

Plenary 5

4 Nations - top challenges, innovative solutions

Speakers:

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Chaired by: Julian Ransom, iON

Room: Ballroom



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Building Safety – Northern Ireland



- **What is Northern Ireland doing?**

- Expert Panel established (Feb 22) to bring forward NI Building Safety Programme. Report published Dec 23
- Department for Communities - Residential Building Safety Team currently establishing NI Regulatory Regime
- 2024/25 - Co-Design Stakeholder Groups rolled out

- **Implementation Mechanisms**

- Primary Legislation will be Required
- Within remit of next Legislative Assembly from 2027

- **Challenges**

- Vacuum of Building Safety Legislation in NI / No current NI Regulatory Regime
- Do we follow England, Wales / Scotland or do we pick the "best bits" from each?
- Availability of Resources with Relevant Competences



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Building Safety - England

- **Now parity in access to remediation funding.** 'Joint Plan to accelerate social housing remediation' - set targets for completion of remediation programmes for 18m+ buildings and for completion/plans being in place for 11-18m buildings by end of 2029.
- **Monitoring progress** towards these targets and acting as a conduit between them and government in raising any ongoing blockages and barriers to progress.
- **Challenges** with the Building Safety Regulator in delays in the Gateway process and safety cases.
- **Understanding** of the issues around building safety defects not covered by the Cladding Safety Scheme, such as Large Panel Systems buildings, internal defects, and buildings under 11 meters.
- **Aim of our work for 2026+** - identify where NHF can add value and support members with decision making on these topics, and push for funding/government support where necessary.



Building Safety - Scotland

Legislation and guidance

- Primary legislation falls under the [Building \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) and [Building \(Scotland\) Regulations 2004](#). Technical guidance updated regularly and [available online](#)

Fire safety and culture change

Raft of fire safety measures introduced in Scotland following Grenfell including:

- Mandatory interlinked smoke and heat alarms across all tenures, sprinklers in new high rise buildings, requirement for two escape stairs for new domestic high rise buildings, restrictions and cladding remediation, culture change and communication
- Changes in lifestyle e.g. storing and charging mobility scooters



[Click here to visit link](#)

Building Safety - Wales

What is Wales doing?

- Developing a **Welsh Building Safety Bill** (currently in the Senedd)
- Aligns with post-Grenfell reforms, but **not a carbon copy of England**
- Fire safety is increasingly embedded into wider housing standards (esp. Welsh Housing Quality Standards).

Implementation Mechanisms

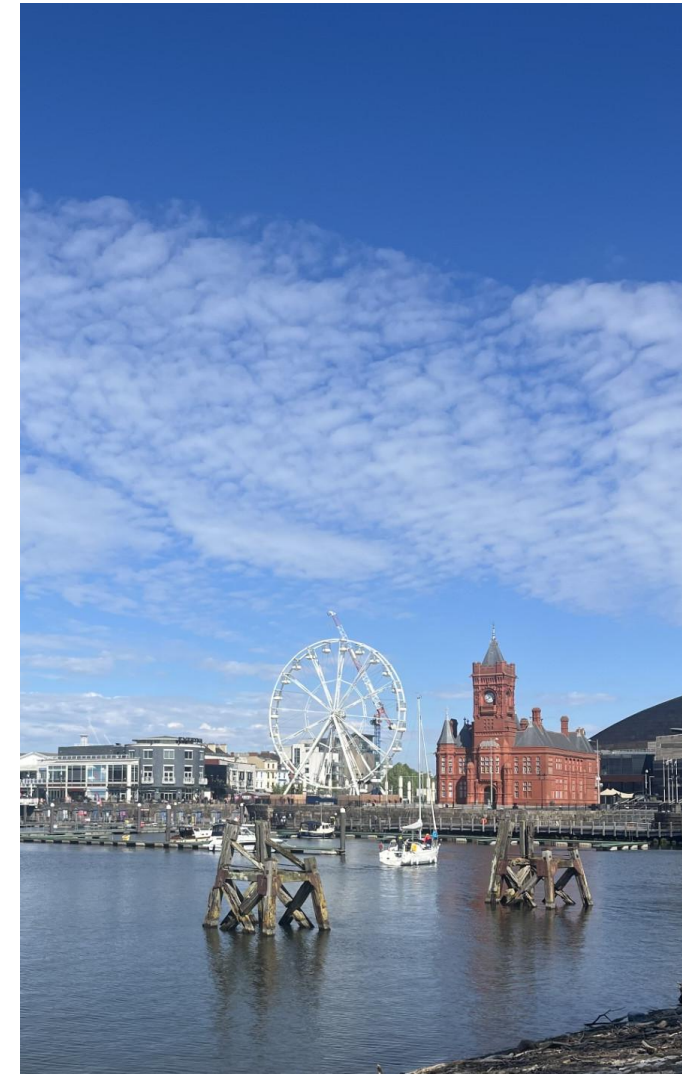
- Primary Legislation (Building Safety Bill)
- Secondary regulation and guidance are expected
- Integration with existing housing standards rather than standalone regimes.

Challenges

- Clarity, while the legislation is still evolving
- Capacity and skills in Asset & Compliance teams
- Managing overlap with existing frameworks

Wales Takeaway

Directionally informed with England, but still forming ‘watch his space...’



Disrepair / Awaabs Law – Northern Ireland



- **What is Northern Ireland doing?**

- Northern Ireland doesn't have an Awaab's law
- Damp & Mold is covered under the Housing (NI) Order 1981 statutory minimum fitness standard for housing.
- It states a dwelling to be fit for human habitation it must be free from dampness prejudicial to the health of the occupants (if any)
- Some housing bodies have dedicated teams or individuals assigned to managing damp and mold



Maintaining healthy homes:
A guide to preventing and resolving damp and mould

- **Implementation Mechanisms / Best Practice Guidance**

- Article 46 of the Housing (NI) Order 1981
- The Department for Communities issued Damp & Mold Guidance to its Housing Association Guide in January 24.
- CIH Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations publish Damp and Mold Guidance document in April 25

- **Challenges**

- Aging condition of housing stock
- Budgetary constraints for long term investment
- Capacity pressures, including surveyor availability and contractor resources



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Disrepair / Awaabs Law - England

Overview: Phase 1 rollout 27 October 2025. Officials are in early "test and learn" stages for Phase 1, gathering evidence before deciding on Phase 2 timing.

Key feedback from England (so far!)

- **Volume of Demand:** Higher than expected; concerns about increased winter demand.
- **Reporting & Triaging:** New online systems and staff support have improved emergency case handling; ongoing challenges with system updates and legislative understanding.
- **Inspections:** Virtual inspections have mixed reception; calls for clearer standards and guidance.
- **Access & Hazard Assessment:** Difficulties with 24-hour responses and compliance; need for photographic examples and sector-wide tools for consistency.
- **Resource Strain:** Rising disrepair cases, increased decant rates, and extended hazard coverage are straining resources; sector requests early, clear guidance for future phases.

Disrepair Awaabs Law - Scotland

A regulatory focus on reporting and assurance is now being formalised through legislation

- Social housing regulator had increased focus on damp and mould with additional reporting requirements
- A Scottish equivalent being introduced across tenures through the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 – regulations due 21 January
- Legislation will require landlords to investigate and take action in certain cases within specified timescales
- Are timescales the best way of dealing with complex cases and does it incentivise speed of response over getting the right repair done?
- How will implementation in the PRS be enforced?



Disrepair / Awaabs Law - Wales

What is Wales doing?

- Already has a strong **legal baseline** via *fitness for human habitation*.
- Introducing **new hazard rules from April**
- Wales doesn't have an Awaab's law, but there is a similar intent **embedded in Welsh housing law**.

Implementation Mechanisms

- Statutory duties on landlords
- WHQS 2023 incorporates hazard requirements
- Enforcement through existing legal frameworks

Challenges

- Operationalising faster response times
- Record keeping and proof of compliance
- Increased legal exposure for landlords

Wales takeaway

Less “new law”, more tightening and enforcing what already exists

Decent Homes – Northern Ireland



- **What is Northern Ireland doing?**

- The Department for Communities (DfC) implemented the original Decent Homes Standard (DHS) in 2004
- A revised Decent Homes Standard by the Department for Communities is currently out for consultation, closes in March 26
- The key principles include improving the condition of social homes, focusing on tenant wellbeing and comfort, as well as considering energy efficiency and the path to net zero.
- Looking to add a fifth Pillar E – Where a home should be safe, secure, sustainable and promotes wellbeing.
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System or Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation Act) 2018 does not apply in NI



- **Implementation Mechanisms**

- New standard should be published later in 2026 with compliance by 2030.

- **Challenges**

- Will be challenging to comply with these additional mandatory requirements in the absence of additional funding



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Decent Homes - England

- **Back reform** to improve quality and safety across rented homes; significant sector investment to date.
- **Implementation:** advocate for a single, sector-wide compliance date of 2037 for social housing to enable orderly planning, efficient system changes and minimal resident disruption.
- **Disrepair:** support shift from 'age' to 'condition' with clearer descriptive definitions and practical guidance (repairs can maintain compliance; avoid confusion between repair vs. disrepair). Will be challenging.
- **New requirements (damp & mould; ventilation/security; floor coverings):** support raising standards but call for evidence-based costing and piloting/targeted provision on floor coverings rather than blanket mandates.
- **Alignment with MEES:** support EPC C by 2030 but seek clarity on metrics (HEM), retain current EPC metrics until finalised, and avoid unintended disruption to decarbonisation plans.
- **Funding & deliverability:** urge a funded approach (e.g. long-term rent certainty, long term retrofit funding, and exploring an ask for existing homes overall)

Decent Homes - Scotland

Tolerable standard - The most basic standard for all homes in Scotland

Repairing standard - Applies to the private rented sector

Scottish Housing Quality Standard

- Introduced in 2004 with a target of all social homes (with some exemptions) complying by 2015 covering 5 broad areas:



Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) 2

- ESSH first introduced in 2014 and replaced by ESSH2 in 2019

No current standard for flooring or furnishing

Decent Homes – Wales WHQS

What is Wales doing?

- **The WHQS 2023** replaces the earlier Welsh standards
- Much more prescriptive and detailed than England's DHS
- Applies at an individual property level – so not the portfolio of properties.

Implementation Mechanisms

- Statutory standard
- Self-assessment backed up by audit and regulatory scrutiny
- Extensive asset data collection

Challenges

- Scale of compliance
- Data quality and system readiness
- Funding gap vs ambition

Wales takeaway

From “decent” to **measurable, auditable quality**.

**Housing
Executive**

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Carbon reduction/ retrofit - England



Policy context:

- Increased focus on fuel poverty/2030 target
- 2025 spending review allocated £13.2bn to the Warm Homes Plan
- 2025 spending review committed £4.2bn over three years to flood defence, raising annual flood budget by 5%

Warm Homes Plan – Key asks

- £3.7bn of additional capital funding for the WH:SHF
- Additional funding for heat networks
- Due to be published...??
- Ongoing engagement with DESNZ on the design of key programmes (i.e. WH:SHF)

EPC / Home Energy Model reform

- Pushing for ongoing engagement with the sector as part of confirming measures and developing guidance.

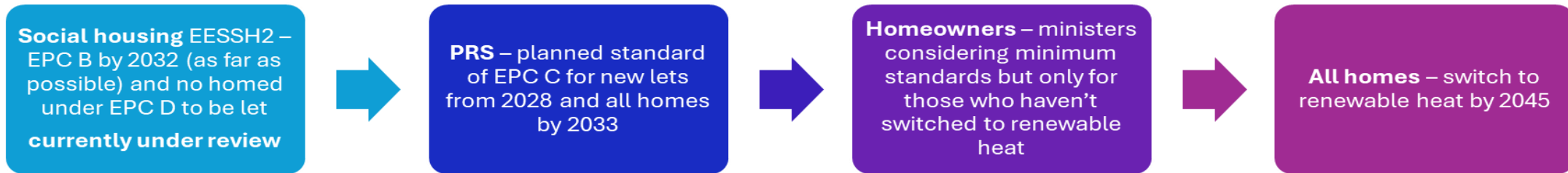
Post 2030

- Moving towards 2050 – what does the government expect from housing organisations?
- What do housing associations need to move towards decarbonisation? Funding, policy staging posts, consumer appetite, strong supply chain

Carbon reduction / retrofit - Scotland

A confusing picture across the housing sector with delays to regulations and uncertainty about standards and timescales BUT overarching statutory target of **net-zero by 2045**

Standards and regulations across tenures:



Only 8% of social housing currently meets the target of EPC B

Interesting projects and emerging legislation

- Scottish Government considering [an equivalent of Passivhaus standard](#) for all new build
- Passivhaus [examples in the social housing sector](#) – it can be done, but can it be done at scale?
- Niddrie Road – full tenement deep retrofit in Glasgow [evaluated by CaCHE](#)
- Tenement maintenance – [proposals for compulsory owners associations](#)

Carbon reduction / retrofit - Wales

What is Wales doing?

- Carbon reduction is fully embedded in the WHQS 2023
- Strong expectations around energy efficiency and retrofit
- More ambitious than England in intent

Implementation Mechanisms

- WHQS requirements
- Programme funding (where available)
- Strategic asset planning expectations

Challenges

- Funding certainty
- Supply chain and skills
- Balancing decarbonisation with tenant disruption

Wales takeaway

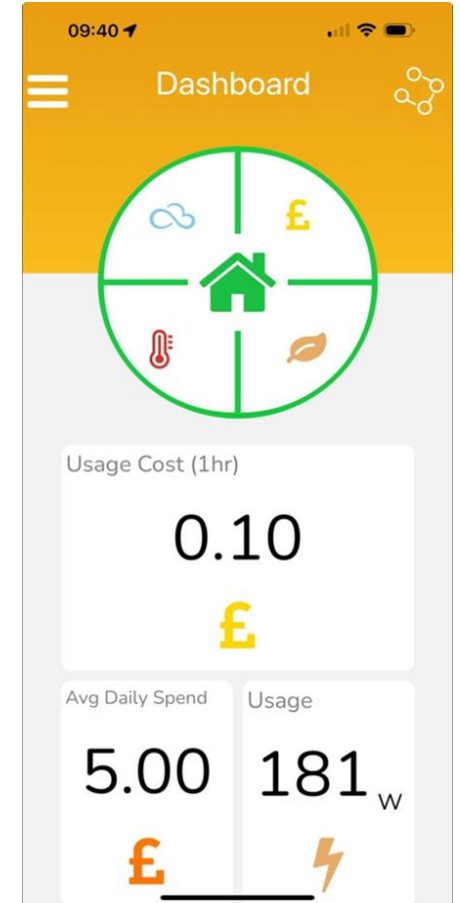
Policy ambition is clear – **delivery pathway less so.**

Special Initiative – Northern Ireland



- **Engage, Educate & Empower - NIHE**

- Leading on a 400-unit low carbon pilot with a focus on tenant engagement, education and live data monitoring
- Current cross reference best practice from GB and Ireland as no policy landscape for low carbon heating and whole house retrofit in NI.
- PAS 2035 concept – whole house approach....Going forward may switch to PAS 2030 if retrofit programmes is based on single items e.g. CWI, EWI etc.
- Tenants using data to inform decisions and we are using data to inform future policy
- Currently developing plans to create our own Skills & Net-Zero Centre of Excellence



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Special Initiatives – England

2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.



- Make sure that warning signs of poor quality homes or residents at risk of harm are not missed – will help to find your silence
- Trust is critical for residents to share data with their landlord – explain how you will use data
- Make it as easy as possible for residents to share information with you
- Staff must be trained, supported, enabled and empowered to play their part



- Aim to gather actionable insight – have a plan for how data will be used
- More data may initially increase demand on housing services – this should be welcomed and prepared for
- Culture is key – all staff must see this as a core part of their role
- Effective, joined up IT systems help – but work can start before transformation is finished

Special Initiatives – Scotland



Designing Homes for Healthy Cognitive Ageing

Embedding inclusive design

- Inclusive and accessible design isn't just for specialist providers or new build homes.
- Simple features can be factored into planned or cyclical maintenance and don't have to add costs.
- Making accessibility the norm rather than the exception improves housing for everyone!



Special Initiatives – Wales

Building Social Value and Fair Work

With the implementation of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Wales Act, the research will examine:

- **Good practice** examples of the **construction industry** and **housing maintenance** delivering **social value** in Wales.
- **What works** in **supporting people facing barriers** into construction employment, education and training?
- What are the **risks** and **opportunities** of social value creation?
- The project is grounded in real projects, lived experience and delivery realities



Thank you.

See you at the
next conference!



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