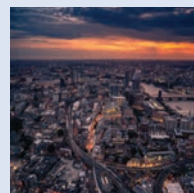
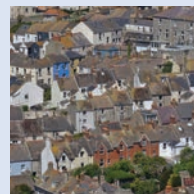


HOUSING MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

JUN/JUL 2024



Industry News
Gove 'regrets' rise in
number of children
in temporary
housing



Comment
Energy Efficient
Block Management

Industry Viewfinder
The Decarbonisation
of Social Housing –
Part Two



Special subsidence feature

How Redditch Borough
Council is putting tenants
first by minimising
disruption. Read the report
on page 32.

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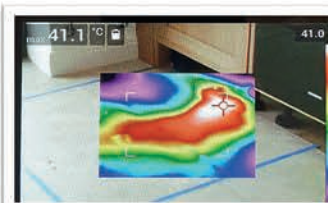
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SCAN ME



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Industry Viewfinder: The Decarbonisation of Social Housing – Part Two

Following on from our 2023 study – which revealed that 41% estimated their tenants to be fuel poor and 80% believed UK social housing's energy performance to be inadequate – *Housing, Management & Maintenance* decided to revisit the research to find out the performance of our respondents housing stock to find out how (if at all) it has improved

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Eliminating emissions

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Editor's comment

A new housing broom could be on its way



Patrick Mooney,
News Editor

The announcement of a General Election for early July came as a great surprise to most of the country and indeed to most of the cabinet according to newspaper reports. It quickly led to the announcement that many MPs would be standing down including the Housing Secretary Michael Gove, who certainly raised the profile of the housing brief while he held it. But what will be his housing legacy? Could it be the increased level of regulation he brought in for social landlords, or the somewhat confusing picture around housebuilding targets? There was the missed opportunity provided by Levelling Up, assuming that it really was meant to deliver a redistribution of wealth and was never more than just a gimmick. Only time will tell, but his successor will not be without advice and suggestions, particularly in terms of the steps needed to increase the supply of housing (upto and possibly beyond 300,000 new homes a year), especially building more social rented housing, but also the need to ramp up investment in improving housing conditions overall and energy efficiency levels.

Sadly the calling of the election has meant that the Conservatives' flagship housing legislation, the Renters (Reform) Bill, failed to reach the statute book. The headline from this was that the 2019 manifesto commitment to ban no-fault evictions could not be delivered despite all of the endless hours spent on its passage in both the Commons and the Lords. Trying to get agreement on this proved to be very tricky, not least because many of the Government's own backbenchers were private landlords and they wanted greater protections for their property investments. However, there are grounds for optimism as it is highly likely that whichever party forms the next Government they will reintroduce the bill, albeit with changes to it. If the Labour party emerges triumphant, then there is a strong possibility that some form of rent controls will also be brought in. The private rented sector has just seen a year of record-breaking rent increases, so it is highly likely that such a move will be very popular with tenants, so long as it doesn't result in lots of rental properties being sold, demand increasing and rents being driven up. It's a delicate balance that needs to be struck.

MISMATCH BETWEEN PLANS AND DELIVERY

The worsening overall condition of private rentals and the failure to crackdown on the illegal subletting of flats by various holiday booking agencies will also feature in Gove's political obituary. He promised much, but his delivery did not match the stated ambitions and ultimately he is likely to be remembered for his department's under performance. I suspect Gove's biggest regret will be the rise in homelessness and in particular the large number of children growing up without a permanent roof over their heads. This is both a tragic loss of life chances, but also the most terrible waste of money which could be a lot better spent on improving conditions, or in paying for new housing to be built.

Several Bills did manage to squeeze through the short wash-up period and this included the Leasehold and Freehold Bill. This new law aims to make it cheaper and easier for more people to extend their lease, buy their freehold and take over management of their building. However, plans to remove ground rent - a charge leaseholders pay on top of their mortgage - or to cap it at £250, have been dropped. Several Conservative peers expressed their concern that a "complex and difficult" piece of law was being rushed through. Another peer who backed it said the bill was "suboptimal" and "not the revolution" hoped for but added: "It's the only game in town." In fact the bill was one of the last to get through, passing at 6:30pm on Friday evening, just hours before Parliament was closed for the election campaign to start. It remains to be seen if the next Government will attempt to amend the new law.

Meanwhile what are the Labour party thinking of doing? Whatever it is I am sure the sector would like some continuity in personnel and policies, and that Housing ministers last longer than a year in office. The churn and turnover in ministers over the last 14 years became something of a joke, with junior ministers moved on before they had mastered their brief. Housing is by nature a long-term project and it would help if politicians were given the time to understand what the issues are and can then work with housing professionals to deliver solutions and improvements. If we can't manage this, then the prospects of delivering 300,000 new homes a year and cutting our appalling homeless figures remains remote.

Patrick Mooney

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On the cover...

*Special subsidence feature:
How Redditch Borough Council
is putting tenants first by
minimising disruption.*

See page 32.

Rental Bill torpedoed by election

The Conservatives' flagship bill to reform the private rented sector was one of the biggest casualties of the Prime Minister's decision to call a General Election in early July. Both landlords' representatives and housing bodies are warning of huge uncertainties affecting the sector, which could badly hit the supply of rental homes.

Despite it being in the 2019 election manifesto, the Renters (Reform) Bill – which was due to ban Section 21 'no fault' evictions – ran out of time, with backbench MPs and peers in the House of Lords still dis-satisfied with key elements. Some wanted greater protections for landlords, while others wanted assurances on the legal processes.

Ironically it was opposition from the Government's own side that eventually ensured it could not get through in the wash up period, as Labour said they would have allowed the bill to proceed through all its stages. It is possible that it will return in the next Government's programme of legislation.

The need for the legislation was starkly revealed in official figures released in mid-May which showed that no fault evictions had risen to a six year high. Some 2,682 households in England were marched out of their homes by bailiffs (using Section 21 powers) between January and March – up 19% in a year.

The Ministry of Justice figures showed a further 7,863 landlords in England started Section 21 eviction proceedings against their tenants in that time period, an increase of 15% in a year. This means that nearly 29,000 households have been kicked out of their home by bailiffs since the Conservatives first promised to ban Section 21 no fault evictions five years ago.

The procedure is a major contributing factor to the rising tide of homelessness because they allow landlords to evict tenants with only two months' notice, without having to give a reason. Recent Government data found that no fault evictions resulted in a record 25,910 households being threatened with homelessness in 2023.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that landlords use the Section 21 route to re-let properties at higher rents to new tenants. The average UK asking rents increased 7.2% to £1,223 a month in the last year, figures from Zoopla show. The highest average rent in the UK is £2,121, in London.

GROWING UNCERTAINTY

Earlier in 2024 MPs ignored calls from organisations representing renters and voted to accept amendments to the Renters (Reform) Bill. These amendments could have indefinitely delayed banning Section 21s and reintroduced some fixed term tenancies, prompting the housing charity Shelter and others to say they could no longer support the Bill.



In the immediate aftermath of the bill failing to squeeze through, the National Residential Landlords Association warned that the private rented sector is now headed for further widespread uncertainty.

Setting out the NRLA's position, Ben Beadle, chief executive of the National Residential Landlords Association, said: "It is hugely disappointing that this bill has not made it into law. The news comes despite the fact that the bill was in a state which would work for tenants and responsible landlords."

"There has been too much dither and delay in Government, and a failure to be clear about how to ensure changes would work in practice. Critically, the market now faces yet more crippling uncertainty about what the future of the private rented sector looks like."

"Reforming the sector will be an important issue for the next government and we will work constructively with them to ensure changes are fair and workable. That means empowering tenants to challenge rogue and criminal landlords whilst ensuring the confidence of responsible landlords to stay in the market."

Meanwhile Polly Neate, chief executive of Shelter, said: "Evictions are rocketing to new heights while the Government put the threats of a small group of self-interested landlord backbenchers over the safety and security of 11 million private renters."

"It's been five years since the Conservatives pledged to rebalance the scales in private renting, and what do we have to show for it? A Renters Reform Bill, left in tatters, which will keep renters trapped in the same hellish conditions they've endured for decades, or abandon them to the whims of their landlords and the terrifying spectre of homelessness."

Gove 'regrets' rise in number of children in temporary housing

Michael Gove has admitted to feelings of regret over increases in the number of homeless households with dependent children living in temporary accommodation.

Official figures published at the end of April showed that nearly 112,000 households were in temporary accommodation on 31 December 2023, a 12.1% increase from the previous year. Of those, 63% included dependent children, hitting record levels in 2023.

Data from the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, showed 34,220 households faced the threat of homelessness, an increase of 4.8% from the same quarter the previous year. Of this figure, 5,790 households faced a section 21 notice, an increase of 10.9% from the same period the previous year.

"I can't look at those figures with anything other than regret," the Housing Secretary told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "The biggest issue overall is that whether it's in the private rental sector, the socially rented sector, or homes to buy, we still need to increase the supply of homes."

When he gave the interview Gove was still expecting the Renters (Reform) Bill to become law, but it was dropped when the Prime Minister announced the General Election would be held in July. The bill was meant to scrap Section 21 evictions, one of the biggest causes of homelessness in recent years.

Last year, the Government added only 234,400 new homes to England's housing stock out of a promised 300,000 additional homes. Gove said: "We've missed the 300,000 target but we've hit the 1 million over the course of Parliament target."

"There's an increasing pressure on housing supply... We have not been building enough homes, we have not been creating the new housing that matches the new formation of households."

Speaking in the House of Commons, Lord Best, a cross-bench peer and member of the all-party parliamentary group on housing market and housing delivery, called for a statutory national housing committee to be established, "to see the job done". Best said: "It is certainly worth trying, against the backdrop of human misery that the severe underprovision of genuinely affordable housing has created."

Fixing dangerous and unfit homes would save more than £1.5 billion in annual health and social care savings

Fixing England's most dangerous homes lived in by older people would directly save the NHS and the social care sector more than £1.5 billion a year, while delivering billions more in health benefits, newly published research has revealed.

Removing the most serious risks to people's health and safety from the country's poorest quality homes where the head of household is 55 or over would result in savings to the NHS of nearly £600 million per year, according to new research from the Centre for Ageing Better.

And formal care costs for older people provided by professional caregivers could be reduced by £1.1 billion a year by 2027 by resolving poor quality home issues, according to analysis by academics at the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre (CPEC), based at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

In addition, the LSE analysis indicates the potential for a further £3.5 billion annual savings in unpaid care costs for older people provided by family members, neighbours, or friends if the nation's poor-quality housing crisis was resolved.

Previous research from the Centre for Ageing Better identified £19 billion of annual health benefits from investing more in home improvement. The new research was presented at a special event on the cost of poor-quality housing to health and social care held at the LSE in late May.

Dr Carole Easton OBE, chief executive at the Centre for Ageing Better, said: "There is a terrible personal cost for older people who live in homes that are making them ill and which have the potential to seriously injure and even kill them. Older people are more likely to live in a dangerous, damp or cold home and are among the most vulnerable to the health impacts which can exacerbate conditions such as asthma and arthritis, as well as increasing the risk of an acute episode such as a stroke or heart attack."

HOUSING AND HEALTH LINK

"But this country's poor-quality housing crisis also reaps a terrible cost on our already stretched health and social care sectors. Fixing unsafe homes is a value-for-money solution that will not only help people to live healthier and longer lives, but will also reduce pressures on health and social care."

"With so much supporting evidence pointing to significant benefits, it beggars belief that home improvement is not higher up the political agenda. Improving the country's health cannot be done without improving the quality of our homes."



Even just removing three common health hazards from homes of bad condensation, excess cold, and rising damp would lower the social care costs considerably

While people aged 55 and over live in around one in three of England's non-decent homes, they account for more than half of the NHS's annual first year treatment costs (£595 million) for injuries or illness as a result of poor-quality housing, according to analysis conducted by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) for the Centre for Ageing Better.

The scale of the health savings from home improvement means that the estimated £4.6 billion bill to repair all Category 1 hazards that pose a threat of death or serious injury in older people's homes would be paid back in just under eight years, the new analysis reveals.

Focusing investment just on mitigating excess cold, which claims the lives of up to 9,000 people a year in England and Wales, in every home in the country headed by an older person would deliver an estimated £325 million worth of savings to the NHS every year and pay back the repair costs within nine years.

The Centre for Ageing Better recently launched the Safe Homes Now campaign with eight other charities including Barnardo's, Asthma + Lung and St John Ambulance.

The campaign is calling for a national strategy to

tackle the poor quality of the country's homes and has challenged the government to halve the number of non-decent homes, which currently totals 3.7 million, within the next 10 years.

The Centre for Ageing Better believes that the solution to resolving the national crisis of dangerous homes is the establishment of a national network of local one-stop shops called Good Home Hubs offering advice on home repairs, adaptations and energy efficiency improvements.

Dr Nicola Brimblecombe, senior researcher at the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre and lead of the LSE research project (CAPE), said: "Our study clearly shows how poor quality and unsuitable housing can increase people's care needs and their ability to live independently, negatively affect wellbeing, and reduce choice."

LONG TERM EFFECTS

"Improving housing has the potential to improve people's quality of life, reduce health and care inequalities, and save money for government as well as having wider benefits to the environment and society. Negative effects of poor housing for social care can be long-term - action to improve poor quality housing cannot come soon enough."

The LSE analysis indicates that the substantial savings in formal care costs for older people by removing health hazards from homes would grow significantly over time - from £1.1 billion a year in 2027 to £2.8 billion a year by 2042. Similarly the cost savings in the level of unpaid care required would mushroom from £3.5 billion a year in 2027 to £7.1 billion a year by 2042.

Even just removing three common health hazards from homes of bad condensation, excess cold, and rising damp would lower the social care costs considerably.

The LSE analysis calculated the cost savings in formal care would grow from £0.4 billion in 2027 to £1 billion by 2042, and the cost savings in the level of unpaid care required would grow from £1.2 billion in 2027 to £2.3 billion by 2042.

The LSE research also found that people living in poor housing develop care needs 8 years earlier than people living in a home without any housing problems. Researchers say this earlier development of and longer time with care needs is potentially avoidable if housing was to be improved.

The academics also point out the effects of poor housing are not experienced equally, with housing tenure, financial resources, and access to information all playing a role in development of care needs and in extent of unmet need for support.



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Building Safety conference calls for industry to step up and commit to change

The Building Safety Regulator has held its second industry wide conference in Birmingham, marking a major milestone for the BSR as the new building safety regime was fully established in law.

With over 1,300 delegates in attendance, the conference provided a platform for industry leaders, regulators and resident representatives to discuss the ongoing transformation of the building safety landscape.

The conference showcased BSR's resident-centric approach, with several sessions dedicated to industry accountability and empowering residents to ensure their voices are heard in building safety decisions which affect their homes.

Sarah Newton, chair of HSE and Philip White, HSE's chief inspector of buildings and director of building safety division opened the conference, highlighting BSR's achievements and outlining its future priorities.

Sarah Newton said: "We are committed to putting residents at the heart of everything we do. At HSE, we understand that building safety is not just about regulation and compliance; it is about people – their lives, their homes, and their communities."

"The new building safety regime is designed to

"We understand that building safety is not just about regulation and compliance; it is about people – their lives, their homes, and their communities"

Sarah Newton, Chair of HSE

give residents a stronger voice and for industry to ensure that their homes are safe."

"Today gave those on the building safety frontlines the chance to share our knowledge and collaborate on solutions to translate the new regulatory framework into actionable steps, ensuring the safety of both existing and future buildings."

Philip White said: "So much has happened in the last year, and at such pace – showing how much we can achieve together when we have a common goal."

"More than 12,000 buildings have been registered with the regulator and many of our conference

delegates, along with others across the UK have already registered as building inspectors and demonstrated their competence."

"Building control professionals play a critical role in ensuring the safety and quality of our built environment – and above all, being regulated will raise industry standards and increase public trust."

Other key topics discussed at the event included:

- Industry accountability and ownership in delivering safe buildings;
- BSR's firm but fair approach to enforcement;
- The critical role of building control professionals in raising standards; and
- A need for continued collaboration between industry, regulators and residents.

Panel discussions were hosted with the Construction Leadership Council, emphasising the importance of building safety as a strategic priority for the entire industry.

The conference also extended beyond the UK, with Dan O'Brien, CEO of cladding safety Victoria in Australia attending as part of an information-gathering visit. His attendance highlighted the vital international collaboration and knowledge-sharing currently taking place in the field of building safety.

Final Grenfell Tower Inquiry report to be published in September

The final report from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will be published later this year on 4 September – more than seven years after the devastating fire which claimed the lives of 72 people.

A brief notice on the inquiry's official website said: "The inquiry has written to core participants to inform them that the phase two report will be published on Wednesday 4 September 2024. Further information about the arrangements for publication will be published in due course."

The Met Police and Crown Prosecution Service have said no charges will be announced until late 2026 at the earliest due to the "complexity" of the inquiry. Any criminal trials are not due to begin until 2027.

This inquiry's report will examine how the

tower block came to be in a condition that allowed the fire to spread. The final hearing for this phase of the inquiry took place in November 2022. It examined a total of 1,500 witness statements and 300,000 documents.

The report into phase one focused on the factual narrative of the events on the night of the blaze. It was published in October 2019. It concluded the tower's cladding did not comply with building regulations and was the "principal" reason for the rapid and "profoundly shocking" spread of the blaze.

"When the report is finally released, we need to know that Sir Martin Moore-Bick's recommendations will be implemented by the new government in power," the bereaved families and survivors group said. "Nearly five years since the publication of the first report, the Government has failed to implement four of the phase one recommendations."

"The Public Inquiry phase two report will hopefully give us the truth we deserve, but it needs to bring the change we so desperately need to see. This change is the legacy for our loved ones. And to ensure no one suffers like us."

A spokesperson for the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities said: "We are grateful to Sir Martin for the important work of his Inquiry

and will carefully consider his final report and recommendations. We will never forget the 72 lives lost at Grenfell and remain absolutely committed to securing justice for the bereaved, survivors and the wider community."

They added that of the 15 recommendations recommended to Government in Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, it had completed 11 and work was ongoing with the remaining four. It said it had also introduced the Building Safety Act, which had brought in "tough new building safety standards".

A police investigation has been under way for nearly seven years alongside the two-part public inquiry. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Stuart Cundy has said the Met has "one chance" to get the investigation right and they "owe that to those who lost their lives" in the fire.

The investigation has become increasingly complex as the Metropolitan Police considers the web of 19 organisations and companies as well as 58 individuals involved in the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower.

Officers have gathered more than 27,000 pieces of evidence from the tower itself. Mr Cundy said he accepted it was "a long time" to wait for justice, but rushing the investigation and making mistakes would be "a worse case scenario".



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Tenants should have a right to a garden



Housing developers and landlords should give tenants a “right to a garden” according to a leading horticulturist who also campaigns for more green spaces in new-build homes.

Jason Williams is known as the cloud gardener. He is campaigning for green spaces in new builds and rights for tenants to grow plants. He recently worked with students to create balcony gardens for the Royal Horticultural Society urban show held in Manchester to demonstrate what can be done in a small space.

Each garden cost £500 to create. He also created an example allotment with easy-to-tend plants, which a developer could easily put into a new-build block of flats. Williams is campaigning for developers and landlords to create spaces for tenants and leaseholders to grow plants, and says it should be part of their responsibility to give green space to the people who live in their developments.

“People are crying out for green space, especially now with this cost of living crisis,” he said. “Things are getting so, so difficult for so many people across our towns and cities and green spaces are a really, really great way of helping people with their wellbeing. And I think that if we can just encourage developers just to take that next step, I think that will really, really be impactful.”

Williams said he thought tenants should have a right to a garden and said he had seen examples of renters being banned from gardening. “It’s really interesting because especially as a renter, you become even more powerless. People have reached out to me and said, actually, I started balcony gardening or I put some pots out around my terraced home. But the developer then said no, you can’t have those pots there because there’s a fire risk. And then all of a sudden, you get completely shut down,” Williams said. Other tenants have also blocked people from gardening, he said.

New laws mean developers who create new builds have to create “biodiversity net gain”, which means having at least 10% more space for nature on the plot of land than there was before they built it. But these areas, Williams said, are often not gardens and do not give a huge wellbeing benefit to the people who live in the developments.

Time to act on the silent scandal of nearly 4 million dangerous homes

A ‘Safe Homes Now’ campaign has been launched to tackle the poor state of housing, which sees 8 million people living in 3.7 million dangerous homes that are cold, in need of repair or have serious hazards.

Almost one in four homes (21%) in the private rented sector fail the decent homes standard compared to around one in seven owner-occupied (14%) and one in 10 (10%) socially rented homes. And the problem is getting worse. For the first time since 2016, the number of non-decent owner occupied homes has risen.

In polling commissioned for the launch of the Safe Homes Now campaign, more than half of people (54%) said it had become more difficult to keep their home warm over the past two years, two in five (39%) said that it has become more difficult to keep their home in a good state of repair and one in four (25%) said that it has become more difficult to keep their home free from hazards and defects.

It has become normalised that people live in homes that might be dangerously cold, in disrepair or with life-threatening hazards. It is a national scandal that is never talked about. And building new homes will not come close to solving the problem, as four in five homes that will exist in 2050 have already been built.

Having good support and policies in place for home improvement is absolutely vital. Yet it is a topic almost never discussed politically and in that silence, our current political system is failing the majority of homeowners and renters.

Thousands are dying in their homes every year because they are too cold. Thousands more are dying in preventable accidents and falls. These are lives cut short, futures unfulfilled, cherished family and friends gone forever.

The Centre for Ageing Better, alongside eight other charities including Barnardo’s, Asthma + Lung UK and Independent Age, has launched Safe Homes Now. The new campaign is calling on whoever forms the next Government to halve over the next decade the 3.7 million dangerous homes in this country.

They believe the target is achievable but only if the housing quality crisis in this country is tackled with the urgency, priority and resource that it warrants. At the moment, they believe housing policy is drifting with no sense of purpose how to tackle this really key issue.

DWINDLING RESOURCES

Resources needed to tackle the problem are dwindling. Research has shown that more than £2 billion has been withdrawn in private sector grant support over the past decade – money that could have funded the repair of 600,000 homes.

Having good support and policies in place for home improvement is absolutely vital. Yet it is a topic almost never discussed politically and in that silence, our current political system is failing the majority of homeowners and renters

The situation has now been reached where more money is being spent maintaining the Houses of Parliament than on the rest of the nation’s privately-rented and owner-occupied homes combined.

The group are calling for a national strategy to tackle the poor quality of the country’s homes because this issue is too big and too important to be resolved with piecemeal, ad-hoc solutions. It needs long-term thinking and planning.

They believe people need greater access to reliable information and support to maintain their homes. Polling has revealed that among people requiring home repairs in the past two years who had not been able to have the work done, more than half (57%) said it was because it was too expensive. A further one in five people (19%) could not find the right person for the job.

The Centre for Ageing Better believes the solution is the establishment of a national network of local one-stop shops called Good Home Hubs. These hubs would offer advice on home repairs and adaptations including where to find trusted tradespeople, identifying what work needs to be done, how to finance repairs and improve energy efficiency.

Polling indicates more than one in two people (57%) would likely use a Good Home Hub if it was available in their area. The next Government is being urged to pilot the Good Home Hub model in 50 areas for at least two years to see the difference it could make to people’s homes and to their lives.

To find out more about the Safe Homes Now campaign and how to get involved, contact christos.tuton@ageing-better.org.uk
Initial members of the Safe Homes Now campaign are: Centre for Ageing Better, Asthma and Lung UK, Barnardo’s, Impact on Urban Health, Independent Age, Nationwide Foundation, Race Equality Foundation, The Runnymede Trust and St John Ambulance.

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Leasehold reforms become law without ground rent cap

Reforms to the leasehold and freehold system in England and Wales have become law – but without a promised cap on ground rents.

The new law aims to make it cheaper and easier for more people to extend their lease, buy their freehold and take over management of their building. But plans to remove ground rent altogether for existing leaseholders, or to cap it at £250 were dropped by Ministers.

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform bill was one of the last pieces of legislation to make it through Parliament before it was shut down ahead of July's General Election.

The former Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove said he originally wanted to cap ground rents at a nominal level. That was changed to a planned £250 cap, but the idea was dropped altogether as the legislation was rushed into law at the last minute on an evening of frantic activity.

A ground rent is paid by owners of leasehold properties on top of their mortgage, with some facing high charges and unexpected increases which can make homes difficult to sell.

But the owners of freehold properties had campaigned hard against the ground rent cap and other measures in the bill arguing it would harm the value of their investments and some companies had threatened to sue the Government for interfering with their property rights.

Labour's shadow housing minister Matthew Pennycook said his party would "finish the job of finally bringing the archaic and iniquitous leasehold system to an end". "Having waited so long and had their expectations raised so high, leaseholders across the country will be bitterly disappointed at the Tories' failure to enact bold leasehold reform," he added.

Speaking as the leasehold bill was being rushed through the House of Lords, Conservative peer Lord Bailey of Paddington said: "This bill is suboptimal, it's not the revolution that many leaseholders across the country have been desperate for. But it's the only game in town, a game that has currently taken 22 years to get to this point."

Labour urged to cap the size of rent rises in England and Wales



Rent rises should be capped for millions of people struggling to afford soaring price increases, according to a report commissioned by the Labour Party.

The stabilisation model proposed by the report's author, Stephen Cowan, suggests a "double lock" for those renewing their tenancies. This would guarantee that any rise is capped at either consumer price inflation or local wage growth – whichever is the lower – across England and Wales.

But Labour is conscious of warnings that rent controls could discourage developers from building new houses and make the affordability crisis even worse. The report warns that rent freezes or limits on rises between tenancies could make it harder to find a rental property, pushing prices up further.

Tenants across the country faced the highest annual increase in rents since records began in 2015 last year, with average monthly rents rising by 9% in the year to February.

The Resolution Foundation thinktank predicts average rents could increase by as much as 13% over the next three years as the current high growth in the private rental market works its way through existing tenancies.

Cowan also recommends that rents can only increase once a year, with tenants receiving at least four months' notice of any increase. He also believes rent review clauses – which give landlords the scope to raise rents mid-contract – should be banned.

In the report, Cowan said that the measures, defined as a "third-generation rent stabilisation" system, were essential to protect people from soaring rents within tenancies and also bolster security for landlords.

Cowan said: "Renters have a right to know that

their home will be safe and of good standard. And good landlords have a right to compete in a market where everyone plays by the same rules. These recommendations will enable those things to happen efficiently and quickly." The review, also recommends:

- An annually updated National Landlords Register which would require landlords to demonstrate compliance with the decent homes standard or face fines and even be subject to a criminal offence;
- The abolition of no-fault evictions, and "back-door" evictions, which may include landlords wishing to move themselves or family members in and landlords wishing to sell a property which Cowan says in the report "shouldn't be a ground for ending a tenancy";
- Measures to discourage landlords from entering the short-term and holiday let market or nightly paid temporary accommodation sector by equalising the tax treatment for all forms of private letting; and
- Policies to ensure that medium-term affordable housing returns to being the second-largest part of the housing sector, to decrease the country's reliance on the private rental market.

Tom Darling, of the Renters' Reform Coalition, said: "These appear to be a commonsense set of proposals for reforming the private rented sector. It will be critical that, if Labour is to win the general election, it gets on and delivers a package of reforms along these lines – and fast. That will deliver security of tenure for renters who, facing an acute and ever-growing renting crisis, have been so badly let down by the government."



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Sanctuary reviews 4,000 homes at direction of the Ombudsman

Sanctuary has undertaken a review of nearly 4,000 homes following a wider order from the Housing Ombudsman. The order for an independent review of policy and practice was made after the Ombudsman made two severe maladministration findings for similar issues handling leaks, damp and mould.

The landlord commissioned a high-level review, independent of its repairs or complaints teams and the Ombudsman, which focused on repairs, record keeping and responding to vulnerabilities. The Ombudsman's ability to make these wider orders under 54(f) of its Scheme was introduced following the Social Housing (Regulation) Act.

The review into the 4,000 cases found that there were potentially 236 impacted homes "where there is limited evidence that roofing works were carried out in an efficient and timely manner".

Where there was limited evidence that the repairs were completed, those residents were contacted by the landlord to see if there are any outstanding issues. If works have not been completed, they are being progressed as a matter of urgency. The landlord will also apologise to any resident where works have not been completed as they should have been.

The landlord also conducted workshops with residents to seek improvements and work on the feedback given. In the two cases that led to this wider order, the residents faced significant distress and inconvenience chasing and waiting for their roof repairs to be resolved, with communication issues rife throughout.

REPAIRS

The independent review found that repairs were not always completed within timescales, there were multiple repeated contacts and follow up repairs, and lower levels of satisfaction when contractors were used.

The landlord has changed its approach to

contractor management, providing closer oversight of the quality of repairs and value for money delivered. This has resulted in a full review of the cancellation and rebooking process, repairs surveys and inspection process.

Residents told the landlord it wanted faster repairs, better communication, more 'right first time' jobs completed, and clarity around which repairs were landlord and which repairs were resident responsibility.

To improve repairs delays and escalations the landlord says it will introduce a root cause analysis process to better underpin service improvement plans, roll out predictive analytics to identify more proactively homes at risk of damp and mould and enhance data management and reporting to deliver improved end-to-end repairs journey.

RECORD KEEPING

The cases showed there is a risk that repairs are closed without being completed and the use of off-line systems increased the risk of data gaps. In some cases there was also over-reliance on spreadsheets, which has now been eradicated with the introduction of new systems to record and manage major repairs.

For damp and mould cases specifically, the landlord has introduced a damp and mould performance dashboard to give visibility of open repairs and complaints. The landlord's Executive Committee receives a weekly report of cases and the Group Board receive a report at every meeting.

It is also using data to identify 'hot' and 'cold' properties, resulting in visits to proactively engage with customers who have reported multiple issues, or visits where the landlord has not heard from a customer for two years.

To improve its overall complaint handling, the independent review recommended the landlord improve learning from complaints through live complaints information, equip

leaders more to listen and act on resident voice, broaden guidance in relation to reasonable adjustments and to strengthen its application of the compensation procedure.

To improve record keeping, the landlord says it will roll out a new technology transformation system, delivering enhanced data management, analysis and reporting. It will also move information on damp and mould onto an integrated online system and continue rolling out its 'customer census' to increase the coverage, range, and quality of data held.

VULNERABILITIES

The independent review looked at whether repairs and escalations considered the resident's vulnerabilities. It also examined how resident vulnerabilities are recorded. The landlord identified various risk factors on several themes such as health and wellbeing and tenancy, looking at short term health conditions, care leavers and those who have fled domestic abuse.

The review found that the inspections team are not provided with adequate training to sufficiently understand wellbeing, vulnerability, and empathy. This has potentially led to wellbeing or vulnerability concerns not being identified when carrying out an inspection.

It also found that the new complaints team structure has meant that training has not matched the skills these specialists need, meaning there is a skills gap. Additionally, there appears to be a lack of consistent training received by frontline staff which enables them to confidently discuss initial complaints and respond appropriately.

To improve on capturing individual circumstances, the landlord says it will develop and implement of revised vulnerability policy, expand its 'Think Customer' and vulnerability training programme across the organisation and implement a new Customer Relationship Management system.

CIH welcomes Welsh Government rent settlement announcement

Cabinet secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning, Julie James MS, has announced the decision to extend the Welsh Government's rent and service charge standard to the end of March 2026.

Housing associations and stock holding local authorities will be able to determine their own rent increases for tenants in 2025/26, subject to

September's consumer price index (CPI) falling between 0% and 3%. These increases will be subject to the formula and guidance set out in the rent standard. If CPI falls outside the range of 0% to 3%, Welsh ministers will determine the appropriate change to rent levels to be applied for the year. Matt Dicks, national director at CIH Cymru said: "We welcome the decision to extend the rent and service charge standard to 2026 and the ministers ongoing focus on ensuring that the right balance is struck between affordability of rent and ensuring that housing organisations can invest in new homes, retrofit existing homes, and provide an excellent service to their tenants."

"The rent settlement is not a target, but a ceiling in which social landlords can work with to strike

this balance. The decision will provide the sector with stability and certainty, enabling housing associations and stock holding local authorities to set rents at a level that are fair and affordable for their tenants."

"We must also acknowledge that the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis are still being felt by many tenants and housing organisations are ready to work with tenants to address any financial hardships they are facing. CIH Cymru will continue to collaborate with the minister and the wider sector to ensure that future rent settlement and rent policies continue to balance affordability with the goal of reaching our shared ambition of providing good, sustainable and warm homes for everyone living in social housing in Wales."

How effectively information is used by social landlords is vital in service delivery outcomes

The Housing Ombudsman has published its latest 'learning from severe maladministration' report, highlighting the huge range of failings that can come from Knowledge and Information Management (KIM) inadequacies.

With the important role that social housing has to play in giving safe and secure housing to millions, the learning in these reports will help landlords provide effective services that protect this aspiration.

The report comes a year after the Spotlight report on the issue, providing more lessons landlords can learn from recent cases. The first section of the report focuses on three key cases where poor KIM can impair the response to repairs, domestic abuse and damp/mould.

In one case a resident was exposed to damp and mould for a prolonged period because the landlord did not have adequate processes in place for information to be passed to new staff members. And in another case no action was taken or vulnerabilities recorded despite four complaints from a domestic abuse survivor.

Other cases demonstrate how landlords are unable to evidence to the Ombudsman action it has taken in response to repairs and anti-social behaviour because of inadequate or missing records, and how this can also hamper investigations by the Ombudsman.

The report also includes some cases where the KIM failing was only maladministration, but provides context for a separate finding of severe maladministration in the case. This includes a complaint where the Ombudsman



recommended the landlord consider a referral to the Information Commissioner's Office following a data breach.

There are also opportunities for landlords to receive support and training on KIM through the Ombudsman's expanding Centre for Learning, which provides CPD-accredited modules, as well as analysis and recommendations from Spotlight reports and other publications.

The landlords highlighted in this latest severe maladministration report are:

- A2Dominion
- Anchor Hanover
- Clarion
- Gateshead Council
- Harlow Council
- Leeds City Council
- Lewisham Council
- L&Q
- Metropolitan Thames Valley
- Notting Hill Genesis

- PA Housing
- Sanctuary

Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman said: "From domestic abuse to repairs to ASB, failings in this area can have a significant impact on residents, their health and wellbeing, as well as eroding trust in their landlord. Inadequate or inaccurate records can also present significant organisational risk, both handling individual cases or more widely."

"This creates a lottery where landlord actions can be inconsistent or non-existent.

There is also a strong correlation between poor records, protracted complaints and severe detriment which is hard to ignore and can involve landlords of all sizes and types."

"In a challenging and changing operating environment, knowledge and information management should be the foundation of a solid service delivery and complaint handling."

Regulator's fees for large social landlords to jump by more than 70%

The Regulator of Social Housing has confirmed a 72% increase in annual fees for larger registered providers (those with more than 1,000 homes) to pay for a new expanded regulatory regime.

This means that from 1 July larger housing associations are to be charged a fee of £9.28 per property owned, up from £5.40. Councils owning more than 1,000 homes will also be charged fees for the first time, set at £6.63 per property. This means social landlords will be paying for the full cost of their regulation.

Landlords with fewer than 1,000 homes will continue to pay a flat fee, but this will more than

double from £300 to £650. Organisations will also have to pay an up front registration fee of £3,000 when applying to become a registered provider, instead of after successfully registering as previously.

The regulator said the changes will ensure it has "the resources, skills and capacity" to deliver its wider role. The RSH's more proactive regulatory remit came into effect from April. Its new powers included undertaking inspections and ensuring landlords complied with the new consumer standards.

Fiona MacGregor, chief executive of RSH, said: "The changes to our fee principles will give

us the resources we need to deliver our new regulatory role, which will help to drive long-term improvement in social landlords for the benefit of tenants."

"We are grateful for the feedback we received during the consultation, which we carefully considered in reaching the final outcome. We recognise the importance of providing value for money for fee payers and we will continue to focus on regulating in an effective and efficient way."

The regulator said 68% of 133 respondents to the consultation agreed with its proposed approach to setting fees for larger registered providers, while 56% of 147 respondents agreed with its proposal for local authority fees. This was based on an estimated fee of £9 to £10 for large RPs and £7 to £8 for councils.

Uncertain future for consultation on social housing tenants' rights to access information about their homes

The outgoing Conservative Government launched a consultation on the rights of social housing tenants to request information from their landlords about the management of their homes, shortly before proroguing Parliament.

It is uncertain what a new incoming Government will do with the responses. The former social housing minister Baroness Scott had said the new rules would give tenants the tools they needed to hold their landlords to account and to drive up standards across the sector.

For the first time, the rules would have permitted social housing tenants or their representatives, such as lawyers, to request information about the management of their homes at no cost. This would have included issues such as damp and mould, health and safety and repair times.

For example, tenants experiencing damp and mould would be able to ask their landlord how many other homes in their building have the same problem and what action the landlord has taken to repair it. At the launch of the consultation process, DLUHC said this would give tenants "the tools to take further action if they choose".

Regarding health and safety issues, tenants would have a right to request information about any breaches in their properties and outcomes of any inspections. The consultation said that "tenants could take further action through the Housing Ombudsman if their landlord isn't making the



repairs they need to make by law".

Under Awaab's Law, which is part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, landlords must fix emergency repairs within 24 hours. DLUHC stated that "tenants will be able to see how often their landlord is meeting this target and challenge them through the courts or take them to the Housing Ombudsman if they don't".

Housing associations would be required to publish information about their performance and to provide the information unless it was reasonable for them not to, with clear guidelines on how they respond to requests. Tenants would also be able to complain to the Housing Ombudsman if they were not happy with how

their information request was handled.

Officials at DLUHC expected information requests to cost landlords about £1.8m in the first year of operation, based on estimates of how long it will take landlords to respond, as well as any additional requests and reviews. There will be an extra cost associated with the Housing Ombudsman Service responding to complaints from tenants regarding landlords' compliance with the requirements.

The Housing Ombudsman was due to consult with registered providers on the proposed fee regime, a year after the new information rules have been introduced "so proposals can take account of actual volumes and costs".

Landlords selling up represents biggest threat to renters

Private landlords selling their properties represents the single biggest threat to renters according to data from different housing organisations.

Among households eligible for support from a council to prevent homelessness following the end of a private rented tenancy agreement, 45% needed help because their landlord planned to sell the property. This was more than twice as much as the next most common reason for the end of rental tenancies which was landlords planning to re-let the property.

The news came in the wake of concerns raised by tenant group Generation Rent, who have warned that "landlords selling properties is a leading cause of homelessness".

Despite increasing demand, the supply of private housing available to rent is still 50,000 homes below pre-pandemic levels, figures from Rightmove show. The total number of privately renting households, including those in stable accommodation, has

hovered around the 4.5 million mark for the last decade, according to the English Housing Survey. In that time, England's population grew by 3.2 million, equivalent to 1.4 million households.

Data published by the National Residential Landlords Association further exposed the scale of the supply crisis across the private rented sector.

A poll of landlords for the NRLA found that 83% reported that demand for rental properties by tenants is 'strong'. The same survey saw 31% say they plan to cut the number of properties they rent out, compared with just 9% who plan to increase the number of properties to let.

The findings are supported by recent Rightmove data which showed that 50,000 properties are needed to bring the supply of rental homes back to pre-pandemic levels.

Ben Beadle, chief executive of the NRLA, said: "Landlords selling up is the single biggest challenge renters face. The only answer is to ensure

responsible landlords have the confidence to stay in the market and sustain tenancies. More broadly, all parties need to accept widespread calls for policies to boost supply in the private rented sector."

But the campaign group Generation Rent accused the NRLA of trying to "hold parliament hostage to the idea that they will sell up over even the smallest strengthening of tenants' rights".

Ben Twomey, its chief executive, said: "Long term, if landlords sell up it makes little difference to the housing market. Bricks and mortar do not sink into the ground, and the home could be bought by another landlord, a first-time buyer or even repurposed for social housing... The short-term issue is that tenants have an appalling lack of protection when landlords choose to sell up."

It wants the next Government to incentivise the sale of homes with sitting tenants and require relocation payments to renters evicted through no fault of their own.

L&Q exploring sale of private rental stock and strategic land functions

One of the country's biggest social landlords is exploring the sale of its private rental properties and strategic land company in an effort to return itself to a traditional model and to 'put residents first'.

L&Q is the second large housing association in the Spring to announce it is looking at changes to enable it to focus more on providing services to its existing residents. Clarion, which owns and manages 125,000 homes, announced it is planning a radical restructure to focus on improved housing management and customer service.

L&Q chief executive Fiona Fletcher-Smith told the UKREIIF conference in Leeds, that she did not see the functions as being core to the 109,000-home housing association's mission. "We are putting our own house in order, and I think the innovative thing I am doing is taking us back to a traditional housing association where your residents come first and then you build," she told a packed room of delegates.

"We are in the market at the minute with the PRS, our commercial portfolio, we are in the

L&Q is the second large housing association in the Spring to announce it is looking at changes to enable it to focus more on providing services to its existing residents

market, we are about to do a deal on our strategic land company"

Asked by the panel chair whether this meant they were up for sale, she confirmed that they were. "They're not core, they're commercial activities that we bolted on over the years that don't make sense anymore," she continued. "So, they will help us to generate more capital. They will help declutter us, make us attractive to the rating agencies again, so we're not as complicated."

A spokesperson for L&Q later said: "One in 23 children in London are homeless, and there is a significant need for new social housing to meet the scale of this crisis. In the absence of a long term government plan for housing that delivers the funding our sector needs, L&Q – like all

housing providers – is exploring opportunities to generate additional financial capacity to invest in affordable housing.

"As part of this, we keep our non-core social housing activity under regular review but no final decisions have been taken."

Most of the £1bn-turnover organisation's private rented properties are managed by L&Q PRS Co Limited, which, according to the most recent accounts, had a portfolio of 2,724 homes and generated an operating margin of 58%.

The association has previously said L&Q Estates controls strategic land capable of potentially delivering more than 76,000 new homes nationwide, enabling the provider to operate as a major developer.

Over half of social landlords are missing 100% gas safety target

Less than half of social landlords (45%) have achieved 100% gas safety compliance, according to a survey of social landlords by the data collection organisation Housemark.

On average, 99.98% of all social homes had an up-to-date gas safety certificate as of 31 March. However, this means around 1,000 social homes did not comply with gas safety regulations at the end of March.

Social housing landlords have actually improved their performance on gas safety in the past 12 months, with a higher percentage of landlords (45%) reporting 100% compliance, but this figure is still down from the 69% of landlords who reported full compliance in 2019. In 2022/23, just 41% of landlords reported full gas safety compliance.

The report highlighted that factors such as "the complexity of market conditions, the pandemic hangover and the asset management challenges faced by the sector" are affecting landlords' compliance rates.

John Wickenden, research manager at

Housemark said: "Our qualitative data from landlords also highlights that additional barriers to gas safety checks have emerged as a result of fuel poverty."

"Gas engineers are finding more tenants with no money on the gas meter. This further indicator of the cost-of-living crisis is revealing new risks and vulnerabilities at a time when support agencies are at breaking point."

There has also been a slight fall in the proportion of repairs completed within the target time, from 87% in December 2023 to 83% in March this year.

According to Housemark's 2023/24 data, there has been an 18% increase in complaints, with a UK-wide average of 51.3 stage one and two complaints

per 1,000 properties. In the previous period (2022/23), social landlords received an average of 43.5 complaints per 1,000 properties.

On the latest survey, Wickenden said: "It is really encouraging to be able to highlight improved performance from housing providers on some key safety areas that will be reflected in Tenant Satisfaction Measures for 2023/24.

He added: "Our data clearly shows that while some metrics are improving, current headwinds and post pandemic recovery are still highlighting areas for improvement. For instance, in 2019, Housemark data showed that over two-thirds of landlords recorded 100% compliance with gas safety, now it is fewer than half"



COMMENT

Energy efficient block management

Robert Poole of Glide explains how regardless of the changing political mood, there is a real need for more energy efficiency in block management



The shift towards greater energy efficiency within block management is crucial due to environmental, economic, and regulatory pressures.

As urban populations grow and the impacts of climate change become more apparent, the need to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions from residential buildings has never been more urgent.

Improving energy efficiency aligns with the British Energy Security Strategy. It reduces the energy demand, enhances the country's energy independence and creates jobs. With most homes using fossil fuels for heating, the UK population is vulnerable to price spikes in the gas market, which can lead to substantial energy bills.

In block management, the need for more energy efficiency is driven by the global push towards sustainability and reducing carbon footprints but, most notably, the financial impact on freeholders and occupiers if this work is not done. In addition, energy efficiency improvements often lead to enhanced indoor environmental quality, contributing to better health and comfort for residents.

The effort to bring our housing stock up to Net-Zero Standards faces substantial financial and logistical hurdles, and currently only a tiny fraction meet the desired efficiency levels. While the government recently shelved plans to introduce a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ECP rating of C to private rental properties, the requirement for EPC E remains, alongside the broader issue of upgrading housing stock. Retrofitting buildings to achieve an EPC rating of C is estimated to cost approximately £48.3 billion.

It's also important to consider how data can enhance building practices and retrofit decisions. Due to the enormity of the challenge and the crucial role of precise data in directing these efforts effectively, cooperative efforts between the public and private sectors are essential.

Technological advancements play a critical role in enhancing energy efficiency. Adopting smart building technologies – such as automated energy management systems, IoT-enabled devices, and advanced HVAC systems – can significantly reduce energy consumption. These technologies allow for real-time monitoring and management of energy use, essential for identifying



inefficiencies and optimising energy use. Furthermore, as noted by the IEA, global trends towards more energy-efficient technologies in buildings have been shown to significantly decrease energy demand, underscoring the importance of ongoing technological adoption.

Energy efficiency in block management offers substantial economic benefits by reducing operational costs and enhancing the value of properties. With rising energy prices, efficient energy management is increasingly vital for keeping utility bills manageable. This is particularly important in multi-unit buildings where energy costs can be a significant portion of monthly expenses. According to recent polling by Energy UK, a substantial barrier to energy efficiency improvements is the high upfront cost.

The government has implemented robust policies to encourage energy-efficient practices. The Heat and Buildings Strategy outlines significant investments aimed at reducing carbon emissions from buildings, a move that directly impacts block management operations. Measures include the government's Green Finance initiatives, the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, the expansion of the energy company obligation and the installation of heat pumps, with the aim to phase out new gas boilers by 2035. Compliance with these policies is not just about avoiding penalties but also about aligning with national goals for energy independence and sustainability.

Addressing social equity through energy efficiency is also critical. Building efficiency enhancement can help alleviate fuel poverty by reducing occupiers' overall energy bills. Ensuring that energy-efficient upgrades are accessible to all, regardless of economic status, is essential for fostering inclusive communities.

There are a number of initiatives that freeholders and occupiers can consider implementing when it comes to improving energy efficiency in blocks of flats:

- **Comprehensive Energy Audits:** Regular energy audits are crucial for understanding how energy is used within buildings and identifying potential areas for improvement. These audits should be thorough and conducted by certified professionals to ensure accuracy and effectiveness.
- **Upgrading Building Insulation:** Improving the insulation in buildings is one of the most effective ways to enhance energy efficiency. Well-insulated buildings require less energy for heating and cooling, which directly translates to lower energy costs.
- **Renewable Energy Installations:** Incorporating renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, storage batteries (ensuring adherence to fire regulations) or biomass energy systems, can significantly reduce dependence on non-renewable energy sources and decrease energy expenses over time.



"The effort to bring our housing stock up to Net-Zero Standards faces substantial financial and logistical hurdles, and currently only a tiny fraction meet the desired efficiency levels"

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

- **Engaging with Occupiers:** Educating occupiers about energy-saving practices and encouraging their participation can lead to significant reductions in energy consumption. Engagement strategies could include informative workshops, regular communications, and incentives for energy-saving behaviours.
- **Green Roofing and Sustainable Landscaping:** Installing green roofs and investing in sustainable landscaping are innovative ways to improve building insulation and reduce heat absorption, leading to lower cooling costs.
- **Continuous Performance Monitoring:** Ongoing monitoring and adjustment of energy systems through the use of sensors ensure that buildings remain at peak efficiency. Utilising energy management software can help track performance and highlight areas for further improvement.
- **New Builds and Regulations:** The Future Home Standard will require new builds to emit 75% less carbon. An uplift in Part L of the building regulations mandates 30% lower CO₂ emissions for new homes compared to previous standards.

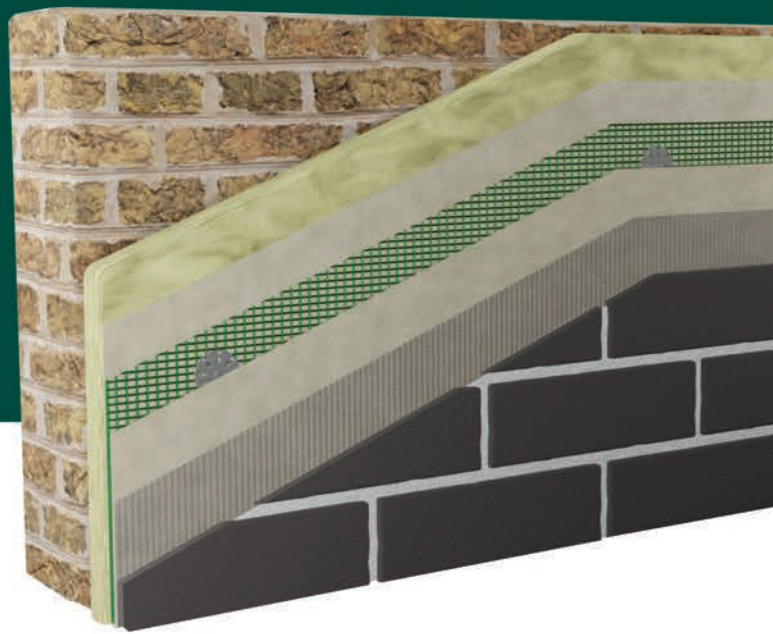
By implementing these strategies, block management companies not only enhance their buildings' energy efficiency but also contribute to broader environmental goals, improve financial performance, and enhance the liveability of their properties. This comprehensive approach is essential for future-proofing property investments and contributing to a sustainable urban future.

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

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INDUSTRY VIEWFINDER

The Decarbonisation of Social Housing – Part Two

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With climate concerns at an all time high, the housing sector is under increasing pressure to decarbonise its stock.

Meanwhile, the Government's net zero 2050 commitments continue to loom large, and tenants are struggling to pay for the energy needed to warm their inefficient homes.

Intended to support the cause, the Government says it has allocated an estimated £6bn in funding to cut energy use in housing, with applications of its latest wave of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund closing in January. This has arguably made little headway in settling the sector.

There is a distinct lack of confidence of the sector's ability to reach these targets, as well as in the Government, which has already back-stepped on its measures (such as its plans to enforce an EPC rating of C in all rental properties last year), alongside the turbulent politics of 2024 leaving everyone unsure of what is next.

Following on from our 2023 study – which revealed that 41% estimated their tenants to be fuel poor and 80% believed UK social housing's energy performance to be inadequate – we decided to revisit the research to find out the performance of our respondents housing stock to find out how (if at all) it has improved.

While some progress is notable, the mountain to climb remains as stark as ever. Over a fifth do not think the decarbonisation of social housing is important, while 78% would describe at least some of their tenants as fuel poor – and almost half of respondents had still not heard of the Social Housing

Decarbonisation Fund, despite its first wave occurring in 2021.

The research survey targeted housing professionals, with nearly three-quarters of the respondents holding managerial or director positions. The investigation aimed to understand the reasons behind their perspectives, identify the barriers they face, and assess the current state of their housing stock.

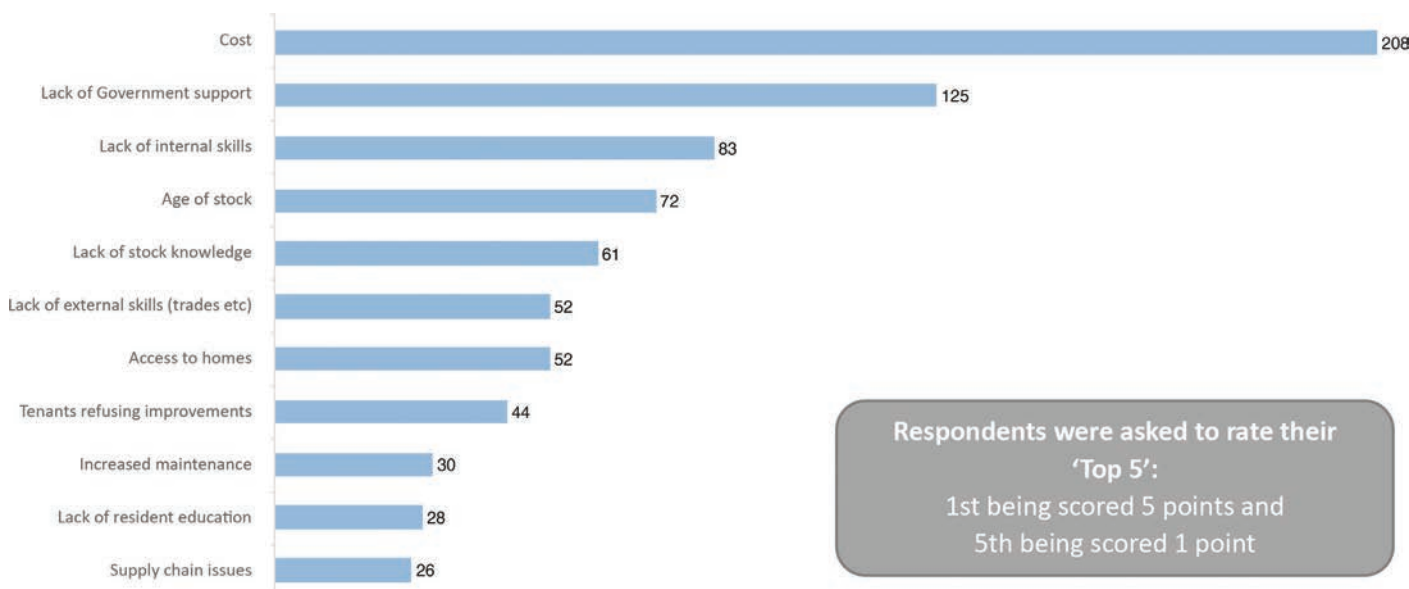
INTRODUCTION

Climate specialists across the globe have time and again found that humans are responsible for virtually all global heating over the past two centuries, and all warn of the stark ecological and humanitarian disasters that will come in its wake if carbon emissions continue to be left unchecked.

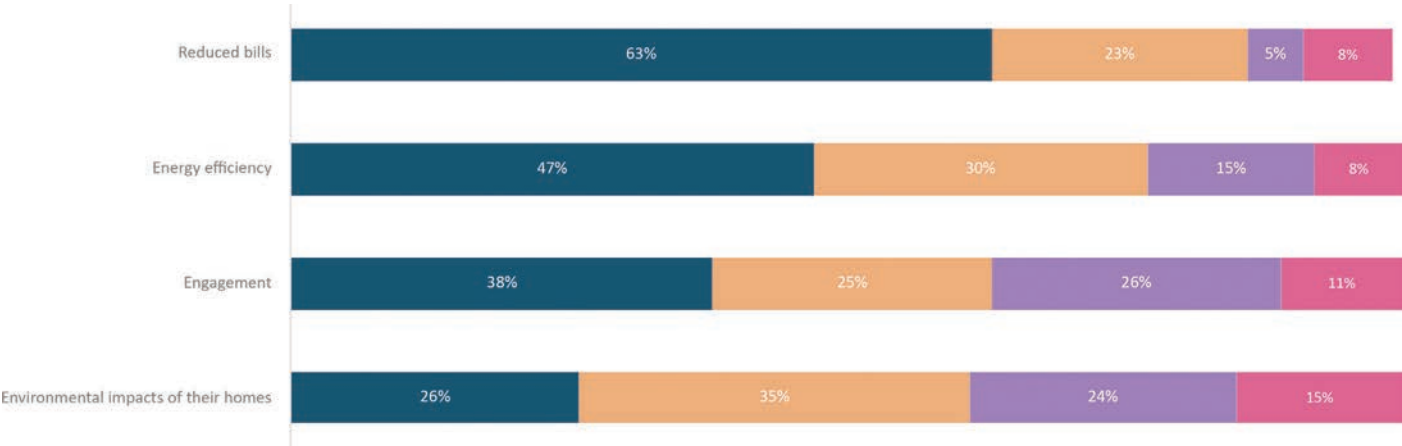
According to the National Housing Federation (NHF), domestic use of fossil fuels accounts for 21% of England's carbon emissions, with social housing in particular making up half of this.

While some headway is possible at present through capturing or offsetting emissions – by planting additional trees or using the still immature technologies of mechanical carbon capture – these will only go so far, and elimination of unnecessary carbon emissions will play the primary role.

There are numerous sources of carbon emissions in UK homes, especially in the fuels used to heat them. Technologies like heat pumps and decarbonised heat networks are already in circulation and performing well here, but these will rely on a strengthened energy network (which itself needs to be decarbonised) to prevent high electricity costs, as well as the insulation necessary to allow these technologies to work as efficiently as possible.



"What do you believe the main barriers to the decarbonisation of the UK's social housing stock will be?"



“How important are the following to your residents on average?”

Very Important Fairly Important Not Greatly Important Unimportant

Unfortunately, with the reportedly oldest stock in Europe, poorly insulated homes are prevalent in the UK, with any gap in the fabric of a home forcing heating systems to work harder to maintain necessary temperatures.

Though there is some argument as to the exact specifications of air tightness needed, the majority of the industry is under no illusion when it comes to the work left to achieve, believing that a fabric first strategy is vital to lower bills and emissions, and ensuring these clean heating systems can thrive.

The Government currently recommends EPC ratings as the measurement for efficiency in homes, informing its Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. It does admit its shortfalls at present – being primarily a measure of how affordable a property’s energy costs are, rather than its carbon impact – but it remains their best ruler, the body seeking for all social homes to reach EPC C by 2030; notwithstanding the political turbulence that has weakened this somewhat.

Also recommending a fabric first approach – suggesting a minimum space heating demand of 90 hkw/m²/year – plans still focus on the immediate consequences of inefficient homes.

In the face of this however, the UK is currently experiencing a cost of living crisis, with prices of rent, energy and food rising dramatically – unlike income or housing benefit – leading to further fuel poverty, lowering standards of living, and arguably taking housing professionals focus away from green technologies.

While understandable, these topics are not separate. According to the Government, almost 20% of social housing residents were deemed to be in fuel poverty in 2019.

In this study, 78% of respondents would describe at least some of their tenants as fuel poor. Essentially, inefficient homes hurt more than just the environment.

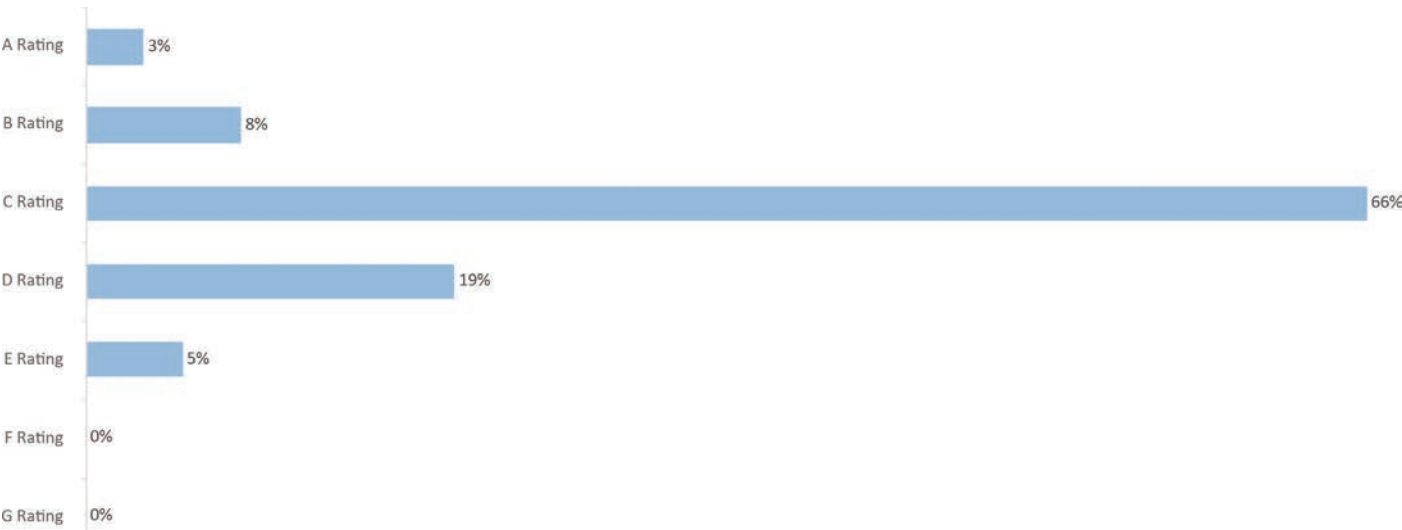
OPINIONS OF DECARBONISATION

Despite the clear challenges to achieve a better future in the long term, residents stand to gain in the short term from this process, with warmer, more affordable, healthier homes.

As such, most of this year’s respondents were appreciative of the need for decarbonisation. When asked how important they believed the decarbonisation of the housing sector to be, 38% said ‘extremely’, 41% ‘quite’, 16% ‘not very’ and just 5% ‘not at all’.

When compared with the previous study, however, this is slightly less positive – at 69% ‘extremely’ and 28% ‘quite’ – again perhaps implying the cost of living crisis has taken precedence, despite its position to tackle the issue.

Alongside the need for decarbonisation, respondents were also asked what they believed to be its main benefits – lessening this theory somewhat. 31%



“What is the average performance of your housing stock in terms of EPC bands?”





Navigating the Maze of the Future Homes Standard

From 2025 the Future Homes Standard comes into force, this and the approved document Part O of the building regulations will change the way that we heat, ventilate and cool new build homes for ever.

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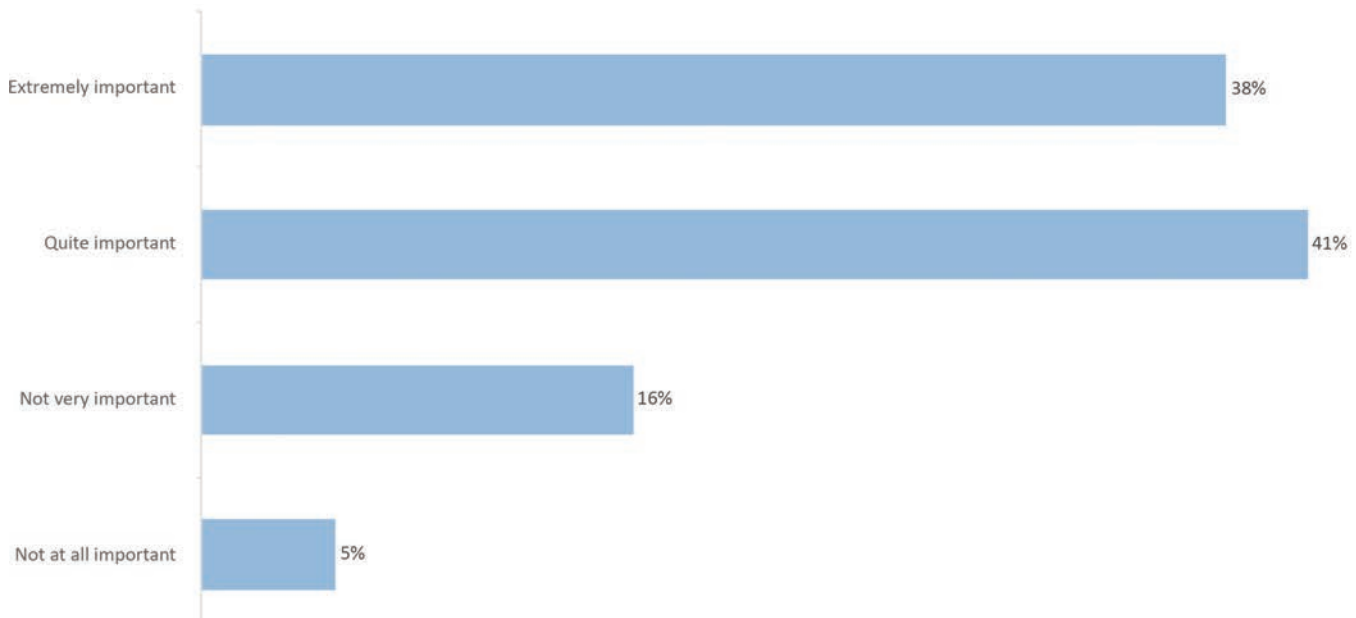
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"How important do you believe the decarbonisation of social housing is?"

said 'helping to combat climate change', 16% 'reducing fuel poverty', 16% 'modernising older stock', 14% 'reducing bills', 7% 'reducing maintenance', 5% 'satisfying tenant demand' – with 11% being lone responses including 'multiple benefits all round', 'to get people to pay', and the less positive, 'it's a waste of money'.

To see if it's residents who aren't interested, housing providers were also asked how important they estimated these issues to be to their tenants – again showing this is unlikely to be the most significant barrier.

This year, the previously highly-rated tenant engagement had fallen in importance to reduced bills, rated as important by 86% of our respondents, and energy efficiency, by 77%. Again, this year, 63% said engagement was important to their residents, and an increased 61% the environmental impact of their homes.

STOCK PERFORMANCE

Focussing on their current stock, for now, to further expose the long journey ahead, when estimating the average performance of their homes, just 3% of respondents said A and 8% B, with the majority (65%) saying C, 19% D and 5% E – improved negligibly from the previous study – with the majority (68%) of these saying they were looking to improve this.

When asked why they were looking to improve the efficiency of their stock, saving money was most commonly mentioned, with comments including "to get the bills down," "reduces cost," and "lower cost of maintenance."

Other respondents said it was because of the benefits it brings to tenants, "bettering people's lives," "improving their situation," and benefiting both "the tenants and the organisation", and another commented: "the higher the efficiency the lower the bills."

Its effect on the houses themselves was also noted. One respondent said they were looking to improve this rating as an "investment into the stock itself", multiple for "performance" and "quality", and that their housing simply "needs updates".

The remaining reasons why they were looking to improve this were around "reducing carbon emissions" and "sustainability", as well as "to meet the net zero carbon strategy that most HA have to meet by 2050", and similarly: "we are committed to achieving the 2050 net zero targets".

This of course leaves 32% of respondents who said they were not currently looking to increase the performance of their housing stock, however.

When asked why not, mirroring those who were looking to improve their

rating, respondents cited "the cost," with the "cost to balance ratio not there."

Others said it was because of a 'lack of knowledge', others still had "never thought about it," were "quite happy with what they've got," or said that they had "other priorities" or "things that take precedent."

THE BARRIERS TO CHANGE

Though slow progress continues to be made by housing providers in some areas this year, considering the continuing levels of fuel poverty among their tenants, residents will likely take little refuge in this.

Of course, there are myriad problems standing in the way of improvement. Tight budgets factor first and foremost – with estimates of decarbonising England's housing stock alone reaching past £100bn.

Yet, housing professionals face further tough decisions. All stakeholders must be brought along on the journey, especially residents. Will residents have to move out while retrofit work is completed? How are the benefits of such work communicated with tenants? And, evident in this year's responses, will the Government introduce the necessary funding and frameworks to enable these changes?

MAIN BARRIERS

Looking at the main problems housing professionals face here, this year's respondents were asked to rate their 'top five' most significant barriers to the decarbonisation of the UK's housing stock, with 1st being scored five points and 5th being scored one point.

As is often the case in our research, cost led the way by some distance, at 208 points, followed by a lack of government support (125 points), a lack of internal skills (83 points) and the ageing of the UK's housing stock (72 points).

Less popular, a lack of stock knowledge scored 61 points, with a lack of external skills and access to homes at 52 points each.

Tenants refusing improvements was next at 44 points, followed by increased maintenance at 30 points, a lack of resident education at 28 points, and – significantly lower than last year – supply chain issues last at 26 points (down 20 points year on year).

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Considering the Government's performance generally in the eyes of housing professionals, respondents were also asked how they believe it has performed in relevant areas – with those surveyed being largely dissatisfied.



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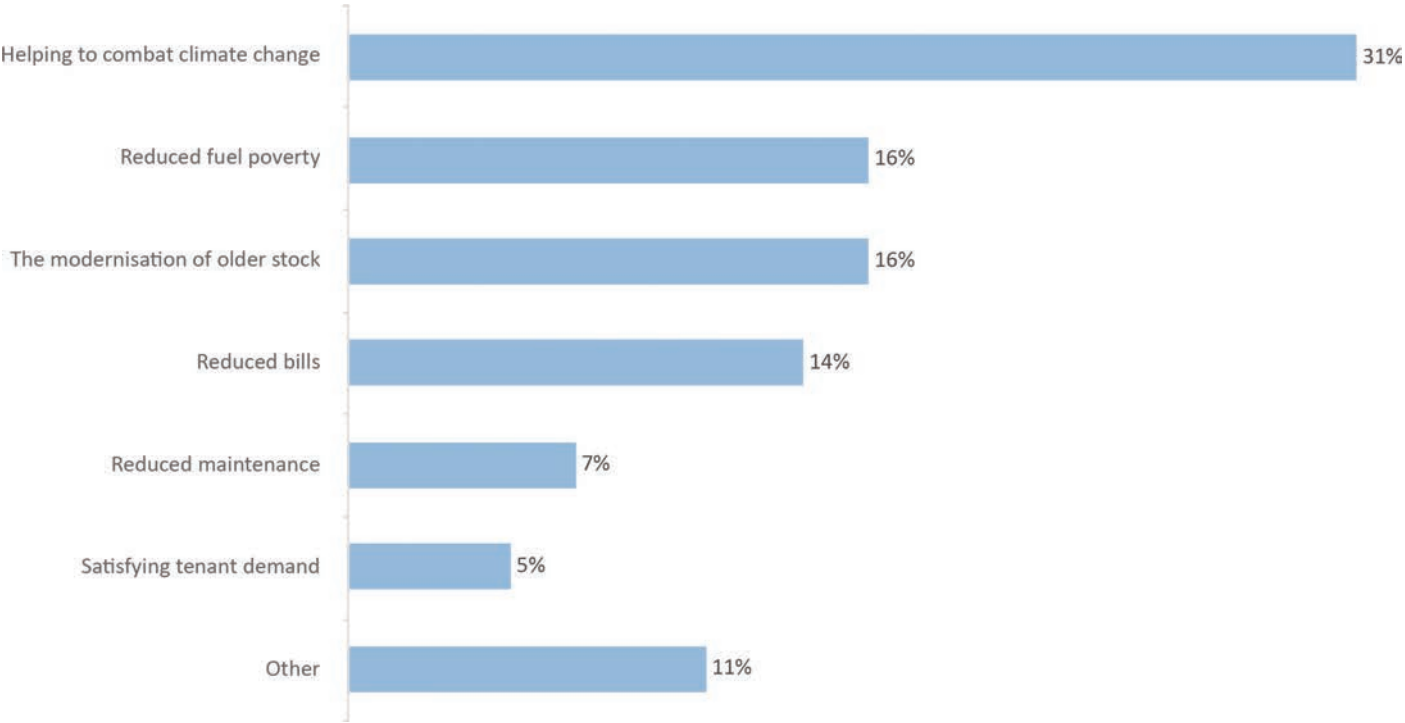
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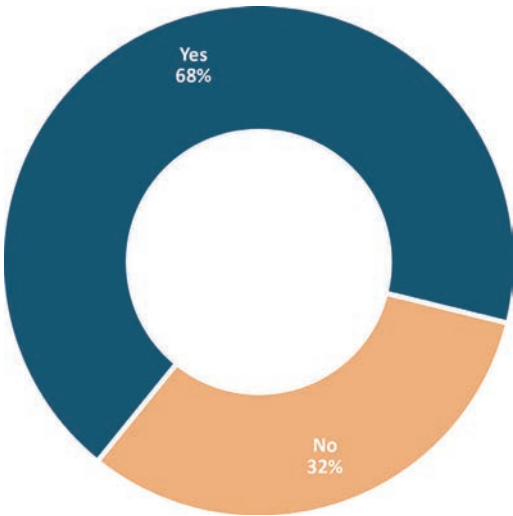


“What do you believe will be the main benefit of the decarbonisation of social housing?”

Just over one in three believed the Government is doing well (5% very, 32% well) in informing the social housing sector on upcoming efficiency changes. Similarly, when asked how it was performing legislating on energy efficiency measures, just 5% said very well, 23% well, 45% not well, and 25% very badly.

Continuing this trend, when it came to educating tenants, 1% said very well, 25% well, 40% not very and 33% very badly, and on funding green social housing, 4% said very well, 12% well, 56% not well, and 26% very badly.

Focusing on the Government’s controversial u-turn on legislating all social homes in the UK to reach EPC C by 2030 – this survey being conducted before the latest election was called – respondents continued to show disappointment.



“Is your company currently looking to improve the energy performance of your housing stock?”

One user commented that the reversal had “sadly slowed down the urgency of improving standards,” and another said, “it needs to happen, and further financial assistance from the Government needs to be provided to get the stock up to EPC C and above”.

FUNDING

In 2023, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, alongside the HM Treasury, announced that £6bn of funding had been allocated to cut energy use and bills in UK homes.

It reported this included ‘targeted support’ for 200,000 low income, cold and social homes, an extra £1.5bn for its boiler upgrade scheme, as well as assurances that these changes would help meet its net zero targets. Throughout, it has continued to encourage the use of heat pumps as a greener alternative for heating homes and reducing emissions.

Forming a significant portion of this support is the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Despite its prominence, however, this research has revealed a real lack of awareness of the funding available.

Despite the majority of this survey’s respondents being eligible for the funding, and the fund’s first wave occurring in 2021, 46% had never heard of it– with 21 having heard of it, but not planning to apply, 15% applied and were accepted, 5% were rejected, and 13% had not applied, but planned to in the future.

Of those who had been accepted, experiences were mixed – with some saying it was “extremely time consuming,” “not straightforward, we had to abandon it,” and “its timescales for applying are too short and to carry out the work with delays being informed is hard. Applications should last five years to enable supplies and contractors to have certainty of work.”

Muddying the waters however, others reported that “it was straightforward,” and that they were “heavily involved” in each wave of funding so far.

AGEING STOCK

Without intervention, a home’s efficiency degrades over time, with some homes built to poor standards in the first place. In either case, retrofitting older



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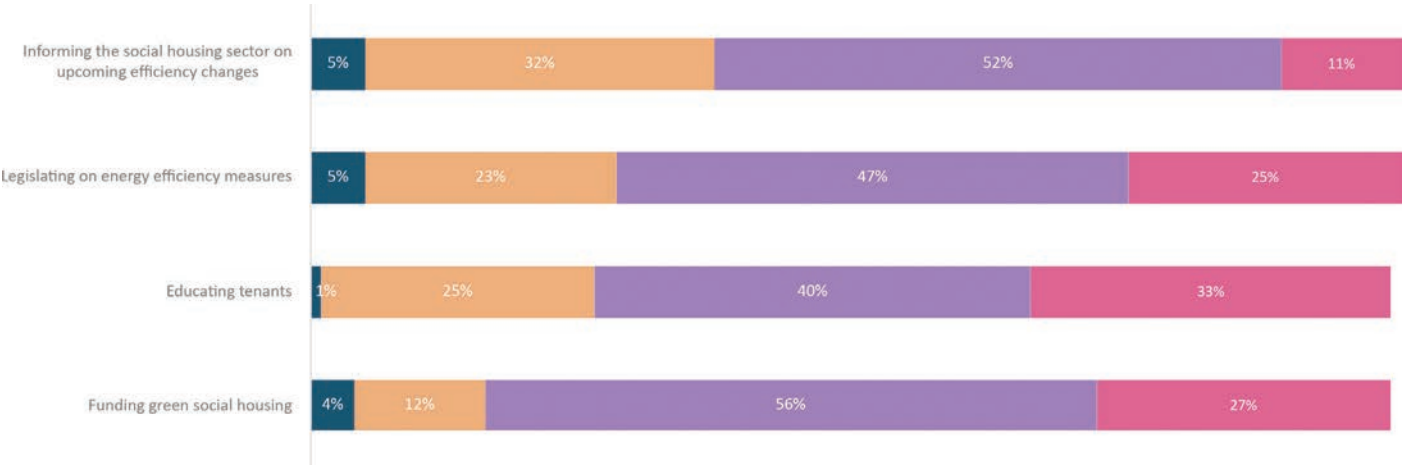


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“How well do you believe the Government has performed in the following areas?”

Very Well Well Not Very Well Very Badly

properties can often come at an increased monetary cost, as well as in time and disruption to residents.

This year’s respondents compounded last year’s data, with the average age of their stock estimated to be 69 years old (compared with last year’s 62).

None of those surveyed this year said their average housing stock was between 0-20 years old, with 22% between 20-40, 24% 40-60, 19% 60-80, 21% 80-90, 4% 100-120, 1% 120-140, 3% 140-150, and 6% over 150 years old.

Confirming the work that this will require across the sector, when asked how respondents would describe the state of the entire UK’s average housing stock in terms, just 10% said they were performing acceptably (3% exceptionally, 7% adequately), with 61% believing the stock needs improvement, and almost one in three (29%) believing the UK’s housing stock is in ‘dire need’ of improvements.

CONCLUSION

While some would expect that appreciation of the need to decarbonise the UK’s housing stock would have increased somewhat since our last study on the topic, unfortunately, this was not the case.

The majority of respondents believed the need for decarbonising the housing

sector was important, but one in five did not. And, even besides its perceived importance, there were a number of further hurdles listed that have continued to prevent them from taking action.

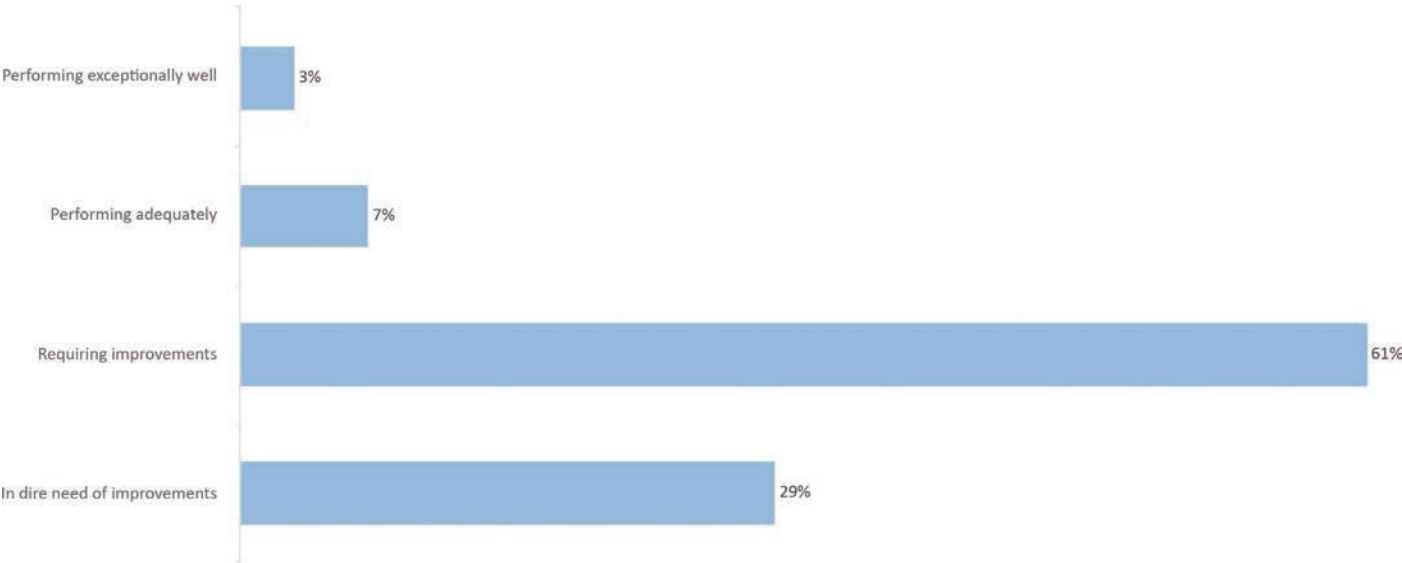
Those surveyed were widely dissatisfied with Government initiatives for one, in every area they were asked of. And, when it came to one of the Government’s flagship schemes to fund green housing, almost half of respondents had not even heard of it.

Another was of course cost, especially in retrofitting their older stock which – matching closely to last year’s respondents – was around 69 years old.

Whatever the barriers, however, too little is being done. For residents, the most prominent benefit of increasing a home’s efficiency will be improving affordability – especially during a cost of living crisis.

This cannot be overstated. Even in their own estimations, 78% of this year’s respondents would describe at least some of their tenants as fuel poor, yet almost a third were not looking to increase the performance of their stock.

Whether it’s housing professionals, the Government, or a combination of both, something has to give to meet targets. A concerted retrofit revival must begin, not just for future generations living on this planet, but for residents today living in outdated, expensive, and unhealthy homes.



“How would you describe the state if the UK’s average social housing stock in terms of energy performance?”



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Eliminating emissions

Eliminating the carbon emissions associated with housing involves understanding the impact of the dwelling over its lifespan. Anastasia Mylona of CIBSE explains how this should be approached



Regular revisions to Building Regulations over the last two decades have focused on improving the energy efficiency of new and existing homes. We understand how to build high-performing homes and we have a realistic pathway to achieving new homes that are zero energy in use.

However, there is a strong argument around the trade-off between the carbon savings achieved by installing ever more energy efficient materials and the carbon emitted during the manufacture of those materials. To reach a point where a building can be described as “zero carbon” we need to calculate both the carbon emissions associated with homes in use and the carbon emissions produced during the manufacture of the products used to build them – the embodied carbon.

Combining these figures together over the anticipated lifespan of a building gives a total Whole Life Carbon calculation and it is this figure that needs to be factored into planning for a zero carbon future.

This issue was brought into sharp focus earlier this year when the London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee published a report calling for Whole Life Carbon assessments to be part of planning applications. The report followed the high-profile debate over the relative sustainability of replacing or repurposing some landmark buildings in the capital.

This was the latest in a series of influential reports effectively supporting the drive to introduce a new section to the Building Regulations. The suggested Part Z would introduce limits to embodied carbon for the first time and, as the name suggests, is designed to move the dial closer to zero carbon buildings.

CIBSE has supported the concept of Part Z since the beginning, while recognising the challenges around introducing such a radical step.

The suggested Part Z would introduce limits to embodied carbon for the first time

Top of the list of these is the lack of information around embodied carbon in building products. The introduction of Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) was a great step forward, providing a robust programme to support manufacturers’ calculations. Each EPD will include a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) detailing the carbon emissions associated with every stage of the life cycle of the product.

This is important because it is estimated that embodied carbon accounts for between 30% and 70% of the whole life carbon emissions from a building. We are gradually seeing individual manufacturers introduce EPDs, although a lack of consistency in the way carbon emissions are measured and evaluated is still a problem.

It is relatively straightforward to calculate the embodied carbon of a product such as brick or a plasterboard panel – where the number of base materials used in manufacture is limited and their origins completely understood. When considering mechanical equipment, however, the picture is much more complicated.

CIBSE focuses primarily on building services: the heating, lighting, ventilation and air conditioning that make buildings habitable and comfortable. Without understanding the embodied carbon of the materials and components that make up these systems it is impossible to calculate the whole life carbon associated with any building project.



Products such as heat pumps, solar PV panels or air conditioning systems are made up of multiple components of varying materials often sourced from a global supply chain. There is little international consistency in how embodied carbon calculations are made and a very variable focus on the need to do such calculations in the first place.

For this reason, CIBSE embarked on developing a calculation method to allow engineers to do this calculation where necessary. The resulting Technical Memorandum 56 (TM56) is not intended to replace EPDs – a manufacturer's detailed EPD will always provide the most detailed and comprehensive embodied carbon information.

What TM65 does is provide a consistent approach to the calculation and reporting of embodied carbon for building services plants and equipment. The calculations include the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the manufacture of a product, its installation, maintenance, repair, replacement, and end of life. It covers the whole life cycle, excluding operational aspects and potential recovery, reuse or recycling of materials.

As the momentum to understand embodied carbon gathers pace around the

globe, more and more manufacturers of all materials will invest in accurate embodied carbon calculations for their products. TM65 is acknowledged by many manufacturers as a first step on the road to a full EPD.

We see and support a future where building regulations set requirements for embodied carbon in the same way that Part L currently sets performance standards for thermal efficiency and Part F for ventilation. Without this step it is logically impossible to claim that any building is truly zero carbon as its environmental impact is not being properly assessed.

In our view it is a glaring omission from the proposed Future Homes Standard. CIBSE has supported Part Z since its inception and we urge the government to come forward with proposals as soon as possible. We hope that sustained pressure from all areas within the building industry will ensure that Part Z will ultimately form part of the Building Regulations and that we will have the knowledge to build genuinely zero carbon housing.

Anastasia Mylona is technical director at CIBSE

Kensa's commitment to tackling fuel poverty

Ed Miliband, the Shadow Secretary for Energy and Net Zero, toured Kensa's Cornwall factory to see how some of the UK's leading Ground Source Heat Pump solutions are being developed and discuss how the British company can help UK decarbonise heat. Mr Miliband met with Kensa's CEO, Tamsin Lishman, and other employees to discuss Kensa's plans to decarbonise heat and hear more about how they are delivering affordable, renewable heating and cooling to people across the UK. Kensa is working to improve heating in communities across the UK by delivering its heat decarbonisation solution – Networked Heat Pumps.



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Fernox adds new filter to product range

Water treatment expert, Fernox has launched the new sealed and ultra-compact TF1 Sigma Mini, providing a practical filter solution for smaller volume systems with restricted space. With an excellent collection capacity to capture system contaminants, it is simple to install and service. By adding the TF1 Sigma Mini to the extensive Fernox portfolio, installers can now find a filter option to suit every requirement. Combining the quality of the Fernox brand with a simple, ultra-compact design, the new magnetic TF1 Sigma Mini from Fernox is ideal for social housing, new build properties and smaller volume heating systems.



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Panasonic partners with Together Housing

Panasonic has partnered with social housing provider, Together Housing, to deliver sustainable heating solutions to over 1,200 properties across the North of England. To date, Together Housing has switched hundreds of homes from gas boilers to Panasonic J Series Aquarea Monobloc air-to-water heat pumps. This year, the team is scheduled to retrofit a further 750 homes with many more to follow. Panasonic is providing 5, 7 or 9 kW units to a range of one to three bedroom properties. Working in collaboration for over two years, Together Housing and Panasonic's shared net zero goals are the foundations for this partnership.



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Lower temperature heating systems can require larger radiators to achieve the comfort heating levels in a home, and in some homes installing larger radiators may be a problem if the wall space does not allow for them. In these situations, K3 radiators from Stelrad – with three panels and three sets of fins – are an ideal solution – providing 50% more metal heating surface than a standard K2 for example, but from the same size radiator footprint. For more information and for selection and fitting tips head for www.stelrad.com/trade or go to the Stelrad videos on YouTube.



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Redditch Borough Council – Improving lives through subsidence maintenance and repair



Situated in the West Midlands, south of Birmingham, Redditch Borough Council's Property Services manages a portfolio of over 6,000 properties. Many of the properties in Redditch were built in the 1970s during a period of rapid growth, numerous sites were developed, and trees and vegetation planted.

Today, a small proportion of those properties are suffering from subsidence. A combination of factors has caused structural movement, impacting some homes. The properties constructed in the 1970s generally had shallower foundations than today's building standards require, meaning that any fluctuation in soil composition has a greater impact on the structure. The soil in Redditch contains a significant amount of clay, which tends to shrink during dry periods due to moisture loss and swell in wet periods. To compound the issue, many trees were planted close to the houses. While tree planting has many benefits, the proximity of trees to the properties has led to tree roots penetrating the clay soils beneath the foundations, contributing to subsidence issues in the area.

Redditch Borough Council has a number of properties affected by subsidence, and in the future climate change may well see more properties impacted. The structural movement presented a difficult challenge: The Council needed to address all the subsidence issues while maintaining a tenant-first mindset. The traditional method of dealing with subsidence is underpinning, which usually requires relocating tenants during the

work, additionally requiring extensive excavation of existing soils, causing significant disruption to the wider community due to the need for heavy construction equipment.



Redditch's Interim Capital Programmes Contract Manager, Penny Bevington, was fully aware of the disruption that any underpinning scheme would have on the lives of The Council's tenants and sought a better solution: "At Redditch, we put our tenants first, the prospect of rehoming many of our tenants to undertake the work wasn't a feasible

solution. If anything, it was viewed as a last resort."

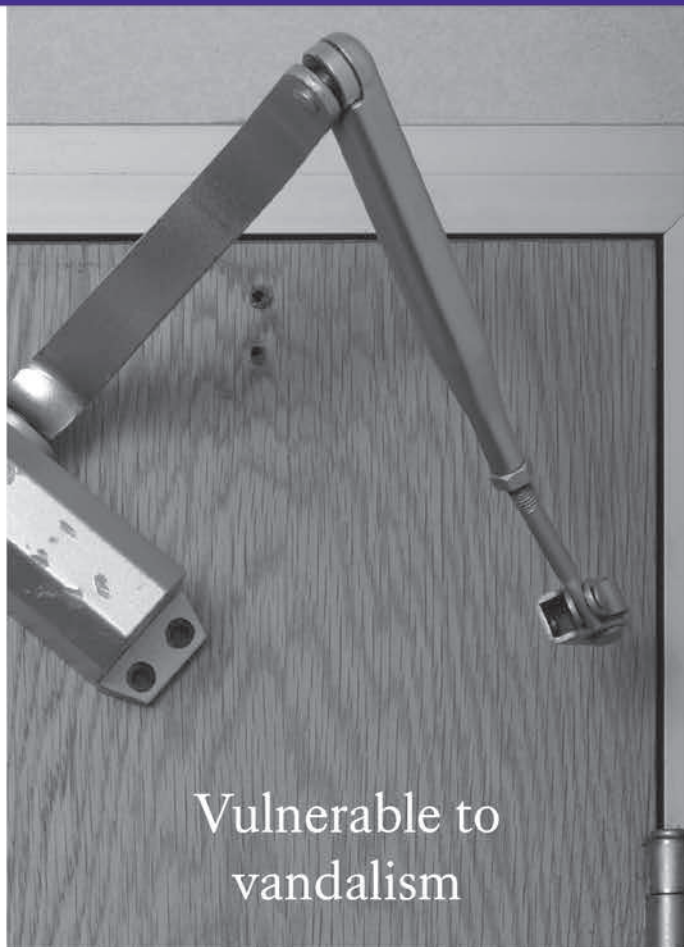
Working with her team, Penny and her senior surveyors approached ground engineering contractor Geobear, who provide a non-disruptive method to deal with subsidence, allowing tenants to remain in their homes, "This modern alternative to underpinning, would ensure the quality of our tenants' lives was not impacted, Geobear's solution could be mobilised quickly and, in most cases, a home can be repaired within a few days."

Craig Dean, Geobear's UK Residential Sales Director, added they are seeing more traction within the social housing sector, emphasising tenant satisfaction: "Our solution for subsidence is such that tenants are rarely impacted by our presence. We simply target the soil area causing the subsidence by drilling through the foundations, and injecting an expansive geopolymer which stabilises the property. In the case of Redditch, we can mobilise and deliver a solution for a handful of properties within weeks from instruction."

With the first batch of works now completed in Redditch, there has been seamless collaboration between the parties to ensure tenants feel no inconvenience Penny Bevington added: "We've not had any issues from the tenants. In fact, they are generally pleased that we've committed to resolving the subsidence at their homes. We're delighted to have this partnership with Geobear and are proud to be putting the lives of our tenants first."

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Aico host Community Awards 2024 to celebrate local excellence

Aico's bi-annual Community Awards celebrates excellence within the social housing industry and local community. On Thursday the 18th of April, 400 guests and finalists took to Birmingham's International Convention Centre to honour the outstanding work of individuals and organisations across the UK.

In support of the Electrical Industries Charity (EIC), this year, Aico curated 13 categories providing entrants with the opportunity to showcase inspirational colleagues, projects, and innovations. The categories were judged by Neal Hooper, Managing Director of Aico, Lesley Baird, Participation Expert, James Prestwich, Director of Policy for the Chartered Institute of Housing, and Khadra Ibrahim, Careers and Community Development Lead for RBKC Housing Management.

The evening saw entertainment from 2022 Britain's Got Talent Winner and Comedian, Axel Blake, who filled the room with laughter.

The new award for 2024, Aico's Apprentice of the Year was presented to Cole Galligan from Loughborough College and Raylec Electrical, for his professionalism and dedication towards his apprenticeship.

Once all the winners had been announced, attendees danced into the night alongside



Top Collective, a spectacular nine piece ensemble band.

Host of the night, Carl Jones, commented "It is heart-warming to see how much these awards mean to all the inspirational individuals and groups who have been shortlisted for such fantastic work in their local communities. Congratulations to Aico for launching such a brilliant initiative, shining a light on these unsung heroes at a tremendous night of celebration."

The Aico Community Awards achieved great success by honouring inspirational individuals and organisations who innovate, excel, and prioritise others. The event raised over £9,000 for the EIC with Aico matching the donation, resulting in a total contribution of £18,000.

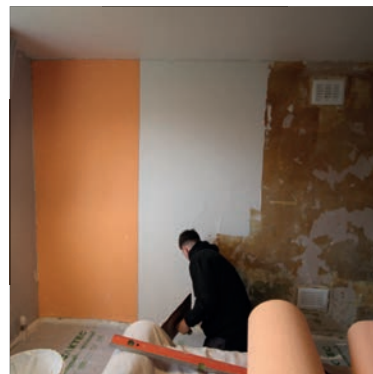
01691 664100

www.aico.co.uk/in-the-community

Manchester housing provider picks ISO-THERM insulation to upgrade older stock

One of the leading providers of affordable housing in the North-West has begun utilising slimline and waterproof Isotherm insulation, recently introduced to the Wykamol range, to help address issues of condensation and mould growth in some of its older properties, with the manufacturer present at the first installation to help train the customer's staff. Speaking about the landlord's reasons for utilising the Wykamol product, the Contract Manager for reactive repairs WCHG, Pete Leonard, added: "We have used Wykamol for a number of years and are always looking for new products that can help us make our homes more energy efficient and minimize disturbance for our customers. This product is easy to use, cuts down on waste also reduces manual handling. We look forward to seeing the long term benefits in the future." ISO-THERM is an ultra-thin – approximately 4mm 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. The ISO-THERM material is both waterproof and vapour permeable.

01282 473 100 www.wykamol.com



Next generation Revive fan launched

Vent-Axia has launched its new Lo-Carbon Revive 7 fan raising the bar on energy efficiency for social housing providers. Designed to meet the specific needs of the social housing sector this next generation of the popular Revive 7 filter-less unitary fan offers greater efficiency, near silent operation, a slimmer profile, all with the same great performance and in line with the updated Part F of the Building Regulations. This gives social housing landlords confidence that the new Lo-Carbon Revive 7 can tackle the issues of condensation and mould, while improving the efficiency of housing stock and comfort for residents.



0344 856 0590 www.vent-axia.com

A 'walk-in' the park

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



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The battle against mould and damp

Are we doing enough to prevent mould and damp, David Bly of Cornerstone is of the opinion more can be done



With constant year-on-year damp, condensation and mould in many homes it could be argued there needs to be 'reset' with regard to how structures are assessed prior to and post any improvements plus, the 'adequacy' of internal atmospheric management protocols aligned to upholding a healthy dwelling.

'Blame' is not an option and can be replaced with 'did you know' since many residents may not be aware of the impact of some everyday activities on the internal conditions as a whole.

And, with this in mind, education in a defined recognisable manner could be a consideration when commencing an investigation of a reported problem.

The mention of whether landlords are doing enough is noted but, they may well be doing enough within their infrastructure plus existing knowledge and therefore, have a reliance on expert trades to deliver the necessary improvement not only in line with regulatory compliance but also in line with an expected outcome.

The UK has some of the oldest and varied housing stock in Europe and, with this in mind, any inspections or indeed improvements must embrace the structural type, period, age and orientation as they can all play an active role in maintaining desired structural health.

With a drive for Net Zero and many Retrofits underway, Cornerstone are of the opinion such 'improvements' require a significant baseline understanding of a number of aspects prior to their undertaking due to a number of elements having to be removed and reconsidered due to their ineffectiveness.

The UK has some of the oldest and varied housing stock in Europe and, with this in mind, any inspections or indeed improvements must embrace the structural type, period, age and orientation

Fully recognising there are many industry experts dealing with structural and atmospheric elements, are we also aware that in the absence of impact assessments, how do we fully recognise the desired outcome has been achieved for a healthy internal environment?

Did you know the existing permeability of a structure i.e. its leakiness, is a key recognition prior to any intended 'improvements' as it affects the prevailing atmospheric conditions alongside the resultant internal comfort of occupants. In addition, determining the permeability rating has a direct alignment to the 'Whole Dwelling ventilation Rate' such that, if we also sought to embrace Net Zero in the absence of structural and atmospheric understanding, could we witness more problems in the future?

With new legislation calling for timely responses to reported issues, there will be a strong desire to embrace key knowledge for meeting compliance and

With new legislation calling for timely responses to reported issues, there will be a strong desire to embrace key knowledge for meeting compliance and effectivity within the stipulated timeline

effectivity within the stipulated timelines and, will embrace the understanding of all involved not only housing staff, surveyors and respective expert trades but, also residents armed with more feasible understandings of their property and atmospheric management.

Better decision making will not only reduce annual spend but will reduce any re-spend activities armed with a greater understanding of improvement expectations.

This can only be achieved by re-thinking how complaints are recorded, how responses are managed and how credible knowledge in a recognised format can be utilised and delivered to residents in a manner of greater understanding for improved conformity.

With a greater understanding of root causes (not root cause) of the 'symptoms' known as damp, condensation and mould, its removal can be considered since recognising the pattern, location and maintenance aspects, delivers a profound solution for a confident outcome. And, the removal of mould also plays a large role in reducing the potential for its re-emergence. Incorrect solutions will not deal effectively with removing the entire mould particulates and, places a greater emphasis on the non-use of bleach products and painting over an outbreak.

In addition, it should also be noted damp and mould are separate elements and would require bespoke approaches for each issue whereby damp tends to identify itself with spoiling, blistering, cracking and darkening of surfaces. Mould can reside on any surface where respective nutrients are available including structures and contents items. If the conditions are suitable



for a number of days, their development can occur in the absence of wet or damp buildings.

For a defined way forward Cornerstone is of the opinion a designated uniform framework is necessary to uphold an unbroken approach to such reported problems. Why? Because we are still dealing with damp, condensation and mould in 2024 and, with an understandable drive with Net Zero, if we sought to implement such recognised aspects in our homes today in the absence of a defined understanding of the structure and occupancy, the problems could escalate.

A greater understanding of structural behaviour will underpin landlord confidence with their improvements concluded in a defined approach whilst providing bespoke guidance for residents for an improved healthier internal living condition. And, will deliver key trend data for future stock management since each landlord/management company will likely be maintaining a host of structure types and geographical locations.

David Bly is managing director of Cornerstone Management Services



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David Bly – Managing Director of Cornerstone Management Services Ltd, a company providing independent expert property health Surveys, is of the opinion more can be done.

With constant year-on-year damp, condensation and mould in many homes it could be argued there needs to be 'reset' with regard to how structures are assessed prior to and post any improvements plus, the 'adequacy' of internal atmospheric management protocols aligned to upholding a healthy dwelling.

'Blame' is not an option and, can be replaced with 'did you know' since many residents may not be aware of the impact of some everyday activities on the internal conditions as a whole.

Whether landlords are doing enough is noted but, they may well be doing all they can within their infrastructure plus existing knowledge base resulting in more needing to be done.



It is Cornerstone's opinion, any improvements must embrace the structural type, period, age and orientation plus existing permeance as they can all play an active role in maintaining desired structural health. And, with a drive for Net Zero and many Retrofits underway, a greater understanding of these ongoing issues and root causes will aid the journeys.

New legislation calling for timely responses to reported issues alongside defined 'better decision making' will not only reduce annual spend but will uphold the strong desire for cost effective remediations for the long term.

This can be achieved by re-thinking how complaints are recorded, how responses are managed and how credible knowledge in a recognised format can be utilised and delivered to residents with a greater understanding for improved conformity.

An innovative approach will instil landlords with confidence their improvements concluded in a defined approach whilst providing bespoke guidance for residents for an improved healthier internal living condition, will deliver a transformed stock management protocol for maintaining a host of structure types and their geographical locations.

To learn more or discuss how we can help, contact us now:

www.cornerstone-ltd.co.uk and 'enquire today'.

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Flooring is fine come rain or shine

West Fraser's highly popular P5 particleboard is available in two versions, CaberFloor P5 and CaberDek; the principle difference between them is that the latter's top face is protected by an ultra-tough peel-clean layer. It is the total length of time for which the installed floors can remain exposed to the weather that generally leads customers to choose between CaberFloor, the UK building industry's favourite solution for fitting out upper storeys, and CaberDek, whose protective film allows for continued work in inclement weather. For further information on CaberFloor, visit West Fraser's housebuilders' page.



uk.westfraser.com/housebuilders

F. Ball launches new smoothing compound

F. Ball and Co. Ltd. has drawn upon the latest cement formulation technology to create a 'best-in-class' high flow smoothing compound: Stopgap 1400. A fast-setting, two-component smoothing compound, with superior self-smoothing properties, Stopgap 1400 is walk-on hard from just 90 minutes after application and ready to receive floorcoverings from 12 hours. Stopgap 1400 can be applied between 2 – 10 mm thick to a wide range of absorbent and non-absorbent subfloors, as well as Stopgap waterproof surface membranes. It is also suitable for use where normal underfloor heating systems are contained within a subfloor.

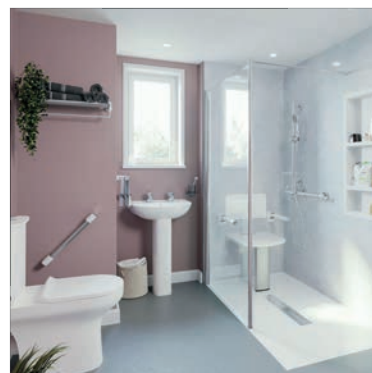


01538 361 633 www.f-ball.co.uk

AKW's extended Onyx range combines style and safety

Accessible showering never looked so good, thanks to the introduction of AKW's extended range of Onyx products. The range now includes updated level access shower trays and ramps, grab rails and shower seats, alongside the cleverly integrated mixer shower and grab rail. With AKW Onyx, inclusive showering isn't just safe it's stylish too. AKW has launched the Onyx Linea shower tray and this includes a long, stainless steel waste feature that allows for faster drainage for high power showers. With a luxurious textured stone-effect finish that offers a high level of slip resistance, as well as a high load capacity of 39 st (247 kg), this sleek shower tray is also suitable for wheelchair users or those with carers. The AKW Onyx range has been extended to include the Onyx Exclusif shower tray and ramp, and the Onyx Exclusif shower tray. The Onyx Exclusif shower tray provides a stylish yet strong showering solution, with a maximum capacity of 31.5 st (200 kg), making it a suitable choice for wheelchair users and carers. It differs from the original Onyx shower tray in that the waste has been relocated and a zinc waste option is also available. Its 26 mm deep tray can either be installed above the floor or be recessed into it, offering both low and full level access options. Alongside this is the new Onyx Exclusif Ramp that has a 31.5 st (200 kg) weight capacity and is available in white to beautifully match the shower tray.

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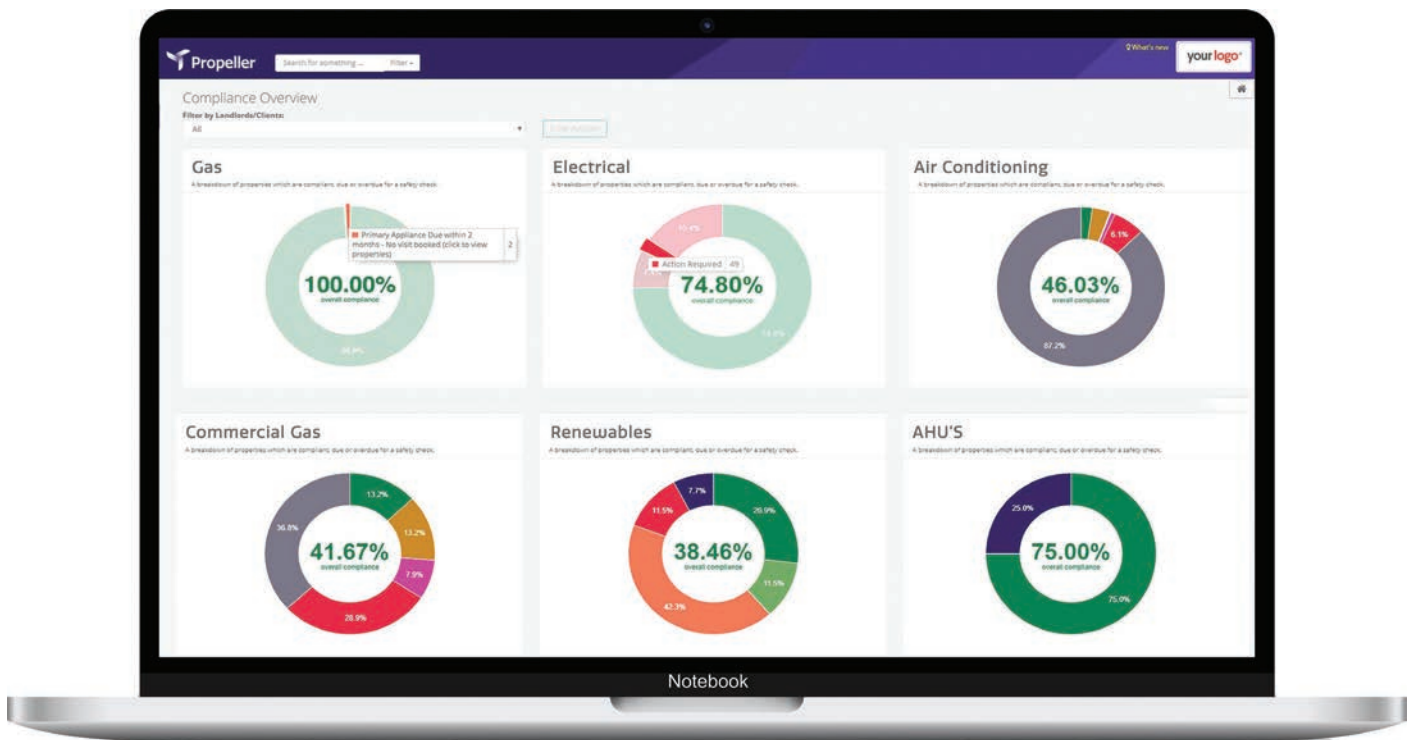


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How software is tackling the compliance challenge

With social landlords under increasing pressure to improve housing compliance, Dave Carr from Propeller explains the role of software in overhauling safety checks and meeting RSH standards

A new regulation, enforced in April 2024, has put housing safety compliance under the microscope leaving local authorities and housing associations with no place to hide.

The Social Housing Act sees the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) take a more proactive role, including regular and stringent inspections of social landlords. Safety and transparency are being brought into sharp focus and the RSH has stronger powers to hold landlords to account.

Although many social landlords have got better at managing housing safety compliance in recent years, these changes will create additional pressures and have already seen some self-referring to the RSH.

ADDRESSING COMPLIANCE PITFALLS

One of the biggest challenges for housing providers is managing inspection processes for gas, electrical, legionella, asbestos and fire safety across thousands of homes. Details of these checks are often collated using manual methods such as spreadsheets. Not only is this time consuming but prone to user error risking key information being omitted.

For larger social landlords, another challenge is keeping track of the total number of homes owned or managed – and exactly what types of checks are

The Social Housing Act sees the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) take a more proactive role, including regular and stringent inspections of social landlords

required for each. Gaps in this data will inevitably lead to inadequate inspection processes and non compliance with RSH standards.

Cloud-based software is critical to overcoming these challenges, providing housing providers with a quick and effective tool for managing all areas of housing compliance. With the right technology, new systems can be implemented without the need to integrate with existing IT programmes or the support of an internal IT department.

A STREAMLINED APPROACH

The first step is to gather robust baseline data which often requires an in-depth review of a housing provider's property register. This can be achieved with the

With the right technology, new systems can be implemented without the need to integrate with existing IT programmes or the support of an internal IT department

support of a specialist housing consultant who can help to establish the types of checks required for each home and how frequently. The latest inspection schedules and associated documentation will also be assimilated to help identify any gaps.

Once this data has been collated, cloud-based software can digitally analyse the information providing an instant view of compliance. The results are presented on an interactive dashboard comprising easy-to-read charts. These visuals break down the percentage of properties with an overdue or missing safety check so any issues can be quickly identified and measures put in place to rectify them.

Only minimal training is required for in-house teams, enabling housing providers to easily update the dashboard. The number of checks being carried out, and the level of compliance across each area, can then be viewed and monitored in real time.

For social landlords which have self referred to the Regulator, the dashboard also enables them to demonstrate how they are proactively responding to any issues identified and progressing towards achieving compliance. Not only does this help to minimise reputational damage but the risk of potentially punitive measures.

TRANSFORMING PROCESSES

South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) is one example of a local authority which has benefited from cloud-based software. In 2020, the council commissioned an audit that identified key areas of work required to meet the Regulator's Home Standard. Based on the findings, the Council referred itself to

the Regulator and in February 2021, was issued with a Regulatory Notice.

To support the improvement process, a comprehensive action plan was implemented to tackle areas of concern which mainly related to inspection processes and awareness of the overall condition of housing stock. SKDC also strengthened its senior housing team and reformed its processes for compliance with the Home Standard to ensure important safety checks were carried out.

As part of the action plan, SKDC adopted cloud-based software to help it overhaul the way it managed compliance safety checks for gas, electrical, legionella, asbestos and fire safety. Details of these checks and associated servicing requirements were previously collated and maintained using excel spreadsheets. With circa 6,000 homes in its portfolio, SKDC recognised the need for a more robust and efficient system giving them greater control of compliance.

The Council worked with specialist consultancy Manifest to analyse its existing housing stock and collate the data required to feed into the software for analysis. Through an online dashboard, the technology provided a clear picture of compliance, ensuring SKDC could understand its servicing needs and provide assurance on safety as part of its wider action plan.

Combined with other improvements and new ways of working adopted by SKDC, the software's swift implementation helped the Council gradually move towards compliance. While under regulatory notice, the dashboard was also used to provide real time evidence of this progress to the RSH.

In October 2023, SKDC's housing service was given the all-clear by the RSH.

TURNING THE TIDE

At a time of great change for the housing sector, which rightly puts resident and building safety front and centre, software can play a vital role in compliance. Ensuring there is a single transparent view of regular compliance activities underpins good building safety management and will help housing providers of all sizes meet RSH standards.

Dave Carr is managing director of Propeller

Powerful performance with Makita

Makita UK has added the new cordless HW001G XGT High Pressure Washer, to its high performance 40VMax XGT range. An ideal solution for trade professionals working with no access to mains power, it provides exceptional mobility combined with a reliable and regular flow rate and pressure, facilitated by three different operation modes.

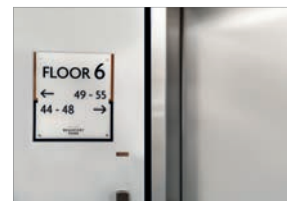


The new 40VMax HW001G XGT Brushless High Pressure Washer offers a powerful performance akin to corded washers, with a maximum permissible pressure of 11.5 MPa. Three operational modes allow users the flexibility to control the pressure depending on the difficulty of the cleaning task at hand.

01908 211678 www.makita.co.uk

Stocksigns shows the way

Following the introduction of the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022, property maintenance company, General Maintenance, needed to source new wayfinding signage for a London apartment complex. Stocksigns was the ideal provider, able to supply compliant signs with a premium finish that aligned with the prestigious aesthetic of the building. Under the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022, high-rise residential buildings with a roof height of over eleven metres or more must be fitted with clear wayfinding signage that can be read easily in all conditions.



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Since its inception in 2016, Housing Management & Maintenance has garnered attention from a diverse readership comprising over 8,000 housing and facilities management professionals, including local authority and housing association representatives, buy-to-let investors and student accommodation providers.

An ABC-validated magazine produced by established business publisher netMedia, Housing Management & Maintenance provides a comprehensive insight into current affairs in the affordable housing and lettings sector in its Industry News section, which is overseen by highly experienced News Editor Patrick Mouney.

Patrick has spent over 30 years in the housing sector working for various local authorities, housing association and regulatory bodies, and is currently a consultant, helping landlords to improve their services, performance, value for money and governance.

Website <http://www.housingmagonline.co.uk/>

Retrofit for zero carbon

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund provides one way for social housing providers in England to improve the quality of homes for their tenants although bidding teams may need support in working out the best way to treat older properties – says Caroline Bowler of SIG Distribution



The application window for funding under Wave 3 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDC) is expected to open this summer. The Fund was set up by the government to enhance the energy efficiency of socially rented homes in England.

Of the 24 million homes in England, 4 million are social homes. Of these, 1.4 million are below Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Band C; with 1.2 million EPC D; 105,000 EPC E; and 40,000 EPC F and G. The government's target is for as many homes as possible to achieve an EPC C by 2035. This makes social landlords responsible for decarbonising a significant proportion of England's homes if England is to reach its net zero target by 2050.

In addition to helping move towards net zero, upgrading the energy efficiency of social housing will also bring significant benefits to tenants. Social housing is some of the least energy efficient in the country, forcing tenants to spend more to heat their homes, so improving their energy efficiency will also reduce heating bills helping to lift households out of fuel poverty. To reduce fuel poverty the government has set a target for fuel poor homes to achieve an Energy Efficiency Rating (EER) C by 2030.

Although meeting energy efficiency standards will bring significant environmental and social benefits, retrofitting energy efficiency improvements can be expensive and technically challenging. The SHDC was introduced to help social landlords make energy efficiency improvements by making funding available in a series of waves. Bidding for Wave 2.2 closed to applications in January 2024. The bidding window for Wave 3 is expected to open in summer, so now is the time to start planning

Landlords looking to take advantage of this fund will find a huge amount of advice on how to access the fund on the government-backed service social housing retrofit accelerator.

Social housing is made up of a wide variety of house types, so it is unlikely

Social housing is made up of a wide variety of house types, so it is unlikely one solution will fit all

one solution will fit all. Eligible measures are energy efficiency and heating measures compatible with the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP), which includes cavity wall, loft and external insulation, ventilation improvements, the installation of heat pumps and window and door replacement.

All retrofit projects should consider the whole-house (envelope, heating, ventilation and energy systems) and not individual elements in isolation. It is also important to remember that retrofit measures don't have to be delivered all in one go and can be phased.

Bidders for funding are encouraged to use fabric first principles, based on reducing the heating demand for a home before installing new heating systems or energy systems to avoid oversizing or inappropriate renewable energy systems being installed.

Government statistics show that to the end of November 2023, the majority of measures installed under Wave 1 and Wave 2.1 funding were insulation measures (59% under Wave 1, 69% under Wave 2) with loft, cavity wall and solid wall insulation all featuring. Other significant measures included the installation of energy efficient doors and windows and solar PV.

As with any retrofit project, however, the real challenge lies in the variation in individual properties. For example, in North Devon, £4.8 million has been allocated to bring some 3,500 properties up to EPC level C over a four-year period. This area has a huge range of house types, each presenting their own technical issues. Many are solid walls, some have flat roofs and a



particular challenge is the Cornish House design – notoriously difficult to bring up to standard. Pressure on the teams responsible for designing, planning and executing the upgrade work is huge and the homes can be technically challenging.

The National Housing Federation and Local Government Association's report *Hard to decarbonise Social Homes*, identified a number of characteristics that make homes harder to decarbonise. In addition to those issues mentioned above, they include housing on the coast or at risk of flooding; heritage homes; constrained sites that may preclude the use of external wall insulation or heat pumps; and homes with bespoke features such as bay windows, which will need particular expertise to manage.

Some of these issues need complex solutions to produce improvements in energy efficiency without producing unwanted side-effects that can actually damage the fabric of an older property. The best technical support for the teams

tasked with such upgrades needs to be both comprehensive and competent.

Individual product manufacturers will give advice on their own products, but for product-neutral advice, a distributor will be best placed.

The benefit of this joined-up approach between housing provider and distributor is that it saves social housing providers having to deal with a multiplicity of material suppliers. It also means that if a particular product is in short supply, they can suggest suitable alternatives.

The climate emergency means that the demand to retrofit all homes, not just social housing, is likely to accelerate. All of which means that the diversity of product solutions and depth of technical expertise offered will become increasingly important in helping the country move towards net zero.

Caroline Bowler is head of public sector framework partnerships at SIG Distribution

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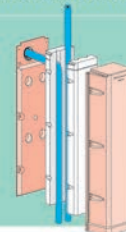
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