

Social housing sector remains financially strong

The Regulator of Social Housing has today (5 March) published the results of its latest [quarterly survey](#) of registered providers' financial health. The report covers the period from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020.

The sector remains financially strong with access to sufficient finance, despite the continuing challenges arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

The sector has good access to finance with total cash and undrawn facilities totalling £35.5 billion at the end of the quarter. The sector continues to attract considerable investment and has raised in total £113 billion in private finance. This includes £3 billion in new facilities during the quarter.

Capitalised repairs and maintenance spending increased to £455 million, a 50% increase on the previous quarter, although it was lower than forecast. Providers have reported ongoing delays as a result of lockdown restrictions; however, outturn spend was more in line with levels seen before the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Investment in housing supply during the quarter was £3.4 billion, an increase of 42% on the previous quarter. This was higher than the forecast for contractually committed schemes. Sales receipts in the quarter totalled £1.7 billion; 17% higher than the forecast and reflecting the caution and uncertainty shown by providers in making forecasts.

Arrears and void loss figures remain stable, although still affected by coronavirus restrictions and associated increase in unemployment. Rent collection rates continue to be consistent with normal seasonal trends, and underlying cashflow performance remains strong.

Forecasts for the next 12 months indicate that performance and plans are continuing to return towards levels seen before the coronavirus pandemic, however this could be impacted if the Government is forced to delay elements of its roadmap.

Will Perry, Director of Strategy at RSH, said:

The social housing sector continues to show financial strength and forecasts increased spend on maintenance and investment over the next twelve months.

The continuing challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic reinforce the need for providers to manage risk effectively and ensure they can both maintain services to tenants and plan and invest for the future.

Notes to editors

- The quarterly survey provides a regular source of information regarding the financial health of private registered providers, in particular with regard to their liquidity position.
- The quarterly survey returns summarised in the report cover the period from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020 and the latest report is based on regulatory returns from 214 PRPs and PRP groups who own or manage more than 1,000 homes. The survey Data about income collection, including rent collection, was first collected in 2013.
- The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.
- For press office contact details, see the [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

[CMA receives multiple appeals over Ofgem price control](#)

News story

Nine firms are seeking permission from the CMA to appeal against Ofgem's price controls for energy companies.



The companies are appealing against changes to the electricity and gas transmission, and gas distribution, licences which set out how much energy companies can charge their customers. These changes are a result of the RII0-2 price control decision issued in [December 2020](#) by Ofgem.

The appeals largely focus on the allowed return on investment and the way Ofgem calculated the costs the companies would spend on maintaining and investing in their networks over the next 5 years.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has 14 working days to decide whether to grant these firms permission to appeal. However, this timeline can be extended to 20 working days if the CMA needs to consider any submission from Ofgem regarding the applications for permission to appeal.

If permission is granted, the CMA will then have 6 months to come to a final view on the appeals.

The 9 firms seeking permission to appeal this price control are:

- Cadent Gas Limited
- National Grid Electricity Transmission plc
- National Grid Gas plc
- Northern Gas Networks Limited
- Southern Gas Networks plc and Scotland Gas Networks plc (joint application)
- Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc
- SP Transmission plc
- Wales & West Utilities Limited

For more information on the process of such appeals, please see the [CMA70](#) and [CMA71](#) guidance.

All information on this case is available on the [Energy Licence Modification Appeals page](#).

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Homes England's MMC research study takes shape

Homes England, the government's housing agency, has finalised its research themes for its six-year, 1,800 home Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) Research Commission and has today published a [report outlining the study](#).

One year in, research and development partners Atkins and Faithful+Gould have completed a large body of work to shape the data and collection methodology and start data collection, as well as engagement with industry.

As part of the government's objective to improve construction productivity and encourage the uptake of MMC in housing delivery, the next phase of this research project will see data collected across eight of Homes England's sites using MMC.

Monitoring the construction of around 1,800 homes across the country over several years, the study will test the performance of different types of MMC to provide long-term, in-depth and verifiable data so that informed decisions about emerging construction technologies can be made.

Covering a range of offsite and modular building techniques, modern methods of construction have the potential to be significantly more productive than traditional building methods; allowing homes to be built more quickly, addressing labour and skills shortages and improving the quality, consistency and energy efficiency of newly built homes.

The research will explore a range of themes, including cost and pace of build, safety performance, snagging and defect issues, construction wastage and logistics and energy efficiency performance. It will also seek to learn lessons about how these technologies will be deployed and give confidence to the industry to drive a greater uptake of MMC technologies.

Working with the Building Research Establishment and University College London, Atkins and Faithful+Gould will collect and monitor data from the developers during the six-year programme and produce annual updates on the research findings, before a final report is published at the end of the build programme.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said: "Building green, well-designed homes is at the heart of this Government's mission to support people in every part of the country. Our support for Modern Methods of Construction will play a vital role in this and this research will help us further understand these new construction technologies which could be revolutionary for the industry in terms of improved productivity, build speed, and economies of scale."

Robert Stone, Technical Director at Homes England, said: "We are committed to providing the industry with the body of evidence it is asking for in order to

drive a greater understanding of modern house building technologies and increase the uptake of modern methods of construction (MMC). “Now more than ever, we recognise that more needs to be done to share learning and build confidence in MMC. This large-scale, long-term and in-depth project will provide the sector with the valuable evidence it needs to make informed decisions about MMC and deliver better homes faster.”

Terrence Stocks, UK Head of Public Sector at Faithful+Gould, said: “With the impacts of Covid-19 and the realisation of our exit from the EU, the need to protect and improve productivity and grow UK revenue is great. Coupled with the release of the UK Government’s Construction Playbook, the importance of this research project has grown. “The work of the combined Faithful+Gould, Atkins, BRE and UCL teams over the past year has been great, and despite remote working a fully collaborative multi-organisational approach has been maintained, with the final metrics and collection methods of the report being tested with industry. The team and the developer organisations, along with their contractors, are now ready to move forward with increased pace, and the next year will see us gathering and analysing data to support a study that will hopefully drive an accelerated uptake of MMC in the residential sector.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

MMC Research Commission Site Details

The below table outlines the sites and the proposed technologies currently involved in the study, though this is subject to change.

Site Name	Location	Size	Primary MMC Technology
Northstowe Phase 2	Cambridge	406 homes	Modular
East Quayside	Newcastle	292 homes	Light Gauge Steel Frame
Swindon Gateway	Swindon	159 homes	Modular
Spencers Park	Hemel Hempstead	600 homes	Panellised
Grappenhall Heys Phase 2	Warrington	220 homes	Modular & Panellised
York Road	Birmingham	80 homes	Panellised
Tattenhoe Phase 4	Milton Keynes	100 homes	Panellised
Park Prewett – Hollies Phase	Basingstoke	30 homes	Modular

About Atkins

Atkins (www.atkinsglobal.com) is one of the world’s most respected design, engineering and project management consultancies, employing over 18,300 people across the UK, North America, Middle East and Africa, Asia Pacific and Europe. We build long-term trusted partnerships to create a world where lives are enriched through the implementation of our ideas. You can view Atkins’ recent projects [here](#).

About Faithful+Gould

Faithful+Gould (www.fgould.com) is a world leading integrated project and program management consultancy. Operating at the forefront of our industry for 70 years, our integrated approach delivers business improvements and efficiencies across every environment and every sector. Faithful+Gould is a member of the SNC-Lavalin Group.

About SNC-Lavalin

Founded in 1911, SNC-Lavalin is a fully integrated professional services and project management company with offices around the world. SNC-Lavalin connects people, technology and data to help shape and deliver world-leading concepts and projects, while offering comprehensive innovative solutions across the asset lifecycle. Our expertise is wide-ranging – consulting & advisory, intelligent networks & cybersecurity, design & engineering, procurement, project & construction management, operations & maintenance, decommissioning and sustaining capital – and delivered to clients in four strategic sectors: EDPM (engineering, design and project management), Infrastructure, Nuclear and Resources, supported by Capital. People. Drive. Results. www.snclavalin.com

[UN Human Rights Council 46: UK statement for the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Countering Terrorism](#)

We thank the Special Rapporteur for her report.

Human Rights and fundamental freedoms must be protected throughout all counter terrorism activities.

We agree on the importance of mainstreaming gender into preventing and countering violent extremism.

Gender stereotypes can be reinforced in research and programming, with women presented as victims or peacemakers, and insufficient attention paid to their diverse roles, in either countering or participating in violent movements. Evidence of women's experiences of terrorism in East Africa underlines the complexity of this issue.

The UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, recognises women's key role in developing strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism.

In Syria, participation in UK supported CVE programmes helps address the rise of radicalisation and prepare participants for reintegration into communities.

We particularly agree with the Special Rapporteur on protecting the right to family life.

Supporting and strengthening family ties can increase individual resilience to radicalisation and recruitment by building self-awareness, empathy, and mutually-supportive networks.

Can the Special Rapporteur provide further advice on best practice for supporting families to protect themselves?

Thank you.

Trustworthy data governance will unlock innovation, research suggests

- A major new CDEI poll finds that the public believe digital technology has a role to play in tackling the pandemic, but its potential is not being fully realised.
- Public support for greater use of digital technology depends on trust in how it is governed. The single biggest predictor for supporting greater use of digital technology was an individual believing that 'the right rules and regulations are in place'. This was more important than demographic factors such as age.
- Trend analysis of the use of AI and data-driven technologies in the same period reveals that conventional data analysis has been more widely used in the COVID-19 response than AI.

The Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation (CDEI), the UK government's advisory body on the responsible use of AI and data-driven technology, has published new research on the use of AI and data-driven technology in the UK's COVID-19 response, highlighting insights into public attitudes, as well as trends it has identified.

The major longitudinal study, with a representative sample of over 12,000 people, ran from June to December 2020. The results show significant public support over that period for the use of data-driven technology to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost three quarters (72%) of the UK population felt that digital technology had the potential to be used in response to the outbreak – a belief shared across all demographic groups. A majority of the public (average 69%) also showed support, in principle, for a number of specific use-cases – including technologies that have not been widely adopted – such as wearable technology to aid social distancing in the workplace.

However, many respondents felt that the potential of data-driven technology was not being fully realised. Fewer than half (42%) said digital technology was making the situation in the UK better (only 7% claimed it was making matters worse). Respondents cited concerns about whether people and organisations would be able to use the technology properly (39%). This was more than double the number who pointed to problems with the technology itself (17%). This points to an opportunity gap – a disconnect between support for technology’s potential, and the extent of its current application.

The research uncovered a clear relationship between trustworthy governance and support for the adoption of new technologies. When controlling for all other variables, the CDEI found that ‘trust that the right rules and regulations are in place’ is the single biggest predictor of whether someone will support the use of digital technology. This was substantially more predictive than attitudinal variables such as people’s level of concern about the pandemic, belief that the technology would be effective, and demographic variables such as age and education. Just under half (43%) said existing rules and regulations were sufficient to ensure the technology is used responsibly, still close to a quarter (24%) disagreed. Older respondents tended to have lower levels of trust in the existing rules and regulations.

The CDEI urges action to build trustworthy governance that earns the confidence of citizens over the long-term, pointing to principles outlined in its [Trust Matrix](#), such as enhancing accountability and transparency. There is currently relatively low knowledge about where to seek recourse in cases where data-driven technology has caused harm: 45% do not know where to raise concerns if they are unhappy with the way digital technology was being used. This finding is consistent with [other CDEI-commissioned](#) research: 68% of people reported that they would not know who to complain to if they felt that an unfair automated decision had been made about them in response to a job application.

The report also highlights trends and patterns relating to the use of AI and data-driven technology during the pandemic. One of these is that, aside from advancing vaccine research, AI did not play the outsized role many thought it would in relief efforts, in part due to a lack of access to data on COVID-19 to train algorithms. Instead, conventional data analysis, underpinned by new data sharing agreements, has made the biggest difference to the work of health services and public authorities.

Edwina Dunn, Deputy Chair for the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, said: “Data-driven technologies including AI have great potential for our economy and society. We need to ensure that the right governance regime is in place if we are to unlock the opportunities that these technologies present. The CDEI will be playing its part to ensure that the UK is developing governance approaches that the public can have confidence in.”

John Whittingdale, Minister of State for Media and Data at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said: “We are determined to build back better and capitalise on all we have learnt from the pandemic, which has forced us to share data quickly, efficiently and responsibly for the public

good. This research confirms that public trust in how we govern data is essential. Through our National Data Strategy we have committed to unlocking the huge potential of data to tackle some of society's greatest challenges, while maintaining our high standards of data protection and governance."

Ends

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Notes to Editor

- The CDEI was set up in 2018 to advise on the governance of AI and data-driven technology. The Centre is overseen by an independent Board, made up of experts from across industry, civil society, academia and government.
- The CDEI collated examples of novel use-cases of AI and data specifically being used to counter and mitigate the effects of the pandemic in its [COVID-19 repository](#). The database highlights the breadth of applications, which range from the piloting of drones that delivered medical supplies to remote regions, to the creation of health equipment databases that monitored the availability of assets in the NHS. It comprises 118 individual use-cases, spanning a broad array of locations and sectors.
- On behalf of the CDEI, over the period of June-December 2020, Deltapoll conducted six surveys to understand public attitudes towards the use of digital technology in the UK's COVID-19 response. Each online survey asked the same set of questions every month to over 2,000 members of the public, representing all regions of the UK. Results were weighted to be representative of the UK adult population as a whole. By combining all six datasets, the CDEI was able to analyse the results from a total population of 12,113 respondents.
- The CDEI published a report on [public sector data sharing](#) in 2020. It involved a detailed analysis of projects where data had been shared between government departments, and with commercial organisations, identifying recurring barriers, and the steps that were taken to address them. The report focused on citizen trust, arguing that it needs to be addressed if we are to maximise the value of data held. It included a [framework](#) to drive forward trustworthy data sharing in the public interest. The CDEI is working in [partnership](#) with other organisations to apply, test and revise the framework in different contexts.
- In June 2020, the CDEI published its [AI Barometer](#), which is a major analysis of the most pressing opportunities, risks, and governance challenges associated with AI and data use in the UK, initially across five sectors. The CDEI convened over 120 experts to generate a community driven view of AI and data use in the UK. It identified barriers to innovation, such as low data quality and availability, a lack of coordinated policy and practice, and a lack of transparency around AI and data use, arguing that these barriers contribute to public distrust, which acts as a more fundamental brake on innovation.