or send them an email.

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Revisiting fire safety

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fires can pose a deadly threat in any home, and sadly, households among the social and private rental sectors have suffered particularly strongly under its presence.

Last year, Housing, Management & Maintenance magazine conducted a research initiative of its readers – made up of UK landlords and housing professionals – to find out the most common causes of fire risk in their housing stock, and the barriers they have faced in addressing them.

This study revealed a significant level of risk among our reader's properties – with respondents reporting lengthy delays in addressing potentially lethal fire risk assessments, a shocking number who had been put in a position where it would be uncomfortable to report safety issues to a superior, and some respondents losing trust in product manufacturers post-Grenfell.

Since then, however, in response to the Hackitt Inquiry of the Grenfell Tower disaster, The Building Safety Act has come into force. Introducing sweeping changes to the way residential buildings are both built and maintained, it is hoped by many that the legislation will help prevent any further such tragedies from occurring and bring about a shift change in the industry.

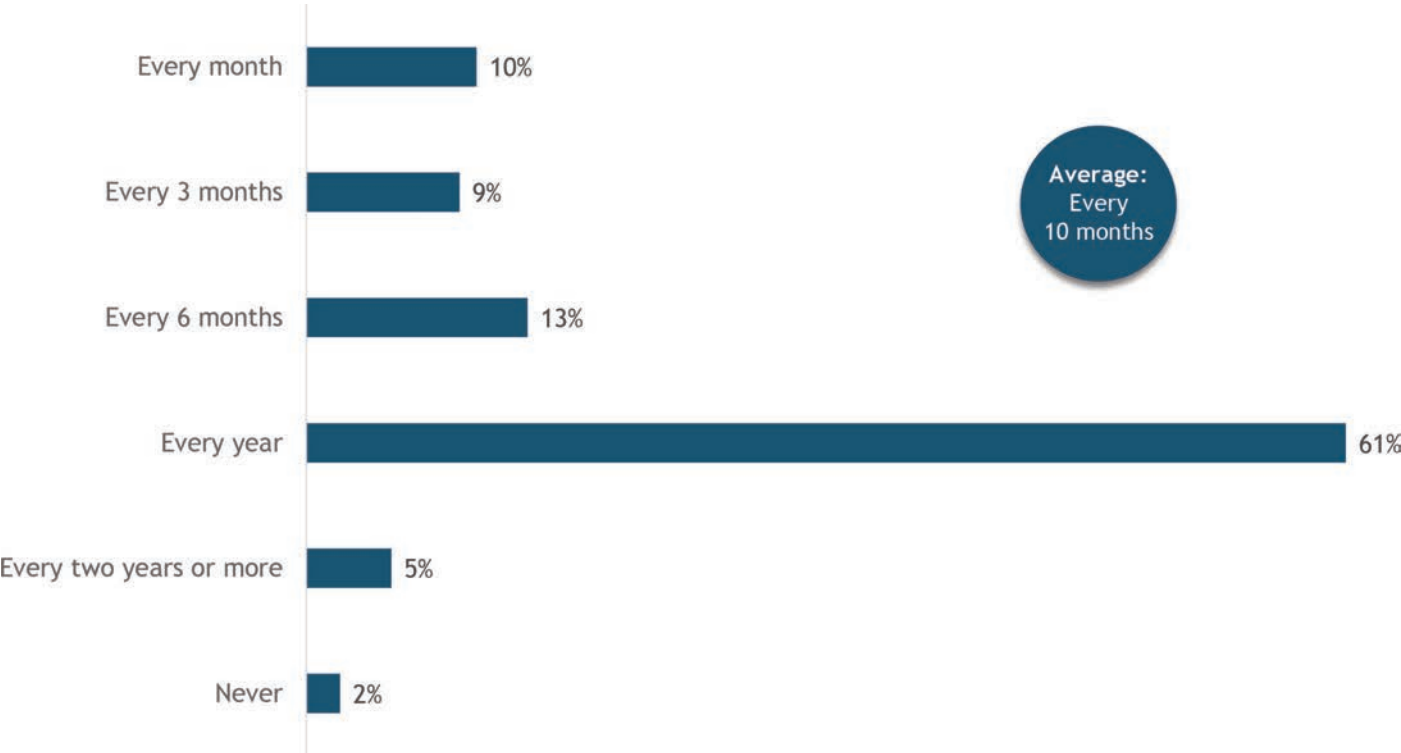
Considering this, this research study aims to find out if – a year on – our readership believe the sector has improved when it comes to fire safety, and how the legislative changes have impacted their businesses.

Fortunately, these moves appear to have been successful so far, with fire

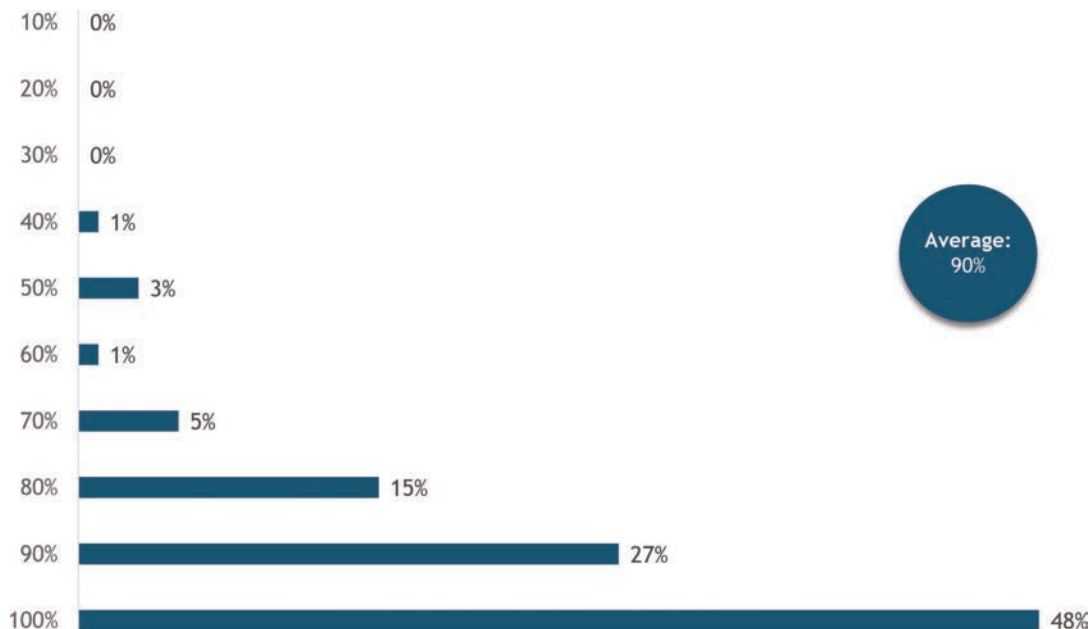
This study revealed a significant level of risk among our reader's properties – with respondents reporting lengthy delays in addressing potentially lethal fire risk assessments

risk having lowered among our respondents' stock in the last year – an overall improvement being shown in both response times and failed assessments, as well as an increased understanding of fire safety regulations. As this white paper will reveal, for example, when asked how often fire assessments were undertaken on each property under their remit, there was a month and a half improvement on last year, with a 12% rise on pass rates.

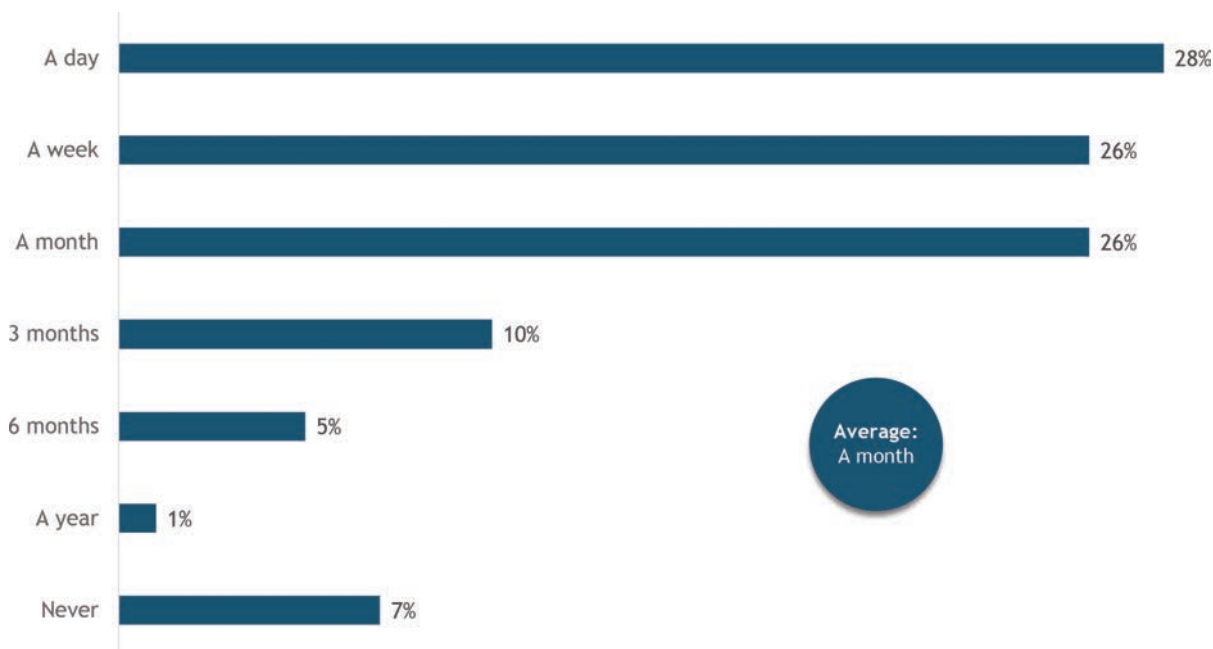
There were some less positive statistics however, with a 17% rise in respondents who currently feel uncomfortable reporting on issues of fire safety to a superior or relevant authority – despite our statistics showing both an overall drop in those who had ever experienced this, as well as the vast majority of our respondents reporting an increased accountability among housing professionals since the Building Safety Bill's introduction.



"How often do you or your association/organisation conduct fire risk assessments on each property under your company's remit?"



“How often on average would you say these assessments pass?”



“How long does it take on average for these issues to be addressed?”

HOW FIRE SAFETY IS PROGRESSING

LAST YEAR

We conducted our original research into fire safety when the Building Safety Act was yet to be fully fleshed-out, and it was not yet entirely clear how far-reaching it would prove to be.

At this time, our readers were feeling relatively positive when it came to these changes – with a large majority (82%) agreeing that the proposed measures went far enough, with one respondent calling it a “restart for the industry,” and another that “it’s comprehensive given what can realistically be achieved.”

Before these changes were realised however, our original research revealed a shocking level of fire risk among our respondents’ stock.

According to our readers at this time, an average of one in five fire risk assessments conducted highlighted a potentially fatal threat, and 22% of these failed assessments took from three years to a month to be addressed.

Further to this – mirroring the suggestions made by Dame Judith Hackitt’s Review of a poor culture of incident reporting in housing at present – 16% were revealed to have been put in a position where it would be uncomfortable to report issues of fire safety or malpractice to a superior or relevant authority, with 11% of those who hadn’t been put in such a position knowing someone who had.





One stamp Many approvals

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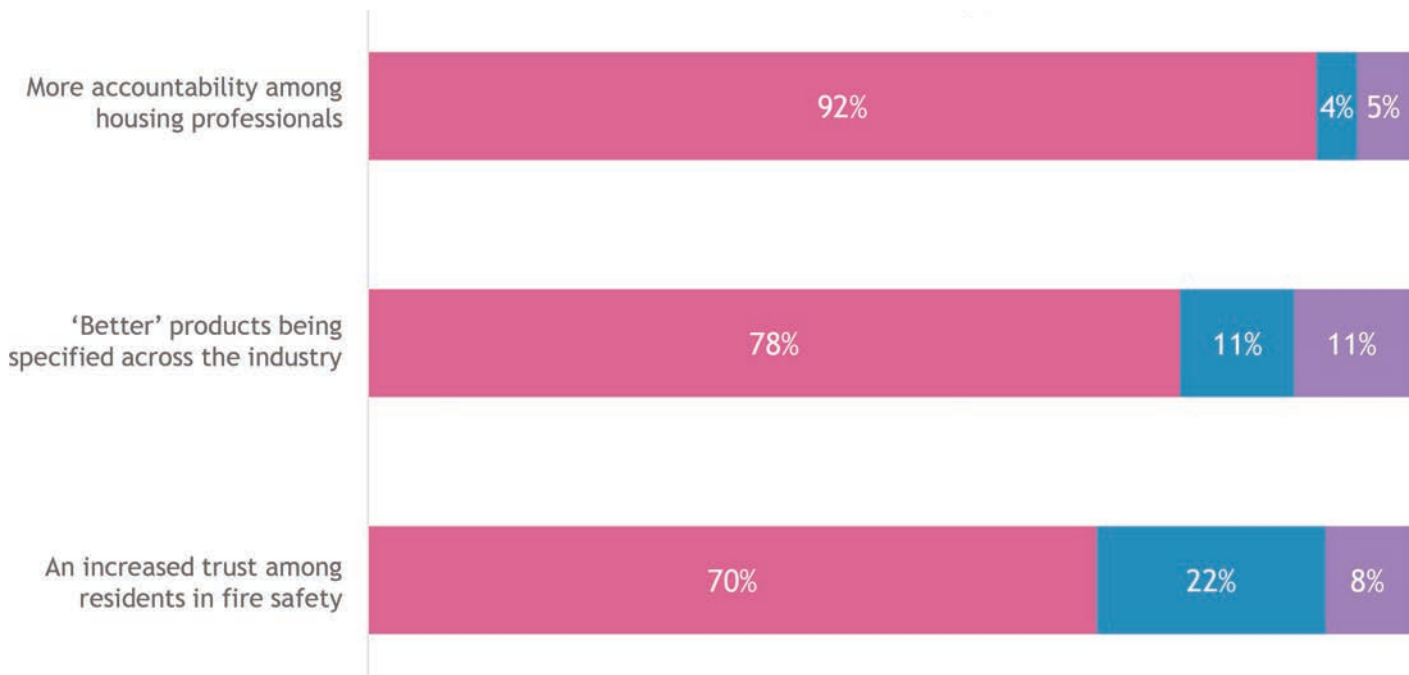
BS EN 1634:
Fire Resistance & Smoke Control



PAS 24:
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Q-MARK CERTIFICATION:
Fire, Smoke & Security



“Do you believe the Building Safety Act will lead to the following?” ■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure/Don't Know

THIS YEAR

With the Building Safety Act now beginning to take effect, many are hopeful that the housing sector is on the right track towards safer homes.

Encouragingly, among this year’s respondents, 70% believe that the Building Safety Act is leading to an increased trust among residents when it comes to fire safety, and 92% believe it is already leading to more accountability among housing professionals.

When it came to the actual quality of fire safety among their stock, the data was similarly encouraging. Asked how often our respondents, or their association/organisation, conduct fire risk assessments on each property under their company’s remit, for instance, 10% reported they do so every month, 9% every three months, 13% every six months, 61% every year, 5% every two years or more, and 2% never – producing an average of 10 months, a six week improvement from last year’s average of 11.55 months.

Additionally, on average these assessments were reported by our respondents to pass around 90% of the time – a 12% rise on last year – and when asked how long it takes on average for these issues to be addressed, a 1 week improvement was shown year on year, averaging a month this year.

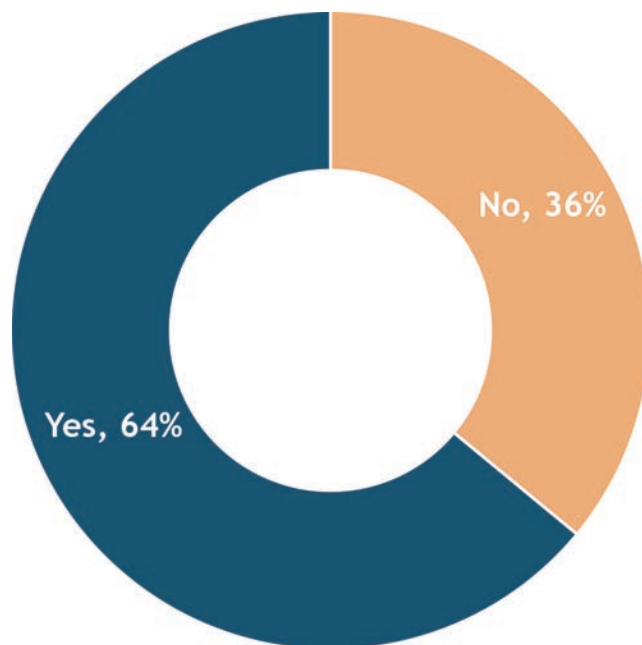
In contrast to the rise in accountability among housing professionals post-Building Safety Bill, however, when asked if they have ever been made to feel uncomfortable reporting on issues of fire safety to a superior or relevant authority, 33% of those who have ever been in such a position still are at present

Encouragingly, among this year’s respondents, 70% believe that the Building Safety Act is leading to an increased trust among residents when it comes to fire safety, and 92% believe it is already leading to more accountability among housing professionals

– a 17% rise on last year. Fortunately, the overall number of those who had ever been put in such a position was slightly lower at 11% this year, a 5% fall.

FUTURE

Overall, when comparing the level of fire risk present in our readership’s housing stock in these two studies, our respondents have painted an encouraging picture of what we can expect in the years to come, with the continued implementation of the Building Safety Act only likely to progress things further.



“Would you say that you have specified ‘better’ products post Grenfell?”



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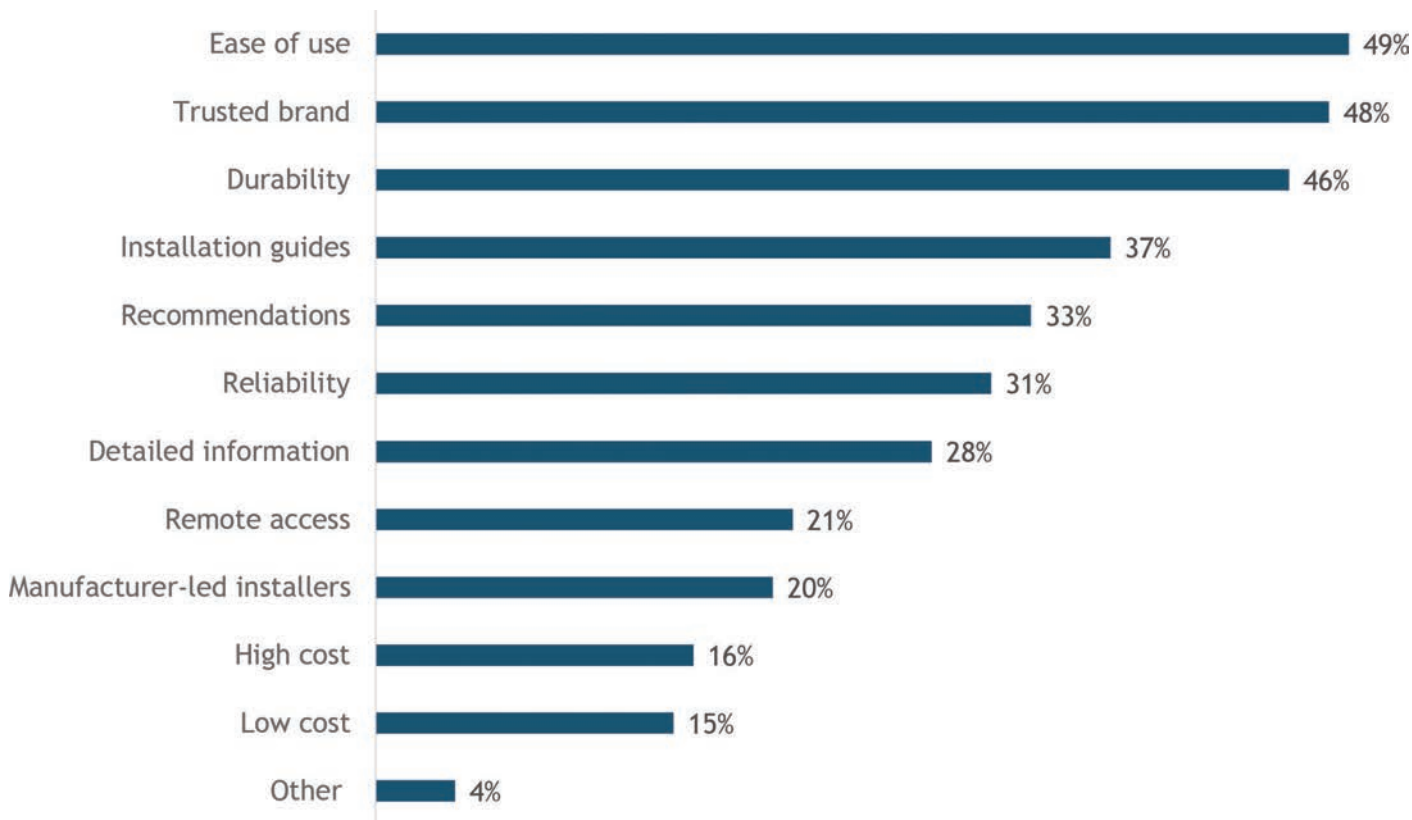
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"What defines a 'better' fire safety product to you?"

Though fire risk of course still remains too high even among these improved figures, perhaps it can be hoped that, as it is still early days for the Building Safety Act, once more buildings fall within its remit, culture change will continue to progress here.

When it comes to what housing professionals can do in the meantime, one thing that was shown just as clearly as in last year's results is that 'better' fire safety products can significantly reduce fire risk – though respondents agreed less on what such a product consists of.

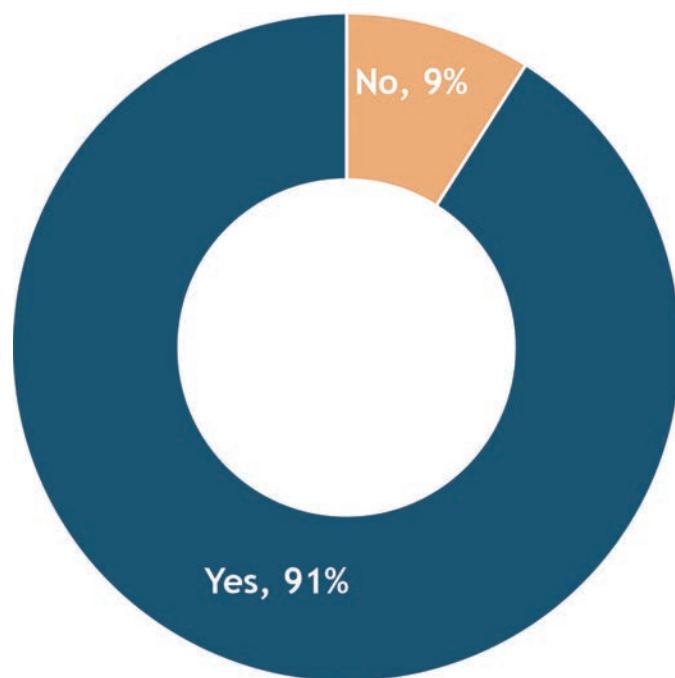
INSTALLING 'BETTER' PRODUCTS

It would seem intuitive, almost inherent, that a 'better' product would perform to a higher standard than a 'worse' product.

Supporting this, the sentiment has been echoed by our readers for two years in a row now, with 85% stating last year that in their experience, 'better' fire safety products significantly reduce fire risk, and an even higher 91% stating so this year – with respondents this year saying that better products "last longer," "perform better," and are tested to "higher standards."

Unfortunately, however, it is not always clear what it is that makes up a 'better' product. When asked what defines such a product to our readers, the

results produced an array of options with far less clear leaders compared to last year. Reliability, for example, was listed last year by 91% of our respondents, almost 20% higher than any other options chosen that year. This year, the gap between the popularity of the options was fairly small, with ease of use being



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

If using 'better' products is not a given across the industry – and their increased performance is well-understood – there must be barriers to their adoption for housing professionals, as well as a number of other reasons behind the continuation of fire risk





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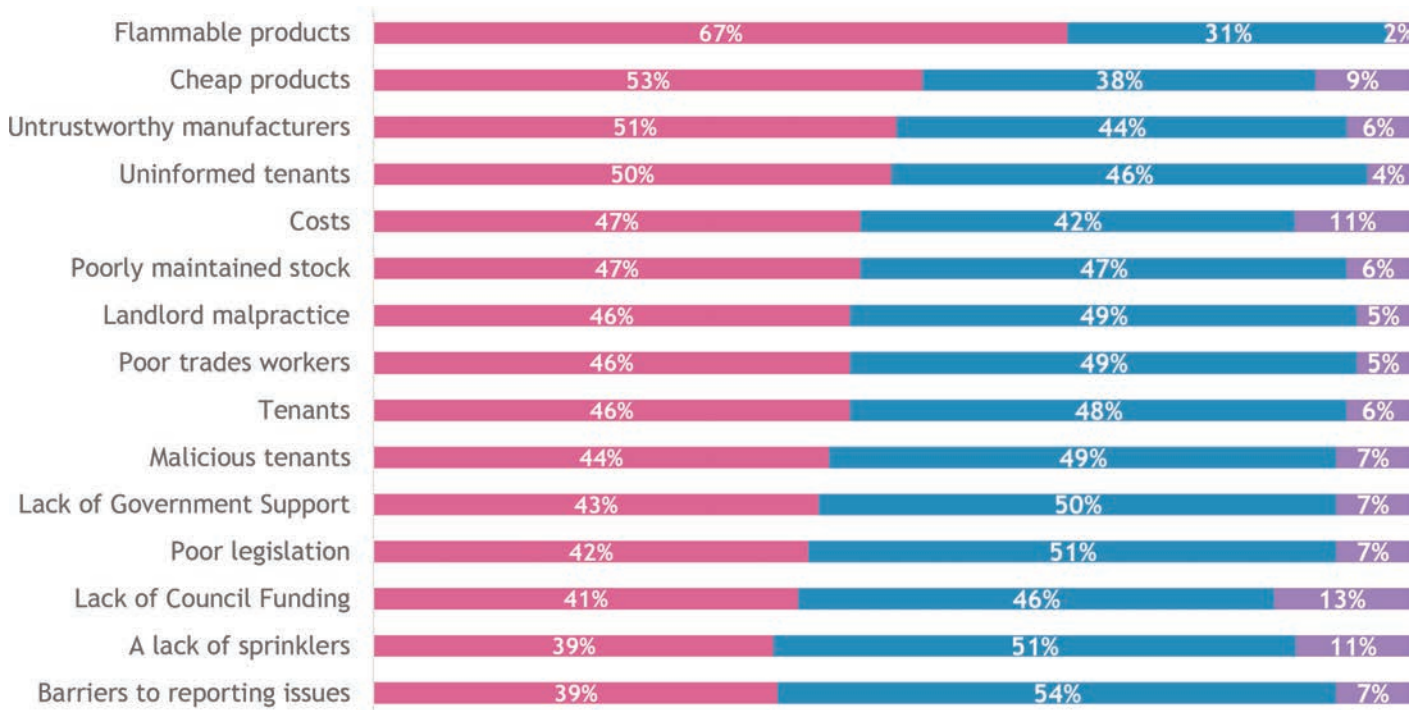
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"What do you think are the main reasons these risks remain present?" ■ Large Risk ■ Small Risk ■ Unsure/Don't Know

the most popular, chosen by 49% of our respondents, with trusted brands (48%), and durability (46%) just behind this. Then, in descending order, were installation guides (37%), recommendations (33%), reliability (31%), detailed information (28%), remote access (21%), manufacturer-led installers (20%), high costs (16%) and conversely low costs (15%).

Hoping to find out whether the use of such products was on the rise, we asked our respondents whether they have specified 'better' products post-Grenfell, and whether they believe the Building Safety Act is leading to 'better' products being specified across the country. Fortunately, most (64%) of our respondents reported that they have specified more of these products post-Grenfell, and the vast majority (78%) believe 'better' products are being installed more widely across the industry as a result of the Act.

BARRIERS TO PROGRESS

As indicated above, if using 'better' products is not a given across the industry – and their increased performance is well-understood – there must be barriers to their adoption for housing professionals, as well as a number of other reasons behind the continuation of fire risk.

When asked what our respondents believed to be the main reasons that fire risks remain present in their housing stock, the results followed last year's relatively closely – with two notable exceptions – but the gap between most and least popular options was fairly close, indicating no clear consensus.

Costs, for example – which lead last year's most significant reasons – fell to the fifth most popular this year (though still chosen by 47%), and 'untrustworthy manufacturers,' which last year was the least popular significant reasons – chosen by 15% – was up to the third most popular this year (at 51%), indicating a knock in confidence in some manufacturers post-Inquiry.

The latter theme of certain manufacturers – or their products in this case – being inferior was continued among the remaining most popular options here chosen, with the most popular by a stretch being flammable products (67%), followed by cheap products (53%).

There were of course many other barriers listed however, all descending closely from uninformed tenants (50%), to poorly maintained stock (47%), poor trades workers (46%), landlord malpractice (46%), tenants (46%), malicious

tenants (44%), lack of Government support (43%), poor legislation (42%), lack of council funding (41%), barriers to reporting (39%) and a lack of sprinklers (39%).

A further reason for the continuation of fire risk indicated by our data was shown in the confusion around who is responsible for rental accommodation fire safety. When asked who they believed the main onus to be on here, closely following the previous year, landlords led at (50%; -1% YOY), followed by building owners at (32%; -8% YOY). Changing things up slightly, the next most popular option this year was tenants at (8%; +6% YOY), then local councils at (2%; -3% YOY), with builders chosen by none of our respondents this year (-2% YOY).

Though improved slightly this year, a further potential cause for the continued fire risk above has been shown in our readers' understanding of the relevant regulations. When asked how well they would say they understand fire safety regulations this year, just 16% reported that they completely understand fire safety regulations (-1% YOY), with (63%; +9% YOY) mainly understanding them, one in five (20%; -4% YOY) only partially understanding them, no one slightly understanding them (-5% YOY) and 1% not understanding them at all (+1% YOY).

Thankfully, this year – perhaps due to legislation introduced post-Grenfell, or in response to awareness of the tragedy itself – fire risk was notably reduced among our respondents

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Most fire-related deaths are entirely preventable, and with the correct specifications, housing professionals can minimise any risks for their tenants.

Despite disaster after disaster however, house fires still occur, and risk remains.





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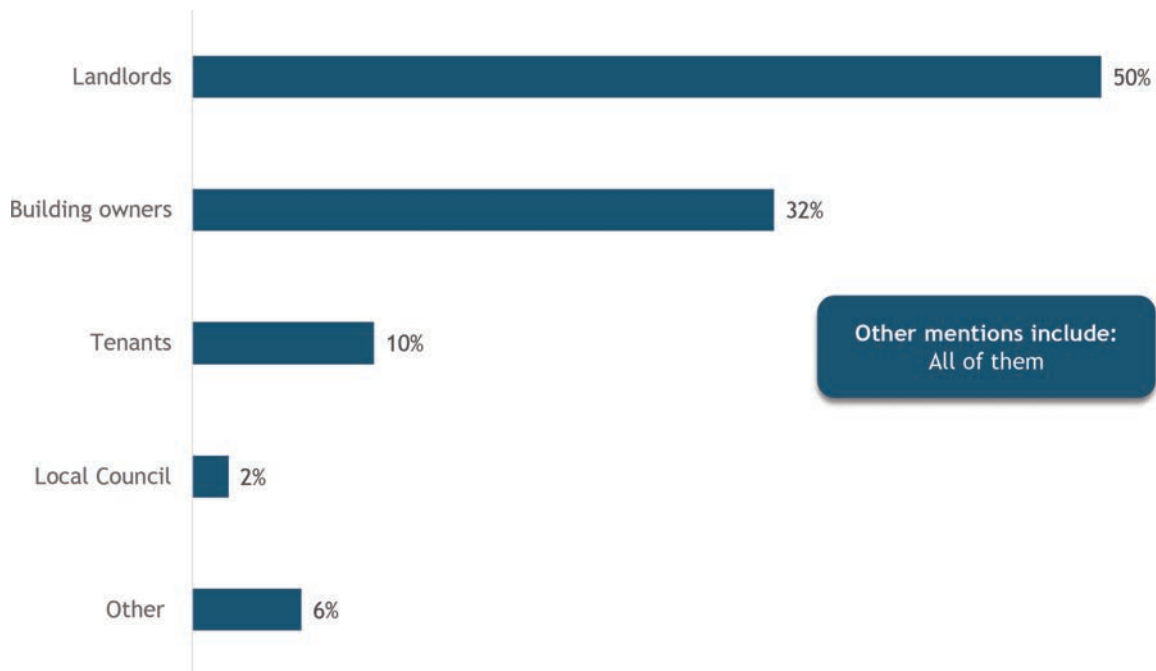
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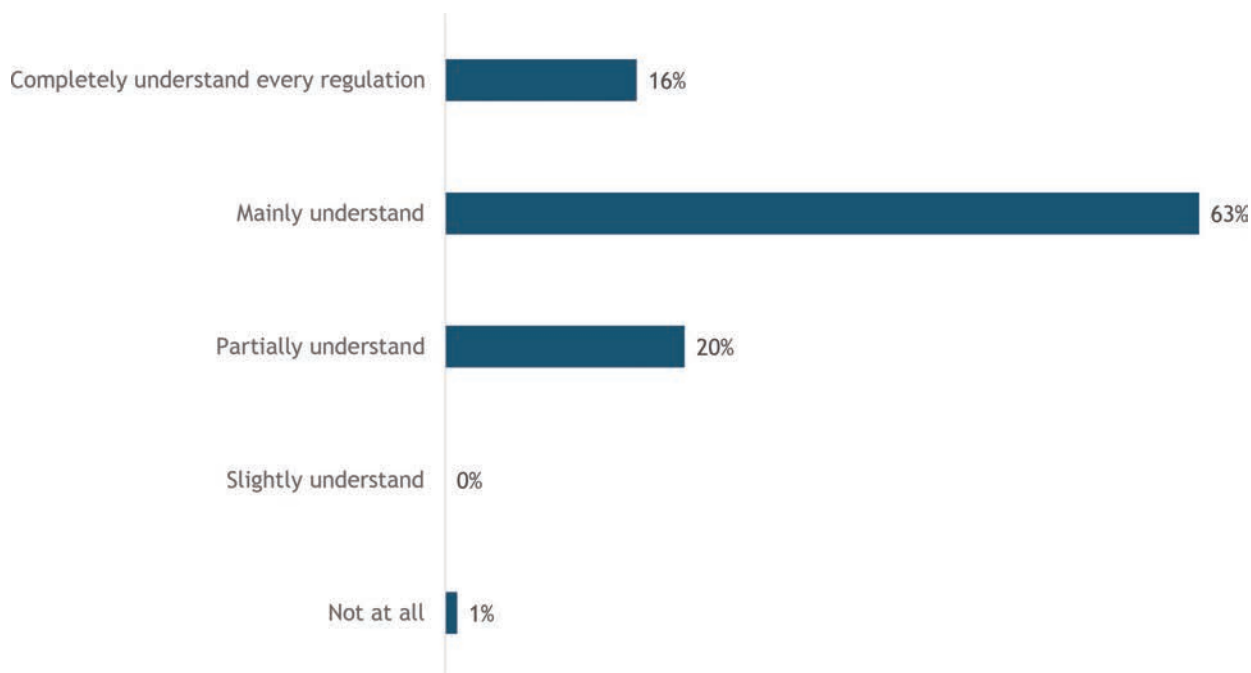
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“Who do you think the main onus should be on rental accommodation fire safety?”



“How well would you say you understand fire safety regulations?”

Thankfully, this year – perhaps due to legislation introduced post-Grenfell, or in response to awareness of the tragedy itself – fire risk was notably reduced among our respondents.

Just one in 10 fire risk assessments are failing on average, as opposed to over two in 10 last year, and failed assessments were shown on average to be addressed a week earlier than last year.

Despite this, however, any failed fire risk assessments means lives could have been in danger, as does any time these issues are left unaddressed.

If there is one thing that our respondents were clear on that housing

professionals can do to achieve lower fire risk, was in specification – with the vast majority understanding that ‘better’ products mean better fire safety – in effect, saving lives.

There are clearly barriers here however, with qualities like ease of use and trust of brands coming at a price, and not all products being created equally.

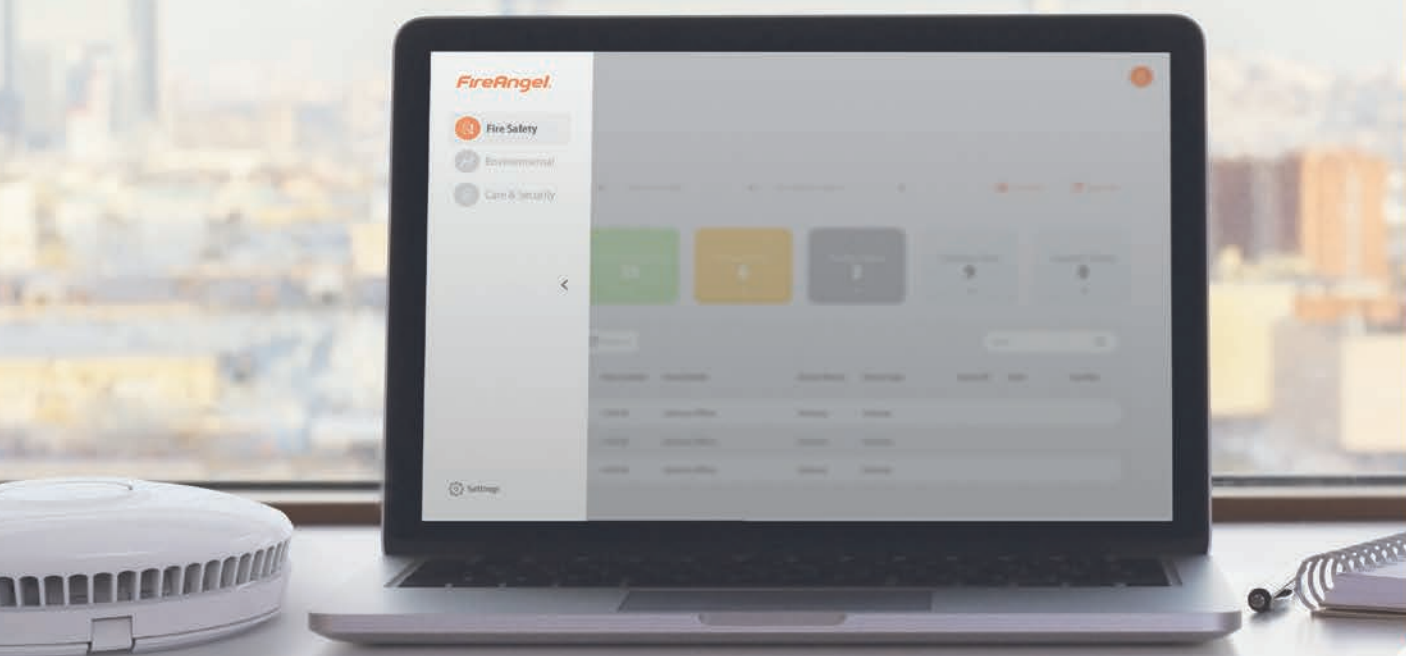
Whether it is achieved by housing professionals, Government, manufactures, tenants – or most likely a combination of all in the sector – until truly effective fire safety products, systems and their use are ubiquitous and diligently maintained, tenants will remain at deadly risk.



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The big one is back

Visitor registration for UK Construction Week Birmingham (UKCW Birmingham), the UK's largest event for the built environment, is now live, with the popular three-day show returning to Birmingham's NEC from 4th to 6th October 2022



Officially opened by architect and Channel 4 presenter George Clarke, UKCW Birmingham will also feature sessions and seminars led by industry experts across the show's six stages:

- UKCW Main Stage - used to tackle overarching construction industry topics, with a mixture of keynotes, panel debates and case studies from industry leaders.
- Sustainability Hub - forming the conference programme at the heart of Timber Expo, the hub programme will tackle the issues, layout strategies and present exemplar case studies to help the sector reach its net zero targets.
- Infrastructure Hub - the main feature content of Civils Expo, the Infrastructure Hub will deliver a three-day programme of case studies debates, networking opportunities, and keynote speeches
- Digital Construction Hub - the show's beating heart of innovation, the Digital Construction Hub will deliver a series of presentations and panel discussions including topics such as Information Management using BIM.
- CPD Hub - a mix of industry relevant CPD's delivered by industry experts, association partners, government departments and exhibitors.
- Offsite Alliance Hub - three days of debate, looking at how to change the way we think about construction to deliver high quality homes for future generations.

UKCW Birmingham will celebrate culture change in construction with three days of debate and discussion from top speakers on how the industry can move forward to tackle its biggest issues, including quality, fire safety, sustainability, offsite manufacturing, mental health, and improving diversity and inclusion.

Designed to connect the whole supply chain and be a catalyst for growth, UKCW Birmingham is the must-attend construction event this Autumn and is expecting around 25,000 attendees.

Visitors will also be able to find sections dedicated to Building Materials, Digitalisation, Infrastructure, Energy, HVAC, Surface & Materials, Timber, Offsite Construction and Skills & Careers.

To register free for UKCW Birmingham, go to: ukcw-birmingham-2022.reg.buzz/pr

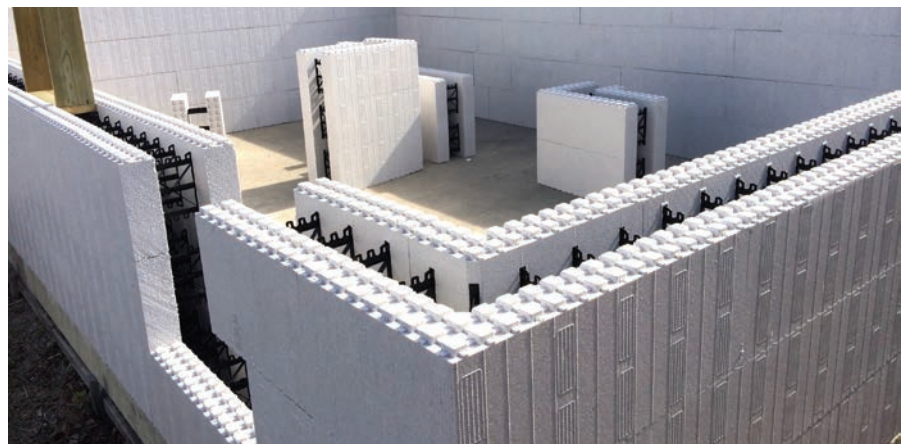
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JACKON's building systems help developers meet and surpass the requirements of all the latest regulations, including the recent changes to the Part L regulations, which have meant that from June this year, all new homes must produce 31% less CO₂ emissions, compared to what was acceptable under the previous Part L regulations. This puts the responsibility for achieving improved energy performance on to the developers of new dwellings.

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Closing the green skills gap

Elaine Gilligan of K Systems argues why reversing the skills shortage could quicken the race to net-zero



Addressing the skills gap in the construction sector could bolster the industry's efforts as it seeks to help the UK reduce carbon emissions. Contractors here and across the world have a major role to play in helping nations achieve net-zero goals.

When it comes to External Wall Insulation (EWI), as a 'fabric-first' energy efficiency measure, it is a key method in tackling the amount of energy used to heat homes.

With the ability to contribute thermal comfort for occupants while also reducing energy usage and thereby carbon emissions, EWI is arguably the most thermally ideal and efficient method to insulate the walls of homes.

As a result, the Government has increased the funding accessible for fabric-first energy efficiency measures, such as EWI.

Added to the building safety funding made available to improve fire safety, there is a significant expansion in potential work.

However, this is all happening at a time when labour is in chronically short supply, with anecdotal evidence indicating some installers are managing a potential pipeline of work that is double their current capacity.

As a result, EWI installers need to pick and choose projects based on their installer network capacity. This is inevitably causing significant delays to overall EWI installation delivery and impacting progress towards carbon emission reduction and fire safety improvement goals.

There are a multitude of reasons. Taking the construction sector as a whole,

almost a quarter of all construction workers are over 50, and as they reach retirement age, fewer people are entering the industry to replace them.

Recent research by City and Guilds found that only 7% of working people would consider a career in construction – dropping to 6% amongst 18-24-year-olds.

This is unwelcome news, as it has been predicted that the industry will need to recruit more than 216,000 new workers by 2025 to meet demand.

It is not just age, however. With many of those operating in the sector, including EWI, originating from outside the UK, the availability of labour has been impacted by the aftermath of Brexit and undoubtedly worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

New legislation, meanwhile, means that those hoping to come to the UK for work must already have a sponsor and be able to speak English to a basic level of competency.

For EWI, a skilled workforce is not just desired, it is essential.

Quality standards for energy efficiency measures are continuing to improve, with the recent adoption of PAS 2035 as a framework for energy efficiency measure installs and further refinement of PAS 2030 as the install quality standard.

Compliance with these standards on EWI installs is, by and large, a requirement to avail of the government and regional financial support eligible for the schemes.

Above all, we must all work to make the construction sector more attractive to new recruits regardless of their background

Meeting PAS 2030 standard means that at least one in four of the installer operatives to be vocationally qualified, to an NVQ level with respect to EWI systems.

Warranty providers and EWI system designers also typically require installers to have received specific training for the exact products and systems being installed.

So, how do we tackle this issue?

Many leading contractors are already taking matters into their own hands, creating skills academies in collaboration with colleges.

Scottish-based AC Whyte for example operates its Energy Efficient Skills Academy in association with South Lanarkshire College and West College Scotland, an initiative which we are delighted to support with free materials and training.

Collaboration between industry and education providers is incredibly important and it is clear that these initiatives are playing a vital role in improving skills across the construction sector. But they are only part of the solution.

Elsewhere, greater support and funding to increase capacity within NVQ training centres is also required.

Above all, we must all work to make the construction sector more attractive to new recruits regardless of their background or previous perceptions of a career in the building trade.

The pipeline of available work is there, along with the opportunity to quicken the race towards net-zero – now we just need more people to help us get there.

Elaine Gilligan is marketing manager at K Systems




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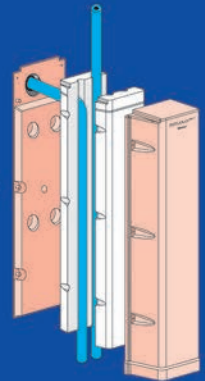


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Aico launch new and improved HomeLINK App for Residents



Seeking to empower residents to create safer and healthier homes, Aico, the European Market Leader in Home Life Safety, has launched the third iteration of the HomeLINK App for Residents. The app provides an innovative solution to some of the housing sector's biggest challenges, such as damp and mould and poor indoor air quality, allowing residents to take the first steps in improving their home's health.

The app is a complementary addition to Aico's HomeLINK Internet of Things (IoT) platform, which includes a network of fire and carbon monoxide alarms, environmental sensors and the Ei1000G Gateway that connects them all. Designed to provide residents with detailed information about the health and safety of their home, the app provides users with hints, tips and recommendations to better their home's indoor environmental conditions, in turn, improving their own health and wellbeing.

For example, with the improved core features, residents will receive notifications and recommendations, detailing how to reduce the risk of allergens, mould and indoor air pollution

besides fire alarm testing reminders. Through real-time information, residents will see a breakdown of carbon dioxide, temperature and humidity conditions within each room, followed up by educational information to understand their home better.

A game-changing new feature with the opportunity for enhanced care provides residents with the ability to invite others to app, so that their family members, carers or friends can also access the information to support the resident in following the healthy home recommendations.

Innovation is a key part of Aico's ethos, and their colleagues at HomeLINK are at the forefront of the research and development for the HomeLINK App for Residents. Taking this to the next level, residents can now trial new, experimental features via the app such as different design elements, allowing HomeLINK to directly collect feedback and quickly implement better user experiences.

Amrita Poptani, Product Manager at HomeLINK comments, "One of the things we noticed early on was how the tiniest thing could affect the moods, perceptions and overall

mental health of the resident when using the app. With this in mind, we ensured elements of the new user experience were fun, exciting and light without taking away from the seriousness of the information. And while it's always a work in progress - this new version not only lays the foundations perfectly but it's also 'very snazzy', as one of our resident-testers put it!"

To date, Aico have brought their HomeLINK connected, smart home solution to over 22,000 socially rented homes in the UK and this number is increasing exponentially, with over 136,000 devices installed, encompassing a Gateway for each property with a set of connected alarms and environmental sensors.

www.aico.co.uk/smart-home

www.youtube.com/watch?v=8b86NzBJ7X8





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Air exchange targets

Richard Poole from Siegenia addresses how and why housing managers should meet the new air exchange targets

The updated new building regulation Approved Document F covering ventilation came into force on 15th June 2022. Part F concerns construction projects that are new or result in the change of use of a dwelling or all other buildings in England. It therefore sets the standards for the ventilation of both new and existing buildings and needs to be considered by any housing management companies considering undertaking upgrades to their stock.

WHY IS PART F CHANGING?

The outgoing Part F has been in place since 2010, but over the years key issues have been identified and concerns have been voiced over the failure of homes complying. In 2020, guidance from Public Health England on selected volatile organic compounds (VOCs) indoors and World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations for indoor pollutant levels meant Part F, as it stood, was out of date.

Part F is also very closely linked with Part L (conservation of fuel and power), as both are being improved to meet the Government's Future Homes Standard. One way of improving energy efficiency is to reduce the heat loss through air permeability, thus building more airtight homes. However, an increased air tightness leads to reduced ventilation and, therefore, Part F requires updating to ensure that sufficient levels of ventilation are still provided.

CHANGES TO APPROVED DOCUMENT PART F

- Simplifying the approach for determining the ventilation rate and system design requirements for a dwelling
- Changing the way that ventilation systems are presented in the Approved Document to reflect common design practices and latest evidence relating to air quality in homes
- Introducing guidance to reduce the ingress of external air pollutants into the main body of the Approved Document
- Simplifying the structure and content of the guidance

WHY THE CHANGE NOW?

Ventilation remains an ongoing challenge not just for private developers and self-builders, but also for those of us undertaking any refurbishment works on properties. With increasing air tightness standards in the UK for new build homes and the focus on procuring the most energy efficient products, we end up creating nothing more than highly efficient sealed boxes. This may sound ideal (and from an energy conservation point of view it is) but without a properly considered holistic ventilation strategy, poor indoor air quality and issues of condensation and mould will ensue and become a recurrent problem for housing managers and landlords.

WHY DO HOMES REQUIRE VENTILATION?

Ventilation specialists will generally quote a 'maximum' air tightness of 4-5m³/hm² as a healthy rate for a naturally ventilated house. That is, ventilated only with extract fans, trickle vents and windows. Anything tighter and some form of forced ventilation will be required.



Decentralised whole-house heat recovery ventilation is less understood but offers some significant benefits over its centralised cousin

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the levels of indoor air pollutants can be two to five times higher than outdoors. The primary function of a ventilation system is to reduce the moisture in the air. The average family of four produces about 15 litres of moisture each day from activities such as bathing, cooking, washing and breathing.

Ventilation also helps dilute the effects of carbon dioxide (CO₂) released through breathing, smoking, cooking and burning fossil fuels. CO₂ levels are measured in parts per million (ppm). Normal outdoor ambient air is regarded as 250-400ppm and safe levels between 400-1000ppm is typical of indoor spaces with good air exchange.

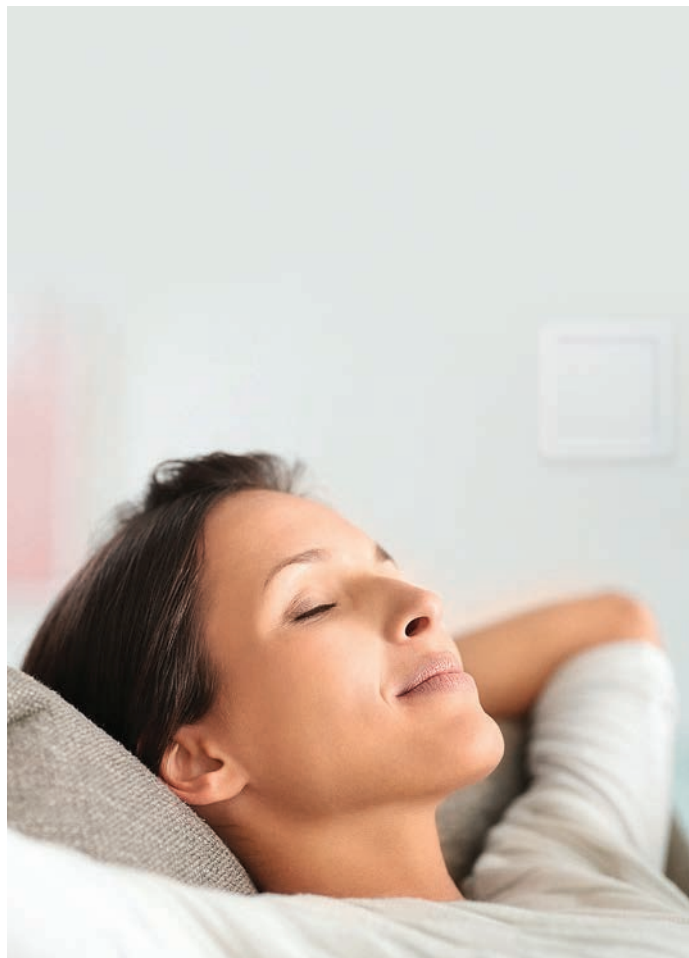
THE TRADITIONAL TRICKLE VENT SOLUTION

Trickle vents are considered under the topic of 'background ventilation' in the new approved document F, stating that these will be a legal requirement for the majority of window installations in England. The new legislation also clearly sets out the ventilation requirement of any habitable room and defines this by "equivalent area" (EA) measured in millimetres squared. For example, a host room that will have no openable windows once an extension or conservatory has been added will need 10,000 mm² EA for ventilation, while an existing bathroom will require trickle vents of 4,000 mm² EA.

Trickle vents are very effective at allowing the exchange of outdoor air with indoor air in the same way that an open window does but in a much more controlled way. Unfortunately, however, in the bid to seal up our homes to prevent heat loss they have often been omitted by the developer or later blocked up by the homeowner.

ALTERNATIVE VENTILATION METHODS TO CONSIDER

The new legislation allows several options (or work arounds) to further improve ventilation performance and/or energy conservation. Centralised whole-house heat recovery systems have been around for some time and have often been



The average family of four produces about 15 litres of moisture each day from activities such as bathing, cooking, washing and breathing

the go-to ventilation solution. However, the installation of these systems does require careful design and planning due to the spaghetti of ducting required to interconnect all rooms. For this reason, they are normally seen as too costly and disruptive for renovations and only considered for new build projects.

Decentralised whole-house heat recovery ventilation is less understood but offers some significant benefits over its centralised cousin, making it a real viable solution for refurbishment projects. As each unit is self-contained there is no need for a loft-mounted centrally managed ventilation device and the associated costly and time-consuming ducting. Once the wall opening is prepared, the installation of each ventilation unit is completed in less than one hour.

These single-room heat recovery units run continuously and automatically switch between air extract and supply in around minute intervals. When running in extract, warmed stale air from the room is extracted and heat is collected in the heat exchanger. The cycle then changes and the unit switches to air supply drawing in fresh air from outside and transferring the captured heat to the incoming clean air supply to raise the fresh air temperature before entering the room. Using heat recovery units as opposed to conventional fans or trickle vents reduces heat losses significantly, with some units, such as Siegenia's Aerotube WRG, recovering as much as 90% of the heat. Single-room ventilation units also provide a constant supply of fresh air to help maintain a healthy home environment.

It is therefore sensible to consider decentralised systems as a credible alternative to both centralised systems and trickle vents, when looking to renovate your housing to meet ventilation standards.

Richard Poole is head of ventilation sales at Siegenia

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Working with low temperature systems

Leading radiator manufacturer **Stelrad** is seeing its radiators being specified more and more for renewable heating systems as the popularity of heat pumps rises in the UK.



Radiators are still a popular and sensible choice as homeowners are familiar with how they heat their homes, and when properly sized, they are the perfect solution to share heat from heat pump installations. To find out more about why radiators are fit for the future, head for the website.

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Heating controls: a path to energy savings

Effective heating controls are an ever more vital part of an efficient central-heating system. And heating controls manufacturer **ESi** says it makes huge sense to look more closely at heating control selection. Clever use of controls can help minimise energy consumption by ensuring each room is at the right temperature for comfort, while avoiding overheating. This will keep homes cosy and cut energy bills which is, at the end of the day, what homeowners and tenants want. The selection of programmers and timers available today are many and varied and range from the simple to the far more complex.



01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

A bright idea to transform

Retrofitting external wall insulation presents practical challenges when applying the insulation around structural openings in a building. One particularly difficult area is where electricity meters are located in a wall cavity. The retrofit standards framework requires thermal bridging and thermal bypassing to be eliminated. Access Panel specialist **Jupiter Blue** are supplying the first ever insulated electricity meter box on the market. The patented design fits over the existing meter box housing and provides an easy to implement, fast and dependable way of meeting the retrofit standards.



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Reducing fire risk across the entire building envelope

Will Wigfield from ROCKWOOL UK explains why above ground level amenities such as roofs, balconies and terraces need greater consideration to mitigate fire risk

Fire safety is critical in any home but has a particular significance and complexity when it comes to high rise residential structures.

With limited land to house our growing population, building up rather than out is a logical way to provide a suitable quantity and quality of affordable homes amidst the space constraints of urban life. Yet designing, building and maintaining high rise homes needs careful consideration; especially as outdoor living spaces become increasingly commonplace.

While balconies and roof upstands of 'relevant' buildings fall within the scope of the combustible ban, meaning they must be constructed of materials rated

Euroclass A2-s1, d0 or better, neither mid-level flat roofs nor terraces count as "specified attachments" in Approved Document B (ADB), and therefore are not subject to the same heightened fire safety requirements.

HEIGHTENED RISKS

It is important to note however, that if a mid-level flat roof system with combustible insulation becomes engaged in a fully developed fire, there could be dangerous consequences. Not only could the combustible material act as a fuel source to potentially attack the facade above, it may

also produce smoke and toxic gases that could enter the building through vents or open windows.

This potential is further exacerbated by the range of risks that come with flat roofs. Hot work, for example, is any process that generates flames, sparks or heat and is responsible for 20% of construction site fires and 15% of all fires in commercial and industrial properties.

Hot work can pose a fire hazard to flat roofs during construction, maintenance or refurbishment, with common processes identified by the Health and Safety Executive as posing a significant risk.

Flat roofs also often house mechanical and electrical equipment, the failure of which can result in fire. Equally, as more high rise developments are featuring rooftop terraces and communal gardens, there's an increase in risk of fire from human activity, whether accidental or malicious.

Moreover, as with external walls, there is the risk of fire spreading to the roof from elsewhere inside the building. But unless it performs the role of a floor, or features an escape route, a flat roof does not count as an "element of structure" and ADB does not provide guidance on appropriate, minimum levels of fire resistance from the underside.

GOING BEYOND

Beyond applications impacted by the combustible ban, ADB places a restriction on the combustibility of materials that can be carried over the roof deck in areas 1,500mm either side of a compartment wall. Where this restriction applies, insulation should be Euroclass A2-s3,d2 or better.

However, non-combustible insulation is increasingly used across the entire roof area of buildings, removing any need to design, specify and install individual zones of non-combustible insulation at compartment wall locations. The use of non-combustible rather than combustible insulation reduces the fuel load available to a fire, and avoids the complication of potentially having to use different insulation materials across multiple zones on the same roof.

As non-combustible materials do not contribute to the spread of fire or emit significant toxic smoke or gases, the installation of non-combustible

As well as contributing to the fire safety and thermal performance of flat roof build-ups and facade elements, certain insulation solutions can also deliver acoustic performance which improves conditions for residents

insulation in a flat roof build-up can be considered best practice. Installing non-combustible insulation across a flat roof matches the established principle of using non-combustible materials in the most safety-critical elements of building construction – and brings the roof, which is in a sense the 'fifth facade' – in line with the approach mandated for external walls covered by the combustible cladding ban.

LONG-TERM PERFORMANCE

As well as contributing to the fire safety and thermal performance of flat roof build-ups and facade elements, certain insulation solutions can also deliver acoustic performance which improves conditions for residents.

Third-party accreditations help simplify routes to compliance, clearly demonstrating a product's suitability for applications such as flat roofs and amenities – and where fire safety is paramount, such as in high rise developments, these clear indicators of quality are extremely valuable.

To help develop industry knowledge on flat roofs and managing fire risk, ROCKWOOL has prepared a whitepaper, *'Flat roofs: Managing fire risk in the fifth facade'*, and a complementary CPD module. To access, visit rockwool.link/hmam

Will Wigfield is product manager of ROCKWOOL UK



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F. Ball launches next generation

F. Ball and Co. Ltd. has launched Stopgap 1500 AquaPro, the latest addition to its range of high-performance, water-mix smoothing underlayments. Stopgap 1500 AquaPro uses the latest technology to create the next generation of water-mix smoothing underlayment and can be applied over old adhesive residues, including bitumen, carpet tile tackifiers and ceramic tile adhesives, eliminating the need for mechanical preparation. In such applications, there is no need to prime beforehand, saving further time and expense. It is walk-on hard in as little as 60 minutes after application.



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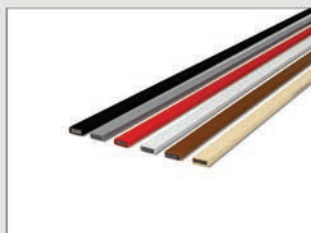
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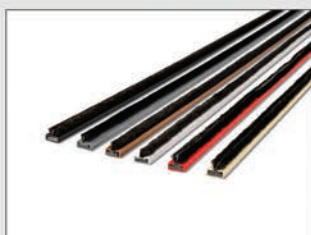
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“Compliant, or non-compliant, that is the question”

Fire doorset legislation has changed significantly in the recent years, with changes made at every stage in the lifecycle of a fire doorset, from design & testing to inspection & maintenance. For social housing fire doorset specifications, this means that every stage in the lifecycle of a fire doorset must be reviewed to ensure ongoing compliance with the new legislation.

One of the most important changes to legislation is the introduction of The Golden Thread, created to link all stages in the lifecycle of a fire doorset. Put simply, at each stage of the lifecycle, it ensures that “what is tested, is manufactured, surveyed, installed and maintained”. This is mandatory for all residential buildings where fire doors are a requirement. The data for the doorsets lifecycle must also be visible and adhered to and changes to the fire doorset must maintain the integrity and intended performance of the fire doorset for its complete lifecycle.

There are five steps in the lifecycle of compliance for a fire doorset, with the first step (Design & Test) being the key reference point for all other steps to ensure the original design intent is preserved.

ONLY 55% COMPLIANT?

In a recent white paper research completed with Housing Management & Maintenance, we asked specifiers of fire doorsets in social housing if they included key elements of the new legislation in their specifications. Our results produced some alarming

findings, highlighting our concern that changes recommended and legally required have not been fully implemented.

Our research was aimed at understanding how the new legislation and guidance had been adopted, with particular focus on use of 3rd party certified companies and individuals to complete each stage in the lifecycle.

For each question we asked, a minimum of 30% of respondents had either not included 3rd party accreditation or were unsure/ didn't know if 3rd party accreditation was included in the specification. Meaning within the respondents questioned, a significant percentage had not implemented these legislative changes and recommendations.

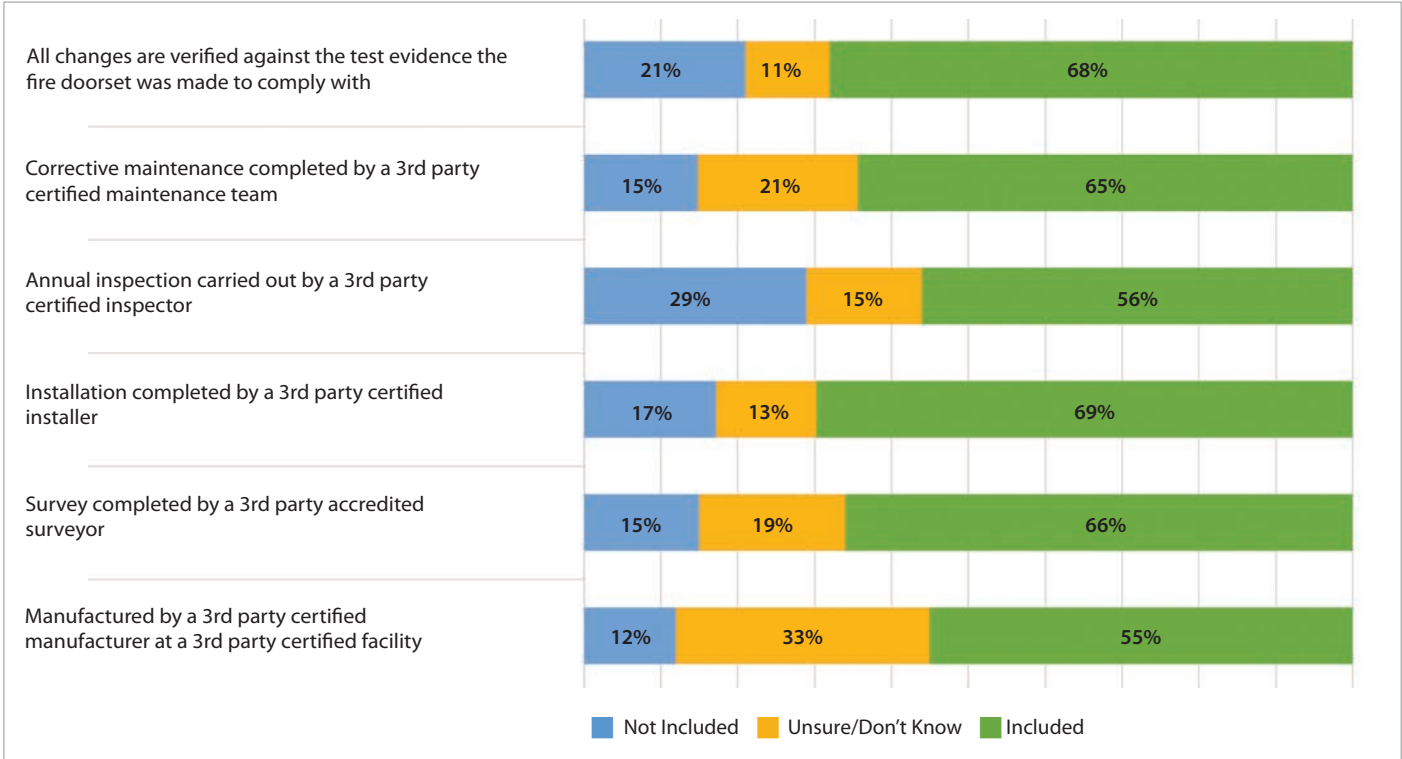
This was especially alarming for the annual inspection of a fire doorset, where it is a legal requirement that the annual inspection is carried out by a 3rd party certified inspector.

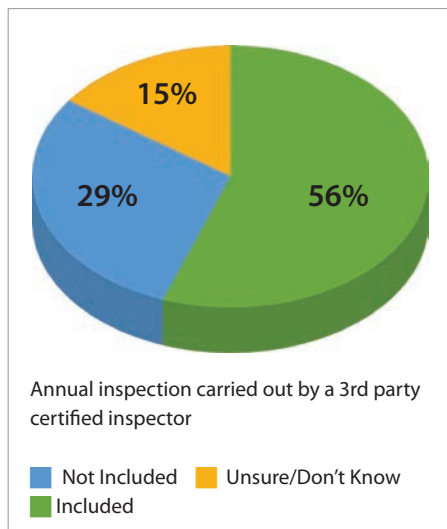
With 29% of respondents not including this in their specifications and a further 15% who are unsure or didn't know.

Therefore a high percentage of doors that may initially be fully compliant, risk future non-compliance due to this key omission.

It is of paramount importance that maintenance teams are fully trained and have knowledge of the individual aspects of a fire doorset. This should include, tested performance knowledge and product composition to ensure what was tested is the same as what is surveyed, manufactured, installed and maintained.

As an example, if a fire doorset has a damaged or broken piece of glazing, the maintenance team will need to have been trained and have the knowledge of how the doorset was constructed. They must be able to replace components like for like and know what components should be replaced as part of this repair. This will ensure the fire doorset remains compliant and its performance is maintained as per original design intent. For example, how will a non-trained maintenance team





be able to know the type of glass required to carry out a repair?

We are hearing about a number of reported cases where components are being replaced during maintenance with components that are not part of the original test data and even where non-fire rated components have been used.

When specifications are changed and aren't reviewed to ensure compliance with legislation, this brings significant personal risk to you as the responsible person(s). Under the new legislation the responsible person(s) is both legally and financially at risk if The Golden Thread is not adhered to at every stage of the lifecycle.

WHAT CAN WINKHAUS DO FOR YOU?

If you are unsure whether your specification is complaint or unsure about what compliance is, we can complete a specification health check or even write your fire doorset specification for you.

We have expanded our free training to aid the understanding of the new requirements for a compliant fire doorset specification. We offer three different levels of training which can be tailored to the audience to ensure it meets your requirements.

To further aid in adoption and understanding of the new legislation we have created The Golden Thread for Fire Doors Checklist which provides you with a definitive list of key things that you are required to include in your specification at every stage of The Golden Thread.

To register for our free training, to receive a specification health check or a copy of our specification checklist, please visit: firetraining.winkhaus.com

WHO ARE WINKHAUS?

Over the past decade the Winkhaus UK technical team have been involved in much of the creation and implementation of the latest standards and guidance relevant to fire legislation. All our fire doorset solutions are compliant with the latest DLUHC (Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities) guidance and are triple Q Mark independent 3rd Party audited.

Winkhaus UK Composite Fire Doorset solutions are the first to attain the new Q Mark 3rd party

audited certification for Smoke and become the first company to attain Q Mark certification for all three critical performance requirements Fire, Smoke & Security. Winkhaus UK Timber Fire Doorset solutions are also currently completing certification to ensure all Fire Doorset solutions hold the same level of accreditation.

01536 316 000
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To register for our free training, to receive a specification health check or a copy of our specification checklist, please visit firetraining.winkhaus.com



The Golden Thread

Fire Doorset legislation has changed significantly in recent years, with the Golden Thread one of the most important changes.

The Golden Thread of information is for all higher risk residential buildings (HRRBs), so that their original design intent is preserved and changes can be managed through a formal review process. There are five steps in the life cycle of compliance for a Fire Doorset, with the first (Design & Test) also the reference point for all others to ensure the **original design intent is preserved.**

1 DESIGN & TEST

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2 SPECIFY

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3 MANUFACTURING

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Factory Process Control establishes constancy and traceability through manufacturing



4 INSTALLATION

Site installation team are **3rd Party** Certified
Installation team receive specific product training
The installation is fully documented, detailing products used
Homeowner/Tenant sign over on completion
Full audit trail for Responsible Person

5 MAINTENANCE POST INSPECTION

Maintenance is covered by a **3rd Party** Certification Scheme
Maintenance team receive specific product training
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Closing the door on fire

Each year, Fire Door Safety Week raises awareness of the vital role that fire doors play in keeping building occupants across the country safe. Helen Hewitt from the British Woodworking Federation (BWF) explores why the campaign remains as important as ever in driving up safety standards in our buildings



The Fire Door Safety campaign continues to increase, as we regularly see fire doors propped open, damaged and poorly installed, which puts lives at risk.

Recent data has clearly highlighted the lack of maintenance and proper care taken over fire doors. Research from the BWF Fire Door Alliance has found that nearly a fifth of those responsible for the specification, installation and maintenance of fire doors (19%) inspect their fire doors twice a year, 14% inspect annually, while 3% only inspect their fire doors when an issue has been reported. This allows for potentially dangerous maintenance issues to go unnoticed, putting lives at risk. In addition, 2% admitted they never inspect their fire doors – meaning that a tragedy is a matter of ‘when’, not ‘if’.

The Government is taking positive steps to address fire door inspection. From the 23rd January 2023, the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 will make it a legal requirement for responsible persons for multi-occupied residential buildings with storeys over 11 metres in height to undertake quarterly checks of all fire doors in common areas, and endeavour to conduct annual checks of all flat entrance doors.

Generally speaking, and where legislation is not in place, at the BWF we advise inspections should be undertaken at a minimum of every six months; unless it is a high traffic area or building, such as a hospital or hotel corridor, in which case it should be once a week or monthly. As only through regular inspections any maintenance issues can be quickly identified, reported and addressed to help maintain the fire safety of the building.

Added to this, building users often misunderstand the role and function

of a fire door. This results in fire doors being propped open or damaged and not reported for remediation – effectively meaning that the door is unable to perform its role.

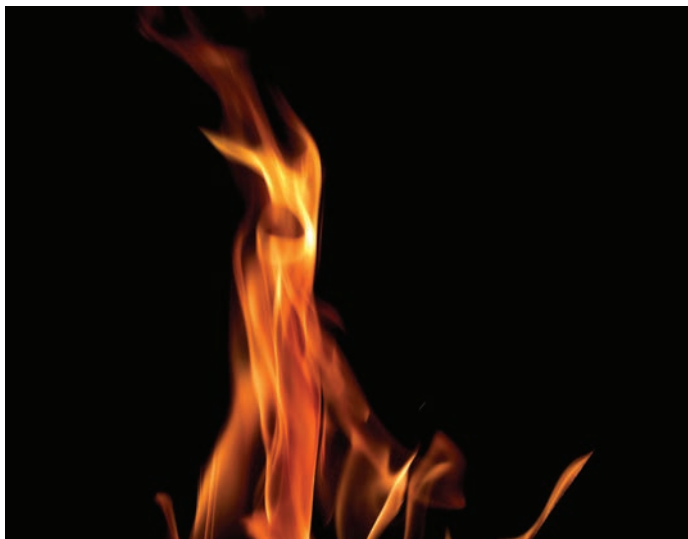
RAISING AWARENESS

Fire Door Safety Week exists to address the ongoing misunderstanding and lack of awareness of the role that fire doors play. Launched in 2013, the campaign is managed by the British Woodworking Federation and is supported by a wide range of partners, including the Home Office’s National Fire Safety campaign, the National Fire Chief’s Council and London Fire Brigade.

Each year the campaign aims to raise awareness of fire doors, drawing attention to specific issues such as poor installation and maintenance, and encouraging building owners and users to check the operation and condition of their fire doors and report those that aren’t fit for purpose. It also engages and educates property owners and the whole building industry to help them better understand the correct specification, installation, maintenance and inspection of fire doors.

Everyone plays their part in ensuring a fire door performs as it should, and Fire Door Safety Week helps all building users understand a fire door’s role and maintenance needs so that lives are not unnecessarily lost due to fire door neglect.

This year the campaign’s focus is on ensuring everyone understands the fundamental and life-saving role that fire doors play in the event of a fire. We’ll be launching new research highlighting common misconceptions of fire doors



Fire doors perform a life-saving role in the event of a fire, but they can only do that if they are correctly specified, installed and maintained

Habitation) Act 2018. This includes ensuring that the property is free of serious hazards, including exposure to uncontrolled fire and associated smoke through the use of fit-for-purpose fire doors, for the duration of the tenancy. Further fire door regulations may also apply depending on whether the fire door is installed in a new building or existing property. For example, the Building Regulations apply for new build properties, while the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order: 2005 (RRO) is pertinent for existing buildings.

For houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) and high-rise buildings, which are often categorised as high-risk, rigorous regulation applies, and checks are put in place to maintain fire safety and protect lives. Regulation can be challenging so it's important to always seek expert advice to ensure compliance and safety.

DRIVING UP STANDARDS

The focus on improving and reforming the professionalism and governance of fire safety professionals is gathering pace, further enhanced through the launch of the Fire Reform White Paper and Consultation. The Reform will implement recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report to improve fire safety across the UK – clearly demonstrating that fire safety remains at the top of the Government's agenda following the introduction of the Acts.

It's clear that fire doors perform a life-saving role in the event of a fire, but they can only do that if they are correctly specified, installed and maintained – and regulation only goes so far. This year Fire Door Safety Week will help ensure everyone is able to play a role in maintaining the fire safety of their buildings by identifying and reporting fire door issues.

Helen Hewitt is CEO of the British Woodworking Federation (BWF)

as part of the campaign and also hosting educational webinars for fire safety professionals to share the latest insight and industry best practice over fire door specification, installation and maintenance.

EVOLVING BUILDING FIRE SAFETY LEGISLATION

This year's Fire Door Safety Week follows the introduction of new building and fire safety legislation – the Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act.

The new legislation puts a focus on accountability, information sharing throughout the supply chain and provides residents with a voice with regard to building safety issues. A positive step forward, the Acts will drive forward best practice and improve fire safety in buildings across the UK.

In addition to these recent changes, landlords also need to ensure their properties are fit for human habitation under the Homes (Fitness for Human

Make fire doors your priority

A survey into fire safety in the social housing sector reported that 95% of respondents named fire doors as the most important fire safety product and more than half cited broken fire doors as the main reason for properties failing fire safety assessments.

With the Hackitt Review calling for greater care in the specification of fire safety products, door closer manufacturer, Samuel Heath asserts that the type of door closer fitted to fire doors in social housing stock should be given as much consideration as the fire door itself.

The right door closer will not only meet relevant fire and accessibility requirements, but also assure continued reliability of the fire door, tenant safety and well-being, as well as help to control whole life costs.

Samuel Heath's Powermatic, jamb-mounted, concealed door closer delivers in all these areas, meeting the necessary performance standards and delivering a host of additional benefits thanks to its total concealment when the door is closed.

For more information, send Samuel Heath an email at info@samuel-heath.com or give them a call.

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Yeoman Shield Fire Door Services offer assurance to clients

Yeoman Shield Fire Door Services division continues to go from strength to strength with the addition of a new team member and new personnel accreditations.

Technical Advisor, Richard Bingley and Technical Supervisor, Shaun Stevenson, already have the FDIS Diploma in Fire Doors. Both have now increased their portfolio

of certification, having recently sat for, and to their credit, achieved the FDIS Fire Door Inspection qualification.

"The FDIS Fire Door Inspection qualification assures our clients that our Fire Door Services supervisors have the essential skills to carry out fire door inspections with the knowledge to identify non-compliant issues," commented Contracts Director, Richard Good.

With an in-depth understanding of the regulations, components, compartmentation, and function, Richard and Shaun can also advise on remedial work required to bring damaged fire doors back to an acceptable standard under best practice guidance.

Offering accepted repair techniques can help reduce the cost of remedial work to non-conforming fire doors whilst a regular Fire Door inspection and maintenance routine will ensure that problematic issues can be dealt with before they get to the point of total fire door replacement.

Yeoman Shield Fire Door Services has been further enhanced by the internal promotion of Gemma Batley to the team.

Richard Good explained: "Gemma has worked within the company for many years as a Senior Sales Coordinator and has great understanding of our fire rated door protection products and will certainly be an asset to the division."

Gemma has been appointed as a Fire Door Supervisor and has already achieved the FDIS Diploma in Fire Doors Certification



ready to progress to the Fire Door Inspection qualifications.


For more information on Yeoman Shield Fire Door Services as well as Yeoman Shield's range of Wall & Door Protection products please contact the company or visit the website.

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