

## Carrying out full stock condition surveys is essential

COMMENT 06/10/17 BY ALAN DAVISON


Social landlords should be wary of cutting back on monitoring the condition of their homes, says *Alan Davison*



Alan Davison is a partner and head of building surveying at Pellings



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 [▶ Carrying out full stock condition surveys is essential, by Alan Davison](#)  
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The horror of the Grenfell Tower disaster has rightly triggered a massive fire safety review of residential tower blocks across the UK and the type of panels with which those towers are clad.

And more recently, the gas supply to the Ledbury Towers in south London was cut off because of fears that in the event of an explosion, concrete panels would blow out and leave the towers in danger of collapse – a reminder of the Ronan Point building collapse in 1968, which killed four people.

While everything must be done to ensure that a disaster like Grenfell never happens again, social housing asset managers are left with something of a dilemma on where and how budget should be allocated for future housing upgrades.

Since Grenfell I have become aware that budget is being diverted away from stock condition surveys to the necessary fire safety emergency works.

Understandably, what clients are telling me is that, morally at least, they have got to get their act together to improve fire safety as a priority.

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For instance, this could include, if the roof is leaking, not replacing it but making it last a few more years with ad hoc repairs, while the installation of new kitchens and bathrooms can wait a year or two.

While fire safety is of utmost priority there is also an opportunity to once and for all undertake proper stock condition surveys covering all their housing assets which, if kept up to date, will facilitate long-term budgeting and financial savings over the life cycle of a residential asset.

The starting point must surely be to assess the condition of housing stock, taking into account building materials and structures from a safety point of view but also looking at the wear and tear condition of those buildings that make them habitable in accordance with modern day standards.

It must not be forgotten that a housing association’s existing stock is its main source of income.

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***“It is vital to ensure that the good condition of the current housing assets is maintained to protect income.”***

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The older capital cost of that stock has been paid off years ago so it is still vital to ensure that the good condition of current housing assets is maintained to protect that income.

Understanding the condition of the stock, and understanding life cycle costing, should surely be the basis of the owner’s business plan and that requires up-to-date information.

I would argue that there is a greater need than ever for stock condition surveys but there must be much clearer thinking on the brief.

In the short term, if residential towers are a priority, tackle them first but undertake a full survey, not a sample which can only give an indication of what needs to be done rather than properly informing budgets going forward.

I find that there are far too many asset owners who commission condition surveys only to repeat them a few years hence because they have not properly recorded the information on computerised databases.

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***“Proper maintenance of housing assets has been undertaken on too much of an ad hoc approach.”***

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Not only is this costly but it makes it impossible to put in place a properly planned maintenance programme and to budget accordingly.

It is reassuring to see that social landlords are converting to database systems.

This means that properly recorded stock condition surveys generate the following year's work and validate those works when complete.

An added further benefit of properly maintained computer databases is that because repairs and maintenance are tendered on a schedule of rates basis with contractors, we don't have to go out to tender each time.

The computer database says what has to be done, the contractor does it, it is recorded on the database and we move on to the next year. We work with a number of clients where that works well but only where full stock condition surveys are done on each property.

Proper maintenance of housing assets has been undertaken on too much of an ad hoc approach in the past.

All those involved in the provision and maintenance of social housing now have a duty to use all the tools available to them to ensure their assets are properly and safely maintained.

*Alan Davison, partner and head of building surveying, Pellings*

Asset management

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