

SUMMER 2026

HOUSING

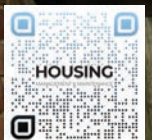
MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

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Geobear Head of Social Housing, Omar Alata explains.

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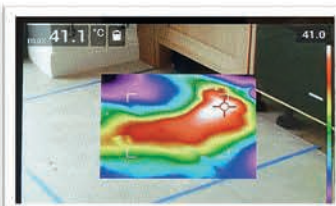
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Managing Editor
James Parker

Publisher
Anthony Parker

Account Director
Midge Myatt

Senior Account Manager
Steve Smith

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

Account Manager
Nicola Herbert
Jamie Weeks

Operations Director
Shelley Collyer

Events Coordinator
Amy Madigan

Studio Manager
Mikey Pooley

Production Assistant
Georgia Musson

**Digital Production
Coordinator**
Kim Musson

**Digital Marketing & Social
Media Assistant**
Nathan Hunt

**Feature Coordinator &
Publisher's Assistant**
Kim Neville

Finance Director
Simon Reed



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

**Advertising &
Administration**
01435 863500
info@netmagmedia.co.uk

Press Releases
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

**Registration &
Circulation Enquiries**
info@netmagmedia.co.uk

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Editor's Comment



This issue of *Housing Management & Maintenance* includes an in-depth report on our fascinating round table held a couple of months ago, airing the views of the supply chain as well as the sector, on effective solutions to fuel poverty. The key focuses were resident engagement, and how to futureproof solutions using tech so that they would not cause future maintenance issues while bringing short-term benefits.


Some of our ongoing series of round table events have more overlap and crossover than others, and the subject of protecting tenants against soaring fuel prices, while cutting carbon and giving them healthy places to live, is one of those. It not only hits the general retrofit picture, and the Warm Homes agenda – plus the future funding waves which we still wait patiently to hear confirmed. It also crosses over to Awaab's Law, and the need to ensure we don't introduce unintended consequences by improving properties' fabric and heating solutions, as well as the Remote Monitoring outlook for social housing teams.

Despite all of the overlapping themes providing topics for our round tables, we have tried to ensure that each event has distinct focus, to make the content as useful as possible for attendees and readers. The valuable insights from all of our delegates never fail to bring things down to the crucial day-to-day realities of balancing a host of priorities for residents, and bringing them along for the journey as allies, despite their struggles with both trust and financial support.

The oft-uttered need for 'holistic' solutions can often be the problem as much as the solution, i.e. the need to both consider all of the factors and permutations, and resource their implementation, can seem overwhelming. Luckily, as our round tables (as well as our related product features in this issue) show, the expertise, if not always the capital cost, is out there.

James Parker

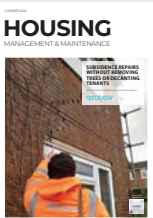
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On the cover...

Subsidence repairs without removing trees or decanting tenants – Geobear Head of Social Housing, Omar Alata explains. See page 18.





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COMMENT

We need to counter retrofit short-termism

Social housing providers are under pressure to bring properties up to EPC 'C' rating by 2030. Gary Doxey at windows manufacturer Eurocell warns that the challenge extends beyond this, to countering short-termism, based on a recent *Housing Management & Maintenance* study.



It's well-known that the UK is home to some of the oldest social housing stock in Europe. Construction of new properties has been painfully slow in recent years, with just 2,260 built in 2024/25. Tight budgets and lack of skilled local labour are largely to blame – factors that also make it difficult to retrofit existing properties to meet new energy-efficiency standards, particularly those built in the post-war era.

As mandatory deadlines get closer, social housing providers may understandably feel that they have no choice but to choose the most cost-effective option that ticks a box in the short-term.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Earlier this year, the Housing Committee warned that while most social housing tenants have 'warm, safe and decent places to live', just under 430,000 properties don't meet the Decent Homes Standard. Poor insulation, damp and mould are common problems, and little progress has been made on improving conditions

since the pandemic. The new Standard doesn't come into force until 2035, but social and private landlords must meet the minimum energy efficiency standard (EPC Band C or equivalent) by 2030. It's a tight deadline, and while the phased compliance deadline to 2039 provides some breathing room, the scale of the challenge is enormous. As many as one in four social homes (around 1.1 million properties) will need work, and the costs will run into billions of pounds.

AVOIDING THE STICKING PLASTER APPROACH

Compliance, budgetary constraints, and political short-termism can make for a toxic mix – at odds with the long-term thinking needed to deliver homes that are sustainable in every sense of the word.

While there are low-cost initiatives that can reduce carbon emissions, like better insulation, bigger projects such as installing heat pumps, solar panels, and windows and doors, are generally more expensive. So, it's not surprising that providers often want to minimise these as much as possible. The problem is that

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lower price doesn't always deliver on performance, increasing the likelihood of replacements being needed further down the line.

This was evident in a report, 'Holistic Approaches to Low Carbon Retrofit at Scale,' published in *Housing Management & Maintenance* in March 2026. The report found that when it comes to windows, professionals in both the non-profit and private sectors are primarily driven by meeting the minimum requirements. Even their attitude to energy efficiency is lukewarm given how critical this is to compliance, as well as reducing damp/mould and fuel poverty.

Around 38% said they were balancing compliance with 'some' energy efficiency improvements, while 29% said their objective was only to meet the minimum Building Regulations. Further down the list, just 13% said they wanted to install the 'highest-performing future-standard windows' no matter what the requirements are.

Less than half of respondents (45%) said they were undertaking a whole house deep retrofit – a holistic approach that encompasses everything from heat pumps and solar panels to triple-glazing and improving airtightness in buildings. Around 62% said there were 'significant' or 'very significant' challenges associated with this approach, and the biggest barrier, cited by 57% of respondents, is funding.

Of course, socially responsible landlords want homes to be kitted out in a way that not only helps them to stay compliant but also improves tenants' quality of life and makes a positive contribution to net-zero targets. But the survey again highlighted cost as the biggest barrier to retrofitting, followed by the age of housing stock, and lack of skilled trades.

While cost is a real concern, I believe we need to shift the focus to value for money. Responsibility doesn't fall to social housing providers alone. Both the Government and industry have a part to play: the former via funding, support and realistic deadlines, and the latter through partnerships and innovative solutions that measurably improve performance and, importantly, can be scaled.

BATCHING FOR SUCCESS

When you look at the UK's largest providers, such as Clarion Housing Group with roughly 125,000 homes, or Peabody with over 100,000, the prospect of an immediate deep retrofit across a large portfolio is financially daunting to say the least. When providers are faced with this significant cost, it's easy to focus on the short-term.

To counter this, the sector needs to move away from an all-or-nothing mindset and start breaking down these vast portfolios. By identifying specific 'batches' of homes where high-performing, future proofed windows are most viable right now, providers can make meaningful progress while reducing the long-term overall cost burden.

It is far better to strategically invest in top-tier, 2050-ready specifications for at least a targeted batch of properties today than to apply a cheap, sticking plaster fix across the board that guarantees a second wave of replacements tomorrow.



"Compliance, budgetary constraints, and political short-termism can make for a toxic mix"

Gary Doxey, Eurocell

BEYOND COMPLIANCE

At an industry level, we're already seeing how strategic partnerships can deliver decarbonisation retrofits at scale.

We've previously worked with illbruck, part of Tremco CPG, and Saint-Gobain on a project for Cambridge City Council for the retrofit of 46 homes. Taking a sustainability-led approach to specification, we were able to deliver a closed-loop, high-performance solution that should mean the authority is able to meet future requirements, as well as current ones.

Although modern window systems can significantly improve EPC ratings, gaps between the frame and the facade will lead to heat loss and make it difficult to reach the required standard.

Partnering with illbruck allowed us to test the windows for air tightness, thermal efficiency and rain resistance at its specialist facility in Bavaria. Saint-Gobain helped to close the loop, with glass being recycled as part of the company's Glass Forever programme, while we took the old PVCu frames to be recycled and remanufactured into new profiles at Eurocell Recycle.

It's not just upfront product and installation costs that stand in the way of retrofits – there can be other risks and compliance issues too.

During construction, high-performance products may be replaced with ones that don't meet the required spec (creating a 'specification gap'), which means properties don't deliver on energy performance. This is where industry once again has an important role to play. A 'specification to installation' model like SureSpec for windows and doors can reduce the drift between design and delivery, ensuring what is designed is fitted, so buildings comply with the standards required.

'TENANT BLOCKING'

There's another reason for avoiding short-termism in retrofitting. The Holistic Approaches to Low Carbon Retrofit at Scale report found that tenants blocking improvements has risen to number five out of 11 factors, up from eighth place two years ago. In 2023, it ranked lowest on the list.

Even with the prospect of lower energy bills and a more comfortable home, tenants are concerned about disruption. There's clearly work to be done in how these improvements are communicated – indeed, 37% of social housing professionals said that tenants can be confused by the term 'retrofit', while 22% believe it's 'somewhat problematic'. The mantra 'do it once, do it right' is critical here – people are more likely to get on board with improvements if they last for decades and the benefits are clearly communicated.

FINAL THOUGHTS

For too long, the UK has had a cultural habit of kicking the can down the road when it comes to infrastructure and housing. We patch things up to satisfy the immediate regulatory cycle, only to pay double when the sticking plaster inevitably peels off. With the 2050 net-zero targets looming, we are running out of road.

So, the message for social landlords is clear – specify for windows and other assets beyond the 2030 deadline, otherwise they risk having to make further retrofits again before 2050.

Short-term piecemeal upgrades are counterproductive if they result in energy performance issues that compromise compliance and need further improvements. Tenant satisfaction will suffer due to higher energy bills and the prospect of further upheaval.

As we've seen, the sector isn't on its own. Innovations and partnerships within industry, coupled with government funding, can make comprehensive retrofits both achievable, and scalable.

Gary Doxey is commercial manager at Eurocell

Tackling Fuel Poverty with Smarter Housing Solutions



We staged a Building Insights LIVE round table in April which explored solutions to the huge challenge of delivering a ‘just’ – e.g. affordable as well as effective – transition for tenants to better-performing homes with lower bills, long-term. Our event, which heard contributions from a wide range of stakeholders in retrofitting social housing found that the challenges were chiefly not around the ability to identify and provide smart approaches, but in how to engage housing tenants effectively and sensitively in order to work in partnership on projects, and tackle affordability problems for smaller providers.

The round table, held in London, was sponsored by Showersave, Dimplex, Intergas and Chameleon Technology, who all brought representatives to the event to discuss innovative and data-driven solutions for social housing clients; and submitted pertinent questions to the panel. The discussion was steered by guest chair, Elaine Middleton, strategic consultant and board member at housing association Livin Housing. She was able to offer a vital perspective from smaller registered providers, as well as asking a series of pertinent questions to the panel. For a debate which really looked at the realities from all perspectives, we were fortunate to have a broad-based group, including key players Clarion, L&G and Mears, as well as representation from the Government’s advisory body the Climate Change Committee (Just Transition Lead Joshua Deru).

At the larger end of the provider spectrum, we were glad to be joined by Becky Ritchie, head of sustainability at Clarion Housing Group, which manages 125,000 homes across the UK. She revealed that a survey undertaken by the Group showed that 43% of their residents (based on the total, a substantial number of households) were struggling to pay energy bills. Legal & General Affordable Homes’ head of stock acquisitions, Faisal Butt was also on hand to provide the 10,000 homes RSP’s position on retrofit strategy, and harnessing data to optimise efficiency.

Other experts present including Piers Williamson, chair of Sustainability for Housing, which has developed a Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing. Rebecca Rieley, head of communities at HACT was also on hand from the non-profit body which has just introduced a retrofit credit scheme for social

ROUND TABLE ATTENDEES

- **Chair: Elaine Middleton**, Strategic Consultant/Livin Housing
- **Joshua Deru**, Just Transition Lead, Climate Change Committee
- **Becky Ritchie**, Head of Sustainability, Clarion Housing Group
- **Faisal Butt**, Head of Stock Acquisitions, Legal & General Affordable Homes
- **Rebecca Rieley**, Head of Communities & Projects, HACT
- **Greg Robinson**, Managing Director – DLO (Direct Labour Organisation), Mears
- **Rachel Taylor**, Senior Lecturer, University of South Wales
- **John Kolm-Murray**, Principal Consultant, Turner & Townsend
- **Dr Marco Picco**, Lecturer in Building Services and Sustainable Engineering University of Lancashire
- **Piers Williamson**, Chair, Sustainability for Housing

SPONSOR ATTENDEES

- **Tony Gordon**, Managing Director, Showersave
- **David Patrick**, Head of Specification Marketing, Glen Dimplex
- **Stewart Thompson**, National Specification Manager (Social Housing & New Build), Intergas
- **Kyle Brown**, Chief Commercial Officer, Chameleon Technology





LESSONS FROM THE SECTOR

A range of voices from the social housing sector, including guest chair Elaine Middleton of Livin Housing, brought real-world perspectives to bringing tenants through a “just transition” to more energy efficient properties, assisted by viewpoints from the supply chain

housing providers. She added that HACT’s fuel fund voucher scheme for tenants had distributed over £10 million worth of vouchers over the past five years, showing the continued need for tackling fuel poverty issues across the UK as cost-of-living issues persist and grow.

The event took place in the wake of the publication of the Warm Homes Plan which includes £5bn directed to upgrading the energy efficiency of low income households. It also came in the context of the updates to MEES (the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard), which establishes a baseline of efficiency for all tenants, and the investment needed to reach EPC ‘C’ for all properties by 2030, in an otherwise changeable policy environment. All of which add further pressure to already cash-strapped social housing providers.

The round table explored how carbon-cutting upgrades to properties’ heating and hot water systems in particular could bring cheaper bills for tenants, harnessing modern technology such as metering and data to ensure efficiency. It also looked at how residents needed to be fully and sensitively engaged in the process, to help build trust and long-term collaboration, as the sector seeks to reduce the 11% of UK households who are currently in fuel poverty. It also looked at wider ‘resilience’ issues around tackling climate change and its effects, as well as helping tenants keep warm efficiently, and have healthier homes.

The practical delivery of solutions was put into real-world contexts with the help of insights from our sponsor representatives, who all made key contributions. We were joined by Tony Gordon, Managing Director of waste water heat recovery system manufacturer Showersave, who looked at the shortcomings of the Warm Homes Plan for driving innovation. David Patrick, Head of Specification Marketing, Glen Dimplex was present to explain how the heating firm had “pioneered a lot of the technology we are familiar with for alleviating fuel poverty. Stewart Thompson, National Specification Manager (Social Housing & New Build), Intergas, looked at the relative issues around both on-gas and off-gas properties for futureproofing tenants. And Kyle Brown, Chief Commercial Officer at smart meter display provider Chameleon Technology was keen to stress how IT standards needed to be upgraded.

THE CHALLENGE

Becky Ritchie from Clarion put the debate into further context from the major provider’s point of view, showing that there were ongoing, and worrying issues for tenants around bills, supporting the need for thought-through, effective and sensitive solutions. She said that as part of the close relationship Clarion tries to

foster with tenants, they carry out an annual survey with tenants, “The Index.” Last year, this showed that 58% were struggling financially, and “not able to pay their bills on a regular basis,” and 48% had difficulty paying gas or electricity bills specifically.

Bearing this financial context in mind, she said Clarion was focused on creating the “just and fair transition” for retrofits, as upfront costs for measures could be as challenging for tenants as the longer term cost rises which measures were designed to offset. Ritchie said that part of the RSP’s Climate Transition Plan was identifying “how can we deploy the right technologies to ensure that residents aren’t going to have increased bills, and that we’re limiting their bills as much as we possibly can.”

The opportunity around retrofit and new build with solutions brought to the fore for prevention of fuel poverty was stressed by the chair and the delegates, including the health impacts to tenants, but also the savings possible for RSPs using modern, data-driven approaches. The dangers and challenges for the sector in doing so, however, were not shied away from, with several delegates pinpointing the unintended consequences of upgrades, in particular overheating properties.

However, Williamson warned that the housing sector was “trying to do this at a time of unprecedented strain on housing associations.” He said that the cost of debt had “doubled” since 2018, and that while there will be “a lot of incentives, a lot of carrots,” he “worried that the retrofit agenda was actually a ‘top of the market’ thing, ie not suitable for mainstream adoption when finances are so tight.

The big problem in producing business cases for retrofit was that “unless you turn your house into a power station, there is no financial return for most of this – the return is about alleviating fuel poverty.”

The context of Section 106 homes was brought up by Tony Gordon of Showersave as a crucial part of the issue, in terms of whether developers were as engaged with the fuel poverty-related solutions here as in the more housing association-led schemes. He asked Faisal Butt of L&G how much of what they did was “developer led or housing association led,” as Showersave had installed in Section 106 houses, and “I can guarantee that 50% didn’t know they had it in there, as it just happens to be part of the development spec.” Butt answered that the provider had a “good partnership” with both types, “but sometimes with the larger PLCs you have to leverage a little bit more influence so you get the better outcomes for residents.”



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RESIDENT AFFORDABILITY ISSUES

Elaine Middleton homed straight in on the pointed issue of affordability in the ongoing cost of living challenge, with not only tenants but many local authorities struggling financially. She asked simply: “How are tenants able to afford the upgrades?,” adding that with the varied pressures of everyday life, it was “easy for people to deprioritise energy efficiency.”

Other delegates alluded to both residents’ struggles to afford upgrades, meaning good incentives were needed, but also the need to ensure that residents were closely engaged, to tackle persistent trust issues, and not treated at arms-length. Rachel Taylor of the University of South Wales referred to a “tension” among residents of “feeling ‘your home may not be your home,’” which could be exacerbated by mishandled upgrade projects which didn’t consider their needs properly. One solution, said Taylor, was “consistency of communication; extending to the front door,” therefore importantly including “onboarding” contractors to ensure they were engaged to both visit and undertake measures.

Resident decants required to undertake property upgrades are always a challenge, but the round table chair Elaine said that they could be more easily handled by the larger providers. She recommended that one way of avoiding decanting tenants was to concentrate on upgrading void properties, suggesting: “Let’s take the financial hit and not race to get people in. Let’s worry about our KPIs and not our budget, and actually do the work.”

Greg Robinson from Mears agreed, saying “it’s exactly what you should be doing; why would you not exhaust the potential to improve that property while you’ve got free rein in terms of hours, access, etc,” adding, “we do try and do that as much as possible.”

Delegates drew attention to the fact that there is a mixed picture across social housing in terms of where properties’ energy efficiency is posing a risk to tenants, including on health criteria. They said there are pockets of health risk around the country, but intelligent data gathering would be the viable means to identify these in detail and address them.

COLLABORATION & PLACE-BASED PLANS

John Kolm-Murray of Turner & Townsend offered some considered views around the need for collaboration across boundaries on upgrades, but also place-based planning – this was endorsed by others including Elaine Middleton. Kolm-Murray spoke about how devolution was supporting the regional approach: “One of the things that came out of the Warm Homes Plan is area-based delivery,” said Kolm-Murray. However, while landlords are well placed, he said, the Government is “actually talking about collaboration not just between landlords, but across tenures, that becomes more viable potentially when the devolved mayoral authorities have their arms around a lot more funding.”



TENANTS AS ALLIES

Delegates including Rebecca Rieley of HACT and Rachel Taylor of University of South Wales stressed the benefits of developing ‘allyship’ with tenants

He said while “some large housing associations are quite wary of having to deal with multiple funders, in terms of the opportunities for community engagement, job creation and skills development, having a geographical based approach, having an offer for everyone will finally crack the able to pay market.” He added that such cross-agency working could help the grid’s District Network Operators, who were “very invested and making sure that’s done properly, because it has significant impacts for their loads – which on some areas are very stretched.”

Elaine Middleton said it remained a “difficult one, because landlords play well in place-based areas, but I’ve also seen why we don’t do that as well, especially when it comes to retrofit, and you’ve got different sides of a road owned by different people.” She asked where there was a role for “suppliers, tech providers, partners, contractors, to bring people together and potentially offer more commercially attractive deals.”

Kolm-Murray said he believed the Government was “slowly thinking about how it could start to incentivise this.”

TENANTS’ ROLE

Piers Williamson raised some provoking questions around tenants’ roles in increasing energy efficiency and reducing bills, saying there was an “implicit problem around the use of assets as designed” to fix.

He asked the group whether it would be more fruitful not to focus on financing mechanisms for upgrades, but instead to “encourage all owners and tenants to use their property intelligently. He gave a related example of people “living in passive houses, and the first thing you see is them opening their windows when they have air recovery going on.” He added that there are “embedded issues around overcrowding, particularly in large conurbations,” and that it was “important to think about solutions behaviourally.”

He said that it was crucial to give tenants realistic, citing a social housing upgrade “during the last energy crisis, when people weren’t told that the aim was for bills not to go up; they were disappointed they didn’t go down. They were paying £20 to disconnect the installations.”

DATA

The use of data on homes’ energy performance almost presents a ‘general’ approach to solving the issues, as it cuts across so many different areas of optimising retrofits and the consequent monitoring of installations to ensure efficiency. Harnessing the potential of huge datasets across social housing portfolios, which is particularly relevant to the larger RPs, can help provide unprecedented transparency of the effectiveness of measures to tackle fuel poverty. Piers Williamson made this point, suggesting the most value would be gained by the larger landlords, but delegates accepted that data collection is another challenge to address for providers, particularly the smaller ones.

But delegates also cautioned that it was difficult to be sure that the project data would work as intended, and also that it would be able to accommodate the changing demographics inherent to a lot of social housing tenancies. People move fairly frequently and experience life changes, so the data gathering needs to be sophisticated and flexible enough to cope with this reality.

The ability of different data sets to work effectively with, and communicate with, each other is fundamental to future success, said the group, though this was in its infancy in the sector. Greg Robinson of Mears suggested there could be “a gap in terms of asset management strategies that have led to this current position,” and whether there is a risk that they’re going to be repeated?

Kyle Brown from sponsor Chameleon Technology said “no-one [in the sector] is doing Internet of Things data right yet,” and “the biggest barrier is cost.” John Kolm-Murray of Turner & Townsend said that this was a “big challenge for small housing providers.” Both Brown and Robinson from Mears said that more rapid deployment of approaches to tackling data were needed, and Brown asserted the current data standard for smart meters was 15 years out of date.

He added that the sector did not need to build all brand new datasets, but instead can “use the existing data.” Kolm-Murray said that in terms of tackling





CLARION CALL

Beckie Ritchie of Clarion Housing said that the association's research showed that many residents were struggling to pay their energy bills

the new Decent Homes Standard, “compared to the Private Rented Sector, social housing is quite well placed to address it. They have quite a lot of data on their stock, admittedly a lot of it can be improved, and they have relationships with their clients.”

The associated health impacts of successful retrofit projects, ostensibly designed to make tenants resilient against fuel poverty, could be evidenced in future using such sensible data approaches, said delegates, helping to spread the word for future projects.

SOLUTIONS

The second, solutions-focused half of the discussion included focus on the ‘holy trinity’ of heat pumps, PV and battery storage, but also important the data and tech issues surrounding making them work for tenants. On that front, tenant engagement also received a substantial amount of discussion.

The chair Elaine Middleton said that there was an overwhelming need, in doing the upgrades required to safeguard against fuel poverty, “that we don’t create a future issue for tenants.”

Becky from Clarion said that her organisation was taking a “worst first” approach to retrofitting, and that MEES (the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard) was driving the ‘single hit’ approach, however the view said that waiting to do projects completely holistically could lead to excessive delays.

CONTRACTORS & TENANTS

Elaine Middleton said that while there were a lot of great ideas around education of tenants on the solutions being employed to ensure they get the efficiencies – and lower bills – promised by upgrades, including apps, they “have to want to do it in the first place.”

Greg Robinson gave the perspective from Mears on how tenants were engaged to ensure they are informed and feel more comfortable. “Every retrofit project we deliver has a Resident Liaison Officer so we’ve got that constant source of communication.” However he added that contractors “need to understand their impact as well, and how they’re expected to engage with residents, and that comes down to onboarding, mobilisation and the governance you put around it at the front end.”

The chair commented that there are “pockets of really good practice” but that the ultimate goal was to make such approaches “common practice across the sector.” Piers Williamson of Sustainability for Housing said that while energy firms like Octopus were “quite clever at this stuff. You have to involve all of those different constituencies, and you have to let contractors through the door in the first place. If you get a 50% turnaway rate, blow most of the economics of most schemes before you even start.”

SUPPLIERS’ QUESTION TIME

Our sponsor delegates confronted some of the challenging administrative and centrally-driven, yet outdated thinking which was preventing the rollout of technologies quickly, including around changes in SAP, and other shifts. The first question (from Intergas Stewart Thompson), prompted a deep dive into the low carbon heating options for upgrading and new build of social homes – from air source and ground source heat pumps, to the need to consider cooling requirements in future.

Thompson asked for views on the criteria being used to select heat pump manufacturers – was it “cost, connectivity, support, aesthetics,” or even “refrigerant type, or brand awareness.” Becky Ritchie from Clarion said that decisions on specification were “led by contractors,” and they were “looking at more strategic procurement, which could help with maintenance down the line.”

Faisal Butt from Legal & General said that when looking at the asset life cycle in selecting a heat pump, the “investment and cost of maintenance does play a part, and the other point I’ve come across recently is around affordability – the affordability of the fuel may drop the SAP rating.” David Patrick from Glen Dimplex commented that the Boiler Upgrade Scheme had been successful, but said that demographic data showed it had “made upgrades more affordable for people who were going to do it anyway.”

Piers Williamson alluded to the skills crisis in the industry for servicing decarbonisation of social housing, giving the example of a Housing Association “hoovering up all the engineers who could service heat pumps, because there were so few of them in the market.” He said servicing and maintaining was a “growing problem,” and chair Elaine Middleton said that the “length of time it takes to service a heat pump versus a traditional gas boiler comes into effect when you are thinking about your productivity measures.”

Greg Robinson of Mears said that the life cycle costs were “significant,” but that the “big driver for them was post install support for tenants.” He added “a bad experience can travel significantly quicker than a good one.”

Thompson said that while it was possible “to turn a home into a power station,” by generating enough electricity to export, he said “it was not applicable to every property.” In addition, social housing providers have “tended to avoid the on gas side; the low hanging fruit has generally been the offgas properties.” He recommended social housing providers look at hybrid heating systems, which could “offer a soft landing,” alongside solar PVs and battery storage “to almost eliminate tenants’ energy bills.”

The discussion also touched on the relative benefits – and cost and land take – of ground source heat pump options for social housing. Becky Ritchie of Clarion said that they had been trialling ground source as well as air source, and this had raised questions around whether this technically means a heat network



REDUCING WASTE HEAT, TURNING UP SAVINGS

Tony Gordon from co-sponsors Showersave draws attention to the fundamentals around low carbon technology in projects



is created, affecting the relevant regulatory framework: “Looking at whether that then turns the properties into a heat network, and whether you then have to comply with the new consumer standards that are coming in, that’s a question that I had that I haven’t had answered yet.”

She concluded: “It’s about the right technology for the right home; I think it will end up being a mix of different things.” The chair asked whether cooling would start to become a new use for heat pumps and whether it was likely to be officially recommended by Government policy in future. Joshua Deru (on behalf of the CCC) said the Government is “still working out heat networks.”

David Patrick gave an example of a heat network in a Silvertown, east London regeneration project, where Dimplex was providing water to water units, feeding off an ambient loop fed by a fifth generation heat network. He explained: “In 15 years there will be 6,500 homes heated and cooled independently and returning energy; almost self-sufficient.”

Piers Williamson mentioned other examples of heat networks being owned by local authorities, at Newcastle and in Swansea, where a Woolworths is being converted into social housing, “with an industrial scale heat exchanger.”



DATA SOLUTIONS

Kyle Brown of Chameleon Technology asked: “How do we make better use of the data that’s already out there to tackle fuel poverty?” He asserted that using data correctly, including to prove efficiencies, “was the means to avoid the scare stories around renewables,” and the round table agreed that monitoring installed solutions, in partnership with tenants, would increasingly become central for ensuring fuel poverty was guarded against.

Piers Williamson told the group that the key was “to involve the energy providers, and contractors; also housing associations need a way of dealing with multiple funders and we need to craft the able to pay market, bringing people together; different bodies, including tech.” Kyle Brown concluded: “The data is all there, we need to get a balance between what the HA wants and what the tenant wants.”

Rachel Taylor steered the topic of harnessing data’s potential back to the crucial need to inform and work with tenants, to ensure they don’t feel they are being manipulated or surveilled. She said: “Consent is important. It needs to be a sophisticated approach, and be clear on the objectives for the data.” Piers Williamson commented that further that the industry needs data that “combines asset data with how people are using it; detailed stuff.”

IN HOT WATER

Tony Gordon of Showersave then posed his question to the group: “What is the impact of neglecting hot water when determining Government policy.” He admitted that “the question itself is clearly telling you that I’m not entirely enamoured by policy; I’ve been on this journey 18 years trying to commercialise a very simple wastewater heat recovery system.” He was joined by David Patrick of co-sponsor Glen Dimplex in entreating Government to give more support to innovative solutions; he explained that the hot water-only heat pump the firm has produced, with no outdoor unit required, had “yet to be recognised as a heat pump in the Boiler Upgrade Scheme.” He said this was “just another example of how hot water is kind of dismissed.”

At the same time, the Government has intervened to drive efficiency with the Future Homes Standard and the enabling Home Energy Model soon to be introduced, but with some questionable assumptions on water use, according to our sponsors. While Gordon said that hot water “isn’t the last mile solution any more, it’s a driver,” based on the likelihood it will present the largest source of emissions in future efficient home designs, “HEM reckons we probably shower about 1.6 times a week each, based on old data from one manufacturer.” Also, the ‘notional house type’ in HEM is based on heat pumps with an underestimated Coefficient of Performance of 2.5, which means “you can remove any water saving device you want after that.”

There was also some discussion about the practicalities of installing heat pumps, including the required hot water cylinders, into existing social homes, David Patrick asserting that they were “a real benefit to the grid.”

COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

Piers Williamson of Sustainability for Housing advocates for communications to tenants around efficiency measures in “language they will understand”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDUSTRY & GOVERNMENT

- **Tony Gordon, Showersave:** We have to look at this gas and electricity price difference, how can you electrify heat and put up the price of electricity? It’s bonkers.
- **Dr Marco Picco, University of Lancashire:** There are different solutions to different problems, so a mix is the way to go, and heat pumps are not the solution to everything.
- **Kyle Brown, Chameleon Technology:** I would ask the Government to update the specification of smart meter data and make it modern and fit for purpose, and put it in the hands of the people who can benefit from it.
- **Becky Ritchie, Clarion Housing Group:** Longer term funding streams than three year funding waves where each year is treated slightly separately. This would help with scaling.
- **Greg Robinson, Mears:** Use lessons learned and evidenced programmes to provide a national archetype guide to support organisations who don’t have the in-house expertise.
- **John Kolm-Murray, Turner & Townsend:** The Government should go harder on place-based delivery, they rowed back a bit in the Warm Homes Plan. It ticks all the boxes, on industry collaboration and efficiencies, community engagement, grid capacity, and jobs and skills.
- **Rebecca Rieley, HACT:** Explore more strongly how tenants can be your allies, see them as an asset in a ‘just transition.’
- **Stewart Thompson, Intergas:** Let’s see the real price of electricity, stop subsidising gas, and recognise low carbon technologies in RDSAP, and not see it as a negative.
- **Piers Williamson, Sustainability for Housing:** Industry is a bit of a laggard on ‘nudge’ psychology, we need to be able to explain what we are talking about to average tenants in language they will understand.
- **David Patrick, Glen Dimplex:** Government needs to recognise the value of a wealth of different technologies in reducing energy consumption and cost, and how to incentivise them.
- **Faisal Butt, Legal & General Affordable Homes:** What is the role institutional capital can play in delivering the Government’s sustainability agenda?



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Roofing's role in safety – post-Awaab's Law

Stuart Nicholson from Marley looks at the role of roofing in providing homes that are safe from damp and mould, as the sector tackles the full ramifications of Awaab's Law.

Under the legislation, social housing providers are reassessing how effectively their homes protect residents from hazards such as damp and mould. The new statutory duties, which came into force in October 2025, place clear requirements on landlords to investigate, remediate and prevent conditions that pose a risk to tenants' health; and to do so within defined timeframes.

Introduced through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the legislation reflects a wider shift in regulation, moving from reactive responses towards demonstrable, preventative asset management.

CLEAR TIMESCALES, INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

Under the new framework, landlords must act swiftly when hazards are reported. Issues deemed to present an 'imminent and significant risk of harm' – such as severe damp, gas leaks or the loss of water or power must be investigated and made safe within 24 hours. Other potential hazards, including less severe damp and mould, must be investigated within 10 working days, with an action plan implemented within five working days of the investigation concluding.

The law also introduces greater transparency for tenants. Landlords are required to provide a written summary of their findings within three working days, and any further work needed to prevent recurrence must be completed within 12 weeks. Together, these measures aim to ensure concerns are taken seriously and resolved before conditions deteriorate.

While damp and mould are often treated as isolated maintenance issues, the regulatory changes reinforce the need for a more holistic understanding of building performance. The causes can be complex, ranging from inadequate ventilation and insulation to structural defects and water ingress.

Roofs, in particular, play a critical role in protecting homes from moisture. Failures around flashings, gable walls, roof coverings or roof penetrations can all contribute to persistent damp problems if not properly designed and installed. As decarbonisation initiatives accelerate, the interaction between existing roof condition and new technologies such as solar PV is becoming an increasingly important consideration.

For those responsible for the delivery of roof installations on existing or new housing stock, selecting a full roof system can add further assurance around weatherproofing, compatibility and long-term value. Social housing specifiers should look to select products which are rigorously tested to ensure they work seamlessly together, helping to reduce risk, and often giving landlords and residents additional peace of mind through extended guarantees.

Awaab's Law arrives at a time when social landlords are already balancing multiple pressures. Meeting EPC requirements, delivering fire safety upgrades,



progressing net zero targets and managing constrained budgets all demand careful coordination. Poor sequencing of works, for example, installing renewable technologies on roofs nearing the end of their service life leads to unnecessary disruption and avoidable costs.

An integrated approach to asset management, where maintenance, retrofit and decarbonisation strategies are aligned, can help providers make best use of available resources. It also reduces the likelihood that defects introduced during improvement works will undermine compliance with health and safety obligations.

A SHIFT IN APPROACH

The key emphasis of Awaab's Law is not only on how quickly landlords respond to reported hazards, but on how effectively they prevent them from occurring in the first place. This places renewed importance on correct diagnosis, robust specification and quality installation across all elements of the building envelope.

For roofing, this means ensuring ventilation, weatherproofing and detailing are considered as part of an integrated design, rather than as standalone components. Consistency of performance over the long term is essential if damp and mould are to be reduced rather than repeatedly remediated.

Ultimately, this is a cultural shift as much as a regulatory one. Senior leaders within social housing organisations now carry clearer legal responsibility for the condition of the homes they manage, and tenants have stronger protections when standards fall short.

Delivering warm, dry and healthy homes has always been a core objective of the sector. The new regulatory framework reinforces that expectation and makes clear that failures in building maintenance and asset management, particularly where they affect residents' health are no longer acceptable.

As landlords prepare for full implementation, understanding how each part of the building contributes to occupant wellbeing will be essential. Designing out damp at source, rather than responding to its consequences, will be key to meeting both the letter and the spirit of the law.

Stuart Nicholson is managing director at Marley



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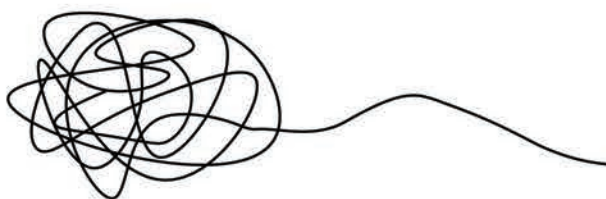
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 **Marley**

“Every decant we avoid is a home that stays in use” – Talking subsidence with Geobear’s Omar Alata



After the hottest summer on record drove subsidence insurance payouts to an all-time high of £307 million, and with drought warnings already in place for 2026, structural movement is climbing the agenda for social landlords. Omar Alata, Head of Social Housing at ground engineering specialist Geobear, discusses procurement habits, and how Harrow Council saved nearly £500,000 on a single block.

OMAR, SUBSIDENCE HAS BEEN IN THE NEWS A LOT OVER THE PAST YEAR. WHAT'S ACTUALLY GOING ON?

The short version is weather. The driest spring in a century was followed by the hottest summer on record, and much of England – London, the South East, the Midlands – sits on shrinkable clay. When clay dries it contracts, foundations move, and you

get the classic symptoms: stepped cracking, sticking doors, gaps at skirtings. Insurers paid out a record £300 million for residential subsidence in 2025, and the damage often shows up months after the heat, so cases are still landing now. With the Environment Agency warning that drought could carry into this summer, I'd expect another busy year.

IS SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK MORE EXPOSED THAN PRIVATE HOUSING?

In many areas, yes. A lot of council stock went up quickly in the post-war and 1970s booms, on foundations shallower than today's standards. Estates were also landscaped generously, with trees planted close to homes. Fifty years on, those trees are mature and their roots are drawing moisture from the clay right under the foundations – what the industry calls clay tree subsidence, and it

accounts for a large share of claims in surge years. Redditch is a good example – Bromsgrove and Redditch Council manages over 6,000 homes, much of it 1970s stock with exactly that combination of shallow footings, clay and maturing trees.

THE TRADITIONAL ANSWER IS UNDERPINNING. WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?

Nothing, structurally – it works. The problem is everything around it. You're excavating under a building, so tenants have to move out, often for 20 weeks or more. Someone has to find and fund temporary accommodation at around £4,000 a month per family room. You've got heavy plant on the estate for months, mud everywhere – and underpinning schemes usually mean cutting back vegetation and removing the very trees that make an estate worth living on. And the whole time,

those homes are voids. The sector already has around 34,000 empty council homes in England, plus 55,000 housing association voids, against 1.34 million households on waiting lists. A repair that adds to the void count for five months is the wrong tool for the moment.

SO WHAT DOES GEOBEAR DO DIFFERENTLY?

We improve the ground instead of rebuilding the foundation. We drill small holes through the foundations and inject an expanding geopolymer resin that targets the weakened soil directly. The majority of the work happens outside the building, with no excavation, and a typical property takes days rather than months. Tenants stay in their homes throughout and most tell us they barely noticed us. It cuts the other way too: where homes have already been voided by subsidence, we can have them back in letting condition within weeks, not months or years. The carbon footprint is around 70% lower than underpinning as well, independently verified.

TELL US ABOUT THE HARROW PROJECT – THE NUMBERS THERE WERE STRIKING.

That one showed what's possible. Harrow Council had a 12-unit block moving on shrinking clay and had followed the standard route: investigation, engineer's recommendation to underpin, tender. The price came back at £240,000 with 20 weeks on site, and every household – many elderly and disabled – facing relocation. We proposed the geopolymer alternative at £83,000, delivered in about ten days, nobody moving out.

The direct saving was 65%, but the indirect savings were just as big. Temporary accommodation alone for those households over 20 weeks would have been somewhere between £240,000 and £320,000, before void losses and weeks of officer time arranging a decant. All in, Harrow saved close to £500,000 on one block – money that went



straight back into other maintenance projects. And honestly, the bit I'm proudest of is what didn't happen: elderly residents weren't moved away from family and carers for five months, and not a single tree around the block was removed. It was clay tree subsidence, but our approach treats the ground rather than punishing the trees – the green space the community actually uses was untouched.

DID ANYTHING NEED TO CHANGE ON THE COUNCIL SIDE TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN?

Procurement, mainly. The tender was already running, so Harrow's maintenance team had to make the case internally for departing from it –

which they did, with the numbers to back it up. Credit to them; challenging an established process takes nerve. The knock-on is that Harrow is now re-evaluating other maintenance schemes through the same lens. Many procurement frameworks were written before methods like ours existed, and quietly lock in the most expensive, most disruptive option by default.

WHAT ARE TENANTS AND RESIDENTS ACTUALLY SAYING?

That's been the most encouraging part. At Redditch, the council has had no complaints at all – if anything, tenants are pleased the council is visibly committing to fixing their homes. Penny Bevington, who leads the capital programme there, put it simply: they put tenants first, and rehoming people wasn't a feasible option. That framing is spreading across the sector.

IF A HOUSING MANAGER SUSPECTS SUBSIDENCE IN THEIR STOCK, WHAT SHOULD THEY DO NOW – BEFORE SUMMER?

Don't wait for the cracks to get worse. Properties showing minor movement now will deteriorate if we get another dry summer, and early intervention is always cheaper. Get them surveyed, and before committing to underpinning – or decanting tenants – ask whether ground improvement is viable. In most clay cases it is. Every decant we avoid is a home that stays in use, and right now the sector can't spare a single one.

Omar Alata is Head of Social Housing at Geobear. To discuss subsidence affecting your stock, please contact the company.

0800 084 3503
www.geobear.com
omar.alata@geobear.com



Report shows Pendock boxing saves over 70% on time & cost

An independent report from specialist consultancy, Baily Garner, has shown that savings of over 70% can be achieved on the time and costs for installation, when using Pendock pipe boxing over site-made MDF and ply options.

The three-month long study was undertaken to accurately quantify the differences between pre-formed, and site made pipe boxing while also providing data that could benefit high volume installers of boxing in residential refurbishment projects, including social housing landlords and contractors.

To obtain direct comparative data, Baily Garner focused on the fabrication, installation and finishing of 75 mm x 150 mm site made boxing, manufactured from both ply and MDF, against the equivalent Pendock pre-formed MX75x150 casing, when used to complete the same task.

The assessment covered both a 100-metre run of boxing and a single 2.5-metre length, which provided a practical basis for the time and cost analysis.



Product/Method	Hours per 100m length	Hours per 2.5m length
Pendock 75 x 150 MX 5mm pipe casing	29.2	0.73
Site constructed 75 x 150 mm pipe casing, MDF clad	108.8	2.72
Site constructed 75 x 150 mm pipe casing, plywood clad	108.8	2.72

Figures were compiled using industry-standard sources, including BCIS TPI and Spon's Price Book, alongside Baily Garner's social housing tender database, to calculate a reliable average labour rate.

When comparing Pendock casing against MDF and ply site made options, the time for installation, including finishing, together with their corresponding labour costs, showed Pendock's pre-formed boxing to be 73% lower, equating to a saving of over £2,400 per 100 metres.

Even allowing for the higher material costs of the pre-finished Pendock casing profile, when compared to sheets of MDF and plywood, this is more than compensated by the considerable



MX boxing requires only 2 fixing battens



reduction in labour, giving an overall saving of around 20%.

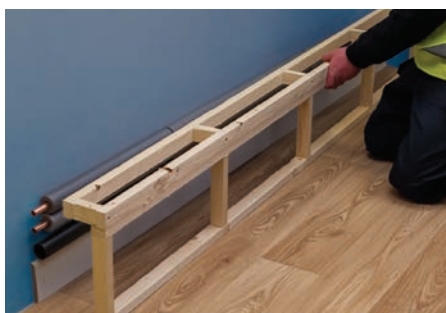
Pendock Director Helen Gough said: "When commissioning the study, it was essential that the process was fully independent, otherwise the results could have been compromised and would not have provided a true reflection of the facts. That was a key reason for choosing Baily Garner, alongside its strong reputation, extensive experience and broad reach."

She added: "The results provide compelling evidence that pre-formed boxing can deliver significant savings in time and costs, which is vital for social landlords, contractors and decision makers operating within an increasingly budget conscious commercial environment."

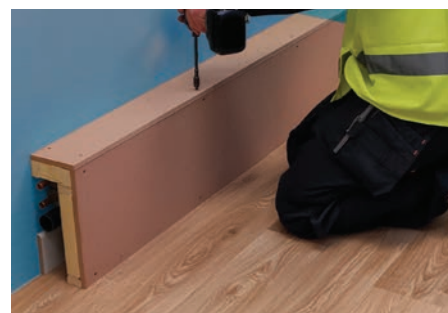
the three methods evaluated, and Pendock's product offers significant savings against both site fabricated alternatives.

But that's not the whole story, as the report also highlights additional opportunities for savings. While multiple site visits may not impact base labour costs, they can create other associated expenses, such as resident liaison on social housing refurbishment projects. Repeated visits may also affect tenant satisfaction because of added disruption and inconvenience, whereas pre-formed pipe boxing can be fully installed in a single visit.

The report also notes a potential quality-assurance benefit, although this was outside the study's scope.



Complex and time consuming ladder-frame structure required for site-made boxing



As Pendock boxing is pre-finished with a white resin impregnated décor paper, this also had a significant influence on the finishing element. Baily Garner found the finishing time for Pendock is around one-third of site made ply and MDF options, as no filler, primer, undercoat or topcoat are required.

Consequently, Baily Garner's main conclusion is that there is a clear cost differential between

Because Pendock is supplied pre-finished, it may provide a more consistent finish than site fabricated boxing, which involves a higher number of components and more trade input, which increases the risk of variation. Scan the QR code to download a copy of the Baily Garner Pipe Boxing Cost Comparison Report.

www.pendock.co.uk



Bell reaches Safer Homes Initiative milestone

Property services specialist Bell is marking a key milestone for its highly successful Safer Homes Initiative. Working in partnership with major housing providers, the scheme has engaged with over 1,000 residents across the country on ways to maintain a safer, healthier, and more secure home – with a particular focus on damp and mould. Lee Hamill, chief revenue officer at Bell said: “Helping to support local communities is something that is central to Bell and our Safer Homes Initiative is an important part of that. We are delighted that the scheme has been embraced by so many social housing providers.”



01236 766878 www.bellgroup.co.uk

Bell wins Retrofit Academy award

Property services specialist Bell has won Retrofit Principal Contractor of the Year at the Retrofit Academy Awards for the second year in a row, with the judges praising the company’s ability to successfully deliver the large, complex retrofit programmes essential to the UK’s drive for net zero. Bell’s award submission highlighted its strategic approach to delivering whole-house retrofit projects; innovative use of data, technology and management systems; dedicated resident liaison, tailored support and community engagement; a commitment to sustainable best practice; and consistently high levels of quality.



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Specialist flooring expertise for evolving housing association developments

Housing associations, local authorities and accommodation providers are balancing growing expectations around durability, maintenance and resident experience. As multi-occupancy developments continue to evolve, specification decisions are becoming increasingly important to long-term performance.

To support this evolving market, Amtico's dedicated Multi-Occupancy team brings together specialist expertise from across the living sector. Working closely with developers, operators, designers and facilities managers, the team helps clients navigate specification challenges across a wide range of projects.

Led by Nikki Wright, head of business development, the team combines more than 40 years of experience across residential and commercial living environments. Jessica Jarvis focuses on SME housebuilders, housing associations and later living developments, while Helen Helm and Keith Helm bring specialist expertise in build-to-rent (BTR) and purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA).

Whether supporting apartment developments, later living communities, housing association schemes or large-scale BTR and PBSA projects, the team provides a joined-up approach to luxury



vinyl tile (LVT) flooring specification, helping clients balance design aspirations with long-term performance requirements.

By combining sector knowledge with product expertise, Amtico's Multi-Occupancy team

helps create living environments that are built to perform for the long term.

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New taps and showers brochure

Leading heating and plumbing sector distributor Navigator MSL has launched its latest dedicated taps and showers brochure offering a comprehensive range of taps for bathrooms and kitchens, along with a selection of showers and shower hoses. The Navigator tap range is fully WRAS approved ensuring compliance with UK Water Regulations and giving installers confidence when specifying, fitting and signing off installations.



Head for the website, email or call Navigator on 01234 781234.

sales@navigatormsl.com www.navigatormsl.com

New tile adhesives and grout range

Setcrete has launched a new tile adhesives and grout range. Backed by the company's reputation for high quality products and proven performance, Setcrete tile adhesives and grouts are aimed at building professionals who want an easy-to-use, no-nonsense product that is consistent and reliable. Suitable for both wall and floor tiles, the launch range includes Rapid S1 Tile Adhesive and Standard S1 Tile Adhesive, which provide excellent bond strength and flexibility to combat moderate movement and vibration. These adhesives are complemented by Rapid Flex Tile Grout, suitable for joints up to 15 mm wide.



01538 361633 setcrete.co.uk

Forbo updates residential vinyl collection

Forbo Flooring Systems has unveiled its refreshed Novilon luxury vinyl sheet collection, designed specifically for the housing market. Combining performance, comfort and sustainability with peace of mind, the range updates further enhance its suitability for busy family homes and light commercial use, with four ranges to choose from. Forbo has updated its Novilon offering, streamlining the brand into four distinct ranges. These consist of Cool Woods, Warm Woods, Material, and Design Woods, featuring herringbone and parquet prints. Installers can benefit from Forbo's 'Back to the Floor' scheme.



01773 744 121 www.forbo-flooring.co.uk/novilon

Altro delivers 'home from home' feel

A package of products from Altro has helped deliver a high-performance 'home from home' refurb at a dementia-care home. Altro has been at the forefront of dementia-friendly design. Vickie Nickolls, Designer at Interior Therapy, selected a package of products from Altro to use in the project, including Altro Wood Comfort acoustic slip resistant flooring in hallways and bedrooms, Altro Wood adhesive-free in the lounge and dining areas and Altro Pisces specialist safety flooring in ensuites, coupled with Altro Tegulis tile effect wall panels for a seamless finish.



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Quick wins for arthritis-friendly facilities

Stuart Reynolds at AKW describes the 'quick wins' available to specifiers when it comes to adaptations for kitchens and bathrooms that make appliances far easier to use for millions of people with arthritis.

Arthritis is so common that you will most likely know someone with the condition. Under the 2010 Equality Act, it can qualify as a disability if it substantially affects daily life, meaning that reasonable adjustments must be made to avoid legal complaints and discrimination claims.

A VERY COMMON CONDITION

Arthritis is a very common condition in the UK and an estimated 10 million people are living with it, according to the charity Arthritis UK. Add to this the other musculoskeletal conditions and this increases to one in four people. When arthritis is mentioned, the first images that come to mind are swollen knuckles and knees, that can affect things such as mobility, weight-bearing movements and grip strength. However, a kitchen or bathroom that has been adapted for someone living with arthritis can be life changing. It will also mean that the tenancy is stabilised, eviction risk reduced, housing services engagement improved and NHS and council goals supported to keep people living safely at home.

FOCUSED ADAPTATIONS ARE COST-EFFECTIVE

With so many users impacted, AKW, in conjunction with Arthritis UK and The Occupational Therapy Service has created guidance to help social landlords improve tenants' bathrooms, kitchens and overall lives. The measures in the guidance are designed to help create thoughtful adaptations, and using the right products in the right places, create cost-efficient, life improving solutions that help minimise tenancy failures in the long-term.

BATHROOM ADJUSTMENTS

In terms of quick wins, painful hands make dexterity an issue for those with arthritis, so choose taps, flushes and controls that are lever-operated or have infrared sensors, with clear hot/cold temperature indicators where necessary. Think about including thermostatic mixer valves, which are useful to avoid scalds when mobility is impaired. And choose a thermostatic care shower with easy-to-use lever operation; one which also includes features to support people with cognitive and/or visual impairment.

Also, to improve transfers around the space, think about incorporating drop-down rails by the toilet or grab rails. Interestingly, our research suggests that many people prefer fluted grab rails, as they feel these offer more grip. Although space is tight in most traditional tenant bathrooms, think carefully about the position of toiletries, toilet roll holders and towels, so they are in easy reach for the user. When it comes to the flooring, choose vinyl material with a minimum R10 rating, as this will provide a slip-resistant and safe environment for the user. Finally, think about including shower chairs and raised toilet seats that make

Choose taps, flushes and controls that are lever-operated or have infrared sensors



Some people think of adaptations as needing a full-scale refurbishment however for many living with arthritis – which is a progressive condition – even the quick wins can make a big difference

showering and toileting easier and can be quickly incorporated.

Higher impact adaptations – mobility and reach can make sinks and baths difficult to use or inaccessible, so replace the bath with a level-access shower. Due to hip, knee and spine limitations, it might be necessary to install wash/dry toilets with automated or easy-to-use controls that do not rely on gross motor skills, raised-height toilets or bidets.

KITCHEN ADJUSTMENTS

Once again, quick wins – similar to the bathroom, dexterity can cause major usage problems in the kitchen for those living with arthritis. Simple 'switch outs' can make a world of difference, including: D-handles on storage, which are easier to pull open compared to knobs, or cupboards that can be opened by pushing rather than pulling. When it comes to sinks and taps, single lever or touchless control taps can be beneficial in eliminating the need to grip. Also movement around the space is key. The kitchen can benefit from the addition of seating/rest areas to support functioning whilst seated.

Higher impact adaptations – bending and reaching are both difficult for those with mobility and balance issues, so think about including height-adjustable worktops, that sinks and hobs can be fitted into. These maximise accessibility, multi-user functioning, and future-proof the space to support someone with a degenerative condition such as arthritis. As well as moving worktops to a more suitable height, move kitchen equipment such as the oven to waist height. In addition, consider using heat-resistant pull-out tables to minimise the carrying



or moving of hot items. Also consider fitting pull-down baskets, pull-out larders and drawers, or use solutions incorporating automated operation, to bring the contents closer to the user.

LIFESTYLE ADJUSTMENTS NEEDN'T BE COMPLICATED

Some people think of adaptations as needing a full-scale refurbishment however for many living with arthritis – which is a progressive condition – even the quick wins can make a big difference. By adding seating or resting areas, positioning everyday objects within reach and at waist height where possible and thinking about safe transfer additions such as grab rails, a life can be transformed.

Stuart Reynolds is UK marketing & product management director at AKW

AKW announces clinical adaptation service in partnership with occupational therapy service

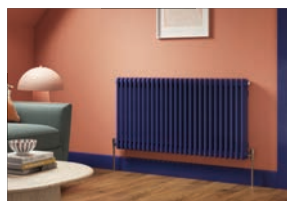
AKW, one of the UK's leading providers of accessible showering and kitchen solutions, has partnered with The Occupational Therapy Service to deliver a fully integrated Clinical Adaptation Service for housing associations and local authorities. The service combines independent occupational therapy expertise with AKW's established design, manufacturing, surveying and supply capabilities, creating a single, coordinated pathway for housing adaptations. The Clinical Adaptation Service enables occupational therapy assessments, adaptation specifications, surveying, quotation, and materials supply to be delivered through a single coordinated visit. Housing providers benefit from a single point of contact from assessment through to specification and supply, faster turnaround times, and a reduction in abortive works and re-adaptations. The service includes independent, person-centred occupational therapy assessments, clinically led adaptation specifications, professional surveying and technical validation, transparent quotations with strong cost control, and high-quality, durable materials designed for long-term use. By aligning clinical assessment with technical delivery, the service reduces duplication, improves accuracy, and supports better budget predictability for commissioners and housing providers. The partnership between AKW and The Occupational Therapy Service provides a fully integrated, clinically led solution designed for the housing sector.

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New look Column radiators from Stelrad

Leading radiator manufacturer, Stelrad Radiators has introduced an Italian-designed new look, improved range of its popular Column radiators – in both its vertical and horizontal column radiator ranges. The most obvious changes are to the design of the radiators that will now feature a new rounded column design. The streamlined model range will feature 54 horizontal radiators and four vertical options with heights between 300 mm and 2,000 mm and lengths from 348 mm to 1,866 mm. They will feature an increased warranty – significantly extended from the current five years to fifteen years.



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A practical pathway to decarbonisation

Intergas Heating's Stewart Thompson discusses how hybrid heat pump solutions can offer a "pragmatic and practical" way to cut emissions, while working within building fabric constraints.

Across the UK, social housing providers are working toward ambitious carbon-reduction targets. Yet many face the complex reality of ageing housing stock, varied building fabric, and limited budgets.

Decarbonising domestic heating is one of the sector's most significant challenges. While installing standalone heat pumps is becoming legislated in new homes, we would always advocate a fabric first approach to reduce heat losses and reduce the heat pump output on any retrofit scheme. For landlords with large and diverse portfolios, the upgrade path is rarely linear. This is where hybrid systems, pairing a heat pump with an existing boiler, can help bridge the gap.

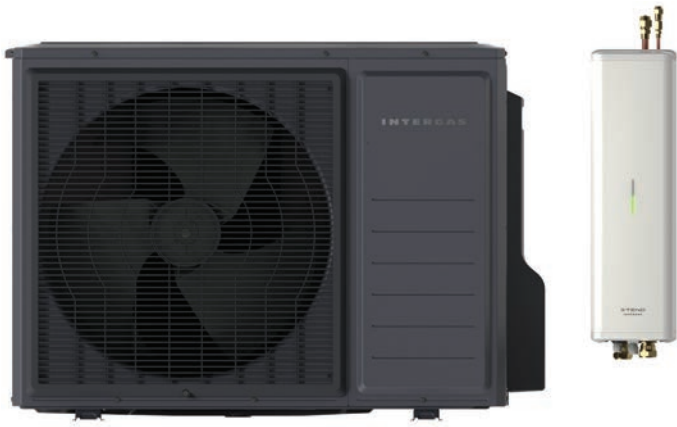
Hybrid heating allows providers to reduce emissions without immediately undertaking extensive and expensive fabric improvement works. In properties where heat loss remains relatively high, a hybrid system uses the boiler only when necessary, with the heat pump delivering the majority of annual heat demand. This approach reduces carbon while maintaining occupant comfort and managing operational risks for asset managers.

Practical constraints, such as radiator size, water storage space, property layout, or customer vulnerability, can affect whether a full heat pump installation is immediately feasible. Hybrid solutions offer a responsive alternative that maximises renewable input while respecting these real-world

limitations. For organisations bound by regulatory targets but managing limited capital budgets, phasing upgrades in this way can stabilise costs over time while still reducing emissions year-on-year.

For providers working toward EPC improvement requirements or preparing for future PAS standards, hybrid systems can also offer a route to significant carbon savings without the need for disruptive internal works. In many cases, only modest changes, such as external unit siting and system controls integration, are required, minimising disruption for customers. This reduced intrusiveness is especially relevant for vulnerable residents, where large-scale refurbishment can be challenging to deliver.

A further advantage for landlords is flexibility. Hybrid systems allow heat pumps to be deployed into properties earlier in investment cycles. As building fabric improvements become feasible, through routine maintenance, void turnover, or planned capital programmes, homes can later transition to full heat-pump operation. This staged approach helps housing providers build organisational skills and supply-chain familiarity at a manageable pace. The ability to spread costs and reduce installation complexity is particularly significant for harder-to-treat properties. Homes built in periods of varying construction standards may not present a uniform upgrade path, meaning a complete portfolio wide switch to full heat pumps may not be achievable in



heat pump without significant upgrades. The provider opted to trial hybrid heat pumps as a means of reducing emissions at scale while avoiding the disruption and cost of immediate deep retrofit.

Over the following year, EPC reassessment showed measurable improvement in the majority of homes. Carbon emissions are reduced due to the heat pump covering everyday heating demand, with the boiler only required during peak conditions. Residents reported stable heating performance, and the landlord gained valuable data to inform future investment decisions. While the trial did not eliminate the need for subsequent fabric upgrades, it enabled progress toward decarbonisation without delaying action.

As local authorities and housing associations plan their pathway to net zero, system flexibility is becoming increasingly important. The heating strategies chosen today must remain adaptable to future regulatory changes, grid decarbonisation, customer needs, and available funding. Hybrid systems offer that adaptability, supporting lower-carbon heating now while keeping future upgrade routes open.

While specific product decisions will depend on organisational standards and procurement processes, hybrid approaches more broadly allow landlords to implement meaningful emissions reductions at scale, with lower customer disruption and reduced need for immediate fabric upgrades.

Looking forward, the social housing sector may increasingly adopt mixed-technology portfolios, combining full heat pumps, hybrids, and traditional systems based on property typology and long-term investment strategy. This targeted, property-specific approach mirrors broader trends in energy efficiency planning, where flexibility and staged improvements are becoming standard practice.

As housing providers continue to balance decarbonisation ambitions with real-world constraints, hybrid heat pumps are emerging as a pragmatic and effective part of the solution. They provide a pathway for organisations to reduce emissions today, support customer comfort, and prepare homes for the fully decarbonised future of domestic heating.

Stewart Thompson is national specification manager at Intergas Heating

Hybrid solutions are not simply a technical compromise

the short term. Hybrid technology can therefore serve as a strategic interim measure that still aligns with long-term decarbonisation plans.

Hybrid solutions are not simply a technical compromise; they represent a targeted response to the characteristics of certain homes. They allow organisations to prioritise insulation and other fabric improvements where they are most effective, while ensuring that carbon reductions continue across the rest of the stock. This adaptive approach is particularly useful for providers seeking to maximise the impact of limited funding streams.

A recent case study illustrates the potential. A group of 30 three-bedroom semi-detached properties, built in the mid-2000s under the Decent Homes framework, underwent an assessment of heating options. The homes had mixed EPC ratings, with many lacking the insulation levels required for a standalone

Take the lead on LEAD



Awareness of the potential health problems caused by lead in the water supply, particularly in infants and children, is growing. In redevelopment of properties the quality of the water supply pipe should be your first priority.

Although the use of lead in plumbing has been banned in the UK for more than 50 years, there are still many properties where a risk of lead contamination of water is a risk. Houses built before 1970 would have been constructed with lead water supply pipes. In some areas of the UK a third of these older properties are still receiving their water through these original lead pipes.

In properties with lead supply pipes, the only totally secure method to reduce lead levels in the water supply is to replace the original supply with

modern plastic pipe. Particularly with older or listed properties, traditional lead replacement methods can cause huge disruption within the property and can put the integrity of a building at risk. Often deterring the replacement, but potentially putting occupants at risk.

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As the INSUduct® requires one simple core drilled hole through the wall, at an appropriate point to connect with the internal plumbing, this enables most lead replacement operations to be completed within a couple of hours. This innovative method of working allows water supply replacements to be completed without undue disruption to occupants and minimises the impact on the building infrastructure.

There is little impact on the exterior appearance of the property, as the INSUduct® system provides a neat, clean finish to the job whilst providing long lasting and effective thermal protection to water pipes and fittings outside the thermal envelope of a building.



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Harness the power of water

Chris Stammers from BEAMA's Underfloor Heating (UFH) Group explains how hydronic (water-based) underfloor heating, paired with air-source heat pumps, delivers reliable energy efficiency – and why social landlords are ideally placed to make the most of it.



The regulatory landscape for social housing has shifted dramatically in a short space of time, bringing some of the biggest changes the industry has ever experienced. The Government's £15bn Warm Homes Plan aims to upgrade up to five million homes and lift up to one million families out of fuel poverty by 2030. For social landlords, this isn't a distant ambition – it comes with clear, time-bound obligations. £1.29bn has been allocated through the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund Wave 3, to be delivered between 2025 and 2028 by eligible social housing landlords.

Alongside this, the Government has confirmed that every social home must meet the current EPC C standard by 2030, with phased compliance extending to 2039 under the new system. From 2030, social landlords will also be required to upgrade homes to meet new energy efficiency standards, which could include improving insulation, installing solar panels or fitting modern heating systems such as heat pumps.

For organisations planning new-build programmes or upgrading existing stock, the heating specification is no longer a secondary concern – it now sits at the centre of compliance, tenant wellbeing and long-term asset value.

HYDRONIC UNDERFLOOR HEATING AND HEAT PUMPS

Air source heat pumps are widely expected to become the primary heating technology for new homes, but maximising efficiency of these renewable heat

sources depends heavily on the heat emitter it's paired with. As heat pumps perform best at low flow temperatures, typically between 35 and 45°C, hydronic underfloor heating is the ideal partner, as it's designed precisely for this range and creates a highly efficient combination.

An accurately designed and professionally installed system can be up to 40% more efficient than a conventional radiator based heating system. That improvement comes from the way underfloor heating works. Pipe loops embedded in the floor create a large, low-temperature radiant surface which heats a space evenly and consistently, rather than generating high-intensity heat from a single point. The heat pump doesn't need to work as hard, which improves its Coefficient of Performance and directly reduces running costs for tenants and evidence from Salford University's Energy House 2.0 backs this up.

Testing a property built to the proposed Future Homes Standard, the study found that a hydronic underfloor heating system paired with an air-to-water heat pump recorded a temperature variation of just 0.8°C at -5°C – compared to a minimum variation of 2.2°C from traditional radiators, with some systems showing differences of up to 4°C. For tenants on tight budgets, that consistency isn't just about comfort, it's about predictable, manageable warmth.

A DIRECT RESPONSE TO FUEL POVERTY

With National Energy Action predicting that 6.7 million UK households could

be in fuel poverty, the heating systems installed in new and upgraded social homes carry real consequences for real people. A tenant in a poorly heated home faces not just discomfort but health risks, increased pressure on NHS services and the daily stress of unaffordable bills. Hydronic underfloor heating addresses this directly.

Because the system covers a much greater surface area than radiators and runs at lower temperatures continuously it uses less energy to maintain comfortable conditions. It also eliminates cold spots and condensation prone surfaces that contribute to damp and mould, which remain among the most persistent and costly issues facing social landlords today. Radiant heat reduces dust circulation, improving indoor air quality and making it a genuinely healthier way to heat a home, particularly for tenants with respiratory conditions.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS

For social housing developers focused on whole-life asset costs, the maintenance picture is compelling, as a well-specified hydronic underfloor heating system requires little maintenance. Reducing the need for reactive and planned maintenance also translates into meaningful operational savings.

Part L of the Building Regulations already requires underfloor heating systems to include zoning capabilities, allowing each area of a home to be led independently. Smart thermostats extend this further, enabling tenants to manage the temperature room by room via a smartphone app and more advanced devices use local weather data to activate heating at exactly the right moment avoiding unnecessary running time and keeping bills as low as possible.

For social landlords dealing with all these new policies at once, hydronic underfloor heating paired with an air-source heat pump isn't just a compliant choice. It's one of the few options that bring energy performance, maintenance cost and regulatory readiness together in a single solution.

Chris Stammers is head of heat systems technologies & portfolio manager for BEAMA's Underfloor Heating (UFH) Group



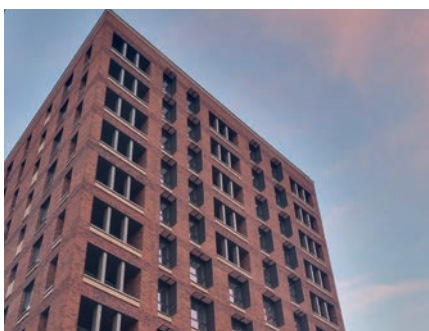
Advanced's smoke control and evacuation alert system protects John Street, Newham

John Street, Newham, a high-rise residential development comprising Blocks A and C, has been equipped with a comprehensive life safety solution from Advanced, incorporating SmokeGo smoke control and EvacGo evacuation alert systems to support a stay-put fire strategy and enhance resident safety.

The project required a robust and compliant approach to smoke control and evacuation alert across two buildings with different heights and risk profiles. Block A is a 14-storey, high-rise residential block, while Block C is a smaller, four-storey building. Each block was equipped with one SmokeGo panel and one EvacGo panel, providing dedicated control tailored to the specific needs of each structure.

SmokeGo was specified to deliver active smoke control via the fire system, supporting the management of smoke in common escape routes and critical areas. Designed to comply with EN 54 Parts 2 and 4, as well as BS 7346-8 and ISO 21927-9, SmokeGo enables automatic and manual control of smoke control fans and dampers from a single, intuitive interface. Its simple matrix-based configuration allowed the project team to clearly define smoke compartments and cause-and-effect relationships, helping ensure smoke is contained and extracted effectively in the event of a fire.

EvacGo was installed as a fully independent BS



8629-compliant evacuation alert system, giving the fire and rescue service a reliable and secure means of alerting residents if evacuation beyond the affected flat is required. Each EvacGo panel is housed within a robust, tamper-proof enclosure and is designed exclusively for use by the fire and rescue service, helping prevent misuse while ensuring clear, decisive control during an incident.

John Newton, Director Life Safety at Simple Group, commented: "John Street was a complex residential project that required careful coordination between smoke control and evacuation alert systems. Using SmokeGo and EvacGo allowed us to deliver a fully compliant solution that aligns with the fire strategy while

giving the fire and rescue service the tools they need to manage incidents safely and effectively."

The SmokeGo smoke control system and EvacGo evacuation alert system operate as separate dedicated life safety systems, ensuring smoke movement can be actively controlled while evacuation decisions remain firmly in the hands of the fire and rescue service. This layered approach supports resident safety without undermining the stay-put strategy that underpins the building's fire design.

Shaun Scott, applications engineer at Advanced, added: "Projects like John Street highlight the importance of implementing smoke control and evacuation alert systems correctly. SmokeGo makes complex smoke control logic far simpler to configure and manage, while EvacGo provides a clear, compliant evacuation alert solution. Together, they deliver confidence for installers, building managers, and emergency responders alike."

With one SmokeGo panel and one EvacGo panel installed in each block, the John Street development now benefits from a coordinated life safety solution that addresses both smoke management and evacuation alerting in line with current best practice and regulatory guidance.

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Why confidence, not just compliance, will define the sector's response to Awaab's Law

Education, prevention and a better understanding of building performance are crucial to helping landlords meet the demands of Awaab's Law, explains Howard Trotter, Business Manager at Shelforce.

The message behind Awaab's Law is unmistakable. A reactive approach to damp, mould and wider housing hazards is no longer acceptable.

Across the sector, there is strong support for the principles behind the law. Nobody disputes the need for greater accountability, the need for safer homes or the need for faster intervention when hazards are identified.

Yet while the commitment is there, confidence in delivering against the new requirements is still developing. That's one of the clearest findings from our new whitepaper, *Navigating Awaab's Law: Compliance, clarity and the critical role of education*.

The research from our survey paints a picture of a sector in transition, where many organisations understand the importance of the legislation but are still working through how to apply it consistently in practice.

A SECTOR IN TRANSITION

One of the most striking findings is the gap between perceived preparedness and operational confidence. While just under half (47.9%) of housing professionals surveyed believe their organisation is fully prepared for Awaab's Law, while more than a quarter (27.4%) say they are only partially prepared and nearly one in four organisations (24.6%) admit they are either still assessing the implications or not prepared at all. Significantly, only 38.9% say they are very confident in their ability to comply under real-world conditions, while 33.4% report little to no confidence at all. That distinction matters.

Policies and procedures are essential, but they only become meaningful when organisations can investigate hazards quickly, make the right decisions and complete remedial work within



increasingly demanding timescales. For local authorities and housing associations managing large and diverse housing stock, that creates a major operational challenge.

COMPLEXITY AND UNDERSTANDING

Awaab's Law extends far beyond damp and mould alone. As the legislation develops, it will increasingly align with wider Housing Health and Safety Rating System hazards including thermal comfort, structural safety and fire risk.

Our research shows there is still uncertainty around these broader responsibilities, particularly when it comes to understanding hazard definitions and intervention thresholds.

In practical terms, many organisations are still asking the same questions: what qualifies as a serious hazard, when should escalation happen and what level of remedial action is required?

Without consistent understanding across housing teams, contractors and supply chains, compliance becomes far more difficult to manage.

FROM SYMPTOMS TO SOLUTIONS

There is a danger in viewing Awaab's Law purely through a compliance lens and the sector now has an opportunity to move from short-term remedies to long-term prevention. That means looking more closely at the role building performance plays in creating healthy homes.

Damp and mould are rarely caused by one issue alone. In most cases, they result from a combination of factors linked to ventilation, insulation, heating and everyday occupancy patterns.

Windows and doors have a particularly important role within that wider environment, yet despite this, our research suggests that, while

some organisations have replacement programmes underway specifically to tackle damp and mould, many still have no such plans in place.

EDUCATION CRITICAL

There is also a tendency to treat condensation and mould purely as maintenance issues when they are often symptoms of wider building performance challenges combined with everyday living conditions. Cooking, showering and drying clothes indoors all introduce moisture into the home and without adequate ventilation that moisture has nowhere to go.

The answer therefore cannot rely solely on repairs after problems emerge. Instead, landlords need a more joined-up approach that combines investment in high-quality building products with practical tenant guidance around moisture management and ventilation.

When residents understand how to manage moisture in the home and landlords invest in well-designed, properly installed building fabric, the conversation shifts from cure to prevention.

That is ultimately what Awaab's Law should drive. Not simply faster repairs, but healthier homes created through better understanding, stronger communication and long-term thinking which will turn the legislation into lasting improvement for residents.

Shelforce has decades of experience supplying high-performance windows, doors and fire doors for social housing projects across Birmingham.

The full white paper is available to download by visiting the website below.

0121 603 5262

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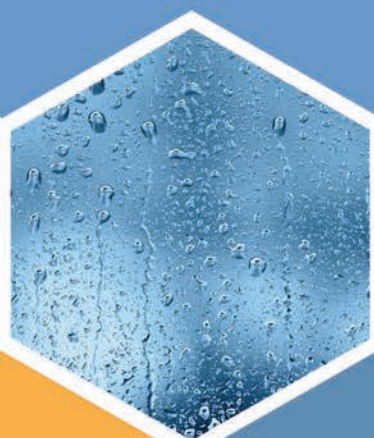


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A breath of fresh air

Luke Brooks of Limelite discusses the shift driven by Awaab's Law to focusing on breathable materials and building performance that offers long-term solutions to persistent damp and mould.

Persistent damp and mould is among the most complex and visible challenges facing social landlords. With the introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and the phased implementation of Awaab's Law from October 2025, we've seen a clear shift in expectations. Providers are no longer judged solely on how quickly they respond to reports, but on whether they deliver effective, lasting solutions that address underlying causes.

For housing management and maintenance teams, this represents a fundamental change in approach. We see the focus moving away from short-term remediation towards interventions that are cost-effective, scalable across large portfolios, and capable of delivering measurable improvements in building performance - without significant disruption to residents.

Across the sector, reports of damp and mould continue to rise, bringing increased scrutiny and tighter regulatory expectations. Alongside compliance pressures, the impact on residents is significant. Poor indoor air quality and prolonged exposure to mould are closely linked to respiratory issues and wider health concerns.

From what we see working with housing providers, many of these challenges stem from the nature of existing housing stock. Older homes, particularly those with solid walls, thermal bridging and limited ventilation, can be especially prone to moisture-related issues. As a result, maintenance teams often find themselves revisiting the same properties, carrying out familiar short-term fixes.

Under the new regulatory landscape, however, this is no longer sustainable. It is not enough to address what is visible; landlords must show they are tackling the conditions that allow damp and mould to persist in the first place.

BEYOND SHORT-TERM FIXES

For years, the sector has relied on surface-level interventions: anti-mould paints, chemical treatments, and upgraded extraction systems. While these can provide temporary relief, they rarely resolve the underlying relationship between moisture, temperature and the building fabric.

At the other end of the scale, more comprehensive retrofit solutions – such as internal or external wall insulation – can deliver meaningful improvements. However, these approaches are not always practical. Cost, complexity, and the potential need for resident decanting can limit their application, particularly across large and varied housing portfolios. This leaves a clear gap between reactive maintenance and full retrofit. Bridging that gap is becoming an increasing priority for housing providers.

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF INTERNAL FINISHES

One area that deserves greater attention is the role of internal wall finishes in managing moisture. Materials that allow buildings to 'breathe' can help regulate moisture levels within the structure, reducing the likelihood of condensation and mould forming.

There is no single solution that will suit every property type or portfolio

Lime-based plasters are one example of this approach. Compared with conventional gypsum systems, they enable moisture to move more freely through the wall and evaporate rather than becoming trapped. This can be particularly relevant in older properties where impermeable materials have contributed to moisture build-up over time.

Some modern lime formulations also incorporate lightweight aggregates, which can offer modest thermal improvements. By helping to raise internal surface temperatures, they can reduce the conditions in which condensation occurs.

In addition, lime's naturally alkaline properties create an environment that is less conducive to mould growth, supporting longer-lasting results.

MAKING SOLUTIONS WORK ACROSS LARGE PORTFOLIOS

For any intervention to be viable, it must work at scale. Housing providers need approaches that can be incorporated into planned works, void programmes and cyclical maintenance without creating additional complexity.

Interventions that are relatively straightforward to apply, minimise disruption, and avoid significant changes to room dimensions are particularly valuable. Just as importantly, solutions that reduce the need for repeat visits can help ease pressure on maintenance teams and improve overall service efficiency.

By focusing on how moisture behaves within the building fabric - rather than simply treating surface symptoms - there is a real opportunity to reduce recurring issues and make better use of limited resources.

FROM COMPLIANCE TO CONFIDENCE

Awaab's Law has reinforced the need for a more proactive, evidence-based approach to damp and mould. In practice, this means demonstrating not only that issues are addressed quickly, but that the solutions implemented are appropriate and effective. Addressing root causes is key. It reflects a broader shift



towards preventative asset management and a more informed understanding of how buildings perform over time. And homes that are warmer and drier contribute directly to improved resident wellbeing, while reducing repeat work means less disruption, helping to rebuild trust in housing services.

BUILDING LONG-TERM RESILIENCE INTO MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES

The sector's challenge is not simply to respond more quickly, but to respond more effectively. That requires a broader view that takes into account building physics, material performance, and the realities of delivering work at scale.

There is no single solution that will suit every property type or portfolio. However, integrating breathable materials, improving thermal performance where possible, and aligning interventions with existing maintenance programmes all form part of a more effective, long-term strategy. As expectations continue to rise, the emphasis must remain on durability, practicality and resident outcomes.

Luke Brooks is senior commercial manager of Packed Products at Limelite



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Anti-slip



Easy installation



Anti-limescale



10-year warranty



Easy maintenance



Multiple sizes



Technical support



Customer service



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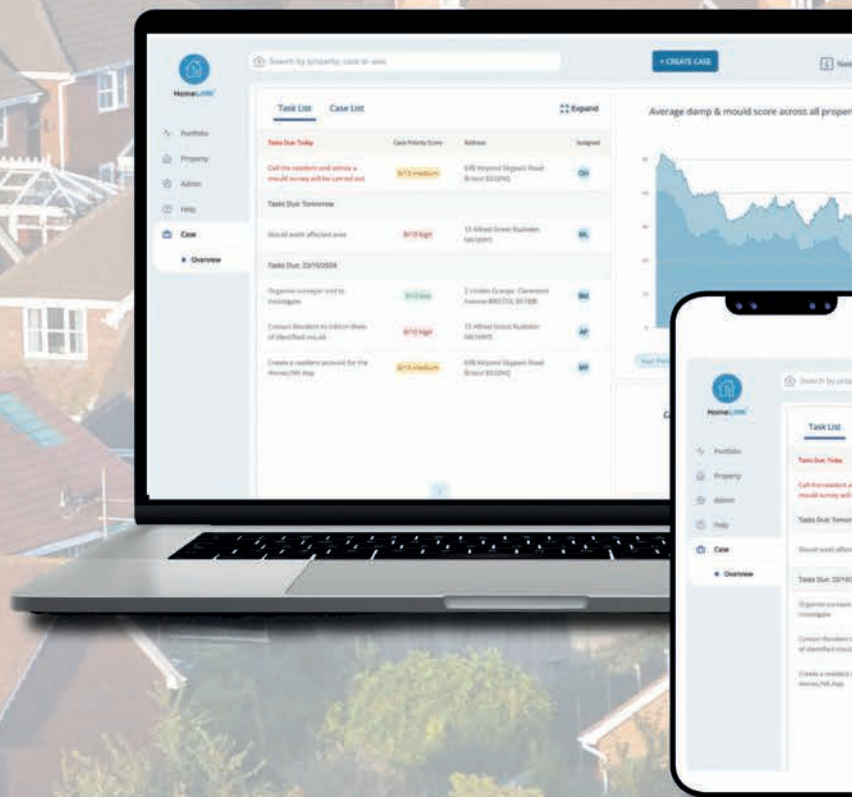
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