

EBOOK

HOW TO NAVIGATE REGULATORY IMPACTS -

Strategic Solutions for Recruitment Challenges in Asset Management

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OVERVIEW >>

Adequate housing is a fundamental human right, according to the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR). In a special **report** the OHCHR outlines some of the key elements of the fundamentals of adequate housing which include:

- **Secure tenure**
- **Availability of services and infrastructure**
- **Affordability**
- **Habitability**
- **Accessibility**
- **Location**
- **Cultural adequacy**

Asset management sectors within Housing Associations (HAs) and Registered Providers (RPs) operating in the UK today must deal with a wide range of regulations including the Building Safety Act, the Grenfell Inquiry, Awab's Law, and the Social Housing Regulation Act (SHRA), all of which are designed to keep tenants safe and secure but which also provide significant recruitment challenges.

In this eBook we look at how the regulations have impacted recruitment, reshaped the need for specialised roles, led to roles that require a stronger customer focus and focused attention on compliance within the framework of multiple regulations and rapidly-evolving market demands.

THE BUILDING SAFETY ACT AND THE GRENFELL INQUIRY >>

On the night of 14 June 2017 a small fire broke out on the fourth floor of the Grenfell Tower block in North Kensington, West London.

It spread quickly via the cladding on the outside of the building and made escape and rescue difficult.

72 people died as a result and many more were injured in the deadliest residential fire since the Blitz in World War II.

On 15 August 2017, a formal inquiry was set up to examine the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the fire and the final report, published in September 2024, can be accessed [here](#). Over the last seven years the Inquiry has shared over 320,000 documents, received over 16,000 witness statements and held more than 300 public hearings in the course of trying to establish the causes of the fire.

The [Executive Summary](#) concluded that the fire at Grenfell Tower was 'the culmination of decades of failure by central government and other bodies in positions of responsibility in the construction industry to look carefully into the danger of incorporating combustible materials into the external walls of high-rise residential buildings and to act on the information available to them'.

The report shares the responsibility for the extent and severity of the fire between successive governments, [The Building Research Establishment](#) (BRE), [The British Board of Agrément](#) (BBA), [Local Authority Building Control](#) (LABC), [The National House Building Council](#) (NHBC), [The Building Research Establishment](#) (BRE) and [The United Kingdom Accreditation Service](#) (UKAS) but lays specific blame on the testing and marketing

of combustible cladding materials, the manufacturers of which, it says, engaged in 'systematic dishonesty' by manipulating testing processes, misrepresenting test data and misleading the market.

In 2018 the government published the [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#), entitled Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report, which was led by Dame Judith Hackitt. Dame Judith described 'how the regulatory system covering high-rise and complex buildings was not fit for purpose' and stressed the need for a 'radical overhaul to futureproof the system'. She made many recommendations including a new regulatory framework to improve building standards and safety to prevent such an occurrence from happening again.

The most significant of these recommendations is the [Building Safety Act](#) which gained Royal Assent in April 2022 and which aims to give residents and homeowners more rights and protections to ensure that their homes are safe. It promises assistance to leaseholders affected by cladding issues and specifies how homes should be constructed and maintained to ensure safety in the future.

IT ALSO CREATED THREE NEW BODIES TO OVERSEE THE CHANGES >>

1 > The Building Control Authority (formerly The Building Safety Regulator) requires everyone involved in undertaking building work on High-Risk Buildings (HRBs) to demonstrate their compliance with the law.

2 > The National Regulator of Construction Products is the UK regulator for construction products and leads on their regulation to ensure that the performance claims of products are met.

3 > The New Homes Ombudsman provides an impartial investigative service to resolve complaints about new homes.

We conducted a survey asking key stakeholders such as Social Housing Providers the question:

'How have recent regulations (e.g., Building Safety Act, Grenfell Inquiry, Awab's Law) impacted your recruitment needs for key roles like Building Safety Managers and surveyors?'



Recruitment need has increased significantly, with roles focused on risk management and prevention as well as extra resources for follow-up checks to ensure compliance with regulations and issues like damp and mold are resolved effectively.

The Building Safety Act has also increased digital and process expertise to support the development and management of effective building safety cases.

The increase has created a competitive environment with high salary demands, even for those who may have some missing skill sets but experience in some areas.

- Respondent

THE IMPACT ON RECRUITMENT FOR BUILDING SAFETY MANAGERS >>

In light of recent legislation the need for specialised roles such as Building Safety Managers (BSMs) and other compliance-driven professionals has changed considerably.

There are over **10,000 residential tower blocks** in the UK comprising 4,813 social residential buildings and 5,301 private residential buildings. In the public sector it's recommended that BSMs, who are not only responsible for housing but also hospitals and schools, are employed by local government authorities and housing associations. In the private sector, BSMs are employed by property management companies, construction companies, and real estate development companies.

Reporting to an Accountable Person (AP) [usually the owner of the property, or the person who manages it] BSMs have a wide and varied range of duties.

These include:

- Overseeing safety systems and implementing safety protocols, particularly with regard to fire safety and structural integrity
- Conducting risk assessments to highlight potential hazards
- Managing and maintaining safety equipment and systems
- Liaising with managers, property owners and regulatory authorities
- Developing and overseeing emergency response protocols and safety plans
- Educating tenants on safety procedures
- Coordinating maintenance and safety inspections
- Training maintenance and management staff
- Staying updated on the latest safety standards and regulations to ensure best practice.

The role of BSMs has evolved beyond recognition in response to recent legislation and requires these professionals to have advanced knowledge of building safety protocols, fire regulations and risk management among many other things. This reshaping of the role has led to heightened demand for suitably-qualified and experienced people and both the public and private sectors are experiencing shortages of them.

We asked Building Service Manager and Surveyor contractors a range of questions to gauge their attitude towards the new regulations, such as:

'What factors are most important to you when considering a new job in housing asset management? (e.g., salary, flexible working, company culture, career progression).'



There are many factors that are important to me, but above all because I'm a working mum with young children, the role must offer flexibility. The salary has to match my skills and experience and the organisation's culture has to be good. Career progression is very important to me too.

- Respondent

HOW CAN OWNERS AND MANAGERS ATTRACT AND RETAIN BSMS?

In the face of stiff competition for suitably-qualified people owners and managers can adopt several strategies to attract and retain BSMs.

The first is to offer a competitive salary structure that reflects the importance of the role, as well as the raft of qualifications, experience, and ongoing CPD that it requires.

Together with a competitive salary, decision-makers should consider offering a range of benefits such as agile working, the potential for flexible working, an essential car user allowance and a pension scheme.

The second is to offer essential training.

If your ideal candidate hasn't yet achieved their **Fire Safety Certificate for Construction** or their **Diploma in Building Safety Management** from the **Chartered Institute of Building** but has many of the other necessary qualifications and experience you require, it may well benefit your organisation to offer them the training they need to be able to perform the role to the best of their ability.

Other training opportunities might include qualifications from the **Institution of Fire Engineers** or the **Institute of Occupational Safety and Health** to broaden the BSM's range of skills.

If your potential candidate has all the necessary skills and qualifications but is hesitant about their abilities to communicate with residents or commercial tenants, consider a communications course that will enable them to get their messages across sensitively and engagingly.

Ongoing training can be a great incentive to join an organisation so think about offering leadership training, membership of professional bodies with the opportunities to attend conferences and events, technology courses and even less traditional training courses such as drone piloting which can assist greatly in safety assessment.

In our Building Service Manager and Surveyor survey we asked contractors:

'What are the biggest challenges you've faced during the recruitment process in this industry? (e.g., long interview processes, lack of clear communication, unclear job expectations)'



I had a good experience when I found my latest job as a Building Safety Manager. I interviewed for three roles and was offered two. In terms of the interview process, I consider two interviews per role to be sufficient and I'd consider pulling out of the process if I was asked to attend more than that.

- Respondent

In December 2020 two-year-old Awaab Ishak died from a respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in the one-bedroom Rochdale flat where he lived with his parents. An inquest found that Awaab's parents had repeatedly complained to Rochdale Boroughwide Housing about the presence of black mould in the kitchen and bathroom of the property, and had asked to be rehoused. They were told to paint over the mould.

AWAAB'S LAW (DAMP AND MOULD) >>

Following Awaab's tragic death in 2023, new legislation, Awaab's Law, was introduced to compel social landlords to fix mould and damp within a strict timeframe to prevent other, completely avoidable deaths.

Awaab's Law was introduced as part of the **Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023** which was designed to regulate social housing, tackle failing social landlords and deal with how complaints about unsafe living conditions to housing authorities are handled.

The **Regulator of Social Housing** was granted additional powers to inspect social housing providers and fine rogue social landlords, and the **Housing Ombudsman** is now able to publish best practice guidance to landlords following tenant complaints. Social landlords now have a strict time limit to address hazards such as mould and damp, inappropriate money transactions outside of the sector can now be investigated and Social Housing Managers are required to have specific qualifications to enable them to deal with mould and damp issues.

It is hoped that the Act will address systemic issues on the safety and quality of social housing as well as how tenants of social housing are treated by their landlords.

What does Awaab's Law mean for surveyors, repair managers and maintenance staff?

Because of the heightened regulatory scrutiny that Awaab's Law ushers in, stricter standards are being enforced on damp and mould in social housing. Social housing landlords are now required by law to investigate and rectify complaints promptly and effectively, and their obligations to do so are legally embedded within tenancy agreements. This means that social landlords must investigate any potential hazards within 14 days of the issues being raised, provide a written summary of their investigations within two days of inspection, begin work on remediation within seven days if the problem is found to pose a significant risk to health or safety, and complete the work within a reasonable timeframe.

All of this means that there is a growing demand for skilled and experienced surveyors, repair managers and maintenance staff. However, like many in-demand occupations, there are not enough people within the profession to fill the gaps and ensure that social housing stock is in good enough condition for its tenants. According to Statista there was a drop of **1,700** Chartered Surveyors, for example, from 96,500 in the last quarter of 2023 to 67,500 in the first quarter of 2024.

How then do social landlords recruit surveyors, repair managers and maintenance staff who are experienced enough to help social landlords be fully compliant with their new responsibilities?

The **Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors** (RICS) has drawn attention to the issue of the skills shortage throughout the construction and maintenance industries and the problems social landlords have recruiting skilled trades workers. It has begun a **campaign** in schools to attract young people into the industry in an effort to become more diverse in its recruitment strategies. It has also urged the government to establish a skills taskforce to identify both gaps and opportunities, invest in apprenticeships, and develop a GCSE in the English Built Environment to inspire young people into the industry.

Other measures that can benefit social landlords in their search for the talent they need are first to source the specialised candidates through partnerships with environmental consultants with whom they may already have partnered.

Such partnerships can offer energy management strategies, environmental impact reports and energy minimisation strategies which are designed to increase operational efficiency and minimise costs. Such measures not only reduce a social landlord's administrative burden but also reduce energy consumption, helping to work towards a Net Zero target and helping eliminate fuel poverty among tenants.

Technology can also assist with assessing and managing housing conditions effectively and can be involved in contractual activities (rent collection, allocating properties, managing tenancies and estates, and repairing and maintaining homes) as well as social activities (those things designed to better support tenants including money, housing and health advice, support in getting into or back into work and developing and regenerating a community).

The Internet of Things can also be used to identify repairs to equipment such as humidity sensors and boilers and enable proactive maintenance to ensure healthy homes for tenants.

THE SHRA – BEYOND COMPLAINTS >>

The **Social Housing (Regulation) Act** (SHRA) received Royal Assent in July 2023. The Bill was designed to ‘make provision about the regulation of social housing; about the terms of approved schemes for the investigation of housing complaints; and for connected purposes’.

Since the Grenfell Tower disaster, and the death of Awaab Ishak, tenants and social housing providers have been working with the government to amplify their voices and ensure that they have decent, safe and affordable homes. It also outlines how tenants can ask for help when they encounter problems with their social housing. The Act should guarantee that social housing providers are compliant with consumer standards, that tenants understand what they can expect from their landlords, that they can find out how their landlords are performing, and that they can have their complaints resolved quickly and effectively.

Under a new **Charter for Social Housing Residents** social housing tenants can now expect the following to be enshrined in law >>

- To be and to feel safe in their home
- Receive information from their landlord about the service they can expect
- Have any complaints dealt with fairly and quickly
- Be treated with respect
- Be able to speak up and have their voice heard
- Have a good quality home and neighbourhood in which to live
- Be supported to be able to own their own home.

The SHRA will ensure that social landlords adhere to the charter, work in the best interests of their tenants, remedy problems when they arise, and, most importantly, listen to residents when they raise issues relating to the safety and quality of their homes.

CUSTOMER FOCUS AND FEEDBACK ROLES

This rebalancing of the relationship between social landlords and their tenants places a greater emphasis on communication between the two parties.

The Act requires landlords to nominate a 'designated person' to be responsible for complying with all aspects of health and safety, communicate with tenants, and deal with complaints and maintenance requests as and when they arise.

A greater focus on the importance of communication has led to an increase in staff being trained in customer service and engagement and has led to a shift in recruitment needs for roles requiring a stronger customer focus, even within non-customer-facing, technical areas such as data management and repairs.

Social landlords are, therefore, increasingly looking for talent that has high-level communication skills to enable the requirements of the Act to be enacted, when they're recruiting new members of staff.

An alternative to this approach is to upskill their existing staff and offer them in-depth training in customer relations and how to handle feedback and complaints more effectively. This is an important aspect of the Act due to the emphasis it places on tenants being heard.

Good communication skills have been valued in the private sector for many years because of the advantages they bring. These include greater productivity, a deeper connection with customers and colleagues alike, and their ability to reduce tension and conflict in a wide variety of situations. They're important in all methods of communication – verbal, non-verbal, phone and written.

Communication and customer relation training empowers employees to develop empathy, build trust, and build strong connections with colleagues and tenants and enables all stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcome.

COMPLIANCE WITH BROADER REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS >>

Within this new spirit of accountability and compliance, and the legal requirements behind many social landlords' decision-making processes sits the use of data. Social landlords hold vast quantities of data about both their tenants and the accommodation they provide and the necessity to use this data effectively, especially within the context of building safety and environmental compliance, has become urgent.

The Building Safety Act states explicitly how social housing should be constructed and maintained and the new bodies it created (the Building Safety Regulator, the National Regulator of Construction Products, and the New Homes Ombudsman) provide oversight to ensure that social housing manages its buildings better and builds high-quality new homes.

Since the changes, a significant burden has fallen on professionals such as Building Service Managers to ensure that homes are fit for purpose and are maintained effectively. But BSMs cannot function in a vacuum and using the data held by social landlords is the key to unlocking effectiveness and cost-saving.

A 2021 [survey](#) by [Inside Housing](#) revealed that housing associations in England spent a total of £5.51bn on maintenance and repairs from 2019-20, an average of £1,579 per property. Keeping track of expenditure and where the money needs to be spent can prove problematic as a report by [BCN](#), a Digital Transformation Specialist, entitled '[Data Challenges in Social Housing 2024](#)' reveals. It cites [2023 research](#) from the Housing Ombudsman which found that 'poor knowledge and information management' were two primary reasons why landlords were failing in their duty to provide adequate services. Adequate record keeping and information are crucial to social landlords to enable them to respond to the challenges of today's social housing and to keep tenants safe.

Within this framework, there is a growing demand for data professionals who can support compliance through robust data tracking, monitoring and reporting systems. However, once again, the prevailing UK skills gap prevents social landlords from effectively using their data to perform all that is required from them, both within the law and to ensure minimum standards of housing.

THE NEED FOR DATA SPECIALISTS

The Housing Ombudsman report highlights the need for consistency in databases, with 47% of large landlords reporting synchronisation issues. Other issues that affected efficient data retrieval and use included outdated systems, poor quality record keeping and, most tellingly, a failure to train staff on either data quality or accurate record keeping.

This has far-reaching implications, from misunderstandings about what maintenance work needs to be done, whether smoke/carbon monoxide detectors have been fitted in multiple properties, right-to-buy issues, and accessing properties to perform repairs or safety checks.

The BCN report goes further and states that staff working for social landlords felt that the current approaches to how data is used prevent them from fulfilling their role properly, that current uses of technology are actually acting as barriers to employees delivering a good service and that poor quality data was enabling poor decision-making.

The imperative, therefore, is for social landlords to recruit specialists with strong analytical and compliance backgrounds, with an emphasis on cross-sector skills development. However, candidates with the vision to understand that data helps social landlords make informed decisions, drive productivity and efficiency, and to develop a record of their tenants that's as unique as they are, can come from any background, not just from within the social housing sector. Casting a wide candidate net will bring new ideas, new ways of thinking and doing and added value for social landlords both in the short- and long-term.

IN CONCLUSION >>

The lessons that have been learned from both the Grenfell Inquiry and the circumstances surrounding Awaab Ishak's death have caused a massive reconsideration of the safety and comfort of social housing tenants, many of whom are the most vulnerable members of our society.

The recruitment challenges that follow from the changes brought about by new and powerful legislation have given many hiring managers pause for thought and have necessitated a reconsideration of the importance of the roles of Building Service Managers, repair managers, and maintenance staff. And it's highlighted the shortage of the suitably-qualified and -experienced staff who are needed to perform roles designed to keep tenants safe in their homes.

Hiring managers within social housing not only have to look for candidates who have the experience to maintain housing stock, but also possess a raft of other skills that previously weren't required including highly-technical qualifications and a comprehensive knowledge of evolving regulations, as well as the soft skills needed for excellent communication between all parties.

Market demands can be challenging when searching for suitable candidates but widening the thought processes of a search and offering training to upskill existing staff may go some way to alleviate the current skills shortage crisis and guarantee that events never take a tragic turn again.

