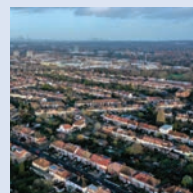


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

DEC/JAN 2024



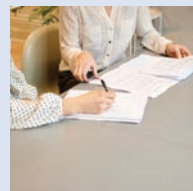
Record numbers
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£1.74 billion cost
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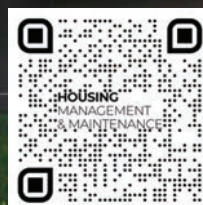
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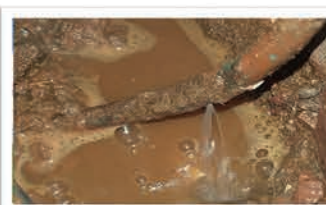
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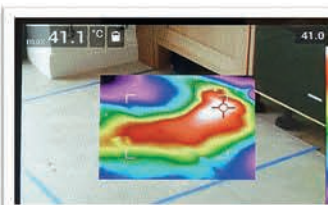
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News Editor
Patrick Mooney
patricknetmag@gmail.com

Publisher
Anthony Parker

**Content & Research
Coordinator**
Shelley Collyer

**Editorial Assistant &
Events Coordinator**
Laura Shadwell

Studio Manager
Mikey Pooley

Production Assistants
Georgia Musson
Kim Musson

Senior Account Manager
Sheehan Edmonds

Account Manager
Nathan Hunt

PR Executive
Suzanne Easter

Publishing Assistant
Kim Neville

Managing Director
Simon Reed



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

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

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

Press releases
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk



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Editor's comment

A housing crisis made in Government



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

There is never a good time to be homeless, but the Christmas and New Year period must be the worst time of all to NOT have a settled home, or a secure roof over your head. It must be particularly bad for children, the elderly and the vulnerable, who are more reliant on the support and help from others. Yet record numbers of people from all of these groups are experiencing homelessness or growing insecurity in their housing, either through threats of eviction or enduring poor living conditions. It is all the more remarkable that we find ourselves in this situation as the present Government has been continuously in power for the last 13 years. This is surely enough time for any administration to get to grips with the problems in the housing market and to solve them.

At the heart of most housing problems is the fact that as a country we have not been building sufficient homes for the population's needs. The problem is particularly acute at the lower cost end of the rental market, in both the private rental and social housing sectors, but it is questionable if either of these has been a priority. Instead the Government's main housing focus has been on the owner-occupied part of the market. But even here they have struggled to deliver. As a nation we face a huge under supply of housing. In 1968 some 425,000 homes were built. Over the past 10 years the average number of new builds dropped to just 170,000 per annum, even as demand for them has increased. Next year, it is forecast that only 151,000 new homes will be built, which is barely half the Government's annual target of 300,000. This is creating lots of societal problems with young adults having to remain at home living with their parents, or too many people chasing too few homes when they come on the market – whether that's for buying or to rent.

Somewhat belatedly the Government has been busying itself in the past year drawing up legislation to improve the governance and performance standards of housing associations and councils (as landlords), and correcting faults in the private renting sector, but these changes are just nibbling at the edges of the problem. The King's Speech in November exemplified the difficulty facing us – there was not a single mention of the overall housing crisis, nor of the Government's plans to solve it. A commitment to reform the leasehold system and completing the passage of the Renters' (Reform) Bill are both welcome, but neither will do much to resolve the underlying issues that we face. They are merely sticking plasters being applied to segments of the market.

A sharp rise in the number of households in temporary accommodation is a clear sign that the housing system is broken and is hitting the poorest people hardest. The latest annual figures show that 157,640 families were homeless in 2022/2023, which is 12.1% higher than before Covid, with 104,510 in temporary accommodation in March this year. The last time that the number of families in temporary accommodation topped 100,000 was back in 2004/05. Many of the households placed in temporary accommodation (B&Bs and hostels) are families with children whose most basic needs are not being met. Their lives and education are being disrupted, they usually cannot play or meet with friends and they are often being placed in accommodation many miles away from their support networks. One recent report suggested that as many as 440,000 children across the country go to sleep each night on the floor.

The latest figures also showed that rough sleeping is on the rise. This is possibly what prompted the unwelcome intervention from ex Home Secretary Suella Braverman, when she said that our streets are being taken over by rows of tents occupied by people, many of them from abroad, living on the streets as a lifestyle choice. She also threatened to take action against any charities found to be supplying tents to the homeless. People bedding down on our pavements and in our parks is probably the most visible sign of a broken housing system and a policy failure, but there are far larger numbers who are living in insecure accommodation. There are about 11 million people living in the private rented sector and all of them are at risk of being served with an eviction notice, giving them just two months notice to leave their current home and to find a new home. The serving of section 21 no-fault evictions is one of the main causes of homelessness and banning them has been a manifesto promise for many years. No date has been set for when a ban on these evictions will come into effect. Michael Gove has said that before a date for such a ban can be set, the process which private landlords use for recovering possession of their properties through the courts needs to be overhauled, with landlords given suitable alternative ways of recovering possession. The gap now dividing the housing haves from the have-nots is worthy of that seasonal baddie, Ebenezer Scrooge.

Patrick Mooney

Patrick Mooney

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On the cover...

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Professional housing body publishes its housing manifesto



Decent and affordable homes make our lives better – providing the safe and secure foundation we all need. But shortages and unequal access mean too many people (often the most vulnerable) are forced to live in overpriced, insecure and poor-quality homes.

The Chartered Institute of Housing says we are all paying the price for this as poor housing costs the NHS £1.4 billion each year. It negatively impacts a child's education and has long-term effects on incomes and employment.

At the heart of the issue is supply – housebuilding has failed to keep pace with demand for years. Latest forecasts suggest the country could see over 300,000 households experiencing the worst forms of homelessness in 2023. A shocking one in five children are living in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes.

“We need political commitment to turn things around. At CIH we're urging all political parties to commit to a long-term plan for housing which recognises it as the foundation for creating healthy and sustainable communities.”

“We can do this with a focus on more homes and better homes. The 10-point plan we've published unpacks this further, with more detail set out in our Strategy for housing.”

UK HOUSING REVIEW AUTUMN BRIEFING PAPER PUBLISHED

The UK Housing Review Autumn Briefing Paper, the fourteenth in the series, builds on the key

At the heart of the issue is supply – housebuilding has failed to keep pace with demand for years

themes identified in the Spring edition of the 2023 UK Housing Review, providing further expert analysis and specialist insight.

The publication comes at a time of tight national budgets and uncertainty. Drawing on the latest statistics, the Autumn Briefing assesses the implications of new policy and market developments in thirteen different topic areas, several of which are UK-wide. Key themes include:

- Housing as a political issue;
- The housing market in flux;
- Challenges around the management of social housing stock;
- The need for supported housing and refugee accommodation; and
- Key housing policy issues from each of the devolved nations, and the consequences of Westminster's March budget cuts.

The impact of the cost of living crisis is underlined in several articles, including one examining if the way we measure inflation inadequately reflects housing costs, highlighting that the affordability crisis for mortgage payers and renters is not fully recognised in monetary policy.

The UK Housing Review series is published by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). It is a free publication.

Commenting on the Autumn Briefing Paper publication CIH chief executive Gavin Smart said: “When we released the 2023 UK Housing Review earlier this year, we highlighted the urgent need for more affordable housing investment. The Autumn Briefing Paper has been written when economic and inflationary pressures continue to deepen the housing crisis. It gives us further evidence of the critical role housing policy ought to play in protecting households from the wide-reaching effects of continued economic pressure.”

Mark Stephens, professor of urban studies at the university of Glasgow and the Review's editor, said: “The rise in interest rates to counter inflation has exposed the weak foundations that have passed for housing policy since the financial crisis 15 years ago. During that period, ultra-low interest rates supported unaffordable house prices to the benefit of existing owners whilst others have become increasingly dependent on expensive and insecure private rented accommodation.”

“As the election approaches, this Briefing Paper signals to all parties the need for a fundamental shift in housing policy, including how we tax housing wealth, regulate rental housing and, crucially, the need for a long-term commitment to increasing the supply of social housing.”

LGA respond to announcement that 50 hotels will be closed to asylum seekers by January

Hotel closures have a direct impact on councils and local government wants to play an active role in working with Government on the decisions over which hotels are to close.

Responding to the immigration minister Robert Jenrick's announcement that 50 hotels will be closed to asylum seekers by January, Councillor Shaun Davies, chair of the Local Government Association said: "Councils have a proud history of supporting humanitarian efforts and continue to work hard to protect and support refugees and help deliver a wide range of Government asylum and resettlement schemes. Councils share the Government's ambitions to end hotel use for asylum seekers."

"We also need advance engagement on what other alternatives, including large sites, will be opened up both for those leaving hotels and for ongoing new arrivals."

"Combined pressures from these many schemes are growing on councils and there continues to be an issue across the refugee and asylum system. We need a joined-up approach across central and local government to the cumulative pressures on local services from all asylum and resettlement programmes."

"This needs to include urgent solutions to our pressing housing needs in the short and the long term across all the schemes that welcome new arrivals to the UK."

"Councils are becoming increasingly concerned over the numbers of asylum seekers presenting as homeless which is likely to dramatically increase when Home Office accommodation is withdrawn as a result of the current clearance of the asylum backlog."

"Given increased demand and the acute shortage of housing available across the country, it will make it extremely challenging for those leaving accommodation to find affordable, long-term accommodation and there needs to be a joint and funded approach nationally, regionally and locally to manage the move on from asylum accommodation and avoid risks of destitution and street homelessness throughout the winter."

Ombudsman's Annual Complaints Review reveals a 323% rise in severe maladministration findings

The Housing Ombudsman's Annual Complaints Review has revealed a sharp increase of severe maladministration findings, as individual performance reports were published for 163 landlords where the Ombudsman made most findings.

Together, they paint a challenging picture of social housing complaints which has seen a huge spike due to poor property conditions, legislative changes, media attention and the inquest into the death of Awaab Ishak.

The review also reveals an increase in maladministration findings where service requests were not handled reasonably and a decrease in findings of no fault. Combined this means more than half of findings were upheld for the first time.

The Annual Complaints Review provides a unique and comprehensive assessment of complaints in social housing, including that the Ombudsman received over 5,000 complaints for the first time last year, a 28% increase on the previous year.

The Ombudsman has again written to Chief Executives of landlords who have a maladministration rate of over 50% to bring urgent attention to the figures. There are 91 landlords with a maladministration rate above 50%, with 25 landlords being above 75%.

This year the Ombudsman has also written to five landlords who had no findings upheld, recognising their positive complaint handling approach.

The Review also looks at Complaint Handling Failure Orders (CHFOs) and key issues for the first time. The Ombudsman issued 146 CHFOs last year, mostly for failing to progress complaints in line with its Complaint Handling Code, with 73% of those being for landlords with over 10,000 homes.

Most worryingly for the Ombudsman is the overall trend in the sector, with a 323% increase in severe maladministration findings, a 40% increase in maladministration findings and 20% drop in no maladministration findings.

In terms of what residents were complaining about, property condition was once again the leading category, with the Ombudsman making almost 2,000 findings where the failure rate has increased dramatically from 39% to 54% this year. The Ombudsman also found a 52% maladministration rate for health and safety complaints.

Another key element of the Annual Complaints Review is the regional data. This shows the South West with the lowest overall maladministration rate, as well as having a significantly lower maladministration rate on health & safety complaints. The North East and Yorkshire has the lowest severe maladministration rate.

London continues to be where the Ombudsman makes most of its determinations, even accounting for the quantity of social homes in the region. It had the highest maladministration rate and accounted for 77 of the 130 severe maladministration findings last year.

More positively were the results from landlord and resident surveys completed by Resident Panels and landlords from across the country. The results show an encouraging trend towards promotion of the complaints process, signposting to the Ombudsman and sharing learning from complaints.

Residents also were more likely to believe that complaints would make a difference compared to last year.

Richard Blakeway, housing ombudsman, said: "Our Annual Complaints Review provides a unique and sobering overview into social housing complaints in this country. While the statistics reflect a picture of poor practice, they also reflect the increased pressures we know that social landlords are facing with a combined housing and cost of living crisis."

"However, despite some notable efforts, what our data shows is a fundamental gap between some of the services landlords deliver and the reasonable expectations of their residents. Too often residents with disabilities or mental health needs are falling between those gaps. Too often the basics not being done properly, with straightforward communication or record keeping being missed leading to problems becoming more severe. This is leading to residents being treated unfairly and experiencing financial detriment or losing the enjoyment of their home."

"As part of the Social Housing Regulation Act our powers have increased as we will soon be issuing wider orders to help landlords improve their policy and practice in key areas where we see potential for repeated failings. Next year, we will also be looking at developing good practice under our Centre for Learning and strongly encourage governing bodies to consider the review and what further action they can take to improve the outcomes for their residents."

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Judges to rule on whether tenants have right to keep a pet

Judges will be asked to rule on whether private landlords can “reasonably” deny a tenant’s request to keep a pet, under sweeping reforms to the private rented sector.

Landlords can currently deny tenants who ask if they can keep pets, while others have charged additional premiums, or a “pet rent” as it is sometimes called.

The Renters (Reform) Bill “requires landlords not to unreasonably withhold consent”, leaving a new ombudsman for private renting, and ultimately the courts, to decide what is reasonable.

The Government has previously said that refusal could be reasonable if a pet was “clearly too large for a small property” or if another tenant in a shared house had a pet allergy. But it expects tenants and landlords will “simply have a discussion about what is reasonable”.

Renters groups say most landlords do not allow pets, in part because of fears of claw damage. It has meant some renters face a difficult choice between giving up their pets or facing homelessness.

The Renters Reform Coalition, which represents tenant groups, wants a new right to keep pets, regardless of the landlord’s view. It said: “Once a tenant signs an agreement, it is their home.”

“If they want to have a pack of Great Danes live there, that should be their right, but they will also be liable for any costs if the dogs tear the place up,” said Tom Darling, the coalition’s campaign manager.

The shake-up in the balance of power between England’s 2.3 million private landlords and their 11 million tenants proposed in the much-delayed Renters Reform Bill will be considered by MPs, after it was included again in the King’s Speech.

The National Residential Landlords Association is calling for “comprehensive guidance” on when landlords can refuse animals, and fears “tenants and landlords will be in a state of limbo, with the prospect of inconsistent judgments by the courts”.

Student maintenance loans almost entirely used up by rent



Students are increasingly taking on paid work to cope with the cost of living while at university, as accommodation costs take up almost all the average maintenance loan received by students in England.

Students are illegally doubling up in rooms and working, according to student housing charity Unipol, which researched the issue with the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi).

In the last two years, average student rents have gone up by 14.6%, while maintenance loans have risen by just 5.2%. The Department for Education said concerned students should ask for help.

In a statement, it said: “Our student finance system ensures that the highest levels of support are targeted at students from the lowest-income families. If students are worried about their circumstances, we urge them to speak to their university.”

Average annual rent for students in England is £7,566, while the average maintenance loan received by students is expected to be £7,590 for the current academic year – leaving them with less than 50p a week to cover other essentials. It is generally accepted that student rents should account for no more than 30% of their income,

Students can borrow up to £9,978 a year for living costs (£13,022 in London), but only people with household earnings under £25,000 are eligible for the maximum amount.

Outside of London and Edinburgh the study found that students in Bristol pay the highest average annual rent outside the capitals, up by 9% over the past two years to £9,200. Exeter is not far behind at £8,559 (+16%), followed by Glasgow, which has seen the biggest rise in rent over the two-year period, up more than 20% to £7,548.

“The student maintenance system is broken,” said Martin Blakey, Unipol’s chief executive. “Students

and parents need urgent and practical solutions to delivering affordable accommodation.”

Nick Hillman, director of Hepi said: “Compared to years gone by, we are now at a crisis point. Across most of the UK, the official levels of maintenance support simply do not cover anything like most students’ actual living costs.”

Hepi and Unipol are calling for the student finance system to be reformed, rebranding the maintenance loan as a “contribution to living costs”, and emphasising the importance of parental contributions.”

A spokesperson for Universities UK, which represents 142 universities, said: “Universities will continue to support students, but we need government to help address this. The 2.8% rise in maintenance support announced for students in England is inadequate and will not cover the real-terms cut to maintenance that students have experienced since inflation began to rise.”

The National Union of Students (NUS) has also argued for maintenance loans to be brought into line with inflation, as a recent survey found most full-time students are working part-time while studying.

“Poorer students are forced, in effect, to attend university part-time,” said Chloe Field of NUS UK. “They must juggle their studies with paid work in order to simply eat and put a roof over their heads.

“We are now at the point where accommodation costs are pricing students out of certain universities, which will have disastrous consequences for students from poorer backgrounds being able to access education.”

The rise in student accommodation costs comes as rental prices more generally increase across the country. Research in September found that the average cost of renting a home rose by 12% in the year to August – more than the increase between 2015 and 2019.

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Private landlords are “not the enemy”

Narratives pitting landlords and tenants against each other are depressingly common, according to a national body representing private landlords. To combat this and help prevent the debate about the future of the private rented sector becoming increasingly polarised, the group's chief executive is trying to reset the relationship.

In an open letter to members of the Renters Reform Coalition, made up of a number of tenant groups, including Shelter, Crisis and Generation Rent, the National Residential Landlords Association has called for an end to these supposed hostilities, on the basis that a vibrant and well-functioning private rented sector is the ultimate aim for both parties.

In the letter NRLA chief executive Ben Beadle stresses that, with demand for rented homes already well outstripping supply, now is time to find common campaigning ground when it comes to rental reform.

He said: “There are already areas where there is consensus, with both the NRLA and the Renters Reform Coalition calling for an end to the unfair freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

“Court reform is another area where we believe we can find common ground and have asked members of the coalition to get on board and offer their input into in making a powerful joint call for reforms to the court system to benefit both tenants and responsible landlords.”

“We have also asked for feedback on some of the finer points of the Bill to find either common campaigning ground, or at least clarity as to what exactly it is that the coalition wants. These include proposals on possession grounds and pets.”

“At the end of the day rental reform must carry the confidence of responsible landlords as well as tenants. After all, greater security for tenants will not mean much if the homes to rent are not there in the first place.”

“Landlords and tenants a reliant on one another, and any reform of the sector must be fair to both parties if we are to build a vibrant and robust private rented sector that works for all.”

£1.74 billion spent supporting 104,000 households in temporary accommodation

Increasing numbers of families are turning to councils for temporary accommodation as homelessness reaches record highs, the Local Government Association warns.

Analysis from the LGA has revealed the number of households living in temporary accommodation has risen by 89% over the past decade to 104,000 households at the end of March 2023 – the highest figures since records began in 1998 and is costing councils at least £1.74 billion in 2022/23.

The severe shortage of social housing means councils are being forced to pay to house people in private temporary accommodation, including hotels and B&Bs while they wait for a permanent home.

The annual cost of paying these rents is estimated to be enough to build about 100,000 new homes over five years. It is twice as high as it was in 2015/16. More than 130,000 children are living in temporary housing – the highest ever number.

Stephen Holt, the leader of Eastbourne borough council, which recently hosted a summit of more than 100 councils, said: “The situation is stark. Councils provide a safety net for the most vulnerable people... and that safety net is at real risk of failing.”

The dwindling supply of affordable housing is further compounded by the rising cost of living and frozen Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates which are driving increases in homelessness and reducing councils’ ability to source suitable accommodation.

The LGA is calling on the Government to take the following actions:

- Restore LHA rates to cover the bottom 30th percentile of local rents;
- further reform Right to Buy which includes allowing councils to retain 100 per cent of receipts on a permanent basis; flexibility to combine Right to Buy receipts with other government grants; the ability to set the size of discounts locally; and the ability to recycle a greater proportion of receipts into building replacement homes;
- Provide a long-term rent deal for council landlords to allow a longer period of annual rent increases for a minimum period of at least 10 years, providing certainty for investment; and
- Provide long-term funding certainty for local government to help councils scale up to deliver an ambitious build programme of 100,000 high-quality, climate-friendly social homes a year.

SQUEEZED BUDGETS

Councillor Darren Rodwell, housing spokesperson for the Local Government Association, said: “Councils are under mounting pressure to find suitable homes for an ever-increasing number of people and are doing the best they can under current circumstances.”

“A plethora of issues has meant that council budgets are being squeezed and the chronic shortage of suitable housing across the country means that councils are increasingly having to turn to alternative options for accommodation at a significant cost.”

“Councils need to be given the powers and resources to build enough social homes for their residents so they can create a more prosperous place to live, with healthier and happier communities.”

Asylum and resettlement schemes are also adding to supply and demand issues. Current programmes involving the increased pace and scale of asylum decisions, closure of hotels for Afghan households and new arrivals from Afghanistan over the next few weeks are now running in parallel with winter pressures, combined with ongoing support for homeless Ukrainian and Afghan households. The clearance of the asylum backlog in particular means increasing risks around destitution and rough sleeping numbers.

Councillor Rodwell, continued: “Councils have a proud history of supporting humanitarian efforts and continue to work hard to protect and support refugees and help deliver a wide range of government asylum and resettlement schemes.”

“However, combined pressures from these many schemes are growing on councils and there continues to be a crisis across the refugee and asylum system. This is being compounded by a housing crisis, the pace and scale of asylum decision making and the rapidly approaching deadline for all remaining Afghan families to move on from hotels by the end of the year.”

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The Housing Ombudsman has released its special investigation report into Islington Council, finding that underlying issues such as a ‘disjointed’ approach to complaints and a ‘lack of clear ownership’ are leading to problems drifting and persisting.

In the report, the Ombudsman issued 89 findings across 30 determinations. In every case the Ombudsman upheld at least one aspect of the resident’s complaint and in almost half of cases found severe maladministration on at least one of the issues raised by the resident.

The council landlord has fully accepted the Ombudsman’s findings and recommendations. It now has a severe maladministration rate of 24.7% which is nearly four times the national average of 6.7%.

Among the cases was a disabled resident unable to use their ground floor wet room for months due to a lack of repairs while another resident’s complaint was stuck in the landlord’s system for three years. Another complaint saw a resident with mental health problems stuck without a working key fob for her building for ten months, something that should have been resolved within 24 hours.

In every case concerning complaint handling the Ombudsman found maladministration, while the landlord’s 83% maladministration rate for property condition was above the national average and the 94% for complaints about anti-social behaviour was far above the national average of 52%.

Overall, the Ombudsman made 186 orders or recommendations to put things right. The Ombudsman identified three key themes and set out a series of recommendations:

- **Disrepair** – There were unreasonable delays within repairs in terms of both acknowledgement and taking action to resolve the issues. The Ombudsman also found that ineffective appointments were a key factor causing delay and inconvenience and disrespected the value of residents’ time. Communication was another poor aspect of repair jobs, with examples including limited notice period of operatives attending, not keeping the resident updated or not notifying the resident they are attending at all. Among its recommendations, the Ombudsman has told the landlord to review its policies to



The Ombudsman has recommended all staff undertake mandatory complaint handling training

- include a risk assessment specifically with vulnerabilities in mind.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)** – The landlord approached noise reports using its ASB policies and procedures but could not demonstrate it followed them. Sometimes long-term patterns of disturbance went unresolved. If the landlord deemed the problem not to meet certain policy thresholds, it offered no alternatives. The Ombudsman also found that often the landlord did not conduct monthly reviews of its cases or work with third parties. There was also a lack of enforcement, poor communication and poor records and documents relating to ASB. The Ombudsman has recommended the landlord self-assess against its Spotlight report on noise and improve monitoring of compliance by officers on its policies in this area.
- **Complaint Handling** – The landlord does not do enough to promote its complaints process to residents nor learn from complaints that

do make it through the process. Until March 2022, the landlord operated an unnecessarily protracted complaint process which has now been amended to two stages. After these delays, which were sometimes measured in years, the responses were of poor quality and contained statements it could not back up with evidence. This often led to the landlord not recognising where it has failed and therefore not offering sufficient redress for the distress and inconvenience caused. A lack of sincere apologies also fostered more feelings of distrust. The Ombudsman has recommended all staff undertake mandatory complaint handling training and for the organisation to appoint a Member Responsible for Complaints to improve oversight.

- **Underlying cross-cutting issues** – Throughout all of the above, underlying cultural issues within the landlord continually let it down. This included being reactive rather than proactive, a clear lack of ownership or responsibility taken and poor record keeping across the board.

Richard Blakeway, housing ombudsman, said:

“The landlord has taken action in several areas, has sought to monitor the effectiveness of these additional measures and has been able to provide clear evidence of the impact these are having.

“The focus of the leadership on embedding change is evident and encouraging. Nonetheless, many of the underlying themes we have identified are present in multiple individual cases, each contributing to the resident’s poor experience.

“The way in which the same issues recur indicates failure to learn from complaints. We have also identified a lack of managerial oversight to ensure that officers are appropriately capable and empowered to follow the policies, procedures and guidance that the landlord does have in place

“Record keeping needs fundamental improvement and the recommendations set out in our Knowledge and Information Management report will be of particular interest. We will continue to monitor the compliance with the recommendations set out in this report and will work with the landlord to help embed those improvements for residents.”

Big jump in build-to-rent starts in London

Nearly 7,000 build-to-rent homes were started in London in 2022 according to a Greater London Authority (GLA) report, representing a massive 50% increase in starts over the previous year.

However, there was a 42% decrease in completions between 2021 and 2022, driven by a 60% reduction in homes completed in London.

Between Q4 in 2019 and Q2 in 2023, build-to-

rent providers were the largest buyer of new market homes on large developments in London. However, sales fell in late 2022 and the first half of 2023, when they accounted for 29% of total sales.

Figures from the GLA’s latest annual monitoring report show that 38,202 homes were added to the housing stock in total in 2021/22, up 13.5% on the 33,656 started in 2020/21.



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No-fault eviction ban back on the agenda, but implementation date delayed indefinitely by court reforms

After running out of time in the last Parliamentary session, the Renters' Reform Bill was included in the King's Speech, along with a pledge to deliver a "fairer deal for renters and landlords, by outlawing no-fault evictions and enabling landlords to evict anti-social tenants faster".

Back in October, the Government revealed it will not introduce the abolition of Section 21 until stronger possession grounds and a new court process is in place. This was confirmed in the briefing notes issued with the King's Speech.

Ministers have been promising to end the right of landlords to evict tenants without needing a reason since 2019, but Michael Gove said it was "vital" to update the courts first.

This includes moving more of the repossession process on-line and a better process to prioritise certain cases, including those involving anti-social behaviour. Downing Street has not put a timescale on how long the promised reforms will take to achieve.

The Opposition accused the Government of kicking the much-delayed proposals into the "long grass", arguing legal reforms would "take years" to complete. Labour's shadow housing

secretary Angela Rayner accused the government of "betraying" renters with a "grubby deal" to avoid confrontation with Tory MPs who opposed to the plan.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "In the last King's Speech before a General Election, the Government has failed to grasp the scale of the housing emergency. Decades of inaction have left us with runaway rents, rising evictions and record levels of homelessness and Ministers are blaming everyone but themselves."

LONG GRASS

"We've already seen the Government play politics with the Renters (Reform) Bill and give in to a small minority of landlords on its own backbench who want to see it kicked into the long grass. Until the Bill is passed and implemented, 11 million private renters will remain living in constant fear of being evicted from their home without cause."

Landlords can currently evict tenants who are not on fixed-term contracts without giving a reason, under housing legislation known as Section 21. After receiving a Section 21 notice, tenants have two

months before their landlord can apply for a court order to evict them.

Under the Government's bill, all tenancies would become "rolling" contracts with no fixed end date. Landlords would be able to evict tenants in certain circumstances, including when they wished to sell the property or when they or a close family member wanted to move in, after six months. It would also make it easier for landlords to repossess their properties in cases of anti-social behaviour or where the tenant repeatedly failed to pay rent.

Ministry of Justice data shows that no-fault evictions in England between April and June this year increased by 41%, compared with the same period in 2022.

The National Residential Landlords Association warned that "uncertainty" over the future of the bill had made it "difficult for landlords and renters to plan for the future".

"As they consider the bill, MPs and peers will need to make sure it secures the confidence of responsible landlords every bit as much as tenants," NRLA chief executive Ben Beadle said. Should the bill fail to secure the confidence of landlords, the shortage of homes will only worsen, ultimately hurting renters."

Homelessness statistics revealed

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has revealed that initial homelessness assessments were made for 311,990 households in England in 2022/23, up 7.0% from the previous year. Of these, 298,430 households were assessed as owed a homelessness duty, due to being threatened with homelessness or already being homeless in 2022/23.

This is up 6.8% from the previous year, and also 3.0% above the pre-Covid level in 2019/20. This increase from 2021/22 is driven by the increase in both households assessed as being threatened with homelessness, as well as households assessed as already homeless at the time of application.

140,790 households were assessed as being threatened with homelessness and therefore owed a prevention duty in 2022/23. This is a 4.8% increase from 2021/22, however remains 5.7% below the pre-Covid-19 level in 2019/20.

The increase from 2021/22 has been influenced by a 22.1% increase, to 54,320 households, in those threatened with homelessness due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. In particular there was a 23.5% increase in households owed a

prevention duty due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let a property.

157,640 households were assessed as homeless and therefore owed a relief duty in 2022/23. This is up 8.6% from 2021/22, and 12.1% above the pre-Covid-19 level in 2019/20. Similar to increases in prevention duties, this also has been influenced by a 39.4% increase, to 20,180 households, in those threatened with homelessness due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. Other notable changes in 2022/23 compared to the previous year include:

- Decreases in the proportion of successful outcomes at the end of prevention and relief duties;
- Increases in number of households (with and without children) owed a homelessness duty; due to the end of an assured shorthold tenancy. In particular, large increases were seen in the end of assured shorthold tenancies due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let properties;
- An increase of 23.3% in households owed a prevention or relief duty where the main applicant was aged 65-74; and
- Increases in number of households owed a prevention or relief duty where the main applicant was in full-time (up 10.8%) or part-time work (up 6.5%), as well as a 19.3%

increase in households where the main applicant was retired.

SHELTER'S RESPONSE TO THE MENTION OF THE RENTERS (REFORM) BILL IN TODAY'S KING'S SPEECH

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "In the last King's Speech before a General Election, the government has failed to grasp the scale of the housing emergency. Decades of inaction has left us with runaway rents, rising evictions and record levels of homelessness and Ministers are blaming everyone but themselves."

"We've already seen the government play politics with the Renters (Reform) Bill and give in to a small minority of landlords on its own backbench who want to see it kicked into the long grass. Until the Bill is passed and implemented, 11 million private renters will remain living in constant fear of being evicted from their home without cause."

"Instead of looking for scapegoats, the government should be pushing forward the solutions that will end the housing emergency for good - building social homes, fixing private renting and making it more affordable. To protect people from homelessness this winter, the Chancellor must unfreeze housing benefit in the upcoming Autumn Statement."



Zaptec EV Chargers: Quick Installation, Quality Hardware, Cost-Efficient, Excellent Safety

With the public's swift uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) and governmental regulations making EV chargers mandatory for new builds in England and Scotland, developers and builders are having to navigate the rapidly growing electric car charger market. With a wide choice of manufacturers to choose from that have an attractive price tag, not all meet the required standards or offer support for development projects.

Of the legitimate options on the market, many tick some boxes, but not all. Sifting through products online, learning new terminology and technologies is hard and time consuming. So we have made your job easier by introducing an AC home charger which has already been chosen as a favourite by 6 of the UK's biggest housing developers, because, well, it's a perfect fit!

Since launching to the UK market in 2021, Norwegian brand Zaptec has established itself as the go-to manufacturer of high-quality EV chargers that look the part without breaking the bank. Combining sleek Scandi design with state-of-the-art charging hardware, Looking for the highest-quality chargers at affordable prices that align with UK standards? Read on to learn more.



A compact range that meets all your customer's needs

Zaptec currently offer two charge points, the Zaptec Go and the Zaptec Pro. The Zaptec Go is perfect for fast and simple home installations while the Pro is oriented toward large site installations, specifically apartments and workplaces. Last year, the Zaptec Go was internationally recognised as the winner of the 2022 Red Dot Design Award for Best Product Design. It is available in 6 colours which customers can easily purchase from Amazon and is competitively priced based on volume. The Zaptec Pro on the other hand provides an excellent end user experience for apartments with parking, where government grants are available to help with the costs. It has patented technology to ensure the car receives the maximum available power.

Scandinavian simplicity & next-gen tech

Zaptec have been producing charging points since 2016 and have supplied over 250,000 units with a reliability rate of 99.7%. The AC home charger Go, weighs just 1.3kg while packing all the features you would expect from a next-generation charging solution. One being Wi-Fi and 4G SIM connectivity making them simple to commission and provide software updates even in unoccupied properties. All Zaptec chargers are designed, engineered and manufactured in Norway, so the company has total control over its quality while also being able to react and adapt its hardware and software to any UK-specific requirements. No need to worry about the cold though, the Zaptec Go has already been proven to work in the bitter chill of the Arctic Circle!

Fast install & lead times

The Zaptec Go was developed to be quick and easy to install, saving time and money – particularly in large developments making it a favourite amongst installers. This is one of the most important considerations for many developers and builders, who are seeking to streamline adherence to new legislation and meet their requirements without additional hassle. Zaptec UK hold substantial stock in the UK, minimising national lead times to help developers hit their deadlines.

5-year Guarantee

Zaptec is the only manufacturer to offer a 5 year guarantee on all of its products rather than the standard 1-3 year warranty of its competitors. Our guarantee covers the hardware and the installation, giving our customers and installers total confidence.

In summary, Zaptec offer developers two high-quality, safe and cost effective solutions for both houses and apartments. The Zaptec Pro and Zaptec Go combine quick and easy installation with award winning design that customers and users will appreciate. To top it all off, Zaptec was voted the safest EV charger with the best technology in 2022 by the NAF (Norwegian Automobile Federation).



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Building owner ordered to pay £60,000 for cladding removal delays

The owner of the Lumiere Building in Manor Park, East London has been ordered to pay £60,000 in fines and court costs after it was found guilty of failing to remove flammable cladding by a deadline set by Newham Council.

The council successfully prosecuted Chaplair Limited for failing to remove flammable cladding by the deadline of 31st March 2021. This is believed to be the first time a local authority has prosecuted a building owner for delays in removing flammable cladding.

At a sentencing hearing at City of London Magistrates Court, the deputy chief magistrate Tan Ikram said cladding on the Lumiere building was highly dangerous and that Chaplair had not taken the risk it posed seriously enough.

Ikram acknowledged that the failure came in the wake of “evolving” Government policy and at a difficult time as the country emerged from the Covid pandemic.

The Lumiere building is a former council office block, which was repurposed for residential use in 2000, and has 71 flats over 10 floors. The building contained the same types of cladding and insulation materials as Grenfell Tower, including aluminum composite material cladding and high pressure laminate panels, as well as timber-boarded panels.

The cladding and panels were replaced with a non-combustible external wall insulation system, a concrete skin and Equitone Natura and Genius spandrel panels.

Chaplair did not start work to remove cladding from the building until May 2021. The remediation work was complete by February 2022, almost a year after the deadline.

In its defence Chaplair said that it faced delays as it was unable to agree a deal with Willmott Dixon and subsequently had to change contractors. Lawtech was hired as the contractor to replace the cladding on the Lumiere Building.

Tragic noise case ended with vulnerable tenant taking their own life

The Ombudsman has found severe maladministration after a housing association's tenant ended his own life following long-running mental health issues and a nine-month noise nuisance complaint which was left unresolved.

The tenant killed himself after the country's biggest social landlord dismissed his pleas for help with a noisy neighbour as “whining” and told him he could not expect silence as he lived in London.

Clarion was advised by the vulnerable tenant's doctor that the effect of noise from the upstairs flat on the tenant's mental health was such that he had already attempted suicide twice. But Clarion failed to fix the problem or find him another home despite receiving more than 20 complaints.

After a nine-month ordeal, the tenant, who has not been named, took his own life in September 2021. After investigating the “deeply distressing” and “tragic” case, the Housing Ombudsman Richard Blakeway, found Clarion responsible for severe maladministration.

He ordered the landlord to review its vulnerable residents policy and apologise to the family, which it has done. He is now telling social housing providers to treat noise more seriously, warning that it is “something that can engulf” residents.

The tenant had also directly told Clarion he had tried to kill himself as a result of stress from the noise and that “he felt so overwhelmed that he did not see any way out”.

Blakeway said Clarion had “repeatedly failed to apply a considered and tailored approach to the resident, despite a previous attempt to end his life. That should have been a warning but instead the landlord did not go far enough. We determined that Clarion's lack of consideration of the resident's vulnerability when handling his complaints about noise led to the resident suffering over a nine-month period.”

In the same month the resident first reported the noise issues, which were related to wooden flooring above and children jumping, the resident attempted an overdose, blaming it on the noise nuisance he was suffering. Despite the landlord recording vulnerabilities for the resident, it did not tailor its responses effectively.

STANDARD PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

In its first response to the resident, the landlord sent a standard ASB letter, agreed to speak to the neighbour and created an action plan for the issue. The neighbour agreed to having carpet fitted, but the resident soon spoke about what little difference this had made.

At this time, there was no risk assessment conducted by the landlord.

Blakeway said Clarion had “repeatedly failed to apply a considered and tailored approach to the resident, despite a previous attempt to end his life”

The resident's GP wrote to the landlord, but the landlord was unable to find the letter due to a staff member leaving their post. But from this time, two months after the initial reporting of the noise nuisance, a tenancy sustainment officer had weekly contact with the resident. In the same month, the landlord issued its stage one response which acknowledged the issues and used the weekly contact as an opportunity for updates regarding the complaint.

The landlord said it would not install sounds monitoring equipment due to the Covid-19 lockdown occurring at the time, which was not a reasonable position to take during this time as while there were still some restrictions in place, Government guidance stated that landlords could carry out repairs and safety inspections.

When the resident filed two more noise reports, he was once again sent the standard ASB letter he was sent months previously. Over the course of four months, the resident completed 18 noise reports and noise recordings were sent to the landlord but due to some software issues, not all were listened to.

A visit to the property by the landlord found “considerable transmission of both noise and movement from the flat above into the resident's flat” but nothing more was done. With issues still ongoing, the mental health team expressed concerns to the landlord about the resident. Throughout the complaint the resident himself complained of worsening mental health including anxiety and depression, stressed and not eating or sleeping.

In the month before the resident took his life, the landlord installed some sound monitoring equipment for a short period before removing it and taking no further action. It also did not act on his rehousing request. 10 days before the resident ended his life, the landlord closed the case.

The Ombudsman's report notes that at the coroner's inquest, while the resident did not leave a note of intent, there was a history of overdose by medication because of the noise issue. There was no Prevention of Future Deaths order made for the landlord and the coroner concluded the resident took his own life.



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Letting agents are receiving 25 tenant enquiries for every rental home

Property portal Rightmove are reporting that in the past two years, average rental prices have kept rising, and more people are looking to rent homes than there have been properties available. In fact, the number of tenants looking to move now, compared to 2019, has increased by more than 40%, while the number of available homes to rent has dropped by 35%.

As a result, letting agents are now receiving an average of 25 email and phone enquiries from prospective tenants for every home available to rent. This has risen from eight enquiries per property in 2019, and five more than in May of this year.

Rightmove's Tim Bannister said: "Record rents and far more tenants looking to move than there are homes available means it will still feel very difficult for many tenants navigating the market. But there are signs that things are slowly improving."

"The number of new rental properties coming to the market is now at its highest level since the end of last year. While it is likely that there is some way to go before this filters through to rental prices, if the improving trend between supply and demand continues, we could start to see the pace of yearly rent rises slow more significantly than it has been."

As mortgage rates rose from the end of 2022 and early 2023, some landlords decided to sell rather than continue letting out properties. The shortage of available rental properties to meet the levels of tenant demand is one of the main reasons why rental prices keep rising.

Outside of London, average advertised rent for new properties hit another new national record



of £1,278 per calendar month (pcm). This is 10% higher than this time last year. Average rents in London have also risen to a new record of £2,627 pcm, up 12.1% compared to a year ago.

In such a busy rental market, Tim Bannister advised renters to be in a position to act quickly to give themselves the best chance of getting the home they want. His top tips include:

1. Move fast to set up a viewing – Set up instant property alerts, and even make yourself known to local estate agents, to make sure you're one of the first to know about a newly listed property;
2. Lay out your non-negotiables – This includes your maximum budget, how many rooms you need, and how long you intend on staying

at the property. This will help keep the focus solely on properties that are right for you;

3. Be flexible where you can – Being open to different move-in dates is tricky, but it can be an attractive addition to a tenant application;
4. Be as organised as possible – Have your finances and documentation ready, so you can move through the tenancy application process smoothly and quickly; and
5. Widen your search, if you can – Home-hunters are increasingly looking outside of traditional hotspots when looking for their next property. Expanding your search could open up more options to find available properties, and you could potentially find cheaper homes, too.

Fuel poverty hit one in four in social housing last winter

One in four households living in social housing was forced to go without heating at times last winter because they could not afford to heat their homes, raising concerns about the risks to people's health.

The number of households living in temperatures below 18°C for periods last winter climbed by 240,000 compared with the winter before. This can lead to higher NHS admissions, while colder homes are also at a greater risk of mould growth.

The data was collected from smart thermostats fitted in about 20,000 households by the energy analytics firm Switcher. Its main purpose was to identify properties in need of energy efficiency work, but it also revealed higher numbers of tenants living in colder homes.

It showed that 23.5% did not heat their homes for a period of at least one week last winter, compared

with 17.4% the year before.

The National Energy Action, a fuel poverty charity, said many more people may be forced to go without heating this winter after cut backs on the support payments made available.

"This new data paints a chilling picture of what happened last winter and what's happening again now in millions of homes across the whole of the UK," said Adam Scorer, the chief executive of National Energy Action.

"People in all tenures are using less but still paying more. Millions are underheating their homes to the point it could be dangerous to their health or even fatal."

The findings emerged after experts warned that low-income tenants in the private rented sector will face higher energy bills as a result of

the Government's decision to scrap plans to force landlords to upgrade their properties to make them more energy-efficient.

Rishi Sunak last month dropped a requirement for landlords to meet stricter energy efficiency standards alongside plans to scrap or delay of a range of green measures which he said imposed a direct cost on consumers.

Scorer said: "Beyond the money needed to afford heating, we are also seeing people not able to cook a hot meal, nor not using hot water for washing. There are people who can't afford to refrigerate their food or medicines, and some people are relying on candles for light."

"Others who are prioritising their heating and other energy use are falling further into energy debt, which is now at record levels. Energy bills remain hundreds of pounds a year higher than at the start of the energy crisis and are likely to rise again in January. Sadly, it seems inevitable the situation will get far worse this winter."

Private renting struggles in East London revealed

Research by the campaigning group Generation Rent into the experiences of private renters in the London borough of Tower Hamlets has revealed that local private renters struggle with affordability, standards and disrepair in their homes, as well as understanding about how best to utilise their rights as renters.

The survey of local private renters offers a snapshot into the experiences of tenants in the borough. 38% of the borough's 120,500 households are private renters:

- Participants ranked rent increases as the biggest issue they have experienced as a renter;
- The majority (58.3%) of respondents reported experiencing mould or damp in the past five years;
- Nearly half (47.7%) of respondents who reported their most recent repair issue stated that their landlord or letting agent had not fixed the problem;
- Almost two thirds (64.6%) of respondents were "very" or "somewhat" concerned about the possibility of their landlord asking them to move; and
- Almost a quarter (23.4%) had faced a landlord who turned up at their property without their permission.

AFFORDABILITY

Participants were given seven issues and asked to rank them in order of priority. Affordability issues were ranked highest, with "rent increases" the highest priority and "affording the monthly rent" the second highest priority. This was followed by "struggling to move into home ownership".

STANDARDS AND REPAIRS

The majority of respondents had experienced mould or damp (58.3%). One respondent described their experience with mould: "I have rented several places in the past with issues of mould and in one instance I was left to do all repairs with no compensation and the other instant nothing was done. I developed bad asthma as a result and couldn't breathe properly the entire time I lived there."

Over two in five (41.7%) had experienced heating and hot water not working as well as problems with storage of rubbish outside the property. Nearly two in five had experienced leaks and draughts (39.6%) as well as a general lack of maintenance of the property and common areas (39.6%).

Around a third of respondents had experienced an infestation (29.2%) and nearly a quarter of respondents had experienced faulty electrics (22.9%).

A second respondent wrote: "For hot water issues

they would usually let us know before I was affected and fix it promptly. But we had issues with our lift for a long time now and they still haven't managed to fix it."

KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHTS

The majority (54.2%) of respondents stated that they were "very" or "fairly" confident about their rights as tenants. However, less than 3 in 10 knew that the local authority can support tenants in cases of harassment, and only a fifth knew that they can support renters living in homes with a poor energy efficiency rating.

This suggests that there could be a gap between tenants' confidence in their knowledge of their rights and their actual knowledge of their rights. The vast majority (84.2%) of all respondents would welcome more information from their local council about their rights and responsibility as a tenant.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The researchers concluded that private renters in Tower Hamlets (and indeed everywhere) deserve a safe, secure and affordable home. In order for this to be achieved, a combination of effective enforcement from local councils, national legislation, and renters' awareness of their rights is required.

It is concerning that this snippet into renting in the London borough reveals that local renters often struggle in finding somewhere affordable to rent and with issues surrounding poor conditions and disrepair.

The Renters (Reform) Bill is an opportunity in improving the lives of private renters across England. But, as well as these reforms, local councils can, and do, perform an integral role in supporting and protecting local renters.

Ex Home Secretary criticised for her claim homelessness is a 'lifestyle choice'

Homelessness charities and housing organisations publicly criticised the former Home Secretary after she described sleeping in tents as a "lifestyle choice".

Organisations across the whole of the housing sector responded in unison to reject Suella Braverman's plans to crack down on the pitching of tents in urban areas, like on pavements and squares, which she largely blamed on individuals from abroad.

Housing charities rounded on Braverman by saying sleeping on the streets was not a lifestyle choice. They said blaming rough sleepers will only push people further away from help and into poverty, putting them at risk of exploitation. It remains to be seen if her replacement as Home Secretary, James Cleverly intends to follow a similar agenda.

Matt Downie, the chief executive of Crisis, said: "In the last 12 months, in London, there's been a 29% increase in people experiencing their first night

on the streets. This is a consequence of poverty – and poverty in this country has been exacerbated by policy choices."

Homelessness charity Shelter said Braverman's comments were a sign of failed government policy: "No one should be punished for being homeless. Criminalising people for sleeping in tents, and making it an offence for charities to help them, is unacceptable."

Some of her fellow MPs also joined the criticism. Bob Blackman, head of the all-party parliamentary group for ending homelessness, said Braverman had been wrong to discuss a complex and serious issue in such terms and advised her to use "wiser" language.

Braverman had posted on X, formerly Twitter, that she planned to crack down on the pitching of tents in urban areas, which she largely blamed on individuals "from abroad".

The former home secretary wrote: "We cannot

allow our streets to be taken over by rows of tents occupied by people, many of them from abroad, living on the streets as a lifestyle choice."

Blackman, who set up the parliamentary group in 2016, said: "Homelessness for people from the UK is not a lifestyle choice, far from it. Every case is unique. People would have ended relationships or fallen out with parents – which is why young people end on the streets. They may have made the wrong choices in life or had an accident and be unable to work. I obviously would never use (Braverman's) words. She should use wiser words."

At the extreme end, it was claimed we will see an increase in deaths and fatalities, the majority of which are totally preventable.

The proposal was not in the King's Speech setting out the Government's priorities for the year ahead. A Downing Street spokesperson said it would not speculate on whether the proposal would eventually be included in the Criminal Justice Bill.

Unregistered plumber given suspended prison sentence for illegal gas work

A man from Essex has been given a suspended jail sentence after carrying out illegal gas work and breaching a Health and Safety Executive enforcement notice.

Back in April 2020, Joshua Pitman, 28, undertook gas work at a house in South Woodham Ferrers, Essex, which included installing gas pipework. However, Mr Pitman's installation at the house was found to not be up to current standards by a Gas Safe Registered engineer.

Pitman, of Whitesmith Drive, Billericay, Essex, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 33 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Regulation 3 of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998.

He was sentenced to 16 months imprisonment, suspended for two years, fined £22,500 and ordered to complete 200 hours of unpaid work at Chelmsford Crown Court in October 2023. He was also ordered to pay costs of £40,000 and £5,810 in compensation.

Andrew Parsons, who lives in the property with his wife Patricia Parsons, says Mr Pitman's illegal gas work caused him and his family a great deal of distress.

Mr Parsons continued: "I would urge anybody out there who is going to employ a plumber, heating engineer, anybody who is going to be doing gas work, make sure you check the certificates, make sure you check those people are who they say they

are, that they have got all the right qualifications and that they have all the right certifications to do that work and are not putting anybody in danger."

An investigation by HSE found that Joshua Pitman undertook illegal work while still serving a suspended jail sentence, having previously been convicted of the same offences.

In October 2019, Mr Pitman was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison, suspended for two years, after being prosecuted by HSE. This HSE prosecution was in relation to illegal gas work Mr Pitman carried out in Brentwood, Essex, in November 2016, where he installed a boiler in one property and relocated a boiler at another despite not being registered with Gas Safe Register.

During this prosecution, Mr Pitman was also served with a Prohibition Notice by HSE which banned him from carrying out gas work while being unregistered. Mr Pitman breached this enforcement notice while working on Mr Parsons' home in April 2020.

Mr Pitman has never completed the required Nationally Accredited Certification Scheme (ACS) qualifications to demonstrate he is competent to carry out gas work nor been registered with Gas Safe Register.

Mr Parsons said: "Joshua Pitman did not have a Gas Safe certificate (and this) caused a lot of disruption for myself and my family via having to put all that work right – the involvement of Cadent,

"Make sure you check the certificates, make sure you check those people are who they say they are, that they have got all the right qualifications and that they have all the right certifications to do that work and are not putting anybody in danger."

Andrew Parsons

HSE and various other contributory factors that have come in to get that fixed and therefore cost a fair amount of money, but also more importantly, put my family in danger by somebody purporting to be Gas Safe Registered and in fact not being and doing the work without those qualifications."

"Hopefully the sentences that he has got and the compensation he is going to have to pay, will deter other people from doing similar work."

Company fined £240,000 after Liverpool residents put at risk during removal of dangerous cladding

A health and safety inspector found combustible cladding lying on residents' balconies at a Liverpool apartment block, posing a serious fire risk.

The cladding was similar to that used on Grenfell Tower when the 2017 disaster occurred. Green Facades Limited had been contracted to remove the potentially dangerous aluminium composite panels and combustible insulation material from The Circle, an eight-storey building on Henry Street in Liverpool.

When an inspector from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) first visited the site on 10 January 2022, the inspection revealed that, in preparation for the removal work, combustible material had been left exposed and there were inadequate means of escaping from the scaffold which was being erected.

The situation had worsened when the inspector returned a few days later, on 21st January 2022.

Further combustible material had been exposed with no protection from potential sources of ignition, and combustible cladding material was found lying on residents' balconies. As the building remained occupied during the works, the inspector alerted Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service who took their own enforcement action.

Green Facades Limited had been subject to earlier enforcement for similar breaches during cladding removal at a site in London. At that time the company was provided with advice on sustainable compliance with the regulations.

An investigation by HSE found that Green Facades Limited, had failed to take appropriate precautions to address the risk of fire and to ensure the safety of residents, workers, and others. It had also failed to take account of published guidance on the safe removal of cladding following the previous issue in London.

The company of Woolwich Road, London pleaded guilty to breaching regulations 11(1) and 13(1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. AT Liverpool Magistrates' Court the company was fined £240,000 and ordered to pay costs of £5,405.

After the hearing HSE inspector Jackie Western said: "The disturbing irony of this case is that work to protect residents from fire risk ended up making the situation more dangerous."

"This prosecution highlights the need for responsible management of the removal of cladding. The potentially tragic consequences of fire involving this type of material are well known following the Grenfell Tower fire. Despite earlier interventions and advice from HSE, and the availability of a wealth of guidance from HSE and others, this company continued to fail in its duty to address the risk of fire, putting people's lives at risk."

Planning permission granted for major regeneration of central Winklebury



Housing association VIVID has been granted planning permission for the major regeneration of central Winklebury. This transformative project will deliver 203 highly sustainable new homes, along with 4.5 acres of public open green space, a new preschool, a community centre, a medical centre and pharmacy, public play area and a new retail hub with parking.

VIVID worked closely with local residents and the wider community, as well as Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Hampshire County Council and the NHS to create an exciting regeneration plan, over a series of consultations and a number of years, to ensure the plans were shaped by the people who would be impacted most.

- Flats, houses and bungalows will be provided in a mix of tenures. High quality and modern, the homes will replace ageing accommodation on the site and will include modular building.
- The proposals will open up 4.5 hectares of previously inaccessible green space to create a new public park for everyone to enjoy. A fort-themed, sustainable play area and new signposting and landmarking will celebrate

and recognise the heritage of Fort Hill. The extensive landscaping will provide wildlife habitat with a range of native British shrubs, trees and grassland, increasing biodiversity.

- A secure new preschool building will replace the current temporary facilities and a new community centre will be a flexible base for a range of activities.
- The Winklebury hub will be replaced with a new centre with street frontage, and retail units.
- The new medical centre will be a multi-purpose building with doctors, nurses, mental health provision and social prescribers. The centre is sized to meet community needs and is supported by health providers.
- 374 parking spaces across the site will include disabled parking bays and electric vehicle charging.

Sustainability will be at the forefront, with waste reduction in place during construction, a 'fabric first' approach to ensure energy efficiency in every home including air source heat pumps and the use of PV solar panels.

New consultation launched on use of regulatory powers

The Regulator of Social Housing has launched a consultation on updated statutory guidance which sets out how it proposes to use its powers.

RSH's existing powers were strengthened by the Social Housing Regulation Act, which received Royal Assent in July 2023. Most come into effect in April next year.

RSH will continue to consider using its powers when social landlords both fail to deliver the outcomes set in regulatory standards and cannot or will not put things right. RSH will also continue to have a proportionate approach and consider each case individually, and the first priority will be for landlords to identify and address issues themselves.

The types of issues that may lead to RSH using its powers include serious failings that put tenants and their homes at risk, financial viability issues, and failure to comply with regulatory standards despite intensive engagement and other regulatory interventions.

RSH's proposed statutory guidance explains the situations where it may use its powers, as well as the process for using them. The consultation is running until Tuesday 16th January 2024.

Jonathan Walters, deputy chief executive at RSH, said: "Our stronger powers will help deliver long-lasting change that improves landlords' services to tenants."

"We will continue to have a proportionate approach and require landlords to fix problems when they fail to deliver the outcomes required in the standards. But if they don't, we have a range of tools to make them put things right. We encourage tenants, landlords and others in the sector to take part in this important consultation."

The Aico|HomeLINK Community Awards to return for 2024



Aico|HomeLINK are bringing their spectacular Community Awards back for 2024, returning on Thursday 18th April 2024, at The ICC, Birmingham.

Hosted by Carl Jones, presenter of Shropshire Business Live TV, the ceremony will welcome over 400 guests and finalists for an evening of celebration, and recognition of excellence within the social housing industry and local community. The Community Awards consists of 13 different categories, ranging from the Woman in Fire Safety Award, to Sustainability Project of the Year.

Aico is also delighted to launch the Apprentice of the Year Award for 2024. The award has been established to honour the brightest talents within

the electrical industry. The top six candidates for this award will be invited to the Aico|HomeLINK Community Awards Ceremony, where the winner will be announced.

All categories are now open to enter. The Community Awards by Aico|HomeLINK are open for nominations to the public and organisations across the UK. Entries will be accepted until the 16th of February 2024.

Neal Hooper, Managing Director of Aico, comments: "We are thrilled to be bringing back the Community Awards, these awards are a celebration of the inspirational people and organisations within social housing and our local communities. Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR) is a key focus for Aico|HomeLINK. We believe it's about making a real difference in the lives of those around us, that's why it's so important to recognise the individuals and organisations who are going above and beyond to make their communities a better place. We look forward to celebrating the achievements of the nominees at the Awards in April."

To find out more, and how to enter, please visit: www.aico.co.uk/news-and-events/aicohomelink-community-awards-2024/

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F. Ball launches RAG 2024

Manufacturer of flooring installation products, F. Ball and Co. Ltd., has unveiled the latest edition of its leading Recommended Adhesives Guide (RAG®), which sees new adhesives recommendations for floorcoverings launched by manufacturers over the past 12 months now added to the guide. The RAG® enables contractors and specifiers to quickly check the compatibility of F. Ball adhesives with over 6,000 branded floorcoverings from over 200 leading international floorcovering manufacturers – offering flooring professionals the most comprehensive guide to floorcovering-adhesive compatibility available.



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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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Sto helps refurbished homes shine brighter and greener

A refurbished housing development is benefiting from an aesthetic, energy-efficient exterior thanks to a Sto external wall insulation system. Located in Bordon, Hampshire, The Pines features 96 former Ministry of Defence (MOD) properties, which have been transformed into modern two to three-bedroom houses and maisonettes. The refurbishment has been completed by Project Worx Ltd on behalf of Annington, one of the UK's largest private owners of residential property, most of which is occupied by military families. Square 1 Architectural Solutions specified and installed the StxTherm Robust external wall insulation system to the exterior of the existing properties. Ideal for low to medium rise housing, StxTherm Robust prevents heat loss and eliminates thermal bridges to enhance energy efficiency. By insulating the outer leaf of each property, the entire structure becomes warm and dry, reducing the risk of condensation and associated mould growth. The installation of the system was completed with a final coat of Stomix Silkotex HD render. This cement-free, silicone resin render is available in a variety of colours, which enabled Annington to create facades with white, grey, blue, beige and yellow finishes. With a high level of water repellence, this render also offers protection from weathering, damp and algae growth.

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Growth for fenestration foam tape sealants in 2024

Demand for retrofitted energy efficiency products will help to drive sales of fenestration foam tape sealants in 2024, according to Andy Swift, sales and operations manager at ISO-Chemie. He believes the sealants' market will remain buoyant over the next 12 months, seeing steady growth despite a challenging construction sector and wider inflationary and economic pressures. In the face of a gloomy outlook in some quarters – a number of construction companies could go under in 2024 due to cost overruns – refurb projects, particularly in the social housing sector, where improved funding for projects is anticipated over the next 12 months to buoy the sector with an 11% growth forecast, are expected to get the green light to meet affordable housing needs. This will see a strong focus on the use of foam sealants, with increased specification of rapid product solutions to deliver greater energy conservation – particularly as fuel bills will remain high. Interest rates will also probably stabilise in 2024, boosting demand for more energy efficient accommodation, says Andy Swift. This in turn, will generate steady business for high performance sealants that reduce, or prevent thermal leakage, from around incorrectly fitted window and door frames. He said: "There are effective products out there to ensure that energy efficiency within buildings should never be overlooked or ignored – it's a matter of designing in these products."

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ISO Chemie's Andy Swift sees growth for foam tape sealants in 2024

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Opening the door to complete compliance

Marcus Parnham from Profab Access, discusses the importance of bi-directional testing as one of the main considerations that social landlords should address when updating riser doors to ensure compliance with the latest building regulations



Housing Management and Maintenance's recent *'Approach to Fire Safety in Social Housing'* research project discovered that proof of compliance via test evidence and certification – in addition to independent fire testing – were the two most important factors for social housing providers when specifying fire-rated riser doors for retrofit applications. However, the research concerningly found that bi-directional testing was only the sixth most important factor.

The Building Safety Act 2022 has provided the construction industry with the foundation for a new building regime that places residents' safety at its centre. As part of this, the Building Safety Regulator, National Regulator for Construction Products, and New Homes Ombudsman, have each been formed to oversee the safety and standards of all buildings, enforce a more effective regulatory regime for construction products, and enable owners of new build homes to raise complaints.

The Construction Products Regulations 2022 identifies the general safety requirements that all construction products being placed on the UK market must meet. These regulations aim to reform the government's current testing regime to overcome ambiguities regarding present guidelines and regulations. It also aims to secure the initial capture and communication of key product data to achieve a successful golden thread of building information throughout every stage of the design, construction and maintenance stages.

ACHIEVING LEGAL COMPLIANCE

In this new regulatory landscape, social housing providers have a responsibility to ensure the riser doors installed throughout every property within their housing portfolio are compliant with the latest building regulations and meet the requirements of the Construction Products Regulations 2022.

For older properties with ageing riser doors that may be constructed of timber, this can be achieved by retrofitting steel riser doors that are installed using adjustable frame systems that have been independently bi-directionally tested and certified as an entire doorset to the latest legislative requirements.

Currently, there are differences between the guidelines outlined in BS EN 1634 Standard and Annex B of Approved Document B2. As a result, some riser door manufacturers may only conduct product assessments via a third party, while others may undertake continuous independent product testing and certification. For manufacturers who submit evidence in the form of assessment reports, it may be based upon primary testing that may have been conducted many years ago.

Providing that the manufacturer states nothing has changed in terms of product materials, specifications and manufacturing techniques, assessments will often be renewed for a further five-year period, without any substantial fire performance tests being completed.

By undertaking product testing and certification by an accredited third party,



manufacturers can prove they have fulfilled their duty of care in terms of best practice. This can be done by providing evidence that the solution is not only fit for purpose, but goes above and beyond current requirements to offer the highest possible standards in quality, performance and safety.

With regard to riser doors in particular, the extensive testing process will guarantee a manufacturer is superseding the guidance outlined in BS EN 1634 to ensure complete compliance with the legislation defined in Annex B of Approved Document B2.

THE BENEFITS OF BI-DIRECTIONAL TESTING

Social housing providers should also look at specifying riser doors that have been bi-directionally tested by an independent test centre. Because bi-directional fire testing physically tests the riser doors in both directions, it offers the highest levels of fire safety as it provides the riser door that will withstand exposure to fire and smoke from both directions for the allotted time period. This adequately prevents the spread of fire throughout a multi-storey dwelling; the opportunity for the fire to enter the riser shaft through a riser door

located in a corridor and exit through another riser door in a different area or floor of the building is eliminated because both sides of the door have been successfully tested and fire integrity accredited to the required fire door requirements.

However, for manufacturers to completely fulfil their duty of care, and for social housing providers to also ensure they are taking all reasonable measures to ensure the building is compliant, safe and suitable, third party testing must be undertaken for the complete doorset, including each individual component, to successfully futureproof the project.

SUCCESSFULLY RETROFITTING RISER DOORS


Beyond the testing of the doorset, it is also critical that it is installed into an approved wall construction in a method consistent with the sample originally tested. In practice, the installation process poses a number of risks to the overall fire integrity of a construction through variables such as the packer type and intumescent mastic bead application.

To overcome this potential gap in compliance, professionals should specify steel riser doors that are supplied as standard with adjustable frame systems that enable the frame to be precisely adjusted to the specific dimensions of each structural opening, without the need for traditionally used packers during installation.

Not only does this reduce fitting times by up to 30%, but it also eliminates the need for intumescent mastic bead application as a secondary operation on site, due to utilising a factory applied integral all-in-one smoke, intumescent and acoustic FS1000 seal. This provides fire stopping between the frame and the wall, while also eliminating the reliance of the correct thickness of intumescent mastic bead.

Most importantly, it also ensures the compliance and adequacy of the entire installation, as its fire integrity performance has been sufficiently documented by an independent assessor. As a result, this also subsequently increases the efficiency of installation and removes any potential margins for error.

Marcus Parnham is commercial director at Profab Access





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Ultra high pressure jetting a concrete removal 'gamechanger'

A specialist team from drainage and wastewater specialist Lanes Group plc has prevented the need to partially demolish three houses by using a water jet to remove concrete from a sewer pipe.

The ultra-high pressure (UHP) jetting system, which powers the water jet to over the speed of sound, was deployed after the foundation concrete in the pipe proved too tough for conventional robotic cutting.

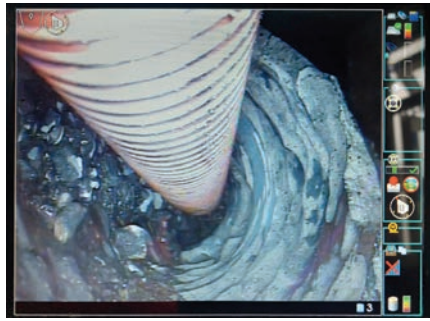
The only practical alternative would have been to excavate and replace the pipe, buried three metres beneath extensions built behind the row of nine terraces homes in Ilford, north east London.

That would have involved the extensions for three of the homes being all but demolished, then reinstated, with the occupants placed in temporary accommodation while the work was done.

Lanes carried out the UHP jetting project on behalf of Thames Water and has now used the technique to complete other challenging concrete removal projects for the water company.

Lanes operations manager Calvin May said: "This was one of the toughest concrete removal projects we've ever tackled, and involved contamination of a 150 mm diameter sewer."

"We believe the concrete may have been linked to a nearby building project. Foundation concrete is particularly hard and, in this case, had time to set solid, completely filling the pipe for 11 metres."



"We didn't make very fast headway with a robotic cutter, which works by grinding down the concrete, so we needed a different approach."

"UHP jetting turned out to be a gamechanger. It was over 20 times as fast as using robotic cutting and prevented the need for an alternative solution that would've been much more costly and disruptive."

It meant the concrete could be removed in 15 shifts, equivalent to three weeks' work.

Lanes, Thames Water's wastewater network services maintenance partner, developed a business case for using UHP jetting to ensure it would work and be cost-effective.

This led to the initial hiring of a UHP jetting system to ensure the concrete removal process was effective – not least because a tanker was having to

visit the site every day to remove sewage building up behind the blockage.

Lanes selected a Falch UHP pump combined with an IMS Robotics jetting system, capable of delivering a water jet at 2,500 bar (over 36,000 pounds per square inch).

Six Lanes wastewater operatives underwent Water Jetting Association hydrodemolition training and equipment supplier instruction to give them the knowledge and skills needed to operate the system.

The UHP jetting system has a jetting nozzle on the end of a hose encased in a flexible steel coil sheath. Once guided into the pipe, a packer is inflated with compressed air to hold the nozzle firmly in place inside the pipe.

A mini camera and powerful LED lights allowed the Lanes operative to then view the jetting operation, while controlling the nozzle with a joystick to direct it most effectively at the concrete.

The concrete was removed in one-metre sections, with the exposed pipe strengthened by installing a cured in place pipe (CIPP) point liner made from fiberglass matting, impregnated with resin.

Once the resin had cured, the liner created a durable new concrete-free pipe within a pipe, with a design life of at least 50 years.

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Pump up the heat

One area with huge potential for decarbonisation is heating and hot water. While this issue must be tackled in all buildings, there is a huge opportunity for housing associations specifically to take steps to decarbonise as Achilleas Georgiou from Mitsubishi Electric explains

Currently, heating and hot water are significant emitters of carbon, and home heating contributes up to 17% of the UK's carbon emissions. Around 1,600 housing associations in the UK make up 20% of the country's housing stock, so changing how they provide heat for their tenants is vital, and decarbonising this section of the UK's housing market would be a huge step towards net zero. To get there, more energy-efficient technologies are a must. These will not only lower emissions but lower energy costs – keeping bills down and helping to keep tenants out of fuel poverty.

Recognising this opportunity, the UK Government has supported the shift to renewable technologies in housing associations, offering support such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to improve the energy efficiency of social rented homes.

HEAT PUMPS: THE SUSTAINABLE CHOICE FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Heat pumps are a reliable option for making heat more sustainable. Their efficient performance allows them to produce 3 kW of heat energy for every 1 kW of electricity consumed, while a gas boiler produces less than 1 kW.

As well as reduced energy usage, there is tangible evidence that heat pumps keep energy prices down for social housing tenants. For example, the Clydesdale Housing Association saved around £850 per year for each tenant after installing over 30 air source heat pumps. This helped keep tenants out of fuel poverty, all while contributing to a greener economy.

ENSURING OPTIMAL PRODUCT PERFORMANCE AND MINIMISING DISRUPTION

Effective management and maintenance of heating systems play an important role in ensuring tenants benefit from cost efficiency and stay comfortable. Poor visibility of the internal workings of heating systems means inefficiencies often go unchecked, and repairs almost always need to be done in person. Heat pumps offer an alternative solution. Many heat pumps are built with technology that allows them to be monitored and controlled remotely and can even have issues fixed by expert engineers without the need for a site visit.

Housing associations can greatly benefit from this. By giving tenants close control over their heating and making maintenance and repairs straightforward, the product's lifespan can be extended. Greater efficiency leads to greater return on investment and ensures systems work effectively for tenants.

MAXIMISING PRODUCT LIFESPAN AND TENANT COMFORT

Extending the lifespan of products is also essential to maximising investment, and keeping waste energy to a minimum is a critical way to ensure this. Fortunately, heat pumps have this consideration built in.

For example, heat pumps allow the temperature to be adjusted individually in each house or apartment, meaning tenants can choose what is appropriate for them. The benefit of this over a centrally controlled temperature is that no energy will be wasted heating homes that prefer a cooler temperature. Not only this, but it keeps tenants happy and comfortable, too.

That said, tenants should be informed on the most effective way to operate their heat pump. Heat pumps are designed to run for longer periods and keep the room at a constant temperature, rather than being turned on and off regularly like a gas boiler – which newer users may not initially understand.

The ease of controlling the temperature of spaces is another measure that will ensure energy-efficient use. Remote controls and apps help tenants manage their heat pump from their personal devices. From there, they always have visibility over how the system runs, set weekly heating schedules, and even see the



weather forecast to plan future energy use.

This type of cloud-based monitoring is helpful for tenants and makes professional management and maintenance of heat pumps much simpler. Heating engineers can access the systems' monitoring information, data, and diagnostics remotely – enabling them to fix some technical issues remotely. With more seamless maintenance and energy-conscious controls, heat pumps make efficient use simple.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As the UK advances toward achieving net zero emissions, we must rethink how the country's housing stock is heated. This is especially pressing in the case of housing associations and large developments, where tenants don't have as much choice over their heating systems. Heat pumps can help greatly reduce emissions across the board and provide other benefits to tenants, housing associations, and those who maintain the products. Lower energy usage, greater efficiency, and sophisticated remote access make heat pumps an effective solution for approaching modern heating.

This technology is already available, and it can make a real difference to home heating.

Achilleas Georgiou is communications manager at Mitsubishi Electric

Embrace Cultural Change for Managing Property Health



Cornerstone fully recognise the call for levelling-up and seeking qualifications when dealing with property conditions and, it aligns with our significant number of independent surveys to date for the prevailing issue of..... damp and mould.

Will qualifications change the approach? Have the processes in place 'always been done that way'?

What if there was a flexible solution available to be embraced within your current operating systems. **Would you trust and use it?**

What if there was a uniform Framework as called for by the Housing Ombudsman.

Would you trust and use it?

What if there was a uniform platform for dealing with damp and mould that embraced your expert contractor network, plus decarbonisation and retrofitting in a user-friendly system.

Would you trust and use it?

Our experience has highlighted the need for change when investigating root causes of a reported problem but moreover, developing 'trend' data with regard to stock conditions for future management protocols. Such an approach removes blame and embraces a culture of change with SMART decisions aligned to accessible fact-based data in a usable and understandable language for housing staff and residents.

Cornerstone are ready to share their knowledge with all social housing partners that will build pride in your organisation, develop and maintain proactive engagement with residents and, uphold calls for a zero-tolerance, uniform system.

Our experience demonstrates many repairs have been undertaken with the best intentions however, the term 're-spend' may argue against that. Whilst there are many expert trades offering and providing the best industry services and installations, are we fully acknowledging their individual impact on the dwelling as a whole?

Examples include ventilation installations and/or repairs void of recognising the structural permeability prior to and post any works that impacts the 'whole dwelling ventilation rate'.

And, with our proven data indicating 91% of all damp and mould surveys to date confirm the structures were dry, how do we decipher the reasons void of a blame culture and, how do we provide credible advice for moving forward.

These are embodied aspects of the Cornerstone investigative service and, we can and do share our knowledge with all interested parties.



A Property Health App

Accessed by both landlords and your residents via a bespoke license, provides immediate guidance for an issue with recognisable causes in a user-friendly language for timely rectifications. Why and How are added for simplistic understanding.

Still a problem?

Upload images/videos to the landlord platform for early intervention.

Landlord solving the problem?

Not an issue. Embedded SMART assistance is designed to impart likely reasons and rectifications. However, if the issue remain or is complex, send the data to Cornerstone for timely assistance – when you need it.

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Facing up to mould & damp

Wendy Thomas at Nuaire discusses the changes to regulations that social housing providers need to be aware of when addressing mould and damp and looks at different retrofit solutions available for compliance

Condensation and dampness in older homes during the winter months was once considered part and parcel of living in a northern climate. 38% of the UK's housing stock is over 70 years old and suffers from poor insulation levels and even poorer ventilation, which means that dampness remains trapped and can lead to the formation of mould. Mould has been viewed as a cosmetic issue in the past, but we now have a far greater understanding of the impacts of mould on health, including asthma, eye irritation, respiratory problems, skin reactions, headaches and, in extreme circumstances, death.

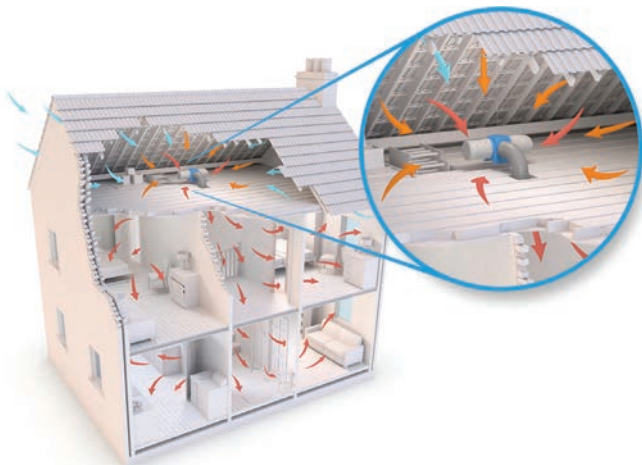
WHAT'S CHANGED?

In December 2020, two-year-old Awaab Ishak died from prolonged exposure to mould in his home in Rochdale. Such was the strength of feeling, that Awaab's Law has been introduced as part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, which requires social housing landlords by law to fix damp and mould issues to strict deadlines, or rehouse tenants in safe accommodation. While the time frames within which landlords will have to act to investigate hazards and make repairs has yet to be decided, the Act will be made enforceable through a more effective

complaint process; Ofsted-style inspections by the Regulator of Social Housing have powers to issue unlimited fines to landlords who fail to meet standards. It will also mean emergency repairs can be made where serious risks to tenants are found, with landlords footing the bill.

GUIDANCE

As part of this process, the government has realised that suitable guidance is not readily available to landlords. Information on different aspects of damp and mould – be it the health risks, how to treat mould, or how to prevent it forming – can be found, but not all in one easy to access place or document. As a result, 'Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home' was published by the Government in September 2023 aimed specifically at rented housing providers (social and private sector landlords). It clearly sets out the legal responsibilities and the serious physical and mental health risks that damp and mould pose. It also defeats the culture of blaming the tenant and their lifestyle; after all, if you live in a fourth floor flat, do you really have a choice about whether to dry clothes indoors or not?



The emphasis in the new guidance is on finding long term solutions. As the guidance states, landlords should “identify and tackle the underlying causes of damp and mould, including building deficiencies, inadequate ventilation and condensation. Simply removing surface mould will not prevent the damp and mould from reappearing.”

When it comes to ensuring effective ventilation, landlords should check that existing measures in place – such as extractor fans and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) systems – are fully operational and up to the job, and that tenants are informed of how to use them.

Bathroom and kitchen extractor fans are generally replaced around every six years as part of planned maintenance. With an increase in minimum air flow rates stipulated in the revised Part F of Building Regulations, you may well need to replace them with more powerful fans, such as a Decentralised Mechanical Extract Ventilation (dMEV) fan. These are mostly continuous running mixed

Cost effective ventilation systems are readily available, and can be quickly and easily fitted into existing properties to provide tenants with improved indoor air quality and comfort

flow axial fans suitable for wall, ceiling and window installation. As an example, the Nuaire Faith-Plus dMEV has been specifically designed and built to achieve the ventilation rates set out in Part F and L Building Regulations. In a typical three bedroom house, requiring a 31 l/s trickle rate, two Faith-Plus fans – one in the bathroom and one in the kitchen – will deliver the air flow required.

For properties where condensation is a major issue and mould is present, waiting for planned maintenance is no longer an option. An immediate solution is required, which could mean more powerful extractor fans, as mentioned, but may require a different solution in the form of a Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) system. PIV systems eliminate condensation dampness, while filtering any harmful outdoor air pollutants. A highly cost-effective solution, they are easily installed in a loft, in under an hour, and provide fresh air to the whole home. They are inexpensive and long lasting.

A MOUNTAIN TO CLIMB

With the English Housing Survey estimating around 904,000 homes in England alone had damp problems in 2021, it's a mountain of a problem that can no longer be ignored. But it's not an insurmountable one: proven, cost effective ventilation systems are readily available that can be quickly and easily fitted into existing properties to provide tenants with improved indoor air quality and comfort, and provide landlords with the peace of mind that comes from knowing they are compliant.

Wendy Thomas is residential product manager of Nuaire

Airtech helps landlords comply

Condensation and mould specialists, **Airtech Solutions**, is offering expert advice and help to social housing providers and private landlords following the publication of the Government's guidance, 'Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home'. This follows on from the Rt Hon Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, writing to council leaders and social housing providers regarding damp and mould after the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak due to a mouldy home, and the subsequent Coroner's report.



01823 690 292 www.airtechsolutions.co.uk

DF2E downflow fan heater

Consort Claudgen's new DF2E downflow fan heater offers many features, including a seven-day timer with six temperature settings daily, open window detection, a digital lock, a large LCD screen, and a reliable battery backup to keep the clock running during power outages. The heater continues its heating programme after power is restored. The heater offers quick warmth and allows you to choose between 1 kW or 2 kW heat output during the installation. For safety, the DF2E has an automatic safety cut-out and will stop operating if the fan or temperature sensor malfunctions.



01646 692172 www.consortepl.com

UltraCare products join Mapei Zero Line

Seven treatments from the UltraCare range have joined **Mapei UK's Zero Line** – a range of low environmental impact products. They include six UltraCare surface maintenance products and UltraCare Smooth Silicone. The extended portfolio, which also includes installation and building products, provides safe and sustainable high-performance solutions with CO₂ fully offset in the entire life cycle. CO₂ emissions – measured throughout the life cycle of products from the Zero line in 2023 using Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology, verified and certified with EPDs – have been offset through the acquisition of certified carbon credits in support of renewable energy and forestry protection projects. The portfolio demonstrates Mapei's commitment to the planet, to people and to biodiversity. Formulated in the Mapei Research Laboratories, and designed for professional and end-user application, Mapei's UltraCare series provides a solution from installation, to the protection and maintenance of surfaces in private and commercial settings. Treatments are formulated for all types of natural and engineered stone and tile finishes and are tailored to a tile's finish and individual characteristics. The new Zero Line products include: UltraCare Multicleaner; UltraCare HD Cleaner; UltraCare Keranet; UltraCare Acid Cleaner; UltraCare Kerapoxy Cleaner; UltraCare Grout Cleaner; UltraCare Smooth Silicone.



info@mapei.co.uk zero.mapei.com



The need for closure

Rob Adams from Arrone, shares best practice guidance for making sure door closers within student halls of residence comply with the latest safety standards

Door closers play an integral part in making sure doors open and close effectively. In the event of a fire, a firmly closed fire door helps to slow down the effects of flames and smoke, with the Government stating that: ‘Fire doors are one of the most important measures to safeguard the means of escape from fire.’

Fire prevention within halls of residence is widely recognised as being a key responsibility for universities. New legislation – The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 – came into force on 23rd January 2023 to introduce new duties on building owners and managers acting as the Responsible Persons.

The regulations are an important step in actioning the recommendations made in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase One report and have been implemented under Article 24 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (Fire Safety Order).

All Responsible Persons working in multi-occupied, multi-storey buildings over 11 metres tall are legally required to conduct quarterly checks of all fire doors within communal areas and, on a best endeavour basis, annual checks of all entrance doors leading on to communal areas.

As is the case with all fire safety measures, it is essential that fire and entrance doors and the associated hardware, particularly the door closers, are kept in good working order

The checks apply to self-closing doors and cover every aspect of fire and entrance doors, including the essential hardware: hinges, locks or latches and door closers. Guidance published by the Government states that the checks should consider:

- If there have been any alterations or damage to a fire door’s glazing apertures or air transfer grille;
- If there are any gaps around the door frame and that seals and hinges are fitted correctly;
- That the door closer shuts the fire door;
- That the fire door closes correctly around the whole frame; and
- That there is no visible damage to the door or door closer.

Responsible Persons should also inform students about the importance of keeping fire doors closed at all times and ask them not to tamper with the doors. Clear information should also be distributed to students about what to do if any of the doors are faulty or damaged in any way and who to notify.

Fire doors should not be wedged open under any circumstances. If a door must be kept open, for instance, because it is in a high traffic area, then the use of an overhead electromagnetic door closing device would provide an acceptable and safe solution. This is a product type that will ensure the door is held open and automatically closes the door when the fire alarm is triggered, all in accordance with fire safety and legal requirements.

As is the case with all fire safety measures, it is essential that fire and entrance doors and the associated hardware, particularly the door closers, are kept in good working order. Regular inspections, as stipulated by the new regulations, play an important role in making sure wear and tear that may lead to defects are immediately detected and repaired.

The guidance is aimed at making sure all responsible persons with a duty to conduct fire door and entrance door checks within halls of residence carry out robust inspections of their door closers. This involves asking themselves the following key questions:

- Is the closer fitted in the correct position?
- Is it still attached correctly to the door and frame or has it become loose or dropped?
- Has it been damaged in any way?
- Does it allow the door to open smoothly?
- Does it close the door in a controlled manner?
- Are all of the screws and other fixings still tightly in place?
- And, are there any signs of fluid on the outside of the door closer or on the face of the door?



When a door closer doesn't function properly, it directly impacts the performance of the fire door it has been fitted to. For instance, the door opening too slowly or closing too quickly or only partially opening and closing, makes it less effective in the event of a fire.

More specifically, faulty door closers can result in doors not latching correctly when opened to 5° or 75 mm, taking too long to close (within 25 seconds is considered best practice) and not easily opening by up to at least 70°.

Door closers are essential for making sure fire and entrance doors are fully functional and, more importantly, ensuring fires are contained as much as possible within halls of residence to ensure the safety of its occupants.

Rob Adams is technical manager for Arrone

F. Ball smoothing compound raises the level

F. Ball's new Stopgap 1600 smoothing compound has provided a fast-track solution as part of the ground-floor refurbishment of a residential property. The surface was first primed with Stopgap P131, diluted with four parts water, before Stopgap 400 Repair was used to make minor repairs to the subfloor and raise the floor level.

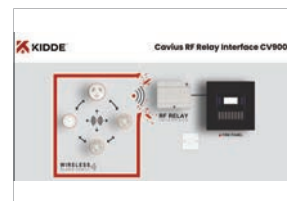


Stopgap 1600 fast-drying, fibre-reinforced smoothing compound was then applied. The product is formulated especially for use over underfloor heating systems and can be applied between 3 mm to 40 mm thick to encapsulate electrical wired or water-fed systems installed over internal subfloors.

01538 361 633 www.f-ball.co.uk

Kidde launches new Cavius Relay Unit

Leading manufacturer of fire safety equipment, Kidde Safety Europe, has announced the launch of a new relay unit under its Cavius brand, designed to provide enhanced safety for building occupants. The new Cavius Relay unit serves as a dedicated connection between smoke and heat alarms, and third-party safety systems in the event of a fire. Enabling an emergency signal to be transmitted to systems such as telecare systems, strobe lights and sounders, this offers an ideal specification for dwellings that house vulnerable people or where compliance with the Equality Act is essential.



03337 722227 www.kidde.com/fire-safety/en/uk

Fibo wall panels in energy-efficient housing

DMDmodular has recently achieved a significant milestone, successfully completing a fully energy-efficient housing project that tackles the industry's most pressing challenges, with Fibo's waterproof wall panels used throughout. Manufactured from layers of PEFC certified plywood and high-pressure laminate, Fibo's wall panels offer a sustainable alternative to tiles, with a carbon saving of 40%. The panels have been installed in a classic Denver White tile effect design, across areas where high-strength, durability and quick assembly were required, such as bathrooms and kitchens.



fibomodular.com www.dmdmodular.com

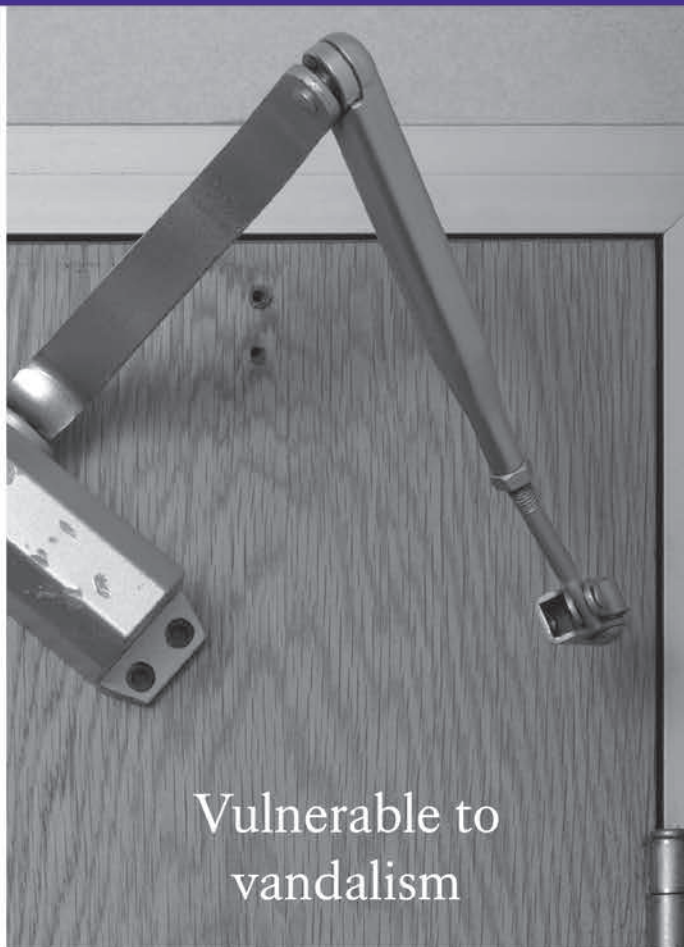
West Fraser's new guide for builders

West Fraser UK has produced a guide which makes the selection process simple and speedy. The builder can be sure that West Fraser's products carry the necessary standards and quality marks for the UK and so comply with UK building specifications. In addition, the transport and environmental costs are minimised. The product portfolios comprise SterlingOSB Zero OSB3, SterlingOSB Zero T&G, CaberFloor P5, CaberDek, CaberShieldPlus, CaberMDF and the newest addition to the range, SterlingOSB Zero PrimedPlus, and all are net carbon negative while the SterlingOSB Zero range contains no formaldehyde.



uk.westfraser.com/housebuilders

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Key requirements for wayfinding

Danny Adamson from Stocksigns Ltd discusses some of the new regulations regarding wayfinding signage following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and the implementation of The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022

On the 15th June 2017, just one day after the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Prime Minister Theresa May launched an inquiry tasked with discovering the truth behind the cause and exacerbation of the fire that claimed the lives of 72 residents. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry is, at time of writing, still yet to publish its final report, but a lot has already changed due to its findings.

FINDINGS AND REGULATIONS

During the inquiry, it was found that the staircase landings in the tower were not clearly marked, nor did they accurately reflect the additional floors created when the tower was refurbished. As a result, firefighters could not identify the floor numbers, which hindered their ability to control the fire and rescue residents. What signage did exist was also difficult to read in the smoky conditions of the fire. As a result, Recommendation 33.27 suggested that all high-rise buildings be fitted with clear wayfinding signage that can be read in all conditions.

The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 went further than this, establishing the need for wayfinding signage as a legal requirement in all existing multiple occupancy residential buildings with a roof height over 11 m. These regulations came into force in January 2023. In addition to the floor number, the regulations also stipulate that signage must be used for the “identification of domestic premises”, such as denoting flat numbers and the flats numbers found on a certain corridor.

This comes into force alongside existing legislation that legally requires all new high-rise buildings to have the aforementioned wayfinding signage. The Government’s fact sheet on the regulations also underscores that, under Section 17 the Fire Safety Order 2005, it is the responsibility of the owner or manager of the building to maintain any and all signage so that it can perform its safety function. With the case of Grenfell Tower in mind, maintaining the signage would have meant updating and replacing all signs throughout the building following its refurbishment.

The companion fact sheet also suggests that, while there is no legal mandate to do so, ‘responsible persons’ may wish to consider installing signage in all types of buildings – high-rise or otherwise – in order to protect residents.

SIGNAGE DESIGN AND LOCATION

In addition to requiring signage, Regulation 8 of The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 also states that all signage should conform to paragraphs 15.13 to 15.16 of Approved Document B Volume 1.

In the document, it is required that all wayfinding signs should be located at the top of every landing of a protected stairway (a stair that leads to a final exit with fire-resistant construction) and be visible from the top of a firefighting stair. Signs should be mounted between 1.7 m and 2 m from the floor, and if possible, this should be consistent across all floors of the building.

Approved Document B Volume 1 also specifies that the font be sans serif in order to make it easy to read. To this end, the minimum height of letters must be 50 mm and floor number should be at least 75 mm. The colour and design of the signage is not stipulated; however, it does require contrasting colours to be used for the text and the background. Consultation with a signage expert, such



The importance of clear and consistent safety signage cannot be denied

as Stocksigns, is advisable here as they will be able to direct you towards suitable options, such as photoluminescent signage, that will allow the signs to be read in low light or with a torch.

While Grenfell Tower had flats that opened directly onto a single lobby, the approved document also dictates the need for – and requirements of – signage in a building with multiple corridors. If you manage a building such as this, you will also need to provide regulation signage that clearly signposts which flat numbers can be found down which corridor.

The importance of clear and consistent safety signage cannot be denied. Whether you are looking at retrofitting existing buildings or implementing a scheme for a new development, with the help of an experienced supplier you will be able to find a compliant and consistent signage solution that enhances safety for residents.

Danny Adamson is managing director of Stocksigns Ltd



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