



Incorporating  **AGSM** and  **AESM**

# Electrical Safety in Social Housing

## Transformational Change

### White paper

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September 2021





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# Executive Summary

The publication by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government of the Social Housing White Paper: *'The Charter for Social Housing Residents'* brings a unique opportunity to collectively rethink how we manage electrical safety in social housing. The Charter is intended to deliver 'transformational change' for the social housing community and sets out measures to ensure that tenants are safe, are listened to and live in good quality homes. It is clear that the will and vision for change exist; the sector has made progress and a vision for a safer future is emerging. It is also clear, however, that much work needs to be done in order to make this vision a reality and meet the aspirations set out by the Government and by social housing organisations themselves. Electrical safety in particular will be a central aspect of this work, now is the time to shine a light on and raise the profile of electrical safety within our organisations and our sector.

In the light of the Grenfell tragedy the social housing sector must accelerate the pace of change to deliver what Dame Judith Hackitt described as *'a cultural and behavioural change ... across the whole sector'*<sup>1</sup> and avoid a cost-cutting *'race to the bottom'*<sup>2</sup>. To bring about transformational change, we must avoid seeing safety as a separate entity or 'bolt-on' but instead recognise it as part of a wider eco-system of interrelated activities and functions including technical, financial, administrative and leadership. We must embed safety within the social capital of our sector, building shared understanding and common values that promote the highest safety standards at every level. No one organisation or individual will hold all the answers and so we must harness our collective strengths with a commitment to collaboration and learning from one another.

The delivery of long-lasting, future-facing and joined-up reform is crucial if we are to avoid short-termism and poor investment in safety. We can draw a useful parallel here with the COVID-19 pandemic; Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England, has claimed that the cost of pandemic preparedness would only have been the equivalent of two lost days of output from the lockdown<sup>3</sup>. Within social housing too, underinvestment in our resilience has indeed proven to be catastrophically fatal. There can be no argument that investment in the future is critical and must include investment in people, systems, awareness and technology. We cannot afford to only pay lip-service to safety nor to settle for 'window dressing'. To move forward we need to acknowledge that we are dealing with complex, interconnected systems where human behaviours meet technical hazards in ways which can be difficult to predict and prepare for.

This White Paper has been written to bring focus onto electrical safety in particular. Whilst much excellent work is being done in safety and compliance departments, the sector as a whole has not given this area enough attention. Every year, almost half of all accidental house fires in the UK are caused by electrical appliances. Electrical goods were the source of ignition in the fires at Grenfell, Lakanal House and Shepherd's Court. Grenfell alone saw 72 people lose their lives in June 2017, with an

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<sup>1</sup> Dame Judith Hackitt, Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Interim Report, December 2017, p6

<sup>2</sup> Dame Judith Hackitt, Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report, May 2018, p5

<sup>3</sup> Mark Carney, The Reith Lectures, BBC Radio 4, Transmitted 16.12.2020

electrical fault on a fridge-freezer being the initial source of ignition. Electrical safety has for too long been seen as less important than gas safety, and yet the evidence is undeniable that each year unsafe electrical work causes more injuries, fatalities and devastation to families and communities. Alongside the *Charter for Social Housing Residents*, the government has launched a separate consultation on electrical safety and the sector will need to be prepared to act on its findings.

**The importance of electrical safety must be underlined across the social housing sector and those professionals responsible for electrical safety management must be supported and given a strong voice within their organisations in order to meet the demands of the *Charter for Social Housing Residents*, improve overall safety in the sector and prevent future tragedies.**

## The role of the Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals

The Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals (ASCP) is committed to raising standards in safety and compliance; informing, supporting and empowering members, and giving a voice to safety and compliance professionals in the social housing sector. As part of the ASCP group, the Association of Electrical Safety Managers (AESM) shares this commitment with a focus specifically on electrical safety.

**This White Paper has been written for and on behalf of members of the ASCP and AESM to highlight the complexity of their safety and compliance work. It seeks to support members in challenging the status quo and to help them be more effective in their work.**

There are nearly one thousand members who share a passion and commitment to raising standards in safety and compliance. They need a strong voice and platform from which to discuss the challenges facing them and to promote their goals and aspirations for a safer future. Their frontline knowledge cannot be overlooked.

The ASCP has been working with members to explore the issues around electrical safety across a variety of events, formats and platforms. On 13 February 2019, members took part in a roundtable event which examined the frequency of electrical inspection and testing in social housing. This was followed by another debate at the ASCP Conference in April 2019. During 2020, members took part in six discussion sessions on the challenges posed by potential legislation for a 5 yearly inspection and testing programme. Three ASCP Think Tanks were established to investigate ongoing challenges in the sector and to take a holistic approach to identifying potential solutions. The ASCP also formed part of the MHCLG working party informing the ongoing consultation on Social Rented Sector Electrical Safety, ensuring our members' voices are being heard at government level and helping to shape policy. In 2021 the ASCP launched the National Social Housing Safety and Compliance Week dedicated to shining a spotlight on safety and compliance at an operational, strategic and cultural level. As part

of this week, the ASCP undertook a short survey to identify key priorities for, and better understand barriers to change within, the sector. (Appendix 1) The results of this survey echo and reinforce the findings from the Think Tanks.

The aim of the ASCP in the above research and in compiling this White Paper has been to holistically examine the topic of electrical safety in social housing. We have taken a purposefully broad approach in order to investigate issues not always explored at a macro-level. Our approach has been realistic and cognisant of the many challenges faced by the sector and the various political, cultural and financial factors that may hinder progress. The aim is not to accuse nor to criticise but to acknowledge the issues, promote discussion, provide challenge, support our members and facilitate change where needed.

This paper sets out and examines the common themes identified by ASCP members and the findings of the Think Tanks. It examines the impact and complexities of each as well as identifying opportunities for change and potential ways forward. The key areas examined are:

### **Safety Cultures**

Strong valued safety cultures will be key to bringing about transformational change and building safer futures. This paper sets out some key considerations for safety culture such as how it is defined, how it is prioritised and who is accountable.

### **Specific Considerations for Individual Departments**

Collective goals and a shared vision for safety are essential to building strong safety cultures and avoiding 'siloed' working. This section of the White Paper seeks to illustrate the areas where safety concerns intersect with the work of the procurement, finance, compliance and legal departments as well as the electrical workforce.

### **Mandating a 5 Year Inspect and Test Programme**

There is a clear feeling in the sector that a regulated 5 Year Inspect and Test programme would improve safety. Whilst undoubtedly a useful tool in identifying risks and improving outcomes, the Think Tank identified a number of caveats and limitations which are outlined in this section to be considered ahead of introduction of any new regulations.

### **Improving Access and Resident Engagement**

This section of the White Paper examines the central importance of access and the risk lack of access can pose to safety and compliance. Access issues around the 5 year Inspect and Test Programme are considered, and we outline our recommendation for regulations. Recommendations to improve resident engagement are also outlined in order to improve access, minimise unsafe behaviours and reduce incidents.

The White Paper concludes by identifying some next steps for the sector and how these might be supported by the ASCP.

# Think Tank Findings

## Safety Culture

Based on the results of the ASCP survey, **35%** of social housing sector professionals feel a change of culture is needed to achieve safety reforms.

**A cultural and behavioural change ... is now required across the whole sector to deliver an effective system that ensures complex buildings are built and maintained so that they are safe for people to live in for many years after the original construction. The mindset of doing things as cheaply as possible and passing on responsibility for problems and shortcomings to others must stop. Everyone's focus must be on doing the right things because it is their responsibility as part of a system which provides buildings that are safe and sustainable for those who will live in and use them for many decades.**

**Dame Judith Hackitt**, Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Interim Report, December 2017, p6

**There is a cultural issue across the sector which can be described as a 'race to the bottom'. There is insufficient focus on delivering the best quality building possible, in order to ensure that residents are safe and feel safe.**

**Dame Judith Hackitt**, Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report, May 2018, p5

The *Building a Safer Future* report clearly calls for a cultural shift that puts safety first. Progress has been made but more than three years after that report's publication there remain accusations that the shift is not happening quickly enough. The *Charter for Social Housing Residents* further sets out the necessity of a cultural shift within the sector. It is not surprising then that safety cultures are a common theme identified by ASCP members when discussing priorities and barriers to change, and that 35% of survey respondents agreed that a change of culture is necessary in the sector in order to achieve safety reforms and further support their work.

Safety Cultures were a key line of enquiry for the ASCP Think Tanks. It is clear that there is a need for every organisation to examine and address accusations of systemic failure. We must be reflective as a sector and really consider why there is a perceived lack of activity and progress in this area and leaders must be bold enough to address any areas for development in their own safety leadership.

The Think Tank findings on safety cultures identified the following key areas for consideration:

### **Definitions:**

Safety Cultures are hard to define. There is no one simple measure or check that can be performed to sum up the culture of an organisation. Whether an organisation has a positive safety culture or not is a subjective question, and often the answer can depend on who you are asking. It is tempting to reduce 'safety culture' down to measuring how consistently staff and organisations follow safety rules and regulations but we know that compliance alone is not enough to keep everyone safe. Within electrical safety for example, we cannot assume that a satisfactory Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) alone makes a property safe. Nor can a reliance on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) be seen as a sign of a strong safety culture. Whilst KPIs are important, they can only measure what is measurable. This means that they can sometimes be superficial and fail to appreciate the tacit knowledge of those at the sharp end or recognise the complexities and nuances of their roles.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines a positive safety culture as one **'characterised by communications founded on mutual trust, by shared perceptions of the importance of safety and by confidence in the efficacy of preventive measures'**.<sup>4</sup> Each organisation must reflectively examine its own culture and communications, perceptions and confidence. Leaders must be bold in asking themselves if they are subject to unconscious bias which can push safety down the list of priorities. They must also ensure buy-in to safety values at every level of the organisation whilst rigorously monitoring competencies, patterns of behaviour and leadership provided.

This is not an easy nor short term task but rather a long term commitment to which adequate focus, resources and funding should be given. Safety and Compliance staff including Electrical Safety Managers must be given a strong voice in this process so that organisations can harness their collective knowledge and expertise.

## **Conflicting Priorities**

It is important to acknowledge the vast, wide reaching role of social housing providers who have an ever growing remit and operate under demanding circumstances. The sector is subject to ever changing political drivers, media scrutiny and a changing social landscape. A decade of austerity and cutbacks has led to underinvestment in people and systems. The increasing demands on the UK housing infrastructure and the complex needs of its residents, financial pressures such as rent arrears, the growing mental-health crisis, increased homelessness and of course the COVID-19 pandemic have all placed additional strain on a system already reeling from the Grenfell tragedy and cladding scandal and now required to comprehend, adapt to and implement new building regulations.

With so many other priorities facing social housing organisations it can be difficult to find time, resources and focus to dedicate to improving safety culture. Whilst in principle all leaders and indeed employees wish to make the sector safer, budgets are limited and resources scarce in some areas and there are many other competing demands which can sometimes take precedence. The ASCP Think Tank found that many in the sector feel that there is still much work to be done in the

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<sup>4</sup> ACSNI Human Factors Study Group: Third report - Organising for safety HSE Books 1993



area of compliance, which is a legal requirement, and a sense that culture cannot be tackled until there is significant progress in this area. In some cases too 'unconscious incompetence' will be at play at board level, with board members unaware of what they do not know and therefore unable to make necessary changes. Giving safety and compliance professionals a strong voice within their organisations and a direct line of communication to the board will go some way to addressing this.

It is crucial that, at the highest level, positive safety culture is valued and not be seen as a 'nice to have' optional extra that can be addressed at some future point. Keeping residents safe must be the overriding objective of each organisation's governance framework and a positive safety culture must be the non-negotiable foundation on which it is built.

**You can either take the view you are post-Grenfell or pre the next Grenfell. Which view you take will impact your sense of urgency for change.**

**Jim Wetherbee**, NASA Astronaut cited in Gill Kernick's 'Catastrophe & Systemic Change: Learning from the Grenfell Tower Fire and Other Disasters', 2021

## Accountability

A positive organisational safety culture must allow for communication and collaboration between departments with a shared vision for safety. The profile of safety and compliance must be raised within organisations, and safety and compliance professionals including Electrical Safety Managers must have a strong voice and be listened to within their organisations. It is important to welcome a diversity of views and to engage with staff across departments as well as residents and external stakeholders to create a culture where all are valued and in which any concerns raised are taken seriously. Leaders will need to examine whether they are doing enough to facilitate communication with and feedback from technical staff and engineers who in turn must feel empowered to raise safety challenges and concerns.

Ultimately though there must be someone within the organisation who is responsible for leading safety and compliance. Paragraph 61 of the *Charter for Social Housing Residents* specifically requires landlords to make public a nominated person responsible for compliance with their safety responsibilities, with legislation to follow to make this a legal requirement.<sup>5</sup>

Organisations will need to identify for themselves explicitly which board member is responsible for leading and managing safety and compliance, and that person must have sufficient reach within the organisation to be able to drive a culture change.

ASCP members have highlighted that across organisations the different departments such as procurement, development, legal, compliance and finance are often operating with different priorities and targets and without unifying goals. There is concern that the responsibility for implementing new regulations and meeting government targets will be pushed 'down the hierarchy' without adequate accountability and responsibility at board level. Safety managers and officers carry the burden of

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper, November 2020, p39

delivering compliance and for this they require adequate support from the leadership team. The requirement for a nominated person in the *Charter for Social Housing Residents* goes some way to addressing this. Due to the significance and impact of safety and compliance, the ASCP Think Tank felt that organisations should go further and appoint a dedicated Director for this area. A dedicated Director of Safety and Compliance would truly raise the profile of safety within an organisation, bring stronger focus onto safety culture, direct governance, shape organisational policy and provide ultimate accountability in the same way, for example, as a Finance Director does for finance.

***The Charter for Social Housing Residents* cites the concept of an ‘accountable person’ for Health and Safety. We feel that, given the significance of safety’s impact on an organisation, providers should go further and appoint a dedicated Director of Safety and Compliance. This would truly raise the profile of safety within an organisation, bring stronger focus onto safety culture and allow the accountable person to direct governance, shape organisational policy and provide ultimate accountability in the same way as, for example, a Finance Director does for finance due to its far reaching impact.**

# Considerations for Individual Departments

**34% of ASCP survey respondents felt that more education and training was needed for themselves and colleagues to better understand safety and compliance issues.**

**36% identified that working with others to help shape best practice was important.**

**31% felt that many different and competing objectives in an organisation was a significant barrier to change.**

Collaboration and a shared vision are key to building strong organisational safety cultures. Our research also highlighted the difficulty of achieving this unified vision when working in separate departments with diverse and even conflicting priorities. In order to make progress and ultimately improve safety for residents we must address 'siloes' working and build cooperation and common goals on safety.

The profile of safety needs to be raised across all departments, with each team aware of their roles and responsibilities in improving safety and compliance. Below are some key points to consider for individual departments:

## Procurement

- **Challenges in the procurement of safety services, advice and products:** competent organisations can have the best policies and procedures but poor understanding of safety in procurement leaves organisations open to unsafe outcomes. With third party services it is even more vital that safety is truly understood –this could be the weakest link for any organisation.
- **Working within the system:** we do not live in an idealised world of perfect purchasing and complete market information and so human frailties and behaviours cannot be divorced from strategic and financial decision making. Raising awareness of safety concerns and promoting a culture that prioritises safety in decision making is important.
- **Purchase prices:** these need to be at a level to attract competent resource and avoid the '**race to the bottom**'<sup>6</sup> which results in unsafe practices and materials. Those responsible for purchasing will need to work more closely with those responsible and accountable for the service delivery.
- **Robust technical specification is needed:** to understand the nuances of the work in order to appreciate the possible outcomes and how it can add long-term value.

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<sup>6</sup> Dame Judith Hackitt, Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report, May 2018, p5

- **Competence:** a much better appreciation of the importance of competence is needed. It is also important to consider how competence is measured and judged. Over reliance on accreditation of trade bodies to demonstrate competence is not enough. Management and supervision, CPD and experience must all be taken in to account.
- **Price versus quality:** the balance between price and quality needs to be carefully weighted on the side of safety rather than cost. Any project, tender or purchase must be commenced with the organisation's safety values and desired outcomes in mind, with decisions being made predominantly based on quality and safety. A split of at least 70/30 in favour of safety and quality over price considerations should be employed when weighing up the factors that influence procurement decisions. Alternative models will only facilitate box ticking and poor value for money.

## Finance

- **Sufficient budgets:** are absolutely crucial to delivering electrical safety. We have too often witnessed the implications of cost cutting and the inevitable race to the bottom. The long-term result is that everyone loses. When reviewing finance budgets and expenditure, adequate provisions should be made to factor in the following costs:
  - **Competent resources** are needed to carry out work, adequately inspect, test, report and track as well as provide engineering judgement and corrective action where necessary.
  - **Remedial works:** budgets will need to reflect the level of work to be undertaken for robust safety regimes.
  - **Compliance and administration resources:** to look after the process data and maintain the audit trail to completion.
  - **Internal electrical competence:** to effectively manage the risks and raise awareness of issues.
  - **Adequate board training:** to understand and act on risks and to facilitate a great safety culture.
  - Fit for purpose **housing management systems and data management** are needed.
  - **Training programmes:** to assist the upskilling of team members.

**'You think safety is expensive...try an incident' – Trevor Kletz**

It is essential that Finance and Procurement Directors better understand the complexity and cost of delivering safe homes as well as the risks of cutting corners. They must provide sufficient funding to resource crucial safety operations. A significant cultural shift is required so that safety is not seen as a 'bolt-on' that can be delivered in a vacuum. This will all take time and cost money. The costs inherent in a new approach and in the remedial work required must be budgeted for in order to bring properties, systems and competence up to new standards.

## Compliance

- **A strong voice:** compliance professionals need a high profile and a strong voice that is listened to and heard within their organisations
- **A 'seat at the table':** compliance teams need a direct line of communication to the board and an invitation to share difficult news. In turn the board have an opportunity to offer direct support and guidance. Taking up the ASCP's suggestion of appointing a designated Director of Safety and Compliance will support this.
- **Robust processes and procedures:** these must be in place to provide a roadmap for organisations and ensure best practice.
- **Nominated persons/authorised persons:** it is vital to appoint people who have specific responsibilities for safety and that they and their colleagues have a clear understanding of their specific remit and responsibilities, and that they have open lines of communication with the board. Competence in these areas must be supported with personal development plans.
- **Joined up thinking and shared safety goals:** compliance and safety may not be the most exciting things on the housing agenda for some, but they are amongst most significant, and have the potential for the most disastrous consequences if not valued and prioritised appropriately.

## Legal

- **Supporting access:** access to properties is a huge and costly issue for the sector, as explored in more detail later in this White Paper. There is understandable reluctance to be overzealous in seeking access to properties, however as a sector we need to overcome this obstacle. We need to deliver on safety obligations in the most efficient and considerate manner possible, with joined up safety goals and with compassion for residents.
- **A greater appetite to gain access:** we need to explore all routes rather than default to the legal route, paying due attention to any vulnerable resident issues. The ASCP feels strongly that a review by the Government and sector into access is necessary if we are to reach our goals on safety and compliance.
- **Working with the judiciary:** we must seek to provide consistency and certainty to streamline the process as much as possible, across different courts and regions.

## Electrical Workforce

### → Employing sufficient skilled electricians

- The social housing sector needs to consider how it is addressing the skills shortage. In a paper written for the ASCP National Social Housing Safety and Compliance Week, Andy Reakes of the Electrotechnical Certification Scheme (ECS) cites The Homeserve Foundation’s estimate that 1.25 million extra construction workers are required by 2030 and 305,000 construction and trades apprenticeships will be needed to boost the construction trades sector as a whole, with 228,000 needed in key trades such as electrical installation. He also points out that CITB’s Construction Skills Network forecasts an extra 217,000 workers by 2025 required to rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic with electrical installation deemed to be one of the most in demand trades. For the social housing sector, greater focus given to building safety, Net Zero emissions, electrification of heat, electric vehicle charging, smart home technology and the internet of things, digitisation and network infrastructure will only increase demand<sup>7</sup>. The sector must take control of this situation if it is to be assured of the continuation of service.
- As a sector we need a clear definition of what competence is and a joint understanding of how to check, assess and manage competence of the electrical workforce. Competence is too often underestimated and over simplified. It is defined by HSE as ‘the combination of **training, skills, experience and knowledge** that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task’ (safely). More recently it has been defined by the MHCLG working groups as **skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours**.

→ **Creating a defined set of regulations for the sector:** Greater clarity would be beneficial. One possibility is that this could follow the same path as gas safety regulations with, for example, the introduction of Regulation 36 specific to landlords as part of a broader set of regulations.

→ **Review of EICR for landlords:** The ASCP does not attempt to draw a conclusion on the EICR’s fitness for purpose, but we do suggest some possible ways to boost clarity:

- a) Whether an additional 1-page safety certificate could be introduced for residents, rather than only providing the full EICR report.
- b) Could the social housing sector, which accounts for 20% of the UK housing stock, have a more streamlined EICR to facilitate a more efficient service?
- c) Distribution of the certificate electronically, with a paper copy provided if requested by the resident.

→ **Reviewing safety devices:** A specific review is needed for safety devices, such as Residual Current Devices, to ensure they are included within safety considerations, taking account of a cost benefit analysis.

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<sup>7</sup> Andy Reakes, *Skills Shortage: The need for qualified and competent electricians in the housing sector*, June 2021, <http://www.safetyandcomplianceweek.co.uk>

# Regulating A 5 Year Inspect and Test Programme

The Association of Electrical Safety Managers think tank held a productive discussion on the potential introduction of a regulated 5 Year Inspect and Test Programme for social housing which would be in line with the requirements for the private sector. **Almost 90% of our survey respondents felt that the introduction of a 5 year programme is necessary to better understand and benchmark electrical safety and to ensure sufficient focus, funding and attention on electrical safety at board level.**

It is important to stress however that a 5 year programme is not a simple 'cure-all' for electrical safety. To avoid non-compliance and ensure a successful outcome for all, there are a number of important caveats and barriers that need to be addressed:

## **What must the Government consider before introducing a regulatory 5 Year Inspect and Test Programme?**

- **A broad and integrated approach** The introduction of such a programme will undoubtedly be significant in identifying risks and improving overall electrical safety. This may be seen by many as the pinnacle of safety within the electrical industry, however it is in reality only one of many actions that need to be taken to help raise safety standards. Once again we must avoid the temptation to 'box tick' as a 5 year programme will only deliver significant change if it is part of a broad, robustly delivered approach.
- **Phasing:** It will be crucial to consider the phasing of any new proposals. In a recent AESM survey, members were asked what lead time would be needed in order to inspect all properties within a 5 year period and be compliant with proposed new regulations. The results were:

**50% of respondents reported that they would need at least a year**

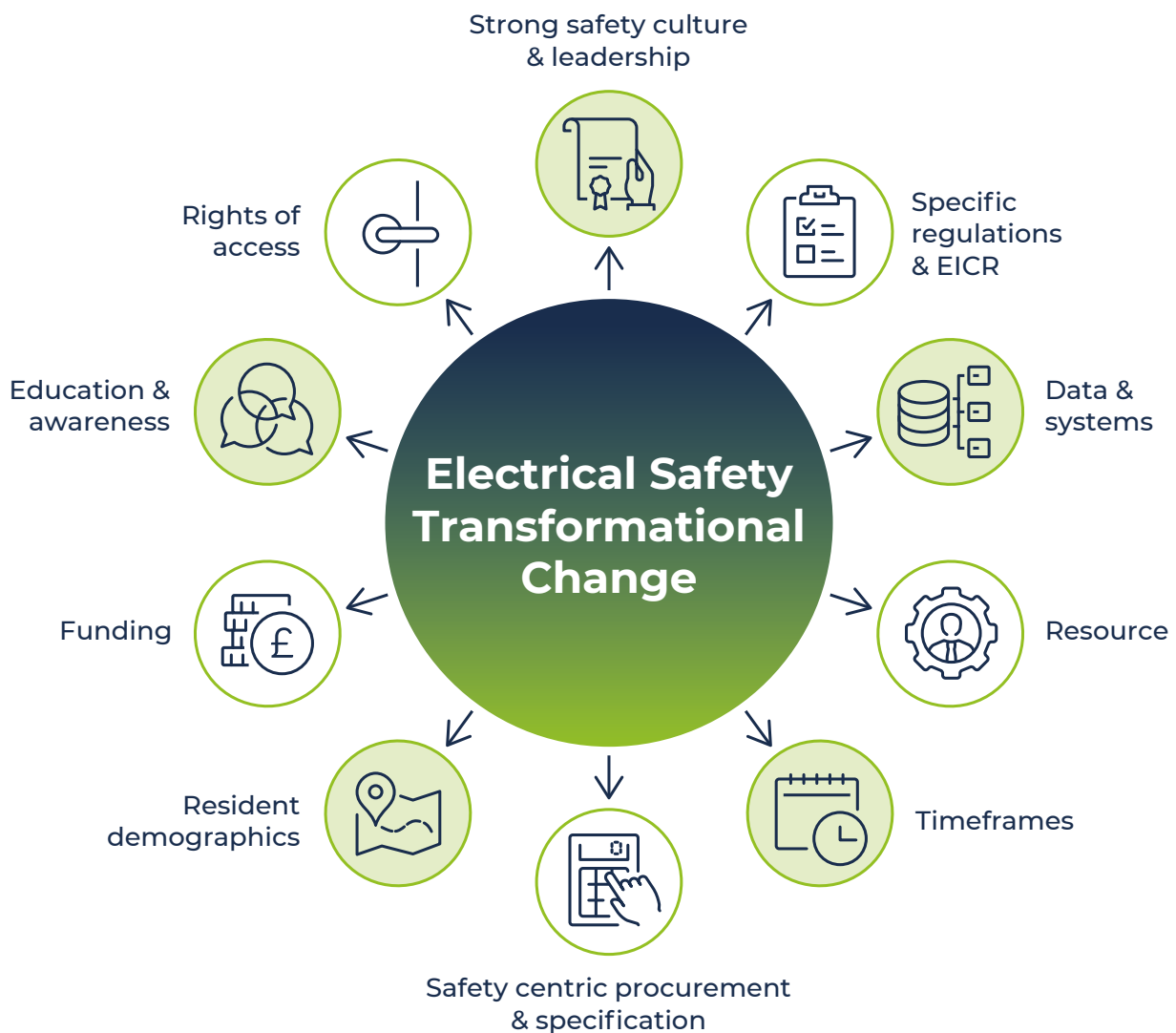
**38% felt 2-3 years would be needed**

**12% felt 4-5 years were required**

The survey clearly identified the scale of the challenge felt by the industry and the barriers they believe are currently in place. Success and timeframe of implementation will depend on the organisation's current programme status.

- **Robust data and housing management systems:** strong systems, processes and procedures must be in place to provide accurate data, information and scheduling.
- **Overcoming access issues:** ensuring access can be gained to carry out inspections and subsequent remedial work. This area is explored further later in this White Paper.

- **The wellbeing of residents:** we must in particular consider the additional and complex needs of residents, being sensitive to mental health issues, language barriers etc.
- **Addressing the volume of work:** for those not on a voluntary 5 Year Programme, the scale of the project is huge. It will be necessary to smooth out the peaks and troughs. For example, if an organisation owns 60,000 properties which have not been inspected for over 5 years, 60,000 inspections would be due, which on a 12 month deadline would mean 5,000 inspections a month – may not be viable.
- **Procuring sufficient competent resource:** to complete EICRs across the social housing stock of 4 million homes in one year would require procuring an extraordinary amount of competent resource. This is likely to be untenable without sufficient lead time.
- **Remedial work:** allowing sufficient time to complete remedial works will be challenging on this scale. The private rented sector has 28 days to complete remedial work or a shorter period if required. We recommend an extended timeframe for the social rented sector due to the scale of work and the complexities of access etc.





→ **Lead time consideration for regulating 5 Year Inspect and Test:** our recommendation would be to focus on high risk buildings first, followed by incremental phasing over a number of years. Consultation with the sector would provide the most practical route to achieving positive outcomes.

Many organisations are already implementing or have implemented 5 Year Inspect and Test Programmes as best practice. This is no small undertaking and should be commended. However, it is likely that many will not have a satisfactory EICR for every single home. This includes the completion of remedial works within the exact date and deadline of a 5-year timeframe which is required to avoid non-compliance and any associated penalties and disruption.

A measured approach would be needed to regulate 5 Year Inspect and Test for social housing in order to understand the broader implications and the potential for disruption caused by new regulations to avoid unintended consequences and waste this opportunity to re-write the future of safety in our sector.

**Without regulation many social housing executive boards may not fully appreciate the significant risks unsafe electrical work could pose, or may consider it lower priority compared to other safety milestones that legally must be met. Based on our research and discussions the ASCP recommendation is to regulate 5 Year Inspect and Test Programmes, but as part of a broad approach that fully takes into account the wider implications and particular complexities of the social housing sector.**

## Limitations of the EICR

One limitation of a 5 year inspect and test programme is that it might lead to an overreliance on the Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) as the ultimate measure of safety as can be the case with the Landlords Gas Safety Record (LGSR). We know that safety is not achieved by checking installations alone. An EICR does not make a property safe. Incident investigations have frequently shown that smoke detectors might have prevented them, hence the Government's ongoing consultation on smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. As in the Grenfell tragedy, in which the initial source of ignition was a faulty fridge-freezer, incidents are often caused by faulty appliances. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) may have prevented other incidents, however this would not automatically be carried out on an EICR, so white goods and other appliances (unless the landlords specified) would not be inspected. The IET's Code of Practice uses the term Inservice Inspection and Testing of electrical equipment removing PAT (as PAT implies portable equipment only). This term includes all electrical equipment whether portable, fixed, or stationary.

It should be noted that in Scotland PAT testing is included within a landlord's check on their own appliances. The safety of residents' own appliances will continue to be an issue for housing providers, one aspect of the solution will be to continue to work to engage and educate residents about electrical safety and the implications of unsafe purchases or incorrect use.

# Improving Access and Resident Engagement

**44% of ASCP survey respondents cited better engagement with residents as a key priority for improvement.**

**27% felt that lack of access was a significant barrier to safety in the sector.**

**When asked how the sector should better work with residents to make homes safer, 80% of those surveyed felt we need to help residents understand why safety and compliance is so important.**

## Access

Access is the 'elephant in the room' when it comes to safety and compliance. It is hugely problematic, staggeringly expensive and can present a significant barrier to safety. Understandably, there is a reticence to put pressure on residents to gain access but in order to deliver on the mandates set out by the Health and Safety Executive and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government it is vital that we as a sector work to overcome this barrier. The current situation places an inequitable burden on the safety and compliance teams to maintain 100% compliance with regulations, and at what cost?

Gaining access to approximately 4 million social housing homes to carry out critical safety work in such high volumes is a huge challenge. Social housing providers must deliver 100% statutory compliance to ensure that residents are protected and safe and to prevent significant consequences and sanctions for their organisations. However, providers can only rely on residents' willingness to let them into the property to carry out legally required safety checks. In circa 25% of gas cases this access is not granted the first time round, and lack of access ultimately results in housing providers incurring huge financial costs whilst jeopardising resident safety.

**In this post-Grenfell era, with new regulations and increased demands placed on social housing providers, the Government, a key stakeholder, needs to support the sector's drive to raise safety standards with stronger powers of access to carry out their statutory safety and compliance checks.**

Legal departments within organisations will need to support this, working towards unified goals on safety. This support will be necessary if the sector is to deliver on the demands set out in *The Charter for Social Housing Residents*. Without support, housing providers are left dealing with resource heavy, costly and time-consuming issues of access and are therefore less able to efficiently deal with the real issues of safety. A unified approach is required from all stakeholders, providers, government and residents if we are to collectively move forward in our goal to build a safer future for all.

## Access challenges for the Five Year Inspect and Test Programme

As discussed above, it is widely felt in the sector that the adoption of a 5 Year Inspect and Test Programme for electrical installations will be a key element in improving safety. Access will be an ongoing challenge for organisations in adopting such a programme. Gas Safety checks, for example, have been in existence for around twenty years and still face significant access challenges. Residents are not accustomed to allowing access to their property for electrical safety checks to be completed which means that access may pose even more of an issue. For this reason a communications programme is needed to help inform residents and take them along the journey. Vulnerable residents such as those with physical or mental health issues (including hoarding which presents a particularly difficult to resolve access challenge) will need careful consideration, as addressed below.

A further factor to consider is the time taken to complete electrical safety checks. Initial inspection and tests alone can take up to four hours with significant additional time needed to carry out any remedial work. The time needed to complete this safety check needs to be effectively communicated to the resident, to avoid any anxiety or misunderstandings.

Scotland and Wales have both identified the need for more robust rights of access to carry out safety inspections. Much of Scotland operates under the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement, which provides stronger powers of access. The ASCP and AESM Think Tank have found that regulation of 5 Year Inspect and Test programmes will be the surest way to ensure they are carried out and given sufficient priority. We propose the addition of a regulation similar to Regulation 36a of the Gas Safety Installation and Use regulations. This would allow an MOT style approach in which checks could be carried out in the [two] months before the deadline (and in certain limited circumstances after the deadline in order to align inspection deadlines across a number of properties or installations to make administration easier). Such a regulation would promote compliance and help to make the process more efficient for landlords.

**CORGI and the Association of Gas Safety Managers long campaigned for Regulation 36a of the Gas Safety Installation and Use Regulations, which saw the introduction of MOT style servicing and allowed landlords the opportunity of getting an inspection undertaken at any time in the preceding two months of the inspection due date. Whereby, the inspection is treated as having been undertaken on the deadline date, being the date when the previous certificate expires. This has gone some way to making LGSR operations more efficient, supporting landlords in overcoming some of the difficulties in scheduling and saving the sector hundreds of millions of pounds every year.**

**We recommend a similar approach be taken to any new electrical safety check regulations.** The ASCP will be supporting the sector with its Access Best Practice group, to look at innovative ways to challenge current thinking and overcome barriers to access.

## Resident Engagement

*The Charter for Social Housing Residents* outlines the current operating environment in which residents must be viewed as consumers of a housing product and clients of housing providers. As such residents' rights must be respected and their voices heard. In this context, resident engagement is even more important if providers are to meet their customers' rightful expectations for a safe and secure home.

80% of those surveyed by the ASCP felt that helping residents to understand why safety and compliance is so important was a key priority for working with residents going forward. Better engagement with residents can help to overcome access issues, promote safer behaviours within homes and reduce the overall number of incidents. Working collaboratively with residents will help to promote a community feel and a sense of collective responsibility for safety.

As explored above, access to properties can be a significant barrier to safety. Working towards better engagement with residents in order to ensure that they understand what is expected of them, what access is required and when, and why this is so important must be a priority for the sector in order to ensure essential inspections, repairs and maintenance can be carried out.

Engagement is not only about access however. There is also a need for a significant programme of education on safe behaviours around electricity within the home. Between April 2019 and March 2020, 34% of all accidental dwelling fires were caused by 'misuse of equipment or appliances' and a further 15% by 'faulty appliances and leads'.<sup>7</sup> As we know, the Grenfell tragedy started with a faulty fridge-freezer which would not have been picked up by current methods of inspecting and testing the fixed wiring. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) may have identified the issue, if the white good was a landlord owned appliance and was inspected within the permitted timeframes.

In the social housing sector, evidence suggests approximately 2% of tenancies are furnished which means it is the residents' responsibility to maintain appliances. With so few furnished tenancies in the social sector, landlords do not have a large role in maintaining or testing appliances, however they do have a role to play in helping to educate residents on appliance safety. The high prevalence of second hand appliances, along with unsafe behaviours such as overloading electrical sockets, all increase risk. Social housing providers and landlords will need to consider how to mitigate those risks through engaging with and educating residents on electrical safety.

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<sup>7</sup> Home Office, Detailed analysis of fires attended by fire and rescue services, England, April 2019 to March 2020, p12

## Vulnerable Residents

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about further developments to the ever-changing social housing landscape, providing unique access challenges and reducing opportunities for engagement. In addition the pandemic has had an impact on the demographic of those housed within social housing properties.

Lockdown brought about the placement of homeless people within social housing. Many of these residents were unfamiliar with the necessary property checks and access requirements associated with social housing properties and this has led to increased access issues.

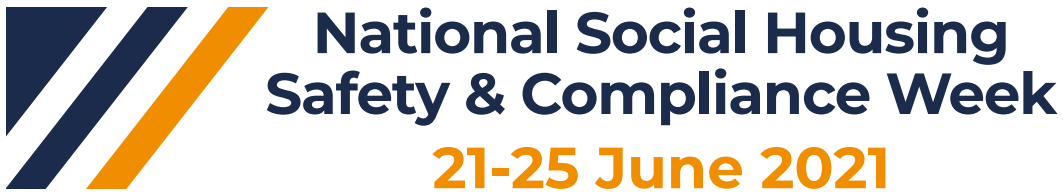
Numbers of vulnerable residents are also increasing, mental health issues are on the rise and one particular area of concern is hoarding. The charity Hoarding UK estimates that between 2 and 5% of people in the UK suffer from a hoarding disorder. This could equate to a staggering 200,000 social properties across the UK. Not only does this pose increased fire hazards, particularly from 'dry' hoarding, but it also presents additional challenges for access and compliance.

## Actions to promote resident engagement

Resident engagement is key to improving safety outcomes. This is an area in which much work is already being done. Social housing providers who are successful in this area highlight the following actions as being central to improving engagement:

- considering how to address the diverse needs of different resident groups
- using a variety of communication strategies tailored to the needs of different groups, across a range of media and platforms and including text, infographics, video and animation for maximum reach and clarity
- providing clear explanations in ways that ensure customers will understand what is being said
- listening to customers, fostering positive relationships and putting in positive effort to understand hard to reach customers
- using compliance and complaint data effectively to spot trends and examine what could be done differently

# Next Steps for Electrical Safety



The ASCP is committed to supporting the social housing sector in delivering transformational change in safety and compliance. One of the proactive initiatives the association has undertaken to provide this support is the launch of the National Social Housing Safety and Compliance Week. This is an annual event dedicated to shining a spotlight on safety and compliance at an operational, strategic, and cultural level. The goal of the week is to highlight the pressures felt within the sector and the support needed to ensure tragic events such as Grenfell are never repeated, as well as empowering the sector to push for significant changes. The event aims to foster a sense of community and shared values and to provide a platform in which safety and compliance professionals can raise challenging issues and harness their collective strengths to work towards solutions.

Ahead of Safety and Compliance Week, the ASCP called for pledges of change from individuals and organisations, to commit to their own safety and compliance promises. People could also draw inspiration from pre-designed pledges which fell into key themes such as listening and communication, bravery in speaking out, and commitment to change.

**The response was inspiring, with over 100 organisations and individuals sharing their goals and commitment to change.**



*We pledge to help our customers & teams to understand why the safety & compliance work we do in homes is critical to delivering safe homes.*

Antony James  
Maintenance and Compliance  
Manager, ateb



*We pledge to inform: We pledge to make it easier for the tenants to find information about the compliance in their communal blocks.*

Mark Plant  
Compliance and Safety Manger  
Newark and Sherwood District Council



***I pledge to improve resident engagement, services and safety by listening to their concerns, encouraging engagement and taking action.***

Mark England  
Head of Innovation, Maintenance and Group Procurement, Coastline Housing



***I pledge to change: I pledge to drive a culture of openness and welcome feedback, even though it may be difficult to receive.***

Fleur Whittingham  
Head of Health and Safety and Compliance Connexus



***We will continue to ensure our tenants are safe in their homes. We will do this by listening to them & committing to continuous improvement/learning***

Natalie Baxter  
Head of Compliance  
The Community Housing Group



***I pledge to be pro-active: I pledge to never accept the status quo and always press for better resources, training, competences in our organisation, I pledge to communicate: I pledge to improve resident engagement by – listening to their concerns, encouraging access, taking action etc, I pledge to remember: I pledge to remember that safety must be a core, lived value that needs to be at the forefront every day. For the sake of Grenfell and tragedies in the past and to avert disasters of the future.***

Daniel Boardman  
Property Compliance Manager  
WDH

National Social Housing Safety and Compliance Week 2021 and the pledges that were made are just the beginning. The ASCP will continue to support those who have pledged, with reminders to keep commitments front of mind, celebrate success and better understand the challenges that may be impeding progress. This event will return annually to help drive transformational change within the sector.

## Next Steps in Achieving Transformational Change

Taking into account the findings of this White Paper, the ASCP and AESM suggest the following five areas will be key for the sector to explore in the coming year in order to accelerate the pace of change and make real progress towards a safer future.

- 1) Overcoming the obstacles in the access process, continuing to promote engagement and working towards a common understanding of complex resident needs**
- 2) Encouraging collective thinking and the breaking down of silos within our organisations**
- 3) Supporting the implementation and regulation of a 5 Year Inspect and Test programme**
- 4) Work on the issue of procurement – with key learnings from other White Papers, *The Charter for Social Housing Residents, Building A Safer Future* and the Government consultations on smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and electrical safety**
- 5) Building positive safety cultures, promoting and facilitating cultural change, continuing to ask difficult questions and to be bold in addressing areas for improvement**

There is no denying the task ahead is vast and challenging. Progress will require shared vision, commitment and drive. By harnessing our collective wisdom and expertise, the sector can achieve transformational change to ensure that tragedies such as Grenfell are never repeated. Together we can build a safer future for everyone.



# Appendix 1:

## Results of Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals Safety Week Survey

### Breakdown of respondents

<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>
Social Housing/Safety and Compliance manager	51
Social Housing Senior Manager	8
Other	17
Social Housing Contractor/Supplier	4
Social Housing Frontline Staff	2
Social Housing Compliance Officer	6
Social Housing Resident	1

### Where we need to improve (beyond access)



### What is stopping us from addressing the biggest challenges



### How can we better engage with residents to help make homes safer



# Acknowledgements

**The ASCP would like to thank all its members for their input and support. Particular thanks are extended to the following members:**

Roy Down, Electrical Safety and Compliance Manager - Sovereign  
Paul Simpson, Electrical Compliance Manager – Yorkshire Housing  
Carlos Murray, Electrical Manager – Great Places  
Liam Gatens, Electrical Manager – South Tyneside Homes  
Darren Hackett, Head of Gas and Electric – Bromford Group  
Richard Hart, Electrical Manager – South Kesteven  
James Russell, Electrical Property Manager – Together Housing  
David Mason, Compliance Manager – Onward Homes  
Scott Cummines – Head of Compliance – Peabody Trust  
Andrew Steen, Compliance Manager – Bassetlaw DC  
Carol Laing, Head of Landlord Compliance and Assurance – Onward Homes  
Martin Simmonds, Senior Services Officer (Electrical) – Dudley MBC  
Gerry Claxton, Technical Services Manager - Broadlands  
Peter Sandry, Compliance Manager – Cornwall Housing  
James McGrath, Electrical Manager – Plus Dane  
Chiara Khan, Property Compliance Manager – Tower Hamlets  
Alison Drake, Customer Safety Manager – Accent Group

In association with





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