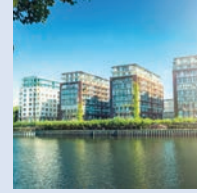


# HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

APR/MAY 2024



**Industry News**  
VIVID maintains  
top regulatory  
ratings



**Landlord Latest**  
Karbon Homes

**Comment**  
Glide

**Show Preview**  
Housing 2024

## Special subsidence feature

How Harrow Council saved up to £500k in alternative accommodation costs using a specialist subsidence repair technique. Read the report on pages 22 & 23.

**geobear**



**Do you want a reliable leak detection company that will save you time, money and stress? At LDS, our engineers pinpoint leaks within 1 metre without causing any damage to the property.**

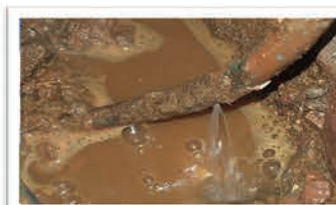
From damp, flat to flat leakages, shower leaks, domestic central heating, and big commercial sites, there is no leak that goes undefeated. With a 1-2 day turnaround, we take matters into our own hands from the first point of contact and the issue is resolved within a matter of days, followed up by a comprehensive report with our findings and photographs.

A 99% success rate and engineers who are specialists in their field makes us the leading leak detection company in the UK. Whether you're in England, Scotland or Wales, LDS will be there to exceed your expectations and locate your leak efficiently, with no fuss.

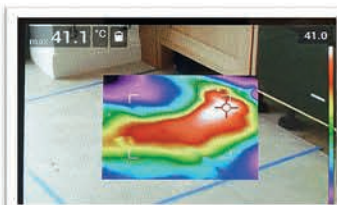
We are always looking for ways to think outside of the box, that's why we have a 99% success rate and have received countless 5\* reviews from our customers over the last year alone.

**LDS have an undefeated 13 years of industry expertise and prioritise efficiency and precision above all else, at every stage of the customer journey – from the first point of contact to the day of the survey, our customers know they are in safe hands with LDS.**

**LDS Leak Detection Specialists Ltd continues to invest in excellence at every step of the customer journey. A personable bespoke service tailored to each client.**



Mains Leak



Heating Leaks



Damp Surveys



Water Ingress & Mould



Flat & Commercial Roof Leaks



CCTV & Drone Surveys

Acoustics  
Correlation  
Tracer Gas  
Thermal Imaging  
Inspection Cameras  
Dye and Salt Testing  
Moisture Mapping  
**National UK Coverage**



**Book a Non Destructive  
Leak Detection Survey today**  
**Tel: 0344 809 4968**  
**www.ldsleakdetection.co.uk**  
**info@ldsleakdetection.co.uk**



# Apr/ May 24

## CONTENTS



### Features

**34** Building Fabric: Retrofitting Roofing

#### Elevating roofing standards in social housing

Wayne Chissel of WestWood Liquid Technologies, discusses the urgent need to improve roofing standards in the housing sector and the role of PMMA liquid waterproofing systems

**40** Interiors: Bathroom Refurbishment & Maintenance

#### Retrofitting bathrooms: A vital strategy for damp & mould control

Jamie Sandilands of Grant Westfield delves into the benefits of utilising panels in damp and mould prone areas, alongside the legal responsibilities of landlords under the Safety Act to ensure tenant safety

**45** Safety & Security: Smoke & Fire Protection

#### The dangers of neglecting smoke control

One crucial aspect of building safety that is often overlooked is the maintenance and repair of smoke control systems. Tom Archer from Colt explores the hidden dangers and why proactive maintenance is essential

**47** Safety & Security: Tenant Wellbeing

#### How housing providers can support tenants effectively

Martin Brown of FM Outsource, explores how housing providers can develop tailored customer service strategies that tackle sensitive concerns and meet tenants' needs effectively

**49** Safety & Security: Tenant Safety & Security

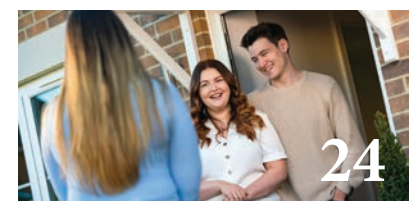
#### A digital approach to life safety systems

The duty of the Accountable Person, outlined in the Building Safety Act, is to take all reasonable steps to prevent building safety risks. Here, Nelson Godinho of SE Controls, outlines what is required and how a truly digitised approach helps to achieve compliance

In this issue of

### HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

Industry News.....	04
Landlord Latest: Karbon Homes .....	24
Comment: Revolutionising	
Leasehold .....	26
Appointments & News .....	30
Housing 2024 Show Preview.....	33



### Products

Building Fabric	
Roofing.....	34
Facades.....	35
Doors & Windows .....	36
Groundworks	
Drainage & Water Management .....	38
Heating, Ventilation & Services.....	39
Insulation .....	39
Interiors	
Bathroom Refurbishment & Maintenance .....	40
Floors & Floor Coverings.....	41
Doors.....	42
Lighting & Electrical.....	42
Walls .....	42
Safety & Security	
Site Hoardings .....	43
Smoke & Fire Protection.....	43
Tenant Safety & Security .....	43
Tenant Wellbeing .....	47

**News Editor**  
Patrick Mooney  
patricknetmag@gmail.com

**Publisher**  
Anthony Parker

**Content & Research  
Coordinator**  
Shelley Collyer

**Events Coordinator &  
Data Analysis**  
Amy Madigan

**Studio Manager**  
Mikey Poolley

**Production Assistants**  
Georgia Musson  
Kim Musson

**Account Manager**  
Nathan Hunt

**Digital Marketing & PR  
Account Manager**  
Suzanne Easter

**Publishing Assistant**  
Kim Neville

**Managing Director**  
Simon Reed



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

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

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

**Press releases**  
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk



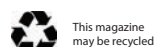
The manufacturer of the paper used within our publication is a Chain-of-Custody certified supplier operating within environmental systems certified to both ISO 14001 and EMAS in order to ensure sustainable production.

Subscription costs just £24 for 6 issues, including post and packing. Phone 01435 863500 for details. Individual copies of the publication are available at £3.25 each including p&g.

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, including photocopying, recording or stored in any information retrieval system without the express prior written consent of the publisher. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of material published in Housing Management & Maintenance, the publisher can accept no responsibility for the claims or opinions made by contributors, manufacturers or advertisers. Editorial contributors to this journal may have made a payment towards the reproduction costs of material used to illustrate their products.

Printed in England



This magazine may be recycled

## Editor's comment

# The Chancellor ignored a gift horse in the mouth!



Patrick Mooney,  
News Editor

The Spring budget represented a huge missed opportunity to revitalise the building of about 90,000 homes for social rent and make a massive step towards ending the blight of homelessness in this country. The housing charity Shelter and the National Housing Federation (NHF) had combined to sponsor and produce a well thought out and considered report. It was a terrible decision by the Chancellor to ignore the proposals and instead to focus his few housing initiatives on very little else. The Shelter/NHF scheme would have helped at least a third of a million people, probably more, into a secure home and given them a real chance of a productive, healthy and happy life. An initial outlay of capital was required but because of the boost it would create to the construction sector and the reduced spend on health etc, the programme was shown to be cost neutral within just three years. In the time it takes a young person to complete a standard degree course, it would have paid for itself and it would have housed one third of the people on council housing waiting lists.

Faced with that logic you would think a sensible Chancellor would have jumped at the chance to invest in it. In fact a sensible, wise and empathetic Chancellor would have aimed for an even higher number of homes to be built. It is odd that a politician who speaks so often about the need for investment should choose to ignore one of the best thought out proposals he will ever see. It would have been one of the better legacies he would be involved with. Instead he chose to ignore it and sadly I don't think he has even explained his thinking to the report's authors. Instead we got the usual nonsense about how the benefits bill will be brought under control by restricting it to those really in need. Mr Hunt really should have changed his advisors as any fool knows that social rent is a lot lower than affordable rent, and affordable rent is a lot lower than market rent, and market rent is a lot lower than the rents charged to keep people in temporary accommodation like bed & breakfast hotels. What hope is there for us when politicians who are presented with such logic decide to turn their backs on it? I sincerely hope that the details of this scheme have also been sent to Rachel Reeves, as it appears inevitable she will be the next incumbent of Number 11 Downing Street.

If there is a change of Government in the next few months, as is widely expected and predicted, then there is a good chance that there will be a re-introduction of commitments to achieving net zero carbon emissions, with a range of measures to deliver improved home insulation, warmer mould free homes, green energy etc. Labour already has an ambitious programme costing approximately £28 billion, to greatly increase the energy efficiency of the nation's homes. For electoral reasons, it has had to put these plans on the shelf, but we can expect them to reappear after the election. It is becoming ever more clear that greatly increasing the supply of and use of heat pumps will be vital if we are to reduce our use of fossil fuels for domestic heating. Thus far these have not really made inroads to the social and privately rented sectors. The cost of heat pump connected heating systems will need to come down and/or bigger subsidies will need to be paid for by taxpayers. But wouldn't it be great if a cost neutral version of the social housing building scheme could be designed. It is difficult to put an exact price on the cost of global warming but we see the effects of it all around us from the increased rainfall to the flooding of homes, communities and farm land.

The big uncertainty on the legislative front, is over the Housing Reform Bill – and whether Section 21 no fault evictions can be outlawed in the very near future. This was first promised by the Conservative Party in 2019 and here we are some five years later wondering nervously if the Government will get it over the line. It is inconceivable that Labour will not support this legislation, but even if it gets passed in the next few months there are doubts over when it will be implemented from. Housing Secretary Michael Gove has been persuaded to delay the go live date for the banning of Section 21 until some unspecified date in the future, when a series of court reforms have been put in place which guarantee private landlords that they can get their rental properties back just as quickly and easily, as they can now. Now surely this is putting the interests of landlords ahead of those unfortunate tenants who can get turfed out of their home with just two months' notice, despite not being guilty of any breaches to their tenancy agreement. The fact that about 80 backbench MPs are also landlords and they threatened to wreck the Bill is surely just coincidental. But we also need to be realistic about the possible impact on private landlords and have incentives so they decide to keep their investment properties rather than sell them off.

Patrick Mooney

Looking to update or cancel your HMM registration? Scan the QR code to visit our registration page. From here you can also register for our Digital Issues and Newsletters.

Alternatively, please visit [housingmmonline.co.uk/subscribe](http://housingmmonline.co.uk/subscribe)



### On the cover...

*Special subsidence feature: How Harrow Council saved up to £500k in alternative accommodation costs using a specialist subsidence repair technique.*

See pages 22-23.

# Tenants face rising tide of no-fault evictions as Reform Bill delayed again

More than 26,000 Section 21 notices have been issued in the past five years since a ban on no-fault evictions was first announced by the Government.

Private tenants have been hit by a series of bad news with official figures showing a dramatic rise in no-fault evictions, a net loss of more than 16,000 social homes for rent and another delay to long-promised laws to give renters greater security.

The number of households evicted through Section 21 procedures rose 39% in 2023 compared with 2022, according to analysis of Ministry of Justice figures by the housing charity Shelter. A further 30,230 landlords started no-fault eviction court proceedings in 2023, a 28% rise in one year.

About one in five households in England now rent from a private landlord – double the number at the start of the millennium. Campaigners say the rising number of evictions showed a worsening trend “blighting the lives of renters across our country”.

Section 21 allows landlords to remove tenants for no reason with just two months’ notice and it is a major driver of homelessness. A bill outlawing the practice is going through Parliament, but its progress has been painfully slow and there are doubts that it will even complete all its stages before a general election is held.

There have been concerns that MPs who are also landlords, have put pressure on the Government to water down reforms protecting tenants. Polly Neate, the chief executive of Shelter, accused the Government of “bowing to vested interests while renters are marched out of their homes in their thousands”.

## LOSS OF SOCIAL RENT HOMES

Neate called for the Renters (Reform) Bill to be delivered to make renting “safer, fairer and more secure” but said the Government must “oppose attempts to water down the bill from inside its own ranks”. “When they head for the ballot box, England’s 11 million renters will remember who stood with them,” she added.

Meanwhile, there has been a net loss of social housing, either through sales or demolition, of more than 16,000 social homes last year compared with the previous year, according to analysis of official figures by Crisis, a homelessness charity.

A total of 25,749 social homes were either sold or demolished last year in England, with only 9,500 being built. In the past decade, there has been a total loss of more than 180,000 social homes, which are let at roughly 40% of market rates. Official



## The number of households evicted through section 21 procedures rose 39% in 2023 compared with 2022

figures also show that 1.28 million households in England are currently stuck on council waiting lists for a social home.

“It’s disgraceful to see the number of social homes continue to be decimated,” said Matt Downie, Crisis’s chief executive. “This is robbing over a million households stuck on council waiting lists of the opportunity of a safe home”

A spokesperson for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said: “Our landmark Renters (Reform) Bill will deliver a fairer private rented sector for both tenants and landlords. It will abolish Section 21 evictions – giving people more security in their homes and empowering them to challenge poor practices. The total stock of social housing has grown by 151,000 since 2010, whereas in the previous 13 years it fell by 420,000.” The figures quoted refer to affordable homes, which are let at much higher prices than social rent homes.

## Ombudsman consults on its business plan after another record year

The Housing Ombudsman is consulting on its Business Plan for 2024/25, at a time when it is experiencing record levels of complaints about services provided by social landlords.

The Business Plan covers the final year of the Ombudsman’s 2022/25 Corporate Plan, which aims to deliver an independent, visible and proactive service for social housing residents and landlords.

While additional resources mean the Ombudsman is expected to double the number of investigations completed in 2023/24 compared to the previous year – equating to a determination being issued around every 20 minutes – the consultation follows another record year in complaints, including:

- A 91% increase in cases in the first 9 months of 2023/24 (compared to the same period last year);
- A maladministration rate of 72% (it was 59% in 2022/23) by Q3;
- Compensation awards of £3.7m (compared to £1.1m for the whole of 2022/23) by Q3; and
- More than 14,000 remedies following investigations (compared to 6,500 in the prior year) by Q3.

A spokesman said that the next year will be pivotal in the housing sector with the commencement of much of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, including proactive consumer regulation and the legal duties to comply with the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code.

The Business Plan sets out how the Ombudsman will develop its role in light of these system changes and significant increases in demand – by working to improve local complaint handling, by implementing its remaining new powers and by delivering the remaining work on its strategic programmes.

The 2024/25 Business Plan also continues the Ombudsman’s focus on expanding its casework activities and using its systemic work to help improve landlord services.

The Ombudsman is using this consultation to seek views on what learning tools it can provide to support landlords in improving their complaint handling and to test support for changes to the fee regime to incentivise better complaint handling.

Overall, 2024/25 is likely to be a difficult year for social landlords and, as a result, the Ombudsman expects demand to continue to increase by between 50% and 80% compared to 2023/24.

# Details of new standards and inspection regime revealed

The Regulator of Social Housing has published its new set of consumer standards and regulatory approach to deliver a “well-governed social housing sector” which provides quality homes and services to tenants.

The biggest change and a potential challenge or even a threat to some social landlords, is that from 1 April, the regulator will inspect large landlords, with 1,000 or more social homes at least once every four years to ensure they are meeting the consumer standards. The RSH will carry out inspections outside of this four-year programme, on small landlords.

Under the new programme of inspections, all large landlords will receive a grade on how well they are meeting the consumer standards ranging from C1 (‘the landlord is delivering on the standards’) to C4 (‘there are very serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards’). The first judgements are expected to be issued this summer and it is likely there will be some surprises, both good and bad.

The big question is whether the new regime succeeds in driving up the quality of service delivery and whether tenants are more satisfied with their housing, their services and the outcomes of their landlords’ services.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of RSH, said: “Social landlords must keep tenants safe in their homes, listen to what they say and put things right when needed.”

The regulator will assess landlords against four new consumer standards carry out regular inspections and scrutinise data on tenant satisfaction and repairs. The tenant satisfaction measures were introduced a year ago as a means of assessing how well housing associations and councils are doing at providing quality homes and services. Large landlords need to submit their first data returns to the regulator by 30 June 2024.

The economic standards set by the regulator remain unchanged. The four new consumer standards are the Safety and Quality Homes standard, the Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard, The Neighbourhood and Community standard and the Tenancy standard.

The regulator’s powers have been expanded to include additional enforcement powers to use in more serious cases. The ‘serious detriment’ test has been removed, making it easier for the regulator to use its monitoring and enforcement powers in relation to the consumer standards without having to show there is actual or potential risk of significant

detriment to tenants.

These powers include requiring a registered provider to submit a performance improvement plan or to take particular actions set out in an enforcement notice.

The regulator will also be able to authorise an appropriate person to enter a social housing premises to take emergency remedial action and issue penalties or require the RP to pay compensation.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of RSH, said: “Social landlords must keep tenants safe in their homes, listen to what they say and put things right when needed. We are introducing new standards to drive improvements in social housing, and we will actively inspect landlords to check they are meeting them.

“We have spoken to thousands of tenants and other stakeholders who have helped shape our new approach, and we are extremely grateful for their input and involvement. It is vital that landlords make sure they are ready.”

## Call for greater clarity on rent-to-rent schemes

Private landlords need more clarity on rent-to-rent arrangements, with a national body (the NRLA) calling for better official guidance to prevent landlords falling foul of rogue operators.

The National Residential Landlords Association recognises the model has been open to misuse, and, in response to a consultation run by National Trading Standards, said that stronger guidance and improved information about how rent-to-rent operates, would help landlords and tenants identify legitimate schemes.

Recent research carried out by the NRLA found landlords have had mixed experiences with rent-to-rent, with some citing a lack of clear guidance from sources such as the Government and Trading Standards as an issue. Instead, it was reported, many landlords are relying on advice from other landlords, often via social media.

### THE ISSUES

When working as it should, rent-to-rent schemes allow landlords to pass responsibilities and compliance over to third party rent-to-rent agents. These agents pay the landlord a guaranteed rent, typically below market value then they let out the property to tenants at a higher rent, keeping the difference as their payment or management fee.

On paper it could be seen as a win/win. Landlords with little time at their disposal can outsource day-to-day management, while those without large capital payments to put down on a property can make a living from property.

However, landlords need to be careful, as there are risks. Some landlords who have entered into such arrangements said their properties were returned in a poor condition, while others said that third parties were renting their homes to undesirable, sometimes criminal, tenants. Others did not receive the rent as promised.

In addition to this mortgage conditions sometimes prohibit rent-to-rent, and the practice has also been given a bad name by those running unlawful rent-to-rent schemes – by sub-letting properties without the landlord’s permission.

### WHAT DOES THE NRLA WANT?

In its submission, the NRLA outlined the complexities of rent-to-rent and called for the Government to produce clear guidance to raise awareness of the potential risks for landlords, and as well as clear directions on how to correctly operate such a scheme themselves.

The NRLA has also responded to an inquiry into the regulation of property agents, by asking for the

introduction of new training and service standards.

The NRLA supports the proposals, which were first mooted by a working group back in 2019. With many landlords relying on the guidance of their agents when it comes to navigating complex housing legislation, the NRLA believes it is essential they have confidence that those they are employing to manage this aspect of their lettings are meeting required standards.

It also said that to ensure a smooth transition once the Renters (Reform) Bill becomes law measures must be in place before changes are implemented, to ensure that consumers are provided with adequate service standards and advice.

It has asked the Government to ensure that:

- Property agents comply with minimum training and service standards, including adherence to an overarching code of practice;
- Consumers (including tenants and private landlords) are treated fairly and equally, with a clear route to redress should it be needed; and
- Any extension of the Regulation of Property Agents (RoPA) to private landlords does not duplicate requirements of the Renters (Reform) Bill or introduce a disproportionate level of additional bureaucracy and cost.



LEARN MORE

# It's **more** than a roof

It's a Marley Solar Roof System.



You may just see a roof. But by specifying a complete Marley Solar Roof System, you can be sure of a secure and robust solution, that also delivers more desirable, energy efficient homes.

It's more than a roof, it's building to make a difference.

[marley.co.uk](http://marley.co.uk)



MARLEY ROOF  
SYSTEM WARRANTY

## Tougher action being allowed to tackle long term empty homes

The Government is allowing local authorities to crack down harder on long term empty homes in an effort to force property owners into selling them or renting them out to local families.

Since April, councils have been able to charge a penalty, equivalent to another 100% of council tax when a property has been empty for 12 months, down from the current two years. The change will potentially bring in millions of pounds more for spending on public services or in keeping overall council tax bills down.

The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities has confirmed a very limited number of exceptions have been set out following a public consultation, which will ensure the changes are fair to homeowners. These will apply to:

- Empty properties that are uninhabitable due to extensive renovation;
- Second homes that are not available for use all year-round due to planning restrictions; or
- For up to a year on homes that have been inherited to prevent families who are grieving from having to pay.

The consultation response gives homeowners clarity so they can plan for the changes before they take effect, while councils will be able to budget for more to spend on public services.

Minister for Local Government Simon Hoare said: “Long term empty properties are shutting local families and young people out of the housing market as they are being denied the opportunity to rent or buy in their own community?”

“So, we are taking action as part of our long-term plan for housing. That means delivering more of the right homes in the right places and giving councils more powers to help give local people the homes they need.”

This follows reforms to give councils greater power to control short-term lets by making them subject to the planning process which will protect people from being pushed out of their local areas, preventing a “hollowing out” of communities and ensuring local people can continue to live in the place they call home.

Government statistics published back in November 2023, revealed that there were 261,189 long-term vacant properties in England, marking an increase of 12,556 empty homes compared to the previous year.

# Building Safety Regulator launches campaign for residents of high-rise buildings



**H**igh-rise building residents have more rights and protections than ever before with residents now able to check if their high-rise building is registered with the safety regulator.

The Building Safety Regulator is tasked with driving forward safety standards across the built environment with The Building Safety Act 2022 at the centre of building safety reforms in England.

The new regulator is asking all those living in tall buildings in England to be aware of how new Building Safety laws affect them. These laws protect and empower people living in high-rise residential buildings (HRBs) to take part in safety decisions that affect them – as well as providing a clear process for reporting safety concerns. This is a major milestone in the journey towards safer high-rise living, placing residents’ rights front and centre.

The Building Safety Act provides a framework for ensuring the safety of residents living in HRBs – these are buildings 18 metres tall or seven or more floors in height containing at least two residential units. They are defined as ‘higher-risk’ under the Act. Residents of these buildings are urged to find out more about how the new law affects them.

Every high-rise building is now required to have a Principal Accountable Person (PAP), ensuring that those responsible for managing the building’s safety can be held to account for fulfilling their legal obligations.

The enhanced residents’ rights include:

- Assurance that safety risks in their building are being effectively addressed
- Access to ongoing information on what is being done to improve safety in their building
- Empowerment to voice safety concerns, with assurance that their concern will be taken seriously
- Clear, accessible, and easy to understand information regarding safety matters

The legislation empowers residents to report safety concerns, assured that their grievances will be taken seriously. Clear protocols are in place for expressing concerns or making a complaint. Residents can raise concerns and issues to the PAP for their building.

Operating within the Health and Safety Executive, the BSR is part of the Government’s response to the Grenfell fire tragedy. An essential element of the new regulator’s role is to ensure the safety of high-rise residential buildings.

Philip White, director of building safety at the Health and Safety Executive, said: “Residents are at the heart of our regulatory efforts. It’s vital for us to amplify their voices and to recognise the role they play in the safety of their buildings. Safety standards in high rise buildings must be assessed and managed by the Principal Accountable Person (PAP). The regulator will review how the building is managed and whether the PAP has complied with their duties.”

“Our residents panel members represent the diverse resident community in high-rise buildings. They provide valuable insights based on their real-life experiences of living in a high-rise building. This engagement contributes significantly to our regulatory programme for HRBs.”

“The residents’ panel welcomes the new measures empowering high-rise residents. They are encouraged by the assurance that residents can speak up with confidence, knowing that their voices will not only be heard but also that their concerns will be considered fully.”

Marlene Price BEM, a member of the BSR Residents Panel, says: “Everyone should feel safe in their home, including the millions of people who live in high-rise buildings. The Building Safety Regulator is working to make this ambition a reality.”



# TACKLE YOUR DISREPAIR PROBLEMS



Net-Zero  
Carbon 2030  
Scan to find  
out more



## PROVIDING PERMANENT SOLUTIONS TO CURE CONDENSATION AND MOULD PROBLEMS

With over thirty years' experience, EnviroVent are market leaders in improving indoor air quality and solving condensation-related problems in the social housing sector.

Our range of whole house ventilation solutions for houses and flats can help to eliminate the problems and prevent them from coming back.

**AVOID WASTING TIME, MONEY AND EFFORT  
AND CONTACT US TODAY FOR A SOLUTION  
TO YOUR PROBLEMS.**



## 3 STEPS TO BEATING YOUR DISREPAIR PROBLEMS

# TEST, TACKLE & TREAT

envirovent.com

call us on  
**0345 27 27 810**

# Severe maladministration in damp and mould cases

**H**ousing Ombudsman has made four findings of severe maladministration against the Guinness Partnership, as a result of vulnerable children living in damp and mould for three years and another resident with fungi growing in one of their bedrooms.

In Case A the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after the landlord failed to fix a roof that was impacted by bird infestation for 21 months. Half of the delays were caused by poor contractor changeover and the temporary measures put in place by the landlord were insufficient, as was its overall offer of compensation. While the landlord acknowledged its failures in its stage two response, it took a further four months to fix the problem.

There was no evidence throughout the repair that the landlord considered its obligations under the housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) and it failed to keep the resident updated throughout the complaint process. The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to pay £1,360 in compensation, provide a written apology from the chief executive and to offer the resident an inspection of his roof if he would like it.

In Case B the Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how the landlord handled repairs and damp, as well as for its complaint handling throughout the case. This meant the resident and her family were left with an ongoing leak that left them living in a damp and cold property for an excessive period of time. The family were forced to live with an ongoing leak, and the associated damp, mould and fungi growing in one of the bedrooms.

There were excessive delays in completing repairs, a consistent lack of communication from both the landlord and its contractor, poor record keeping, poor contract monitoring, repeated failure to complete a permanent repair and failure to follow its policies and procedures.

## COMPLAINT HANDLING DELAYED

There were also severe failings within the landlord's complaint handling. After seven months

delay, it failed to provide a Stage 1 response and escalated directly to Stage 2 with no clear instruction from the resident. The landlord's complaint handling was overly protracted, ineffective and disorganised, and the landlord sent a Stage 1 complaint three days after it sent its Stage 2 complaint with no explanation. It had sent no prior acknowledgement or indication it was investigating a further Stage 1 complaint. In addition, the stage 1 response was factually incorrect. While the landlord's learning statement says these issues were raised in 2021, the repairs in this case were still not resolved by the landlord at the time of the Ombudsman's determination and had to be ordered as part of an action plan with the resident.

The Ombudsman also ordered the landlord to pay the resident £5,300 in compensation, carry out an inspection and heat loss survey at the home, as well as seeking whether the resident needs any adjustments based on a heart attack she suffered during the complaint.

In Case C the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after failure to effectively deal with damp and mould in a vulnerable child's bedroom for almost three years. After the initial reporting of the incident, an operative attended the property and recommended intrusive tests were required, but this was not acted on.

When it was raised again months later, the landlord sent another operative who recommended the same thing but in response simply isolated an outdoor tap and marked the job as complete. Over the next 14 months the resident chased the landlord for repairs and had jobs cancelled three times to rectify this situation. The landlord provided no updates or timetable on the repair, causing further distress to the resident.

The landlord was aware of the child's health condition and received a letter from the family doctor explaining the need for the mould to be treated urgently, but this was not seen in its actions. As in Case B, the landlord has stated in its learning statement that the issues in this case were from 2021, but at the time of determination works still

had not been completed and the resident and her child were still living in damp and mould.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to instruct a specialist damp surveyor to produce a report to identify the remedies needed, follow the works required in that report in full, as well as paying the resident £2,720 in the meantime for the distress and inconvenience caused.

## LENGTHY DELAYS & POOR COMMS

In Case D the Ombudsman found severe maladministration after the landlord failed to undertake effective repairs, with some still outstanding at the point of the Ombudsman's determination – 14 months after it was first notified. Because of the landlord's failings, and its poor communication, the resident's enjoyment of her property has been severely curtailed for a prolonged period.

When the resident reported her doors were faulty, the landlord should have arranged someone to assess this within 24 hours – however it took 13 calendar days for someone to look at them. This did not have the urgency required to make the home safe. The landlord visited the property on four separate occasions and noted the same repairs were needed every time, without any further action taking place.

Despite further reports that the resident's house was "freezing" in the winter months, the landlord continued to miss opportunities to expedite the repairs or consider how it could reduce the detrimental impact of the cold on the resident and her children, given the time of year.

Another repair ongoing was a bathroom refurbishment, which was confirmed after an inspection. However, some of it was completed but not all. When this was chased the landlord reported it had finished the works but no such installation had taken place.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to pay the resident £5,500 in compensation, to review its repairs and record keeping, as well as reviewing itself against the Complaint Handling Code.

## Welsh HA advises 40 households to leave homes due to RAAC risk

Discredited building material has been found in 60 HA owned properties on the Gower Estate in Hirwaun, South Wales with fears for another 17 privately-owned homes on the same estate.

Welsh housing association Trivallis advised 40 households to move out of their homes due to the risks posed by Re-inforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). The residents were offered hotel accommodation to facilitate a quick evacuation.

Trivallis has said that none of the tenants were forced to move out, and that "it was up to each family to decide". A Trivallis spokesperson said: "We know there will be anxiety among other Trivallis tenants who will be worried that their homes have RAAC which could be dangerous. But, just to be clear, the homes in Hirwaun are the only homes of this type that we own, and our current data hasn't

highlighted other risks."

The lightweight concrete, which is at risk of sudden collapse, was detected in relation to issues affecting the roofs and ceilings. RAAC was predominantly used in public sector buildings constructed between the 1950s and 1990s, including some social housing buildings. The Regulator of Social Housing has previously said that RAAC is not widespread in social housing, but it has warned social housing providers to check whether the concrete is present in their homes. Some 364 council homes in Aberdeen, Scotland were also evacuated earlier this year due to RAAC risks.



The European Market Leader in  
Home Life Safety

POWERFUL INSIGHTS.  
PROACTIVE MAINTENANCE.  
PREVENTATIVE MEASURES.



## THE HomeLINK<sup>®</sup> CONNECTED HOME SOLUTION

A proven and scalable solution for the challenges faced by social housing providers, while generating a return on investment. The HomeLINK Connected Home Solution assists with:



Pinpointing the cause of  
damp and mould



Improving compliance  
& asset management



Achieving net zero



Enhancing fire safety

Scan here to find out more about the Connected Home Solution.



## NRLA and Crisis call on Government to provide clarity on Renters (Reform) Bill

The NRLA, in collaboration with leading anti-homelessness charity Crisis, has published a joint letter calling for the Government to urgently provide clarity on the future of the Renters (Reform) Bill.

With speculation about possible draft amendments to the Bill rife across the national press, it is critical that the Government take steps to update key stakeholders on the direction of travel with respect to these proposed rental reforms.

Addressed to DLUHC Secretary of State Michael Gove MP, the letter's contents are as follows:

Dear Secretary of State,

The Renters (Reform) Bill represents the biggest set of changes to the private rented sector for over 30 years. It is vital that it supports tenants and responsible landlords and prevents homelessness.

Over recent weeks a number of media reports have suggested that the Government is considering amendments to the Bill.

The rumour, speculation and a litany of off-the record briefings are causing a huge amount of concern and uncertainty for tenants and responsible landlords.

We therefore call on the Government to publish, as a matter of urgency and in full, any amendments it might now be considering so that all parties can judge for themselves what is on the table and debate the substance in public. Time is running out to ensure that this Bill can complete its passage through Parliament with the proper consideration it deserves.

The lack of progress and uncertainty about the future is destabilising and damaging for those living and working in the private-rented sector. This has to end. In light of the public interest in this matter we plan to make this letter public.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Beadle, chief executive, National Residential Landlords Association  
Matt Downie, chief executive, Crisis

*If you have any questions in relation to the above letter, please email [press@nrla.org.uk](mailto:press@nrla.org.uk)*

# English councils only inspecting half of mould reports in private rental housing



Government data has revealed that councils in England are only inspecting about half of the privately rented properties where they receive reports of damp and mould.

A recent Government survey of more than 300 councils found they inspected 11,897 homes for serious damp and mould in 2021/22, the latest year for which data is available, despite receiving 23,727 complaints in total.

It is understood that budget cuts and shortages of staff resources have contributed to the current situation. Nearly 85% of councils included in the data said a lack of funding and resources was the biggest or second biggest impediment to their ability to hold private landlords to account.

In the majority (87%) of cases where illegal and dangerous levels of damp and mould were identified (defined as Category 1 or Category 2 hazards) councils usually opted to follow an informal resolution. This is both cheaper and potentially quicker, without the need for court appearances.

In the relatively few instances where they took formal action, council officers issued 1,539 improvement notices (these are legal orders that force landlords to make improvements), 105 fixed penalty notices and they undertook just 27 prosecutions against landlords for serious damp and mould in homes in 2021/22.

This is despite a heightening of the concerns about the impact and danger of mould and damp since the mould-related death in 2020 of toddler Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. The number of fines issued and prosecutions pursued by councils dropped between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Staff at more than two-thirds of councils also said the housing health and safety rating system – the

main legal framework used to maintain quality in the private rented sector – needed to be reformed, with at least one council suggesting it was “not fit for purpose”.

“Councils do everything they can to tackle bad practice and are taking action, as appropriate, to raise standards in the private rented sector,” said councillor Darren Rodwell, the housing spokesperson for the Local Government Association (LGA).

“However, many local enforcement teams do not currently have the resources and capacity to proactively tackle poor standards in the private rental sector due to the severe financial constraints facing councils.”

The summary on the mould and damp data found almost two-thirds of councils had five or fewer full-time staff working on housing standards and enforcement for private landlords. Councils with the biggest and most proactive housing enforcement teams were those that had opted to implement a licensing scheme for private landlords.

“Enforcement budgets have been stretched to the limit,” said Roz Spencer, a director of housing charity Safer Renting. “With existing resources, even the Office for National Statistics reckons only 35% of private landlords are compliant with the law and just over one in five privately rented homes is ‘decent.’”

“If councils are to add the long-term health risks [of damp and mould] on to a level playing field with the more immediate risks they will need more money. Without it, they’ll be forced to choose between short-term threats say, fire safety, on the one hand and damp and mould on the other. People can and do die from both.”



**We're the UK's largest flooring contractor and more**

**Carpet - Vinyl - Laminate - LVT - Safety Floor - Blinds & Curtains - Furniture & Lighting**

**Specification, supply & installation nationally**



# *Designer Contracts*

Email: [Enquiries@DesignerContracts.com](mailto:Enquiries@DesignerContracts.com)

Phone: 01246 854577

[www.DesignerContracts.com](http://www.DesignerContracts.com)



## HA rent arrears jump to a record high of nearly £800 million

Unpaid rent owed to housing associations by their tenants rose by 8.4% to reach a record high of just under £800 million, after a significant rise in arrears was recorded last year.

After a period of relative stability in the mid to late 2010s, the amount of rent outstanding has steadily risen each year since 2018, with the latest combined accounts showing an increase in rent arrears from £736 million in 2022 to £798 million last year. This is the equivalent of one in 20 tenants (or 5.3%) not being able to pay their rent.

Alistair Smyth, director of policy and research at the National Housing Federation, said: “Rising costs have affected all sectors, including the social housing sector, and to balance affordability for residents with ensuring they can continue to deliver quality homes and services now and in the future, housing associations consider any decisions about rents very carefully.”

“We continue to call on government for a long-term rent settlement for the social housing sector as part of a broader long-term plan for housing,” he added. “This approach would provide stability and certainty for residents and social landlords, allowing them to plan for the future.”

Mr Smyth stressed that “housing associations have tailored support in place to help any residents” in financial difficulty and that the sector had committed to ensure “no tenant will be evicted because of financial hardship”.

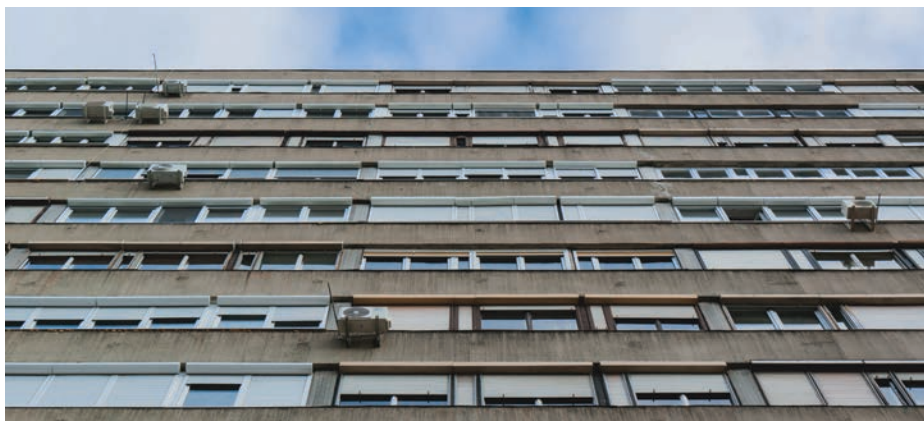
A spokesman for the Regulator of Social Housing said: “The majority of providers report that their level of rent arrears is within their business plan assumptions and that, while tenants are being affected by cost of living pressures, overall arrears are in line with cyclical trends.”

“Providers must have a firm understanding of arrears and manage all financial risks carefully, particularly in the current economic climate where there is limited headroom.”

“We continue to monitor the arrears data that providers submit to us, along with other financial returns. When there are issues of regulatory concern, we will follow up in line with our normal approach.”

Housing associations have also been facing increased financial pressure in recent years due to high borrowing costs and inflation, with many HAs reporting significant reductions in their operating surpluses.

# Budget fails to please housing bodies or to address our housing crisis



A largely housing-lite budget has failed to stimulate the imagination of the major representative bodies involved in the delivery of housing services across the nation.

This year’s Budget announced (among several other changes) the following fiscal changes:

- Capital Gains Tax will be reduced from 28% to 24%;
- National Insurance to be paid by workers will fall by 2p;
- The furnished holiday lets tax regime is set to be abolished.

Responding to the Budget, Ben Beadle, chief executive of the National Residential Landlords Association, said: “The Chancellor has once again ignored calls to revitalise long-term investment in quality rented homes in favour of tinkering at the margins for short-term gain.”

“Increasing taxes on holiday lets and cuts to Capital Gains Tax will make no meaningful difference to the supply of long-term rental properties. Meanwhile, those reliant on housing benefits still do not know if their benefits will be frozen from next year or not.”

“With an average of 11 tenants chasing every home for private rent, social housing waiting lists at 1.3 million, almost 110,000 households in temporary accommodation and the number of first-time buyers slumping, the Budget needed to tackle the housing crisis once and for all. What we got was a deafening silence. This was a missed opportunity to make providing new homes to rent and buy the priority it desperately needs to be.”

Kate Henderson, chief executive of the National Housing Federation, made similar comments, saying: “We’re disappointed that this year’s budget was not used as an opportunity to address the housing emergency and chronic shortage of

affordable homes across the country.”

“The measures announced by the Chancellor to support families on the lowest incomes, including the extension of the Household Support Fund are welcome and will provide some relief for those who are struggling with the rising cost of living.”

“However, with child homelessness at record levels and one in six children growing up in overcrowded homes with little space or privacy, urgent and meaningful action on housing is needed. This housing crisis can be solved but it requires a change of approach. The Government must put an end to short-term thinking and piecemeal policy decisions and commit to a national long-term plan for housing which aims to deliver the secure, affordable, high-quality homes local people need.”

Meanwhile Gavin Smart, Chartered Institute of Housing chief executive commented: “From a housing perspective, this was a disappointing budget. Given the significant housing crisis that we’re currently navigating there was no mention of the urgent action needed to address this.

“There were some welcome announcements to help support people in debt, such as the temporary extension of the Household Support Fund, which we had called for, and the abolition of the Debt Relief Order charge, but they won’t bring down rising housing costs.”

“In our pre-Budget submission we called for urgent action to boost social housing supply, invest in homelessness prevention and decarbonise the residential sector. These calls remain and we’ll continue to push the government to go further. We need a sustainable housing system to support a vibrant economy.”

It almost looks as if the Conservative Government have given up on attracting votes on housing issues from people regardless of their housing tenure type or financial means.

# 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:

[www.cornerstone-ltd.co.uk](http://www.cornerstone-ltd.co.uk)

0344 846 0955

[info@cornerstone-ltd.co.uk](mailto:info@cornerstone-ltd.co.uk)

023 9200 9270

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

# Big compensation payouts to council tenants over damp and mouldy conditions

The Housing Ombudsman has awarded £40,000 in compensation to residents after they were left in “dire damp and mouldy conditions” by Lewisham Council. In addition the Ombudsman found three findings of severe maladministration by the landlord.

Collectively the cases show how landlords should be using complaints to identify potential issues. The level of compensation awarded in two cases reflects the rent paid by the residents during a period where the significance of the failings meant they lost enjoyment of their homes.

In Case A the Ombudsman ordered the landlord to pay nearly £20,000 in compensation after significant failings left a family in unsuitable conditions, such as mould on a baby’s cot bed.

The landlord failed to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the steps it took to investigate the root cause of the damp and mould and failed to take into account any of the external factors, simply attributing a lot of the problems to the residents’ lifestyle.

The landlord also failed to provide evidence of surveys carried out, as well as clarity on what actual repairs have been done on the property to date with regards to the leaks uncovered. Eight years after the resident first reported a leak to the home, the landlord was still saying an annual mould wash would be sufficient.

## LACK OF SUPPORT

The landlord did not demonstrate how it supported the resident and her family while dealing with the re-occurring damp and mould as well as consideration of the health and wellbeing of the family, particularly as it was made aware of health conditions within the household and the additional impact of the overcrowding in the property.

There was extensive damage to the resident’s property, including mould on her children’s mattress and the baby’s cot bed. The walls within the property were covered in mould in both the living room and the bathroom. Evidence from the children’s school also indicated the living conditions affected their attendance.

On top of the significant compensation, the Ombudsman ordered the landlord to decant the resident and her family, consider whether that needs to be made permanent considering the vulnerabilities present in the household, and look into producing a damp and mould strategy.

In Case B the Ombudsman found severe maladministration for how the landlord dealt with a leak that ended up with damp and mould, leading to damaged belongings and the resident being unable to use one bedroom.

After the leaseholder reported the problem, there



Six windows were noted as being “in poor condition” and in need of repair. The inspection also said that the landlord needed to look at double glazing in the property and repair the extractor fan in the bathroom

was no evidence to suggest the landlord investigated the cause of the leak. Contractors did look at the roof but found no evidence of a leak, and multiple jobs raised over a year proved ineffective as the leak was still evident when the Ombudsman determined the case.

The time taken to complete the repairs fell considerably outside the timescales mentioned in the landlord’s repairs policy. These delays caused significant distress and inconvenience to the resident, with her unable to use one of the bedrooms, as well as her personal belongings being damaged from the dampness and mould. At various points in the process the resident sought updates from the landlord but was often not replied to at all.

The Ombudsman ordered the landlord to complete a surveyor’s report to enable it to know what actions to take to stop the problem, pay £1,700 in compensation and to provide the resident with details of the landlord’s insurer.

## POOR CONDITIONS & DELAYED REPAIRS

In Case C the Ombudsman found severe maladministration and ordered £19,500 in compensation after the landlord failed to deal with a window repair for six years, leading to severe damp and mould in the property.

The resident has various vulnerabilities within the household, including allergies, asthma, and mental health difficulties caused by the conditions. When the resident first reported ‘brown plaster’ it

was ordered to remove that and to check for any other defects. There is no evidence this checking of other defects ever happened.

In the same inspection, six windows were noted as being “in poor condition” and in need of repair. The inspection also said that the landlord needed to look at double glazing in the property and repair the extractor fan in the bathroom. In the inspection report six years later, the windows were noted as being “held together with tape” and the black mould in the home as “severe”.

Some window repairs were done two years into the complaint, some three years later and the final repairs happening a year after that, which was an unacceptable timeframe. The actions taken and the records kept do not indicate any level of understanding of the issue affecting the resident, or any urgency in completing the required repairs. The landlord seemed to be waiting to undertake the repairs as part of ‘major works’.

On top of the compensation, the Ombudsman ordered the landlord to undertake a full survey of the property and carry out a comprehensive review of its practices in relation to responding to requests for repairs and record keeping. The chief executive was also required to write an apology to the resident.

In its learning from these cases, the landlord says it has undertaken a full review of its complaint handling, as well as both short and long-term solutions to how it handles repairs.



# 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.

Find out more at [www.nuaire.co.uk/condensation-face-the-facts](http://www.nuaire.co.uk/condensation-face-the-facts)



# Rents up 9% in record yearly rise

Rents in the UK rose by 9% in the 12 months to February - the highest annual increase since records began in 2015, with rises recorded in all parts of the country.

Renters in London saw their rents go up the most at 10.6%, taking the average monthly rent in the capital to £2,035. Outside of the capital, Bristol was the most expensive place to rent privately - costing £1,734 a month.

Average monthly rent increases across the UK ranged from 8.8% in England through to 10.9% in Scotland and 9% in Wales according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This meant tenants in each country paid an extra £104, £93 or £60 a month respectively.

Rent prices have gradually increased across the UK since the ONS began collecting data for the whole of the UK in 2015, but have spiked since 2022. Meanwhile, average UK house prices fell by 0.6% in the year to January, though it marked a slower drop than the 2.2% annual fall recorded a month earlier.

Research published by data-gathering website Statista, suggested landlords were upping their prices due to the increased costs of running a rental property. But that was not the only reason. In a survey of almost 1,000 landlords, carried out towards the end of last year, more than half (59%) said they were trying to “align with local market rents”.

Ben Beadle, of the National Residential Landlords Association, blamed the “chronic shortage of properties to meet demand” for rents being hiked up. “The chancellor needs to develop growth tax measures to ensure a healthy supply of



quality homes to rent,” he said, pointing to advice from leading economic research group the Institute for Fiscal Studies that the “more harshly landlords are taxed, the higher rents will be”.

A spokesperson for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said it recognised “the cost-of-living pressures tenants are facing” and “our landmark Renters (Reform) Bill offers a new, fairer deal for tenants and landlords”.

“The most recent data shows the size of the private rented sector has doubled since 2004, peaking in 2016 and has remained roughly stable since,” they added.

Responding to the latest rent figures, housing charity Shelter’s chief executive Polly Neate said

private renting had “reached boiling point”. She added: “Decades of failure to build genuinely affordable social homes has made private renting the only option for many, and as a result, competition for overpriced and often shoddy rentals is fierce.”

Ms Neate said this meant landlords were free to “hike up the rent, safe in the knowledge that if their tenants can’t pay, they can issue a no-fault eviction with just two months’ notice and get a new tenant at a higher rent. To help struggling families keep hold of their homes, the Government must keep its promise to renters and pass a watertight Renters (Reform) Bill to ban no-fault evictions,” she added.

## Rough sleeping soars while homeless children in temporary accommodation hits a record high

Rough sleeping has risen sharply by 27% while the number of homeless children forced to live in temporary accommodation has hit another record high, reflecting the crisis afflicting the housing market.

The latest snapshot figures on the number of people sleeping rough in England in 2023 reveal that 3,898 people were recorded as sleeping rough on a given night, a 27% increase in one year. The number of people sleeping rough in England has more than doubled since 2010 when the data started being collected – up 120%.

What is worse, is that these annual figures are likely to be an underestimate, as people who sleep in less visible locations can be missed. In 2019 the Government made a manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024, but these figures show it is failing on this promise and the situation is going

from bad to worse.

The latest statutory homelessness figures to be released, show homelessness is at another high in England between July and September 2023, with 109,000 households recorded as homeless and in temporary accommodation – another record high figure and up 10% in a year.

There are 142,490 children who are homeless – another record and up 16,960 (14%) in a year. In total 78,460 households in England faced homelessness between July and September 2023.

Shelter is calling for all political parties to commit to ending the housing emergency by building 90,000 social homes a year with rents tied to local incomes. In a joint report, published by Shelter and the National Housing Federation (NHF) it is claiming that building 90,000 social homes would not only pay for itself in terms of

economic and social benefits within three years, but it would add over £50 billion to the economy in the long term.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: “The figures are further proof that the government cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the housing emergency. Far from ending rough sleeping, through its own ineffectiveness the government has allowed it to more than double on their watch, while the number of children homeless in temporary accommodation hits yet another shameful high.

“We haven’t built enough social homes in decades, and with rents at a record high, thousands of people are being forced to spend their nights freezing on street corners. Meanwhile families are being pushed into grim hostels and B&Bs miles away from their support networks and where children have to share beds.

“Ignoring a crisis of this magnitude cannot continue. Everyone at risk of street homelessness should be provided with suitable emergency accommodation. But the only lasting solution is for the government and all political parties to commit to build genuinely affordable and good quality social homes – we need 90,000 a year.”

# Fears of a new cladding crisis after blaze destroys timber-frame homes

**B**arnet council in North London has warned of a potential new national fire safety crisis after it discovered hundreds of low-rise timber-frame homes had been fitted with plastic cladding that can spread fire.

The council has alerted both the Government, other councils and the Mayor of London, that other homeowners in similar properties across the country could be affected. It said the 580 homes that needed fixing in its area were “the tip of the iceberg” and there is a need for a national plan to raise awareness and work out how best to support homeowners.

A row of homes in Moss Hall Grove in Finchley was destroyed in June last year when a fire spread rapidly across the terrace, gutting the properties. Eight people escaped unhurt and 30 were evacuated from the surrounding area.

The council has found more homes with similar

UPVC panels that were also not built with measures to stop the spread of fire. The one- and two-storey homes were built with timber frames from the 1930s to the 1960s but were retrofitted with UPVC cladding panels in the 1980s. Others have timber cladding, timber frames and inadequate fire compartmentation.

The repair bill is estimated at close to £17 million, of which £3.6 million will be borne by the taxpayer to fix council houses.

Nearly 4,000 buildings over 11 metres in height in England have been identified with unsafe cladding. Only a fifth have been fully fixed, while works are under way on another fifth. About 80% of the buildings with the highly combustible Grenfell-style aluminium composite material cladding have been fixed.

The latest development could increase costs, further squeezing budgets for building

much-needed social housing or repairing substandard homes.

Darren Rodwell, the building safety spokesperson for the LGA, said: “In light of other recent fires, it’s clear the government cannot risk any further delay... the government should provide guidance to all owners, so they are aware of where they need to take action.

The government should also make funding available to remediate problems where they are found so the cost of these works do not end up putting more pressure on already stretched council budgets.”

Officials at the Housing Department said less than 4% of England’s housing stock was postwar timber framed construction, based on the 2020/21 English Housing Survey

## Tenants watchdog proposes big hike in fees

The Housing Ombudsman has proposed a 40% increase in the fees paid by social landlords, as well as a “polluter pays” model, so that those who use the service more have to pay for it.

Richard Blakeway has said the Ombudsman’s fees need to increase as demand on the service continues to increase exponentially.

The Housing Ombudsman has proposed increasing the fees it charges housing providers to £8.03 a home, up from £5.75 per unit in 2023/24.

The new fee was originally set at £9.16 a home, but due to problems with recruitment the proposed fee was lowered.

The Ombudsman is also considering a potential change to its funding regime, proposing a “polluter pays” model to drive better landlord complaint-handling behaviour. The proposed model would see housing providers pay both a membership and a cost per case fee. Alternatively, it may involve higher charges for those with the highest maladministration rates and who’s tenants use the service proportionately more.

Any changes to its fee regime will need to be approved by the Housing Secretary and the Treasury. Blakeway says he recognises the financial pressures in the housing sector, but added that “while demand continues to increase exponentially,

we will require more resource to meet this”.

The document says that the fee has been calculated to support increases in its caseworker headcount and to deliver more determinations on complaints. It also notes that the Social Housing (Regulation) Act has given the Housing Ombudsman Service new powers, including overseeing adherence to the complaint handling code from the beginning of the new financial year.

This will be done through returns from landlords, which will include their self-evaluations, in addition to insights from HOS casework. The Ombudsman reported that demand for the service grew beyond its forecast, exceeding 78% in the first nine months of 2023/24, and is expected to be significantly above the 30% increase previously modelled for 2024/25.

## Private landlords rents warning to Welsh Parliament

The National Residential Landlords Association has warned that the threat of rent controls together with the introduction of new legislation has seen rents in Wales soar.

Steve Bletsoe, NRLA operations manager for Wales, told the Senedd’s Local Government and Housing Committee that from having the slowest rising rents in the UK, Wales is now recording the fastest rising rate as a result of this perfect storm.

He said that the best way to offset these challenges is not to introduce rent controls but to encourage the supply of more homes to rent, telling the Senedd: “Rents went up over 10% the month the consultation on rent controls happened...it scared a lot of people into either putting their rents up above

inflation or exiting the market completely”.

He added: “If you increase the supply, and I mean good quality supply, the market dictates rents. Governments don’t need to intervene; the market will dictate it.”

Giving evidence as part of the committee’s Private Rented Sector inquiry, Bletsoe stressed the need for the Government to support existing landlords as well as encouraging new investment – something that has fallen dramatically over the last 12 months.

His argument was reinforced by evidence from Richard Rowntree of Paragon Bank who quoted UK Finance data suggesting that only 2,000 properties were purchased in Wales with a buy to let mortgage last year, down from 4,000 the year before.

Bletsoe also used the session to call for an urgent review of Land Transaction Tax (LTT) to further stimulate growth in the sector. He told the committee about the decades of under-provision of social housing that have seen more and more households look to the private sector for a home, despite the fact that private landlords are not always equipped to deal with the unique challenges facing social tenants.

He called for additional support to drive bad landlords from the sector and ensure consistent enforcement, also referencing ongoing issues with Rent Smart Wales, calling for greater clarity on what its purpose is and what is revenue being used for, as well as welcoming the forthcoming review.

# Unregistered plumber handed suspended prison sentence

An unregistered plumber has received a suspended prison sentence after he carried out illegal gas work at a house in Peterborough.

Anthony Rice, trading as Rice Plumbing and Oil Heating, attended the property on Edwalton Avenue on 31 January 2023 where he replaced a gas boiler and altered gas pipe work. However, Rice accidentally connected the gas supply with water, meaning the property's gas pipes and gas meter were flooded.

Gas engineers from Cadent later attended the property and were required to pump water from the emergency control valve and replace the gas meter. The engineers classed the gas boiler Rice had installed as immediately dangerous, capped off the gas supply before notifying the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

A HSE investigation found that Rice has never been registered with the Gas Safe Register, which is a legal requirement for carrying out this type of

HSE inspector Adam Johnson said: "Anthony Rice undertook gas work which he was not registered to do. All gas work must be conducted by registered Gas Safe engineers to ensure the highest standards are met to prevent injury and loss of life."

work. He also held no qualifications, nor had he completed any training in gas work.

HSE has guidance for gas consumers and what they need to know in order to manage gas appliances and equipment safety as well as what you need to do in an emergency.

Anthony Rice, of Fullbridge Road, Werrington, Peterborough, pleaded guilty to contravening Regulations 3(1) and 3(3) of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998, contrary to Section 33(1)(c) of the Health and Safety at

Work etc. Act 1974. He was sentenced to six months in prison, suspended for six months, and ordered to pay £3,000 in costs at Peterborough Magistrates' Court.

HSE inspector Adam Johnson said: "Anthony Rice undertook gas work which he was not registered to do. All gas work must be conducted by registered Gas Safe engineers to ensure the highest standards are met to prevent injury and loss of life."

This HSE prosecution was led by HSE enforcement lawyer Matthew Reynolds.

---

## Over half of councils face bankruptcy within next parliament

More than half (51%) of senior council figures warn their councils are likely to go bust in the next parliament unless local government funding is reformed, reveals a new report from the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), with 9% of council respondents saying they were likely to declare effective bankruptcy in the next financial year – representing 14 unique councils. A mere 4% of respondents had confidence in the sustainability of local government finance and only 6% are happy with the central government's performance on understanding the scale of the problem facing council finances.

The 2024 *State of Local Government Finance* report, which anonymously surveyed council leaders, chief executives, chief finance officers and cabinet members for finance, found nine in 10 plan to increase fees on areas such as parking and environmental waste, and the same proportion plan to raise council tax, with one fifth (21%) continuing to sell publicly-owned assets. Worryingly, more than half of respondents drew on their reserves this financial year and plan to draw on them again in the upcoming year.

Published annually since 2012, this year's survey found nearly one third of council respondents (31.9%) plan on cutting parks and leisure, with another third (30.6%) cutting arts and culture and a similar proportion slashing business support (30%). One in 10 will cut SEND services, 11.9% will cut children's care services and 16.2% will slash adult social care.

Even for councils that manage to balance the books, there are concerns that some services they provide may fall below legal standards, which will continue unabated without costly legal challenges

For councils with responsibility for social care, children's social care is by far the most urgent short term pressure, and adults and children's social care together make up the most serious long-term pressure. Among councils without these responsibilities, housing and homelessness is the most serious short-term and long-term pressure, with environment and waste a close second place for long-term pressure.

High inflation alongside rising need for council services, has compounded the impact of central government funding cuts. Even for councils that manage to balance the books, there are concerns that some services they provide may fall below legal standards, which will continue unabated without costly legal challenges.

The LGIU believes there are several solutions to the local government funding crisis that, crucially, don't add more pressure on the taxpayer. Sharing surplus funds between wealthier and more deprived

councils while allocating central government funding to areas based on need rather than bidding are two of four low-cost solutions to the local government funding crisis, proposed in the 'Learning from local government finance across the world' report.

These are popular options for reform: multi-year financial settlements were favoured by 97% of respondents, ending competitive bids for funding and 100% business rates retention by three-quarters. Yearly finance settlements incentivise short-term financial planning, such as the reduction in preventative services to make ends meet annually, even if these end up costing more in the long term.

The 2024 *State of Local Government Finance* report is part of the wider work of the LGIU's Local Democracy Research Centre, which was set up by the LGIU to investigate the things that matter to our members and to local governments around the world.

# Hyde secures highest rating for cladding work



Hyde has secured an A1 EWS1, the highest fire safety rating for remediation work at Gary Court in Croydon.

Gary Court is a nine-storey high rise building and comprises 150 homes and several commercial units. It was built with what was later confirmed to be non-compliant and combustible elements. Hyde applied for funding, commenced the design work and worked with contractor Equans and consultant Martin Arnold to carry out the major work to replace all combustible elements of all of the external walls.

An A1 rating means that the building is safe and does not contain any combustible materials – so no further external wall work will be needed. It also means that Hyde and their residents have clarity about the external makeup of the building, knowing that it's safe. And importantly,

homeowners are now able to sell and remortgage their homes.

The remediation project cost just under £10 million. Of this, Hyde was awarded £6.4 million through the Government's Building Safety Fund, meaning no charges have been passed on to residents.

Gary Court was wrapped in scaffolding for two summers – 2022/23, with the site compound completely taking over the car park and internal courtyard. Hyde carried the work out while residents remained in their homes. The impact on residents was considerable so Hyde shared regular updates and held monthly meetings with residents. The work also included redesigning the car park with a new pedestrian gate and lowering kerbs to accommodate disabled residents.

Luke Driscoll, Hyde's director of asset management and sustainability, said: "We're really proud of the work we've done at Gary Court and I'm pleased to say this has landed us an A1 EWS1 rating, which is the highest rating that can be issued by a fire engineer. Making sure our homes and residents who live in them are safe is our priority. And, the work we've completed here ties into our Sustainability Strategy and Building Safety Programme."

"This was quite a unique and interesting project because we removed all individual bricks – every single brick was taken down from the walls, cleaned, stored, and then put back. That's more than 250,000 bricks! The work we carried out will make sure we're compliant with building safety regulations and keep our residents and their homes safe."

## VIVID maintains top regulatory ratings

VIVID has maintained its G1 V1 ratings by the Regulator for Social Housing. This achievement follows an in-depth assessment by the regulator and is the highest governance and financial viability rating that can be awarded.

The housing association is on a drive to improve services so they're easier to access and use by its residents, be better at keeping tenants informed and increase the speed of routine repairs. VIVID is part-way through a business transformation programme and is the first organisation in the UK to deploy Microsoft Omnichannel for all customer contact.

Its commitment to increasing the supply of new



Mark Perry, Chief Executive of VIVID

homes remains. In 2022-23 VIVID built 1,390 new homes, of which 88% were for affordable tenures, making it the sixth largest developer of new homes amongst housing associations in England. This year it has work underway to turn a contaminated brownfield site into a new waterfront community called Victory Quay, with 850 new homes, green spaces, commercial and recreational facilities near its head office in Portsmouth. This is one of only a few contaminated sites like this in the country to be actively moving forward, demonstrating the role housing associations play in regenerating large, complex sites and boosting economic growth.

# Saving £500k through a new approach to subsidence repair



Block of flats affected by subsidence

A block of flats with 12 units, owned and managed by Harrow Council, had suffered from structural movement due to the clay shrinking beneath the foundations. This resulted in cracks in the brickwork, internal walls and ceilings meaning it would require underpinning repairs and the tenants would need to relocate.

The standard approach to this issue was followed: a site investigation to understand the issue, a structural engineer's recommendation for underpinning works, and a tender process to identify contractors and delivery. The tender process began in May 2022, with 20 weeks of work to commence in September 2022.

However, contractor Geobear approached Harrow Council to propose an alternative to underpinning – ground improvement using geopolymer injection. This innovative approach, developed by Geobear in 1980, uses an innovative ground injection technique to minimise structural movement in buildings affected by shrinking clay soil. Crucially, it could be delivered in ten days without tenants needing to relocate for up to 20 weeks.

The benefits of the Geobear alternative to underpinning were so great that Simba Manjonjori, Interim Planned Investment Manager at Harrow Council, put a case forward to the senior management. He argued that there needed to be a change to the procurement approach to enable them to capitalise on the benefits. The request was granted and the scheme delivered benefits to Harrow Council, the residents, and the local community.

## BENEFITS OF INNOVATIVE SUBSIDENCE REPAIR

The benefits of using Geobear to deliver the subsidence repairs are both quantitative and qualitative.

### BENEFITS FOR RESIDENTS

- Residents would not need to vacate the property during work. Many tenants in the units were elderly or disabled, and relocating during underpinning works for 20 weeks would have significantly impacted their mental and physical well-being.
- Relocation would mean residents being moved away from friends and family for 20 weeks, disrupting the support many depend on for day-to-day living.

- The Geobear works are all outside the property and minimally intrusive. The residents are not impacted and have full access to the entrance and garden areas.
- No excavation/digging means minimal noise pollution to residents in properties.

### BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT

- The Geobear work is minimally intrusive – just two vehicles needing parking. With underpinning, major heavy machinery would have been required to be in the area for 20 weeks going backwards and forwards through tight residential areas with difficult access.
- Excavation and machinery would ruin the



Drain monitoring during works



Geobear injection unit on site

local green spaces and leave mud and dirt throughout the neighbourhood. The noise of digging and excavation from underpinning would affect the neighbourhood for 20 weeks. Geobear has no impact.

- The carbon footprint of an underpinning scheme is 53% greater than the Geobear method of ground improvement. This is verified in a Carbon Footprint report comparing Geobear’s solution on a residential property to a traditional underpinning scheme.
- With underpinning schemes, there is a requirement for the cutback of vegetation and tree removal. The Geobear solution does not require the removal of trees, leaving the green space unaffected.

**BENEFITS FOR HARROW COUNCIL**

- Up to £320,000 saved on the costs of relocating tenants into hotels, plus costs associated with vacant stock.
- Reduced administration time/cost. Staff resources at Harrow would have spent several weeks arranging the relocation and logistical aspects of the original scheme.

The total financial savings for Harrow Council over 20 weeks was almost £500,000. This sum includes both direct savings on the cost of work and indirect savings from requiring no alternative accommodation. The cost savings for Harrow Council could be invested in other urgent property maintenance projects.

In terms of indirect cost savings, these can be calculated based on losses due to void unit costs to Harrow Council, plus the alternative accommodation costs. The cost of tenants to be moved to temporary accommodation is approximately £4000 per month – per family room. Therefore, a total temporary accommodation cost for 12-16 units (as there were some households with children), during the 20 weeks of underpinning, would have equated to £240,000 - £320,000.

The benefits and overall savings of the scheme have been widely recognised within Harrow Council and similar asset maintenance schemes are now being re-evaluated to ensure value is maximised.



Satellite view of affected property

**REMOVING BARRIERS**

Many procurement processes are standardised and unchallenged. This case provides an excellent example of how and why existing procurement should be considered to maximise the value of local government and housing association budgets.

Harrow Council had a standard procurement process that was challenged by their housing maintenance team. The argument for using Geobear’s innovative approach was quantified, illustrating the cashable benefits to the council and qualitative benefits to the community.

Other organisations may have a similar approach to asset maintenance and procurement that has been unchanged for many years. This can prevent new ideas and improvements to existing, tried and tested approaches that deliver increased value.

Working in partnership with Harrow Council on this project has proved an excellent example of how to deliver value through innovation.

To discuss subsidence affecting your stock, please contact Geobear Key Account Director Christopher Carlton.

0800 084 3503 christopher.carlton@geobear.com



Non-intrusive injection points



Tree roots affected clay soils, trees remained



## LANDLORD LATEST



# Karbon Homes

Karbon Homes is a housing provider based in the North East of England, focusing on delivering three strategic aims for affordable homes

**K**arbon Homes builds, manages and looks after around 32,000 affordable homes for people across the North East and Yorkshire, located across diverse communities that all face very different opportunities and challenges.

Our mission is to provide our residents and communities with a strong foundation for life, giving them the tools they need to thrive.

To achieve this, we're committed to delivering on three strategic aims: to provide as many good quality homes as we can, deliver excellent service to our tenants and shape strong, sustainable places for our communities.

### TENANT WELLBEING & ENGAGEMENT

We strive to put our tenants at the heart of everything we do and we're committed to ensuring our residents' voices are heard and that their feedback is kept central to all our decision making.

We facilitate a host of ways for our tenants to influence, challenge and help deliver the work that we do, either in person or digitally.

For those tenants who have an interest in a particular topic, such as improving our digital services, guiding our building safety strategy, or influencing our roadmap to net zero, we have a range of project-specific

tenant groups.

And for those who are passionate about the community in which they live and are interested in helping us improve the services we offer locally, we have a number of area forums.

As we've grown as an organisation and continue to grow, it's remained important to us that we stay in the best possible position to provide tenants with an excellent experience. An important element of that is staying local, having a strong connection with the communities in which we work and a clear understanding of both the challenges and opportunities that those communities face.

The area forums play a key role in this, enabling us to directly connect with residents in different communities, and understand their thoughts and views on local issues and services. To further ensure we remain connected locally, we have rolled out a new customer service model, which gave our housing management and property services colleagues smaller patches.

This will enable them to be more visible and available to tenants, which in turn will help them build stronger relationships with them and ensure they have access to any support they may need.

Our local presence within our communities, paired with the positive





“We strive to put our tenants at the heart of everything we do and we’re committed to ensuring our residents’ voices are heard

and that their feedback is kept central to all our decision making.”

Ian Johnson, Executive Director of Customer Services at Karbon Homes

experience lots of tenants have with us, has meant Karbon Homes has become an organisation that many of our tenants show an interest in working for. The variety of roles available within a housing association makes our sector an appealing one to join and with the help of the Foundations for Life Team, our employability support service, we’ve been able to support lots of tenants to join Karbon as colleagues.

One successful route has been through our apprenticeship programme where we keep all positions exclusively for those living in a Karbon household. With each intake we have a diverse range of people taking up these positions, from those wanting to learn a trade, to those looking for an opportunity to explore a new career direction or get back into work after a break.

As we continue to see the cost-of-living rise and more tenants turning to us for help, we’ve remained committed to growing and strengthening the additional services we offer that support tenants beyond our landlord-tenant relationship.

Our Money Matters Team, which helps tenants to maximise their income through money, benefits and debt advice, has worked with close to 4,000 tenants over the last year, generating £4.5m of confirmed income gains. We’ve also invested more into our tenant hardship fund, which aims to support those tenants who are struggling to heat and power their home. Tenant-facing colleagues can make non-repayable awards of up to £120, in a combination of supermarket and fuel vouchers, to those who need them. Over the last 12 months we’ve issued 770 crisis vouchers, totalling £46,000.

## MAJOR PROJECTS

At Karbon Homes we are constantly investing in improving the quality of our existing homes which often sees us engage in larger scale regeneration projects, to ensure our homes meet the current and changing needs of residents.

We’re currently working on a £4 million regeneration of Athol House, a sheltered scheme in Northumberland. The original scheme, which consisted of small, bedsit-style flats that didn’t meet modern standards or residents’ aspirations, is being replaced with a new, modernised scheme, with a mix of spacious one and two-bed apartments and high-quality communal areas to help to facilitate community cohesion.

We’re also building strong partnerships with local partners to regenerate brownfield sites into much-needed affordable housing. Working in partnership with South Tyneside Council, this financial year we’re regenerating three sites with disused buildings, to bring three, cutting-edge Extra Care schemes to the borough.

Designed for people who have additional support needs and in partnership with South Tyneside Council, the schemes will bring up to 300 new homes, helping people with differing levels of care and support needs to live well and independently. A number of these will be specifically designed for those living with dementia.

The challenge of achieving net zero by 2050 remains front and centre across the organisation and we’re continuing to explore more ways in which we can ensure the homes we build are as energy efficient as possible and boost the energy efficiency standards of our homes.

With support from the government’s Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) wave 2.1, this January we began a new retrofit programme, investing £3.6 million in improving the energy efficiency of 218 homes in Northumberland and County Durham. These homes, which are some of our lowest performing when it comes to energy efficiency, will benefit from a mix



of external wall insulation, underfloor insulation, cavity wall insulation and loft insulation top-ups. Some will also be fitted with Solar PV panels.

This round of SHDF funding follows on from the Wave 1 round, which supported our first major retrofit project of 97 homes in the villages of Ouston, County Durham and Otterburn, Northumberland, which we completed last year. Residents who benefitted from this work told us what a difference it made to their homes, not only helping them stay warm for longer but helping them keep their energy costs down. In this cost-of-living crisis, anything we can do to help residents save money is important.

As well as investment in homes, we’re also committed to investing in our communities, helping to address the impact that the declining physical fabric of places has on the quality of life of those who live there. On the Byker Estate in the east end of Newcastle Upon Tyne, a community of 1,800 homes, consisting of 11 neighbourhoods, we’re embarking on an extensive £11 million neighbourhood improvement plan which helps address the individual needs of the community.

For each of the 11 neighbourhoods we’ve devised a bespoke investment plan, each influenced by the residents who live there. The plans have been designed to address each neighbourhood’s specific challenges, from waste management improvements to car parking and safe play spaces for families.

## THE SOCIAL HOUSING ACT

Over the last few years, the adequacy of the social housing sector has faced real scrutiny, with conversations around tenant empowerment and involvement coming to the fore. This has set the context for the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, which has created a new proactive approach to regulating the sector, ensuring standards are met and action is taken against failings.

At Karbon Homes we are ready for this. We welcome the focus on driving up standards and the vision for a more proactive and robust approach to consumer regulation. We’re already culturally and organisationally aligned to the requirements of the Act and we’re now taking the time to cross reference all the requirements and check for any potential gaps or areas of improvement that are needed.

Listening to and acting upon the tenant voice already plays a key role in the way we operate, and we are continuing to focus strongly on tenant voice, ensuring it influences thinking and helps drive change at all levels



of the organisation. The launch of our new tenant services delivery model, which focuses on providing a great service to tenants in their homes and neighbourhoods, will further enhance this, helping us to build stronger, more proactive relationships with tenants.

#### DATA MANAGEMENT & AI SOFTWARE

At Karbon Homes, our in-house responsive repairs function is under a lot of pressure with a whole host of competing demands that have been placed on the sector over recent years, and that pressure is unlikely to lessen anytime soon.

Over the last 18 months we've been working in collaboration with Mobysoft, a specialist in data-driven insight, to look at using advanced technology to help colleagues from across the property services function to deliver a higher quality of service over time, which in turn boosts tenant satisfaction.

Mobysoft's RepairSense tool provides AI-powered repairs intelligence and has been key in helping us make sense of our repairs data. We wanted to get under the surface of some of the biggest inefficiencies across our four main trades: plumbers, heating engineers, electricians and joiners, and RepairSense has allowed us to gather that insight and understand where improvements could be made.

We quickly started seeing the benefits of using the tool and the data it provides. A key improvement the tool has helped us make is a reduction in repeat repairs, and there's a lot more improvements like this that the system can help us make going forward.

We have also worked in collaboration with Mobysoft to develop their damp and mould dashboard, which sits within the RepairSense system. This allows us to proactively manage cases of damp and mould, which is especially important for us with the imminent introduction of Awaab's Law.

#### KEY OBJECTIVES

Looking ahead to the coming years, Karbon Homes and our peers in the housing sector, are faced with significant challenges. Higher inflation, the growing cost of living, contractor uncertainties and difficulties in the supply chain, alongside facing lots of competing demands and expectations from tenants, stakeholders and our regulatory bodies, present us with a series of hurdles right across the organisation.

However, with challenge comes opportunity, and we'll remain focused on the delivery of our key strategic aims, balancing our business head and

our social heart to ensure we are doing right by our tenants, colleagues and the organisation.

Our primary focus will be on improving the quality of our existing homes, ensuring they are decent, safe and meet the needs of our tenants. We'll also continue to focus on how we can further improve the tenant experience we provide. This will include development and investment in providing a great digital choice, maximising our use of technology to support a more flexible, timely and effective tenant experience, and ensuring digital channels are available to those who want them.

And we'll remain ambitious in the delivery of new homes. In the coming months we're set to start work on our largest development project yet – 750 affordable homes at Seaham Garden Village in County Durham. We're a key partner in the project, responsible for the development of over half of the site's 1,500 homes, 100% of which will be affordable.

Over the coming years we're also committed to further developing our place shaping approach, which moves away from a concentration on investment in alleviating the problems our communities face and instead focuses on setting new goals that help tackle the roots of these problems, in order to facilitate long-lasting change.

We are piloting our place shaping approach in two 'Karbon Impact Areas' where we have a high proportion of homes – Byker, a diverse ward east of Newcastle Upon Tyne, and Stanley, an ex-mining town in North Durham. Alongside exploring the data on issues such as employment, people, infrastructure and transport, we have worked closely with tenants, colleagues and the local community there to understand the challenges they face and what sustainable difference we can make.

In Stanley, a former mining town in North Durham where Karbon Homes owns and manages around 25% of the housing stock, we have purchased a derelict board school on Stanley Front Street. The purchase is part of a wider project to help boost the local economy by regenerating the high street and bringing more vibrancy into the community. We've outlined a number of potential options for what could be done with the site and now we're embarking on a community consultation with local residents and key stakeholders to understand what they'd like to see happen to the building.

*Article supplied by Ian Johnson, executive director of customer services at Karbon Homes*

## COMMENT

# Revolutionising leasehold

Robert Poole of Glide reflects on the legislative changes proposed and explores the transformative path ahead for owners and managers of blocks of flats



The UK stands on the precipice of a historic overhaul in property ownership. With the King's speech unveiling the anticipated leasehold reform, an age-old system is set to be redefined.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) estimates there are around 4.98 million leasehold homes in England, of which 70% are flats and 30% are houses. The majority of flats in the private sector are leasehold (an estimated 94% of owner-occupied flats and 71% of privately rented flats). Around 8% of houses in England are leasehold.

For years, the leasehold system has been a topic of contention, leaving homeowners and managers of blocks of flats grappling with its intricacies. The prospect of reform is certainly a breath of fresh air. Both major political parties, each with their own vision, aim to address the fundamental issues that plague the current leasehold system.

## LABOUR'S PROMISE TO ABOLISH LEASEHOLD

The Labour Party's pledge to abolish leasehold within its first 100 days of government is a bold move that seeks to dismantle a centuries-old tradition. The intention is to replace it with a more transparent and equitable alternative, potentially a commonhold system. This radical change could simplify property ownership, eliminate ground rents, and empower leaseholders, however, it poses significant challenges because dispute resolution is much more complicated as it requires all owners of the freehold to be consulted on decisions. With the lack of a first-tier tribunal in place, this could mean disputes are never resolved.

## THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO SUBSTANTIAL REFORM

On the other hand, the Conservative Party is focused on reforming the existing leasehold system. The Leasehold and Freehold Bill is intended to introduce measures to increase leaseholders' rights, provide them with more control over their properties, and make lease extensions more affordable.

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill heralds a landmark shift in the leasehold system. It promises a future where homeowners are granted greater autonomy over their homes, with reduced costs and red tape. Whether the future is Labour's vision of abolishment or the Conservatives' less radical reform, we are set to radically alter the leasehold landscape.



“For years, the leasehold system has been a topic of contention, leaving homeowners and managers of blocks of flats grappling with its intricacies.”

Robert Poole, director of Glide (part of Leaders Romans Group)

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The reform introduces opportunities for a more empowered homeowner base and transparent property management system, potentially fostering sustainable communities and higher living standards.

**Enhanced Property Ownership:** Reforms aim to empower homeowners by giving them greater control over their properties. This shift can lead to more satisfied and engaged property owners.

**Increased Transparency:** Abolishing leasehold or introducing more stringent regulations can bring greater transparency to property transactions.



**Improved Property Management:** With more involved and informed property owners, the quality of property management could improve, leading to better maintenance, higher standards, and more harmonious communal living.

**Sustainable Communities:** Leasehold reform can encourage a stronger sense of community and shared responsibility among residents of blocks of flats. This can foster more sustainable and pleasant living environments.

**Regulation of Managing Agents:** The bill stopped short of proposing the regulation of management agents, which is a potential missed opportunity.

**CHALLENGES ON THE HORIZON**

While the prospect of reform is promising, it's important to acknowledge the challenges of uprooting an entrenched system. The transition from the current leasehold system to a reformed one presents a multitude of challenges, including:

- **Implementation Challenges:** Overhauling an established system demands meticulous planning and regulation.
- **Financial Implications:** The financial repercussions for stakeholders must be balanced with the new reforms.
- **Valuation and Compensation:** Fair compensation for freeholders under the new system needs careful consideration.
- **Administrative Burden:** The introduction of new processes will increase administrative demands and therefore costs for leaseholders.
- **Public Awareness and Education:** A comprehensive campaign is essential to inform property owners of the changes.
- **Equity Concerns:** The reforms must not create new disparities within the property market.
- **Local Variations:** Accommodating regional differences in property dynamics is vital.
- **Enforcement and Dispute Resolution:** New mechanisms are required to manage conflicts and ensure compliance.

While there are undoubtedly opportunities with the proposed reforms, this does need to be balanced with the potential challenges – of which there are many. These challenges need to be carefully considered and the correct processes put in place to ensure the changes really do work in reality.

**THE LEASEHOLD AND FREEHOLD REFORM BILL DETAILED**

This Bill is a step towards correcting historical imbalances, featuring:

- Easier and cheaper freehold purchases for leaseholders.
- The lease extension term increases to 990 years.
- Immediate rights for new leaseholders to extend leases or purchase freeholds
- Empowerment for mixed-use building leaseholders to manage their properties
- Enhanced consumer rights and transparency for leaseholders.

For those managing blocks of flats, the Bill mandates:

- A re-evaluation of service charge structures and management fees.
- A redefinition of lease extension negotiations and pricing strategies.
- A restructured financial model in response to potential ground rent caps.

**ADAPTING TO NEW LEGISLATION**

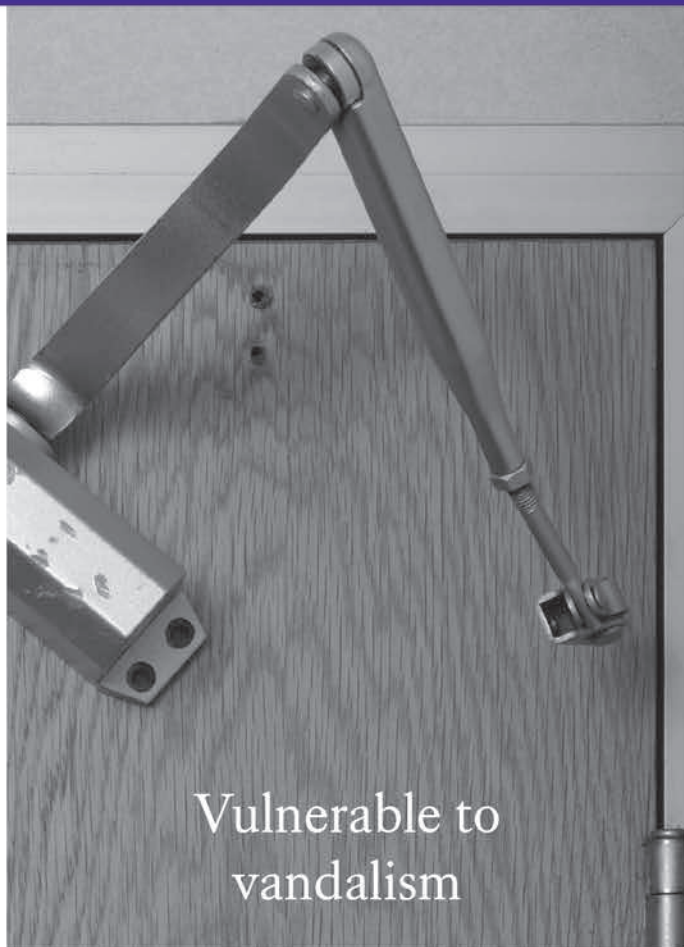
Owners and managers must adapt to:

- Transparent service charge and insurance fee regulations.
- A shift towards freehold ownership and longer lease terms.
- New administrative demands and consumer rights standards.

As leasehold reform moves forward, addressing these changes will undoubtedly be a challenge. A thoughtful and comprehensive approach that consults widely with practitioners, leaseholders and freeholders and considers all potential challenges is necessary to make the transition as smooth as possible. The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill is potentially a transformative step. If the Bill is passed, the focus will be on meeting these new standards head-on, fostering innovation, and ensuring long-term success for all stakeholders involved.

*Robert Poole is director of Glide (part of Leaders Romans Group)*

# YOUR FIRE DOORS MAY COME WITH MORE THAN ONE OVERHEAD



Vulnerable to  
vandalism



Concealed from  
vandalism

Suitable for use on one-hour and half-hour fire doors.

Completely concealed when the door is closed.

May be used on social housing entrance doors.



## **POWERMATIC**<sup>®</sup>

The concealed door closer  
[concealeddoorclosers.com](http://concealeddoorclosers.com)

Tel 0121 766 4200 [info@samuel-heath.com](mailto:info@samuel-heath.com)

# In profile - Pendock pipe boxing

The use of pre-formed boxings and casings for concealing pipework on social housing refurbishment projects has gradually overtaken the time intensive procedure of fabricating individual boxing on site to become the preferred solution for most social landlords and contractors. To meet this need, the Pendock Profiles range is arguably the most comprehensive available.

Traditional methods of covering surface mounted heating system and boiler pipework typically involved the fabrication of boxing from wood or MDF. To create the required shape, the raw materials need to be cut to length then fixed to the wall, as well as sanding, sealing, priming, and painting sealing, all of which are extremely time consuming and costly, especially in terms of labour.

Although the most obvious advantage of using ready-made plywood boxing are the significant reductions in time and cost that can be achieved, aesthetics also play a role in decisions to adopt 'pre-made' over 'site-made'.

## IMPROVED FINISH IN LESS TIME

As pre-formed boxing is curved to form a smooth 'L' shaped profile, so there are no sharp corners, joints along or untidy overlapping edges along their length, as can often be the case with site fabricated alternatives.

A further benefit of pre-formed boxing is due to the wide ranges of sizes available, which means that the correct profiles can be selected to meet the project dimensions, so they will fit more closely over the pipework. This helps minimise the intrusion and visual impact in flats, where skirting level heating pipework or high level fire sprinkler systems are being concealed.

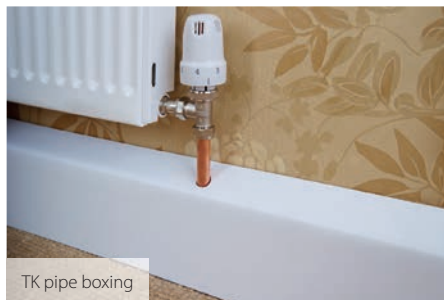
The choice of sizes not only increases versatility, but also enables a consistent finish to be achieved in each individual flat, even where different styles or size of profile are installed. This becomes more important where multiple blocks of flats are being refurbished, as each one will have the same continuity of finish, which is much more difficult to accomplish with site made boxing.

In addition, all plywood profiles are pre-finished with a white resin impregnated decor paper, as



Metal pipe boxing at Phoenix Point, Thamesmead

standard, which removes the need for painting on site, saving even more time and further improving consistency of finish.



TK pipe boxing

services and other utilities. Bespoke manufactured to individual project specifications from 2mm aluminium, as standard, metal boxing is used widely for concealing external pipework used in low carbon district heating schemes, as well as air-source and ground-source heat pumps.

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

## EXPANDED BOXING RANGE

The latest product in the range is Pendock's MXV boxing, which is designed specifically to conceal flexible ducting used with Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) systems. MXV, like TK pipe boxing, MXF fire sprinkler boxing and BC boiler casings, is manufactured from UKTR compliant pre-formed plywood.

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

BC boiler pipe casings offer a simple method of hiding unsightly boiler pipework, valves, filters and flues, while also allowing easy access for gas safety checks, routine inspection or boiler maintenance.

## BESPOKE METAL PIPE BOXING

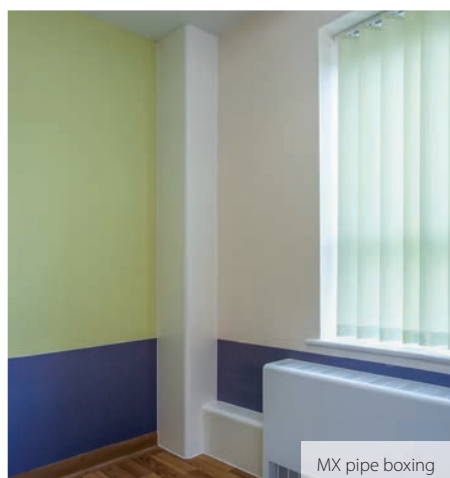
Where exterior pipework needs protecting and concealing, the CHM and MXM metal pipe boxing range has been engineered to enclose building



CHM metal pipe boxing

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

01952 580 590  
www.pendock.co.uk



MX pipe boxing

NEW

TRITON THE UK'S SHOWER COMPANY

HOUSING 2024 STAND E58

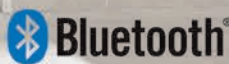
For a cleaner conscience

# OMNICARE ELECTRIC SHOWERS

DESIGN | SAFETY | SIMPLICITY



Omicare Design Digital



## Discover the perfect fit with the Whale Instant Match Pump

Bluetooth Compatible with Omnicare Design Digital and Omnicare Ultra Digital

Contact our dedicated specification team

Call: 02476 324 776 | Email: [specification@tritonshowers.co.uk](mailto:specification@tritonshowers.co.uk) | Web: [www.tritonshowers.co.uk/care-electric-showers](http://www.tritonshowers.co.uk/care-electric-showers)

## AKW awarded EcoVadis Silver Medal for sustainability achievement

AKW, one of the UK's leading providers of bathrooms, kitchens and mobility aids, is now recognised for being in the top 15% of businesses who have participated in the EcoVadis assessment. As recognition for this, AKW have been awarded a silver medal accreditation, reflecting the company's dedication to incorporating environmentally and socially responsible practices into its operations. This accreditation assures AKW customers that they are sourcing products from a sustainable supplier, offering even more peace of mind. EcoVadis, the world's largest provider of business sustainability ratings, helps companies gain greater insight into their sustainability performance. The medals are awarded based on 21 major sustainability issues and are reviewed annually. Obtaining a silver medal has demonstrated AKW's progress to date. Working collaboratively with the EcoVadis project team, all AKW departments are actively developing comprehensive improvement programmes, centred on driving continuous advancements in sustainability practices. This will help to move even further up the rankings in the future. AKW is pleased to have been recognised for exceeding the industry average through environmental, social and value initiatives. In addition, AKW was praised for its policies on: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Child Labour, Forced Labour & Human Trafficking, Career Management & Training and Employee Health & Safety.

01905 823298 [www.akw-ltd.co.uk](http://www.akw-ltd.co.uk)



## Marmox 'goes round the houses' at Futurebuild

Visitors to this spring's FutureBuild exhibition were drawn to the Marmox stand D26 by a diverse mix of products. The renowned UK manufacturer had its knowledgeable sales team on hand to explain the merits of its debutant fire-rated insulation panel. Fireboard is the new high performance internal and external wall insulation (XPS) board which shares Marmox's honeycomb surface structure with Multiboard to create an A1 non-combustible certified render-backer which is weatherproof. Importantly, it can be used internally across walls or ceilings to take a plaster finish, while providing sound absorption as well as thermal insulation. Fireboard is 'Resistant to Fire' with the following accreditation: BS EN 1182, EN 1716 and EN13823. Marmox's Marketing Manager, Grant Terry, comments: "We saw a very positive response from contractors, consultants and other specifiers to the new Fireboard which offers a practical and economic answer to multiple challenges in both new build and refurbishment situations and there was similar enthusiasm for our recently extended Slicedstone range, which presents thin veneers of natural sandstone on a stabilised backing, which makes it simple to install either internally or externally as a very versatile finish. Our team have returned from the show with a lot of new contacts and dozens of leads to follow up."

[sales@marmox.co.uk](mailto:sales@marmox.co.uk) [www.marmox.co.uk](http://www.marmox.co.uk)



**AKW**  
Life Made Better

THE NEW GENERATION

## Electric Showers



Our refreshed range of electric showers features further advances in design and ease of use, as well as an improved look and feel. From contrasting colours and soft-touch controls, to LED display and remote operation, every element has been considered.



Scan to watch our video

[www.akw-ltd.co.uk](http://www.akw-ltd.co.uk) | Telephone: 01905 823 298 | Email: [sales@akw-ltd.co.uk](mailto:sales@akw-ltd.co.uk)



25-27 June, Manchester Central

# Uniting the sector. Making lives better.



**H**ousing 2024 provides space for the housing and wider living sector to come together, discuss and collaborate, to identify solutions and speak with one voice to those framing the debate. Raising the voice of the housing and wider living sector, with thriving communities at the heart.

Housing is more than bricks and mortar, and the solutions for today's housing crisis require innovative solutions and funding to meet the needs of growing and differing tenures. The next government must place the delivery of high-quality, accessible, affordable and sustainable housing at the heart of its long-term plans for the UK.

In an election year, following years of the most challenging circumstances for housing associations, registered providers and their tenants and residents, there has never been a more important time for the housing and wider living sector to come together. The next Government must consider housing the true priority it needs to be for the wider benefit of communities, national growth and improving outcomes for people.

Continuing economic and political uncertainty; balancing the books and delivering priorities amid heightened regulation and governance regimes; development and new build vs asset management and compliance; meeting and exceeding tenant and resident expectations; and, restoration of the role of anchor organisations within communities to rebuild trust – just a few of the core themes which we will be unpicking across the week.

Housing 2024 are also broadening the scope to embrace solutions coming through across the wider living sector – hear from key players amongst build-to-rent landlords, co-living, multi-family and single-occupancy and student living operators – alongside health, housing and care to identify success in some of the partnerships emerging.

Housing enables attendees to access a breadth and depth of information and networking not available anywhere else. Join over 9,000 attendees; listen, learn, digest and discuss and takeaway solutions to your communities.

Housing is the only event that brings together senior leaders, decision-makers

and their wider teams at all levels to listen to experts, learn from each other and work to identify solutions to the housing crisis in a way that best meets their communities' needs.

Whether you work in, or with, local authorities, housing associations, government agencies, build-to-rent landlords, co-living, multi-family and single-occupancy and student living operators, institutional investors, key partners and suppliers, housebuilders or master developers, you will find content, supply chain partners, collaboration and networking opportunities to help you with your day-to-day decisions.

Housing is the event highlight of the year and the only place that you, and your teams, can hear the latest industry and business critical developments together with the entire housing and wider living sector.

Join us at Housing this year and take the opportunity to network with fellow professionals, gain valuable insight from industry experts and increase your knowledge and professional development.

*Article supplied by Housing 2024*





# Elevating roofing standards in social housing

Wayne Chissel of WestWood Liquid Technologies, discusses the urgent need to improve roofing standards in the housing sector and the role of PMMA liquid waterproofing systems

In the ever-evolving landscape of social housing, there is not only a pressing need for greater compliance but excellence in roofing and waterproofing standards. When refurbishing homes, durability and safety in social housing should not be left to chance. Manufacturers appointed for these upgrades must be accountable and work with housing providers and specifiers to deliver products that exceed minimum requirements.

## THE POWER OF PMMA

When refurbishing a roof, Polymethyl Methacrylate (PMMA) liquid-applied waterproofing systems play a key role in raising both safety and quality standards. Although PMMA is not a new or emerging chemistry, it has significantly evolved. Thanks to ongoing research and development, PMMA provides a highly versatile and robust waterproofing system which can be used for various applications across the housing sector including flat roofs, balconies, walkways and car parking.

PMMA-based systems, which are solvent free and cold applied, tend to have a minimum of two components – the resin and a catalyst or activator. Contractors will mix the components together on site, starting an exothermic reaction to initiate the curing process.

A polyester reinforcing fleece, which is first saturated within the waterproofing layer, bonds the membrane to the substrate as it is applied in its wet state. The surface layer is then installed onto the embedment coat while still wet to form a single, seamless membrane of uniform thickness.

## SAFETY FIRST

A key advantage of using a PMMA system is that it does not require an open flame to install on site, which is a huge health and safety benefit for the contractor, client and end user. To date, there have not been any incidents of fire recorded globally on a roof due to PMMA being installed.

As with any construction site work, there are always risks associated with building. At WestWood, our protocol is not to sell products to any contractor that hasn't undertaken our mandatory contractor training. This is paramount to ensure the safe installation of our PMMA systems and guarantee a robust solution for the customer.

## MINIMISING DISRUPTION

Another reason why PMMA is so successful is that it can rapidly cure, making it ideal for occupied housing blocks. The liquid membrane can be cured in as little as 15 to 20 minutes even at sub-zero temperatures. With variable amounts of catalyst added to the resin, the curing times can be controlled on site to suit the requirements of the installation team.

Certain PMMA systems can also be applied in temperatures as low as -15°C. This means projects can be completed in all weathers, reducing the risk of delays and further minimising disruption for residents.

As a long-term solution, PMMA provides peace of mind too. With durable, flexible and hard-wearing properties, PMMA ensures watertightness for up to 25 years. Third-party accreditations such as BBA, ETA, and FM Approval

## With durable, flexible and hard-wearing properties, PMMA ensures watertightness for up to 25 years

provide further assurance the roof will meet building regulations and perform as expected.

### SETTING THE STANDARD

From a manufacturer's perspective, embracing standards like  $B_{ROOF}(T4)$ , ensures more accountability and quality assurance.

$B_{ROOF}(T4)$  classification, obtained through TS 1187 within the EN 13501-5 standard, evaluates roofing materials' fire performance. It specifically measures their resistance to external fire exposure, which is crucial for preventing flame penetration and spread.  $B_{ROOF}(T4)$  compliance is integral, ensuring roofs meet stringent fire safety standards and bolsters occupants' safety by reducing the risk of flame spread.

This regulation significantly influences specification, necessitating high fire-resistance materials. Commonly used system build-ups meeting  $B_{ROOF}(T4)$  include PMMA liquid-applied membranes.

During installation of a liquid-applied membrane, manufacturer training and guidelines must be adhered to, which includes robust sealing, appropriate detailing at roof penetrations, and integration with other fire safety measures like compartmentation and fire barriers.

By seeking relevant training and certifications to demonstrate competence in designing, installing, and maintaining fire-compliant roofing systems, roofing professionals can achieve regulatory compliance while enhancing the roofing industry's reputation and buildings' fire safety.

### PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Raising standards in housing refurbishment can't be achieved through products alone. With residents often remaining in-situ during refurbishment, meticulous



planning, seamless coordination, efficient execution and quick application are all paramount. Collaboration is key in this respect requiring manufacturers, contractors and the client to work together to achieve the best possible outcome.

Through effective partnership working and products which go beyond minimum requirements, project teams can navigate challenges effectively while upholding the highest standards of safety and quality.

*Wayne Chissell is technical director at WestWood Liquid Technologies*

## EnviroVent celebrates double award

EnviroVent is celebrating winning two prestigious regional business awards: The Yorkshire Post Excellence in Business – and the Insider Media Made in Yorkshire awards. For both awards, EnviroVent won 'Manufacturer of the Year' category, demonstrating its commitment to excellence in design, innovation and manufacture. Judges praised EnviroVent for the company's dynamic approach to increasing manufacturing capacity, after the business recognised demand in the social housing and new build sector and moved to its own purpose-built expanded factory in Harrogate.



01423 810 810 [www.envirovent.com](http://www.envirovent.com)

## Housing Management & Maintenance

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



[www.housingmmonline.co.uk](http://www.housingmmonline.co.uk)

## Sto rainscreen cladding system streamlines construction at Blar Mor

A Sto rainscreen cladding system has provided an alternative construction method for a new housing development, generating time and cost efficiencies. Located in Fort William in the Scottish Highlands, Blar Mor comprises 117 one-to-four-bedroom affordable homes, which have been built by TSL Contractors. The main contractor partnered with AFS (Scotland), a leading provider of external facade solutions, to deliver a durable cladding system for timber frame homes, removing the requirement for traditional construction. "Given the location of the development, TSL Contractors was seeking a new facade solution which would enable them to build the homes more efficiently without compromising on quality," explained Steve Avery, director of AFS. "Having used Sto's products for numerous new-build projects, we recommended the StoVentec rainscreen cladding system." Sto reviewed wind load information and provided a Sto fixing assessment to assist AFS in the installation of the StoVentec system. Comprising StoVentec carrier boards, these were installed on the timber battens to create a ventilated cavity. Made from 96% recycled expanded glass granulate, the carrier boards are reinforced on both sides with glass fibre mesh. StoVentec boards don't expand or contract with temperature change, providing a stable board to receive the render build up, and they can also be butt jointed with no risk of cracking.



0330 024 2666 [www.sto.co.uk](http://www.sto.co.uk)

# SFS White Paper sheds fresh light on window position

*Callum Thornton, the fenestration product manager for SFS UK, explains why social housing specifiers and housing managers should consider continuity of insulation around window openings as a priority for tackling thermal-bridging and mould growth.*

The tragic death of a young boy whose family lived in unacceptably sub-standard conditions led to the Social Housing Regulation Bill being amended in 2023 to include 'Awaab's Law' compelling landlords across the country to investigate and rectify damp and mould within a strict timeframe. These all-too-common problems also serve to underline the need to understand the key causes of mould growth, including the crucial positioning of windows within the outer walls.

This is a highly complex technical challenge, that is just as important to address during refurbishment and improvement contracts, as it is when trying to comply with the latest requirements of Approved Document L for new build projects. And this April saw the New Build Heat Standard implemented in England (and Wales) while Scotland is tightening requirements ready for the enactment of its own PassivHaus standard in two years' time; with windows having to achieve a U-value of 0.80 W/m<sup>2</sup>k.

## A CHEQUERED HISTORY

The size, shape and location of window openings have been a key feature in architectural styles down the ages, but current day concerns over energy performance mean that the actual position of fenestration units within the wall section has now taken on a far greater significance. Getting it wrong will not only be reflected in higher heating costs but will almost inevitably impact on occupants' health, as well as their comfort.

In order to assist building professionals, including social housing providers, to better understand the conundrum of maintaining continuity of thermal performance across the building envelope, SFS has added to its library of White Papers with the latest entitled: "Optimising window placement."

Windows are an essential component of the building envelope, serving multiple functions such as allowing natural light to enter, providing security, offering panoramic views, and facilitating ventilation while minimizing heat loss. Because of this, windows are unfortunately usually the weakest point in the thermal envelope.

However, with the introduction of revisions to Approved Document Part L in 2022 and new SAP software, the maximum permitted U-values for a window unit were lowered and, as we look ahead to the Future Homes Standard 2025, it is evident that compliance requirements will become even

more demanding. With this in mind, it is crucial to carefully consider the impact of window position on the overall efficiency of the glazed unit.

It is more than three decades since the BRE first identified that the floor/wall and other junctions across the building envelope were just as important as the elevations themselves. We waited until 2008 for the guidance on cold bridging to be introduced into Building Regulations, but the subject is comprehensively addressed in the current Approved Document L, Volume 1 section on 'Continuity of Insulation,' which emphasises how windows should be "contiguous with the insulation layer of the external wall."

The approach taken towards compliance with Approved Document L, Volume 1 can vary depending on the design of the overall wall build-up chosen. Typical approaches in the UK vary from cavity wall construction, solid masonry wrapped with an insulated render or an EWI system or, for existing properties – especially in conservation areas – Internal Wall Insulation (IWI) is often preferred.

The principle of continuity is important in all cases, but the SFS White Paper on Optimising Window Placement' explains the challenges, technical requirements, and potential pitfalls of falling short.

One part of the document utilises thermal modelling – in the form of software generated heat flux section drawings – to illustrate how the different window positions can have a marked effect on the thermal performance of the overall element.

The examples include a solid wall construction where an equal thickness of insulation has been affixed to the external face, but contrasts locating the window frame within the masonry, and shifted forward so it is fully aligned with the insulation zone, which reduces heat transfer through the frame itself. Other examples show how the PSI values, or thermal bridging heat losses, can also vary between the top and bottom of a window frame.

While window sills, heads or jambs are only some of the thermal bridges occurring around a building, their high frequency across the envelope mean their significance is magnified, particularly for high-rise and HMOs.

In addition, as with any thermal bridge, the loss of heat around window perimeters will lead to condensation as moist air cools rapidly as the dew point is exceeded. At best, the surface condensation is a nuisance and can stain plasterwork; at worst it causes mould growth, allowing spores to be released into the atmosphere, precipitating or exacerbating respiratory problems.

## PLANNING FOR THERMAL IMPROVEMENT

The question of timing, as well as alignment, also regularly arises in retrofit and refurbishment



Photo By Hydra 4x on Unsplash

situations where EWI (a favourite recourse for both high-rise and low-rise improvements) is counted as the former, and window replacement as the latter with property owners, particularly social housing landlords, generally wishing to maximise the service life of existing fenestration. Inevitably, though, many contracts constitute urgent upgrades and 'quick fixes', often involving complications such as having to decant tenants. Accordingly, at the FutureBuild event in March, Savills reported that evaluating initial waves of the SHDF showed that joined up thinking for such interventions was essential to minimise visits and avoid 'tenant fatigue'.

In fact, social housing providers frequently find themselves aiming to invoke measures attracting defined funding, such as ECO schemes, rather than striving to achieve best outcomes. Unfortunately, fitting new windows some years after EWI rarely sees the frames aligned contiguously with the wall insulation, and problems of thermal bridging are simply exacerbated, storing up problems for the future. Such failures can lead to higher heating bills, degradation of the building fabric and poorer health outcomes for residents.

Ideally, coordinated and comprehensive upgrades across our building stock will save lives and a key strategy for avoiding such issues should see building managers and other specifiers seeking to have high performance windows installed on special cantilever brackets, beyond the building structure, including supporting much heavier, triple-glazed windows. Inevitably, aligning these higher performing window frames with wider insulation zones, outside the main structure, demands longer cantilevers and the sustaining of greater lever-arm forces in order to achieve the ultimate goal of thermal continuity.

As well as manufacturing appropriately designed and tested brackets and offering holistic technical support to all parties seeking to optimise the benefits of energy upgrades in our buildings, SFS has published a series of White Papers on the subject of external wall insulation, rainscreen systems and fenestration.

0330 0555888 [uk.sfs.com](http://uk.sfs.com)



**SFS**



Download the brochure...

# Tackling difficulties in thick insulation layers

Optimise Window Installation with JB-D Plus

Maximise window performance with the JB-D Plus: Simplify, speed up and enhance thermal efficiency by installing windows within the insulation layer.

Visit [uk.sfs.com](http://uk.sfs.com) for more information.

## Proctor Air® provides peace of mind for apartment residents during essential reroofing works

A significant challenge when working on the roof of any existing, occupied building is protecting the people inside the building without the full roof system in place. That challenge is multiplied when the building in question is large and work has to be carried out in sections over a longer period of time.

At Hatchmeadow apartments in Northumberland, a key performance characteristic of Proctor Air that helped to address these challenges was its water holdout. That, combined with its vapour and air permeability, offered long-term peace of mind for the building owners, as well as apartment residents.

The roof included an area of solar PV panels, so the new roofing system had to be capable of providing weathertightness and condensation control in several different circumstances across the single building – all while residents remained in occupancy during the work.

### USING PROCTOR AIR AS PART OF A 'BELT AND BRACES' SOLUTION

James Roy, senior quantity surveyor at Wensley Roofing, describes the replacement roof system as a "belt and braces" approach.

"The specification used Proctor Air over the rafters, followed by counter battens, tile battens, and a new pantile finish," he explained. "We even



used butyl tape over the nail holes to provide a complete seal against rainwater."

At the time of writing, Wensley Roofing are about halfway through the reroofing work. "Some of the residents were having to use buckets to catch leaking water," said James. "Since installing this new system the leaks have now stopped, and there has been some bad weather."

### HOW HAS PROCTOR AIR HELPED THE REROOFING PROCESS?

The attention to detail required to deliver the thorough specification, coupled with the size of the Hatchmeadow apartments roof, has naturally restricted the pace at which the work can be delivered. As a premium roofing membrane, Proctor Air has helped to alleviate any concerns

about leaving the underlay exposed for short periods of time.

"The belt and braces approach has made labour a challenge on this project," said James. "But with the Proctor Air membrane in place, we've been comfortable leaving it exposed for a couple of days if necessary, knowing that residents in the apartments below are still protected."

This reassurance is possible because Proctor Air is rated W1 under EN 13859-1, with over 1m Head of Water, and has hydrophobic additive in all three of its layers. Its water resistance meets the guidance of NFRC's Technical Bulletin 6. Additionally, the membrane can be left exposed to UV for up to three months.

Proctor Air allows the underlay to be used on roofs featuring solar PV, as long as a ventilated batten space is provided. This is in addition to tightly-jointed slates, tiles and metal sheet, all of which would also normally be considered vapour impermeable.

Because the Hatchmeadow apartments specification featured a counterbatten layer, Proctor Air could be used with confidence across the entire roof, including under the existing area of PV panels.

01250 872 261

[proctorgroup.com/products/proctor-air](http://proctorgroup.com/products/proctor-air)



# Helping water achieve net zero!

## LoFlo INLINE® For unmetered supplies, installed after the stop tap



- Proven to save up to 25% water consumption
- Reduce energy bills, by reducing water heating costs
- Simple & quick installation on any water supply
- Suitable for ANY property, including caravans and park homes (on permanent water supply)

## Groundbreaker® The surface mounted water control management system



- Allows metering where traditional installation would be impractical
- Can be installed at any point to new or existing building
- Perfect platform for 'Smart Water Meters'
- Complies with best practice guidelines for jointless installation

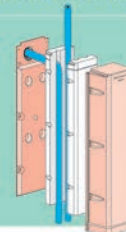
## NRv<sup>2</sup> LoFlo® Reduce 'time controlled' waste use by modulating supply rates



- Low-cost solution to water 'over supply'
- No customer interaction, mounted between the meter and manifold
- Variable flow rates available to maximise customer satisfaction

## INSUduct® The innovative pipe replacement solution

- Minimises disturbance, time and cost
- Replace old, leaking or lead water supply pipes in under 2 hours
- No major excavations
- Minimal disruption



**SAVE WATER ENERGY AND MONEY with these great products**

For further information go to:  
[www.groundbreaker.co.uk/products](http://www.groundbreaker.co.uk/products)  
 Email: [sales@groundbreaker.co.uk](mailto:sales@groundbreaker.co.uk) Tel: 01379 741993

Groundbreaker Systems,  
 3 Fairways, Stuston,  
 nr Diss IP21 4AB



**waterwise**  
 Affiliate

## Safe heating from Stelrad

Stelrad offers the widest range of low surface temperature radiators – LSTs – designed for the casings to never exceed 43°C making the radiators safe to touch.



Ideal for all buildings where young, elderly and vulnerable people live, work or gather, these radiators are widely used in sheltered housing, care and nursing homes, medical facilities and leisure centres and sports facilities.

Take a closer look on the Stelrad website.

0800 876 6813 [www.stelrad.com/trade](http://www.stelrad.com/trade)

## Vent-Axia's Heat Save helps council

Vent-Axia has helped Hillingdon Council decarbonise its social housing properties by providing energy efficient heat recovery ventilation for residents' homes. To provide the mechanical ventilation with heat recovery Hillingdon Council opted for two products from Vent-Axia's Heat Recovery Retrofit Solution, the Lo-Carbon Heat Save and the Lo-Carbon Temptra. The range has been designed to deliver decarbonisation to social housing providers, offering increased ventilation, while minimising unnecessary heat loss through heat recovery technology.



0344 856 0590 [www.vent-axia.com/HeatRecoveryRetrofitSolution](http://www.vent-axia.com/HeatRecoveryRetrofitSolution)

## Dosafil launches solid water treatment

There are four key products in the new Dosafil water treatment range launched recently – DR1 solid inhibitor sticks, which is the first solid inhibitor in the world to gain NSF International CIAS certification – formerly known as BuildCert.



Then there's DR2 Solid Cleaner sticks, DR3 Solid heavy duty cleaner sticks and DR4 Solid biocide sticks and all the products meet the same standards as the traditional liquid competitors.

Head to the Dosafil website for more information.

0345 605 0405 [www.dosafil.co.uk](http://www.dosafil.co.uk)

## Housing Management & Maintenance

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



[www.housingmmonline.co.uk](http://www.housingmmonline.co.uk)

## Keeping kitchens and bathrooms free of condensation, odours and mould

Vectaire has four fans with EC motors for single room ventilation of wet rooms. The Elegance (axial with 100 mm or 120 mm ducts) and the Elix (centrifugal) operate continuously, quietly and economically. They have a choice of two trickle speeds and options of delay timer, humidistat and low voltage. The Elprex is a powerful, four speed centrifugal fan for larger areas. It has a choice of three trickle speeds, the same model options as the Elegance and Elix, plus models with a data-logger.

Vectaire's single room heat recovery unit, HREC1003, is available in three tube lengths; can be rotated into four positions; incorporates a summer bypass and frost-stat, and saves both money and heat with a 75% heat exchange efficiency. It includes a terminal kit with weather louvre and condensate outlet, and is available in standard, timer, humidity control and SELV models.

These products fully comply with the latest building regulation requirements and can be installed quickly, easily and safely. They keep rooms condensation free and stop the build-up of unhealthy and unsightly mould.

01494 522333 [www.vectaire.co.uk](http://www.vectaire.co.uk)



## Sto maximises thermal efficiency and aesthetics for retrofitted homes

In partnership with E.ON and Green Homes Solutions, Sto has enhanced energy efficiency for Cheshire residents while maintaining the traditional appearance of their homes. Following funding by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), all the properties have been upgraded with Sto's external wall insulation (EWI) system. Installed by Green Homes Solutions, the EWI system is improving the homes' thermal performance by reducing heat loss and energy consumption while protecting the properties from weather damage. The risk of condensation, damp and mould has also been minimised. To meet the needs of residents, who did not want the look or feel of their homes to change, Sto's solution included a range of products designed to replicate the homes' traditional brick appearance and complement architectural details. This saw StoCleyer B brick slips, StoDeco profiles and StoFentra Duo windowsills installed on each property. Manufactured from synthetic render, the StoCleyer B brick slips offer a realistic brick appearance with a durable, weather-resistant finish. The StoDeco Profiles replicate stone architectural detailing on the window heads and are manufactured using a lightweight material that is easy to install. To prevent the risk of any moisture from damaging the EWI system, which can be a common risk when retrofitting, the StoFentra Duo windowsills absorb movement and prevent water ingress.



0330 024 2666 [www.sto.co.uk](http://www.sto.co.uk)

# Retrofitting bathrooms: A vital strategy for damp & mould control

Jamie Sandilands of Grant Westfield delves into the benefits of utilising panels in damp and mould prone areas, alongside the legal responsibilities of landlords under the Safety Act to ensure tenant safety



**D**amp and mould pose significant challenges in maintaining a safe and healthy living environment, especially in areas prone to moisture build-up and humidity such as bathrooms. Retrofitting bathrooms with moisture-resistant wall panels presents a proactive approach to addressing these issues, regardless of the specific product used.

## THE THREAT OF DAMP AND MOULD

Damp and mould thrive in environments with high humidity levels and poor ventilation, making bathrooms particularly vulnerable. The accumulation of moisture from showers and baths, coupled with inadequate ventilation, creates ideal conditions for mould growth. Left unchecked, damp and mould not only jeopardise the structural integrity of the property but also pose health risks to occupants, leading to respiratory problems and allergies.

## LANDLORDS' LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Under the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, landlords are legally obligated to provide habitable living conditions for their tenants. This includes addressing issues of damp and mould in a timely and effective manner. Failure to do so not only can endanger a tenant's health and safety but also exposes landlords to potential legal liabilities. Retrofitting bathrooms with

moisture-resistant solutions is a proactive measure that landlords can take to fulfil their duty of care and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

Campaigners have also demanded social housing reforms after the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, who died from mould exposure in his Rochdale home in 2020. As a result, Awaab's Law was introduced as a component of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and makes up the biggest government reforms affecting social housing in a decade. Awaab's Law requires landlords to promptly address and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes.

## THE ROLE OF WALL PANELS

Wall panels offer a versatile and effective solution for combating damp and mould in bathrooms. Unlike traditional tiling, which is susceptible to grout deterioration and water seepage, panels provide a seamless and waterproof barrier that prevents moisture ingress and inhibits mould growth. This not only safeguards the structural integrity of the property but also reduces the need for frequent maintenance and repairs.

There is also the added benefit that the installation process for wall panels is relatively straightforward, minimising disruption and downtime. Whether it's retrofitting existing bathrooms or incorporating panels into new construction,



## Retrofitting bathrooms with moisture-resistant wall panels presents a proactive approach

the versatility and ease of installation make panels a practical choice for addressing damp and mould concerns.

For some landlords, especially in a time of increasing costs, any loss of rental occurred during a renovation project can be financially challenging. However, wall panels offer a time- and cost-effective solution. If a bathroom already has tiles in place, wall panels can be installed directly on top of almost any sound surface whilst maintaining their watertight integrity, saving time, effort and scarce resources. Unlike tiled surfaces, newly panelled bathrooms will be ready to use in just 24 hours, and on average, fitting wall panels saves on average 15 hours of installation time compared to the equivalent area being tiled.

As wall panels are so easy to fit, it eliminates snagging issues that can be both costly and time consuming to fix. By choosing waterproof wall panels instead of traditional tiles, it eliminates the problem of water leakage due to improper tile installation and grouting in a bathroom. Tiles should also be re-sealed every year and grouting re-touched every eight years as it loses its colour and mould builds up. There is also the associated cost saving at the time of installation – by as much as £30 per m<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to their functional benefits, wall panels also offer aesthetic advantages, enhancing the visual appeal of bathroom spaces. With a wide range of design options available, including contemporary finishes and classic motifs, panels allow landlords to elevate the overall look and feel of their properties while simultaneously addressing practical concerns.

Beyond the installation of wall panels, landlords can further mitigate damp and mould risks by implementing effective ventilation solutions. Adequate ventilation helps regulate humidity levels and promote air circulation, reducing the likelihood of moisture accumulation and mould growth. Simple measures such as installing extractor fans or improving natural ventilation can significantly enhance bathroom airflow and minimise damp-related issues.



Educating tenants about proper bathroom maintenance and ventilation practices is also essential in preventing damp and mould problems. By fostering awareness and responsibility, landlords can empower tenants to take proactive steps in safeguarding their living environment and maintaining a healthy home.

In conclusion, retrofitting bathrooms with moisture-resistant wall panels is a proactive and effective strategy for controlling damp and mould in rental properties. By addressing these issues comprehensively and promoting tenant awareness, landlords can fulfil their legal obligations under the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 and ensure a safe and healthy living environment for their tenants.

*Jamie Sandilands is specification director at Grant Westfield*

## Cost-effective and easy to install shower and bathroom wall panels

Alongside its leading tile ranges, **Parkside Architectural Tiles** is also able to offer new-build and refurbishment housing projects shower and bathroom wall panels that give a waterproof and hassle-free finish. With a 30-year manufacturer warranty and available in an impressive range of decorative effects, the PVC and laminate shower and bathroom wall panels bring a premium look without the price tag. From marble and terrazzo to mineral, stone and tile; the system makes it fast and easy to create a high-spec look in a 100% waterproof finish that's mould-resistant and easy to clean. For social homes and student accommodation, the cellular PVC panels are a stylish and low-cost solution. 100% waterproof, they are ideal for use in showers, bathrooms and wetrooms, creating an attractive and durable wall finish. Quick to install on a range of wall substrates using compatible high-grab adhesive, the panels can be installed in shower enclosures, bath surrounds and walls to give a finish that requires minimal maintenance. Importantly, the finish is easy to clean for tenants and without grout lines, it helps to cut down on mould and bacteria growth. Periodic maintenance with an anti-bacterial PVC cleaner maintains excellent hygiene. The surface is also resistant to scratches and stains. The affordable panels improve the look of bathrooms in social and affordable homes while making them easier to look after and more hygienic for tenants.

0116 276 2532 [www.parkside.co.uk](http://www.parkside.co.uk)



## Save time and promote safety with Mapei Topcem

**Mapei** has developed a range of rapid-drying screeds that perform to the highest technical standards in fast-track installations, while also providing a safe and sustainable application. To speed up moisture evaporation in Portland cement-based screed, Mapei has formulated a special binder which incorporates admixtures in powder form. The binder reduces the amount of mixing water needed, increases mechanical strength and reduces shrinkage and drying time. Products featuring this technology include Mapei's best-selling EMICODE: EC1 Plus-certified Topcem and Topcem Pronto. Mapei Topcem is a specialist hydraulic binder for normal setting, fast-drying and shrinkage-compensated screeds. It can be used to form bonded, unbonded, floating screeds – including those with piped underfloor heating – on new and existing concrete prior to floor installation – inside and outdoors. Mapei Topcem Pronto is the ready-mixed, rapid-drying formulation with high thermal conductivity, ideal for heated screeds. Both screeds set to light traffic after 12 hours. Ceramic tiles can be laid after 24 hours, natural stone after two days and, within four days, the finish is completely dry and can accept moisture sensitive floorcoverings, including resilient and wood flooring. In addition to new applications, Mapei Topcem and Topcem Pronto are also ideal for patching, repairing and time-sensitive screed replacement.

[info@mapei.co.uk](mailto:info@mapei.co.uk) [www.mapei.co.uk](http://www.mapei.co.uk)



## Vicaima present another dimension for interiors with Dekordor® 3D

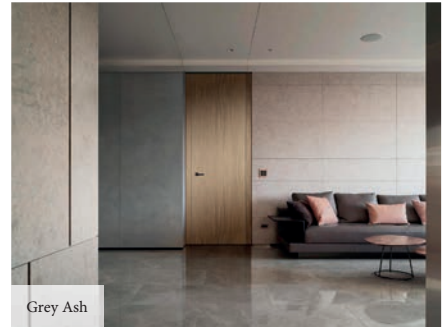


Arctic Oak

Popular for over a decade, the Dekordor® 3D range from Vicaima has long been a first choice with specifiers of living and working spaces. With its attractive textural and hard wearing surface, ideal for contemporary surroundings as well as demanding locations; this competitively priced interior timber door or door kit has much to commend it for both modern private dwellings and social environments. Now, with innovation and inspiration firmly in mind, the range has been re-imagined for a new generation of specifiers, with no less than 15 tonal and textural options, making flexible design and performance, available to suit a wider range of project budgets.

While colours like the original horizontal Grey remain as popular today as it always was, a fresh palette has been introduced to satisfy modern trends and encompassing both vertical and horizontal textured faces. For those who seek the neutrality of crisp and light colours, Artic and Silver Oak blend perfectly with busy surroundings and make excellent use of light in small spaces. Conversely, where rich warm tones would be ideal and needed to emulate otherwise expensive alternatives, Chocolate, Urban and light Walnut provide the perfect solution. However, if the desire is to embrace a more monochrome look, new Carbon Black, Grey Oak or Cloud White could provide the answer.

Dekordor® 3D is not just about door appearance either. It can be provided in the full gambit of performance solutions from Vicaima. Manufactured with fire (whether FD30 or FD60), security (including dual scope and SBD accreditation) and acoustic certification (ranging



Grey Ash

from 34 to 45 dB) the range can be supplied as part of a matching door assembly and with associated joinery such as skirting and wall panels. Furthermore, with flexible design options such as factory glazing, decorative grooves and inlays are also possible. In short tailored to your project needs, whatever they may be.

For more information about the Vicaima Dekordor® 3D Range take a closer look now by downloading the brochure or request a colour sample of your chosen finish by request.



Carbon Black

Arctic Oak

Chocolate Walnut

marketing@vicaima.com  
www.vicaima.com/files/files/catalog/vicaima-dekordor-3d-quadrilingue.pdf

## Wykamol launches ultra-thin ISO-THERM retrofit insulation

Wykamol has launched an innovative, patented textile-based thermal wall insulation which is ideal for creating dry and warm walls, primarily in retrofit situations, with the potential to save energy and protect properties from penetrating damp. ISO-THERM is an ultra-thin – approximately 4 mm thick – specially woven polyester-based material which, due to its flexibility and ease of use, can quickly be cut around light switches, sockets, radiator brackets, architraves, skirting boards and even complex shaped decorative mouldings. This therefore avoids the disruption and cost of employing additional trades such as electricians, plumbers or carpenters. The ISO-THERM membrane is secured to the brick or block substrate with Wykamol's unique ISO-THERM Adhesive, applied at a thickness of approximately 5 mm using a notched trowel. The ISO-THERM is then simply rolled into the glue before receiving a plaster skim coat, affording an overall finish of approximately 10 mm. The ISO-THERM material is both waterproof and vapour permeable, so resists lateral damp transference to prevent natural surface nitrates and chlorides forming as efflorescence and therefore does not support the growth of surface mould, instead allowing the wall to breathe. Available in 1 x 7.5 metre-long rolls, ISO-THERM is stable enough to accommodate a multitude of wall finishes and can even be applied to sound plasterboard.

01282 473 100 www.wykamol.com



## Stylish Evolve decorative light switches and sockets from BG Electrical

The Evolve range of decorative switches and sockets from BG Electrical is proving a winner for electrical installers as they combine end user demand for style and value with easy, quick fitting and 'no-return' reliability. This award-winning range is suitable for both domestic and commercial applications and the range is the perfect way to ensure all essential power points enhance décor rather than detract from it. Aesthetically attractive, the slimline switches and sockets are designed with screwless face plates which easily clip on and off to make decorating easier. Launched by leading lighting and electrical brand Luceco under its specialist wiring and accessories brand BG Electrical, the Evolve range boasts eight different colours including brushed steel, black chrome, and matt blue as well as satin brass, polished copper, matt black, matt grey, and pearlescent white. The range includes switches, sockets and power points including fast charge USB sockets, Wi-Fi range extenders, cooker controls, shaver sockets, dimmer switches as well as Grid range extension and Euro module range extension combining power, data, TV, telephone, and audio. There are 25-year warranties, and the range design ensures a 'right first time' approach to any wiring installation. BG Electrical is part of the Luceco Group, which also includes the Luceco Lighting and Masterplug brands.

01952 238 100 luceco.com/uk



## Creak-free flooring from West Fraser

West Fraser's CaberFloor P5 is a high-performance particleboard which is widely specified by developers, architects and self-builders due to its stability, durability and ease of installation. The high-density panels come in thicknesses of 18 or 22 mm, in both square-edged or tongue and grooved profiles; the latter features profiles on all four sides to offer maximum flexibility. The precision-engineered edges ensure smooth and speedy installation while the tight-fitting joints eliminate creaking. Choosing T&G CaberFloor P5 removes the need for intermediate noggins, while 'secret' or hidden nailing or screws can be employed within the joints.



[uk.westfraser.com](http://uk.westfraser.com)

## DF2E downflow fan heater

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



01646 692172 [www.consortepl.com](http://www.consortepl.com)

## DF2E DOWNFLOW FAN HEATER WITH 7-DAY TIMER

- Adjustable heat output (1kW or 2kW)
- 7-day programme, 6 temperature settings per day
- Digital variable thermostat
- Safety & lock features
- Open window detection

For more info on DF2E heater

**NOW AVAILABLE**

01646 692172
 [sales@consortep.com](mailto:sales@consortep.com)
 [www.consortepl.com](http://www.consortepl.com)

## The 'next generation' of fire safety

Pyroguard is delighted to announce the launch of Pyroguard Advance. Pyroguard Advance is a brand-new, high-performance product, featuring an innovative gel interlayer technology expertly developed following the completion of a dedicated research, development and test programme. Providing EW classification with a fire resistance of 30 or 60 minutes, Pyroguard Advance can also deliver exceptional fire protection at larger certified pane sizes, with a high tolerance to variations in glazing media – all helping customers to meet the demands of increasingly challenging fire safety applications.



01942 710 720 [www.pyroguard.eu](http://www.pyroguard.eu)

## Benefits of SterlingOSB ZeroPrimedPlus

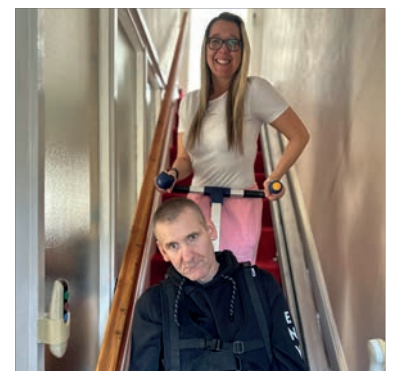
A multidisciplinary construction and property company based in the East Midlands has used SterlingOSB ZeroPrimedPlus, from West Fraser, for the hoardings around one of its latest residential projects, close to Derby CityCentre and its own head offices. Aside from the practicalities of the ready-to-use panels offering time-savings when erecting a safe and secure site hoarding, INCO Construction & Development Consultants – (part of The Berry Group) cited the smart and professional appearance of West Fraser's new product as being a primary reason for moving away from the use of standard OSB or plywood.



[uk.westfraser.com](http://uk.westfraser.com)

## AAT launches new way for social housing to accommodate disabled tenants

AAT GB is launching an innovative service specifically for social housing organisations, aimed at making the social housing stock work for everyone, making homes more accessible, without any structural alteration. The service centres around AAT's #1 selling S-Max Sella stairclimber combined with the unique Universal Back accessory. The combination means that almost anyone with a mobility issue – the most common impairment felt by the 6.2 million social housing tenants who are disabled – can access all levels of their home and get safely in and out of a multi occupancy unit. It means many inaccessible homes become accessible, enabling the SHP to balance the needs of the tenant and its housing stock for less than £1,500/tenant/without Disabled Facilities Grant funding. Importantly, the S-Max Sella requires no installation nor structural fixing. Thus in individual homes there is no need for structural survey and in MOUs – which account for more than 35% of housing stock, there is no impact on common parts. The equipment can be recycled/ re-issued to other tenants when no longer needed by the original recipient. AAT's service is a flexible package with options including assessment of the tenant and their home to determine suitability, provision of the equipment, training of the tenant's carer(s), annual service & maintenance of the equipment in line with LOLER regulations, and management of the social housing provider's stairclimber stock.



01978 821875 [sales@aatgb.com](mailto:sales@aatgb.com)

# **marmox** fireboard

Fire Protection • Sound Absorption • Thermal Insulation

**A1 Certified**  
*Render/Plaster Board*

- **A1 Fire Protection**
- **Sound & Thermal Insulation**
- **Thin & Lightweight**
- **Easy to Cut & Install**

**NEW PRODUCT**

Available in 20, 50 & 100mm.

Use on masonry, wooden  
or metal structures!

**marmox**  
Waterproofing & Insulation Solutions

W: [www.marmox.co.uk](http://www.marmox.co.uk)

T: 01634 835290

T: [sales@marmox.co.uk](mailto:sales@marmox.co.uk)

# The dangers of neglecting smoke control

One crucial aspect of building safety that is often overlooked is the maintenance and repair of smoke control systems. Tom Archer from Colt explores the hidden dangers and why proactive maintenance is essential

**A**s a responsible building manager, ensuring the safety of your occupants should be your top priority. However, one aspect of building safety that is often overlooked is the maintenance and repair of smoke control systems – as these systems are often hidden in walls and ductwork, they are frequently forgotten. Due to patchy record-keeping, some building managers may not even realise that they have these types of systems installed in their buildings and therefore inadvertently overlook their maintenance and repair.

Smoke ventilation systems are installed in a wide range of building types (most typically multi-storey and large, open-plan single-storey) and are designed to protect lives and property in the event of a fire – ignoring their maintenance can lead to catastrophic consequences. Smoke ventilation systems are used to remove heat and smoke from buildings during a fire. They keep escape routes clear for people evacuating the building and also make access routes into the building safer for the firefighting service and first responders. This enables them to reach those in need and the source of the fire more quickly.

## COMPROMISED LIFE SAFETY

Perhaps the most significant danger of ignoring smoke control system repairs is the compromised life safety of building occupants. Smoke control systems play a vital role in managing smoke and toxic gases during a fire, allowing occupants to evacuate safely and providing time for firefighters to control the blaze. Without properly functioning systems, smoke can spread rapidly, obscuring exit routes and making it difficult for people to escape. In a worst case scenario, this can result in injuries or even fatalities.

## LEGAL AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

In the UK, building managers must follow the guidance and regulations laid out in The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO). It states that the “Responsible Person” (typically a building owner and/or operator) must ensure their smoke control systems are maintained in an efficient state, are in efficient working order and in good repair at all times. Neglecting smoke control system repairs can lead to violations of these regulations, potentially resulting in legal consequences and fines for those responsible. Moreover, insurance companies may deny claims if it is determined that the building owner failed to maintain the smoke control system properly.

## INCREASED PROPERTY DAMAGE

In addition to compromising life safety, a malfunctioning smoke control system can also lead to increased property damage during a fire. Smoke can damage building materials, equipment, and valuable assets, resulting in significant financial losses. A properly functioning smoke control system can help contain the fire and minimise damage, saving both lives and property.

## SYSTEM DEGRADATION

Smoke control systems, like any mechanical equipment, degrade over time due to wear and tear. Ignoring necessary repairs can accelerate this process, leading to more frequent breakdowns and higher maintenance costs in the long run. Regular inspections and repairs can extend the lifespan of your system, ensuring it operates effectively when needed most.



## LOSS OF PUBLIC TRUST

Building safety is paramount for gaining and maintaining public trust. Ignoring smoke control system repairs can erode this trust, as occupants and visitors may become concerned about their safety. A reputation for inadequate safety measures can negatively impact the reputation of the building and its developers, deterring potential tenants, visitors and future business opportunities.

## INCREASED LIABILITY

In the unfortunate event of a fire-related injury or fatality in your building, failing to maintain smoke control systems can increase your liability. Negligence in maintaining safety systems can lead to costly lawsuits and damage your business or organisation's reputation.

In conclusion, ignoring smoke control system repairs may seem like a cost-saving measure in the short term, but the hidden dangers it poses can have devastating consequences for both life safety and property.

Building managers must prioritise regular inspections, maintenance, and repairs of smoke control systems to ensure they function optimally in the event of a fire. By doing so, you not only meet your legal obligations but also safeguard the lives of occupants and protect the valuable assets within your building.

If you think the smoke control systems in your building have not been recently serviced, reach out to a maintenance expert. They can carry out a free building survey and provide a list of recommendations and actions to take to ensure your systems are safe and compliant.

*Tom Archer is UK Sales Manager at Colt*

# Comply with the rules by using the people who helped make them.



## Entrust Colt with your smoke control servicing.

Colt's technical directors have long been involved in the development of fire and smoke control standards and guidance. Our team of expert engineers receive regular training from these same technical directors so you can rest assured that they know exactly how to keep your buildings safe.

### Competency is crucial.

When it comes to smoke control maintenance, you must ensure your service provider is highly competent and certified by a third party. Colt is the UK's first company to be certified to both IFC SDI 19 and SDI 05 schemes, awarded in recognition of our skill as an installer and servicer of smoke control systems and fire curtains.

Each one of our expertly trained engineers has one aim in mind – to keep your buildings safe and legal, whether your system was designed and installed by Colt or not.



### Smoke is different to fire.

Smoke is different to fire and needs specialist maintenance. All too often, smoke control maintenance is lumped in with fire alarms and security and has only a functionality test or is sub-contracted out to 'smoke vent' or 'AOV' operatives. Unlike Colt, unfortunately (and dangerously), not all these companies are fully accredited or certified to be doing maintenance on systems as complex as smoke control.

To find out more, visit us at:

[coltinfo.co.uk/service-maintenance](http://coltinfo.co.uk/service-maintenance) calls us on 02392 491735 or email [service@uk.coltgroup.com](mailto:service@uk.coltgroup.com)



**CERTIFICATED INSTALLER OF  
ACTIVE FIRE PROTECTION**

*Certificate number: IFCC 3141*

## Choose Colt

# COLT

Service



Expertise built on experience.

# How housing providers can support tenants effectively

Martin Brown of FM Outsource, explores how housing providers can develop tailored customer service strategies that tackle sensitive concerns and meet tenants' needs effectively



**S**ocial housing has been cast into the spotlight in recent years, with tragic stories of those living in poor conditions catapulting the sector up the public and political agendas.

Of course, many housing associations and registered social landlords are already doing a great job when it comes to accommodating tenant needs. Where improvements are needed, a series of encouraging interventions and efforts have been made to tackle wider issues across the industry, from introducing Awaab's law to taking steps to improve housing quality and giving a greater voice to tenants.

Going forward, developing, and maintaining positive tenant-landlord relationships will be key to creating a better future for social housing residents. Of course, tenants are the customers of housing providers and the fundamentals of a good customer service strategy remain important. However, the diverse, sensitive, and often emotive nature of tenant queries, concerns, and complaints require tailored care and more considered communication than in the cases of some other sectors.

Here are three principles to help landlords – from social housing to private rental sector providers – create effective customer service strategies that support their tenants effectively.

## COMMUNICATIONS TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT TENANT NEEDS

While customer service strategies in many other industries are targeted to specific customer demographics, the housing tenant population is diverse and there is no 'one size fits all' approach.

Social tenants come from a wide range of backgrounds and their needs differ depending on circumstances, meaning customer service requires a more tailored approach.

For example, a greater proportion of social tenants are from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background compared to all households, meaning that English may not be the first language of some customers. To avoid excluding tenants, housing providers should offer multilingual communications, and outsourcing this type of support can be a more viable option to accommodate the breadth of tenant languages. Having an agent who can speak fluently and understand the nuances of the conversation helps to ensure that customers feel that their concerns are heard and – crucially – not misinterpreted.

Meanwhile, the data shows that a greater percentage of social renters are disabled, compared to the total population. Disability comes in many forms, and therefore different tenants may have different communication needs. Providing a range of different ways to contact the housing provider enables as



## Fostering a long-term, two-way relationship with tenants should be an absolute priority for housing provider

Fostering a long-term, two-way relationship with tenants should be an absolute priority for housing providers. Regular tenant communication, as well as offering customer support 24/7, 365 days a year, helps to provide round-the-clock reassurance that the housing provider is there to support at any hour of the day and night.

In turn, this builds familiarity and trust, supporting tenants to feel comfortable in expressing concerns with their landlord. With the cost-of-living crisis causing more social housing tenants to be in rent arrears compared to during the pandemic, those customers may feel more compelled to pick up the phone to a 'real' person, in the knowledge that they'll receive empathy about their circumstances in return.

### PREVENTION OVER CURE

By creating this type of reciprocal, ongoing conversation, customer service teams also have a greater opportunity to catch emerging issues through their interactions with tenants and proactively intervene, before they become bigger problems to resolve.

This shift of emphasis from troubleshooting to communicating not only cultivates better relationships and helps empower customers to raise often sensitive issues – it is part of a long-term strategy to help reduce the reputational risks of missing a major issue.

Ultimately, by looking long-term at tenant communications, and taking an authentic, consistent, and inclusive approach to customer care, housing providers can ensure they are accommodating tenant needs and supporting their customers effectively.

*Martin Brown is CCO at FM Outsource*

many tenants as possible to access customer service easily. For example, a deaf tenant may need to contact their landlord via social media or live chat, while an individual with a learning disability may prefer a phone conversation with an agent who can explain things in a clear, jargon-free way. Deploying intelligent, omnichannel software can be an effective way to collate and manage these various communications streams and monitor the status of queries in one place, ensuring that no tenant concern goes unaddressed.

### CONSISTENCY AND CARE

While responding to enquiries effectively is important, ensuring that tenants feel empowered to voice their thoughts and raise any concerns in the first place is a critical initial step. But with typical tenant enquiries ranging from emerging leaks to mounting bills, understandably, some customers may lack the confidence to raise these issues proactively.

## Gilberts ups the standard in smoke and fire protection

With growing emphasis on managing the risk of smoke and fire within building safety, leading air movement engineer **Gilberts** is leading the way to optimise control. To address increasing demand and to exceed criteria laid down in the latest Building Regulations, Gilberts is launching a new, fully tested range of insulated smoke and fire dampers. The insulated dampers complement Gilberts' established Ductgard units for HVAC ductwork. The insulation element of the new dampers helps minimise the risk of heat transfer and thus the risk of fire spreading beyond the compartment. Its performance exceeds the two relevant layers of fire safety in buildings: integrity of compartmentation and structural safety. Spring and thermal fuse activated, the insulated dampers offer fire resistance of EI30, EI60, EI90 and EI120 for general ventilation systems with walls and partitions of various ratings. Thus, they deliver effective cut-off partitioning between the fire-engulfed zone and the remaining part of the building, helping maintain the building integrity. The range is fully tested and certified to EN15650, EN13501-3 and EN1366-2. The introduction of the insulated dampers builds on Gilberts' 60+ years' heritage of bringing to market advanced technology that enhances the design, safety, energy efficiency and occupier comfort of non-domestic buildings.

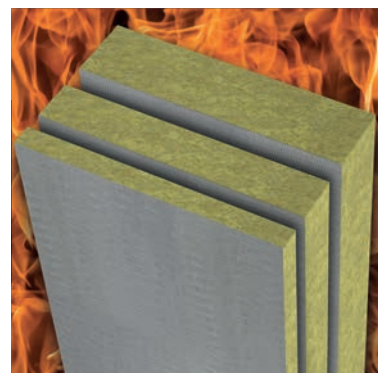
01253 766911 [info@gilbertsblackpool.com](mailto:info@gilbertsblackpool.com)



## New Marmox Fireboard offers ideal EWI and IWI substrate

Building on the broad benefits of its widely specified Multiboard, insulation manufacturer **Marmox** introduced in January a highly versatile Fireboard into its range for both internal and external wall insulation (IWI/EWI) applications. The Marmox Stone Wool based product shares the unique Marmox honeycomb surface structure with its XPS forerunner, Multiboard, to create an A1 non-combustible certified render-backer which is weatherproof. It can further be used internally across walls or ceilings to take a plaster finish, while providing sound absorption properties, as well as thermal insulation. The 600 x 1,200 mm Fireboards are available in thicknesses from 20 mm, 50 mm and 100 mm and with the polymer modified mortar honeycomb coating applied to both faces. With a nominal density of 150 kg/m<sup>3</sup> the boards' core material offers a compressive strength of 90 tonnes/m<sup>2</sup>. The 20 mm Fireboard is ideally suited for external window and door reveals, ready for renering. As detailed in a newly available A5 technical brochure which can be downloaded, Marmox Fireboard has been tested to prove compliance with BS EN 1182, EN 1716 and EN13823 conducted by UKTC, along with other testing completed by the BRE. Indeed, the British manufacturer is proud to announce on its website that: "Marmox Fireboard is a powerhouse solution, designed to tackle fire hazards, intrusive noise, and the biting cold, all in one lightweight, easy-to-handle board."

[sales@marmox.co.uk](mailto:sales@marmox.co.uk) [www.marmox.co.uk](http://www.marmox.co.uk)







# A digital approach to life safety systems

The duty of the Accountable Person, outlined in the Building Safety Act, is to take all reasonable steps to prevent building safety risks. Here, Nelson Godinho of SE Controls, outlines what is required and how a truly digitised approach helps to achieve compliance

**T**he required technologies to achieve a digitalised approach to life safety are now commonplace so it is a choice, not a limitation of technology that is preventing improved building safety, despite the introduction of the Building Safety Act in April 2022.

The Building Safety Act imposes specific requirements for higher risk buildings (HRB), defined as those at least 18 metres tall or with at least seven storeys and a minimum of two residential units. Like properties managed by many social housing and facilities management professionals as well as those involved in buy-to-let and student accommodation.

## WHAT INFORMATION IS REQUIRED

There are three building safety 'gateways' intended to ensure that building safety has been incorporated from design through to occupancy. Each one acts as a hard stop on the project with work unable to continue to the next phase without approval from the appointed Building Safety Regulator.

The first comes at the end of the planning stage and requires those responsible for the project to demonstrate that building safety has been considered as part of the outline planning application. A fire statement needs to be submitted as part of passing this gateway to detail how fire safety has been incorporated.

At the end of the design phase, before construction can begin, the duty holders must submit detailed information about the building 'as designed' as well as the competence of the principal designer and principal contractor. This must include details of how building safety will be maintained throughout construction as well as while occupied. In particular, the fire strategy will need to be approved at this stage. Having a detailed design of life safety systems, typically specifying the essential product characteristics at asset/device level referenced both in the Building Regulations and the harmonised standards, is critical to achieving the desired outcomes. The duty holders must also outline the strategy for the management of the digital golden thread information.



## There are three building safety ‘gateways’ intended to ensure that building safety has been incorporated from design through to occupancy

The information must be structured to allow it to be retained, accessed and transferred effectively.

Before the building can be occupied it must be certified as safe with a completion certificate issued by the Building Safety Regulator. To receive this certificate, the duty holders must provide details of the as-built building along with key information about the building and declarations from the principal designer and principal contractor that it complies with the Building Regulations. Completion of this stage also requires confirmation that the digital golden thread information has been handed over to the ‘accountable person’.

### DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

Smoke control systems are rarely activated unless in an emergency. Those who are responsible for a building must ensure that the systems will perform as intended when called upon.

Manual, periodic inspections coupled with decentralised record-keeping may result in outdated data, potential human errors, and the risk of missing or misplaced records. Consequently, the opportunities for proactive maintenance and timely remediation are limited, which may jeopardise system performance during emergencies.

### HOW A DIGITALISED APPROACH HELPS TO ACHIEVE COMPLIANCE

With the right systems and innovations in place, every asset that makes up the life safety system in a building can be combined into a digitalised system or ‘ecosystem’. This will change how systems are managed in key areas:

An actuator on an automatically opening vent (AOV) can have its parameters, settings and performance tracked in real-time from the moment it is manufactured, right through its lifetime. This means that in the event of a fire, it can be proven digitally that the product was safe and compliant at any point in its history, including in the event of a fire.

Configurable technology allows parameters of the products within a life safety system to be tailored using technologies such as Bluetooth and

mobile applications, removing the requirement for laptop or specialist equipment on site.

A digitalised approach also provides total transparency detailing exactly who has interacted with the products in a life safety system, what they did, why they did it and when.

Also, with the installation of a 4G-enabled router in every building, remote product validation is also possible whereby products can potentially be tested, and the weekly test results recorded, validating its performance against the fire strategy available in the cloud. Communication of all the data on the life safety systems can be securely and automatically transmitted and stored in the cloud, where it can be accessed by everyone responsible for the building.

Creating and managing data and content in a structured way via a common data environment will enable it to be consumed and accessed by a wide range of stakeholders using an ever-increasing number of asset management platforms.

Moreover, maintenance processes can be streamlined with remote diagnostics and support. The local or in-house maintenance team in some cases can resolve the issue, removing the requirement for costly engineer callouts, minimising response times and ensuring prompt action in case of faults or maintenance requirements.

The Building Safety Act, as with most legislation, is complex in places. However, if disciplined approaches are taken in software and technology selection, content management and data strategy, satisfying the requirements of this and future similar legislation will become simpler to achieve. Most importantly, it prioritises the life safety of residents in social housing communities.

To download SE Controls’ whitepaper ‘Understanding the Building Safety Act: Driving safety with a holistic technology-driven approach’, please scan the QR Code.

*Nelson Godinho is Fire Engineer at SE Controls*





# BUILDING INSIGHTS

A PODCAST FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY  
LISTEN AT [HOUSINGMMONLINE.CO.UK](https://www.housingmmonline.co.uk)





UK Health  
Security  
Agency

Radon is a  
radioactive gas



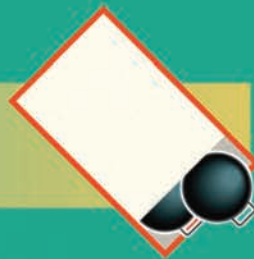
Radon enters buildings from  
the ground and can reach  
high concentrations



More than 1,100 lung  
cancer deaths per year  
are linked to radon



Radon is identified  
as a potential hazard  
in HHSRS



A map of radon affected areas and  
details of UKHSA services are online at

[www.ukradon.org](http://www.ukradon.org)



We advise government and the public on radon-related issues, and have four decades of experience and expertise in delivering radon programmes for landlords and workplaces. We provide information on the risk of harm from radon, how to check your housing stock and workplaces and what to do when action needs to be taken. Our expertise includes the field of radon research, policy setting and running effective radon measurement programmes for our customers.

We remain independent of companies providing remedial services and our advice is impartial.

Contact the Radon Group at UKHSA by email:  
[radon@ukhsa.gov.uk](mailto:radon@ukhsa.gov.uk) or phone: **01235 822622** for more  
information and guidance