

The State of Social Housing 2024.

Leveraging technology to deliver a
compliant, tenant-first experience.



Foreword.

The economic and legislative landscape in 2024 is an undeniably challenging one for registered providers of social housing – and it’s having a significant impact on the way in which the industry is approaching the social housing crisis.

Whilst there is still not nearly enough social housing available, we’re seeing providers prioritising investment in the upgrading of their existing stock over new builds, and for good reasons.



Cem Savas
CEO and Co-founder of Plentific

The cost of borrowing as well as the cost and availability of material and labour, together with several new compliance regulations and legislation passed, is driving a renewed focus on existing stock. Especially where stock does not meet the standards of a decent dwelling.

In our own data we have seen providers taking their responsibility towards the fixing of damp and mould issues very seriously, as the number of work orders raised and completed have seen a significant jump from 2022 to 2023. We’re also seeing a reduction in days to completion, resonating with the Ombudsman’s view that landlords are continuously aiming to improve the resident experience.

However, it is clear that the impetus on improving tenant satisfaction will only increase, as additional regulations are being implemented by the Regulator of Social Housing this year. Much of which we review in this paper.

The situation is exacerbated for housing associations (HAs) as they do not always receive the same level of government support as councils and other providers do. Some of the country’s largest HAs have already highlighted the financial losses experienced due to more stringent standards coupled with the sharp rising costs of repairs and maintenance.

For most, 2024 will prove to be a year of doing more with less. Increasingly we’re seeing providers adjusting for a more robust operating model with the help of technology. For most, it acts as a multiplier of their existing capabilities: delivering a tenant-first experience, while simultaneously increasing operational efficiency to ensure compliance and prevent unnecessary financial losses.

Considering the resident experience uncovered in our previous research report “Experience is Everything”, and against the backdrop of challenges faced by the industry, this whitepaper seeks to explore the ways in which technology can be leveraged to help providers balance the demands from multiple stakeholders.

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The Imperative for Housing Stock Upgrades.

The social housing shortfall is showing no signs of abating. According to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) a total of 58,027¹ new homes were built during 2022/23 – and yet they have assessed 157,640 households as homeless in the same period.

However, with the cost of debt expected to remain higher for longer², registered providers are anticipated to invest more in maintaining and improving their current stock rather than building new homes. This shift is driven not only by the prohibitive cost of development but also by legislative requirements³ related to increased safety and net-zero commitments.

In the following section, we will explore in greater detail the financial and regulatory obstacles that registered providers are facing in the current landscape. We will also examine why the convergence of these challenges is compelling a substantial number of registered providers to redirect their attention towards upgrading their existing stock.



1. Affordable housing is the sum of social rent, affordable rent, intermediate rent (including London Living Rent), affordable home ownership, shared ownership and London Affordable Rent.
2. https://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/229130/355571-0
3. Closing the gap: Unlocking investment to address the UK's affordable housing challenge, Octopus Real Estate report

The Cost of Expansion.

The prevailing sentiment across the housing sector is that there's a pressing need for a substantial increase in government funding to meet the demand for new housing. Especially now, as many providers are operating on a very narrow ledge of liquidity, stuck between escalating costs in all aspects of their operations, and capped rents (7.7% for 2024/25).

The 2023 RSM survey, "Health of the Housing Sector"⁴, underscores this urgency, with nearly a third (29%) of their respondents indicating that economic uncertainty would lead to a decrease in the number of units built, and almost half (48%) planning to build fewer than 250 units over the next three years.

Also in the RSM survey, respondents consistently ranked Additional Government Funding as the primary factor influencing the size of future development programs, with 88% highlighting its significance. This requirement has persisted over the past four years, indicating a consistent need for increased financial support from the government.

Reviewing the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) quarterly data⁵ on the number of affordable homes developed by quarter, the decrease in output momentum by their registered providers paints a somewhat worrying picture: whilst the past five years of development is trending reassuringly upwards (Fig. 1), the last four quarters of available data shows a reduction in delivery (Fig. 2).

Figure 1: Affordable home ownership units developed 2019/20 - 2023/24 (Q1-Q3)

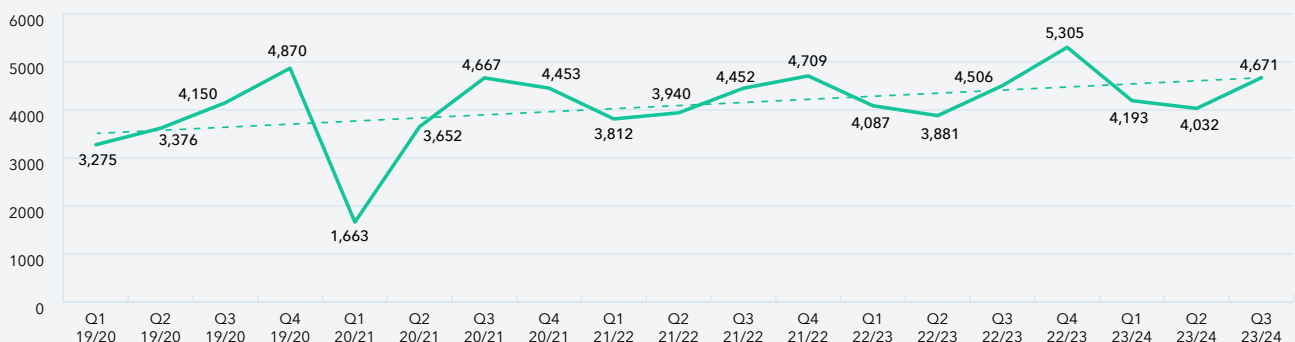
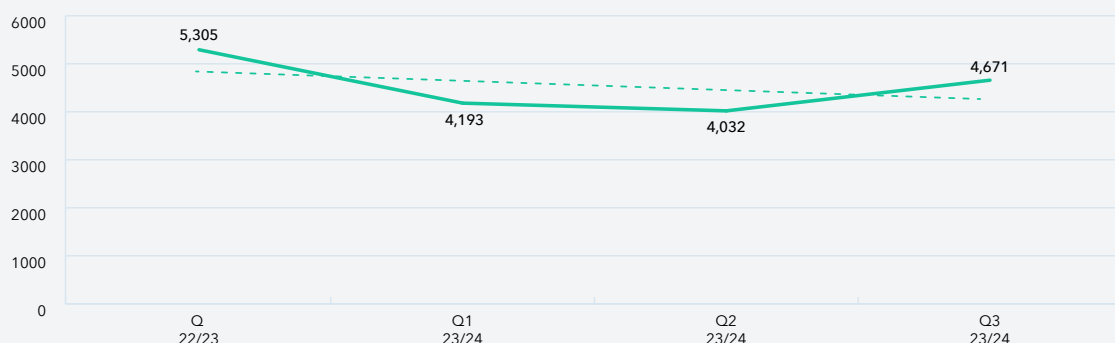


Figure 2: Affordable home ownership units developed, last four quarters



4. <https://www.rsmuk.com/insights/health-of-the-social-housing-sector-2023>

5. Quarterly survey report based on responses from private registered providers of social housing who own or manage more than 1,000 homes.

According to the Bank of England's summary of business conditions for 2023-Q4, private and social house-building activity has slowed over the last year, by up to 30% in some locations. Instead, much of the activity in lower new housing development is channelled into repair and maintenance.⁶

In particular, the following aspects are impacting registered providers' ability to deliver new affordable homes.

The cost of borrowing

According to the RSM Survey, 94% of housing associations that participated in the social housing sector survey in November, indicated that increased inflation was the most significant factor affecting their organisation, while 71% expressed concerns about rising interest rates. Unsurprisingly, 87% of respondents said that they would only utilise "available grant and bank funding" to finance their housing development plans. The second most popular funding solution, chosen by only 42% of respondents, involved using their own resources by reinvesting surpluses from housing activities.

Currently hovering at 5.25%, the Bank of England's interest rate is at its highest level since April 2008 as the Bank aims to reduce inflation from the current 4% to the government target of 2%. Consequently, housing providers are adopting a cautious "wait and see" approach to expansion, especially as the interest rate is not expected to budge in March.

However, the RSH's latest quarterly update is showing a surprising uptick on New Finance Agreed in Q3 2023/24, resulting in an upwards trend over the last 12 months (Fig. 4) despite a general downward trend when viewed over the past five years (Fig. 5).

On the upside, and in a move that will support thousands of new homes, the government has extended the Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme with £3bn in February this year, providing low-cost loans to housing providers. Whilst providers are also able to invest these funds in existing stock, there is also a requirement for new homes.

Housing Minister Lee Rowley acknowledged that "getting cost-effective loans can be a stumbling block for many developers building more affordable homes or upgrading their existing stock...to not only improve the lives of those already living in homes, but help thousands of families benefit from new, high-quality, affordable housing."⁷

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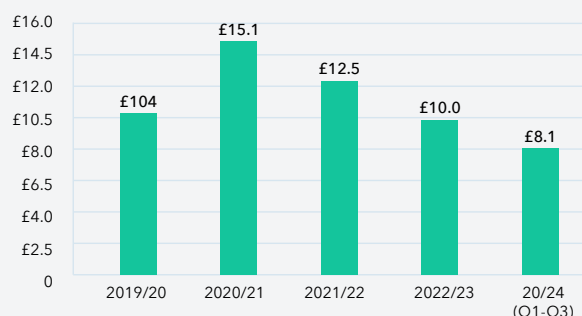
87%

of respondents said that they would only utilise "available grant and bank funding" to finance their housing development plans

Figure 4: New finance agreed (billion £) in the last 12 months



Figure 5: New finance agreed (billion £)



6. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/agents-summary/2023/2023-q4>

7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/3-billion-affordable-housing-boost-to-deliver-20000-new-homes>

Cost and availability of material and labour

G15, made up of London's 11 biggest housing associations, have indicated that some of their members expect to cut their development plans by as much as a third "due to rising inflation and interest rates"⁸, and that the group will be prioritising investment in their existing stock, should the government fail to provide them with additional funding and support.

Similarly, an Octopus Real Estate and Inside Housing report⁹ found that housing associations are increasingly diverting funds towards retrofitting existing properties, thereby reducing the available budget for constructing new homes. Their research revealed a projected "22% average decline in development pipelines among England's largest registered providers." Some providers in their survey have however indicated that they would reduce development by as much as 40%.

Despite 91% of their respondents regarding development as integral to their core purpose, overall the respondents acknowledged interest rates, a renewed focus on existing stock, and construction costs as the top three barriers to their development plans.

According to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), housing providers recorded a significant amount of investment in existing stock in 2022, a trend that persisted into 2023. Notably, during the first half of the year, providers continued to address backlogs of repairs accumulated during previous periods of coronavirus lockdowns.

Notwithstanding providers' diligent efforts, they face formidable challenges due to escalating costs. According to the RSM's "Health of the Housing Sector" report, 87% of survey respondents identified the rising cost of building materials as a major concern for their organisations in 2024. Additionally, material shortages present another obstacle, with 57% of respondents finding it difficult to access the required materials.

The impact of increasing costs is also evident from the RSH's data. Overall, 2022/23 saw a £7.7bn investment in repairs and maintenance, which is a 20% uplift from the year before¹⁰ (Fig. 6).

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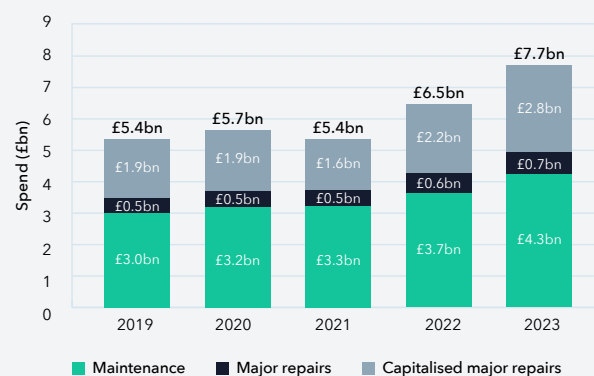
57%

of respondents finding it difficult to access the required materials

£7.7bn

investment in repairs and maintenance in 2022/23

Figure 6: Total major repairs and maintenance spend

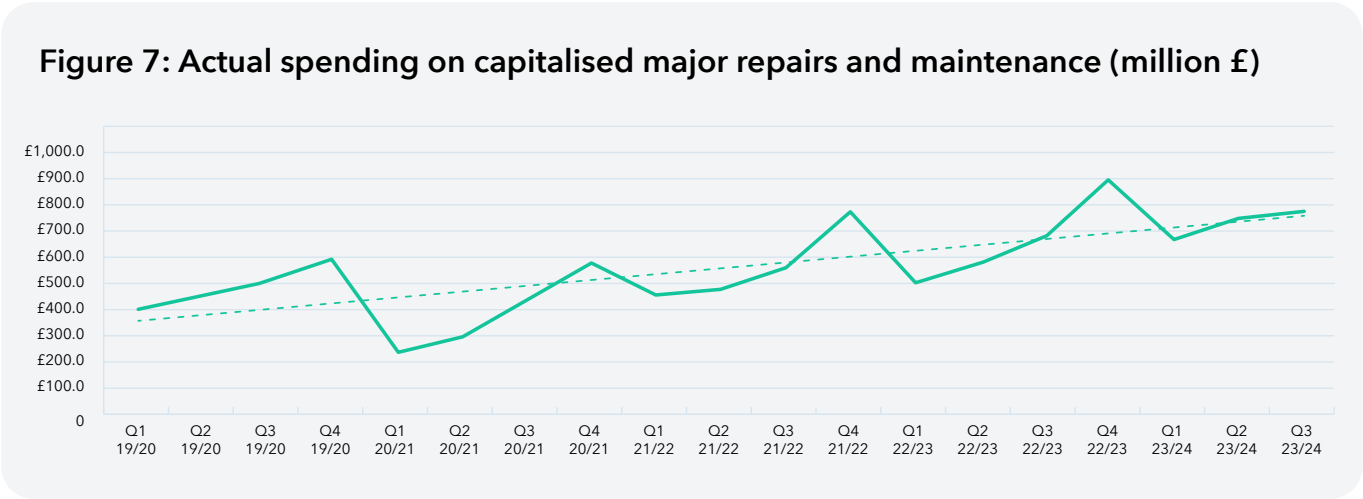


8. <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/londons-biggest-housing-associations-plan-to-cut-development-by-up-to-a-third-81422>

9. <https://octopus-realestate.com/closing-the-gap-affordable-housing-report-2023/>

10. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65781e49095987000d95de3e/20231207_GA2023.pdf

Actual spending on capitalised repairs and maintenance (repairs that add to the reporting value of the asset) have been steadily rising since 2019: in the last four quarters of available data, the average spend per quarter was £771m, whilst in the four quarters of 2019/2020, average spend was only £489m per quarter (Fig. 7).



The Wider Cost of Poor Housing.

The repercussions of inadequate housing extend far beyond the immediate residents, impacting various stakeholders, including the healthcare sector. According to the Building Research Establishment's (BRE) 2023 report titled 'The Cost of Poor Housing in England by Tenure'¹¹, approximately 217,000 (5%) of social rented homes were identified as having a Category 1 hazard – a significant uptick from the 2021/22 government reported figures of 164,000 households (4%)¹². Left unaddressed, it is estimated that these hazards would incur an annual cost to the NHS of £65 million.

The BRE report highlights that the average cost to rectify these hazardous conditions is £3,784 per home. Moreover, if the necessary investment to mitigate these risks were made in one go, the savings to the NHS in first-year treatment costs alone would result in a payback period of between 12 and 13 years.

The two most prevalent Category 1 hazards are excessive cold, and falls associated with stairs. According to the BRE report, there are 22,615 social rented homes with a Category 1 excessive cold hazard, i.e. homes with an F or G EPC rating. Additionally, there are 80,262 socially rented homes with an excessive falls hazard, making it the most prevalent Category 1 hazard in social rented homes. According to a 2021/22 government study, 4% of social renters (180,000 households) also experienced damp problems.

Ironically, the estimated fixing cost for an excessive falls hazard is relatively low at £618 per home, compared to the estimated £3,800 per home to resolve an excessive cold hazard. Resolving damp and mould hazards is estimated at approximately £985 per dwelling.

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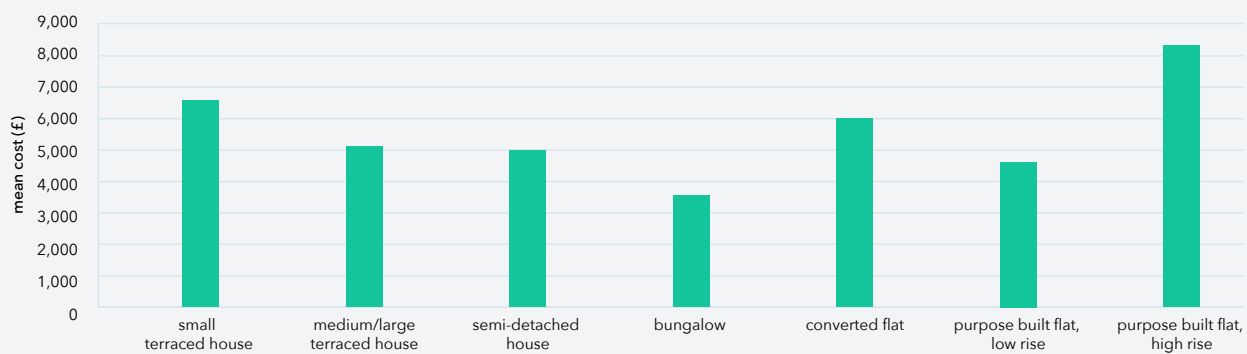
11. <https://bregroup.com/news-insights/the-cost-of-poor-housing-to-the-nhs/>

12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-social-rented-sector/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-social-rented-sector#dwelling-condition-safety-and-energy>

According to the government’s 2021/22 study (published mid 2023), it was estimated to cost less to fix social housing (£5,300) than it would do for private rented dwellings (8,200) or for owner occupied homes (£8,000)¹³. Of all social dwelling types, purpose built, high rise flats were the most expensive at £8,400 per unit. (Fig. 8)

Research commissioned for Plentific’s recent whitepaper “**Experience is Everything**”, showed that the leading maintenance issues reported by residents in the UK are regarding ‘Temperature in Home’ (36%), and ‘Damp or Mould’ (34%). Unfortunately, respondents indicated that Damp and Mould issues were not the quickest to be resolved – only listed in fourth position after Ventilation, Interior Decorating and Security requests.

Figure 8: Fixing cost per unit, per social dwelling type



13. https://www.plentific.com/resource-center/white-papers/experience-is-everything/download/?utm_source=other_campaign&utm_medium=content_piece&utm_campaign=uk_2024_q2_age_rc_state_of_social_housing_report

The Cost of Compliance Failures.

The social housing sector will continue to incur escalating costs as more complex regulatory standards are implemented – standards that aim to not only provide social housing residents with shelter, but also to ensure that their dwellings are safe and decent.



Revised Decent Home Standards

The Decent Homes Standard is a legal standard, for now only applicable to the social rented sector, which sets the following standards for a dwelling¹⁴:



It meets the statutory minimum standard for housing according to the Housing Health and Safety System (HHSRS) of 2006: homes which contain a Category 1 hazard are considered non-decent.



It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort



It must be in a reasonable state of repair



It must have reasonably modern facilities and services

Currently, a notable proportion of existing housing stock falls short of meeting the criteria for a 'Decent Home'. According to the latest English Housing Survey (2021/22) there are 3.5 million households (14%) in England that fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Of these, 9% are Local Authority dwellings and 10% are Housing Association dwellings¹⁵.

However, in 2023 Registered Providers have spent a record £7.7bn on repairs and maintenance, up 20% from the previous year's record high of £6.5bn. Whilst some of the expense increase can be attributed to inflation, for the most part the size of the spend is indicative of the commitment to improve stock decency and energy efficiency¹⁶.

14. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7968b740f0b63d72fc5926/138355.pdf>

15. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-housing-quality-and-condition/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-housing-quality-and-condition>

16. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65781e49095987000d95de3e/20231207_GA2023.pdf

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), in their recent “Levelling Up White Paper,” has pledged to halve the number of non-decent rented homes by 2030. As part of this commitment, a review of the Decent Homes Standard commenced in July 2023 with several initiatives now underway, including¹⁷:

- Enhancing the capabilities of the Housing Ombudsman Service to address systemic issues beyond individual cases, and eliminating the requirement for tenants to wait eight weeks after completing their landlord’s complaint process before accessing the Ombudsman.
- Collaborating with the Housing Ombudsman Service to establish a new complaint handling code, simplifying the complaint escalation process for tenants.
- Introducing *Tenant Satisfaction Measures* and implementing a proactive consumer regulation regime in partnership with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

Social housing advisor Kate Davies, in her recent Social Housing¹⁸ whitepaper, highlights a critical point: *“Although building new homes is urgent and essential, this must never be at the expense of social tenants or their homes.”*

Despite the Housing Ombudsman continuing to handle a rising number of complaints, with 5,398 cases being reported in 2022/23¹⁹, Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman, commended landlords: *“Two years since we published our in-depth Spotlight report on damp and mould – and a year on from the landmark inquest into the avoidable death of Awaab Ishak – we are seeing an unprecedented focus by landlords on strengthening their handling of these cases. Overall, it is clear from landlords’ compliance with our orders that there is stronger leadership, better training, more use of technology and greater investment into tackling the root causes of damp and mould.”*

66%

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“

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- Richard Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman

17. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-housing-quality>

18. Social Housing: radical reform through better collaboration, interdependent working and technological innovation.

19. <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/2023/11/08/ombudsman-says-landlords-are-finding-their-silences-as-complaints-rise-on-damp-and-mould-and-changes-need-to-be-made/>

According to Plentific, completed orders for damp and mould cases have increased by 66% from 2022 to 2023.

In addition, Plentific has seen a steady decrease in completion times over the past three years (Fig. 10), further supporting the Ombudsman's view that landlords are prioritising the health and general satisfaction of their tenants. Of particular interest is the steady decline in completion time from September 2023 (Fig. 11).

Introduction of the RSH's Tenant Satisfaction Measures, 2023

In 2022, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) emphasised the importance of social landlords actively listening to tenants' concerns, understanding their needs, removing barriers to accessing services, and promptly addressing any issues that arise.

The RSH, in partnership with the DLUHC, introduced the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), which are expected to support the proactive regulation of its Consumer Standards, and specifically its Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

The TSMs consist of 22 measures, including 12 tenant perception measures (TPMs) and 10 management information measures (MIs) – and there is clear and prescriptive guidance for the way in which data is collected²⁰.

Figure 10: YoY time to completion of work orders (days)

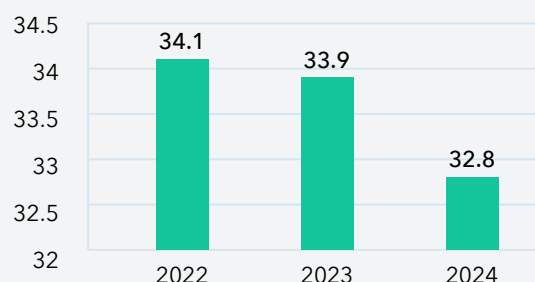
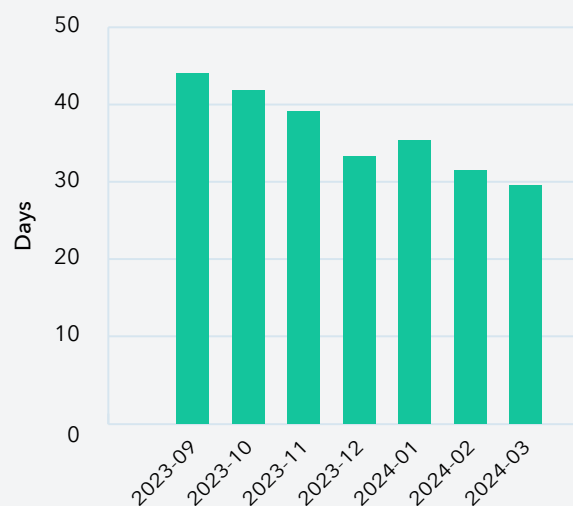


Figure 11: MoM time to completion of work orders (days)



20. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/632af26de90e07371e5e585c/20220913_Annex5_TSM_Tenant-Survey-Requirements.pdf

In particular, TPMs will measure tenant satisfaction relating to:

- **TP01** – Overall satisfaction
- **TP02** – Satisfaction with repairs
- **TP03** – Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair
- **TP04** – Satisfaction that the home is well-maintained
- **TP05** – Satisfaction that the home is safe
- **TP06** – Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them
- **TP07** – Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
- **TP08** – Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect
- **TP09** – Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints
- **TP10** – Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well-maintained
- **TP11** – Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods
- **TP12** – Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour

The RSH has announced plans to release the first year of TSM data in Autumn 2024, and the submission deadline for landlords overseeing 1,000 or more homes is set for 30 June 2024.

Social Housing Regulation Act and Awaab's Law, July 2023

After the heartbreaking loss of 2-year-old Awaab Ishak, who tragically passed away due to excessive mould exposure in their Rochdale home, the DLUHC initiated a consultation to address the pressing need for reform. On 20 July 2023, Awaab's Law entered the statute book as Clause 42 of the Social Housing Regulation Act. This law mandates that all landlords must promptly address reported health and safety hazards within a strict time frame. Failure to do so grants tenants the right to pursue legal action against their landlords for breaching the terms of their tenancy agreement.

The Social Housing Regulation Act, which received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023, will also provide

various government bodies with greater powers to hold landlords to account. According to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP, the act will "help to ensure that tenants get the safe, warm and decent homes they deserve – and those who have seriously neglected their responsibilities for far too long will face the consequences." Under the act, the following takes effect:²¹



Strengthening of the Regulator of Social Housing to carry out regular inspections of the largest social housing providers and the power to issue unlimited fines to unscrupulous social landlords. This includes the right to enter properties with only 48 hours' notice and to order emergency repairs.



Additional Housing Ombudsman powers granted to publish best practice guidance to landlords following investigations into tenant complaints.



Powers to set strict time limits for social landlords to address hazards such as damp and mould.



Introducing stronger economic powers to follow inappropriate money transactions outside of the sector.



New qualification requirements for social housing managers

Under the revised law, the RSH is also proposing four new standards that came into effect on the 1st of April 2024, including the Safety and Quality Standard, the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, the Neighbourhood and Community Standard and the Tenancy Standard²².

21. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-social-housing-act-receives-royal-assent-to-become-law>

22. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-consumer-standards/consumer-standards-consultation-reshaping-consumer-regulation-accessible-version#proposed-stock-quality>

Mandatory qualifications for social housing managers

Following the introduction of Awaab’s Law, social housing managers are now mandated to obtain professional qualifications as per new regulations, aimed at safeguarding residents and elevating standards within the sector. Approximately 25,000 managers throughout the sector will need to possess housing management qualifications regulated by Ofqual, equivalent to either a Level 4 or 5 Certificate or Diploma in Housing, or a foundation degree from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The Building Safety Act 2022

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, the enactment of the Building Safety Act 2022 signalled significant revisions to current regulations. The primary objective is to bolster the rights and protections afforded to residents and homeowners. In essence, the Act broadens the responsibilities of landlords overseeing residential buildings deemed higher-risk (those at least 11 metres high or 5 storeys) to address building defects and ensure compliance with the safety standards mandated by the legislation.

In a 2021/22 government study¹³, 329,000 of social renter households (8%) did not feel safe at home due to fear of a fire breaking out, with those living in the Midlands feeling most unsafe (Fig. 12).

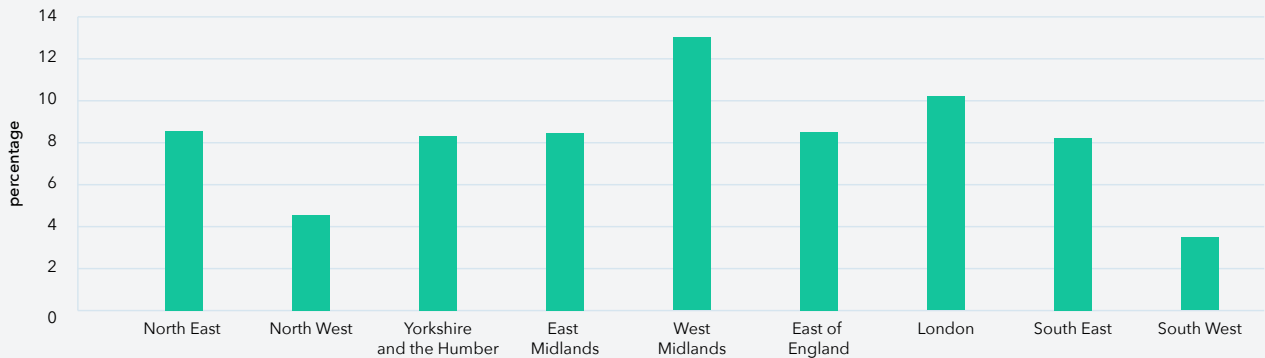
25,000

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329,000

of social renter households (8%) did not feel safe at home due to fear of a fire breaking out in a 2021/22 government study

Figure 12: Percentage of renters that do not feel safe at home due to fear of a fire breaking out, by region



Everyone has a right to feel safe in their dwelling, but while imperative and non-negotiable, retrofitting existing stock to meet the requirements of the Act imposes additional financial strain on registered providers. Especially as landlords are tasked with covering most of the remedial work costs, without the ability to recover it through service charges²³. Yet another factor that is tipping the balance of activity and investment towards upgrades instead of new builds.

In Summary

The intensified scrutiny of social housing regulations, standards, and processes throughout 2023 and into 2024 underscores the government's dedication to eliminating neglected, non-decent rental dwellings: as characterised by excessive cold, dampness, and mould, which impacts the health and opportunities of residents.

However, the burden of funding these necessary changes, including retrofitting and building safety measures, has predominantly fallen on housing associations. The G15 group estimates that since the inception of significant policy changes in 2016, they have incurred a loss of £6.6 billion in investment resources.

It is evident that a shift towards a more collaborative partnership between the government and housing associations in particular is critical. Especially if housing associations are to sustain their contributions to the social housing sector from new builds to the retrofitting of existing stock.



23. <https://www.farrer.co.uk/news-and-insights/practical-implications-of-the-building-safety-act-2022/>

Using Technology to Deliver a Tenant-First Approach.

Gavin Smart, CEO of the Chartered Institute of Housing, noted that it is critical that tenants and residents “are treated with dignity and respect; and that their voices and views are heard and taken account of in decisions that affect them, their homes and the communities they live in.”

According to her research, social housing advisor Kate Davies highlighted that social housing tenants essentially want three things from their housing provider:

- 1 To get the repairs that they ask for, done quickly and to a high standard
- 2 To be heard
- 3 To be communicated with

And yet, for the most part, a lack of sufficient service delivery is not because providers do not care or are unaware of the needs of their residents. Instead, increasingly it's proving to be a resource issue. As available resources are spread too thin while demand for them is increasing, there are often not enough hands to get done what needs doing.

Which is why the role of technology is pivotal in the delivery of a tenant first experience.

In the RSH's Innovation Plan (2017) it was explicitly noted that “the regulator's Value for Money standard emphasises that providers should seek ongoing improvements in efficiency and effectiveness, not just short-term economies.”

When considering the rising costs of building materials and borrowing, together with the limit on rent charged, many providers are finding themselves in a rather precarious position. This section will review ways in which registered providers could improve their efficiencies and effectiveness by using technology to:

- help them deliver a tenant-first experience.
- support their teams as they strive to remain compliant with the additional regulations and standards recently passed.
- prevent avoidable losses from existing stock.
- provide deeper operational insights to inform decision-making.

24. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81cd4d40f0b623026993d8/Innovation_plan_Regulation_of_social_housing_March_2017.pdf

Reducing time to resolution.

Residents require service requests for repairs to not only be addressed quickly but to also be done right, ideally the first time round. As per the various new frameworks discussed earlier, these are not just resident preferences for landlords to consider, but instead are a:

- measured standard to report on as of June 2023, as part of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TP02 – Satisfaction with repairs and TP03 – Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair).
- legal right where mould issues are concerned, following the incorporation of Awaab's Law.

The correct technology can significantly enhance tenant satisfaction by bringing residents, customer service and contractors together on a single platform via a dedicated customer portal. This will empower residents to log complaints 24/7, which can then be allocated to a local, verified contractor in real-time - enabling a quicker, frictionless resolution.

Giving residents the ability to rate their contractors on the platform, will further a more customer centric approach by contractors, ensure a better experience for the residents and help registered providers to see and eliminate poor performers from their preferred supplier lists.

To help contractors get the job done right, first time, the right software should also provide contractors with access to their allocated work orders, including the detailed notes by residents, so that they can show up for the repair, fully prepared and equipped.

Many Housing Associations have utilised technology effectively in this regard. Turnaround time of requests could be reduced by 54%, or first-time fix rates could be increased from 30% to 85%. Also first-time fix rates could be raised to 91%.

According to Plentific, the average job completion time for providers in their system is 2.3 days, maintaining a first-time fix rate of 85% and a 79% customer satisfaction score.

91%

First-time fix rate for providers based on Plentific data sets

2.3 days

the average job completion time for providers tracked in the Plentific platform

79%

customer satisfaction score according to data in the Plentific platform



Compliance supported via automation

Residents have an additional recourse via the Ombudsman by lodging a complaint if they are dissatisfied with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing.

Following consultations in Autumn 2023, a two-stage complaints process was defined in the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2022. It has also been made clear that “A process with more than two stages is not acceptable under any circumstances.”

Each stage has set timeframes²⁵ in which to respond:

Stage 1

- a. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt.
- b. Landlords must issue a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Stage 2

- a. Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged within five working days of the escalation request being received.
- b. Landlords must issue a final response to the stage 2 complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Considering both the volume of complaints as well as the repercussions if target timeframes are broken, the support of the right software will prove to be invaluable: automatic milestone and due date prompts, could support case managers in driving progress while keeping the case top of mind and ensuring a speedy resolution.

Running everything through a dedicated software solution also means that registered providers will be able to provide an audit trail for each property, as a means of independently verifying that the right actions have been taken within the required timeframes.

25. <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Code-Changes-FINAL.pdf>

Improving Void Management.

According to Rightmove's latest rental index, the average void period in January 2024 was 22 days (compared to 23 days in January 2023)²⁶.

In the past year alone, the demand for social housing has exceeded supply by nearly 3:1. According to the RSH, vacant properties have cost registered providers void rent fees of £0.3 billion in 2023, consistent with the three-year average of £0.3 billion.

Providers with a significant proportion of supported housing for older people seem to bear the brunt of these losses, accounting for 39% of total void losses. Reasons for void losses vary, including ongoing material and labour shortages. Additionally, in light of several legislative changes in 2022/23, many providers are opting to make significant improvements to the overall standard of non-decent dwellings, particularly with heightened attention to fire safety, mould, and damp.

The right software can help to move a property much faster through the repair cycle ahead of being released for occupation by significantly reducing handover delays from one stage to the next, and ensuring that tasks are allocated to the correct person at each stage.

£0.3 billion

cost of vacant properties for registered providers in 2023

39%

of total void losses account for providers with a significant proportion of supported housing for older people

26. <https://www.goodlord.co/newsagent/goodlord-rental-index>

Full Visibility of Supplier Costs.

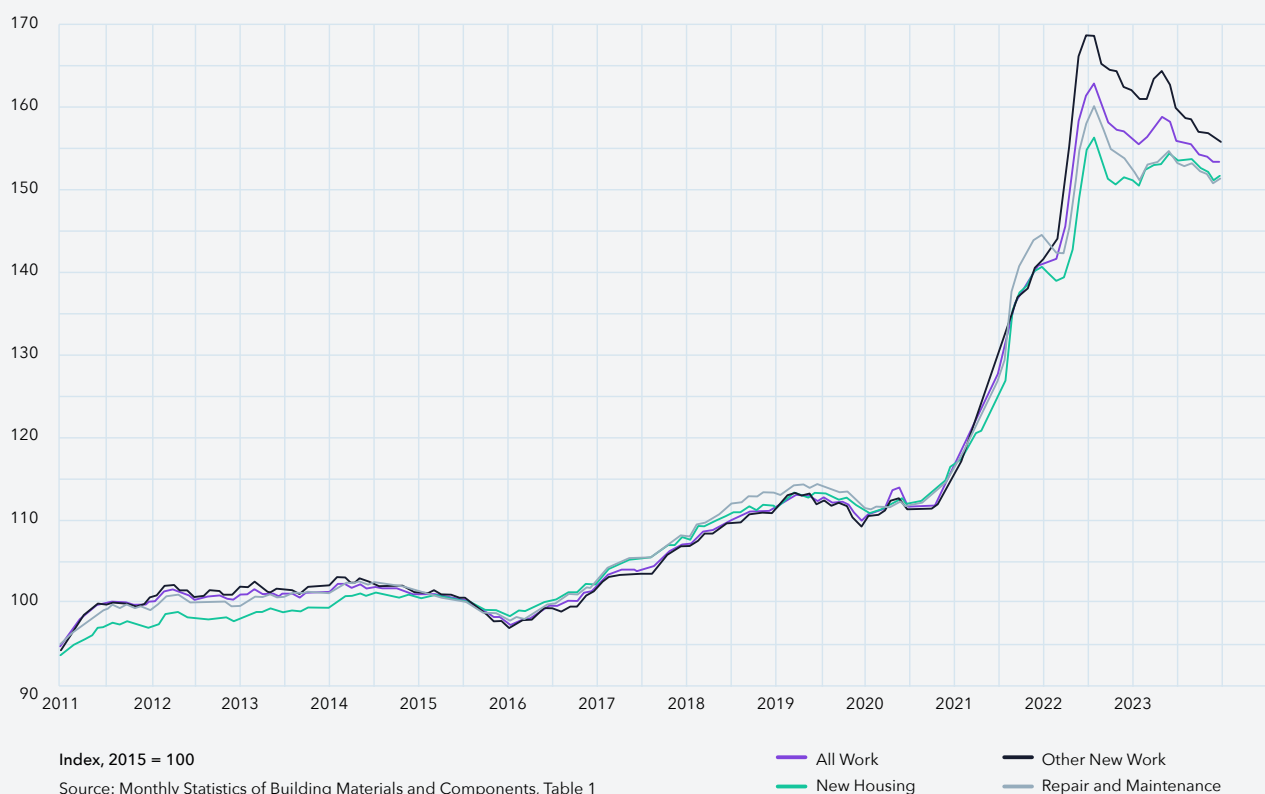
According to the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), the material price index for 'Repair and Maintenance' decreased by 0.08% in December 2023 compared to the same month the previous year. And while lower than the record highs of 2022, the cost of repairs remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels (see Fig. 13).

As such, there is little room for error and surprise expenses, as housing associations and councils are facing repair and maintenance bills far higher than expected. This comes at a time when they are also encouraged to limit service charge increases to 7.7%, in line with the rent cap.

With the right software, housing providers can have a real-time view of the cost of repairs as it happens. It can also help to manage costs by providing contractors with a cost framework: this not only helps contractors compare their costs to that of other contractors in the marketplace, but also helps them to improve their acceptance rate with accurate quoting.

In addition, and as part of managing costs, software can help to monitor the difference between quoted fees and final invoices, as a means of predicting future costs. On a more granular level, it will also track individual contractor pricing practices, and flag contractors who are consistently escalating their original quotations.

Figure 13: Construction Material Price Indices, UK, 01/2024



27. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65bd1a15c43191000d1a44e1/Construction_Building_Materials_-_Commentary_January_2024.pdf

Avoid Damage and Cost Escalation with Predictive Maintenance.

Unreported damage can escalate into larger issues with far-reaching consequences, including inflated repair costs and heightened risks of tenant complaints, RSH judgments, and reputational damage.

Utilising software can streamline reminders and actions associated with inspections and repairs for items beyond their warranty period. Advanced AI-powered solutions offer the potential to transition providers from a reactive to a predictive maintenance approach, anticipating issues before they arise and mitigating costly damage.



Improved Data Quality for a Better Resident Experience.

Property management software offers a compelling solution to the challenges faced by registered providers, as they seek to deliver a better service to their residents. However, the current state of data management within the housing sector, as highlighted by industry experts like Kate Davies and in reports such as the Better Social Housing Review (BSHR)²⁸, makes this a challenging goal.

Properties are often managed whilst relying on often inaccurate, outdated, and inaccessible data. This hampers good decision-making, compromises safety standards, and undermines accountability. It's also a tremendous resource drain on the industry: the Housing Association's Charitable Trust (HACT) estimates that 25-30% of all resources are dedicated to the recording, collating, cleaning and re-keying of poor-quality data²⁹.



Poor data also exposes the provider to investigations and fines, as the RSH's new Safety & Quality consumer standard requires that all "registered providers must have an accurate record at an individual property level of the condition of their stock, based on a physical assessment of all homes, and keep this up to date."

Property management software can help to alleviate the data burden by centralising data gathered from built-in inspections, ensuring its accuracy and accessibility in real-time. In addition, the right software will tie into planning and reporting tools that can action findings immediately.

Equally as important is the time that software frees up by automating mundane and repetitive tasks. More time saved means more opportunity to do on-site inspections of existing stock - enabling providers to maintain accurate records of property conditions and ensure ongoing compliance with RSH standards.

By streamlining data management processes, software can help to reduce the burden of manual data entry and allow staff to focus on delivering high-quality services to residents.

For the most part, technology makes life better wherever it's applied, and the same goes for registered providers. With the right software, errors are reduced and time is freed up, which ultimately helps providers to focus on their core business and deliver a tenant-first experience.

Following government's decision in 2010 to cut the social housing budget by 63%, the largest cut to any capital budget at the time³⁰, as well as subsequent decisions that led to further underinvestment, it comes as no surprise that the housing crisis is intensifying as the shortfall gap of affordable houses comes under additional pressure.

However, landlords' actions can be undermined by common failings, particularly inconsistency, ineffective diagnostics, repair delays and poor communication."

28. <https://www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk/>

29. <https://hact.org.uk/how-we-can-help/data-excellence/>

30. https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/The_Lyons_Housing_Review_2.pdf

Want to know more about Plentific's property management software?

At Plentific, we have extensive industry experience in transforming housing organisations towards operational excellence with property management software. Take the first steps towards improving your operational efficiency and resident experience and talk to our specialists.

[Talk to us](#)

About Plentific

Plentific is a Software as a Service (SaaS) platform and tech-enabled Marketplace developed to connect owners, operators, service providers, and residents in a single place, facilitating real-time property operations. Recognised for its award-winning solutions, Plentific helps streamline operations, unlock resources, enhance resident satisfaction, and ensure asset safety. Users benefit from data-driven insights that prompt action, resulting in tangible impact.

Plentific's solutions include Work Order Management, Resident Self-service, a Tech-enabled Contractor Marketplace, Contractor and Internal Workforce Management, Inspections and Compliance Management.

Committed to building stronger communities where people can thrive, Plentific leverages technology to enhance the lives of 3M+ residents and businesses of 25,000+ service providers worldwide.

