

HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

FEB/MAR 2024



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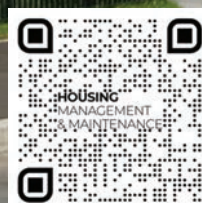


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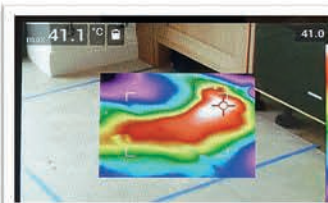
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Editor's comment

Links between housing and health brought into sharp focus



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

As we enter the final few months before the General Election is held, thoughts are turning to which policies, plans and targets will make it into the manifestos of the political parties. Indeed housing could be an important battleground over which significant differences might be identified and fought over. It will be a race against time for the Rent (Reform) Bill to see if it can get passed all of its Parliamentary stages and onto the statute books before the election is called. Both the Conservatives and Labour are committed to the reform of Section 21 (dealing with no fault evictions) so there are reasonable grounds for optimism that a deal can be done.

Another piece of legislation that is likely to get over the line is the long awaited Awaab's Law, which sets a series of tough targets for social landlords in terms of fixing major problems such as mould and damp in tenants' homes within strict timelines. Under the proposals, social landlords will be required to investigate dangerous hazards within 14 days, start fixing them within a further seven days, and make emergency repairs within 24 hours. Landlords who fail to comply with the requirements can be taken to court where they may be ordered to pay compensation to tenants. Michael Gove announced that housing providers will be required to keep clear records, "showing every attempt" to comply with the timescales so they can no longer "dither and delay" to fix residents' homes.

The statutory consultation period for the proposals closes in early March, so confirmation of the final details are expected soon, including a start date for the new standards and the full range of hazards covered. There may be a transition period for implementing the new rules, as many housing professionals are very concerned about the sector's ability to meet such stringent rules in the short term. But in the opposite corner of the proverbial boxing ring, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) has called on the Housing Secretary to accelerate this crackdown on landlords who fail to fix tens of thousands of mouldy homes, with a warning that unless laws are toughened up then many more people will die from the effects.

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, special adviser on air quality to the RCP, warned of widening ill-health as more people inhale fungal toxins. The Government is saying only that it will deliver the promise "as soon as practically possible". Professor Holgate said increased flooding, more householders keeping windows tightly shut to save energy and the fungus becoming increasingly resilient to treatment – in homes as well as in the human body (as a result of widespread use of fungicides in farming) made reform more urgent.

It is unclear exactly what other hazards will be included within the new requirements on social landlords, although they are likely to include all those identified in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, such as trip hazards and difficult to heat properties. This could therefore affect as many as 200,000 homes in the social housing sector. If this figure is remotely accurate then the cost of completing these works will be extraordinarily high and there is no sign of the Government coming up with any funds. This will put enormous strain on the budgets of housing associations and councils which still own their own housing.

The Housing Ombudsman is also flexing his muscles and proving to be a real handful to social landlords who are failing to provide decent homes and decent services in all cases. The relatively high incidence of mouldy homes in the Ombudsman's caseload and subsequent findings of serious maladministration, are also being reflected in the Ombudsman's increasing use of compensation orders against landlords. I wonder how many HA Boards use the number of adjudications and fines when deciding on the bonuses of their senior executives?

It was always anticipated Awaab's Law would be introduced, given the strong reaction to the toddler's death, but it was less certain that it would only apply to social landlords. After all according to the English Housing Survey's findings, conditions in the private rented sector are on average worse than in the social housing sector. Presumably this will need to be addressed at some point, but when and how are pertinent points! It is also of concern that the accommodation used to house tens of thousands of asylum seekers, will be excluded from the remit of Awaab's Law. According to Home Office data, 118,800 asylum seekers were in receipt of accommodation and support from the Home Office and their contractors as of September 2023. This accommodation is a mix of shared housing provided by landlords in the private rented sector and hotel accommodation. The news media has reported on many problems of mould, damp and vermin infestations in such properties and many asylum seekers have claimed their poor living conditions have made them ill, particularly with lung conditions such as asthma. As you can see, the coming year will not be without its challenges!

Patrick Mooney

Patrick Mooney

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On the cover...

Mark Edgerley of Boyer comments on the impact of the proposed Infrastructure Levy

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Government to force landlords to tackle mouldy and hazardous homes in short timescales

Social housing landlords will be forced to repair damp and mouldy homes within strict timelines as part of the Government's proposed legal and regulatory changes after a toddler's death.

Under the proposals, social landlords will be required to investigate dangerous hazards within 14 days, start fixing them within a further seven days, and make emergency repairs within 24 hours. Landlords who fail to comply with the requirements could be taken to court where they may be ordered to pay compensation to tenants.

Housing providers will be required to keep clear records, "showing every attempt" to comply with the timescales so they can no longer "dither and delay" to fix residents' homes. The statutory consultation period for the proposals closed on 5th March, so confirmation of the final details are expected soon, including a start date for the new standards and the full range of hazards covered.

In addition, the Government expects that if for any reason the landlord is unable to make the property safe with repair works or temporary measures, they must offer to temporarily rehouse the resident at the landlord's expense.

There may be a transition period for implementing the new rules, as many housing professionals are very concerned about the sector's ability to meet such stringent rules in the short term. The National Housing Federation commented: "In our discussions with the Government, we've been clear that our members support a clearer framework for tackling hazards in the home. However, these proposed measures will have practical implications for the sector."

HEALTH RISKS

On the other hand, the Royal College of Physicians has called on Michael Gove to accelerate his promised crackdown on landlords failing to fix tens of thousands of mouldy homes, with a warning that

unless laws are toughened many more people will die from the effects.

Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, special adviser on air quality to the RCP, warned of widening ill-health as more people inhale fungal toxins. He said the consequences include people suffering headaches, low energy, declining immunity and increased susceptibility among children to respiratory infections as well as deaths.

The Government is saying only that it will deliver the promise "as soon as practically possible". Professor Holgate said increased flooding, more householders keeping windows tightly shut to save energy and fungus becoming increasingly resilient to treatment – in homes as well as in the human body – as a result of widespread use of fungicides in farming, made reform more urgent.

The changes are part of what is called Awaab's Law, an amendment to the Social Housing Regulation Act, which became law in July last year. It is named after Awaab Ishak, a two-year-old boy who died as a result of direct exposure to damp and mould in his Rochdale Boroughwide Housing home.

It is unclear exactly what other hazards will be included within the new requirements on social landlords, although they are likely to include all those identified in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, such as trip hazards and difficult to heat properties. This could therefore affect as many as 200,000 homes in the social housing sector.

The Social Housing Regulation Act gives the Regulator of Social Housing powers to set strict time limits for social landlords to address hazards such as damp and mould. It also gives the regulator powers to carry out regular inspections of the largest social housing providers and issue unlimited fines to rogue social landlords.

ROBUST ACTIONS

Housing Secretary, Michael Gove said: "The tragic death of Awaab Ishak should never have happened.

His family have shown courageous leadership, determination and dignity to champion these changes and now it's time for us to deliver for them through Awaab's Law.

He described the changes as part of a stronger and more robust set of actions against social landlords who have 'refused to take their basic responsibilities seriously for far too long.'

"Alongside Awaab's Law, our landmark Social Housing Act will drastically improve the quality of life in social housing, granting residents a proper voice to fight those who think they can cheat the system and ensuring rogue landlords face the full force of the law."

Since March last year, the Housing Ombudsman Richard Blakeway, has made 721 findings of fault in how landlords tackled damp, mould and leaks, more than for the previous 12 months and several times more than in 2020/21. About 88,000 households in social housing are believed by the regulator to be living with serious damp and mould problems.

Housing campaigner Kwajo Tweneboa said it was crucial the proposals had "teeth" and were properly enforced. "Many families across the country are still living in homes with damp and mould, creating misery but more worryingly risks (to) their health and safety. I'm pleased to see Awaab's Law reach the consultation phase and hope that it goes far enough to prevent other families going through the tragedy Awaab's family have had to."

The latest English Housing Survey data, published in July 2023, found that damp and mould affect 177,000 social sector homes, but residents also face other severe problems. BRE, the built environment research body, estimates that around 217,000 social rented homes are blighted by a range of dangerous health and safety hazards. The people who live in them, and suffer the consequences, require treatment by the NHS that costs around £65 million a year.

Regulator downgrades two HAs over viability concerns

The Regulator of Social Housing has downgraded the financial viability gradings of North Yorkshire-based Broadacres Housing Association and the English Rural Housing Association from V1 to V2, stating that their "capacity to respond to adverse events" is impacted.

In its published judgements, the regulator said that Broadacres is investing in improving the quality and energy efficiency of its existing homes, while

also developing new homes, including homes for sale, "exposing Broadacres in the short term to housing market risk".

The assessment indicated that Broadacres' financial performance is affected by its efforts to build new homes, while investing in existing stock, especially in the context of inflation and interest rate fluctuations.

Broadacres owns and manages around 6,600

homes in North Yorkshire and is aiming to deliver 1,000 new homes in the five years to March 2028.

The regulator stated that 1,250-home English Rural's financial profile has weakened due to increased interest costs associated with continued debt-funded development and ongoing investment in its existing homes, which have reduced margins and financial headroom on funder interest cover covenants.

What Labour's version of rental reform might look like



The Renters (Reform) Bill has promised the biggest shake-up of the private rented sector in decades, but the bill has yet to clear all its stages before it becomes law and there is a chance it may not be passed before an election is called.

The National Residential Landlords Association has been working closely with the Government on the content of the bill and it is advising its members there are two likely options going forward:

1. Either the bill is rushed through in the last few days of Parliament during 'wash-up'. This would need the co-operation of the opposition who would probably require some concessions to give their support.
2. Or the bill falls, meaning it is scrapped. However, it would almost certainly return in some form shortly after the election, with both the main parties committed to removing Section 21 no-fault evictions.

Either way private landlords should expect that at some point in the near future all tenancies will become periodic, membership of a redress scheme will be mandatory and Section 21 grounds for evictions will no longer be usable.

During committee stage Labour MPs raised several amendments, which may indicate the potential direction of travel for rental reform if Labour wins the election. Based on their proposed amendments, it is likely several other adjustments would be made to:

- The timing of implementation;
- Which possession grounds would be mandatory; and
- The length of certain notices.

Under the current version of the bill, Section 21

grounds will not be removed immediately after Royal Assent is given. Instead, the Secretary of State has powers to set a date on which:

- No new assured shorthold tenancies can be created; and
- Pre-existing assured shorthold tenancies become assured tenancies, losing the right to serve Section 21 notices.

To ensure that the courts are in a position to cope with contested cases, the Government has indicated these dates will not be set until the courts have been sufficiently reformed to cope with an increase in contested possession cases. However, it is thought Labour would push for the removal of Section 21 notices first, with court reform following afterwards.

They are also likely to amend proposed changes to the Section 8 possession grounds. Changes are set to include:

- Mandatory grounds, which can be used when the landlord intends to sell or move a family member into the property;
- A new 'persistent rent arrears' ground, to be used when a tenant has fallen into two months of arrears three times;
- A new mandatory ground for use in student HMOs;
- A lower evidence bar for the discretionary anti-social behaviour ground.

Labour has major concerns about the new grounds and this is where its version of rental reform is likely to be significantly different to that of the Conservatives. Proposed amendments included calls to:

- Change the grounds in which a landlord intends to sell or move family member into

the property, so that landlords cannot use it in the first two years of a tenancy (currently six months). It also wants to increase the notice required to four months (from two);

- Require the landlord to offer the property for sale to the tenant before the sale ground can be used;
- Remove the persistent rent arrears ground entirely, as well as giving courts power to adjourn or suspend possession claims brought under mandatory rent arrears grounds; and
- Introduce a 'hardship test' to some mandatory grounds, providing the courts with discretion to refuse a possession order if they believed greater hardship would be caused to the tenant than the landlord.

Labour also tabled amendments to strengthen the financial penalties for failing to sign up to the proposed Property Portal, and requiring landlords to notify the Portal when they serve a possession notice.

The Renters (Reform) Bill already restricts landlords in relation to rent rises, by prohibiting the use of rent review clauses. Instead, landlords must give a Section 13 notice with at least two months notice if they plan to increase the rent. If the tenant challenges this, then the tribunal can set the rent to the market rate, even if this rate is higher than the rent proposed by the landlord.

Labour's amendments proposed limiting the tribunal here. Under its plans if the proposed increase is challenged by the tenant, the Tribunal would only be able to set the rent at the amount proposed by the landlord or lower. In addition, it also proposed rent increases would only take effect two months after the tribunal had made its decision.

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Regulatory fees for HAs to rise by 1.5% from April

The Regulator of Social Housing has announced there will be a rise in regulatory fees of 1.5% in April, with a possible further increase to follow later in the year.

The size of a second increase (which would apply from 1 July) depends on the outcome of the consultation exercise on proposed changes to the regulator's fee regime and is also subject to approval from the Housing Secretary.

The regulator has said it anticipates that large private registered providers with 1,000 homes or more will pay no more than £1.37 per home for the first quarter (April to June 2024). For these large RPs, this will work out at £5.48 per home annually.

Fees for small private registered providers, with fewer than 1,000 homes, are anticipated to be £75 for the first quarter. This is equivalent to £300 on an annualised basis, in line with prior years.

When the proposals were published last September, the regulator said that once it is fully staffed social landlords with more than 1,000 properties will pay between £9 and £10 per social housing unit, up from £5.40 per home in 2023/24. Landlords with fewer than 1,000 social homes would still be charged an annual flat fee, but this is set to double from £300 a year to between £600 and £700.

A letter sent to all social landlords earlier this year stated that an invoice for the first quarter will be issued in March 2024, and a subsequent invoice for quarters two to four will be issued in June 2024. The March 2024 invoice will include a rebate for unspent fees from 2022/23.

Small private registered providers will receive one invoice in 2024/25, which will be issued in June. The invoice will be made up of £75 for quarter one and the quarter two to four fee.

There will be no rebate for small landlords as the cost to regulate and register is no less than the fee charged.

New homeless households outnumber new social homes by six to one

National Housing Federation analysis of affordable housing figures and homelessness statistics has found that for every new social home built in England last year, six households were accepted as homeless by their local council.

Government figures show that 52,800 households were accepted by their local council as homeless last year (2022/23) including 30,300 families with children – this equates to 145 households and 88 families every day.

In comparison, only 8,386 new social rented homes were built in the same period – equivalent to just 23 per day. There was a net total of 9,561 additional social rent homes last year, including acquisitions, a figure that has fallen by a staggering 76% since 2010. Social rented homes are typically 50% of market rents and the only homes affordable to homeless families.

To prevent rough sleeping, where possible homeless people and families are housed by councils in emergency accommodation, including hostels with shared facilities and bed and breakfasts. Government figures reveal there are now 105,750 households living in temporary accommodation, including 138,930 children. These levels are the highest since records began.

As a result of rising homelessness, largely caused by the severe shortage of social homes, Government spending on emergency accommodation and homelessness prevention has drastically increased.

English councils spent a record £1.74bn on temporary accommodation in 2022/23 which represented 9% of their annual budget. Total spending on temporary accommodation has increased by 62% in the last five years alone.

In addition, the shortage of social homes means more and more families on low incomes are forced to live in expensive and insecure private rented homes, leading to a sharp rise in government spending on housing benefit. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies the housing benefit bill has doubled since the early 2000s.

The current crisis has been caused by decades of underinvestment in affordable homes by successive governments. In 2010 the Government cut funding for affordable housing by 63%, the biggest cut to any capital budget at the time.

It also cut all funding for new homes at social rents. This led to a rapid decline in the number of new social homes being built, thereby intensifying an already existing shortage. While in recent years, the government has allowed grant funding to be used to build

The shortage of social homes means more and more families on low incomes are forced to live in expensive and insecure private rented homes

homes for social rents, funding remains at historically low levels.

According to NHF research, there are now 4.2 million people in need of social housing in England, including homeless people and those in overcrowded, unaffordable and unsuitable homes.

Despite already reaching record levels, the number of homeless households and families is set to continue worsening at a rapid rate, without urgent action from the Government.

Research carried out by Pragmatix Advisory, on behalf of the NHF, highlighted that the numbers of children in temporary accommodation is estimated to reach 150,000 by 2030. This would be the equivalent of six children in every school in England living in emergency accommodation.

Ahead of the next general election, the National Housing Federation is calling on all political parties to commit to a long term national plan to solve the housing crisis, which prioritises social housing.

Kate Henderson, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, said: "The disparity between rising homelessness and the delivery of new social homes puts into stark perspective just how far away we are from tackling England's worsening housing crisis."

"Our research shows we need to build 90,000 socially rented homes each year to house all those in need including homeless families, more than 10 times the number built last year. As homelessness continues rising at record levels, we need comprehensive action to ramp up delivery of social homes to the numbers needed."

"The chronic shortage of social housing is having wide ranging impacts, not only for those becoming homeless and living in poverty and overcrowding, but also in the private rented sector where increased demand from people who cannot access social housing has pushed up rents and in turn house prices. This is also costing the government and indeed the taxpayer huge sums, with costs of temporary accommodation, homelessness prevention and the housing benefit bill soaring."



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Mayor launches consultation on improving housing conditions for all tenants in Manchester region

Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham has launched a consultation on the Greater Manchester Good Landlord Charter. The charter is the first of its kind in the country, bringing together landlords and renters to improve the standards of homes in social housing and the private rented sector.

It aims to recognise and develop best practice, boost tenant confidence in the quality of good rental properties and provide an ambitious new voluntary standard for landlord excellence, no matter what kind of housing they let.

The Good Landlord Charter sets out a vision of better renting, which meets the following characteristics:

- Affordable – a tenant should understand how their rent and other charges are set and should not be ripped-off.
- Inclusive – a tenant should not have a worse renting experience because of who they are.
- Private and secure – a tenant should be reasonably free to enjoy their home and make it their own.
- Responsive – a landlord should respond satisfactorily to requests for repairs, correspondence and complaints.
- Safe and decent – a tenant should be able to live free from physical or psychological discomfort in their home.
- Supportive – a tenant should have essential information about renting their home and be helped to access extra support if they need it.
- Well managed – a landlord should be competent or use a competent managing agent.

The plans for the charter follow a similar model to the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, launched in 2019, which has now engaged with more than a thousand employers across the city-region, helping them go above the bare legal minimum employment offer. Consultation on the draft charter closes on 26th February.

The Good Landlord Charter will leverage public funding and other key devolved powers in a similar way. For example, when public bodies are involved in seeking rented homes – such as for use as temporary accommodation – they could require those bidding to sign up to the Charter.

Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, said: “I’m clear that driving up the quality of rented housing is one of my key priorities. We know your home has a huge impact on so many aspects of life, from your physical and mental health, to your safety and security.”

“This work has, in part, been driven by the devastating conclusions of the inquest that



The Greater Manchester Good Landlord Charter is the first of its kind in the country, bringing together landlords and renters to improve the standards of homes in social housing and the private rented sector

followed Awaab Ishak's death. A two-year-old boy died because of the quality of his home, and we recognised this had to be the moment when things changed.”

Research commissioned as part of the development of the Good Landlord Charter found that over 75% of private tenants say accreditation would make a difference to their likelihood of renting from a particular landlord.

The survey also revealed that 75% of private tenants experienced a maintenance issue in their property within the last year, including 40% that have experienced damp and mould and nearly 33% a broken boiler or heating. When maintenance problems have been experienced, 40% of private tenants have been left dissatisfied with the outcome.

Residents living in properties where the landlord refuses to engage with local bodies or the Charter will be empowered with the right to request a Greater Manchester Property Check. This will be underpinned by stronger, multi-disciplinary inspection and enforcement capability to carry out the checks and issue notices where standards remain unacceptable,

with investment of £3.5million to support local authorities to deliver this.

In Greater Manchester's private rented sector alone, the Government currently spends more than half a billion pounds annually through the housing element of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, with no assurance about the quality of the homes that landlords are providing. When taking into account social housing as well, that number rises to £1.5bn.

In 2019 almost 12% of all homes in Greater Manchester had a category one hazard – this means a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety – and over 17% did not meet the current Decent Homes Standard. In the private rented sector, 15% of homes had a serious health and safety hazard and over 26% are non-decent.

Greater Manchester's Trailblazer devolution deal contains a commitment to work with Government to explore how the welfare, housing and health and social care systems can be reconfigured to help drive improvements to the renting experience and the quality of homes in the private rented sector.

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Rental reform on the agenda as NRLA meets with PRS Minister

Court reform, student lets and a proposed moratorium on notice periods came under the microscope when the NRLA chief executive Ben Beadle met with Minister for the Private Rented Sector Jacob Young.

The National Residential Landlords Association is committed to ensuring that the Renters (Reform) Bill retains the support of responsible landlords while allowing the Government to meet its commitments to tenants, with Beadle sharing members' concerns – and potential solutions.

Beadle asked for more detail on court reform and how the Government will assess when the courts are ready for change, following the commitment that Section 21 will only go after improvements to the courts. The Minister reinforced this position.

He also reiterated the association's calls for an amendment to the Bill to introduce a moratorium on tenants serving notice. This would prevent tenants from giving two months' notice to leave a property until after they had lived there for six-months.

This follows fears that proposals currently included in the Bill could turn the sector into 'Airbnb lite'; with tenants able to give two months' notice as soon as they move in.

The NRLA argues the amendment is vital if landlords, particularly those with mortgages to pay, are to have the security they need to remain in the sector and continue to invest; concerns shared by organisations including UK Finance and build-to-rent operators Grainger, as well as the influential Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee.

Beadle said: "It was a really constructive meeting and a great opportunity to share with the Minister the concerns our members have and the unintended consequences of some aspects of the Bill."

"We know change will happen, but this was a great opportunity to not only raise our concerns, but proposed sensible and workable solutions that will benefit both landlords and tenants."



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Elsewhere on the agenda Beadle and the Minister addressed another proposal put forward by the NRLA, calling on the Government to extend its amendment introducing a possession ground for student HMOs to other student lets.

They also discussed how the transition from ASTs to periodic tenancies will pan out, with Beadle urging the Minister to introduce change over a

period of three years, to minimise the impact on the supply of homes to let.

He argued that allowing pre-existing ASTs to come to end naturally would avoid the situations seen in Scotland and Wales, where similar reforms saw the Scottish PRS shrink by 6% and Welsh possession claims increase by almost 300%.

Social landlords to raise rents by up to 7.7%

Housing associations can increase rents by up to 7.7% from April, after the Government decided to revert to its previous rent setting formula when the cost of living cap comes to an end in March 2024. Guidance issued by the Department for Levelling

Up, Housing and Communities states that social landlords can increase rents by the consumer price index measure of inflation in the previous September plus 1%.

This formula, set under a multi-year settlement spanning 2020 to 2025, was suspended in 2023/24 and replaced with a fixed increase limit of 7%. Spiralling inflation would have permitted increases of more than 11% and the Government felt this was not fair on tenants.

James Prestwich, director of policy and external affairs at the Chartered Institute of Housing, said it is vital affordability for residents

is "balanced" against ensuring social landlords have capacity to invest in existing housing and in building new homes.

He said: "We know social landlords wrestle with finding this balance each year, and the current squeeze on personal incomes makes these decisions particularly difficult."

"CIH believes the imperative to invest in homes and services does necessitate an index-linked rent increase while also calling upon social landlords to seek to provide sufficient support to those tenants hardest hit by this increase and least able to afford it."

Face the facts; condensation and mould is a compliance issue, not a complaint issue.



People living in damp and mouldy properties are at an increased risk of developing respiratory and other serious health issues. Under Awaab's Law, social housing landlords must address damp and mould within strict time frames, or face the prospect of unlimited fines. A UK based manufacturer, Nuaire, has been providing ventilation solutions for over 55 years. We have a full range of cost-effective solutions to prevent condensation and mould in both existing and new homes. We work with landlords of all sizes and are on hand to provide you with advice and guidance.

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Single parent families at higher risk of eviction

More than 70,000 lone-parent households are facing eviction in the early months of 2024 amid warnings that they are “bearing the brunt” of the housing crisis in England.

A survey by Shelter found that one in seven lone parents who rent privately (equivalent to more than 74,000 people and their children) are facing homelessness within weeks.

The housing charity found that one-parent families were far more likely to fall behind on their rent or face so-called no-fault evictions than the wider population.

The survey, conducted by YouGov and funded by the Nationwide Building Society, found that more than two in five single parents (41%) say they have borrowed money to pay their rent, compared with 27% of households without children.

Almost 60% said that they feared becoming homeless due to rising housing costs, compared with 40% of households without children.

Polly Neate, the chief executive of Shelter, said: “Private renting is broken and lone parents are bearing the brunt of the crisis. Decades of failure to build genuinely affordable social homes has meant that competition for rentals is fierce and the barriers to finding and keeping hold of a safe home are higher than ever.”

Neate said: “Wrangling runaway rents and soaring living costs, all while trying to balance childcare and work is hard enough for all parents, but it’s made more so if you have to do a lot of it on your own.”

The number of private landlords seeking to evict tenants through the courts has risen to a seven-year high, amid warnings that the use of no-fault evictions is “soaring out of control”.

NHF launches a plan to ‘fix the housing crisis’

The National Housing Federation has launched a new report ‘Let’s fix the housing crisis: delivering a long-term plan for housing.’ With an election looming it is calling on all political parties to work with them to end the current housing emergency.

In its introduction, the report says the housing crisis is affecting our health, our life chances and our financial security. It is also holding back our economy and costing our country billions. It is breaking down our communities and driving families and keyworkers into financial hardship, away from work, schools and support networks.

Specifically on housing it says there are 8.5m people in England who cannot access the housing they need, which includes two million children in England living in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes. Some groups of people are feeling the crisis more acutely with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic households and Disabled people more likely to experience homelessness or to live in poor quality, unsuitable or overcrowded homes.

The NHF says the housing crisis affects almost everyone, but to really transform the system we need to focus on those at the sharpest end, and on the issues that are most acute for the economy. The report lists these as:

- people stuck in temporary accommodation with no chance to put down roots;
- families with no-where for children to play or do their homework;
- young people unable to get their first home;
- people struggling to make ends meet as the cost of even the cheapest private housing takes up more and more of their income;
- people going without the support they need to live independently;
- people living in poor quality, expensive to heat homes;
- businesses struggling to stay afloat as poor housing options make it hard for people to stay in their communities or live near work; and
- regional economies held back because of the housing crisis.

With a long-term plan in place, by 2035 the NHF believes we could see the next Government achieve the following:

End child homelessness: A record number of children are homeless, forced to live in inadequate temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfasts. This disrupts their education, affects their life chances and puts huge pressure on families. This situation is also putting a huge and growing pressure on public finances and services, and risks bankrupting some local authorities. The next Government needs to end this scandal.

Halve overcrowding: Children cannot thrive if they do not have the space to learn, play and grow. More than 310,000 children in England are forced to share a bed with family members. This affects the mental and physical health of families. A long-term housing plan to halve overcrowding would improve the life chances of 1.8m people including almost a million children.

Provide the security of a social home for one million more people: A good quality, genuinely affordable, social rent home provides security and stability. But too often low and middle income families have no choice but to live in expensive and insecure accommodation in the private rented sector. High housing costs reduce their standard of living and force many to rely on benefits to make ends meet. The Government can fix this with a plan to build the 90,000 new social homes we need every year to keep up with demand.

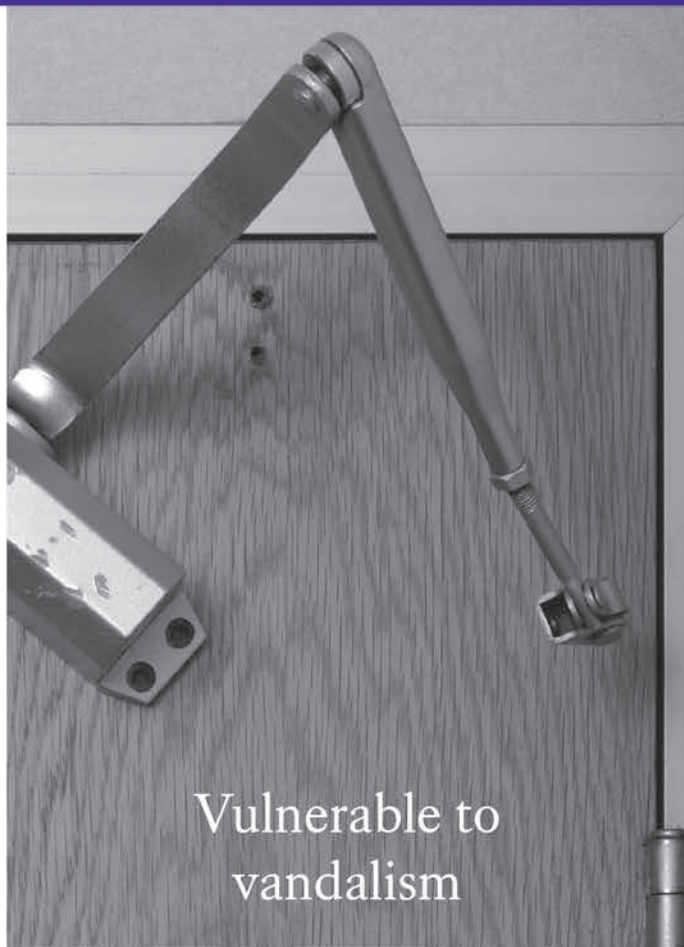
It is not just about numbers. We will only reap the benefits of more social homes if they are the right homes, built in the right location, with the right support for those who need it.

Ensure a warm and decent home for seven million more families: For many people, improving the safety, quality and energy efficiency of their current home will make a real difference to their health and wellbeing as well as playing a huge role in the transition to a net zero economy. Over the next 10 years that will mean completing necessary building safety remediation works and improving millions of homes, of all tenures, so they meet the new Decent Homes Standard, including energy efficiency standards.

Improve affordability: High housing costs force too many people into homes that are too small, far from their communities and too far from work. For decades, house prices have gone up by much more than wages, and rents are now at record levels leaving millions spending more and more of their income on housing. The welfare system has not kept pace, pushing more people into poverty as a result of their housing costs. Millions more now face big increases in mortgage costs as interest rates have risen. With a long-term plan, the government should ensure that housing costs rise more slowly than incomes, so that housing becomes more affordable over time.

Boost productivity by ensuring every region has the homes it needs to grow: Unaffordable and inadequate housing is holding back our economy. Across the UK, businesses and workers are struggling as the high cost and poor quality of housing is making it harder to attract and keep workers, run a successful company or build a fulfilling career. Integrate transportation networks with housing requirements, ensuring that every region can grow, and that there are places people can afford and want to live and work.

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England's largest HA ordered to pay almost £11,000 in compensation for damp and mould failings

The Housing Ombudsman has ordered Clarion to pay £10,800 in compensation to households after it made four findings of severe maladministration across three cases.

Richard Blakeway, housing ombudsman, said: "Complaints about leaks, damp and mould have increased significantly in the past year and these cases show residents had to go to extraordinary lengths for their landlord to take action, which should not have been necessary."

"There is also evidence of the landlord failing to join the dots or having similar points of failure, especially in the cases where there were multiple related complaints from the same block."

"Running throughout these three cases is evidence of delay, poor communications and ineffective action. There were multiple instances in these cases where it would not have been too late to rectify the incident for the resident and to repair the relationship between them and the landlord. However, these opportunities were also missed."

This is the latest in a string of Ombudsman findings against England's biggest housing association, that have been critical of the landlord's services and its complaint handling.

CASE A

In Case A, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after the landlord failed to rectify leaks reported by the resident for five years, causing her a high level of distress and inconvenience.

The resident had to spend a lot of her own time and effort chasing for responses and action. The landlord did not manage repairs consistently or in the same way as it did other reported leaks within the same block. This meant the resident had a vastly different outcome to her neighbours, who had similar issues resolved in a much timelier manner.

Further to this, the offer of compensation was insufficient and a further 12 months passed before the leak was finally resolved, compounding the failings. The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to pay the resident £4,400 in compensation and have a director apologise to the resident.

It was also instructed to review how oversight and engagement with third parties could be improved to avoid the inconsistencies in responding to different residents. In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has taken on new Service Level Agreements which would see that if a contractor or developer doesn't fix the issue. The landlord will rectify the issue itself and levy costs afterwards.

CASE B

In Case B, two counts of severe maladministration were given for how the landlord responded to

a damp and mould complaint, as well as the associated complaint handling.

The landlord failed to act quickly to the resident's complaints of damp and mould in both bedrooms and she experienced significant difficulty in getting Clarion to acknowledge concerns about the fabric of the building. Often, the landlord's responses lacked empathy and put the onus on changing her lifestyle.

Although the property was due for regeneration, the landlord was not proactive in seeking resolutions in line with its health and safety obligations and failed to effectively communicate with the resident. Worryingly, there were other complaints from residents in the same block experiencing the same problems.

While the original appointment for the repairs were made within timescales, the landlord should have thought about attending sooner after the resident explained her children had to move into the living room to escape the mould.

With communication from the landlord to the resident continuing to be poor, she asked her MP for help and described feeling suicidal. The resident was finally moved out and works undertaken to resolve the problem. However, the problems soon returned and the resident reported that her home smells of damp and floor tiles are lifting.

This led to the Ombudsman ordering the landlord to inspect and identify any further remedial works required. The Ombudsman ordered a senior member of the landlord's management team to apologise in person, pay £5,000 in compensation and to investigate and respond to the resident's reports of discrimination and racial bias.

On top of this, it must review whether any further compensation was owed due to the decant and carry out a full review of the case which would include taking into account the Ombudsman's Spotlight reports on damp and mould and Knowledge and Information Management.

CASE C

In Case C, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after the landlord did not take all the steps it could reasonably be expected to take to investigate and resolve the damp and mould issues. This caused the resident and her family significant distress.

The resident said as a result of this disrepair, she was unable to use a bedroom and provided medical evidence referring to her housing situation possibly exacerbating her children's medical conditions. The resident believed the landlord was simply masking the problems rather than dealing with the root cause.



In its learning from Case's B and C, the landlord says it has developed a new damp and mould strategy which has seen every member of staff undertake damp and mould training

The landlord fitted a new bathroom, undertook an inspection of the drains, reglazed windows and undertook mould washes. An inspection after this found that it was caused by condensation and therefore no further action was required.

After more complaints, the landlord undertook a new survey with environmental health present and found that further repairs were needed – some of these had been completed but others had not.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to appoint an independent external damp and mould specialist to undertake a thorough and rigorous assessment of the property, including the exterior walls and ventilation, pay £1,200 in compensation and assign someone in the organisation to be her single point of contact for all communications.

In its learning from Case's B and C, the landlord says it has developed a new damp and mould strategy which has seen every member of staff undertake damp and mould training.



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Ombudsman urges Croydon Council to use learning as a springboard for improvement in delivering its housing services

The Housing Ombudsman has found severe maladministration in four cases involving Croydon Council, urging the landlord to use these as a springboard to deliver better services.

It also ordered the council to pay the residents almost £8,500 in compensation. The cases covered several aspects of the council's landlord responsibilities, including anti-social behaviour, adaptations and mutual exchange.

CASE A

In Case A, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after the landlord mishandled an upgrade and adaption to the resident's kitchen and bathroom.

It led the resident to believe it would carry out extra works that did not form part of an occupational therapist's recommendations as long as she paid for these, which she agreed to.

Given that it was aware that she had physical and mental conditions, the landlord failed to take these circumstances into consideration and missed several opportunities to put things right.

The landlord's failure to follow its procedures, its lack of knowledge and its delays in investigating the case effectively negatively affected her day-to-day living.

On top of this, the landlord at one point incorrectly told the resident it would not undertake her adaptations at all. Miscommunication between the landlord and the OT department was concerning, as both are part of the same local authority.

The landlord also failed to provide important evidence by way of emails or call logs and notes of outcome of visits with key people involved, and therefore failed to demonstrate that it handled the upgrade and adaptations requests to the resident's kitchen and bathroom appropriately.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to pay £3,875 in compensation and organise an occupational therapist assessment of the entire property, following up on this with any adaptations that need to be made.

CASE B

In Case B, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after the landlord failed to adopt a victim-centred approach or respond to the resident's allegations of anti-social behaviour (ASB), including indirect racial harassment.

It failed to support the resident through regular communication and there was no evidence



In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has complied with the orders above and has therefore made improvements to its mutual exchange process

it liaised closely with partner agencies at the earliest opportunity.

Despite numerous reports and the resident stating the impact it was having on her mental health, the landlord failed to undertake a risk assessment and was unsympathetic to her concerns about attending court as a witness.

Although there is evidence of the landlord asking for timesheets from an early point, two years' worth of these could not be found. It also took nearly three years, in which multiple neighbours had also experienced this ASB, for the landlord to hold a multi-agency meeting.

These delays and failings led to severe distress for the resident who, by the end of this investigation, had been complaining of this for nearly five years.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to pay the resident £2,900 in compensation, for the housing director to apologise to the resident and for it to conduct a full review of its ASB policy and procedure, with particular focus on the use of the risk assessment matrix and action plans.

CASE C

In Case C, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how the landlord handled

noise nuisance. The resident reported that this impacted her mental health.

The landlord did not follow its own anti-social behaviour policy during this case, and in particular did not keep the resident informed about the progress of the case until she complained again. This caused unreasonable delay and distress to the resident.

It also took five years to supply any sound recording equipment, and the Ombudsman made an order to ensure this happened. Although equipment was in high demand, this was not a reason for it to be unavailable for this length of time. During this time, it also took years for alternatives to be arranged and used.

While the landlord carried out an inspection and wrote to the landlord during this case, it did not keep the resident updated of any outcomes and the issues remained.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to apologise to the resident, provide her with a device such as sound recording equipment so she can make accurate reports moving forwards and pay £900 in compensation.

CASE D

In Case D, the Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how delays in processing a mutual exchange application and arranging the inspection and repairs caused for the exchanged to be cancelled.

This was despite a large amount of chasing by the resident over a period of months. It also meant that the resident was left sleeping on the sofa as her son was using the only bedroom.

The landlord accepted this was a failing on its behalf and the Ombudsman has not seen any evidence of it ever giving urgency to these works despite a 42 day deadline needing to be met. Instead, some of the works were completed two months after the exchange had already been cancelled.

Although the landlord accepted its failings, it did not offer any compensation for the upset, disappointment and distress it caused. It also offered no further practical support after this period.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to provide a written apology from the Chief Executive, pay £700 in compensation and review its mutual exchange process.

In its learning from this case, the landlord says it has complied with the orders above and has therefore made improvements to its mutual exchange process.

NHF calls for protection of homelessness services from decommissioning

The National Housing Federation has written to the homelessness minister, Felicity Buchan, about the amount of homelessness accommodation spaces currently at risk of closure due to a crisis in local government funding.

The letter calls on the Government to boost and ringfence funding for supported housing, to protect homeless services commissioned by local authorities.

Several councils are considering proposals to withdraw funding from housing associations, who deliver supported accommodation for people facing homelessness, due to financial pressures facing local authorities.

A Local Government Association survey late last year found that one in five council leaders think it is likely they will have to issue a Section 114 notice, effectively declaring bankruptcy, either this year or next. Birmingham and Nottingham council have already issued Section 114 notices, placing their non-statutory supported accommodation contracts at risk.

Now, county councils are not required to fund homelessness support services, but more than half in England do through their commitment to reduce health inequalities.

If these proposals are not prevented through increased and ringfenced government funding, over 250 homes for people who are homeless may

Now, county councils are not required to fund homelessness support services, but more than half in England do through their commitment to reduce health inequalities

be lost across the country. This would put residents, and those facing homelessness at risk of rough sleeping and increase the burden on social care and NHS services.

The evidence shows that increasing and ringfencing this funding will also save money. Research by Imogen Blood & Associates, commissioned by the National Housing Federation, found that the average cost per person of supported accommodation was £21,000 per person per year, whereas allowing a person to remain homeless for a long period of time cost £43,000 per person per year.

In addition to the National Housing Federation, Homeless Link, and the Local Government Association, the letter was also co-signed by the Chartered Institute of Housing, Centrepoin,



Rethink Mental Illness, Crisis, Shelter, the National Care Forum, and the Rural Homelessness Counts Coalition.

The group say that to reduce homelessness and end child homelessness by 2035, the Government must commit to a long-term plan to fix the housing crisis, which should include a commitment to long term, ring fenced and increased funding for supported housing and support services.

Funding to help hundreds of rough sleepers off streets

Hundreds of rough sleepers should be helped off the streets and into long term settled accommodation thanks to over £17m of new Government funding.

The money has been given to local authorities across England most in need so they can provide more bed spaces for people who are sleeping rough this winter and more long-term secure accommodation.

London boroughs including Hammersmith, Lambeth and Greenwich collectively received over £3m. Nottingham City Council received over £400,000, Bristol City Council over £300,000 and Hastings & Eastbourne Borough Councils almost £250,000.

Whether this is sufficient to help these hard pressed councils to fully clear their backlogs of cases remains to be seen, but it will be warmly

welcomed by those working with homeless people on the streets.

This new money brings the total funding for the Rough Sleeping Initiative to over £547m and forms part of a wider package of support backed by over £2bn of Government funding over three years. This includes helping individuals find work, manage their finances and access mental and physical health services.

Minister for rough sleeping, Felicity Buchan said: "As the cold weather continues this winter, our mission to help people off the streets is even more urgent. We are determined to deliver our manifesto pledge to end rough sleeping and today's announcement demonstrates our continuing commitment to supporting the most vulnerable in our society with access to a safe and warm home, backed by over £2bn of government funding

over three years."

"The winter period is particularly high-risk for individuals who are sleeping rough, increasing the demand for immediate 'off the street' accommodation so the funding package includes £4m available to local authorities facing the greatest pressures in rough sleeping in England."

Meanwhile over 1,000 people have been housed through the Housing First Pilots in Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, and the West Midlands Combined Authority, providing long term housing for the homeless.

The scheme has reported that the vast majority using the scheme (92%) found a home within a year and said they feel safer, less likely to be a victim of crime and less likely to be involved in antisocial behaviour.

The Government has a manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. This means rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible and, where it cannot be prevented, it is a rare, brief and non-recurring experience.

Ombudsman inspection report urges Lambeth Council to tackle cause of complaints to create meaningful change

The Housing Ombudsman has released its inspection report into Lambeth Council, finding that despite improvements made, these have not been “seen and felt by its residents”.

An inspection was launched by the Ombudsman after it remained dis-satisfied at information provided by the landlord in response to its orders about complaint handling.

The inspection allowed the Ombudsman to hear from complaint handling staff directly and understand the pressures the landlord is facing, as well as identify inconsistencies in handling complaint effectively. This additional insight has been invaluable.

The inspection found a lack of consistency in various aspects of the landlord's complaint handling, including how it lodged complaints, with timescales being outside of compliance with the Complaint Handling Code, and some complaints being dealt with by a separate ‘members enquiries’ process.

Furthermore, several members of staff told the Ombudsman different things about the same processes of closing complaints.

While good progress has been made in some parts of the complaint handling, for example reducing overdue complaints from 2,283 in April 2022 to 154 in November 2023, the landlord is not resourced to adequately respond to the complaints it is handling through its existing process.

This means the landlord's efforts to respond adequately to complaints will only ever go so far. Unless addressed, residents will continue to have to

contact the landlord several times to be heard and face unacceptable delays to complaints.

The inspection also found a need for the landlord to refocus on the reoccurring issues that lead to complaints coming to the Ombudsman: not fulfilling its commitments made at stage two and not recognising the full impact of its failings and providing appropriate redress.

The landlord's focus on the volume of outstanding complaints also meant its approach to learning from complaints and root cause analysis is underdeveloped.

Due to the clear link between the landlord's approach to repairs and its complaint handling performance, the inspection also made recommendations around this, including making sure repairs records are more robust and consider vulnerabilities.

The landlord also carried out its own internal review following our investigation and has built on some of the findings, which was welcomed by the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman will continue to hold the landlord to account through its casework and will review the landlord's performance in its next annual report, which is produced for all landlords the Ombudsman handles several complaints.

Richard Blakeway, housing ombudsman, said: “This inspection happened because two residents had to seek the Ombudsman's intervention more than once to resolve complaints that we had previously upheld. The landlord must ensure this is not repeated.”

Due to the clear link between the landlord's approach to repairs and its complaint handling performance, the inspection also made recommendations around this, including making sure repairs records are more robust and consider vulnerabilities

“There are already positive signs. The Ombudsman has not issued the landlord with a Complaint Handling Failure Order in over six months, having issued five last year. However, the steps the landlord has taken have yet to result in a more consistently positive resident experience.”

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Wigan and Woking councils breach regulator's safety standards

The Regulator of Social Housing has concluded that both Wigan and Woking councils have breached the consumer standards as a result of failings in their on-going safety work to tenants' homes.

Through its engagement with each council, the RSH has confirmed that they failed to meet a range of health and safety requirements in a large number of their tenanted homes.

Wigan Council did not carry out annual gas safety inspections in over 1,000 homes. It had installed around 16,000 carbon monoxide detectors

in tenants' homes, but failed to install them in another 10,000. It also reported that around 275 homes did not have valid electrical inspection certificates and that over 150 high-risk fire safety actions were overdue.

Woking Borough Council had completed fire risk assessments for the majority of flatted blocks requiring them, but the RSH found there were more than 400 overdue safety actions from the assessments. In addition, the council was unable to confirm whether smoke detectors

are installed in over a quarter of its tenants' homes.

Wigan Council and Woking Borough Council have both put programmes in place to address these issues. The RSH has said it will continue to monitor each council as they carry out this work.

Kate Dodsworth, chief of regulatory engagement at RSH, said: “Wigan Council and Woking Borough Council both failed to meet our consumer standards and need to put things right promptly for tenants.”

“It is vital that all social landlords have accurate, up-to-date health and safety data and use it to ensure their tenants' homes are safe. As well as our ongoing investigations, we will be out on the front foot from next April inspecting landlords to make sure they are providing good-quality homes and services.”



LANDLORD LATEST



Salix Homes

Salix Homes is a housing association based in Salford, Greater Manchester, providing social and affordable homes and housing services

Salix Homes own and manage over 8,000 homes, which comprises a real mix of properties including tower blocks and large housing estates, as well as independent living schemes for the over 55s. We're a not-for-profit charitable organisation, which means we invest any profits straight back into our homes and communities.

Recently we've launched our new Values – "Trustworthy, Successful and Inclusive" – which are weaved into the fabric of our organisation and the services we deliver.

Last year saw us implement a new operating model, making changes to the way we work so we can give our tenants better access to support and services. We're getting back to our roots and refocusing on our core values to provide good quality homes and services, and getting to know our residents and their homes better, so we can better meet their needs.

Sustainability is a key focus for all housing sectors currently and we're improving the energy efficiency of our homes and buildings, which will benefit our tenants and the environment. Improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock helps in the fight against climate change, but also brings real benefits to low-income households who are experiencing fuel poverty.

The Government has set a target that all social housing should have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of a 'C' rating by 2030, while we have committed to becoming a carbon neutral organisation by 2038.

Of course, the housing crisis and the lack of truly affordable homes remains a huge issue, on a national scale, so building new affordable and social housing is a key priority. We even have our own affordable home ownership brand – Willo Homes, supporting our ambitions to increase housing choice and deliver more affordable housing opportunities.

While Salford has experienced something of a housing development boom in recent years, the shortage of affordable homes in this area is well documented. As a social housing provider, with our foundations firmly rooted in Salford, we want to deliver the right type of housing in the right places, and we're aiming to deliver 100 new homes every year.

TENANT WELLBEING & ENGAGEMENT

Our tenants are at the heart of everything we do at Salix Homes. We're passionate about ensuring their voices are heard and providing opportunities for them to help shape and improve our services.

When it comes to tenant engagement, we've received national recognition for the work we've been doing and were one of the first housing associations to introduce a modern approach to scrutiny and customer engagement with our Customer Committee, which was launched in 2020.

The Salix Homes Customer Committee is made up of 12 tenants, who are remunerated for their skills, time and insight, on a par with our Board members.



They're a Committee of our Board, responsible for ensuring we're delivering on the consumer standards, achieving value for money, and holding us to account.

We also have a number of resident groups who focus on key areas of the organisation and give us suggestions and feedback to help us make improvements. We've recently been carrying out a review of our Repairs Service and we held tenant focus groups with their comments and feedback feeding directly into the new proposals for the service.

At Salix Homes we're always looking for new opportunities to increase tenants engagement and support our residents' wellbeing. With the cost-of-living crisis, times are incredibly tough for many people, and we see first-hand the effects this is having on people's health and wellbeing. We're increasing the support we provide to residents, and we've doubled our Customer Support Fund, which provides emergency hardship grants.

We're also continuing to work closely with our partners to support our residents, whether it's helping people into work, providing advice on benefits and money management, or investing in grass roots projects through our community grant schemes, we aim to do all we can to help our tenants and communities.

MAJOR PROJECTS

Salix Homes works hard to ensure our properties are safe, modern, desirable and energy efficient, and we continually invest in our tenants homes and communities through an ongoing programme of improvement work.

We're building new homes in Salford, which includes social and affordable housing, and we have two new-build developments that will complete this year – Neighbourhood and Greenhaus.

Neighbourhood is a 157-home development, which is being built on brownfield land that has stood vacant for more than a decade. In total, 91 of the properties at Neighbourhood will be social housing, affordable rent or shared ownership, and we're also working closely with Salford City Council, which is purchasing 25 of these properties for social rent.

Greenhaus is a ground-breaking 96-home eco-apartment block, which is being built to Passivhaus standards, which is the gold standard for energy efficient buildings and construction. Passivhaus certified properties enjoy reduced energy consumption of around 90% compared to traditional housing stock, helping residents to reduce their fuel bills while cutting carbon footprints.

It's being delivered in partnership with the English Cities Fund (ECF) – a joint venture between nationwide placemaker Muse, Legal & General and Homes England, to bring together the public and private sector to transform urban areas.



“As a social housing provider, with our foundations firmly rooted in Salford, we want to deliver the right type of housing in the right places, and we're aiming to deliver 100 new homes every year”

Sue Sutton, Chief Executive at Salix Homes

As part of this partnership, we're also due to start work soon on a second Passivhaus development – Willlohaus, which will deliver another 100 affordable eco-apartments in Salford.

Both Greenhaus and Willlohaus represent a new era of new-build, affordable and eco-friendly homes that will be fit-for-the-future and contribute towards the battle against climate change, while helping to tackle the housing crisis.

In addition to building new homes, we're also continuing to invest in our existing housing stock and developing an enhanced Salix Homes property standard, in line with the Government's Decent Homes standard, to ensure our homes are high quality, safer, cleaner and greener.

A multi-million pound eco-transformation at two of our high rise blocks – Grey Friar and White Friar Court – is underway, which includes external wall and roof insulation to improve the thermal efficiency of the building. We're fitting new windows and ventilation; the facade and balconies will be completely rendered and transformed, and we're also installing a ground source heating system.

This significant investment project, which is being partially funded from the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), will give a new lease of life to these ageing 1960s tower blocks, transforming the properties into desirable, modern homes which are more comfortable and economical to run, while helping to meet our carbon neutral ambitions.

Building safety remains a key part of our investment programme. Salix Homes has been a trailblazer for building safety, and last year we became one of the first housing associations to achieve Building a Safer Future Charter Champion Status.



Building Safety is a continuous journey, and with the new Building Safety Regulator now established, and new duties and safety standards, we continue to invest in and improve the safety of all our buildings, which over the coming years includes sprinklers being fitted in all our high-rise blocks.

THE SOCIAL HOUSING ACT

The Social Housing Act and the new Consumer Standards are paving the way for huge changes across the social housing sector.

Ultimately, the reforms aim to deliver safer, higher quality homes and stronger landlord/tenant relationships, where residents' voices are heard and listened to. As a social housing provider, these things should always be our core purpose, and we welcome the reforms.

Changes can't happen overnight, and we've been evolving and adapting for many years now. Certainly, since the Grenfell tragedy, we've been committed to do everything in our power to ensure our buildings and our residents are safe, and feel safe, in their homes, and we've made great strides on this front, however, we'll continue to learn and grow to ensure all our buildings are safe places to live, both now and in the future.

The Awaab's Law amendment is a crucial part of the reforms and tackling hazards in our properties is an absolute critical priority for Salix Homes. We take the condition of our homes very seriously and we are committed to making sure all our tenants have a healthy and safe home, and crucially that they're listened to if they do raise a concern with us.

There is of course a lot of work still to do ahead of the regulatory changes, but we're working hard to prepare for the new regulation and improve our services for tenants. We're getting to know our residents and their homes better, we're improving and analysing our tenant and property data, and we're better equipping our workforce to deliver our services and meaningfully engage with residents.

TENANT PORTAL

Salix Homes tenants are able to manage their tenancy online using our 'MySalix Customer Portal', which includes reporting repairs and maintenance issues. They can simply book a repair on the portal, schedule a time to suit them, and track the engineer, so they'll know who's going to arrive and when.

We're currently exploring a new solution to enhance the diagnostic effectiveness of the MySalix portal, to further streamline and improve our repairs service. We're also looking at introducing a remote inspection and surveying tool, whereby we can use live-video technology to assess and survey repairs and maintenance jobs as part of the initial assessment. It's something

that we initially trialled during the Covid-19 pandemic when there were restrictions around visiting people's homes, but we're now looking to implement this technology to further speed-up and enhance the service.

We are committed to using a data driven approach to the management of our assets, and last year, we secured funding from the Social Housing Quality Fund (SHQF) to install Switchee smart thermostats in more than 2,300 properties across Salford, which act as an early warning indicator to let us know if a property is at risk of damp, mould or condensation.

The Switchee devices measure the temperature, airflow and humidity, and if they detect an issue, for example a property being consistently below 18°C, they send us a warning signal directly. We can arrange an inspection to determine if any further action is required and they can also detect any faults with the boiler, so we can take action if we need to.

KEY OBJECTIVES

Last year, we launched our latest corporate plan, "Our Sustainable Future 2023-25", setting out our key objectives for the next two years. We're aiming to get back to our roots and refocus on our core values to provide good quality homes and services. The plan focuses on three key areas, which are:

Sustainable Homes: We aim to provide high quality homes for our residents, making sure they are safe, affordable and energy efficient. We're aiming to introduce our new home quality standard, maintain 100% home safety compliance, increase satisfaction with our repairs service, ensure we have a data-driven approach to the management of our assets, and build 300 new homes by 2025.

Sustainable Business: The focus for our business is to be fit for today and prepared for tomorrow, making sure we remain efficient and well-governed, and we've recently retained our G1/V2 Regulatory Status. We're also focusing on developing a more modern employee offer and delivering an inclusive and supportive working environment.

Sustainable Communities: We are committed to providing first class services and investing in our customer service channels to ensure we are meeting and exceeding our tenants' expectations. We're reviewing and developing our approach to customer service, including tenant communications and accessibility, in a bid to increase residents' satisfaction. We're also continuing to develop our tenant engagement arrangements to ensure a strong and influential resident voice, as well as increase the social value of our work in communities.

Article supplied by Sue Sutton, chief executive of Salix Homes

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COMMENT

The Funding Issues faced by Local Authorities

Mark Edgerley of Boyer comments on the impact of the proposed Infrastructure Levy

The news in September 2023 that Birmingham City Council ('Europe's largest local authority') had been forced to issue a Section 114 notice sent out a message that resonated far beyond the West Midlands: that local authority financing was in serious trouble.

Birmingham's finances were shown to reveal a projected gap of £87m between income and expenditure for the 2024/25 financial year and the Section 114 notice (a reference to the section of Local Government Finance Act 1988) effectively declared bankruptcy. Birmingham can no longer afford to service the significant debt that it owes and it is clear that the businesses that it had created to generate financial security had not only failed to do so, but contributed to its financial downfall.

Sadly this is not uncommon. In November 2023 the County Councils Network and Society of County Treasurers conducted a survey of 41 of county and unitary authorities which found that 10% are not confident that they can balance their budget in 2023. The figure increased to 40% in 2024 and 60% in 2025, due to a combination of stubbornly high inflation, rising demand and 'broken' provider markets for children in care. This is despite councils planning to make over £2bn worth of 'challenging' savings and service cuts over the three-year period.

Furthermore, in June 2023 the Chartered Institute of Housing warned that 44% of local authorities were reducing housing programmes, while a quarter

had already halted development – with a devastating impact on the supply of social and affordable housing.

Many local authorities are also opting to dispose of failing commercial property investments, with some even selling their own workspaces. Kent County Council put the county hall in Maidstone up for sale and prior to that Wakefield Council had temporarily closed its county hall in a bid to save on rising energy costs.





“Rather than councils taking on an increasing responsibility for commercial and investment decisions directly, while having increased responsibilities for budget allocation... I propose greater collaboration with the private sector.”

Mark Edgerley, Associate Director of Boyer (part of Leaders Romans Group)

The means by which the Government hopes to address the financial issues facing local authorities is a new Infrastructure Levy. It is proposed that the Infrastructure Levy would replace both the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 payments, to be calculated on the Gross Development Value (GDV) of a scheme on completion.

The rationale for the new levy is the Government's stated objective in the context of levelling up: 'ensuring local communities can take back control'. Central to this is additional borrowing and budgeting powers: a new 'Right to Require' aims to strengthen local government's powers in the negotiation process and through the Infrastructure Levy it is intended that developers pay more (a 'fairer share') which can help fund affordable housing and local infrastructure including transport, healthcare and education. With much of the levy payable on completion rather than throughout development, the change (to be implemented through secondary legislation attached to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act) would give local authorities additional borrowing powers.

However, I question whether these extended powers will ultimately benefit local authorities, which are already almost universally under-resourced and whose circumstances have, in some cases, been worsened as a result of bad investments and poor commercial decisions. My concern is that enabling local authorities to borrow against future receipts opens up the potential for yet more Section 114s.

Furthermore, there is concern in the industry that, unlike CIL and Section 106, the Infrastructure Levy funds may be spent on costs not associated with infrastructure. Therefore there is an increased likelihood that the funding will be used for other requirements, rather than specifically for the new communities that are being created. As we have already seen, this is exacerbated as demands – from social care to meeting net zero – increase.

Under Section 106 and CIL, funding may not be used by local authorities to fund in a commercially and speculative manner. While this limits the

opportunity for smart investments, it also reduces risk and ring-fences the funds for community infrastructure and provision of housing and services associated with the new development.

The downside of the 'flexibility' brought about by the Infrastructure Levy is that more mistakes could be made in public expenditure.

Financial decision-making by locally elected politicians will invariably be compromised by the fact that politicians, understandably, are motivated by achieving electoral support within a specific political cycle. This tends to be achieved through short-term successes, rather than the longer-term approach that strategic investment requires. Changes in leadership, policy priorities and political agendas will inevitably compromise long term success.

Rather than councils taking on an increasing responsibility for commercial and investment decisions directly, while having increased responsibilities for budget allocation (compromised further by diminishing resources) I propose greater collaboration with the private sector.

There are many instances in which public and private partnerships have created successful housing and regeneration bodies, and where the private sector has provided resources – such as to planning teams to help local authorities as a means of addressing nutrient neutrality or working on the busier stages of a local plan. In these arrangements, both parties can play to their strengths and the council is freed up to make decisions that only the council can make – such as budgeting.

Like many in the development sector I have reservations about the Infrastructure Levy. Most importantly, the increased flexibility that it offers local authorities should not be regarded as an advantage. If the Infrastructure Levy were to be implemented I would suggest that the greater flexibility (or responsibility) that it bestows on the public sector should be supported by greater flexibility to pursue public/private working arrangements.



INDUSTRY VIEWFINDER

The Social Housing Act: Empowering Tenants

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Landlords have a duty to ensure tenants live in safe homes, free from hazards.

Unfit homes result in deadly risks to tenants, from the dangers of fire, to poor air quality and inadequate repairs.

Retaining Royal Assent in July 2023, The Social Housing (Regulation) Act was introduced to tackle these issues by reforming the quality and safety of homes in the sector.

Aiming to balance the relationship between residents and providers, the Act brings new powers to set time limits on actioning complaints of health and safety, as well as a number of new requirements for housing professionals – including qualification requirements for social housing managers, new standards intended to improve the health and safety of social housing, and the enforcement of customer standards compliance.

In short, the landscape of health and safety for housing professionals has fundamentally changed.

As such, *Housing Management & Maintenance* sought to learn how the housing sector is experiencing this change, as well as their experience of failure in the health and safety of housing to date.

While the majority of our respondents welcomed the upcoming changes – over three-quarters at manager or director level – almost half would not describe all their housing as ‘safe’, and only one in five respondents reported that none of their homes are damp or mouldy.

Our survey provides data that goes some way to explaining why this is, while highlighting a number of clear failings of the sector at present.

INTRODUCTION

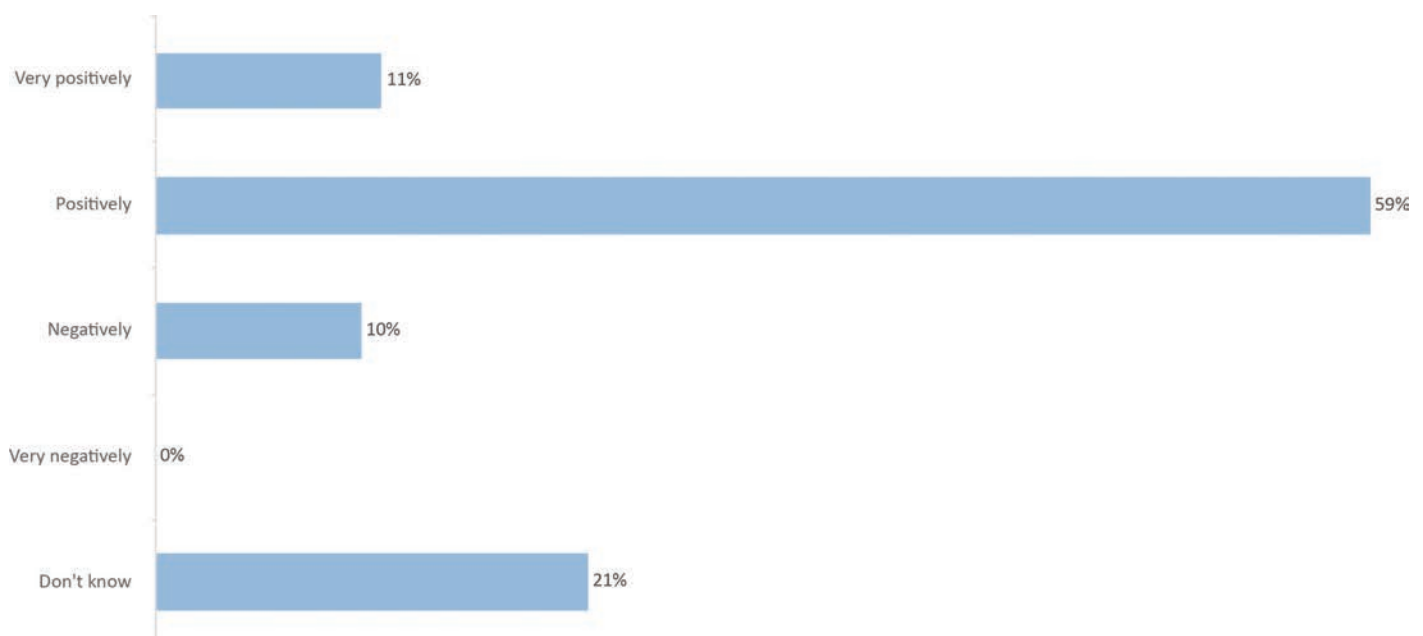
In the wake of the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, which was caused by the damp and mould in his home, the Government tabled amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to require landlords to fix reported health hazards within specified timelines.

Labelled “Awaab’s Law,” consultations which take in views from across the sector are currently underway, and the release of the results later this year should further define a time frame for landlords.

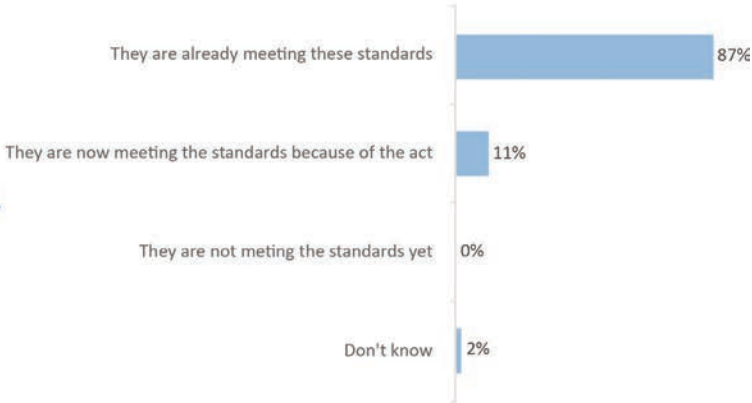
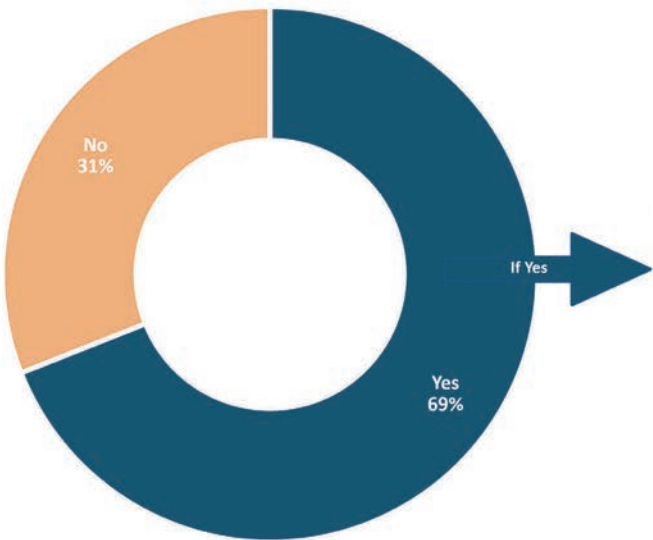
One of the ways these standards are being defined at present is through the Charter for Social Housing Residents, which was introduced to detail what social housing residents should expect from their landlords, such as feeling safe in their home, and safe in the knowledge that their complaints will be resolved quickly.

In setting the standard for social housing, residents must be both listened to and given the opportunity for redress where failings occur, having information about the services provided, be treated with respect, and have a good quality home to live in.

For landlords, this means that they must ensure residents are informed on the ways they are working, that they ‘put things right when they go wrong’, that they



“How do you think the Social Housing (Regulation) Act will affect the housing sector?”



"Does your company know how it is performing against the upcoming time limits for addressing hazards?"
"If 'yes' - How often is it meeting the new time limits?"

listen to residents, and that they have someone who is responsible for health and safety in their housing stock.

It is hoped that through these measures, complaints will be dealt with quickly, and that any failings are looked into by the Housing Ombudsman, which will inform landlords on how they should handle them.

This year will be key in beginning to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures, as many of the requirements of the Act start to take effect.

The introduction of a proactive consumer regime and a new set of consumer standards is just one example, as well as the results of the consultation on Awaab's Law, and details of the new qualifications registered provider employees will have to hold.

By July 2024, landlords of more than 1,000 homes will have to complete self-assessments to the Housing Ombudsman, those with fewer homes are expected to do so 12 weeks after their financial year-end – with an end to the two tiered system of standards for complaints procedures between social and private properties.

THE STOCK AT PRESENT

Our survey highlighted the importance of these new measures, with our respondents revealing serious failings in their stock.

When asked what portion of their housing stock they would describe as 'safe', a shocking 12% of respondents would describe none of their housing as such, with only a quarter (25%) who would describe all of their housing as 'safe'.

Following this, just 19% of our respondents would describe none of their housing as damp or mouldy, with respondents reporting that an average of almost a third (28%) of their stock is currently damp or mouldy, and one in ten saying that all their stock suffers from these issues.

Introducing some confusion around why these issues of health and safety are not being dealt with in the above responses, the length of time in which respondents' companies are reported to action such complaints was relatively quick in comparison.

71% of respondents said that initial inspections are carried out within a week after complaints have been raised, with the following remedial works actioned by 49% within a week and 41% within a month.

Some might assume that this implies a poor relationship between tenants and landlords, where residents do not feel able to reach out with such complaints. This was not entirely supported in our data, however.

When asked how respondents would describe their organisation's relationship with their tenants, the vast majority were positive. 66% said their

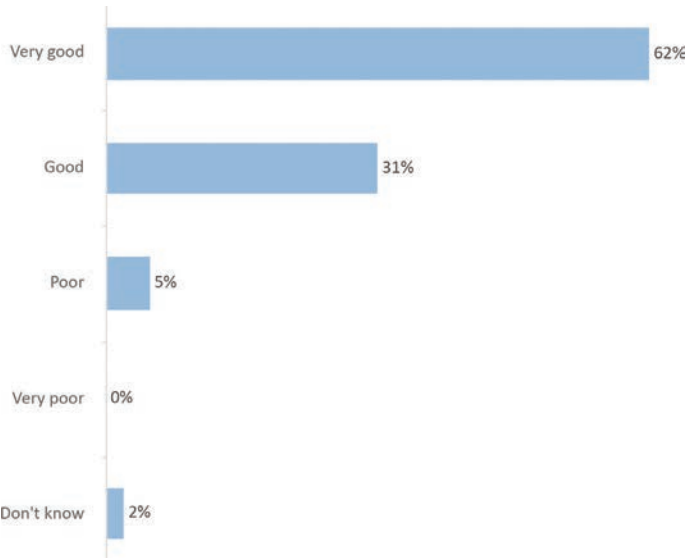
relationship with their tenants was 'very good', 31% 'good', just 5% 'poor' and 2% who didn't know.

Of the few who reported they had a poor relationship with their tenants, when asked what the barriers were to improving these relationships, respondents cited teams "unable to work together," teams "lacking coordination," and one user blaming "incompetent senior management, a lack of good methods for achieving good outcomes, and managers having no understanding of demand." They continue, arguing: "blame the people, not the system."

Still, this leaves the question, are housing professionals aware of the need for regulation to improve this, and do they think the upcoming changes are both necessary and realistic in the timeframe set?

APPRECIATION FOR CHANGE

When it came to the reception of the Act itself, the large majority of respondents believe the sector as a whole has received it well, with 58% saying it was received 'positively', and 8% 'very positively'.



"How would you describe your organisation's relationship with tenants?"



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.

For further information:

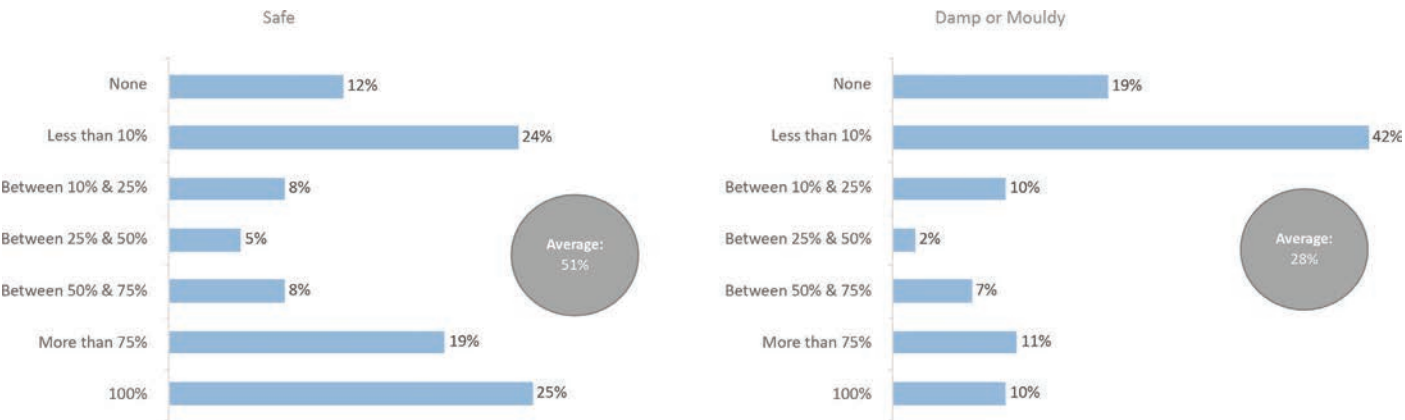
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'Levelling Up' will eradicate stigma, shift attitude and enhance resident engagement with proven SMART understandable knowledge at your fingertips



“What portion of the housing stock your organisation owns would you describe as ‘safe’ and would you say is affected by, or is classed as damp or mouldy?”

When asked why they believed this, respondents gave welcoming feedback. One said the Act has been received positively by housing professionals because “they now have a real duty of care to understand the needs of residents.”

Continuing with those who say the landscape shift itself is the reason for housing professional’s receiving the act well, one said that, “because of the act, people are aware,” and another that “things have to get better.”

Others argued that landlords should be meeting these standards regardless of legislation, saying “it’s something in our DNA, we should always be doing it.”

Similarly, another said that most professionals they know “always want to improve and work towards eliminating any negative reactions.”

Despite the positive reception overall, however, 14% reported the act has been received negatively by the sector.

One respondent put this down to the “additional work and record keeping, with less staff than five years ago.” Continuing, they also cited the legal worries of “pressure from no-win no-fee solicitors to take action on behalf of residents.”

Worries of additional burdens were a common theme. “The initial reaction has been positive, but trundling through the required repairs is the issue,” said one housing professional. Others were concerned by the “limited amount of time to react,” of the “added burden and cost,” and another stated that housing professionals “just don’t think they know what to do, and there aren’t the resources to do it effectively.”

Further concerns included the “blaming of tenants” still being “widespread,” and that some housing professionals simply “don’t know about it.”

For the wider sector as a whole, the consensus among the majority was also one of positivity, with 11% of respondents believing the Act will ‘very positively’ affect the housing sector, 59% ‘positively’, 10% ‘negatively’, 0% ‘very negatively’, and a notably large 21% who said they didn’t know.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Positively, when it came to trust in the trades dealing with such issues, the vast majority (84%) of our respondents believed that the trades they work with are aware of their impacts on health and safety.

Further, the majority of respondents believed that, in the wake of Awaab Ishak’s death, the culture around the remediation of issues of damp and mould has improved.

Of the 71% that believed the culture has improved since, respondents said that the tragedy “brought home the reality and made those in power sit up and listen,” that “tenants are taken more seriously,” “people are happier” and “taking it seriously,” and that the event highlighted “clear oversight at board and executive level.”

However, over one in ten respondents (11%) had not heard of the tragedy, and this still leaves nearly one in five (18%) who have heard of the tragedy, yet did not believe that the culture has improved since. One such respondent argued that “providers are panicking,” and that the sector “doesn’t have enough staff.”

Again worried about resources, another respondent worried that there are “no extra funds,” despite the “greater pressure on the frontline to react.” Another argued that while “rents have been capped,” providers are left with “less income to deal with disrepair.”

Of the remaining concerns, one user furthered their worries of “disrepair claims lining solicitors pockets,” and another believed the regulation following the tragedy has “changed for the worse.”

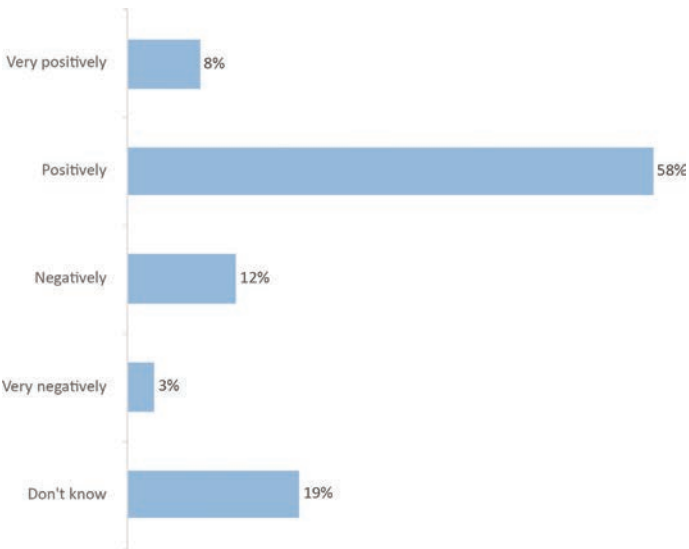
REPERCUSSIONS

When it came to the enhanced role of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) introduced in the Act, again the vast majority felt positively. 55% felt ‘positive’ about this enhanced role, and a further 13% felt ‘very positive.’

Asked to explain why this was, respondents said the sector “needs a professional approach to housing and accountability,” that this is a “change for the better,” that the change “provides more motivation,” as well as lauding the “greater powers to deal with failing organisations.”

Additionally, respondents noted the need for “all staff to be qualified,” enabling their ability “to enhance their service to tenants.”

While in the minority, there was a small number who weren’t entirely happy about the enhanced role of the RSH, with 6% thinking ‘negatively’ of the change,



“How well do you think the majority of housing professionals have reacted to the Social Housing Act?”



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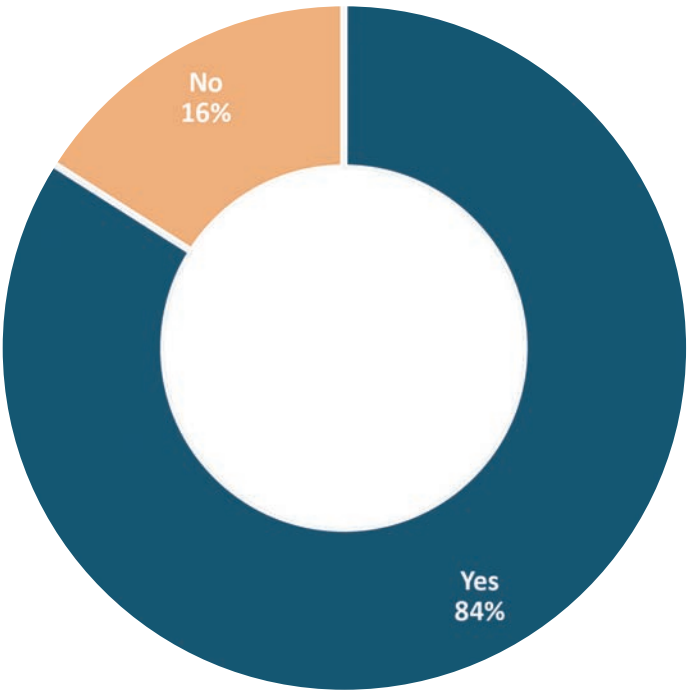
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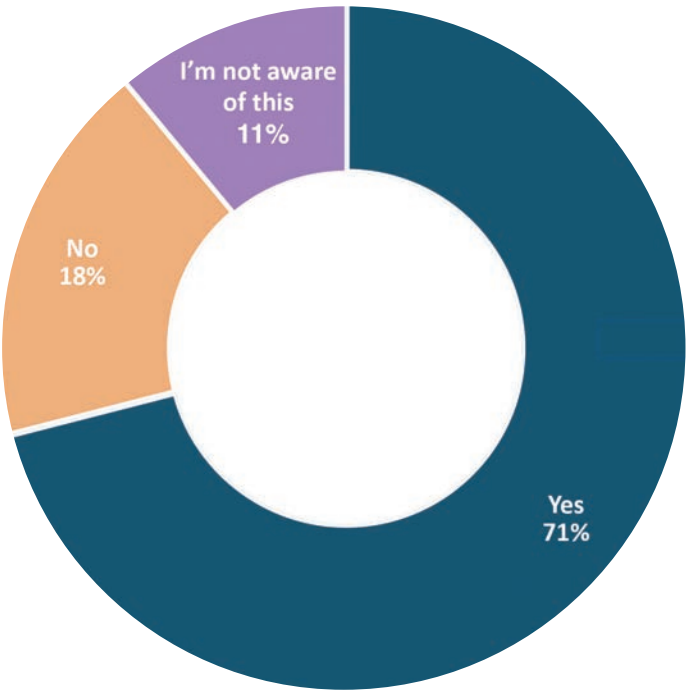
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“Are the majority of trades you work with aware of their impacts on the health and safety of residents?”



“Do you think the culture around addressing issues if damp and mould across the sector has changed following the death of Awaab Ishak?”

and 2% ‘very negatively’. Among the reasons for this, respondents said they “don’t think they will add any value, and there is a danger that it will become similar to the situation we currently have with Ofsted in Schools – it may drive good people out of the industry.”

Other respondents argued that the enforced powers “could have been provided with more guidance,” and that “the new regulations put more pressure on providers.”

BARRIERS TO CHANGE

With a relatively healthy understanding of the need for change – including an appreciation of the enhanced powers to tackle failings, and the trust in trades to consider the health and safety of residents – it is clear that there must be significant barriers to change if – as our respondents have relayed – failings continue to occur.

There are a number of barriers set before housing professionals here, from the challenges of any additional resources needed to meet the rising safety standards, to the wider pressure to continue to build more housing – with delivery declining significantly in 2023.

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

When it came to some of the requirements of the Act, a lack of adoption was shown.

Asked, if applicable, if their organisation had appointed a health and safety lead officer, only around a quarter (26%) said they had done so, leaving 74% who at the time of asking were yet to do so.

Similarly, when it came to training around the new regulations, 79% said their organisations are providing none, with a little over one in five (21%) saying their organisation is distributing such training.

With over three-quarters of our respondents being at manager level or above, a lack of understanding – or at least preparedness – of the Act was revealed by almost a third (31%) of our respondents reporting they are unaware of how their company was performing against the upcoming time limits for addressing hazards.

Thankfully, of the 69% who did know, the vast majority (87%) were already meeting the standards prior to the Act, and 11% are now meeting the standards in response to the Act (with 2% being unsure).

In terms of the number of senior managers holding the new qualifications soon to be required, almost half (41%) said none at all. This was followed by 29% at less than a quarter holding the qualifications, 7% a quarter to half, 13% half to three quarters, and just 9% who said that all their managers currently hold the new qualifications – with an overall average of just one in four managers believed to hold these qualifications at the time of asking.

ATTITUDE

One of the most prominent barriers highlighted in this survey, 81% of our respondents believed that the timescales for correcting faults in tenants’ homes are ‘unrealistic.’

Their attitude wasn’t as stark when it came to the proactivity of the sector in addressing complaints of health and safety, with a relatively even split.

For complaints of damp and mould, a little over half (53%) believed the majority of housing professionals to be reactive, and 47% proactive. Slightly improved, for complaints of safety issues, 55% said proactive, and 45% reactive.

In either case, though, this still means that around half of respondents believed most housing professionals only deal with issues of health and safety as and when they arise.

TENANT RELATIONSHIPS

While the majority of respondents (77%) believe the Social Housing Act will improve relationships between tenants and landlords, a notable one in five (23%) did not believe this would be the case.

“It’s like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut,” said one respondent. “It’s a reactive measure by the Government who don’t understand the real problem.”

They continued: “It will put greater constraints on already stretched resources and senior management are just covering their backs rather than trying to address the problem.”





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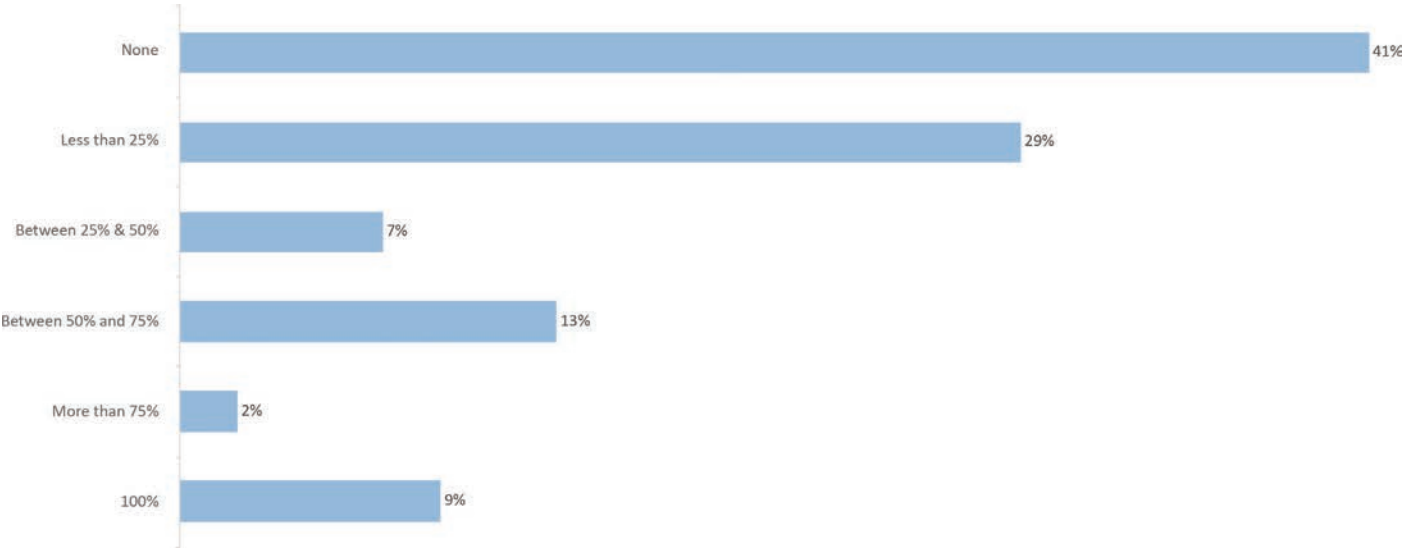
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“What percentage of managers and senior managers in your organisation already hold the new qualifications Registered social housing managers are expected to have under the act?”

Another respondent argued that it’s “a money thing” for landlords, who don’t have the funds to “find a solution for the problem, already with a lot of people in small houses without much breathing space.”

One respondent believed that the Act will make relationships worse by “creating tensions between tenants and landlords,” who have “bigger issues already, without the added pressure on landlords now.”

Other takes included that they don’t believe residents “will even notice,” and that “there’s always going to be differences between tenants and landlords.”

CONCLUSION

Intended to balance the relationship between residents and landlords, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act is introducing sweeping reforms that will affect all housing professionals.

Thankfully, the majority of our survey’s respondents thought positively of the

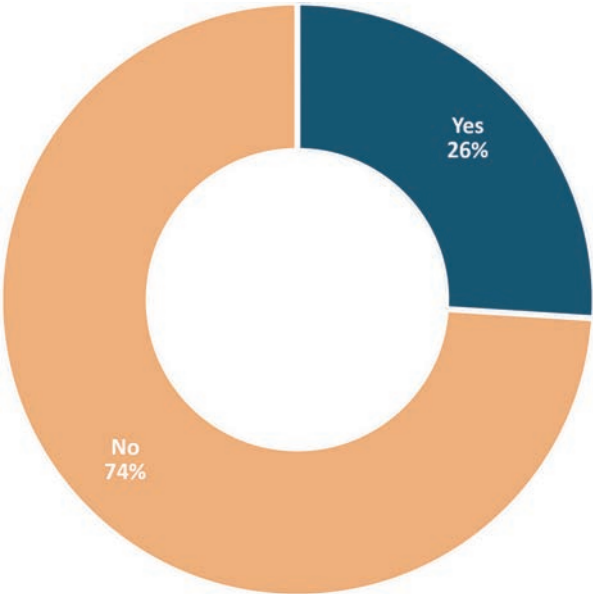
Act, trades are trusted to look after the health and safety of residents, and the majority believe the culture of addressing issues of damp and mould across the sector has improved following the death of Awaab Ishak.

Despite this positivity, however, our research also highlighted significant ongoing risks in the UK’s housing stock at present.

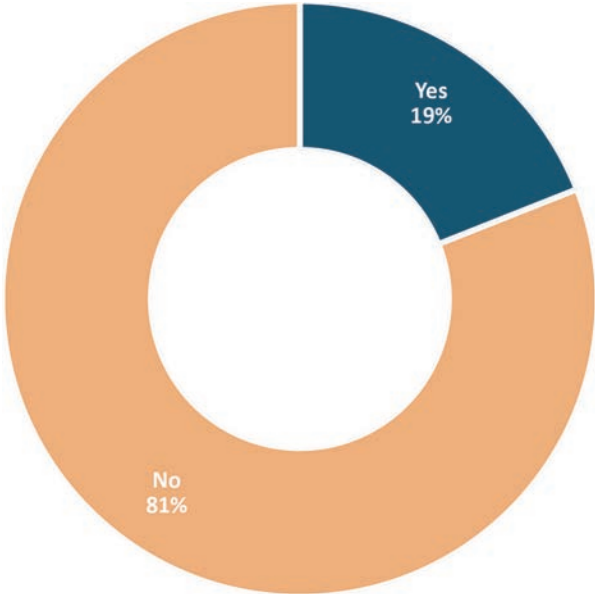
Three-quarters of respondents reported at least some of their housing to be unsafe, three-fifths of respondents reported current issues of damp and mould present in their stock, and four-fifths of respondents believed the timescales for correcting faults introduced in the Act are ‘unrealistic.’

Only time will tell if the measures included in the Act will be enough to enact a real culture change, but – according to our respondents at least – this is change for the better!

The full white paper can be downloaded free of charge at housingmmonline.co.uk



“Has the organisation appointed a new Health & Safety lead officer?”



“Are the timescales for correcting faults in tenants’ homes realistic?”



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Condensation and black mould problems



‘My walls are damp’, ‘my ceiling is damp’ – there are not many Maintenance Managers, Housing Managers and Surveyors across the Country who have not heard this complaint from tenants in the “condensation season” from October to April. But it is not damp in the truest sense – there are 14 different varieties of damp, ranging through from rising damp, penetrating damp, bursts, leaks, spillages to condensation. 80-85% of the complaints of damp are complaints of condensation resulting in black mould growing on the walls and ceilings, only 15-20% are true damp problems. A typical family can produce up to 25 pints of moisture a day, when it contacts any cold surfaces condensation will form.

Black mould problems are a favourite topic for the National and Local Press and last year attracted the attention of ITV news investigators and National Newspaper coverage, not good publicity for Local Authorities and Housing Associations.

Mould is not only ugly, it causes untold misery to tenants with black growths covering their

walls and ceilings, clothes and furnishings being contaminated and their health at serious risk from the air-borne spores, as well as unpleasant musty smells pervading throughout the property.

Every dwelling, irrespective of its construction contains within its fabric mould spores which are dormant and completely harmless. Mould needs very little nutrient and will grow irrespective of the decorative finish, starting in corners, wall junctions and behind wardrobes, areas of least air movement, where moisture is condensing.

Mould spores cause a wide range of upper respiratory complaints and allergic reactions, including asthma, bronchitis, nausea, malaise, food poisoning.

Under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) mould is a Category 1 hazard and the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 states, it is the responsibility of the landlord to resolve the problems. The Housing Ombudsman has now stated the problems of mould and condensation cannot be attributed to “life style issues”.

It is extremely unfortunate that it has taken the recent tragic death of a child due to mould, according to the coroner, for the problems of mould to be acknowledged and addressed with the seriousness they deserve.

MGC’s mould treatments have been successfully used for over 56 years by Local Authorities, Housing Associations, private land-lords and homeowners. All MGC mould treatments, fungicidal additives and fungicidal paints are approved under COPR 1986 (As amended) by the Health and Safety Executive and listed in M3NHF Schedule of Rates for mould treatment.

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Futurebuild unites top innovators & collaborators

Futurebuild, the built environment's most influential event for innovation and collaboration returns 5-7 March 2024 at London's ExCeL. Promising to be the most transformative yet, it will carry on its mission of taking a stand for a better built environment with 'take a stand for change' as this year's key theme.

PUSHING BOUNDARIES

The Futurebuild conference, curated by The Edge and sponsored by Soprema and One Click LCA, is a highly respected gathering of influential innovators and collaborators tackling the industry's problems head on. The three daily themes are: Pathways to change, Levers for change and Sharing visions for change. Featuring a line-up of the who's who of the built and natural environment; guests for 2024 include: Smith Mordak, chief executive of UKGBC; Muyiwa Oki, president of RIBA and Sara Edmonds, co-director of National Retrofit Hub to name just a few.

The conference will cover a multitude of topics, reaching every corner of the industry. Key seminars include: Net zero housing: the quality-affordability conundrum, chaired by Catherine Adams, director of Building Systems and Net Zero at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; Retrofitting our existing homes at scale chaired by Simon McWhirter, deputy chief executive at UK Green Building Council and Board Member, National Retrofit Hub, and How to design built assets that are future-fit: healthy, regenerative and socially equitable, chaired by Chaline Church of 540 World.

MORE THAN JUST A CONFERENCE

As well as the two conferences, Futurebuild is the industry's largest exhibition, featuring over 400 innovative brands and six stages that will host 500+ industry-leading speakers across sections FutureX Innovation, Buildings, Energy, Materials, Sustainable Infrastructure and Digital.

Each section contains its own seminar stage, addressing the biggest challenges facing the built environment and spotlighting the latest trends. The Materials section, sponsored by Aggregate Industries, contains the latest solutions in material efficiency, whilst the Buildings seminar programme, sponsored by Steico, covers all aspects of building including new build, refurb and retrofit.

The FutureX stage, sponsored by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Innovate UK and Carbon Trust, allows visitors to discover the newest developments and innovations in the built environment. The Digital stage, sponsored by Cemex, will examine the process, outcomes and benefits that digital construction provides the industry, and visitors will have the chance to meet those behind the cutting-edge technologies. The Sustainable Infrastructure stage, sponsored by ACO, has been created in response to our visitor needs, and will include all aspects of infrastructure including green, blue, grey and social infrastructure solutions. Lastly, the Energy section, sponsored by Kensa Group, will provide the latest technologies and solutions for decarbonisation of heat and the delivery of a smart and flexible energy system.

The knowledge programme has been made possible with the help and support of our event sponsors and 80 partners.



EMBRACING INNOVATION

As the industry platform for innovation, Futurebuild has continued to partner with game-changing brands. Follow our Innovation Trail to meet our Innovation Partners: Advantage Austria, NexGen, MKc Training Services Ltd, Bauder, the Concrete Centre, Tepeo, Sugastune UK Ltd, SDS Ltd, Quantum, Mixergy Ltd, LKAB Minerals Ltd, Glen Dimplex Heating and Ventilation, Curv360 Ltd, Aico, 540 World and Kensa.

The Future X Innovation section, sponsored by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, The Carbon Trust and Innovate UK is an exciting zone that showcases start-ups and SMEs innovative ideas and technologies that will make net zero possible.

The Big Innovation Pitch also returns for 2024, and will highlight the newest and brightest solutions to built environment challenges in an exciting presentation battle, taking place in front of a live audience.

ACCELERATING HIGH-QUALITY RETROFIT

For the first time, Futurebuild has partnered with The National Retrofit Academy to launch The National Retrofit Conference, which will take place alongside Futurebuild 2024. Sponsored by Sustainable Building Services UK Ltd, the National Retrofit Conference will bring together visionaries and industry leaders to focus on a crucial mission – decarbonising our existing housing stock.

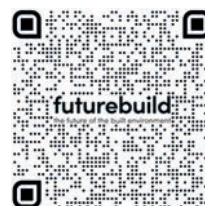
The three-day conference will focus on Skills, Innovation and Policy and provide the practical solutions that attendees can take away to drive their retrofit programmes forward, with a line-up of speakers that includes thought leaders from inside and outside of the sector.

Futurebuild 2024 invites industry leaders, visionaries, and enthusiasts alike to join us, and share ideas, embrace innovation and help create the blueprint for a better tomorrow.

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Arma metal pipe boxing – a tough solution from Encasement

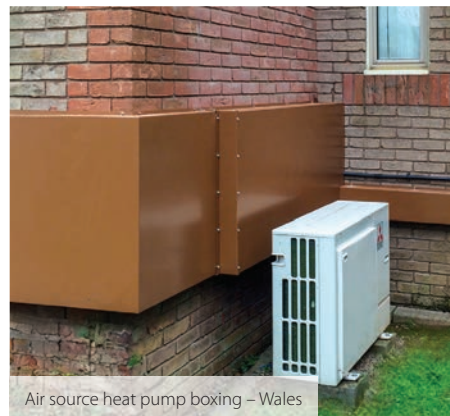
For social landlords, and their contractors, concealing exposed pipework presents a range of challenges as part of the ongoing property management and refurbishment procedures. The chosen boxing solutions not only need to be durable, easy to install and unobtrusive, but they must also be cost effective.

While most interior pipe casing and boxing projects can be resolved by using boxing manufactured from pre-formed plywood, with a pre-finished, wipe clean surface, where external pipework and services need to be concealed, standard plywood boxing is unsuitable and is not recommended for exterior applications, due to its lack of weather resistance.

In situations where pipework needs to be concealed from the elements, protected from damage, or both, Encasement's Arma metal pipe boxing provides a tough and versatile solution that also improves aesthetics and adds a uniform finish to the project.

PROTECTING PIPEWORK

With de-carbonisation and the move toward net zero goals prompting the growing use of low carbon district heating schemes, as well as air-source heat pump installations, and ground source loop arrays, the need for versatile and durable pipe protection is essential.



Air source heat pump boxing – Wales

Retrofit heat networks typically require large quantities of lagged pipework to be secured to the exterior walls of properties, often rising several storeys on a residential block before the distribution pipework branches off to serve each flat.

For air source or ground source heat pump installations, the length of pipework required is usually considerably less than a large district heat network, but metal pipe boxing is used for precisely the same reasons - to conceal and protect pipework, which in most cases are located close to the ground and in easy reach.



Arma concealing distributed heating pipework – Clapham

Clearly, the location and routing of the pipework is dependent on the specifics of each project, so the pipe boxing also needs to be adaptable to meet these different project layouts. Other aspects, such as ease of installation and the choice of finish are also considerations when specifying metal pipe boxing.

BESPOKE MANUFACTURE

As Arma metal boxing is bespoke manufactured from strong, lightweight and corrosion resistant aluminium, to the dimensions and requirement of individual projects, this not only helps simplify the installation, but helps provide an integrated finish while also protecting the pipework from damage or tampering.

Access for routine inspection and maintenance can also be incorporated into the pipe boxing with the use of hinged metal doors or removable panels. In most cases the doors are specified with key locks for authorised access only, particularly where they are within easy reach, while removable access panels are usually secured with tamper proof security fixings.

Two fixing options are available for the 'U' shaped channel profiles with either an external flange or concealed angle bracket, both of which can be readily secured to external walls with suitable fixings.

PERFECT FINISH

PPC finishes in any BS or RAL paint colour can be specified to contrast or blend in with wall colours and surroundings, while a range of dedicated accessories is also available, which include internal

and external corners, as well as joint covers and end caps.

Arma is also used on a growing range of social housing projects where fire sprinklers are installed in high rise residential blocks, to conceal interior runs of pipework where there are no sprinkler heads, such as in communal areas. As Arma is non-combustible, its use aids compliance with fire safety requirements.

Encasement also offers a supply and install service on the Arma product range to provide specifiers and main contractors with a professional, expert solution that helps simplify the installation process.

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EnviroVent extends its commitment

EnviroVent, is enhancing its commitment to the social housing sector by appointing James Kane as head of sales – social housing. James has been promoted to the role after being EnviroVent's Regional Sales Manager for London and the South East for the past two years. James will manage a team of 22 people including EnviroVent's social housing surveyors and ventilation specialists. James is looking forward to working closely with EnviroVent's New Build team to further support their work in Social Housing new build projects across the country and to meet growing customer demand in this area.

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Bring maximum performance to housing projects

Delivering excellent value and enjoying home-like wood and stone designs, sheet vinyl makes an excellent flooring choice in affordable and social housing. With the Xtreme collection from **Beauflor**, these types of projects can benefit from some of the hardest wearing floors available. Xtreme uses a high-performance 2 mm thick construction that features a 0.70 mm wear layer to withstand heavy industrial use (class 43). This makes it a great choice in busy communal areas, where the need to stand up to intense wear and keep looking good is essential. What's more, the floor features Beauflor's Premium Coating for easy maintenance – it can be cleaned with just a mild detergent – and is slip-resistant to 42+ TRRL. Beauflor has also equipped Xtreme with its Bacteria Shield+ anti-bacterial treatment to inhibit the growth of mould and bacteria and improve hygiene. The impressive performance on offer can be enjoyed in a wide range of natural looks for a welcoming and home-like floor. Classic oak planks, limed wood, chevron planks, textile and concrete effects make sure there's a design suitable for any interior style. In total, Xtreme offers 48 options including a range of coloured floors. A matt Natural Look textured surface gives a more realistic appearance to wood and concrete effects. Xtreme is manufactured in Belgium from high quality materials for an enduring flooring option.

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Beauflor for better floors in social housing



Beauflor® manufactures affordable, durable and easy to maintain sheet vinyl floors that can help landlords, associations and other providers of social housing to ensure tenants benefit from the wellbeing advantages of floor coverings.

There is a growing amount of research that highlights the benefits on tenant wellbeing through the provision of floor coverings within social housing, and in the case of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), this has forced regulatory change. WHQS now demands that social housing should have suitable floor coverings at change of tenancy.

Whether this will become the case in England and Scotland where regulations place no such standards on flooring remains to be seen. But social housing landlords looking to provide their tenants with a safe home that supports their wellbeing could do well to follow the model for all projects, regardless of location.

Currently, it's estimated that around 80% of social homes are rented to tenants without floor coverings. Landlords are often concerned with the health and safety issues that may arise from leaving carpets in place (carpets account for 50% of all social housing floors). However with many tenants not having the capability to fund new floors, they often end up struggling with debt through loans or living on bare floors for months or years throughout their tenancy.

With sheet vinyl flooring there is an opportunity to provide tenants with floor coverings without having to replace them at tenancy voids, saving cost while also providing tenants with a standard of home that increases well-being and minimises ill health. In addition, providing flooring can reduce the chance of loneliness and isolation as tenants will feel proud to have people to visit their home.

Made in Belgium, Beauflor sheet vinyl flooring offers an affordable and attractive finish across a wide range of popular natural looks with benefits that include easy installation, durability

and low maintenance. In many domestic rooms Beauflor sheet vinyl floor can be laid without glue, cutting down on material costs and time. The benefits of fast installation are made even more apparent in floors that feature a textile backing, such as the Blacktex collection. These can be installed loose lay in areas up to 35 m² over a range of substrates, including tile and timber floors, making them a good choice for refurbishment.

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"This service has been a life-saver for us. We're now able to move into a warm and cosy home, just in time for winter. The staff were polite and did an amazing job, the work has been impeccable and I thank them very much for their service."

Sofia M. - Resident of Raven Housing Trust



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Roadmap to decarbonised heating: Are we on track?

Global urgency demands net-zero emissions by 2050 to combat climate change. Addressing the building sector, primarily heated by natural gas, is crucial, as it constitutes nearly one-third of UK carbon emissions. Chris Caton from Ideal Heating explains

Scientific consensus is that the world must reach net zero by 2050 to prevent the worst effects of climate change. A key step towards net zero in the UK is reducing emissions by 68% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. So far, the UK has made significant cuts to its greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) emissions, which have fallen by 48% since 1990.

WHY DECARBONISING HEATING MATTERS

In the UK, the building sector is the second largest emitter of GHGs, with most of these emissions resulting from heating and hot water demand in homes being fulfilled by natural gas. In total, the heating of homes and workspaces makes up almost a third of UK carbon emissions.

Decarbonising heating in our buildings – primarily through the replacement of natural gas boilers with heat pumps – is therefore a key government goal. But with any change comes uncertainty and let's not underplay the extent of this change: almost 80% of homes in the UK are currently heated by natural gas. Every time the government makes an announcement about heat pumps, uncertainty and confusion abound.

The latest major government announcement – at the time of writing – was in September 2023 when Prime Minister Rishi Sunak advised of delays to some

climate targets – including the phase out of off-grid gas boilers, in a bid to save people money during the cost of living crisis. For many, this has been viewed as a watering-down of the UK's net zero policies.

But what impact will this, and more recent developments, actually have on the decarbonisation of heating in buildings?

WHAT'S ACTUALLY CHANGED?

The headline news is that a 20% exemption to the phase-out of all fossil fuel boilers has been provided, and the phasing out of fossil fuel heating installations for off the gas grid properties in England – set in the government's Heat and Buildings Strategy for 2026 – has been pushed back to 2035. Furthermore, it will include an exemption for off-gas grid properties where there is no suitable low carbon heating solution. This essentially means an 80% phase-out by 2035, rather than 100%.

All other Government policies on heating remain the same as before, with the target of deploying 600,000 heat pumps per year by 2028 unchanged. The Future Homes Standard and the Future Building Standard will still be introduced in 2025 in England to ensure new buildings are built to be as efficient as possible. The Clean Heat Market Mechanism, which applies to the whole of the UK

In the UK, the building sector is the second largest emitter of GHGs, with most of these emissions resulting from heating and hot water demand in homes being fulfilled by natural gas

and is designed to incentivise the heating industry to invest in developing the heat pump market, has now been confirmed from January 2024 for all boilers under 70 kW. The Heat Pump Investment Accelerator Competition and the Heat Training Grant will continue unchanged, and the Heat Network Market Framework and Heat Network Zoning will also continue as planned.

Under the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, available in England and Wales, the grant level has doubled for heat pumps to £7,500. Biomass boilers will continue to receive grants of £5,000. Phase 4 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme will see £1.17bn worth of grants for 2025/2026 – 2027/2028, to enable public sector organisations to switch to clean energy, such as heat pumps as well as installing energy efficiency measures like insulation.

WHAT NEXT?

There can be no doubt that heat pumps will be the core means of decarbonising heating in buildings. However, whether the target of deploying 600,000 heat pumps per year by 2028 can be achieved remains hotly debated. In response to the government's announcement in September 2023, the Climate Change Committee said: "These announcements significantly increase the risks to the Government achieving its own targets on heat pump installations." It cites the importance of low-carbon heating mechanisms, including heat pumps, to increase the rate of decarbonisation in buildings. However, the UK had the lowest number of heat pumps installed per capita in 2022 compared to neighbouring countries.



There are a number of factors at play here, including the cost of heat pumps (plus comparatively high running costs), lack of public trust in them, and the scarcity of trained installers. When it comes to the latter, training really is essential as while there are some similarities, fitting a heat pump is quite different from a gas boiler. As of July 2022, the number of qualified heat pump engineers was estimated to be around 3,000, but according to Nesta's (a UK innovation foundation that provides programmes, investment, policy and research to promote innovation across a broad range of sectors) modelling the UK will need at least 27,000 qualified engineers by 2028 to meet the Government's installation targets. This means the training of 5,000-7,000 installers per year is needed between 2025 and 2035.

It's clear that there are challenges here, but also plenty of opportunities. There isn't a one-stop, overnight solution to get to net zero and decarbonise UK heating; this is going to be a stepped process, but it is one we must make.

Chris Caton is product director – commercial at Ideal Heating



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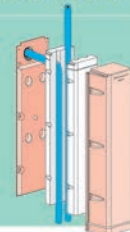
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Winning strategies for biodiversity

Managing open spaces is much more than cutting grass and collecting litter and with the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) legislation in January, it has become even more complex. In this article, David King of Meadfleet, explores the challenges BNG brings and the solutions available

Where local authorities and housing associations are involved in the establishment of private or mixed tenure residential development, they must ensure appropriate solutions are secured for the ongoing management of open spaces on these schemes.

THE COMPLEXITIES

In January 2024 it became mandatory under The Environment Act 2021, that all planning applications of nine units or more must produce at least a 10% uplift in biodiversity. With the aim of creating a strategic nature recovery plan to leave the natural environment in a better condition. As there will always be a loss of biodiversity from construction, housebuilders have three options: providing onsite net gain within the development; offsite solutions; or the purchase of statutory credits from Natural England. It is likely that a combination of these solutions will be required to achieve the necessary gains.

Developers cannot pick whichever option suits them for each new scheme. The legislation stipulates a hierarchy with onsite solutions the primary option, then offsite, and finally the purchase of statutory credits is a last resort. It will need to be demonstrated that a solution is unachievable before moving to the next option.

With onsite net gain the primary solution, most developments will incorporate more extensive and complex habitats within their green infrastructure, requiring suitable long-term management. This has its own challenges depending on the scale of open space available and the impact this has on the developable land.

The marketplace for the purchase of offsite units generated by third party landowners is currently unclear with no formal central database, and the Natural England Biodiversity Net Gain Register being used purely for registering a development's allocated offsite units.

It is unlikely there will be local offsite units available for all requirements from the outset. Buying and selling units across local planning authority (LPA) boundaries will be inevitable which will increase costs as penalties are incurred when units are outside the LPA. Alternatively, there is an option for housebuilders to buy offsite land to generate the required credits and appoint a suitable management organisation to deliver the biodiversity improvements over the 30-year period.

The statutory biodiversity credit scheme aims to ensure that the pace of development in England is not impacted by the new legislation, offering a costly last resort solution. With prices starting at £42,000 plus VAT per credit, is this a viable solution even in the short term?

The additional requirements are certainly a challenge and will impact the viability and speed of housing developments.

LIFETIME MANAGEMENT MODEL

There will no doubt be concerns in the marketplace regarding the long-term responsibility of a 30-year covenant and selecting the right management model to entrust with the new requirements.

There is a need for a lifetime management solution that can take on the liability and complexity of the requirements involved. There are already many





aspects of open space management that require specialist expertise including play areas, woodlands, and SuDS. With members of the public accessing open spaces, risks must be carefully managed. With the addition of BNG and the crucial role the legislation will play in providing spaces for nature, it is vital that these areas are managed by experienced open space experts.

A lifetime management model with in-house expertise to manage all aspects of open space features objectively and responsibly over the long-term will ensure a developer's legacy is protected and risks minimised. Housing providers should look for long-standing organisations with a proven reputation for excellence and expertise and the in-house specialist knowledge required. This approach also helps reduce customer costs and provides clear lines of accountability.

Open space management companies must be experts in managing open spaces for biodiversity and engaging customers in the benefits of



managing areas for wildlife. In-house ecologists that will take on the adaptive management, monitoring, and surveying requirements of BNG and can provide support to housing providers throughout the process.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The benefit that biodiversity net gain will have to the current climate and biodiversity crisis is exponential and aligning the industry with the Government's biodiversity net gain targets will more firmly place sustainability at the centre of future development. Through a collaborative solution-based approach and the positive promotion of BNG, biodiverse neighbourhoods will be celebrated by residents and will offer a solution for nature recovery.

David King is managing director of Meadfleet

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.



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Fernox heat pump filter wins award

Fernox has been awarded the 'Domestic Heating Product of the Year – Components' for its Sigma TF1 HP Filter at the H&V News Awards 2023. The H&V News Awards brings together the entire HVAC supply chain, including manufacturers, contractors, consultants and installers. This year's event, held at London's Hilton Metropole Hotel, saw the Fernox TF1 Sigma HP Filter win the Domestic Heating Product of the Year award, which is presented for the product that demonstrates genuine innovation or a novel application of existing technology to new markets.



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IoT: Creating healthier, safer sustainable homes

Internet of Things (IoT) and connected home technologies are already transforming how we view the indoor environment. Without the data these devices provide, we are effectively blind to the health of our homes, as Aico explains

The use of Internet of Things (IoT) technology is rising, with housing providers across the UK rapidly deploying connected devices within their properties to improve asset management and promote resident health and safety.

With tightening legislation around requirements for landlords regarding the health and safety of their housing stock, and growing public concern surrounding disrepair, IoT is one of the few remaining options for landlords, in order to combat poor ventilation, high carbon dioxide levels, low energy efficiency, fuel poverty and damp and mould.

With over 5 million socially rented homes in the UK, all varying in age and condition, it would be impossible for landlords to take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the management and maintenance of their housing portfolio.

However, it is necessary for many housing providers to take this route due to the lack of information on their properties. With this comes a limited understanding of how well individual homes are performing. Without specific data on each property in a portfolio, how can they detect which homes could benefit from retrofit or maintenance and if the measures put in place work as intended?

DATA AND INSIGHT SOLUTIONS

Connected technologies help to combat this challenge. When installed across a housing portfolio, this smart technology enables real-time insights into which homes are performing well and which could benefit from upgrades.

By replacing assumption and guesswork with data and insights, it is possible for organisations to achieve their overarching goal of ensuring safe, healthy and sustainable homes for every resident.

Connected technologies enable landlords to gather data remotely from connected fire and carbon monoxide alarms and environmental sensors, with all the information available via an online portal, segmented into high, medium and low risk.

Damp and mould are becoming an ever-increasing issue within social housing properties, with landlords being responsible for providing well-maintained homes for their residents. No case of damp or mould should ever be ignored. If left untreated, it not only compromises the property's structural integrity, but also poses a significant health risk to residents, prompting respiratory infections, allergies and asthma. Mould can also negatively affect those with existing conditions, such as respiratory illnesses and skin conditions; as well as individuals who are immunocompromised.

By using a connected home solution it is possible for housing associations to pinpoint properties which are at risk of developing damp and mould due to poor air quality.

There is a range of structural and environmental factors that can contribute to these conditions. Using the data collected from environmental sensors, the connected home solution can provide a unique 'structural vs environmental' insight to identify the root cause of the problem.

The structural data looks at typical surface humidity, heat dissipation and natural ventilation deficit to identify if factors, such as the thermal efficiency of a room, are impacting the risk of damp and mould. Environmental factors include humidity surges, heating instability and ventilation idleness to



determine if damp and mould are forming due to the conditions to which a property is being subjected.

This in-depth analysis enables landlords to accurately target properties in disrepair, and proactively allocate the correct resources to homes that require maintenance.

PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

Using connected devices gives housing providers complete transparency in relation to the quality of their housing portfolio. With in-depth data from individual houses and specific rooms, it becomes simple to identify any underlying problems that could contribute to disrepair. This gives landlords the knowledge to tackle issues in a preventative manner, as opposed to reactive responses when the scale of the problem has developed into something more severe.

With the number of disrepair claims increasing within the social housing sector, combined with ageing housing stock and strict regulations, such as the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, landlords are under immense pressure to ensure the provision of safe and healthy homes for residents.

IoT enables landlords to identify disrepair before it becomes a problem. Through deploying a suite of sensors and analysing the data received via machine learning, IoT technology provides a holistic view of property conditions remotely, enabling a proactive approach to property maintenance. The actionable insights enable landlords to be proactive rather than reactive. From identifying an environmental risk – for example, poor indoor air quality – to knowing if there are maintenance issues like an alarm head removal from the baseplate. By leveraging data and insights, landlords can target at-risk properties and effectively allocate resources to increase both time and cost savings.

Article supplied by Aico

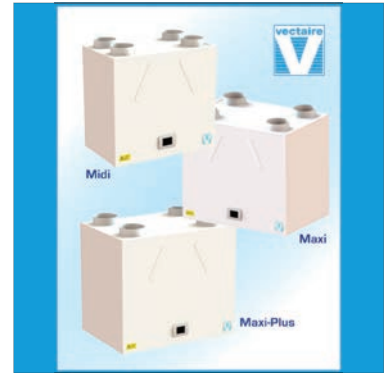
Ventilation for the built environment – combatting mould

It's well known that poor indoor air quality contributes to respiratory and allergy problems and inadequate ventilation leads to condensation and consequent mould growth. Vectaire's MVHRs help with these problems.

Incorporating two fans they deliver low level continuous ventilation – extracting stale, damp air from wet rooms, and intaking fresh air. The two, separated airflows pass through a heat exchanger, recovering heat from outgoing air and filtering it before transferring it to the incoming, fresh air supply. It's then ducted to the living areas for a comfortable environment.

The Midis, upright WHHRs, for loft or cupboard installation, are for residential properties up to 170 m². They recover up to 94% of the heat from extracted air with variable choice of trickle, boost and purge speeds, summer bypass and integral frost-stat. They are available with or without LCD and humidistat. The "AT" versions (sound tested by BRE) operate almost silently (sound levels down to <5 dBA). The two other models in this range are the Maxi for areas up to 250 m² and the Maxi Plus for areas up to 400 m².

01494 522333 www.vectaire.co.uk



Panasonic A/C enhances resident comfort

The Belvedere House Care Home recently completed a significant modernisation project, incorporating state-of-the-art climate control systems to ensure optimal resident comfort and improve the indoor air quality. With a focus on residents' health and wellbeing, mechanical services and A/C installation company, Technicool Air Conditioning Ltd, selected three Panasonic VRF 2-pipe units, 58 ducted units for bedrooms, and an additional twin system for the communal areas. The seamless operation of the entire system is managed through a centralised control panel, enhancing both efficiency and convenience.



0808 2082115 www.aircon.panasonic.eu/GB_en

A 'walk-in' the park

When creating a wet room, tanking may seem like a less inspiring functional necessity but underestimate its importance at your peril. Leaks from a poorly tanked wet room or walk-in shower can result in unpleasant odours and ugly marks. In more severe cases, the resultant damp and flooding can present serious health risks and even undermine the structural integrity of a property. To help the trade tank wet rooms with exceptional speed and efficiency as well as with maximum peace of mind, Bond It has the solution – its high performance tanking slurry. Once applied, Bond It tanking slurry is fully effective after just two coats.



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Future-proof your residential facade

Mark Snowden from Rockpanel outlines the benefits of ventilated facades, why their specification can help ensure the wellbeing of occupants and how substandard external cladding systems can lead to hidden costs and uninsurability

2017 marked a defining moment in the public's consciousness regarding the fire safety of materials and systems used in the external cladding of new and renovated high-rise structures. It also brought into stark focus issues concerning compliance with and interpretation of fire and building regulations and how they impact on the materials originally specified for a project compared to what was, in reality, used.

In England, changes to fire regulations regarding residential buildings over 18 metres made it mandatory that all components in the external wall meet or exceed EN13501 Class A2-s1,d0, with guidance that those of 11 metres also adhere to the same specification.

Increasingly, the proposed use of some cladding systems, be they substandard in terms of fire-safety or inferior surface quality and shorter product life, can lead to difficulties in securing funding, issues with building insurance, future maintenance and replacement costs, impacting both residents and property owners.

WHAT IS A VENTILATED FACADE?

A ventilated facade is a construction with an air gap between the insulation and the cladding. It protects a building against the elements while at the same time helping maintain a healthy indoor climate. This type of external cladding offers many advantages. A ventilated facade is lighter and quicker to install than other options, leading to savings in construction costs and minimise disruption to residents. Individual panels can also be dismantled for maintenance and the whole facade can easily be replaced, reducing inconvenience to the building's inhabitants.

Once in place, a ventilated facade reduces the direct solar impact on the building, resulting in a healthier indoor climate. It also offers thermal insulation, which contributes to energy efficiency and acts to reduce the impact of exterior noise on those within. Ventilated cladding also affords architects and specifiers opportunities to use colour and other surface designs to create facades not achievable with other alternatives. Realistic interpretations of wood, steel and stone are available along with RAL-matched colour and an ingenious design which changes colour depending on how light hits its surface.

THE EUROCLASS SYSTEM

Euroclass represents the most comprehensive and up-to-date standards system regarding reaction to fire. It compares ignitability, flame spread, heat release, smoke production and propensity for producing flaming droplets/particles etc. Within this system each classification means that, for a product tested within a certain end-use situation, specific parameters are achieved. For example, with relevance to an A2 rating, all of the tests for previous classification levels are completed, plus a test for the calorific content.

CONSIDERING THE SYSTEM AS A WHOLE

In order to be confident that a facade adheres to the highest fire safety performance, it is vital to view the characteristics of its construction as a whole – from panels and sub-frame, through to the insulation used and the design of cavity compartmentation, fire barriers, fixings and all other components.



ARRIVING AT AN AGREED SOLUTION

Ideally, with any recladding project, a feasibility programme is instigated to explore design options and to consult with stakeholders, residents and other interested parties to arrive at a jointly agreed solution. A resident committee member commented about one of the projects depicted here: "The consultation process was very democratic. Regular meetings were held to discuss the plans and progress with due diligence given to every aspect of the materials and installation. We are very pleased with the results and know surrounding residents are envious, with some assuming the three blocks are complete new builds."

In relation to this project, residents were shown examples of the proposed materials, with tenants and landlords able to visit an on-site space where they could view samples, gather information and build confidence in the renovation scheme. Tenant and council meetings were also held where the fire resistant properties of the proposed materials were demonstrated.

Two projects where sustainable and non-combustible ventilated facades have been used to great effect in the complete recladding of residential blocks, a development of three in London and a similar grouping in Manchester, delivering future-proof transformation for the hundreds of homes within.

Planning approval for The Manchester project was made considerably easier due to the wide range of surface designs available, enabling close matching of the cladding to be replaced.

For the London properties, the panels have a unique appearance which reflects in such a way that, depending on the angle light hits its surface and the point of view, a changing spectrum of colour tones are visible. Due to an innovative and unique crystal effect layer, it transforms any building into an eye-catching structure that is constantly transforming, impactful and inspiring.

Mark Snowden is business manager for the UK and Ireland at Rockpanel

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