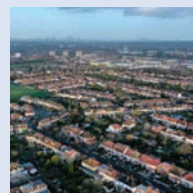


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

APR/MAY 2023



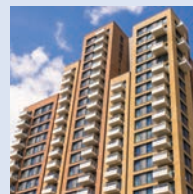
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quality private
rentals

Ombudsman
rebukes social
landlords

Asbestos
company director
imprisoned

25k housing staff
require training

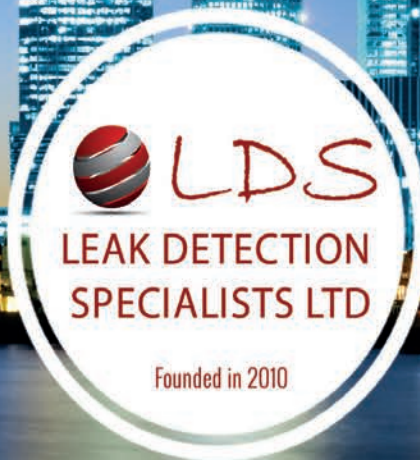
Gove urges tenants
to complain



Subsidence – reducing costs and impact to tenants

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Apr/ May 23

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Editor's comment

More than training is required to fix the housing sector's problems



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

I am not going to criticise the new requirement for housing management staff to undertake training to obtain professional qualifications, but I will challenge the notion that this is somehow going to magically improve the quality of housing accommodation and services delivered to millions of social housing tenants. The award of a certificate simply indicates that a certain level of knowledge has been successfully acquired, understood and been re-used in answering some exam questions correctly. On its own training can achieve very little, except for more knowledgeable staff. For it to really make a difference those staff need to be given support, responsibilities, empowered to make decisions and the resources to make use of their newly acquired knowledge. There also needs to be a practical element so that people can demonstrate how they have used their knowledge productively and continue to do so.

Many of the social landlords who have been criticised by the Ombudsman, the Regulator and even the Secretary of State in the past couple of years are led by and employ many staff with professional qualifications. This has not prevented their organisations making mistakes or letting down their tenants. All too often housing management staff are expected to be gatekeepers of limited resources, whether that is in the allocation of new homes, investigating a transfer request due to overcrowding, tackling reports of antisocial behaviour, or signing off repairs and checking the quality of work undertaken. If this is to change for the better, then the culture within social landlords has to change. Boards and executive directors need to be fully engaged with the quality of day-to-day services, to be genuinely interested in performance, why complaints are being made and what is being done to resolve problems and ensure they are not repeated. For this to work properly there can be no tick box mentality and tenants need to be fully informed and involved in reviewing performance and decision making. Change of this sort does not come easily.

What calls Mr Gove's demand for professionalism into question is the fact he is limiting this to those who work directly for social landlords. Why is this requirement not being applied to all the consultants and agents who work with and for the sector and what about extending the requirement to the private rented sector? There can be no justification for not extending it – after all conditions in the private rented sector are not vastly superior and in many instances they are worse. It has taken over 20 years for the Government to decide to extend the decent housing standard to the private rented sector. Let's hope it doesn't take as long for this particular initiative to be standardised across both the social and private rental sectors. My other concern is that the professional training and qualification requirement has not prevented mistakes in other areas of work, such as medicine, teaching and social services, so what else is Mr Gove prepared to do to drive up standards in social housing?

Collectively the sector has expressed its disappointment at a budget which was almost completely devoid of housing related announcements. The biggest domestic issue for the past year has been the cost of energy and its impact on things like heating bills, as well as its impact on the lives of low income families. We also know that probably the single biggest positive step we could take as a nation would be to improve the insulation of our homes.

This would deliver huge benefits to so many people, including the hundreds of thousands of people living in cold properties, many of who are also living with damp and mould. It would make our homes warmer places to live during the colder months of the year and cooler in the hotter months, while also costing us a lot less money in energy costs. Why the chancellor didn't put all sorts of incentives in place for property owners and landlords to invest in better insulation is a mystery.

A few months ago huge sums of money were set aside to stimulate the replacement of carbon guzzling domestic gas boilers with more modern heat pumps. The programme is not going particularly well and is well behind schedule. But in order to get the full benefit from new heat pumps, our houses and flats need to have better levels of insulation. The BRE have analysed the EHS property condition data and identified the correlation between hazards in our homes with the cost of needing medical treatment. The costs for the NHS are amazing and on their own, they ought to be enough to demand that action is taken. When we see the number of properties in the private rented sector which suffer from Category 1 hazards, we should demand stronger and more decisive action is undertaken.

Patrick Mooney



On the cover...

Photograph taken by a drone in Leicester, commissioned by contractor Geobear who were documenting the process to stabilise social housing properties affected by subsidence.

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- **Fire Door Signs** - convey crucial information on the use and purpose of fire doors, helping to prevent the spread of fire and smoke throughout a building
- **Fire Action Notices** - provide essential information on the steps occupants must take in case of a fire, including raising the alarm and safely evacuating the building
- **Fire Equipment Signs** - indicate the location and type of fire extinguishers and other fire-fighting equipment available to use correctly and efficiently during a fire

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2023 Legislation Update for Flats

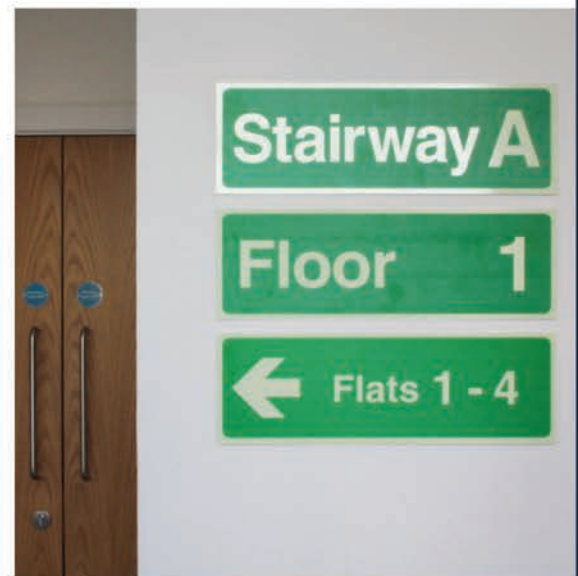
As of January 2023, an update to Fire Safety Regulations was added within Fire Safety Approved Document B. This update requires all flats with a top storey over 11m above ground level to provide Wayfinding Signs on every floor.

This new range of signage is designed to help guide firefighters in the event of a fire, so they know what floor they're on, and how many flats are on each level and which direction they're in.

The new regulations state specific requirements regarding the letter and numeral height of the text on the signs, as well as how they should be positioned to best assist the fire service. (Appx. 15.13-15.16)

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SafetySigns4Less have a range of Wayfinding Signs readily available, and guarantee to manufacture your custom signs so that they comply with the strict legislation laid out in Approved Document B. Their team will manually check each custom sign order to ensure it complies, and advise you on any changes or amends to be compliant to what's listed in Approved Document B.



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'Awaab's Law' must be extended to private rented sector

The Citizens Advice charity is demanding the private rented sector should be covered by the same new standards on damp and mould being introduced for social housing properties, under the proposed 'Awaab's Law'.

The new law is being introduced in memory of two-year-old Awaab Ishak who tragically died in 2020 after prolonged exposure to mould in his parents' Rochdale flat. His death has prompted a raft of actions from Government and regulatory bodies, in a concerted effort to improve property conditions.

Social housing landlords will need to investigate and fix health hazards, including damp and mould, within strict new time limits. Timescales of 14 days for a landlord to investigate a problem and seven days to make good on the repairs are being consulted on.

Based on the results of its research about conditions in the private sector, Citizens Advice wants the Government to extend the new responsibilities to private landlords and to follow through on a promise to make sure all new private rental properties are upgraded to a minimum EPC Rating of C by 2025 and existing tenancies by 2028.

Landlords are only required to bring their properties up to an E Rating if the improvement

The new law is being introduced in memory of two-year-old Awaab Ishak who tragically died in 2020 after prolonged exposure to mould in his parents' Rochdale flat. His death has prompted a raft of actions from Government and regulatory bodies, in a concerted effort to improve property conditions

works do not exceed £3,500. The charity wants the cap on landlord investment to be increased from £3,500 to £10,000.

The charity's research shows that 1.6 million children are living in privately rented homes with damp, mould or excessive cold. Their analysis suggests more than half of private renters in England are struggling with one or more of these issues right now.

Taking action to upgrade property conditions could slash tenants' energy bills and help reduce the public health concerns caused by cold, damp and mouldy homes. This would also complement the Government introducing a Decent Homes Standard covering the private rented sector for the first time.

Gillian Cooper, head of energy policy at Citizens Advice, said: "Every week we hear stories of people living in cold, damp and mouldy properties they can't afford to heat properly."

"Improving energy efficiency in privately rented homes has never been more urgent. It's the step needed to keep people's essential bills low, while also helping to protect their mental and physical health."

The charity found that private tenants are 73% more likely to live with damp if they live in a property with an EPC Rating of D-G, rather than A-C. The average private sector tenant in England spends £350 more a year on heating because of poorly insulated and damp homes, while those in the least efficient properties are paying an extra £950, according to Citizens Advice.

£42 million to support delivery of building safety reforms

The Government is providing funds to support the recruitment and training of more than 220 Building Control Inspectors and Fire Inspectors working with the new Building Safety Regulator.

A total of £42.5 million is being made available over the next three years. This will support the delivery of tough new standards for managing building safety for higher-risk buildings brought in by the Building Safety Act.

The package consists of a £16.5m grant to Local Authority Building Control (LABC), the representative body for local authority building control in England and Wales, and £26m to support the Fire and Rescue Services in England and the National Fire Chiefs Council.

The grant funding will enable local regulators to recruit, train and employ new Building Control Inspectors and Fire Inspectors. These local partners will support the work of the new Building Safety Regulator in overseeing the safety and standards of the design, construction and management of higher-risk buildings, as well as strengthening the sector as a whole.

Around 110 Building Inspectors and 111 new Fire Protection Officers across England will be

recruited and receive high-quality training over a three year programme designed to direct skills and resources to areas with a greater distribution of high-rise buildings.

Peter Baker, chief inspector of buildings at the Health and Safety Executive said: "Local Authority and Fire and Rescue Services are vital to the delivery of the new safety regime for higher-risk residential buildings. I welcome the work to quickly increase capability and capacity so our regulatory partners can deliver their important roles. Our common goal is ensuring the success of the new regime in keeping residents safe in their homes, now and in the future."

LABC chief executive, Lorna Stimpson said: "We are delighted to have secured this funding to provide much needed additional resources for our local authority members in England. Building control surveyors are a scarce commodity and so it's important that we start to invest in this previously underfunded but vital public service role. We welcome the role that local authority building control will have as part of the new building safety regulator's multi-disciplinary teams, and in helping to implement the reforms

LABC chief executive, Lorna Stimpson said: "We are delighted to have secured this funding to provide much needed additional resources for our local authority members in England"

recommended by Dame Judith Hackitt."

Under the new regime, Building Control Inspectors, Fire Inspectors and Fire Engineers will be the local partner regulators of the new Building Safety Regulator in the Health and Safety Executive.

The Building Safety Regulator will have new powers and responsibilities to ensure the safety of all buildings and will have additional responsibilities for how higher-risk buildings should be constructed and safely maintained.

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Social housing tenants urged to make more use of complaints

Housing Secretary Michael Gove is urging social housing tenants to make their voices heard by complaining about substandard housing conditions and services, as part of a 'Make Things Right' advertising campaign.

Gove is also encouraging more tenants to escalate their complaints to the Housing Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the landlord's final response.

This follows other recent actions to protect tenants in social housing, including setting time limits for landlords to investigate and fix damp and mould under Awaab's Law and introducing mandatory qualifications for social housing managers to make sure residents receive a quality service.

A national marketing campaign were running adverts using images of black mould and leaking ceilings across social media platforms including neighbourhood app NextDoor, on radio stations and streaming platforms like Spotify in over six languages.

The campaign is also providing funds for training in two pilot areas, London and the North West, so they can support more residents who have problems in their homes.

The Housing Secretary said: "Too many social housing tenants are being let down and ignored. This Government is determined to stand up for them and give them a proper voice. They deserve a decent, safe and secure home, just like everybody else."

"So we are shining a light on rogue landlords that ignore their tenants time and again and allow families to live in disrepair. This campaign will make sure tenants know their rights and how to make a complaint – giving them the confidence to go to the Ombudsman and ensure action is taken."

Social housing campaigner Kwajo Tweneboa said: "What we've learnt is that social housing in the UK is far from where it should be, and tenants have been monumentally let down whilst enduring terrible living conditions."

RIGHT TO COMPLAIN

"It's clear things must change, this campaign is the start of that. The campaign makes clear that disrepair issues from damp and mould to collapsed ceilings must be fixed. Tenants have a right to complain and be listened to, treated with dignity, fairness and respect but most of all live in a house they can call a home."

Findings from the Government's social housing resident panel – bringing together over 200 residents across the country – found 65% of members said their experiences of raising complaints with their landlord had been unsatisfactory. Some of the key issues residents raised include:

- The time taken for complaints to be addressed



Findings from the Government's social housing resident panel – bringing together over 200 residents across the country – found 65% of members said their experiences of raising complaints with their landlord had been unsatisfactory

and resolved;

- Disrespectful conduct, lack of communication, or inaccuracy of information experienced during previous complaints process;
- Lack of repercussions for landlords if residents are not taken seriously or complaints are not resolved satisfactorily; and
- Burden and complexity of the complaints process.

Almost a third of all social renters considered making a complaint in 2020/21, but 27% chose not to because they thought nothing would be done in response, according to figures from the English Housing Survey.

Since October last year, it has been quicker and easier for residents to take complaints directly to the Housing Ombudsman, after the requirement for people to go to their MP or local councillor first

and wait eight weeks after completing the landlord's process was removed.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will strengthen the powers of the Regulator, allowing it to enter properties with only 48 hours' notice, make emergency repairs with landlords footing the bill and issue unlimited fines to failing landlords. It is expected to receive Royal Assent in late Spring.

Housing Ombudsman Richard Blakeway said: "Effective complaint handling starts with landlords getting things right first time. If and when things do go wrong, landlords must fix the issue, apologise, offer appropriate compensation, and show they have learnt from those errors."

"If that doesn't happen then residents can take their complaint to us at the Housing Ombudsman. We're free, independent and impartial in order to help residents and landlords find a resolution to their complaint."

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Large-scale HA mergers are back on the agenda

The challenging economic climate appears to be sparking a new wave of mergers between housing associations, as social housing landlords look to grow their businesses and make themselves more resilient and efficient.

The cap on this year's rent rise coupled with higher than inflation increases in repair and maintenance costs, as well as Government demands for extra work on safety, tackling damp and mould, as well as retrofitting energy efficiency measures are all adding to the financial pressures on social landlords.

In response Sovereign and Network Homes have announced plans to merge to create an 82,000-home business, with a 1st October target date set for its completion. If it goes ahead, it will be one of the largest housing associations in the country.

They plan to invest £9.2 billion over the next 10 years, building 25,000 new homes (nearly 4,000 more than currently planned) and to establish a new community foundation to invest £100 million in communities over the same timescale.

Also in the south of England, Hampshire based Abri is due to welcome Berkshire based Silva Homes into its group structure, giving it a combined portfolio of 45,000 homes.

An outline business case has been agreed and the HAs are now in "advanced discussions" about the merger, with a final decision expected later in the year following the completion of consultation with residents and other stakeholders.

Gary Orr, group chief executive of Abri, said: "Abri and Silva offer each other an excellent potential fit. Alongside our geography, we share the same fundamental purpose and very similar objectives. Most importantly, we're both committed to delivering the best possible services through local teams who are close to their customers and communities."

After a lengthy period spent completing due diligence checks and getting the approvals required from stakeholders, Sanctuary has recently completed its takeover of Swan to create a large association with 115,000 homes.

Social housing managers must be qualified under new laws to protect residents

Around 25,000 social housing managers must gain professional qualifications under new rules designed to protect residents, improve their living conditions and raise standards across the sector.

Housing staff will be required to have an appropriate level housing management qualification regulated by Ofqual equivalent to a Level 4 or 5 Certificate or Diploma in Housing, or a foundation degree from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The changes are being made through amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, which are intended to drive up standards in the sector and hold landlords to account over the service they provide to their tenants. There is no expectation this requirement will be extended to the private rented sector, nor to management agents or consultancies working in the social housing sector.

Any social housing landlord who fails to meet the requirements of the new standards could receive an unlimited fine from the regulator. The bill also gives the regulator tough new powers – allowing them to enter properties with only 48 hours notice and make emergency repairs with landlords footing the bill.

It follows Awaab's Law, introduced earlier this year, which will force social landlords to fix damp and mould within strict time limits.

The Government's press release says the new requirements will professionalise and drive the culture change needed in the sector, ensuring residents receive a high level of service and are treated with respect at all times. While many managers already provide a high quality professional service, not all do. This will ensure that all managers have the skills and qualifications they need.

It emphasises the change will bring social housing more closely into line with other sectors providing front line services, including social work, teaching, and health and care services.

PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE

However, there is no guarantee that professionalising the sector's workforce in this way will automatically drive up standards and prevent tragedies, or problems such as the poor housing conditions, such as overcrowding or the build up of mould and damp.

Secretary of State for Housing Michael Gove said: "The Grenfell Tower tragedy and, more recently, the death of Awaab Ishak showed the devastating consequences of residents inexcusably being let down by poor performing landlords who consistently failed to listen to them. We know that many social housing residents are not receiving the



service or respect they deserve."

"The changes we are delivering will make sure social housing managers across the country have the right skills and experience to deliver an excellent service and drive up standards across the board."

Gavin Smart, chief executive at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said: "We welcome the Government's focus on and support for professionalism in housing. We believe housing professionals should do all they can to ensure that tenants and residents have access to good quality, affordable homes; that they are treated with dignity and respect; and that their voices and views are heard and taken account of in decisions that affect them, their homes and the communities they live in and that the vast majority of housing professionals and organisations share this belief."

"We look forward to working with Government to support organisations and individuals in achieving the qualifications needed under these new requirements."

There are lots of details still to be worked out to clarify timescales for implementation of the training mandate, how the training will be delivered and paid for, as well as the full extent of staff who will need to pass training qualifications. Some commentators are questioning the possible impact on staff recruitment and retention, staff levels, pay rates and overall training programmes.

It is unclear how the success of the new requirements will be measured and whether tenants will have any say in assessing whether individual landlords and their housing staff are delivering improved outcomes. If the new training requirement does not lead to higher standards in the short to medium term it is likely to be labelled an expensive failure.



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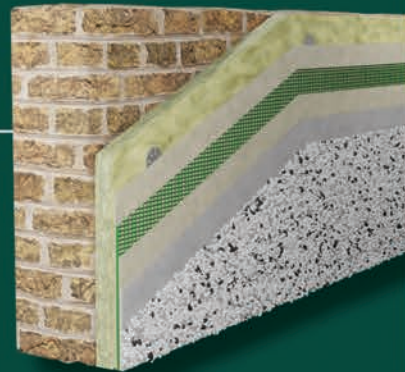
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Over 600,000 private rentals are poor quality and hazardous to occupants

Analysis of the nation's housing stock has revealed that the private rental sector accounts for a quarter of all poor housing in England, with excessive cold and the likelihood of falls on stairs representing the biggest risks to tenants.

Work undertaken by the Building Research Establishment shows that around 620,000 private rented homes had one or more Category 1 hazards and it would cost about £2.5 billion to correct all of these faults. The results are reported in a briefing paper called 'The cost of poor housing in England by tenure'.

It reveals that the most common hazard in the private rented sector is unsafe stairs, with around 251,348 properties affected, compared with 80,300 social rented properties similarly affected.

Other serious hazards in the private rented sector include excessive cold (178,541), damp and mould growth (32,701) and overcrowding (16,695 properties). These are all 'Category 1', the most serious type of hazard defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Category 1 excess cold hazards resulted in a cost burden to the NHS of around £1.2 billion per annum. Falls on the stairs were, however, the most common hazard, with an annual cost to the NHS of around £271 million.

Around a third of homes (32%) in the private rented sector were built before 1919, and so are more likely to suffer from more serious disrepair and, in terms of retrofitting options, tend

to be more problematic (including more expensive) to treat.

Some 40% of private rented homes are flats; including 11% of converted flats which commonly date from pre 1919 and are more likely to have Category 1 hazards compared with all other types of dwellings. Other key findings about private rentals are:

- The average cost to make all poor housing safer was £4,039.
- The average repair cost to mitigate excessively cold homes was £6,835.
- Around half (50%) of poor housing could be removed with an investment of under £1,176. Conversely the cost to make homes safe was between £10,000 and £46,343 for the most expensive 10% of homes.
- 70% of the most dangerous stairs could be made safer for under £700.

If all hazards were mitigated now, the payback to the NHS would be realised between eight and nine years.

Improving the energy efficiency of excessively cold homes would realise notable NHS cost savings.

On average, an investment of £6,835 would be required.

Under the current Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES), landlords can claim an exemption if work to raise the EPC Rating of the dwelling to Band E (the approximate threshold for excess cold) exceeds £3,500 including VAT. This

£3,500 ceiling therefore restricts the scope of the MEES regulations.

Roughly half of the cold homes require an investment of £9,000 or more, while conversely roughly a third (30%) require £2,175 or less.

The private rented sector has the largest number of homes (almost 33,000) that are classified as poor housing due to the most serious damp and mould growth hazards identified by the English Housing Survey.

Many of the common barriers in improving energy efficiency apply to some private landlords: affordability of higher cost improvement measures such as solid wall insulation and availability of suitable qualified installers.

For some landlords, there is a potential 'split incentive' whereby landlords are responsible for the cost of energy efficiency improvements, but their tenants are the main beneficiaries, particularly if landlords do not anticipate an equivalent monetary rise in the value of their property.

Private renters tend to be younger than homeowners, with just 8% aged 65 years or over. There was, however, an increase in the number and proportion of people aged 55-64 living in the private rented sector, from 7% in 2009/10 to 10% in 2019/20 and an increase in the number of households with dependent children (by about 547,000) over the same period. Older people and young children are the most vulnerable age group for many Category 1 hazards assessed by the HHSRS.

New regulator takes major step forward in 'landmark moment for building safety'

Those responsible for the safety of around 12,500 high-rise residential buildings in England have to register with the new Building Safety Regulator by October this year.

The Building Safety Regulator was established to protect high-rise residents from unsafe building practices in England in response to the Grenfell Tower fire.

Under the Building Safety Act, high-rise residential buildings which are 18 metres tall or higher, or at least seven storeys, with two or more residential units are defined as 'higher-risk'. They all have to be registered in the six months from April 2023, along with a named person responsible for maintaining their safety.

A new campaign aimed at owners and managers

of high-rise residential buildings will highlight their new legal duties. It will call on those responsible for the safety management of higher-risk buildings to prepare for a new wave of regulatory change to ensure that they are ready to step up and comply.

The registration process is a crucial stage in setting up the new building safety regime. Registering buildings in scope will be a legal requirement and owners and managers who fail to comply by October 2023 will be investigated and may face prosecution.

HSE Chief Executive Sarah Albon said: "This registration process is an important step towards building a safer future for residents of high-rise buildings. We want it to be clear where responsibility for safety in these buildings lies."

"As the Building Safety Regulator, we will draw from our experience to provide guidance and oversight for the industry and lay the foundation for a world-leading building safety regime, which is a part of our mission to protect people and places."

Chief Inspector of Buildings Peter Baker said: "Our message is clear – industry must raise its standards and residents of high-rise buildings in England must be kept safe."

"This is a landmark moment for building safety, the information provided through registration will be an invaluable part of our crackdown on unsafe building practices. Those who are responsible for high-rise residential buildings must register; failure to do so will be against the law."

Building registration is a major step in a package of measures to ensure high-rise residential buildings are safe for residents and users.

It follows the introduction of Planning Gateway One in August 2021 and will be followed by more robust building control of high-rise developments, and the certification of occupied high-rise buildings by the new Regulator.

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Significant failings led to unreasonable eviction of a resident

The Ombudsman has found severe maladministration by 3CHA after a resident living in supported housing was issued with an immediate eviction notice, contrary to the landlord's policy and without reasonable evidence for issuing the notice.

This caused significant detriment to the resident. Following an investigation, the Ombudsman ordered the landlord to strengthen performance monitoring of its managing agent, to apologise and pay the resident £1,800 in compensation.

The finding has raised further concerns about exempt accommodation providers, particularly those operating in the Birmingham area. This type of accommodation is often used to house people with very few other housing options, such as prison leavers, rough sleepers, refugees and migrants, and those experiencing substance misuse issues.

3CHA is a registered provider of social housing, with under 1,000 properties of mostly supported housing in the Midlands. It uses a number of managing agents for the day-to-day management and provision of services to its tenants.

A managing agent for the landlord issued the resident with an "Official Eviction Notice" asking her to leave her supported accommodation immediately otherwise further action would be taken. It said this followed verbal and written warnings, none of which were presented to the Ombudsman.

The eviction notice was against the landlord's policy, in which evictions have to be signed off by a

senior manager, a notice to quit be completed, and a reasonable 28 day period of notice given. It was not clear if any of this was completed.

Two reasons were given for her eviction – the refusal to let a gas engineer enter the property without a face mask because of the Covid-19 pandemic and service charge arrears. The landlord has subsequently said the resident was within her rights to refuse access and the Ombudsman has seen no evidence of any arrears.

The landlord acknowledged to the resident it retained ultimate "responsibility" towards its residents, regardless of the fact the property was managed by the agent. The landlord is therefore responsible for the significant failure of the managing agent to treat the resident fairly.

In its learning from the case, the landlord said it has undertaken additional quality assessment reviews and property inspections with the managing agent, as well as monitoring its eviction approval process.

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman, said: "When we examined the relationship between landlords and managing agents, we found it was sometimes dysfunctional. This investigation demonstrates the detriment to a resident that can result from service failures and raises several significant concerns."

"We're not the only ones concerned about the quality of supported accommodation and we hope that some of the lessons from this case will drive improvements. Around the time of this case the

The landlord acknowledged to the resident it retained ultimate "responsibility" towards its residents, regardless of the fact the property was managed by the agent. The landlord is therefore responsible for the significant failure of the managing agent to treat the resident fairly

resident was also raising concerns about the "heavy handed" and "intimidating" behaviour of the managing agent's staff."

"The resident was treated unfairly, and the landlord does not appear to have considered the seriousness of the situation in its responses at the time, or the detriment the resident would likely have been caused. Furthermore, it has not demonstrated that it sought to "put things right".

"I would urge the sector to revisit our Spotlight report on dealing with private freeholders and managing agents, where we set out a number of good practice recommendations."

London council failed to complete 'high-risk' fire safety work at thousands of its rental properties

A North London council put thousands of its tenants' lives at risk by failing to complete essential fire and electrical safety works to its housing stock.

In a regulatory notice the Regulator of Social Housing concluded that Haringey Council breached the Home Standard and, as a result, there was potential for serious detriment to the council's tenants.

Following a self-referral from the council in late 2022, the regulator confirmed that the council breached health and safety requirements. It had failed to complete a significant number of remedial fire safety actions, including 4,000 that were high risk. In addition, it did not have up-to-date electrical safety reports for thousands of its homes.

Through an investigation the regulator found that

over 100 of the council's homes had serious hazards, known as 'Category 1' hazards, and nearly 5,000 of its homes did not meet the Decent Homes Standard. The council decided last year to close its ALMO and bring the management of its housing stock under its direct control.

Haringey Council is undertaking a full condition survey of its tenants' homes and has put a programme in place to rectify the issues, including the establishment of a new cross party Housing Improvement Board (chaired by the Chief Executive), a new tenant forum and a Housing Improvement Plan.

Kate Dodsworth, director of consumer regulation at RSH, said: "Haringey Council put thousands of tenants at potential risk by failing to meet

health and safety requirements for fire and electrical safety."

"Our investigation has also revealed that a significant number of Haringey Council homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. The council needs to act urgently to put things right for tenants, and we are monitoring it closely as it does this."

Haringey Council Leader Peray Ahmet and Chief Executive Andy Donald issued a statement saying the regulatory notice confirmed what they had expected, both in terms of serious shortcomings in key areas of safety compliance and that a significant number of homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard.

"We are very sorry that our residents have not been receiving the quality of service that they should have done. What is important now is that we move quickly to change this."

All blocks that had a backlog of overdue fire risk assessments have been cleared, electrical checks on all domestic properties are due to be completed by May and a five year programme of investing over £400 million in homes has been established.

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Company and its director prosecuted for unsafe removal of asbestos

An asbestos removal company has been convicted and its director given a prison sentence after failing to ensure the safe removal of asbestos from domestic properties.

Asbestos Boss Limited, also known as Asbestos Team and its director, Daniel Luke Cockcroft, advertised as a licensed asbestos removal company and removed licensable material from homes throughout Great Britain.

An investigation carried out by the Health and Safety Executive found that Asbestos Boss Limited had never held a licence and their poor working practices resulted in the largescale spread of asbestos and exposure to residents.

Little to no precautions were taken by Asbestos Boss Limited and so their own workers, as well as anybody at the premises they were working on, were at serious risk of exposure to asbestos. The company and their director also breached a prohibition notice on several occasions.

At Manchester Magistrates' Court, Asbestos Boss Limited of Old Gloucester Street, London was found guilty of breaching regulations 8(1) and 11(1)(a) of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. They were also found guilty of one charge relating to the failure to comply with a prohibition notice at two separate addresses which prevented them from working with licensed asbestos materials.

Company director Daniel Luke Cockcroft of Darnes Avenue, Halifax, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 37 of the Health and Safety at

Work Act 1974 in relation to the company's failing of regulation 8(1) and 11(1)(a) of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 as well as the charge for breach of a prohibition notice. He was immediately imprisoned for six months and ordered to pay victim compensation.

HSE Inspector Matt Greenly said: "Asbestos is a killer. Companies and their directors need to recognise the dangers of removing asbestos by themselves both to their employees and others. Asbestos removal should only be carried out by trained personnel who understand the risks and how to control them."

"Asbestos Boss have deliberately removed a highly dangerous material resulting in a significant risk of exposure to cancer causing asbestos. They not only have put their customers at risk but have also undoubtedly put themselves, their workers, and their families at serious risk."

"By undertaking asbestos removal work himself, Mr Cockcroft has also chanced his own life, and the life of his family by working unsafely with asbestos, despite knowing full well what the risks were."

"This case should serve as a warning to any other companies who think they can make a quick profit by cutting corners and risking lives. I also hope that potential customers will be able to avoid rogue companies like Asbestos Boss by carrying out simple checks to ensure that any company they employ is legitimate and competent to prevent them and their families being put at serious risk."

Asbestos Boss and Mr Cockcroft, were also prosecuted by Stockport Trading Standards, in a jointly run case with HSE. Cockcroft and the company were both charged with fraud in relation to falsifying training certificates, a business insurance document and unauthorised use of trade association logos.

This gave the impression that the business was credible and that workers were adequately trained and competent in relation to asbestos removal. Cockcroft pleaded guilty to fraud and the company was also convicted. Daniel Cockcroft was sentenced to an additional four month in prison making a total prison term of 10 months.

Young tradespeople need to know the risk of asbestos

A new safety campaign is urging Millennials, Gen Z workers and other younger people who work as plumbers, electricians and in other trades, to take the risk of asbestos much more seriously.

That's the message from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The workplace regulator has launched the campaign to raise awareness of the risks associated with the dangerous substance.

The campaign, called 'Asbestos and You', will target all tradespeople with a focus on younger workers in trades such as plastering and joinery. HSE wants to reach construction workers who started their careers after the use of asbestos was banned in 1999.

The regulator is concerned the length of time it takes for symptoms to develop after asbestos exposure could lead to a perception among today's younger workers that it is something that only impacts older people who were working before the ban.

5,000 people a year still die from asbestos related illnesses and asbestos can still be found in buildings

built or refurbished before the year 2000.

Asbestos containing materials were used extensively in the construction and maintenance of buildings in Great Britain from the 1950s until the ban. That means construction workers of all ages could still be exposed to asbestos fibres today.

HSE's chief executive Sarah Albon said: "Asbestos exposure in Great Britain is still the single greatest cause of work-related deaths. We are committed to protecting people in the workplace and reducing future work-related ill health."

"Everyone working in construction today, of any age, must take the risk from asbestos seriously. Asbestos is dangerous when not maintained in a safe condition or if physically disturbed without the right measures in place to avoid fibres being released into the air."

If asbestos fibres are inhaled, they can cause serious diseases such as mesothelioma, asbestos related lung cancer, asbestosis, and pleural thickening. Construction tradespeople of any age are at significant risk if they disturb

If asbestos fibres are inhaled, they can cause serious diseases such as mesothelioma, asbestos related lung cancer, asbestosis, and pleural thickening

materials containing asbestos during repairs and refurbishment.

HSE's head of health and work policy Mike Calcutt said: "These diseases often take a long time to develop, and it can take 20 to 30 years for symptoms to appear. It is crucial that all workers know how to recognise the dangers and take the right actions to protect themselves and those around them from being exposed to asbestos fibres."

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Creating healthier homes for the future with underfloor heating

Joanna Crown at WMS explains why radiant heating is the key to creating and redeveloping healthier homes for the future, which incorporate affordable warmth as standard



The decarbonisation of UK homes is becoming increasingly important and newly introduced regulations are already changing how we heat new and existing properties.

The low water temperature update to the Building Regulations and Part L, introduced last summer, requires every newly built home to prove a 31% reduction in CO₂, compared to previous standards. While any new or replacement heating systems being installed should be designed to accept low-carbon heating in the future and demonstrate a maximum flow temperature of 55°C.

Half of the respondents who took part in the recent Housing Management & Maintenance 'Decarbonisation of Social Housing' study believe the UK's average social housing stock requires improvement in energy performance – with a further 30% in dire need of improvement.

The new rules and the industry's urgency to find solutions have brought the benefits of healthy, safe and energy-efficient heating even further into the spotlight. Now is the time to get up to speed with the optimum specification choices.

THE UNDERFLOOR SOLUTION

The leading solution, which ticks every box for both new and existing properties, is hydronic (water-based) underfloor heating. This technology

works by circulating warm water through a series of continuous loops fitted underneath the floor, creating a large radiant surface that heats the room from the floor upwards. This tried and tested radiant form of heating – which dates back to Roman times – is much more comfortable than the convected heat provided by radiators which draw cold air across the floor before heating it and then convect the warm air upwards towards the ceiling.

As it covers a much greater surface area than radiators and is designed to run at low temperatures 35°C rather than the 70°C of a typical radiator system, underfloor heating is also the ideal solution to meet the revised regulations. In addition, this low-temperature system is an ideal partner technology for renewable energy sources, such as heat pumps.

AFFORDABLE WARMTH

A recent report from National Energy Action predicts that 6.7 million UK households could be in fuel poverty – an increase of 2.2 million from 2021, and these figures are set to rise. These people cannot afford to heat their homes, at a reasonable cost, to the temperatures required to be healthy and comfortable.

When asked about fuel poverty within the Housing Management & Maintenance study, 41% of respondents estimated that their tenants are fuel-poor, with 62% stating that reduced bills are very important for tenants.

Underfloor heating is the solution to provide affordable warmth for today and the future.

As well as being up to 15-40% more efficient than an equivalent radiator system, once in place, a well-designed system will be able to run at the most efficient settings, further reducing bills and environmental impact. Underfloor heating systems can also be fully zoned, ticking a crucial regulatory box and minimising energy wastage. Each zone can be carefully controlled individually from a central thermostat or smartphone app.

MINIMAL MAINTENANCE AND COMBATS MOULD

Typically, traditional radiators require an annual check for air in the system/bleeding, and sometimes more invasive inhibitor dosing is needed – plus, they may need to be entirely replaced every 25 years.

In stark contrast, underfloor heating systems require very little maintenance and can last three times longer, with most offering at least a 75-year guarantee, providing additional reassurance that it will likely outlive the lifetime of the building. Good quality underfloor heating pipe, made from superior quality, five-layer, sustainable PERT (polyethylene of raised temperature resistance), can also be melted down safely and reused, offering a sustainable solution throughout the product's life cycle.

Underfloor heating also combats mould thanks to the large expanse of heat radiating from the whole floor surface, warming surfaces and eliminating cold spots in a room where mould could develop.

SUPPORTS SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

One important aspect when incorporating health and well-being into the design of a property is air quality, notably to support those who suffer from allergies and asthma. While traditional radiator systems encourage allergens and dust to circulate into the air – which can exacerbate respiratory conditions – underfloor heating reduces the movement of these problematic particles, making it one of the healthiest ways to heat a building.

In fact, the International WELL Building Institute credits radiant heating technologies as the best way of heating for comfort. Underfloor heating also



promotes a safe environment due to having no hard edges and no scalding surfaces, creating safer indoor environments for children, as well as elderly and vulnerable tenants.

COMPLETE DESIGN FREEDOM

Every inch counts within a property, particularly when space is at a premium. Underfloor heating is the perfect space-saving solution, as it frees up wall space and provides complete freedom for interior layouts and allows for the specification of extra-large windows, which let more light in, further increasing well-being.

This aspect is especially important when planning a home for those with additional needs. In addition, as the radiant heating system is fully concealed under the floor, walls are kept free to accommodate equipment or additional entrances, which may be vital for the occupant to move around the space, which can increase their safety and overall sense of well-being when living in the property.

Joanna Crown is marketing director at WMS and BEAMA Underfloor Heating group chair

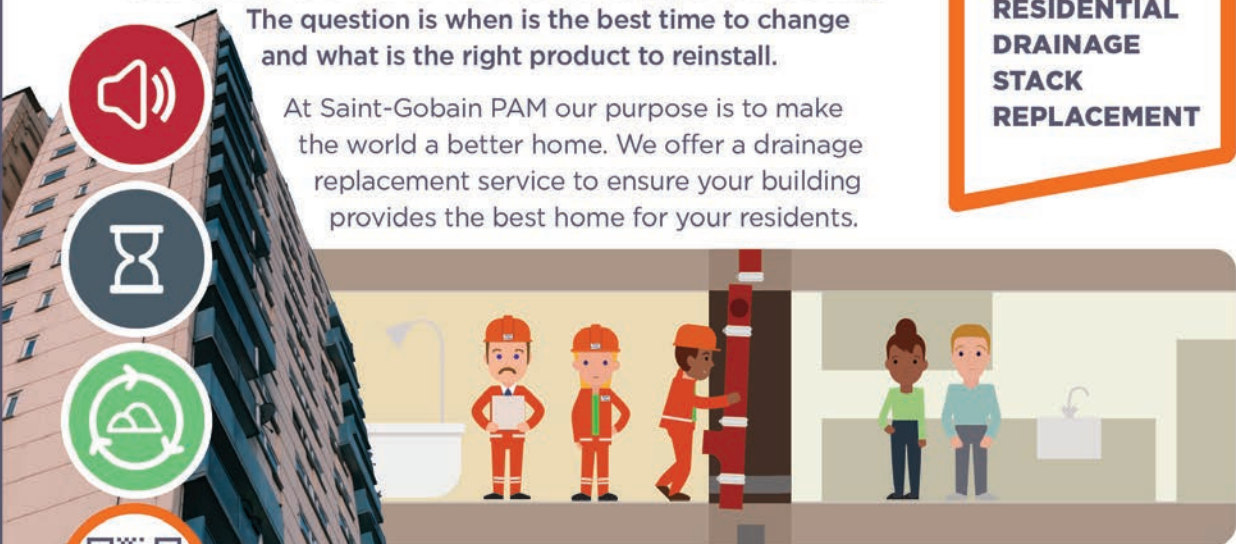


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Subsidence – reducing costs and impact to tenants



Drone image of a street impacted by subsidence caused by trees

WHAT IS SUBSIDENCE?

As many as 3,000 cases of subsidence are reported each year affecting social housing stock. Subsidence is the downward structural movement of a building; which is the consequence of a change in soil dynamics beneath a building's foundation. The downward movement means part of the structure is pulling away and generally results in cracks to the property appearing.

Cracks in the walls of a building can be very alarming for tenants and should be assessed immediately and the cause treated promptly. Subsidence usually occurs as a result of long periods without significant rainfall, meaning trees extend their roots further looking for moisture, drying out the soil and leading to the ground shrinking / swelling. Properties which are built on clay soils and near trees and other vegetation are more prone to subsidence, although other issues which may cause subsidence include properties on granular soils with ageing Victorian drainage systems, or near previous mining activity or subject to frequent flooding.

Last summer was the driest since 1976, leading to a surge in properties being affected by subsidence. The Association of British Insurers reports there might be 12,000 to 15,000 subsidence claims in a typical 12 month period. In a so-called 'surge' year like 2022, numbers could more than double. Tenants or asset maintainers in impacted areas can expect to see an increase in tell-tale signs such as cracks appearing in walls,

difficulty opening windows and doors, or more severe structural problems.

With the changes in climate, the prevalence of subsidence events will be more common.



Drilling to insert injection tubes in restricted access

The challenge for maintenance professionals is how to deal with subsidence quickly, efficiently and cost effectively.

Underpinning a building was the traditional method of dealing with subsidence, however this has been surpassed with modern injection processes provided by suppliers such as Geobear. Their solutions remove expense and time from subsidence maintenance and they are providing subsidence solutions for housing associations across the country. The example below illustrates how associations can benefit from Geobear's system which can also be used to stabilise blocks of flats.

CASE STUDY – GEOBEAR, REMOVING COST AND TIME FROM SUBSIDENCE REPAIR

A housing association in the Midlands had a large number of properties that had suffered from structural movement due to the drying of soils and drainage systems being in a state of disrepair. The properties were largely Victorian terraced homes located on busy one-way streets.

The traditional solution, mass concrete underpinning, requires properties to be empty as major excavation is needed in and around the structure. Therefore Geobear was approached to provide an alternative solution to tackle dozens of properties in as short a timeframe as possible.

The managing agent was introduced to Geobear, a ground engineering company that uses innovative methods to stabilise properties. The method used by

Geobear injects an expansive geopolymer resin into the ground beneath foundations. The resin solidifies in the ground and compacts granular soils, or fills the fissures in clay soils, providing full stabilisation beneath the sinking foundation and preventing any further structural movement.

By working in partnership, dozens of properties were stabilised in a single month, providing cost savings to the client and importantly, with no requirement for tenants to move out of the property or neighbourhoods disrupted.

In choosing the Geobear solution, the Housing Association was able to process the foundation maintenance requirements for properties in bulk. Dealing with groups of properties in this manner greatly reduced the administrative time required and enabled all the works to be processed and scheduled within weeks, rather than over a course of a number of years.

With this method of stabilisation, the client did not have to process the temporary relocation of tenants, or utilise void properties. For each individual property this would save thousands in relocation costs and potentially lost rental income, notwithstanding the inconvenience for the tenants.

For the tenants of the properties, their primary concerns were not having to move out of their home, but also the safety of the property they lived in. Living within a property that has cracks in the walls caused by subsidence can be a major concern. With the maintenance works completed they have the assurance that the property is being maintained and safe to live in.

ALTERNATIVES

The traditional alternative to stabilise buildings suffering with subsidence is mass concrete underpinning. This is a labour-intensive activity that takes many weeks or even months to complete. It involves major excavation around the foundations of properties and damages surrounding areas. The location of the property is an important factor as underpinning the front elevation of a row of pavement lined, terraced properties, located on busy one-way streets is a major undertaking and impacts the wider community.

However, with the Geobear solution only one van was required to park outside the properties. Consequently, there was virtually no disruption to any other residents in the community, especially as on average it took two days to stabilise each property.

The cost to underpin a single property is in a similar bracket to the Geobear solution, but with measurable financial benefits come in the form of reduced administrative costs and more significantly their being no relocation costs, or lost rental income. The relocation for a family while traditional underpinning is completed could amount to in excess of £5k, in using Geobear this cost is removed.

THE FUTURE

Subsidence is an issue facing all associations, some more than others. At present procurement of underpinning services differs depending whether it's Council or Association managed. If the example provided by Geobear can be



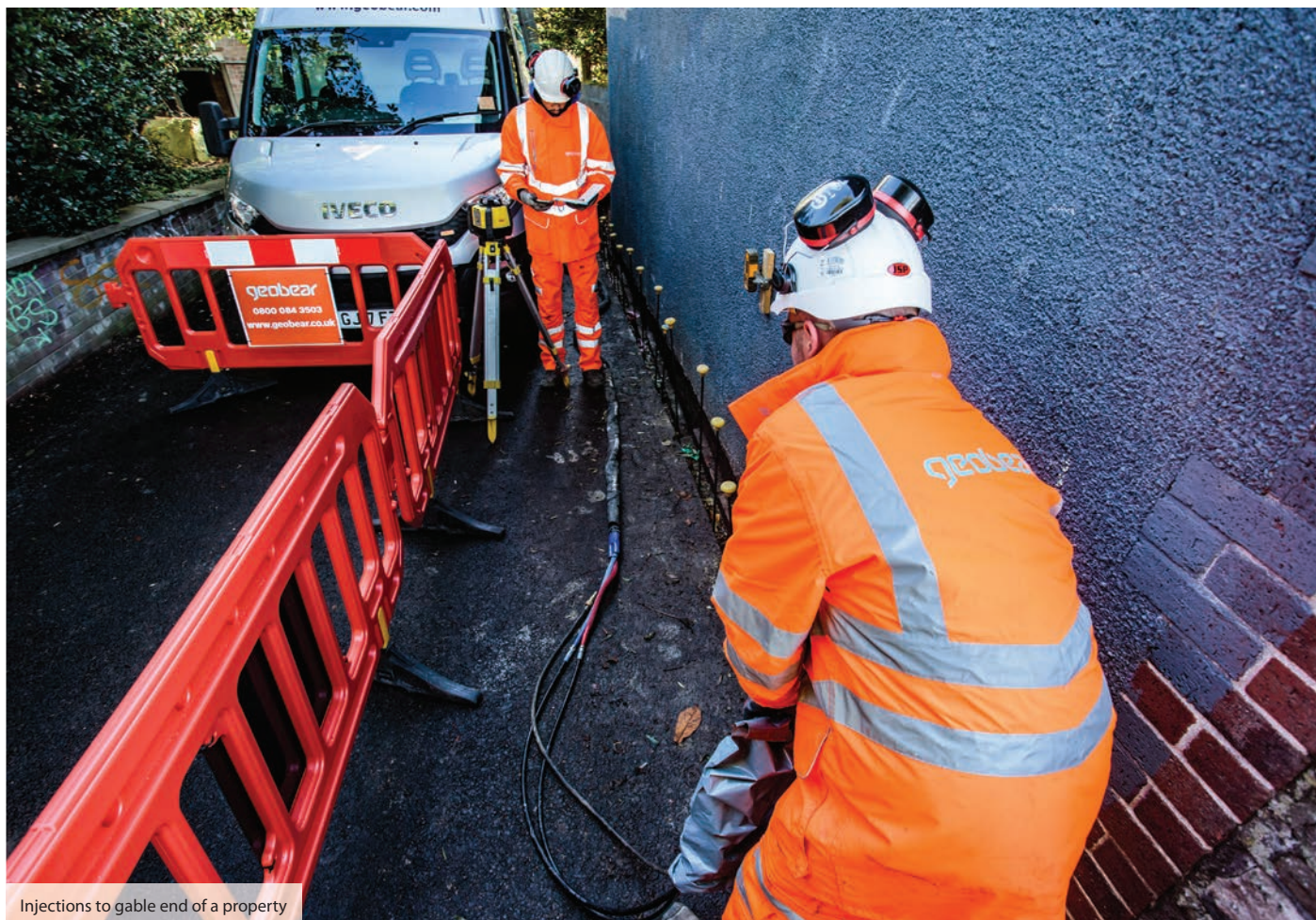
Drain monitoring to ensure materials do not block drains

adopted by other housing associations, the cost benefits are significant. For example, if an association has 10 properties with subsidence each requiring tenant relocation, there is a potential for £50k in cost savings.

By adopting a partnered approach to property subsidence with Geobear, the sector as a whole could save millions in costs and ensure it's housing stock is fit for purpose, and minimise the quantity of stock unavailable to tenants.

To discuss working with Geobear, please contact Chris Carlton.

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Housing 2023

Throughout the whole of the UK, the housing sector is facing unprecedented challenges. From uncertainty in government funding; new regulations; the pressing need for more homes; the equally pressing need to maintain and improve the homes we have while modernising procedures and services to meet the expectations and needs of tenants and residents. And that's without mentioning external pressures such as the continuing cost of living crisis and the pressure on all other public sector services.

That's why, for Housing 2023, we have put together a fantastic programme of content that packs in lots of learning. With an abundance of thought-leaders and expert-thinkers joining us across three days, the event is an opportunity to come together with peers from across the sector to network and innovate. And through all of this, we'll make sure improving professionalism is at the heart of every discussion, to ensure you continue to provide the best outcomes for your tenants and residents.

WHY ATTEND HOUSING 2023

Learn something with over 150 hours of CPD accredited sessions across six stages on the showfloor – the award-winning Fringe stage, Unlock Net Zero Live stage, Tenant and Resident Engagement stage, Knowledge and Insight stages and PH Live.

Engage with the government at Housing 2023 and hear essential updates and guidance from leaders across housing including DESNZ, DLUHC, Homes England and RSH.

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Plus network with over 8000 housing professionals and find the whole supply chain under one roof, from the main procurement frameworks to government bodies, from development and asset management experts to green home suppliers and engagement specialists, Housing covers the entire supply chain! Discover a show floor packed with over 350 exhibitors and discover new and innovative solutions that could help you deliver better quality homes.

THE HOUSING EXPERIENCE

Housing is not just about the award-winning content, it is an opportunity to meet, share, collaborate and take the opportunities on offer back to your teams and organisations. This year, there are more tangible outcomes and takeaways than ever before, and a programme of events and activities for you and your teams to take part in:

- Celebrating Brunswick: An anniversary tour (26 June) – join our study tour to see the Brunswick Village development showcasing great community spirit, regeneration and extra-care living.
- Women in Housing/Housing Heroes Awards (26 June) – the opening ceremony at Housing 2023. Celebrate the leaders, innovators and changemakers across the sector, shining a light on the incredible work carried out by teams and individuals in the past 12 months.
- Attend the Unlock Net Zero Live Awards (27 June) – recognising and championing progress on the journey to decarbonisation for the UK housing sector and the supply chain that supports it.



- Take part in our charity walk to Castlefield Viaduct (28 June) – details to be confirmed, but keep your diary free, this is one not to be missed and a great chance to give back to the local community.
- Housing Rocks, charity fundraiser (28 June) – join up to 900 people who want to give back at Housing Rocks and raise as much for charity as possible. Submit 'bands' for rock-a-oke followed by a true Mancunian DJ!
- Housing jobs fair (29 June) – in partnership with GMCA Careers Hub, GM Housing Providers, Manchester City Council, Manchester Evening News, Inside Housing and supported by Cllr Bev Craig, leader, Manchester City Council. For all those looking for a career with purpose. The housing jobs fair will bring together the largest recruiters in the region and those looking for opportunities to join a long term career in a sector that supports local communities.

Housing is the biggest event in the housing calendar and absolutely the place for you and your teams to be. This year, there are more tangible outcomes and takeaways than ever before. Housing has something for everyone! Scan the QR code below to register for your free* visitor pass today!

Article supplied by the Housing 2023

**Visitor passes are free to housing associations, local authorities, public sector, housebuilders, master developers, funders, architects, planners and BTR landlords, student accommodation, retirement living and extra-care providers. Fees will apply to other commercial organisations and will be automatically added so please ensure you register using your work email address.*



Maintaining a low profile with Pendock pipe boxing

The use of pre-formed boxings and casing, for concealing pipework on social housing refurbishment projects, has gradually overtaken the time intensive process of fabricating and finishing individual boxings on site, to become the preferred solution for many registered providers and contractors.

While the most obvious and persuasive advantages of using ready-made plywood boxing are the significant reductions in time and costs that can be achieved, aesthetics have also played an increasingly large role in the decision to adopt 'pre-made' over 'site-made'.

SMOOTH PROFILES

Pre-formed boxing is curved to form a smooth 'L' shaped profile, so there are no sharp corners or joints along the edges of the profiles, as is usually the case with site fabricated alternatives.

Also, due to the wide ranges of sizes available, the correct profiles can be selected to meet the dimensions needed for the project, so they can fit more closely over the pipework. This helps minimise the intrusion and visual impact in flats, where skirting level heating pipework or high level fire sprinkler systems are being concealed.



MXF fire sprinkler boxing

The Pendock Profiles range of specialist casings is already a common feature in countless projects across the UK including heating system refurbishments, boiler upgrades and retro-fit fire sprinkler system installation.

PRODUCT RANGE

MXF fire sprinkler boxing, TK pipe boxing and BC boiler casings are all manufactured from UKTR compliant pre-formed plywood, which enables Pendock boxing to be fitted in around half the time of site made alternatives. Also, they can be easily removed and re-fitted to aid routine inspection and maintenance without having to dismantle or break the boxing.

The TK pipe boxing range is designed primarily for use at skirting level and incorporates a 115° angle to the top of the profile, enabling it to 'blend-in' to the skirting and help it avoid being used as a step. A three sided version, the TKD, is also available, for mid-wall or vertical use, which incorporates the 115° angle on both sides of the profile.

Like the MXF and TK ranges, the boiler pipe casings are manufactured from pre-finished and pre-formed plywood. Designed specifically to conceal unsightly boiler pipework, valves, filters and flues, they also allow easy access for gas safety checks, routine inspection or boiler maintenance.



BC Boiler pipe casing

Where exterior pipework needs protecting and concealing, the CHM and MXM metal pipe boxing range has been engineered to enclose building services and other utilities. Bespoke manufactured to individual project specifications from 2 mm aluminium, as standard, metal boxing is used widely for concealing external pipework used in low carbon district heating schemes, as well as air-source and ground-source heat pumps.



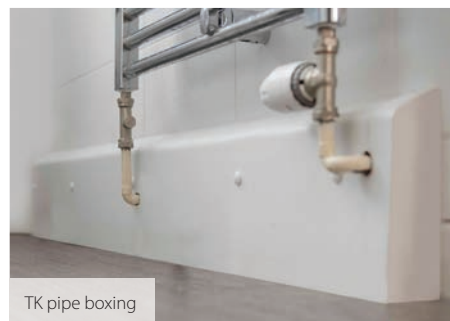
CHM metal pipe boxing

Fire sprinkler supply pipework mounted in open balconies or externally to flats are also covered using metal boxing to provide added security and weather resistance. Also, as it is non-combustible, it is used in high rise residential blocks to conceal interior runs of pipework where no sprinkler heads are present, such as communal areas.

Details on the full Pendock Profiles family can be found on the company's website along with downloadable drawings in PDF and DWG format, plus NBS specification clauses.



01952 580 590
www.pendock.co.uk



TK pipe boxing

To add even greater versatility, Pendock's pipe casings range includes a wide choice of sizes, which enables a consistent finish to be achieved in individual flats, even where different profile styles or sizes are installed.

This becomes more important where blocks of flats are being refurbished, as each one will have the same continuity of finish, which is much more difficult to accomplish with site made boxing.

In addition, all plywood profiles are pre-finished with a white resin impregnated décor paper, as standard, which removes the need for painting on site, saving even more time and the associated costs, while further improving consistency of finish on a project.

As they are quicker to install, and provide a better quality of finish, these benefits can also support satisfaction levels by not only reducing tenant disruption during refurbishment programmes, but also helping to achieve more attractive and less obtrusive results due to the boxings' lower profile.

What progress has been made since Grenfell?

Hannah Mansell, from the Masonite group of companies in the UK, outlines findings from research into how the public sector approaches fire safety and the biggest challenges facing organisations looking to safeguard resident wellbeing in high-rise buildings

In 2017, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – launched the Building Safety Programme to bolster the health and safety of residents in higher risk residential buildings in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire.

Five years on from the programme's formation, Door-Stop International partnered with Surveys in Public Sector to understand the extent to which the public sector's approach to fire safety has evolved during this time. We wanted to find out if changing legislation had helped or hindered their collective efforts; what they saw as the barriers to implementing fire safety; and if housing associations and local authorities were taking fire safety and compliance as seriously as they should be.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

We asked stakeholders how aware they were of the programme and the (then) proposed building reforms. Worryingly, just over one-quarter had little or no awareness, despite the well-publicised journey of the Building Safety Bill.

While the Building Safety Act received Royal Assent in April 2022, a time period of around 18 months was planned when it came to implementation. With this in mind, we asked stakeholders if their organisation would wait for the proposals to be enforced or if they would refurbish their high-rise buildings in advance of a potential deadline. In total, 45% of respondents said that upgrades were already underway, while 31% claimed to be in the process of building a strategy to address these issues. Only 6% said they would wait for the mandate, which suggests that most of the public sector was taking a proactive approach.

We're moving in a positive direction but, at the time of the survey, only 14% of respondents felt confident that their housing stock was fully compliant, and 1% admitted they were 'just beginning to address fire safety'.

The majority of people said their organisation was 'actively addressing fire safety'. The most common method utilised was regular fire risk assessments. Modernisation and refurbishment projects, maintaining basic compliance with available resources, and reacting to resident feedback all ranked highly too. A number of other methods were highlighted including: resident engagement; evacuation systems; sprinkler systems; and dedicated fire safety and compliance teams.

THE BARRIERS TO COMPLIANCE

The top three challenges when managing fire safety and compliance were identified as maintaining compliance in-step with changing legislation, followed by the skills gap around fire safety and prohibitive retrofit cost.

When it comes to decision making, more than three quarters of respondents felt confident that the legislation had not hindered them. Of those that felt it had, they attributed this to not having the skillset to make decisions, no one wanting to take responsibility and not being able to acquire the relevant insurance to make decisions.

While encouraging that most respondents felt confident, we must also recognise that legislative changes must be easy to understand and must be accessible. Failure to do so may place organisations at risk of falling behind. The ramifications for residents could be very serious indeed.



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Achieving life safety is crucial, particularly in light of the wider challenges for those managing large housing stocks, such as different risk profiles, annual budgets and long-range spending plans. When it comes to fire safety, it is important to take a holistic, long-term view. It will never be 'done' – it is something that needs continuous monitoring, to be responsive and the strategy adjusted accordingly.

Our research highlights the need to ensure that all stakeholders involved in fire safety are competent. The lack of skills and knowledge is not only a barrier to getting things done in the first place, but to ensuring that when works get underway, they are compliant.

To read the full report, visit: www.masonite.co.uk/firedoorsets/learnmore

Hannah Mansell is group technical director for Masonite group of companies in the UK

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT IN HIGH RISE RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IS A LEGAL REQUIREMENT BUT MAKES SENSE IN ALL KINDS OF SOCIAL HOUSING

It is good practice to give residents as much information as possible, including but not limited to: how a fire door system works (by identifying the different components); the purpose of fire doors; what their fire door should look like and how it should operate on a daily basis; that the traceability label or plug should be located on the door; potential issues with a fire door that are a result of both wear and tear, and vandalism; and that the door closers should not be disabled, no additional ironmongery added, and that fire doors should not be wedged or propped open.

Respected fire door system now certified for external use, fanlights and sidelights

Hurst Doors has become one of just a handful of UK suppliers certified to produce a quality composite FD30s fire doorset with sidelights and fanlights. The company are now certified under the BM Trada UKCA marking of external pedestrian fire rated doorsets scheme. This allows them to supply five of their most popular door styles for settings that are open to the elements, such as external flat entrances, incorporating fanlights and/or sidelights. Subjected to rigorous third party testing, the Neuma fds fire door system has undergone more than 30 bi-directional tests at three independent and accredited European test laboratories. In testing the fire doors achieved an average integrity of 45 minutes (or 50% longer than the FD30s standard requires). Suitable for reactive maintenance, refurbishment projects, new-build developments and more, Hurst's fire doors are currently being supplied to several large-scale social housing projects. Mart Atkinson, Hurst Doors sales director comments: "The Neuma fds fire door system was born out of a desire to create a fire door product that was proven to consistently perform and that the sector can rely on. That meant we needed it to offer outstanding fire performance – but also be versatile enough to excel in a wide variety of residential and commercial settings." The product has also been tested to the tougher EN 1634-1:2014 standard. Testing has been completed on both solid and glazed door options.

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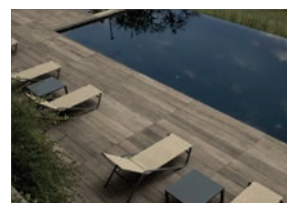
Sealmaster and Intumescent Seals of Cambridge have been an industry leader in sealing solutions for doors, windows, glazing and a variety of applications since 1960. The family run business manufactures a wide variety of products designed to keep your heating inside and the weather out. Whether you need acoustic, draught, weather, glazing, intumescent, fire or smoke seals – Sealmaster is the place to go. Sales & Marketing Director, Natasha Malcolm-Brown said: "We are so proud to make everything in Britain, and our team will be glad to help with all of your questions to find the right solution for you."

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of Cambridge

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Dura Composites launches plank range

Dura Composites has launched Dura Deck® Inspire, the first ever 1.8 m long A1 fire-rated porcelain deck plank balcony solution in the UK, especially suited to applications where the building height exceeds 11 m, following the change of legislation for medium and high rise buildings. Dura Deck® Inspire is completely resistant to open flames and extreme temperatures, with an A1 fire rating in accordance with BS EN 13501. This highly-engineered luxury product has the appearance of traditional decking but is perfect for all high-rise applications. This may include new builds and renewals, such as rooftops, terraces and balconies.

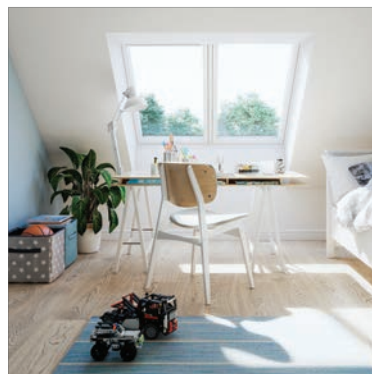


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Let the light in with Building Superstore

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Housing Management & Maintenance

The Housing Management & Maintenance (HMM) website is an online provider of past and present news items dedicated to keep professionals within this sector updated with a wide range of topics including legislation, projects, products and more. housingmmonline.co.uk is a one-stop source for all the latest press releases providing any visitor with access to information about products and services that they may require. From the website, you can find links to digital issues that have live links to advertisers' sites, as well as email alerts to keep you as informed as possible.



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A bathroom and kitchens role in reaching net zero targets

Chris Tranter from Bristan looks at the kitchen and bathroom solutions available to help providers work more efficiently and sustainably across retrofit projects



Soaring energy prices and the cost-of-living crisis are having a huge impact on housing providers as they look for affordable solutions to help the UK reach net zero targets. More than one in five homes in the UK were built more than 100 years ago, meaning there are thousands of poorly insulated buildings in need of frequent maintenance across the country. Retrofitting affordable housing stock is a huge challenge, but it will help to keep down household bills, while supporting the transition to net zero through reducing emissions.

So how can housing managers find the best sustainable solutions and products to retrofit social housing?

SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

While energy-efficient retrofits often centre around heating, building fabric, glazing and insulation, the kitchen and bathroom can play a vital role in delivering warm and efficient homes; in turn improving the comfort, health and wellbeing of social housing tenants.

There are many ways to make kitchens and bathrooms more sustainable and one key area is by upgrading to energy efficient appliances to reduce water or electricity costs.

Implementing cost-saving initiatives like these is crucial to help decrease greenhouse gas emissions, ease the UK's water shortage and help the UK to meet net zero targets.

VALUE AND REASSURANCE

Retrofitting can be a delicate balance for providers who aim to find quality products that offer real value. One way to ensure this is by searching for entry-

Retrofitting affordable housing stock will help to keep down household bills, while supporting the transition to net zero through reducing emissions

level products from reputable manufacturers. When it comes to bathroom products, it's crucial to use a supplier that offers guaranteed quality and durability. Housing providers should seek out products that provide long-term solutions and peace of mind, by looking for brands that offer guarantees on their brassware products. All products are WRAS approved and come with a five-year parts guarantee too.

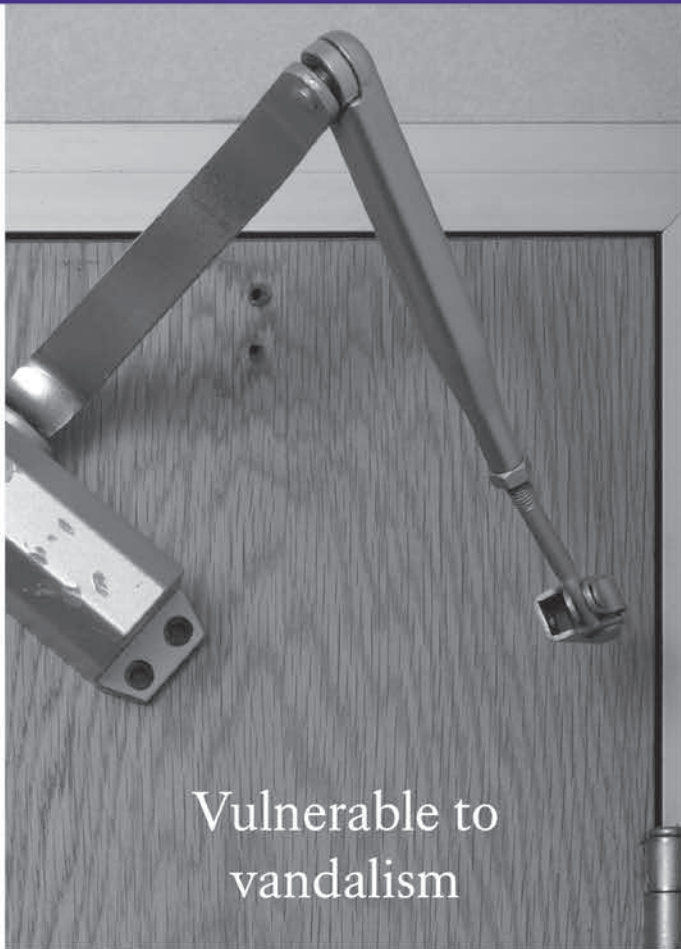
OUTSTANDING SERVICE

Choosing a supplier with a dedicated team and a commitment to post-installation support is essential. Leading brands should always invest in its service capabilities.

While retrofitting Britain's social housing is a big challenge for housing providers, it's a necessity to help support the net-zero transition and the government's levelling up agenda. By choosing a trusted, WRAS-approved, reputable bathroom manufacturer to help retrofit kitchens and bathrooms, you can guarantee great value, expertise and the best products on the market.

Chris Tranter is senior product manager at Bristan

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New technology is the key to fire door compliance

With new regulation now in force for checking fire doors, Dave Carr from Propeller Powered explains how advanced technology is helping the housing sector to comply



all those with responsibility to identify, manage, and mitigate risks relative to each door. Using a mobile device, each code can be scanned to reveal the door's history and any defects can be instantly captured using an App. In real time, this information is logged on a central dashboard where actions for repairing individual doors can be raised and prioritised.

Advanced technology means this process can take place offline if needed, avoiding issues in buildings with poor WiFi connectivity or low network signal.

The QR codes are also key to increasing building safety transparency and communication regarding fire doors. Residents can use the codes to access vital safety information about their building, including a summary of a fire door's service history. The same codes can be used by residents to instantly raise issues about specific doors, and upload photographs, triggering automated tasks that are flagged for action.

STREAMLINING PROCESSES

Another advantage of adopting new technology is that it can reduce the need to source technical experts or specialists to achieve compliance. The latest software can be implemented in as little as two weeks and is easy to use requiring minimal training. It can also be tailored to an organisation's specific policies, meaning it can be used by social landlords of any size and by internal teams or external fire safety contractors.

The ability to tailor the software not only provides flexibility but additional functionality. Other areas of compliance including gas, electrical, and legionella can be incorporated into the same system bringing all key data into one place, eliminating the need for multiple systems.

No access visits can also be recorded using the App, evidencing the number of attempts to survey a flat door for vital safety checks.

PROACTIVE APPROACHES

With the need to improve fire door safety front of mind for many social landlords, housing associations have already begun to pilot and implement new technology.

For example, LiveWest has recently updated their system to record actions for doors and has set up a QR code system. Combined with a dashboard, this technology enables the housing association to assess which doors need to be upgraded or replaced to achieve compliance.

LiveWest's existing repairs system has set servicing schedules based on priorities identified via the software and plans have been put in place to inspect all 22,960 doors over the next two years. These include communal and flat doors in buildings – less than 11 m high – to go over and above the regulatory requirements.

With limited time left for the housing sector to refine its procedures for checking fire doors and achieving compliance, adopting new technology can tackle the challenge head on. Advanced software will not only save landlords significant time but provide a robust, auditable register and a higher quality service for residents.

Dave Carr is managing director of Propeller Powered

Enforced in January 2023, the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 set new legal duties for those who own or manage multi-occupied residential buildings over 11 m high. These include an obligation for the 'responsible person' to conduct quarterly checks on communal doors that lead onto common areas like hallways, and annual inspections on flat entrance doors. Evidence of the steps taken to comply with the regulations must also be recorded.

For social landlords, the rules present a steep and challenging path to compliance. Ensuring fire doors are safe is critical, but with dozens of doors to check even in small housing blocks, the scale of the task can't be underestimated. For many housing associations and local authorities, new procedures will be required to meet the requirements. Relying on manual processes such as spreadsheets and paper forms for inspections will present a huge administrative burden that swallows significant time and resources while risking human error.

ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT

In response, new technology has been fast tracked specifically for the housing sector. This has been designed based on feedback from housing associations and property managers, making sure it is flexible enough to meet the requirements of individual organisations as well as the regulations.

The technology's development is focused on enabling social landlords to carry out the checks quickly and effectively while creating an auditable trail and more transparency.

This is achieved thanks to new cloud-based software allowing fire door maintenance and inspection programmes to be managed digitally. Pilots have shown that this process can help landlords conduct the checks up to six times faster than their previous systems.

Fire doors, including time-stamped images, can be digitally recorded into a database along with a history of inspections for auditing purposes. The frequency of inspections can be set and adjusted to comply with the regulations and to meet an organisation's own building safety criteria.

TRACEABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

At the heart of the software is QR code technology which gives every fire door within a property a unique asset tag. This provides the 'golden thread' enabling

Concealment reduces risk of door closer damage

Renowned for its ability to assure a clean, unhindered appearance to doors and interiors, Samuel Heath's Powermatic controlled, concealed door closer is used extensively in flats, apartments and HMOs throughout the social housing sector thanks to the safety, reliability and low maintenance benefits that the door closer delivers.

Unlike surface-mounted door closers, Powermatic is completely concealed when the door is closed, and not easily visible when open. This can significantly reduce the opportunity for the door closer to be vandalised, tampered with or removed.

Together with the fact that the door closer is maintenance-free and facilitates adjustment of closing speed and latching action without removal from the door, this attribute can result in a reduced maintenance burden for social landlords.

Reduced risk of vandalism also provides significant safety benefits; a damaged door closer can prevent the door from closing correctly. Any door, especially a fire door, that fails to function is, at best, an inconvenience and, at worst, potentially fatal.

From a performance perspective, Powermatic boasts a plethora of national and European technical performance accreditations, including UKCA and CE marking, fire testing on half-hour and one-hour fire doors to BS EN 1634,



opening forces that comply with BS8300 and the ability to enable doors to meet the requirements of Approved Document M. It is also the only Certifire jamb-mounted door closer

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Legionella risk assessments

The Legionella Control Association (LCA) discusses why a thorough risk assessment is a good starting point for adhering to legislation, as well as the importance of ensuring it is undertaken by a trained and occupationally competent person

A Risk Assessment is required if you employ five or more people. The need for a Legionella risk assessment is driven by the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) and the need to keep both staff and stakeholders safe (Sections 2 and 3 of the Act). The need to assess the risk is directed from the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (2002) (COSHH) Guidance.

At the core of any assessment of risk we need to understand the basics. These are defined in the British Standard for Legionella Risk Assessments (BS8580-1 (2019)):

- Contamination: Can Legionella or any other bacteria or nutrients enter the system?
- Amplification: Are growth conditions present?
- Transmission: Is there a way for aerosols to be created?
- Exposure: Can people encounter any aerosols created?
- Susceptibility: Who are the people present and how at risk are they?

These five factors – with the acronym CATES – form the basis of our scoring of risk. A competent risk assessor will be able to use the CATES in the context of your site, system and assets.

A COMPETENT ASSESSOR IS CRITICAL

A risk assessment undertaken by someone who does not understand the different water systems, how they interact with each asset, potential infection pathways or the impact of susceptibility in the local population could make significant omissions or errors in assessing the risk. A bad risk assessment is nearly as bad as no risk assessment at all.

The risk assessment should make it clear which building(s) and system(s) are covered; details of any previous risk assessment (if applicable); the system conditions; an asset register with details on condition of the assets; any areas not assessed and details on the inherent and residual risks; and how far the gap is from the residual risk to as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP).

The inherent risk is the worst-case scenario, where there are no controls or our controls fail. If nothing happens to the system this is the risk that will eventually occur and needs to be avoided. The residual risk is the level of risk that remains once control measures are implemented – the risk that exists day to day when the controls are active. The ALARP risk is the lowest it can reasonably be; this should not be hampered by financial constraints and should be attainable.

THE APPROVED CODE OF PRACTICE FOR LEGIONELLA (ACOP L8)

Now in its fourth edition, ACoP L8 is the bible when it comes to Legionella control. It holds a special legal status, where if you don't follow the guidance and you have an issue with Legionella then you have to demonstrate that your actions were equal to or better than the ACoP. Within ACoP L8 there is advice on finding competent help. Paragraph 57 of the ACoP talks about the use of third party competent help and how using such help doesn't absolve the end user of responsibility to ensure the assessment or controls have been effective. It does say that an "illustration of the levels of services to expect can be found in the Code of Conduct administered by the LCA."

A good risk assessment will identify the risks present, and recommend the steps to take to reduce that risk, taking the form of Technical Recommendations. The Risk Assessment may also include a Written Scheme of Control which needs to be converted into a set of Control Measures which can be used to help mitigate the risk.



THE CHALLENGE WITH CONTROLLING LEGIONELLA

We need to ensure that the hot water is kept above 50°C (and over 55°C in Healthcare), keep the cold water below 20°C, remove all dead-legs, keep the water clean, and keep it moving. The reality is that this can be challenging. A number of scenarios can cause an outlet to become infrequently used. This can create an area of stagnation where temperature control becomes challenging – ideal growth conditions for Legionella.

The aim of the risk assessment is to identify the risk. If we identify a risk we need to write down how we are going to manage and mitigate that risk. This is known as the Written Scheme of Control. We should look to provide practical ways to manage the risk. The hierarchy should be:

- Elimination: Can we eliminate the risk?
- Substitution: If we can't eliminate it, can we substitute the asset for a less risky asset?
- Engineering controls: If we can't substitute what engineering controls can we apply?
- Admin controls: If we can't engineer a solution can we make a process to control?
- PPE/RPE: If we can't control the risk we must break the infection pathway.

The Written Scheme of control – when implemented – will detail a set of control measures that are designed to reduce the risk from the inherent level to residual. It's important that the controls are implemented, and you create records for these actions, be they temperature checks, flushing of little used outlets or bigger jobs like cleaning and descaling of showers or TMV servicing. The efficacy of the control measures also needs to be checked; we need to make sure that our controls are effective, and we have evidence. They must be kept for a minimum of five years and should be used whenever we come to review the Risk Assessment.

The LCA is a voluntary organisation whose membership comprises providers of services and products concerned with the control of legionella bacteria in water systems

Aico host webinar on 'A Spotlight on Damp and Mould' with The Housing Ombudsman



Aico has recently welcomed the Housing Ombudsman Service to an online event focusing on damp and mould in the housing sector and best practices to keep residents safe.

"A *Spotlight on Damp and Mould: It's not lifestyle*" report, published in October 2021 placed the responsibility for resolving poor quality housing in the hands of social landlords. The report provided 26 recommendations for landlords to assess their approach to resolving cases of damp and mould. In February 2023, The Housing Ombudsman published a follow up report to provide insight into landlords' responses to the 2021 report. This new report included a number of actions that landlords have taken as a result, including improving surveying equipment, the use of sensor technology, resident facing apps and the use of an online dashboard, such as the HomeLINK Connected Solution.

Following the reports, HomeLINK's Sustainability & Ethics Lead, Sam Collier, welcomed Victoria King, sector learning and development lead for the Housing Ombudsman Service and Mark England, head of innovation, sustainability and procurement for Coastline Housing. The panel also welcomed Alan Park, compliance and systemic investigations manager at the Housing Ombudsman Service

for an engaging and thought-provoking Q&A session.

With over 500 attendees, Sam Collier opened the event giving an overview and timeline of the increased efforts to prevent damp and mould cases by the sector as a whole and highlighted the work yet to be done. Victoria King presented on the "It's not lifestyle" report one year on, highlighting a need for a change in culture and The Housing Ombudsman's recommendations. Victoria was followed by Mark England, who shared Coastline Housings approach to the report, highlighting the use of data and a proactive approach.

HomeLINK's Sustainability & Ethics Lead, Sam Collier who hosted the session commented: "Aico decided to host the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) on this webinar as we believe we all have a part to play in tackling damp and mould in the sector. We know our customers are facing a huge uphill task to improve the condition of their housing stock, and this event provided some excellent insight into what steps they can take to make progress in this area. It's great to see the HOS providing recommendations around innovative tools such as sensors, dashboards and resident apps to enhance the data landlords have about the condition of their properties, so they can make better informed decisions, and improve the health of their homes and the wellbeing of their residents.

The example provided by Coastline Housing showed the impact these approaches are already having, and hopefully one other landlords can follow."

Victoria King, sector learning and development lead for the Housing Ombudsman added: "In our damp and mould report, we said that landlords need to have a sustained focus on culture and behaviours to ensure issues are not dismissed. This event helps the sector to do that, and we highlighted our recommendations again, including the need for landlords to develop a damp and mould strategy and for landlords to implement a proactive communications strategy. Whilst we know this is now a priority for many landlords, especially for those attending events such as this, we urge senior leaders to go faster and further in their efforts to do what is right by their residents."

This event was the first in a miniseries being hosted by the market leader on damp and mould. In the next webinar on May 10th, HomeLINK's Product Manager, Jordan Toulson, will take an in depth look at a case study surrounding damp and mould, what approach the landlord has taken and how technology can support. To register for the next event, please visit: bit.ly/3TCPcZb

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