UK COLLABORATIVE CENTRE FOR HOUSING EVIDENCE

Learning from experiences of remediation in the building safety crisis

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Contents

Executive summary 5
1. Introduction 11
2. Research context 14
   Introduction 14
   Research approach 14
   Context and progress of remediation 16
3. Planning remediation 20
   Introduction 20
   Summary of survey results 20
   Planning work and preparing leaseholders 20
   Consultation and choice 22
4. Impacts of remediation 26
   Introduction 26
   Summary of survey results 26
   Mental wellbeing 27
   Impact on the senses 28
   Privacy, security, and safety 33
   Use of space 37
   On-site construction practices 39
   Moving out 42
   Issues for landlords 43
5. Communication during works 45
   Introduction 45
   Summary of survey results 45
   Acknowledging the building safety legacy and rebuilding trust 46
   Day-to-day communication relating to remediation work 47
   Communication of changing timeframes 49
   Leaseholders' self-organising and communicating 50
6. Key learning points for good practice in remediation 52
   Introduction 52
   1. Involvement and liveability in planning remediation 52
   2. Consultation and choice 53
   3. Communication 54
   4. Daily working practices for those working on-site 55
   5. Assurance 56
References 58

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Executive summary

Background

Building safety problems identified in the aftermath of the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire have resulted in the need for large-scale remediation of buildings around the UK. In many cases, this will mean removing external wall systems comprised of cladding and insulation, and retrofitting buildings with alternative materials. In some cases, internal works to communal areas and people's homes are also required, for example to remedy inadequate compartmentation or replace flammable materials. These are long-term programmes of work that are being undertaken in close proximity to households, with a significant impact on their daily lives. Tom Hunt, MP for Ipswich, described one building in which he came across "conditions that I would feel guilty about an animal living in, never mind human beings", with "shrink wrap… leading to virtually no natural light at all in the building. Bars across the windows were added, meaning that getting fresh air was very hard", with serious anxiety and mental health impacts for residents (Westminster Hall Debate, 2022).

This report is based on a survey of 149 leaseholders and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 leaseholders in England who have experience of building safety remediation. The purpose of the research is twofold. First, to report the experiences of leaseholders living in buildings which have been undergoing remediation. Second, to generate learning and key principles in order to improve the experience in the many buildings in which work is yet to commence.

As the research has been specifically undertaken with long leaseholders of flats in England, throughout the report the term 'leaseholders' is used, rather than residents or tenants. However, many of the issues described in the report are likely to overlap significantly with the experiences of private and social rent tenants in mixed-tenure buildings undergoing remediation. As such, many of the key learning points which feature in the last section of the report will be of direct relevance to the remediation of residential buildings, regardless of the tenure structure.

Planning remediation

90% of leaseholders responding to the survey and living in buildings during remediation agreed that the work had changed how they felt about their home. The fundamental problem with remediation so far is that in many cases discussed here it has proceeded without consideration for the experience of those who are living through the works, and whose homes are impacted. In many cases, leaseholders have not been viewed as having a voice in remediation, and there is little evidence that their interests have been at the heart of decision-making. However, steps can be taken to minimise the negative impact of remediation works on those living through these major works.

Prior to work commencing, 68% of leaseholders responding to the survey did not have a good understanding of the impact that remediation would have. There is a need to improve pre-remediation communication, and to clearly set out lines of responsibility, what work is being done to the building (the scope of work), when it will be done (the schedule of work), and how leaseholders are likely to be affected (the impact of work). During interviews, it was clear that not all leaseholders were offered an open meeting with the different organisations involved in the project before remediation started. Only 41% of leaseholders responding to the survey felt that they understood who was responsible for managing the remediation project.

In planning remediation works and choosing different courses of action, there has not been enough focus on the experience of those who would be living in the buildings. This fits with the overall response to the survey, in which 80% of leaseholders did not feel that their views were listened to when planning remediation works. In interviews, many leaseholders described a process of being told about aspects of the works, rather than being consulted or involved in a discussion. This contributed to the overall impression that the conduct of remediation work was another facet of the building safety crisis in which control and agency over decisions relating to their homes was removed from leaseholders.

Lived impacts of remediation

Whilst remediation represented another step towards the possibility of being free from building safety problems, living through the work has a negative impact on mental wellbeing. 87% of leaseholders responding to the survey and living in the building during remediation agreed that their mental health had been negatively affected by the work. Some leaseholders were managing conditions such as stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal feelings, and PTSD, which were manifestations of the ongoing stressors associated with building safety problems.

The negative impact of noise was highlighted by virtually all participants and was one of the biggest issues experienced by leaseholders. This was in line with the results from the survey, in which 84% of leaseholders living in buildings during remediation reported that they were not able to enjoy peace and quiet at home during the work. Loss of light was also an issue for numerous leaseholders; this was generally a result of the placement of scaffolding and boards, netting, and sheeting. 56% of leaseholders responding to the survey and living in buildings during remediation reported that they were not able to receive adequate natural light into the home during the works. During interviews, leaseholders with plastic sheeting were the most likely to highlight loss of light as a significant factor. It was often not clear to leaseholders why plastic sheeting rather than netting needed to be used, highlighting the need for more transparent engagement with leaseholders around the use of a material that can significantly impact on the experience of the home. Where possible, plastic sheeting should be avoided in favour of mesh, and in cases where it is necessary it should be used for the shortest period possible.

As well as light, the placement of scaffolding and wrapping materials could also affect air flow into homes. 59% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that they were not able to adequately ventilate their property when living there during works. A guiding principle of work should be to cause the least disruption necessary, for the shortest period, and to actively consider the impact on liveability for those who are resident in buildings through the works. Leaseholders were concerned about fluctuating temperatures due to coverings and the removal of insulation, with the latter compounded by anxiety around the rising costs of energy.

Most leaseholders reported impacts on their sense of privacy at home during remediation works, with many highlighting the intrusive nature of the work. In the survey, this was one of the biggest areas of dissatisfaction, with 73% of leaseholders living in buildings through remediation reporting that they did not have adequate privacy at home during the works. During interviews, for some female participants in particular, the loss of privacy contributed to a wider sense of unsafety at home. Living in a scaffolded building was highlighted in several cases as a security concern. This was also a significant area of dissatisfaction among survey respondents, with 74% of leaseholders reporting that their building did not feel secure during remediation works. Interviews uncovered several examples of individuals climbing scaffolding and accessing buildings, increased theft, and attempted burglaries. Building works could also change the feel of wider developments, with more people, and more semi-hidden areas which could create spaces for anti-social behaviour. Individuals also frequently lost access to communal green space, which was taken over for the storage of materials.

Many leaseholders reported that contractors working on site lacked awareness that they were working on occupied buildings and failed to adjust their behaviour to the context around them. There were several reports of smoking on site, which was a particular source of anxiety given the wider context of remediation projects. Avoidable noise, contractors staring into people's homes, and rubbish being left outside were also relatively common experiences, adding to the perception that homes were not being respected, and that the day-to-day lived experience was not considered.

Communication

Leaseholders often described communication with other parties involved in building remediation in terms of a fight, struggle, or battle. Many interviewees described negative experiences, such as being unable to get answers to reasonable questions, being ignored or dismissed as a nuisance, or being labelled as vexatious. It is essential to improve communications with leaseholders during remediation works, which may be aided by improving their involvement in planning work in the first place, and evidencing that the experience of those living in the building is being prioritised throughout the remediation process. 64% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that they did not find it easy to get in touch with those responsible for managing remediation during the works, and 70% reported that they had not found it easy to receive a response. Although channels of communication will differ across different buildings, it is important that leaseholders know who is responsible for communicating during remediation, what kind of information they will receive, and how often. Issues relating to communication may be built into contracting, to ensure that this is considered as an essential part of the remediation process, alongside the material safety improvements to buildings.

There was demand for more frequent and detailed information about the works that were being carried out. Information about what type of work was being carried out, in which part of the buildings, and when, may enable those living there to more effectively plan around the inevitable disruption. The communication of changing timeframes was a particular source of stress and frustration. 77% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that the timelines for different aspects of remediation had not been made clear to them. As with other areas, during interviews there was a call for greater transparency over set-backs, as well as more effective project planning. Understandably, leaseholders wanted to know when the work would be completed, because it marked not just the end of disruptive building work, but also the possibility that they could move on with their lives from a crisis that for many individuals has defined the last few years of their life.

Given the importance of leaseholders having a voice in remediation works, it is important to recognise that the mechanisms through which such involvement may happen will differ by building. For leaseholders in buildings approaching remediation, it is therefore important to consider the channels that exist – or may be established – to enable greater influence in the process of building works.

Five areas of key learning for good practice

There was a strong desire from leaseholders who participated in the research to improve the experience for others. The aim is not to generate prescriptive rules that must be applied in a uniform way for every remediation project, but to promote broader principles or approaches to planning and undertaking remediation with leaseholders in mind. The mistrust and sense of betrayal that has characterised many leaseholders' experiences of the building safety crisis underlines the need for remediation to be guided by: meaningful involvement, choice, transparency of information, understanding, and assurance. When a contractor starts a remediation project, this is not 'day one' for those living in the building, but may represent the culmination of many years of frustrating, stressful, anxious and uncertain experiences.

Principles of good practice for building safety remediation

1. Involvement and liveability in planning remediation

- Those leading remediation works should recognise leaseholders as key stakeholders in the remediation process, promoting a culture which values 'resident voice' and engagement
- In planning remediation, the views, opinions and preferences of leaseholders should help shape the approach to undertaking remediation work
- Promoting a liveable environment should be a core part of decision-making when planning remediation. Those responsible for remediation work should be able to evidence that the impacts on liveability have been considered, which may be used to inform choices relating to:
  - Phasing of work
  - Days / time of work
  - Access to common spaces
  - Maintaining ventilation and light
  - Noise mitigation measures
  - Measures to increase privacy
  - Site-security plans
- Measures that have a negative impact on liveability should be in place for the shortest possible time period, with these measures kept under regular review
- Leaseholders should be able to attend an open meeting / open day with contractors and other key organisations involved in remediation, prior to works commencing

2. Consultation and choice

- Leaseholders should be given meaningful choices – where these exist – relating to the conduct of remediation works and the materials used
- Those responsible for remediation should communicate the possible advantages and disadvantages of particular choices to leaseholders
- Where choice is not possible, this should be transparently explained and a rationale provided
- There should be transparency around how decisions about moving people from the building during remediation works are made, including underpinning guidance and processes

3. Communication

- A communications plan should be available to leaseholders, setting out responsibilities and expectations around communication between different organisations or parties, and leaseholders, at different stages of remediation; expectations around communication may be included in contracting arrangements
- Leaseholders should have access to regular communications about the nature and progress of remediation works, even during less intensive phases of work
- Leaseholders should have transparent access to 'live' information setting out the work taking place in specific locations on-site at given time intervals, for example week-by-week or month-by-month. This should state the impact the work is likely to have on those living in particular parts of a building
- Timeframes for the completion of different elements of work should be clear and accessible
- Where there are delays, a reasonable effort should be made to make a realistic estimate for the completion of different elements of work, avoiding the use of 'TBC' or 'unknown'

4. Daily working practices for those working on-site

- All individuals working on site should be briefed about the wider context of building safety remediation and working on an occupied building
- Individuals should make adjustments to working practices that account for working alongside homes which are occupied
- Individuals should use a dedicated lunch and rest area away from people's homes
- Individuals should make an effort to minimise avoidable noise when working in proximity to people's homes
- Individuals should ensure that conversations and language are appropriate for a context in which you can be overheard by others, including children
- Where possible, individuals should avoid looking into people's homes; if travelling up and down scaffolding or using lifts face outwards to maintain privacy
- Individuals should never smoke on site outside a designated area; this is unsafe and can cause a lot of anxiety for people living with fire safety problems
- All individuals should regularly check for, and clear away, rubbish
- Designated individuals should regularly check communal areas, roads, pavements, and car parks for dropped nails and other hazards
- All individuals should maintain security by closing doors and never leaving fire doors open

5. Assurance

- Quality-assurance mechanisms should be built into building remediation projects, with outcomes being communicated to leaseholders at appropriate intervals

1. Introduction

Since the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, which was one of the largest residential building fires in England since the Second World War, building safety problems have been identified in a range of buildings for multiple occupancy around the UK (Local Government Association, 2021), and internationally (Apps, 2021; Oswald et al, 2021, 2022). Typically, these problems include flammable cladding and insulation as part of the external building façade, missing fire breaks, inadequate compartmentation (which contains fire within a given location in a building), fire doors that do not meet standards, and flammable materials on balconies. The risk of living in a building with these problems may be mitigated in the interim by temporary measures such as a waking watch (a building fire safety patrol), or the retrofitting of a fire alarm system, but ultimately in order to make buildings safe the underlying problems need to be fixed. In many cases, this will mean removing external wall systems and retrofitting buildings with alternative materials. This process is known as remediation.

Building remediation is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost, people's homes should be safe to live in, with buildings meeting the necessary fire safety standards to minimise risk. Those living in homes affected by building safety problems experience a range of stressors that have a negative impact on mental wellbeing (Martin and Preece, 2021; Preece, 2021). However, building safety problems also affect the valuation of properties, with mortgage lenders seeking assurance that the assets that they lend against are secure. Without remediation work, assessments of external wall systems for valuation purposes (the EWS1, see Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, 2021) may not provide the necessary assurance for lenders, resulting in mortgage applications being rejected and leaseholders being unable to sell their homes. Despite the urgency of remediation works, progress in replacing Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) cladding has been described as "slow", whilst many buildings with other defects that are "known to be unsafe…have not yet been remediated and may not be for some time" (Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2020, p.5).

There is currently a lack of comprehensive data on the number of buildings that are likely to require remediation for building safety problems. The most detailed data exists only in relation to ACM cladding systems, for which the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) releases monthly statistics. The most recent release shows that 95% of high-rise residential and publicly owned buildings in England had either started or completed remediation work to replace ACM cladding (DLUHC, 2022a). However, building safety remediation must be undertaken in a much wider set of buildings with a range of defects. For example, as of August 2022, the Building Safety Fund (a Government fund to support the remediation of non-ACM cladding systems on residential buildings above 18 metres) had received registrations from approximately 2930 private buildings, of which 1018 were proceeding with an application for funding (DLUHC, 2022b). However, this fund does not target buildings under 18 metres or with non-cladding defects, which will not be revealed within these figures.

The research that is discussed in this report is based on a survey of 149 leaseholders and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 leaseholders in England who have experience of building safety remediation. Buildings were at different stages in the remediation process, with work having recently begun on some sites, and nearing completion in others. The purpose of this research is twofold. First, to report the experiences of leaseholders living in buildings which have been undergoing remediation for building safety issues. Second, to generate learning from these earlier waves of remediation in order to improve the experience in the many buildings in which work is yet to commence. This learning is not intended to be prescriptive, but is aimed at generating key principles, to inform approaches to planning and undertaking remediation with leaseholders in mind.

Given safety concerns and the disruption to individuals' lives that has come to characterise the building safety crisis in England, achieving building remediation is important in its own right. However, it is also crucial to consider the manner in which remediation is conducted. These are long-term programmes of work that are being undertaken in close proximity to households, with a significant impact on their daily lives. Individuals are likely to face months, and years, of building works to remedy significant faults. In some cases, individuals may have to live through works within the home and communal areas, as well as external works; in other cases

they may have to move out for weeks or months. Our homes are often idealised as a crucial site of control, autonomy, and privacy, a space of quiet enjoyment that brings socio-emotional benefits (Kearns et al., 2000; King, 2008). There are many cases in which this idealised conceptualisation of 'home as haven' is disrupted, with negative consequences (Gurney, 2021; Madigan et al, 1990; Ortega-Alcázar and Wilkinson, 2021). Remediation is a process that is likely to significantly disrupt individuals' ability to feel at home. 90% of leaseholders responding to our survey and living in buildings during remediation agreed that the work had changed how they felt about their home. However, steps can be taken to minimise the negative impact of remediation works on those living through these major works, and this is an investment worth making. As MP Tom Hunt argued:

> We need to balance the need to carry out that work with the mental health of those who are expected to live in those buildings while the work is carried out…We need to get to a position where the work is carried out, but in a way that is sensitive to people's needs and their mental health
>
> ***(Westminster Hall Debate, 2022)***

The content of some of this report may be difficult reading for stakeholders involved in remediation works, and particularly for leaseholders of homes in which work has not yet started. The fundamental problem with remediation so far is that in many cases discussed here it has proceeded without consideration for the experience of those who are living through the works, and whose homes are impacted. In many cases, leaseholders have not been viewed as having a voice in remediation, and there is little evidence that their interests have been at the heart of decision-making. There are some examples of positive practice, but there are also many examples of leaseholders continuing to struggle to access basic information and to have their voices heard. After the Grenfell Tower fire, the Hackitt review into building safety highlighted systemic failures in building regulation and fire safety, which enabled "a culture of indifference to perpetuate" (Hackitt, 2018, p.11). One of the core failings highlighted by the review was that "the voices of residents often goes unheard, even when safety issues are identified", and that in the future residents "must be recognised by others as having a voice" (Hackitt, 2018, p.11-12). At present, there is little evidence that this learning has been applied more widely to areas such as building remediation. Whilst leaseholders may not be building owners, these are their homes.

Following this introduction, the report is structured by five further chapters. Chapter Two sets out the research context, including the methodological approach, key characteristics of survey and interview participants, and brief context about the status of remediation work for the interview sample. Chapter Three presents results from survey and interview data related to the planning of remediation works, including the involvement of leaseholders in these processes. Chapter Four sets out the key impacts arising from living through remediation, including consideration of mental harms, impacts on the senses, and socio-emotional factors such as privacy and security. Chapter Five discusses issues relating to communication with leaseholders during remediation works. Finally, Chapter Six summarises key learning points arising from the research and discusses principles for future remediation.

2. Research context

Introduction

This chapter briefly describes the approach taken to the research, which comprised a survey and interviews with leaseholders of buildings in which remediation to address building safety problems had commenced. Summary statistics are presented detailing the composition of the survey and interview respondents. Finally, some additional contextual information relating to the progress and nature of building remediation among interview participants is discussed.

Research approach

Research was carried out between May and July 2022. There were two phases. A survey was distributed to leaseholders affected by building remediation by key campaign groups the UK Cladding Action Group, and End Our Cladding Scandal. This included information about the work being included on a newsletter and relevant social media channels. There were 149 responses to the survey, comprised of 110 leaseholders who were either currently resident in the building undergoing remediation, or had been resident for some of the works (but may have had to, or chosen to, move out at a later date). 34 landlords responded to the survey, including leaseholders who had never lived in the property, and those who had previously lived there but had moved out prior to remediation works. The composition of the survey sample can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Survey participant characteristics

	(%)
Gender	
Female	60
Male	36
Prefer not to say / blank	5
Age	
18-24	1
25-34	14
35-44	28
45-54	26
55-64	17
65-74	9
75+	3
Prefer not to say / blank	3

	(%)
Disability, illness or long-term health condition	
Yes	31
No	58
Prefer not to say / blank	12
Ethnicity	
White British (incl. English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish)	63
Asian or Asian British	11
White – other group	15
Other ethnic group	2
Prefer not to say / blank	9
Sexual orientation	
Straight or heterosexual	78
Gay or lesbian	8
Bisexual	1
Other sexual orientation	1
Prefer not to say / blank	12

Interviews were then carried out with 21 leaseholders who had completed the initial survey and consented to being contacted about an interview. The purposive sample of leaseholders sought to achieve a mix of household-types and building locations. The full composition of the sample can be seen in Table 2. Summary statistics from the survey are presented in subsequent sections of the report, alongside the relevant themes that they illustrate. This provides a picture of wider experiences and perceptions, which qualitative interview data will explore in more depth.

Table 2: Interview participant characteristics

	(%)
Gender	
Female	13
Male	8
Age	
25-34	4
35-44	5
45-54	6
55-64	5
65-74	1

	(%)
Disability, illness or long-term health condition	
Yes	9
No	13
Prefer not to say / blank	1
Ethnicity	
White British (incl. English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish)	15
Asian or Asian British	3
White – other group	1
Prefer not to say	2
Sexual orientation	
Straight or heterosexual	15
Gay or lesbian	3
Bisexual	1
Prefer not to say	2
Household composition	
Living alone	8
Living with spouse / partner	4
Living with spouse / partner and child(ren)	5
Living with another family member	1
Living with friends or non-family member	1
Prefer not to say	1
N/A	1
Residential status	
Living in the building	19
Temporarily not resident	1
Never lived there (landlord)	1
Geographical region	
North West	3
South East (including London)	13
South West	1
West Midlands	2
Yorkshire and Humber	2

Interviews typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were carried out using a mix of phone and video meeting software. With the consent of participants, these interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed to provide a written record of the conversations. As part of the research, interviewees were also given the option of providing photos or other digital media which they felt reflected something important about their experience of building remediation. Of the participants who chose to participate in this activity, some media were provided solely for use during the interview, to provide further insight into experiences, and in other cases participants provided consent for media to be used in the public domain (through inclusion in this report and as part of other dissemination activities associated with the research). In order to reduce the potential for individuals to be identified through the combination of photos, quotes, and demographic details, the photos which are used in the dissemination of the research and in this report will not be connected to a participant identifier but will be given a generic description.

The following sections outline additional context relating to building remediation in the interview sample, including the nature of building safety problems, the progress of remediation, and funding arrangements.

Context and progress of remediation

The sample contained buildings at varied points in their remediation, with different problems, and different funding mechanisms. Most leaseholders taking part in the interviews were living in buildings with flammable cladding and/or insulation, missing fire breaks, and problems with balconies. As Freya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained, "if I had to show you every single thing that was wrong…Your flat is a toaster…Everything from the plug sockets were not insulated, to walls, to fire doors, to the entrance door, the insulation…". It was only once building work started on-site that the full picture of problems could emerge. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) described being shown by one of the contractors that "behind the panelling there's a box of chicken nuggets and a milkshake, which the builders…left behind". In John's (male, 55-64, South-East) building, when the panelling was removed "in some areas there was absolutely nothing behind…the next thing you could see was the plasterboard of the internal wall".

Figure 1: What problems does remediation work seek to address in participants' buildings? (n)

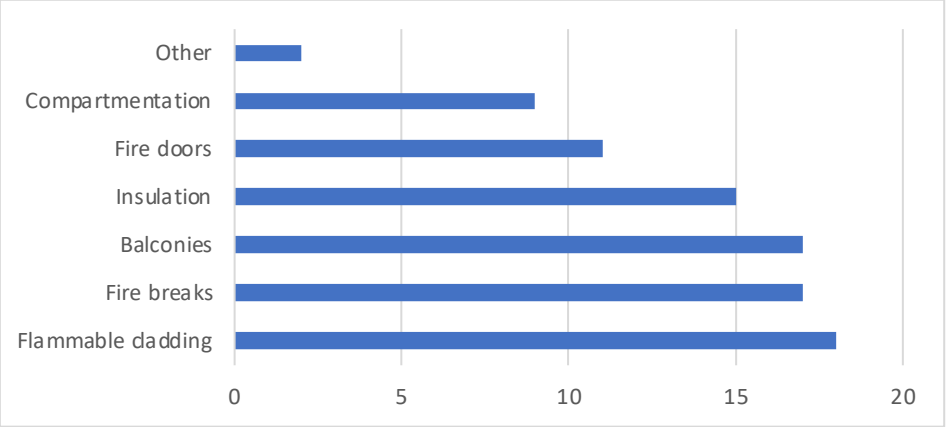


Image 1: A core from an external wall showing insulation and render construction

In most cases, remediation was being carried out largely externally. In some cases, there were also works to communal areas internally, and in a small number of cases there were also works taking place within individuals' flats, which would require them to move out. In one case, although external work was ongoing, lack of clarity on funding meant that internal works had not yet been considered, but this would be required to make the building safe. In another building, remediation of a section of ACM cladding had been previously completed, but the render to the rest of the building had subsequently been found to be inadequate, resulting in a further round of remediation which had recently commenced.

Most leaseholders (14) did not know what External Wall Survey (EWS1) rating their building was expected to receive following the completion of remediation works. Three expected to receive the highest rating (A1), and four a B1 rating.

In all cases, remediation work was ongoing. As Table 3 shows, in most cases, remediation had started within the last two years, but in a small number of cases it had been ongoing for two to three years.

Table 3: When did remediation start in participants' buildings?

	(n)
Within the last 6 months	6
6 months-1 year ago	3
1-2 years ago	9
2-3 years ago	2
More than 3 years ago	1

Five leaseholders reported that they had not been informed of a completion date. Two leaseholders had been provided with a completion date, both for projects which had commenced within the last six months. The remaining 14 leaseholders had been given a completion date, but this had been extended during the course of the works.

Although 18 participants reported that remediation was funded by a Government fund, such as the Building Safety Fund or Private / Social Sector ACM fund, 11 of those also reported that leaseholders had or would be expected to contribute some funding. Two participants reported that the building freeholder was funding remediation, and in three cases developers or freeholders were also part-funding remediation which had also received Government funding. In many cases, it was not yet clear what elements of remediation (such as balconies) leaseholders may need to pay for. This may explain why, in responses to the survey about their experience of remediation work, 82% of respondents living in buildings undergoing remediation were worried about the financial impact of the work. Despite Government legislation and funding measures, there was still a considerable amount of uncertainty about the exact financial impact on individuals, and broader concerns about the market for flats post-remediation were also voiced by participants.

For those with Government funding, the road to achieving and then accessing that funding had often been very slow. As John (male, 55-64, South-East) argued, "although the money is available, it's incredibly hard to get hold of and then once you've got it, it's incredibly hard to manage the project". In one case, there was a six-month delay whilst an appeal to decide whether an element was within the scope of the fund was considered (and then approved). Rob (male, 35-44, South-East) estimated that they had probably taken a year getting together and revising the paperwork for the funding application, and then another 13 months since the submission that contracts were signed and work began, but there was then another two to three months before the first money was released to enable them to pay the contractor.

As might be expected in such complex programmes of work, there were a range of different organisations involved in remediation projects. Alongside – typically – a lead contractor and a managing agent, there may also be a separate project management company, sub-contractors, civil engineers, funding bodies, freeholders, original developers (who may also own the freehold), housing associations (who may be developers, freeholders, leaseholders), resident management companies, and local councils involved. Whilst the precise set of actors differs from building to building, there are typically numerous individuals and organisations involved, representing different interests, and with accountability for different aspects of remediation. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that planning remediation work is a complex task, but as the next chapter shows, there is little evidence that the leaseholder experience is widely considered.

The data that features in this report is presented thematically, in line with the analysis that has been carried out. There are three key chapters, focusing on planning and preparation, lived impacts, and communication during works. The final substantive chapter draws out key learning from the research, with a view to influencing practice.

A note on terminology: as the research has been specifically undertaken with long leaseholders of flats in England, throughout the report the term 'leaseholders' is used, rather than residents or tenants. However, it is important to acknowledge that many of the issues described in the report are likely to overlap significantly with the experiences of private and social rent tenants in mixed-tenure buildings undergoing remediation.

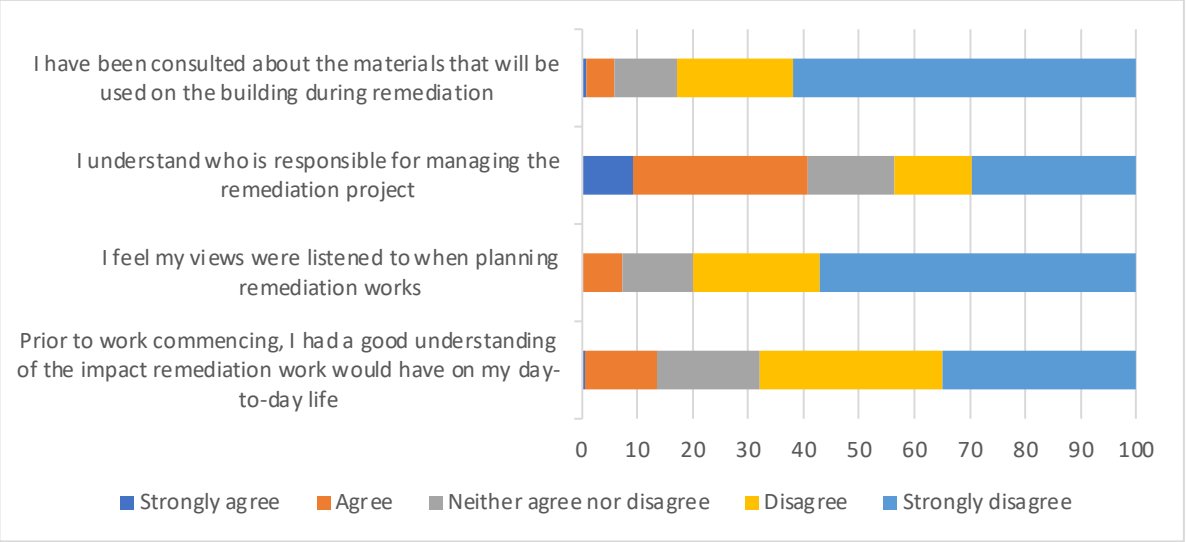
3. Planning remediation

Introduction

This chapter discussed leaseholders' experiences of planning for remediation works in their building, the extent of their involvement in these plans, and any consultation or choices that they were involved in relating to the works. Many leaseholders explained that in retrospect, they had little understanding of what the work would be like in practice, and there were not always adequate plans in place to communicate the scope, scale and impact of works. Furthermore, there was only minimal evidence that leaseholders were involved in decisions that affected them; it was common for there to be no consultation about choices which would have a demonstrable impact on the experience of living through remediation. There was little evidence that the experience of those living in the building was considered as an important factor when planning for building remediation, for example in the phasing of work, the choice of materials, and conduct on site.

Summary of survey results

Figure 2: Leaseholders' perceptions of remediation planning (%; n=134-140)



Planning work and preparing leaseholders

When embarking on a major construction programme, it is important to consider what this experience will be like for those living through the works. Of leaseholders responding to the survey, 68% overall did not agree that they had a good understanding of the impact that remediation would have, prior to work commencing. Although it may not be possible to fully prepare individuals for the day-to-day reality of building works – as Alexander (male, 35-44, South-East) argued, "we weren't really prepared, but how can you be?" – opportunities should be taken to provide information about the likely impacts. As Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) explained, "I don't think anyone was really prepared for the remediation and how it actually is…the daylight aspect…noise and things like that; that should have been relayed back much earlier".

In advance of work starting on site, several leaseholders described examples of information meetings being held – whether in person or online – with the different organisations involved in the remediation (such as managing agents, project managers, developers, and contractors) and leaseholders. This was generally used to communicate an initial schedule for remediation and information about the works. The level of detail provided was variable. Tim explained that:

> "The principal contractor…took us through the scheme…We did think at the time that it was the best communication we'd ever had…in terms of just clarity and so on…We had a decent idea what to expect…they went through how the scaffolding was going to work and the mast climbers and access"
>
> ***(Tim, male, 45-54, South-East)***

Although many leaseholders had experienced poor communication in the past with some of the organisations involved in their building, this could be an opportunity for proactive and transparent communication. As Clara (female, 25-34, North-West) argued, "the communication had been poor…being kept in the dark has been one of the worst things", but the meeting she had attended with the contractor was "actually really good…they had massive plans of huge posters all over the walls of what each phase was going to look like, what the building was going to look like at the end", the building was being completed "in three phases, and they're working from the top floor down…they've put like this white netting on".

However, it was clear that not all leaseholders had been offered this kind of pre-remediation meeting:

> [The managing agent] sent us a big pack with…a Gantt chart in, and a general overview of how long the project should take…But other than that, no…we didn't have…like a kick-off meeting with [the contractor]…We don't have a town hall or anything where we all meet…or Google Meets, or Teams
>
> ***(Nicola, female, 25-34, South-East)***

> There was a meeting to discuss the three bids [for the remediation work] that had been received. But it was very high level…That's when we were told the first two to three months will be really noisy with the scaffolding being erected...but then after that it should be okay…Which was completely not true
>
> ***(Hannah, female, 45-54, West Midlands)***

> They've never sent a letter about these works during the whole process. They've only communicated by email…And they...didn't ever give us a description of exactly what the works where…We'd surmised it from the Section 20...and the fire risk assessments… there was just no communication of...what exactly works will be done
>
> ***(Heather, female, 55-64, South-East)***

> We had to push for a meeting…the first communication we got [by letter]…just said, 'Okay, the work will start, they'll be scaffolding'
>
> ***(Harry, male, 35-44, North-West)***

There is a need to improve pre-remediation communication, and to clearly set out lines of responsibility, what work is being done to the building (the scope of work), when it will be done (the schedule of work), and how leaseholders are likely to be affected (the impact of work). For example, only 41% of leaseholders responding to the survey felt that they understood who was responsible for managing the remediation project, while 44% did not understand this responsibility.

In some cases, problems with the initial planning had knock-on consequences on site, for example in one case there was a three month delay to the start in order to complete surveys on the weight-loads for the scaffolding and apply for relevant licenses, in another case there were no facilities set up for contractors, so "they were

weeing in bottles in the roof space" or "peeing in the bushes" (Heather, female, 55-64, South-East). Several individuals noted that initial plans had to be re-thought once contractors began work. For example, whilst a number of leaseholders explained that work had been planned in phases – so that different parts of the building would be worked on in turn – it was relatively common for this to change during the course of the works. As John (male, 55-64, South-East) explained "it started off like that, but it's not always been the case and it's probably deteriorated during the project". In part this was "because of what they were finding behind the panels on certain elevations, they had to stop working on those to do some designs, so they started work on other elevations" (John, male, 55-64, South-East). Similarly, in Judith's (female, 45-54, South-East) development, the plan had been to work block-by-block but it now "seems like they're doing bits all over the place all the time, so I think they seem to have…ditched their initial plan…I think that, because of the way the materials have arrived, they've…just said, 'Right…we've got stuff for this, let's do this'". However, this kind of approach could make it more difficult to see the progress being made, making communication all the more important.

In other cases, participants believed that there was a general lack of thought and consideration of lived experience in the planning of works, i.e. in planning remediation works there had not been enough focus on the experience of those who would be living in the buildings. This fits with the overall response to the survey, in which 80% of leaseholders did not feel that their views were listened to when planning remediation works. For example, Priya argued:

> They didn't need to scaffold the whole building…they rushed to scaffold the whole building and cover it in plastic…People on the lower floors…they're just sitting there… when what you could have done is scaffold one part, finish that work, move on…Or okay, scaffold it, but don't cover the whole damn thing in plastic. Work in stages
>
> ***(Priya, female, 45-54, South-East)***

This was the approach being taken in Rob's (male, 35-44, South-East) building, "they're doing it in sections, which is brilliant…you can have several people onsite doing different parts of the project"; this meant that the scaffolding on their section should come down six months before the completion of the last part of the building. However, overall, there was very little communication with leaseholders of the relative positives or negatives of different approaches to the phasing of works, or the different trade-offs that may be made in making these decisions. Based on leaseholders' experiences, there is little evidence that the experience of those living in the buildings is prioritised in such choices.

Consultation and choice

Prior to remediation work starting, there are many decisions that need to be made. In some cases, a particular approach may be mandated by building control, health and safety regulations, or the terms of the lease. In other cases, there may be a range of options, each with relative strengths and weaknesses. Even where decisions may be mandated by existing rules and regulations, in the sample interviewed for this research there is little evidence that the rationale for a particular approach is clearly explained to leaseholders. In cases in which there exist a range of possible options, again in this sample there is little evidence that leaseholders are involved in discussions related to these different options. Of those responding to the survey, for example, only 6% of leaseholders agreed that they had been consulted about the materials that would be used on the building during remediation works. A number of interview participants indicated that they would have welcomed greater involvement in, and transparency over, the planning of remediation works.

Many leaseholders described a process of being told about aspects of their remediation work, rather than being consulted or involved in a discussion. Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) sums this up when she explained that "the Residents' Association were informed…of how it [the remediation] was going to happen. There was no discussion about how it was going to happen". Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) argued that in her development, leaseholders were "not considered stakeholders in the process...no consultation", similarly Anna (female, 55-64,

West Midlands) explained that "we didn't have any choices. We were told what was going to be used [on the façade]…They've put samples of that up on the ground floor…but there was no choice, we were told". In some cases, leaseholders had challenged these choices, but had not received satisfactory responses. For example, the use of plastic sheeting in one development "has been a real bone of contention…I don't think we've ever quite got an answer as to why, in this building, we wanted to put up Monarflex…And there may well be a very good reason, but we never seem to be able to get an answer" (Judith, female, 45-54, South-East). This was despite established mechanisms for discussion with leaseholders and other residents, for example "a very good Residents' Association…if they'd actually collaborated with us…I would have felt that our voice was in that…There's no resident voice in any of this at all…And this is our home…I don't see why it's acceptable for us to not be part of the conversation" (Judith). In this development, there were one or two examples of consultation, for example around Sunday working, but this was presented as a yes/no choice with no context about what it would achieve.

Another participant explained that they had found out about their building being wrapped in a plastic covering when a resident saw a building control application. When leaseholders questioned the need for this material, they were told:

> We've got to have sheeting…'the insurers say you need to have [it]'…We've asked for proof of that…There's no difference between the…netting or the sheeting, because they both have the same effect of essentially protecting the scaffolding. But…the contractors just say, 'Oh, it's health and safety. Oh, it's insurance'…they think we're stupid people
>
> ***(Harry, male, 35-44, North-West)***

As well as materials, there were different views on days and hours of work, and this is another area in which consultation with leaseholders should be expected. As Hannah (female, 45-54, West Midlands) recalled, building work "started off meant to be just Monday to Friday. And then…some months into it they decided that... they needed to work Saturdays as well…There was no consulting".

Whilst some decisions – such as the phasing of scaffolding or works – may be complex and constrained by finances or regulatory requirements, in other areas involving those who are living through the works, and whose homes are affected, has potential quality of life benefits and fewer notable draw backs. For example, two leaseholders described the way in which scaffolding had been set up around their buildings, making access to the building difficult because of the closure of pavements and narrow chicanes that were difficult for prams. As Tim explained:

> The point is, nobody sat down and said, 'is there a way that we can keep the pavement open?'... Maybe there is, maybe there isn't. Maybe it would take longer, be more expensive…But it just doesn't feel like anybody said…'we're going to see whether we can deal with this'. It's just like, 'nope, it's easiest for us to just use the entire pavement, doesn't matter'
>
> ***(Tim, male, 45-54, South-East)***

This left leaseholders with the impression that "no one stood there and thought, 'wow, this is really bad for the people living here'" (Tim), i.e. that the resident experience had not been considered.

These examples contributed to an overall process in which "agency was always removed from us…The complete absence of proper meaningful consultation on any aspect of it was really problematic" (Hannah, female, 45-54, West Midlands). Most leaseholders living through remediation works are located within a wider context of building safety over which they have limited control, and previous research has demonstrated that this is a notable pathway to the experience of mental harms (Preece, 2021). Any area in which choices can be offered during remediation works – even relatively small things – may therefore act to enhance feelings of control. Some participants were aware of the limitations involved, but still believed that "the engagement might be top-down, but it's still engagement rather than just, you know, nothing whatsoever" (Harry, male, 35-44, North-West). Others, however, were more sceptical, arguing that "Grenfell, they were all consulted weren't they, but they weren't really listened to" (Simon, male, 35-44, North-West).

In a few cases, there were examples of leaseholders having input into certain choices, although what this looked like differed by building, and to some extent depends on the mechanisms that already existed for communicating with leaseholders and engaging with their views. For example, one resident-managed building used a small group of leaseholders to make decisions "on the actual colour and sheen and finish of the cladding. They gave us several samples…We had a small group including some experts" (John, male, 55-64, South-East). In another case (with a resident-managed structure), there was a conscious effort to consult, for example having a vote on the colour of the render, and "talking about the netting and the covering outside the building…to make sure people's view wasn't massively blocked" (Rob, male, 35-44, South-East). The votes on the render finish were collected by the Managing Agent. In this example, the participant's view was that the management structure gave "an element of control and visibility" (Rob) to leaseholders that otherwise may be missing.

There are some practical challenges in improving consultation and planning related to remediation works, for example not every building has a mechanism for reflecting the views of leaseholders, such as a recognised Residents' Association. The willingness of building owners to engage in greater consultation relating to remediation works will likely also be influenced by a range of factors, including the perception of increased administrative burden and therefore potential costs. There was some evidence that enhanced building management costs were funded through Government-funded remediation schemes, recognising the expansion of management responsibilities and communication needs during remediation. There is a strong argument for greater recognition of the involvement of leaseholders in decisions that affect their home and their daily lives during remediation, and different levers may be used by Government to focus attention on this issue. This also aligns with a wider context in which the regulation of property agents is being considered (Regulation of Property Agents Working Group, 2019).

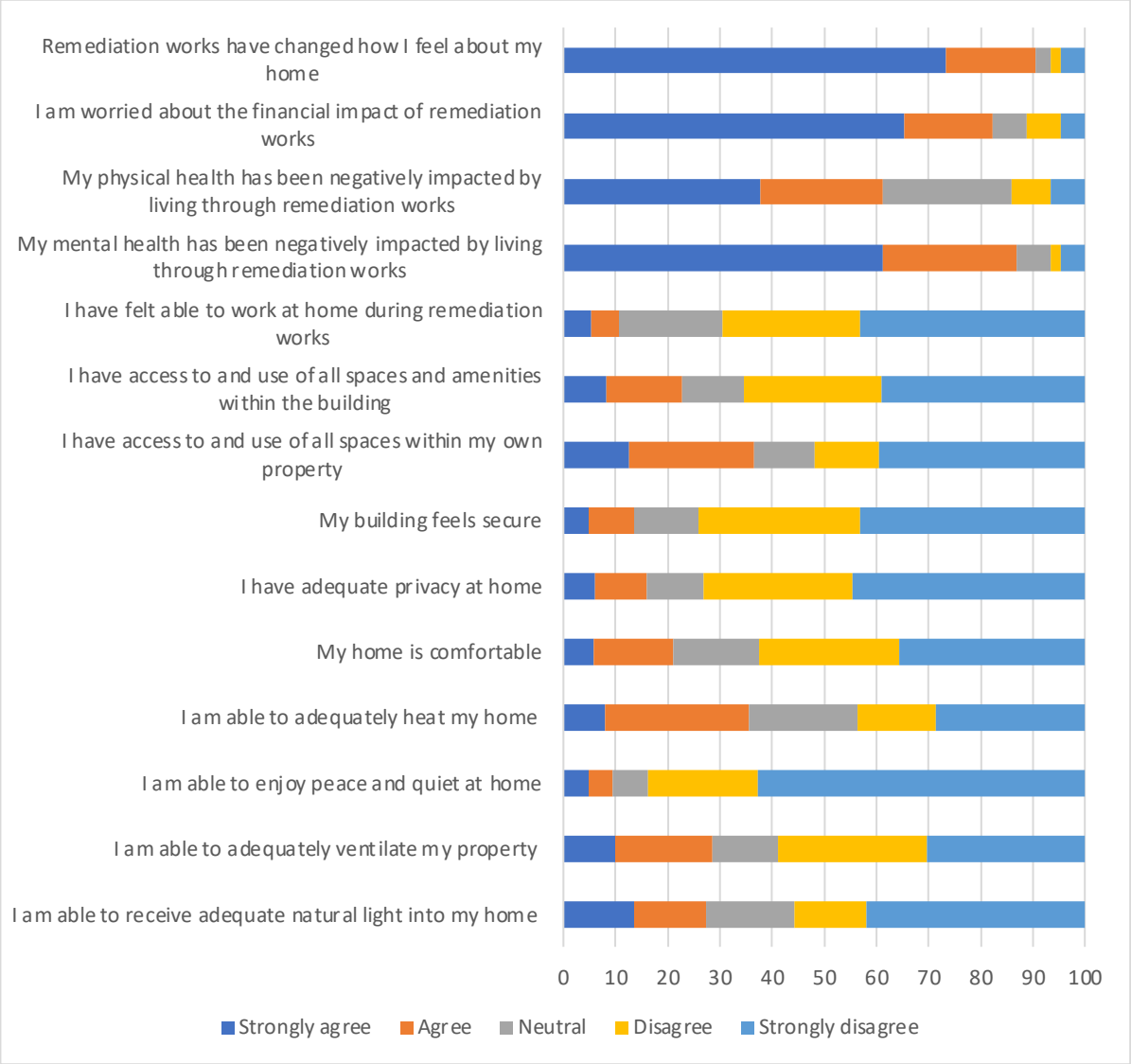
4. Impacts of remediation

Introduction

This chapter explores the impacts of remediation from the perspective of the leaseholders living through it. It is perhaps not surprising that such extensive building works have a negative impact on mental health. Leaseholders explained the different dimensions of impact, from the senses (the sights, sounds and feelings associated with the works), to reductions in feelings of privacy, security and safety. The chapter then sets out adaptations to the use of space within and outside the home that building remediation necessitated, before a discussion of the impact that behaviour on site could have. The experiences of leaseholders who have had to move out for a period of the works are then discussed. Finally, whilst the main focus has been on the experience of those living in buildings, some issues specific to landlords are raised.

Summary of survey results

Figure 3: The impact of remediation on leaseholders resident in buildings undergoing remediation (%; n=88-110)



Mental wellbeing

There were complex and conflicting emotions associated with building remediation. On the one hand, many leaseholders felt that starting building work represented another step towards being free of the stress of building safety problems. However, this came alongside the realisation that living through the work would be very difficult. Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) described this as "an absolute rollercoaster" which at the end would not result in a tangible improvement as with a home extension or renovation, but would just "make it safe from something that should never have gone on the building in the first place". As Simon explained:

> It's like Covid…if somebody had said we're going to have a pandemic and you're not going to be able to leave the house for a year, nobody would have believed that and it's the same with this. That's how it feels…to have your whole building taken apart and put back together, it's like who on earth thinks that that is okay to just do and…then we'll just move on from it?
>
> *(Simon, male, 35-44, North-West)*

There is no doubt that living through building safety remediation has a negative impact on people's mental wellbeing. Of the leaseholders who responded to the survey and were living in buildings during remediation, 87% agreed overall that their mental health had been negatively affected by the work, with 61% agreeing that their physical health had been negatively impacted. Some leaseholders were managing conditions such as stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal feelings, and PTSD, which were manifestations of the ongoing stressors associated with building safety problems. Charlotte (female, 25-34, South-East) was seeing a therapist who had "diagnosed me with PTSD last year…I had to take a lot of anxiety medication, which I still have to take. It was putting a strain on my marriage. I wasn't a good mum…I couldn't really enjoy my time with my daughter". Nina (female, 55-64, South-East) had "ground down my…teeth so much from the stress when I was going to sleep at night, and constantly thinking about 'how can we get out of this situation?'". Alana had been signed off work for over a year, largely as a result of the stress of building safety problems:

> People need to take seriously the impact this has on residents' mental health. I just think it's completely glossed over. And there's an expectation that you just accept what's going on and be grateful for the fact that the work is being done. There's no recognition that we are homeowners, this is our home. It may be your [contractors'] place of work but it's actually our home. And if going forward there could be more understanding and empathy towards residents, I think that would go a long way
>
> *(Alana, female, 35-44, South-East)*

Image 2: Medication being taken by one participant in the research

Other household members were affected as well, for example Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) explained the impact on her children of living through remediation works being a constant reminder of the unsafety of their home: "[my son will] talk about how worried he is… Every day we have the reminder with this scaffolding up and all the work that's being done". Similarly, Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) described the impact on her child: "[my daughter's] mental health has really been affected. She comes in night crying saying, 'Somebody's at the window. I can hear noises'".

Living through any kind of building works is unlikely to be a pleasant experience, but the kind of work that is being undertaken in these buildings is both bigger, more disruptive, and longer lasting than that experienced by most individuals in their homes. Remediation is also another process within the wider building safety crisis in which leaseholders' experience a loss of control, which is another pathway to mental harm. Hannah (female, 45-54, West Midlands) found it difficult to explain the impact to family and friends, particularly because "it feels like it's just not stopped for years". The work had had a profound impact on her emotionally, with "times when I thought I was…really close to an edge", resulting in "a form of trauma that I don't know that I'll ever properly recover from" (Hannah). This was compounded – as in a number of cases from these earlier waves of remediation – by the combined impact of remediation works and pandemic-related lockdowns, in which individuals were largely confined to their homes. This resulted in the sensation in which "it felt like being attacked physically in your own home" (Hannah), whilst being unable to leave.

Impact on the senses

The negative impact of noise was highlighted by virtually all participants and was one of the biggest issues experienced by leaseholders. This was in line with the results from the survey, in which 84% of leaseholders living in buildings during remediation reported that they were not able to enjoy peace and quiet at home during the work. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) described the noise as "another level" with "day in, day out drilling, banging". Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) reflected that "I didn't realise at first how loud it was going to be…Usually it's pretty quiet, so going from that to having drilling right outside your window…it is really disruptive". Drilling was responsible for a lot of the noise described by leaseholders: "One of the most debilitating aspects is just the drilling that goes on…So all of that drilling just goes straight through the building. I mean, it's like having a drill in your head" (Tim, male, 45-54, South-East).

Alana (female, 35-44, South-East) had to leave her home because "I can't live with the constant noise" which "feels as though you're in some weird sort of torture". In this case, work was also taking place on Saturdays, which removed a space of respite for those living in the building. Hannah (female, 45-54, West Midlands) reflected that if she had been told the level and duration of noise disruption at the start "I would never have stayed". She described living with "above 90 decibels noise…on an almost daily basis now for 20 months", which was a "completely abnormal level of noise" (equivalent to a mower or hairdryer) that had been "unbearable" (Hannah). A small number of participants had been less disrupted by noise, except when scaffolding was going up or when work was taking place more directly outside their flat, but for most it had been a significant problem.

Noise manifested not just aurally but also physically through "big vibrations" (Nicola, female, 25-34, South-East). Charlotte (female, 25-34, South-East) described "eight hours of drilling, every day. The walls would shake…The lampshades would shake…It was like having someone stand next to you [with] one of those concrete drills that you have…in the middle of the road". Similarly, Hannah (female, 45-54, West Midlands) recalled that the vibrations were so strong that "my skirting fell off…I once had a bottle smashed…because the shaking was so extreme". As well as the volume and physical manifestation of noise, its unpredictability was also a major stressor. Hannah argued that "one of the hardest things about it has been the unpredictability…so you could never know". This disruption coincided with a significant shift in working practices, brought about by pandemic 'stay home' orders, but also resulting in more enduring changes to home working for some groups. Working at home during remediation works was highlighted by many as being challenging, because of the unpredictability of noise: "It's quiet today, it was incredibly noisy yesterday…I'm regularly on calls having to go, 'I'm really sorry about the noise'…that's been really difficult" (Judith, female, 45-54, South-East). As Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) argued: "if you knew, 'Okay, it's going to be happening this day…these hours' and then you'd be able to sort of manage it a bit more. Whereas it's just suddenly you hear…and it's just…that…shock".

Loss of light was also mentioned by numerous leaseholders; this was generally a result of the placement of scaffolding and boards, netting, and sheeting. 56% of leaseholders responding to the survey and living in buildings during remediation reported that they were not able to receive adequate natural light into the home during the works. During interviews, leaseholders with plastic sheeting were the most likely to highlight loss of light as a significant factor with Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) describing her flat as "claustrophobic". However, even scaffolding could impact on light levels, with Laura (female, 65-74, South-West) explaining that "it was a bit like a grey day every day when the scaffolding went up because it was very different to that bright flat you're used to". Some participants were able to compare their experience of different types of covering. As Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) explained, switching from sheeting to netting had "made a massive difference, to be able to see out". Clara had previously been living with green mesh, but this was replaced with a clear mesh which also made a significant difference to her experience:

> They put up a green…mesh…it brought some light in, but it made the entire flat when it was sunny like, this green like, sunlight…Then they took it all down and…they put up the clear one which was loads better…Something as simple as what wrapping is around the building, it can make a massive difference
>
> *(Clara, female, 25-34, North-West)*

Image 3: A view from behind plastic sheeting

Image 4: Impact on light from scaffolding

Image 5: Netting on scaffolding

As well as light, the connection with the outside world was disrupted by scaffold coverings. As Anna (female, 55-64, West Midlands) explained, because of the plastic sheeting, "we never knew what the weather was like, so we'd end up going outside either overdressed or underdressed, because until we got downstairs... We didn't know what it was doing". For some, this added to mental distress: "we had netting…basically it was completely dark…When the scaffolding came off…I just cried with relief, because there was light in the building...I had just got used to being in the dark for so long" (Hannah, female, 45-54, West Midlands). By contrast, Clara (female, 25-34, North-West) explained that she was "really worried about what mesh they'd put up around the building and whether I'd…have no light or not be able to see outside", but they had installed a light mesh, which meant that she could still "see a bit of greenery out of the window and also let loads of light in…it's really helped".

It was often not clear to leaseholders why plastic sheeting rather than netting needed to be used. Where responses were provided, these tended to make a general reference to health and safety, but many were sceptical of the need for sheeting specifically when they knew of other buildings which used netting.

> The building…was wrapped in Monarflex, so you can't see out. You haven't got a clue whether, you know, it's raining, sunshining or anything. And each time we asked them to remove it, they would say, "No, it's there to catch anything that's falling." Now, I've seen other buildings in this area under remediation… All of them have debris netting
>
> *(Priya, female, 45-54, South-East)*

This highlights the need for more transparent engagement with leaseholders around the use of a material that can significantly on the experience of the home. Where possible, plastic sheeting should be avoided in favour of mesh, and in cases where it is necessary it should be used for the shortest period possible.

As well as light, the placement of scaffolding and wrapping materials could also affect air flow into homes. 59% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that they were not able to adequately ventilate their property when living there during works. Leaseholders' balconies were generally not accessible during remediation works. However, doors may be a key source of ventilation for flats. In some cases, restriction relied on voluntary compliance, in other cases there were physical barriers to opening. For example, Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) described posters being put up saying "'Do not open this door'". The doors in Alexander's living room and bedroom were sealed, but the door was the only source of ventilation in his bedroom:

> They put basically tape over it and say, 'You're not allowed to go out'. That for me was the main issue because as summer approached and it gets hotter, well, I need to ventilate…I did actually climb out on the scaffolding, climbed on the balcony and removed the tape to break open my door
>
> *(Alexander, male, 35-44, South-East)*

In another building, doors had been physically restricted because of a small number of individuals continuing to use their balconies. This meant that doors could only be opened by "a few centimetres" (Harry, male, 35-44, North-West). Whilst this prevented access to balconies, it also limited ventilation for those who were complying with the restrictions on outside access, which was perceived as being "the path with least resistance for them [the managing agent and contractor], rather than what is…in the best interests of the residents, the people who are actually living there" (Harry).

Access to ventilation could also come and go depending on the work being undertaken, as Anna explained:

> When they first put the scaffolding up, they actually put it so that the poles meant that we couldn't open our windows properly. We could open them, like, three or four inches. And so we asked them if they would sort that out, which they did…The windows on the corridor are actually smoke vents, and they put the scaffolding so that those windows would not have been able to open without getting very badly damaged…They seem to adjust the scaffolding depending on what they're doing…Depending on then who's doing it and who's sensible, they don't always put it back so that we can still open our windows, so that's been a bit of a problem
>
> *(Anna, female, 55-64, West Midlands)*

A guiding principle of work should be to cause the least disruption necessary, for the shortest period, and to be mindful of the lived experience of those who are resident in buildings through the works.

Whilst temperatures in summer could be high – exacerbated in some cases by sheeting – and lack of ventilation, participants also highlighted problems with cold in winter due to the removal of external wall insulation. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) had experienced these extremes during the course of their remediation: "In the winter when they removed the panelling, it was so cold…Then comes summer, and a substantial proportion of the building is still under Monarflex [plastic sheeting]…It's baking in the morning when the sun shines on it, because it's a heat trap".

With rising cost of living particularly being driven by energy costs, leaseholders were worried about the cost of heating their homes, especially given that many buildings receive a communal supply which is classed as commercial and – at the time of the research – was not subject to regulation through price caps. 44% of survey respondents living in buildings during remediation found that they were not able to adequately heat their home (although the research was carried out in summer, and this may be expected to worsen as more people progress to living through a winter season). Depending on how work was carried out in practice, some leaseholders were left without insulation for long periods of time, rather than sections of the building being completed in smaller phases. As Anna explained:

> They scaffolded us completely, sheeted us completely...And took all the cladding off top to bottom... And all the insulation, and then started putting it back on…We went all through last winter with no insulation on the building at all. We didn't put the heating on because it wasn't worth it…with these bills, we've been trying to save money…I wore four layers through the winter... all day every day, indoors
>
> *(Anna, female, 55-64, West Midlands)*

One participant noted that they had been told that they would not be charged for excess energy usage related to remediation, although it was not clear how this would be managed in practice: "We had to have the heating on more. They did say they'd pay for the excess. They'd compare the bills and pay for the excess…There was mould growing in the window sills. It's just been horrific" (Alana, female, 35-44, South-East). However, others had been informed that there was no compensation: "I've said to [the housing association], 'how are we supposed to pay for all-day electricity? And all-day heating?'. Because there's no insulation on the building to keep the flats warm. And they're like, 'yeah, there's no compensation'" (Charlotte, female, 25-34, South-East). Sarah (female, 25-34, Yorkshire and Humber) explained her concern about works continuing through winter, with the expectation that "if we don't have the insulation replaced by the winter, we will be extremely cold and there might be parts of the flat that we cannot use".

Privacy, security, and safety

Most leaseholders reported impacts on their sense of privacy at home during remediation works, with many highlighting the intrusive nature of the work. In the survey, this was one of the biggest areas of dissatisfaction, with 73% of leaseholders living in buildings through remediation reporting that they did not have adequate privacy at home during the works. This is not surprising, particularly given that many individuals lived above ground-level and were not routinely exposed to strangers walking past their windows, let alone working outside for extended periods. As Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) explained, "I've definitely caught…the scaffolders like peering in, or the contractors peering in…This is my home at the end of the day; you wouldn't go up to someone's house in the street and just peer in the window". This kind of experience led several individuals to reflect the sentiment that "I don't think the workmen have been briefed very well that actually, this is people's homes" (Judith, female, 45-54, South-East).

Image 6: A contractor outside a child's bedroom window

Many flats were also designed to maximise light and views, with useable spaces such as living areas and bedrooms also having large external windows. Some residents reported having their curtains closed most of the time because of workers outside, as Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained: "There's no privacy…We have to have the curtains drawn...day and night…It feels really claustrophobic". The works had changed how they used their home, for example "we don't sit near the windows… They're going up and down…they do stop, they look…I've come into the room a couple of times and seen…people standing outside staring in" (Priya). This meant that she also asked her daughter to "keep her blinds closed" because there were men around on site. Others had to remind their children to shut the bathroom door when going to the toilet, because "someone could be standing right there…it's like a different mindset for us…you just don't think about it" (Judith, female, 45-54, South-East).

Whilst most individuals talked about the loss of privacy that came alongside remediation works, female participants were more likely to link this to their own safety and security. Alexander (male, 35-44, South-East) reported that some of his female neighbours "don't really feel safe. Some of them have reported that they were stared at", but for him "it's not so much of an issue". Alana explained that:

> I'm not comfortable at home…When there are builders working, they're walking around. They like to have a good look in, so there's…no privacy at all…In the bedrooms the blinds are down constantly, and I worry about my safety. I worry about the fact that I'm a single female living in my apartment, if they see me there…It could be me being really paranoid and over the top…But they stare, and if you walk past them in the street, because they line up outside…there are shops opposite. You go to the shop, they'll be sat there. They make comments…You feel intimidated walking past there… And those are then the same faces that I'm seeing outside my balcony starting into my flat
>
> *(Alana, female, 35-44, South-East)*

Therefore, for some individuals the loss of privacy contributed to a wider sense of unsafety at home. There were some examples of apparently greater consideration towards privacy issues. Tim explained that although the sudden appearance of contractors outside on the balcony could be intrusive, when they were using a lift up and down past the window, they did not stare in: "The lift, that would go past the window where I work, it's by my desk…It would be up and down, up and down…In fairness…they were…pretty good at not looking in the window. Like, whenever it would go past, they would always be faced outwards" (Tim, male, 45-54, South-East). Small adjustments, like contractors facing outwards where possible when outside properties therefore lessened the impact of works. Rob (male, 35-44, South-East) also reported a more positive experience, noting that "they're quite good, I think they're trained to try not to look inside, don't stare, don't make eye contact, so the scaffolding company seem quite professional in trying to respect privacy". Some individuals had also been offered, or had bought themselves, a one-way privacy film to apply to the windows.

As well as impacting on privacy, living in a scaffolded building was highlighted in several cases as a security concern. This was also a significant area of dissatisfaction among survey respondents, with 74% of leaseholders reporting that their building did not feel secure during remediation works. During interviews, there were reports of individuals gaining access to the scaffolding and building, of non-residents "roaming the buildings" (Chris, male, 55-64, South-East), "attempts of burglaries…up the scaffolding" (Clara, female, 25-34, North-West), and postal theft. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) described people "scaling the scaffolding…at night, literally jumping from balcony to balcony, shining torches in and then trying doors". Sarah (female, 25-34, Yorkshire and Humber) explained that the "builders kept propping open the front doors as they work. The big impact on our lives has been not feeling safe and secure whilst this work goes on. That is something that really has had a negative impact on our mental health and wellbeing". These kinds of experiences could affect how safe individuals felt at home. Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) explained that one of the reasons they had chosen their home was because it seemed to be "a safe and secure place" but the works meant that "it turned from being a safe, lovely place to live with our children…to a hugely stressful place".

Image 7: Fly tipping at one development

Building works could also change the feel of wider developments, with more people, and more semi-hidden areas which could create spaces for anti-social behaviour. This atmosphere then changes how people feel about their local area. As Alexander (male, 35-44, South-East) explained, the remediation work "had a direct impact on the security on the estate…more drug use going on and people just feel like it's a hiding place…When the construction closed off certain areas, that's become a refuge for some youngsters to hang out". At another building, there had been rough sleepers, "just parking up behind in and around the scaffolding…We deal with the street team…But we see needles…faeces…in and around the scaffolding" (Harry, male, 35-44, North-West). Although there were motion sensors on the scaffolding, security "take 30 minutes, 45 minutes to come round…by the time that happens they've long scarpered"; there was a need for better security mechanisms, such as "someone there on-site" (Harry).

Living on a building site also exposed leaseholders to safety concerns. The most commonly reported problem was scaffolding nails causing punctures. Whilst these could drop from scaffolding accidentally, Alana also reported that there had been deliberate targeting of vehicles on site:

> We've had incidents where in the car park there are nails being left, and they're puncturing tyres…Someone had very strategically placed a really long upturned nail behind one of the rear tyres…I got really annoyed…managed to find the site foreman and he turned around and said, 'I'll check the CCTV. But to be honest it wouldn't surprise me because we've got a lot of cowboys on-site'…There have been other residents who have complained about the same thing
>
> ***(Alana, female, 35-44, South-East)***

Whilst some building works were only taking place externally, other leaseholders had works within their flats, and/or within common areas as well. For Charlotte, significant work in the communal areas of her building meant having to be constantly aware of what may await them as they leave their home:

I took my daughter to the park…And we walked outside our front door, and the builders had just left drills plugged in all down the corridor…And gone home for the night… We've got baby gates up all over the flat…we've got stuff on the corners of all of the tables. But like if I open the door…

(Charlotte, female, 25-34, South-East)

She juxtaposed her attempts to create a safe home environment within their home with the exposure to a construction site outside their door when it was opened.

Image 8: A child walks down a communal corridor where building works are taking place

Another participant explained their view that the communal areas of their building were "so unsafe that it was shocking...Your corridor was exposed to the cables, the wires, the insulation… My neighbour's little boy…tripped and fell over wires and sharp points…and they asked for evidence to see that it was the contractor's fault" (Freya, female, 45-54, South-East). Similarly, when fire doors were kept open, the reported response was also one in which the individual had to prove the problem: "Fire doors [are] kept open by constructors because it's easier…In a place that's flammable you're still leaving the door open?...They come back and say, 'How can you prove it was the construction and not a resident?'" (Freya, female, 45-54, South-East).

Image 9: A fire door left open

Use of space

Leaseholders responding to the survey reported impacts on their access to space within the home and within their wider building, with 52% reporting that they did not have use of all spaces within their own property during remediation works, and 65% reporting that they did not have access to all of the spaces and amenities within the wider building. Remediation work often resulted in the loss of balconies as useable spaces, because much of the work relates to replacing external cladding. Harry explained that one of the frustrating aspects of this loss of private outside space was that it may be unusable even when no work was taking place:

> I've had the scaffolding outside…for…I don't know, nine months. I'm not allowed to access my balcony, but no work's being done on my balcony…The scaffolding's outside there, okay, that's their property, if they then want to work on mine…they should just say, 'We're doing that in this month'… Because the fact is they just put scaffolding up and they've just like left it for a year… It's just this one-size-fits-all kind approach rather than…considerate construction
>
> *(Harry, male, 35-44, North-West)*

As well as this – perhaps anticipated – loss of outside space, participants also highlighted the loss of communal outdoor spaces within wider developments, due to the storage of materials on site. For some, this coincided with pandemic-related 'stay home' orders, which worsened the sense of loss related to being unable to use local outdoor space. Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) had lost access to a courtyard because "that's where they're parking up all their…material and insulation". This was common at other sites, for example John (male, 55-64, South-East) lost access to the communal garden for around two years because "it's being used for storage of all the goods and the scaffolding poles". Judith had also lost use of communal green space: "we had a nice bit of grass where the kids all played…First thing they did was cover all that over and put all the scaffolding materials on it, so we lost access to any of our green space…And then… they cut down all the trees…outside to put the scaffolding up" (Judith, female, 45-54, South-East).

Individuals also used space differently. This was partly as a result of adjusting living to the remediation work around them, and partly because household circumstances had changed during the lengthy periods of waiting endured as part of the wider building safety crisis and its impact on residential mobility. Home working has become much more common for some groups, extending beyond the limits of specific stay home orders during the pandemic. However, 69% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that they were not able to work at home during remediation works. Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) did "enjoy working from home" but was planning to go "into work five days a week…when they're drilling…it's [the flexibility] something that's sort of been taken away from you". In other homes, young children were getting older and were unable to

access their own private space because they were unable to move. Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) explained that "one of the most challenging things has been…my daughter's…still sharing a room with her brother…We can't give her the space she needs". Nina had a similar problem, living in a one-bedroom flat with their son:

When he turned 12…we gave him the bedroom…Initially we were sleeping on the sofa bed…Then we sort of sat down with my son, I said, 'Look, can we just sleep on the floor in the evenings?'…He was like, 'Yeah, I don't mind, that's fine'…We didn't want him to go to secondary school and get any kind of peer pressure about, 'I share a bedroom with my mum and dad'. That was a real big worry for us"

(Nina, female, 55-64, South-East)

Image 10: Overcrowding as a result of being unable to move on

Being unable to move to a bigger home left her feeling like "you'd kind of failed your family… because you've not been able to give them what you wanted to give them…We just wanted to be able to give you a bedroom, and we wanted to have a bedroom!" (Nina).

On-site construction practices

Whilst appreciating that contractors had work to do on site, leaseholders commonly perceive that individuals working on-site lacked awareness that they were working on an occupied building, and failed to adjust their behaviour in light of this. As Tim (male, 45-54, South-East) explained, "the slight sense you get is that…these people are used to working on building sites…So they make noise, they shout, they sit around outside. And it's like, 'guys, this is not a building site, this is people's homes, and you need to respect that'".

First, some practices suggested lack of consideration of the wider context of building safety problems and the anxiety that this may provoke among those living in buildings with fire safety concerns. There were several reports of smoking on site. Whilst most sites are not likely to permit smoking, the wider context for these buildings makes it particularly difficult for those living there to see this taking place. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) described seeing scaffolders stopping to "have a fag outside…And then they'll chuck it there and walk off". In Judith's (female, 45-54, South-East) building there had been "a number of incidents of issues with workmen smoking on the scaffolding by the cladding…those people were removed from site…It was just incredibly stressful for us all". Similarly, Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) had seen "contractors smoking on balconies".

Image 11: A contractor smoking on scaffolding

There was a sense of shock at on-site smoking in particular, as Tim (male, 45-54, South-East) explained: "You're fixing a building that is a fire hazard…Could you maybe, a) not smoke outside people's houses, b) not smoke outside a house or a building which is meant to be a fire risk?...There's just…nothing there to suggest that they're thinking about that". Whilst there may be training for some established staff members, Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) highlighted the use of "'cladding gangs'…who are just employed on a…weekly, daily basis" and who may have been less likely to have been fully inducted into expected site practices. In one positive example, Rob (male, 35-44, South-East) noted that their contractors "seem quite well-briefed" in relation to working on occupied buildings, with particular attention to fire risk, such as fire extinguishers on every floor and the removal of combustible material in sealed bins.

Second, whilst noise was always going to be inescapable, there was also avoidable noise during construction work, for example from talking, shouting and singing. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained that workers "were singing at the top of their voice…but it was peppered with rude words". There was sometimes perceived to be a lack of appreciation that "I can hear their conversations…And sometimes it's not very nice stuff" (Nicola, female, 25-34, South-East). A similar sentiment was expressed by Hannah, who argued:

> At no point did...the building agents or the construction companies involved consider that...they were in a residential building with people living and working and sleeping at home. There was absolutely…zero attempt to accommodate the fact that this wasn't a building site…The head contractor said to me recently, 'my men forget that this is not a building site every day'. To which my response was, '...why are you not taking responsibility for it?'…We had radios blaring, music blaring, people shouting at each other…not just the noise of the building itself, but all of this noise
>
> *(Hannah, female, 45-54, West Midlands)*

Similarly, Tim (male, 45-54, South-East) described people outside their home on their phone, "and it's just like 'be on your phone somewhere else'…you don't need to do that outside my house, which is just a little bit of thoughtlessness".

Third, participants also explained that the sight of the day-to-day dirt, dust, and grime of living on a building site affected their experience of home. Lack of tidying up added to the perception that homes were not being respected, and that the lived experience of residents was not considered. As Freya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained, "can't this constructor just clean up after themselves? Why do they leave their coffee cups and their rubbish?". Similarly, Alana (female, 35-44, South-East) described the way in which contractors "leave their rubbish on the balcony so I can't even open the door", and Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) had "crisp packets and…bits of people's lunch just lying outside the windows".

Image 12: Insulation left on a balcony

Image 13: Building materials left on a balcony

Anna highlighted the way in which something that was perceived as a trivial and inescapable part of living through building works actually devalued their experience of home:

> It's just having been such a long time and living it...and the attitude of the workers is, 'Oh well, what do you expect? It's a building site, of course it's going to be dirty'…The amount of rubbish that they leave around…all that kind of stuff, just the grind from day-to-day...Every time you go out, you see it…There's brick dust everywhere, which they don't sweep up so people walk through it. And then it's all trodden into the building...And all up the stairs. And they don't come in and clean the stairs. I do it. You know, and I'm kind of thinking, 'This is not my job. This is my home'. People are living here…and it wasn't ever intended that people would live in a building site
>
> ***(Anna, female, 55-64, West Midlands)***

Remediation is a long-term experience, which makes attention to these kinds of details all the more important, as small details can build over time to add to the sensation of what Anna describes as the 'grind' of daily life, and the relentlessness of the experience.

Moving out

In most cases, remediation in buildings within this sample was carried out with leaseholders in-situ. However, there were a small number of cases in which leaseholders and other residents were, or would be, decanted for some of the work. For example, in Freya's (female, 45-54, South-East) building, assessments were carried out which determined how long they would have to move out for: "My flat was deemed a low-level risk, so I only had to move out for a month. Most flats had to move out for six to nine months". Alana (female, 35-44, South-East) had to move out from her home at the start of the pandemic lockdown, a time in which "I do not want to move out of my flat…I want to be at home when that happens, I don't want to be living out of a suitcase…in a different space". However, she was required to move, which contributed to an "unsettling" experience, which then lasted for months rather than weeks because of construction shut-downs.

For those with experience of being moved out, several things were important. The location of alternative accommodation was a core concern, given that "you've got schools, you've got cars, you've got your whole life uprooted" (Freya, female, 45-54, South-East). Individuals need to be relocated within the same area to enable life to continue, for example access to work. Clara (female, 25-34, North-West) had been informed that she would be given "the options of what they have available for us to move into" and had been to see one building, although this did not suit the locational needs of all residents. It was also important for individuals to have high-quality, and like-for-like accommodation, with information about particular requirements being collected, such as "do you need two bedrooms, do you need a parking space, do you work from home, do you need a desk…do you have any dependents under eighteen" (Clara). However, having initially been told that they would need to move out for a couple of months, there was then very little information, leading to "quite a long unanswered question…you might have to pay for it yourself or…you're going to have to sort yourself out" (Clara) – this highlights the importance of providing all the relevant information that those affected would likely need to know at the start of the process.

The process of moving was also important, but the amount of help received by these leaseholders was variable. For example, Clara had been told that there was a special company overseeing the move out, which would arrange accommodation, and "they've paid for a removal company to come and take out big pieces of furniture into storage". By contrast, Alana had to move her own belongings to their temporary housing, whilst everything else was "packed up and left in the flat". Describing the experience of moving, Alana explained that:

> I can't take my books. I can't take all my clothes, or my cosmetics. You know your creature comforts. Because it's a home…Even when you're a student…I had a lot of stuff…and I had help. I had no help…I packed suitcases. And obviously I wanted my own pillows and my own duvet. And you just feel like a bag woman, walking down the street with pillows and duvets. You get to a certain point in life and you're not expecting to be doing these things…The apartment had a TV that didn't work. It had internet that didn't work…And I know it wasn't just me…That's how I know that there had been no care or consideration towards the feelings of the residents
>
> ***(Alana, female, 35-44, South-East)***

Whilst only a small number of individuals had moved, or were going to be moved, during part of their remediation works, there were others who would have preferred to move but this was not offered as an option. For example, Hannah (female, 45-54, West Midlands) reflected that if she had known what she would be living through, "I would never have stayed…We shouldn't have been allowed to stay". This suggests that there needs to be both greater understanding of the day-to-day impact of living through these types of building works in situ, greater transparency of that impact, and transparency of decision-making around moves. Nina (female, 55-64, South-East), for example, had been informed that their housing association would consider buying-back shared ownership properties where it was not reasonable for someone to remain during building works, but they wanted to know "who made the decisions about what was reasonable?... Because it seems to me it's only…reasonable to you as a company, rather than what is reasonable to the resident".

Issues for landlords

Although the focus of the research has been on the lived experience of remediation, leaseholders who rent out their property can also be affected by remediation works. Some leaseholders have never lived in the property, and purchased it as a buy-to-let investment with the intention of renting it out; others have become 'accidental landlords', previously living in the property before moving out and renting it, in some cases because they were unable to sell it due to building safety problems. As part of the research, 34 non-resident leaseholder landlords completed the initial survey, and two landlords were interviewed to gain further insights into the issues they faced – Anna (female, 55-64, West Midlands), who owned three properties and also lived in an affected flat, and Jimi (male, 45-54, Yorkshire and Humber), who had bought one flat as an investment.

Landlords responding to the survey had generally continued to rent out their flats during remediation works, with 83% (29 of 34 respondents) reporting that they had compared to 15% who had not. Both landlords who were interviewed had kept renting their properties out, although it was not clear whether this would be possible as remediation work progressed. For example, one tenant was not renewing their lease, and due to remediation the flat would not be inhabitable for several months – this meant that "I now face three months with no income off that flat…The council won't zero-rate it for council tax" (Anna, female, 55-64, West Midlands). Given the likelihood of delays, there remained the possibility that this loss of income could go on for longer. When responding to the survey, 52% of landlords (17 of 32 respondents) reported that they had found it hard to find tenants as a result of remediation works, compared to 22% who had not found it difficult to find tenants. 46% of landlords (15 of 32 respondents) had found it difficult to keep tenants during remediation works, compared with 25% who had not found this difficult. In Jimi's flat, the same tenant had been resident for several years; despite the scaffolding and sheeting "they were still happy to live in that area, they continued to stay". However, the rent had been "kept…low on purpose, obviously, because of the state of the building and the disruption" (Jimi, male, 45-54, Yorkshire and Humber).

Reducing the rent was one option for landlords who struggled to let properties during remediation. For example, 65% (20 of 31 respondents) of landlords responding to the survey agreed that they had reduced the rent on their property as a result of remediation works. However, there were some concerns raised during the interviews about the possible consequences of this on the wider development. One leaseholder highlighted that in her development the rents had been reduced, resulting in "less than salubrious actors trying to rent these apartments, then trying to Airbnb them on short lets" (Priya, female, 45-54, South-East), which had created anti-social behaviour issues for other leaseholders and residents.

5. Communication during works

Introduction

This chapter focuses on leaseholders' experiences of communication during the course of remediation works. It is important to acknowledge that current experiences are also informed by a longer history of communication with some of the stakeholders involved in building remediation. In many cases, a past history of communication problems was compounded during remediation, with mistrust and lack of understanding being particular issues; leaseholders frequently characterised communication with building managers and other stakeholders as a battle or fight. Day-to-day communication relating to remediation was challenging, with leaseholders emphasising a need for greater transparency and proactive engagement by those leading remediation projects. There was demand for more detailed, transparent, and frequent communication relating to what work was taking place and when. Communication of changing timeframes was particularly important, given that for many leaseholders the end of remediation marked the possibility that they could move on from a crisis that has defined the last few years of their life. Finally, leaseholders' narratives also reflected on the importance of communication and organisation among leaseholders during works.

Summary of survey results

Figure 4: Leaseholders' perceptions of communication during remediation (%; n=131-139)

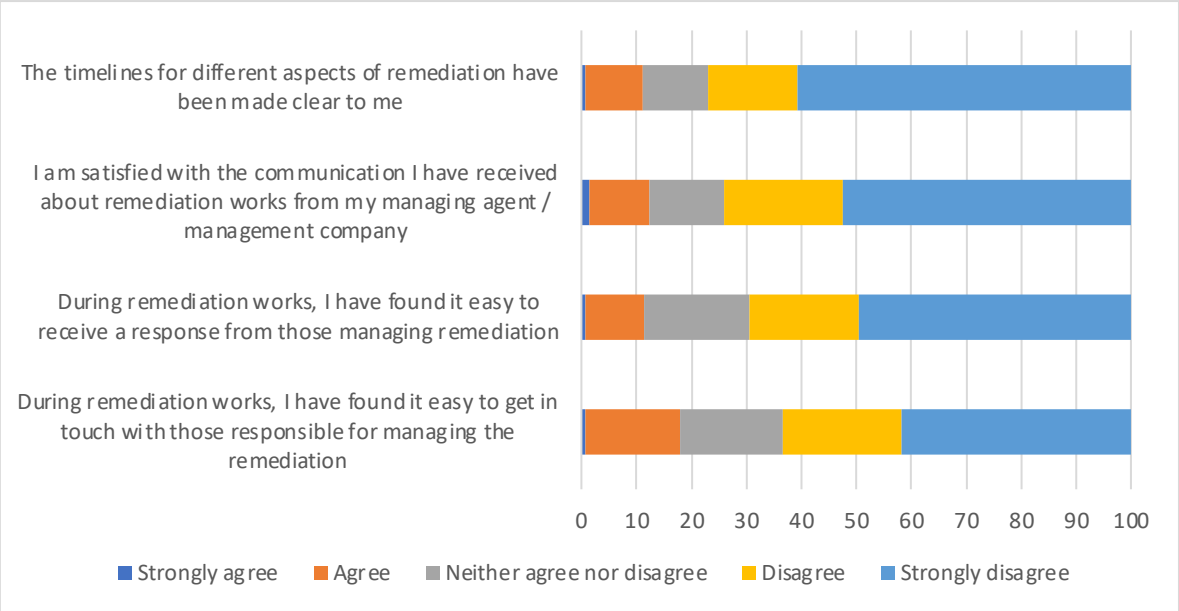
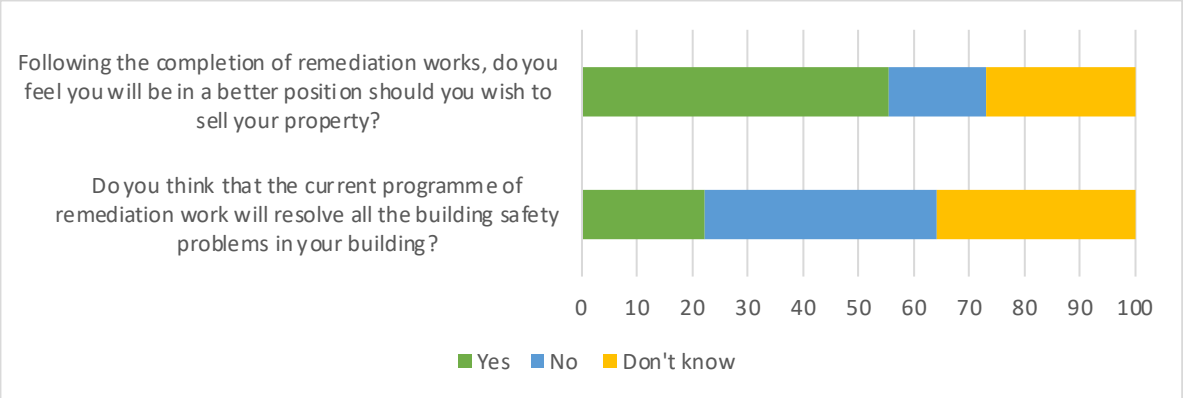


Figure 5: Leaseholders' perceptions of the outcome of remediation works (n=148)



Acknowledging the building safety legacy and rebuilding trust

Many leaseholders have been living with the knowledge of building safety problems in their homes for many years. This has been a significant source of stress, from living in a building that they know is not safe, to the financial anxiety provoked by the escalating cost of interim safety measures, insurance premiums, and potentially funding building remediation. Although the Government policy environment has evolved considerably in the period since the Grenfell Tower fire – and many (though not all) leaseholders may now be protected from the most extreme costs – the stress caused by this uncertainty has left a long and damaging legacy. As Judith (female, 45-54, South-East) explained, her developer had a "real kind of culture of 'we can't say sorry, we can't include you, because by doing that we will open ourselves to…admitting things". This resulted in "this real culture…here of 'it's us versus [the developer]', rather than 'we all want this to be a safe and nice place to live in'" (Judith). Stakeholders working on building remediation need to understand this legacy, because it impacts on people's experience of, and involvement in, remediation works in their building.

Leaseholders often described communication with other parties involved in building remediation in terms of a fight, struggle, or battle. Through their years of involvement in the building safety crisis, many leaseholders had spent a lot of time trying to obtain information, first about the problems facing their building, then about who was responsible for remedying and funding work, and now in relation to the progress of remediation. Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) described a "vicious circle" that ongoing poor experiences and communications with their managing agent had created, leading to a situation in which "there's no way to…intervene. Everyone is frustrated with each other at this point".

In some cases, leaseholders faced complete non-communication from some stakeholders, for example Tim (male, 45-54, South-East) whose original developer "just point blank wouldn't engage with us". In other instances, leaseholder reported the dismissal of queries, with attitudes such as: "'Just go away, we don't want to talk to you…stop hassling us'" (Priya, female, 45-54, South-East). When trying to find out what the problems were in their building, Charlotte (female, 25-34, South-East) explained that their housing association "treated me…like this neurotic inconvenience…I was really gaslit". Others felt that their questions were "dismissed" (Heather, female, 55-64, South-East), subject to "constant ignoring" (Chris, male, 55-64, South-East), and "pretty much told 'cease and desist'" when seeking information (Tim, male, 45-54, South-East). As Freya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained, "on top of all of this, you have your own life to deal with", making communication problems a significant stressor.

For many leaseholders, the tone of communications added to negative experiences. For example, Freya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained that others involved in the remediation works "treat all of us like complete idiots" and ultimately, the nature of communications suggested that "they could not care" about the mental distress being experienced. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) explained that their developer perceived leaseholders as "a

nuisance…'why won't they just shut up?'", whilst Alana (female, 35-44, South-East) felt she was viewed by the managing agent as "an annoyance", and Hannah (female, 45-54, West Midlands) that her managing agent and freeholder were "just not caring" about the situation. On several occasions, participants described instances in which, when a problem was raised, their honesty was questioned. For example, Alana's door balcony door was broken when contactors were working outside and "they've denied that they've done it…I have to fix it" even though "it's damaged from the outside. The only people to have been on that balcony are builders". Others explained that they were labelled as "vexatious" because they had "emailed too many times and asked the same question…The reason I've emailed too many times is because you don't answer" (Chris, male, 55-64, South-East).

When leaseholders explain that they feel dismissed and talked down to by others during remediation works, this may not solely be about one poor communication experience, but may represent the unlocking of a much longer history in which they have struggled to get information and have their experiences taken seriously. Communication is likely to be one of the most difficult areas to get right in remediation projects, partly because of the need to overcome this damaging legacy. As Nicola had indicated earlier, it is difficult to get out of this "vicious circle", but it is essential to improve communications with leaseholders during remediation works. This may be aided by improving leaseholders' involvement in the planning of works in the first place and providing greater reassurance that the experience of those living in the building is being prioritised throughout the remediation process.

Day-to-day communication relating to remediation work

Communication during remediation works was often challenging, with leaseholders left frustrated by lack of information. 64% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that they did not find it easy to get in touch with those responsible for managing remediation during the works, and 70% reported that they had not found it easy to receive a response. 75% of survey respondents were not satisfied with the communication they received about remediation works from their managing agent / management company. Although channels of communication will differ across different buildings, it is important that leaseholders know who is responsible for communicating during remediation, what kind of information they will receive, and how often. In many cases, managing agents were the main body communicating with leaseholders – in some cases carrying out this function on behalf of a non-resident building owner – but in other cases communication related to remediation came directly from the contractors, including via an individual responsible for resident liaison during works. To ensure greater consistency and accountability, communication requirements may be built into contracting for works, to ensure that this is considered as an essential part of the remediation process, alongside safety improvements to buildings.

Lines of communication and accountability were made more complex by the volume of different bodies involved. Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) argued that it needed to be clear "who is responsible for what" as otherwise contractors may have "the contract to do one bit of communication…the managing agent to another; are there bits falling in-between?". Simon (male, 35-44, North-West) highlighted that "part of the problem is it's the landlord only [who] has the final say in everything, liaising with the management company". This could result in "a lot of mixed messages and mis-communications and delays and…vague information because they don't want to commit to things", resulting in "you just feel like you're paying somebody to withhold information from you and manage the flow of information" (Simon). This was similar to the experience of Tim, who explained that whilst they held their managing agents "in the absolute lowest regard", they also recognised conflicts:

> They [the managing agent] are stuck between us and the freeholder. And the freeholder are saying, 'don't give anything away, don't make any concessions, we're not going to talk to them'. And they're also trying to…oversee the project. And the thing is, though, that when we ask for information or response, we get nothing
>
> ***(Tim, male, 45-54, South-East)***

This created the feeling that actually, "there's just no sense that anybody is acting in our best interests" in relation to

the project (Tim). This is a crucial issue relating to how the voices of leaseholders are heard, valued, and acted upon during remediation. A number of leaseholders made the comparison with an individual having building work in their own house, a situation in which you as the owner and resident would have control over the decisions that were made. Leaseholders, however, are in the position of having bought their homes (and so often feeling like owner-occupiers), yet living within buildings that were often owned by another party who was the ultimate client for building safety works.

It was relatively common for leaseholders to receive updates from contractors and/or managing agents during remediation works, for example a newsletter, but the frequency and content varied. Priya (female, 45-54, South-East) received an update around every two weeks, but "the last one that came in was a cut-and-paste job, and now…it's an open end-date…And they meet with the Residents' Association once every month and give them the same update". Having initially experienced problems, Clara (female, 25-34, North-West) reported that the communication had improved based on leaseholders' feedback, and they now had "regular meetings…and now they put letters in everyone's mailboxes…posters all over the building saying 'this meeting is happening here'". However, others reported very little communication about the works, for example Anna (female, 55-64, West Midlands) explained that "we don't get regular letterbox drops telling us what's going on" and Nicola (female, 25-34, South-East) favoured "more check-ins…every four weeks or so, just to let us know we're on track…To keep us all in the loop…These are people's homes and…we would appreciate to know how the works are coming along".

Some participants had a specific resident liaison individual who was a line of communication between those living in the building and the contractor. John (male, 55-64, South-East) explained that the contractors "have a full-time on-site leaseholder-liaison person. So you can go down and have a chat if you want and they will listen". Similarly, there was an on-site presence in Rob's (male, 35-44, South-East) building, with "some open days for leaseholders and residents to go and talk to them [the contractors] in the office…At least…there's visibility there". Having a presence on-site not only provided relatively easy access to a point of contact during remediation works, but also gave more confidence that the individual understood the experience of living through the works. Others had less positive experiences, however, with one participant reporting that the liaison officer would just refer people to the managing agent, suggesting they were there "in name only" rather than "doing something that is actually productive, constructive, and is helping residents" (Harry, male, 35-44, North-West).

Wherever it ultimately came from, many leaseholders wanted more frequent and detailed information about the works that were being carried out, for example each week or month. Information about what type of work was being carried out and in which part of the buildings may enable those living there to more effectively plan around the inevitable disruption. As Tim explained:

> They [the contractor] have always point blank refused to inform us when they will be working where…It's a massively complicated project and they've got different people doing different things. And maybe they don't always know who's going to be on site…But...they could say 'this week, we're going to be here and making a lot of noise', so that you could think to yourself, 'okay, I'll postpone a call or do something else, or go for a walk'…But it's just like, 'no, we can't tell you when we're going to be where'…I would strongly urge a contractor and the contracting entity to say, 'we need some idea of when you're going to be where'. Because, again, it's just debilitating
>
> ***(Tim, male, 45-54, South-East).***

This inability to predict disruption was viewed by many as particularly problematic, because it left individuals unable to plan or make arrangements to minimise disruption. In this sense, it was another factor that diminished the control people had over their lives. As Hannah argued:

> The problem was the lack of predictability. So, I would say to them, can you tell us next week, I need to know I'm clear [from noise]? …They would never be able to tell us. And we kept saying 'you just need to give us…an idea on…at least a month-to-month basis'…It shouldn't be that difficult. Because if this was our own home, you would be able to tell us
>
> ***(Hannah, female, 45-54, West Midlands)***

Access to more fine-grained information about working on site was raised by numerous leaseholders. As Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) argued, "it would make a lot more sense if they said, a proper drill down work program to say, 'Okay, they'll be outside your flat or this block of flats or in this phase' whereas you just get told, 'Buildings 1, 2, 3'". Communication was also important even where nothing was happening; as Nina (female, 55-64, South-East) reflected, "you have to tell people, even if there's nothing going on…send round a monthly update, even if it was to say…that nothing's changed". In part this was important "because there's a heightened level of anxiety in the building, you've probably got to communicate better, or more, than one would normally do" (Rob, male, 35-44, South-East), but its importance also stems from the experience of longstanding communication problems, which for many leaseholders has eroded trust.

Communication of changing timeframes

Although many participants anticipated delays to remediation work, given the complexity of the projects, the communication of changing timeframes was a particular source of stress and frustration. 77% of leaseholders responding to the survey reported that the timelines for different aspects of remediation had not been made clear to them. As with other areas, during interviews there was a call for greater transparency over set-backs, as well as more effective project planning. For example, many leaseholders reported that delays had been blamed on labour and supply shortages, which – in their view – were already well-established issues that should have realistically been accounted for in the original timescales for the projects, and potentially mitigated by other measures. As Freya (female, 45-54, South-East) argued, "are you telling me that…all these massive companies couldn't have forecast this and secured people to work…and made sure that they were paying them the right amount to secure the work?". In John's case, work had been schedule to take around 40 weeks, but was now likely to overrun by around a year, with particular issues related to the need to design aspects of the remediation as they uncovered the building, which resulted in significant bottlenecks.

Where delays happened, it was important to be transparent, for example in one development work had only just started on one elevation of the building, yet residents were still being told that the EWS1 would be issued within 5 months: "Well, if they do that then they might as well just…create world peace. That's impossible" (Freya, female, 45-54, South-East). In other cases, there were "out-of-date plans on noticeboards that just bear no resemblance to the reality at the moment" (Anna, female, 55-64, West Midlands). Although they were nearing the end of their building works, Tim (male, 45-54, South-East) explained that "we really don't have...a clear understanding when they're going to finish…It just feels like the managing agent and the contractor have just given up telling us… They must have an idea of what's left to do when they're going to get it done. But they're just not telling us".

In another multi-building development, Alana's building was the first on which work started, but there were now other buildings that would finish before them: "They've pushed the date back so many times, I'm actually not quite sure when the building will get completed" (Alana, female, 35-44, South-East). There were now days in which "you don't see a single builder working, because they're obviously…onto other buildings, and there's just no work going on. And in the meantime we're just expected to be okay with it" (Alana). Again, there was very little communication and transparency about this, when "one of the private blocks will get finished before us [a mixed-tenure block]… and it's the same team of builders working on all" (Alana). The provision of updated estimates for the completion of different elements of work is a reasonable expectation, and even if those dates change, this is arguably preferable to simply marking items "TBC" (Alexander, male, 35-44, South-East) or "unknown" (Harry, male, 35-44, North-West), which added to the sense of a process with no end in sight. There should be regular updates and explanations, with these taking place proactively, "rather than just having to…be kicked, pulled, dragging and screaming" (Harry). Understandably, leaseholders wanted to know when the work would be completed, because it marked not just the end of disruptive building work, but also the possibility that they could move on with their lives from a crisis that for many individuals has defined the last few years of their life. Whilst only 22% of leaseholders responding to the survey believed that their remediation works would solve all the building safety problems in their building, 55% believed that following the completion of works they would be in a better position should they wish to sell.

Leaseholders' self-organising and communicating

Given the importance of leaseholders having a voice in remediation works, it is important to recognise that the mechanisms through which such involvement may happen will differ by building. In this sample, some participants lived in buildings with a resident-managed structure, others had a recognised Residents' Association, and some had informal mechanisms of organisation and communication such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Some of the research participants were involved in these formal structures, for example as volunteer directors or chairs. Although there was a significant burden associated with these positions – in terms of the time devoted to leasehold issues – there were also advantages to having strong mechanisms through which the views of leaseholders could be represented to other stakeholders in the remediation process. One of the first things that happened in Tim's building once they found out that they had building safety problems, was a resident formed "what is now the Tenants' Association…And very, very proactively gathered us together". Prior to that they did not have a formal association, but it became important as "our conduit" (Tim, male, 45-54, South-East) for formal communication with the freeholder via the management company. Similarly, in Heather's (female, 55-64, South-East) building a residents' group had recently been set up because of the remediation work which had "actually galvanised us" to seek more information from their housing association freeholder and challenge some decisions. In Priya's development, there was a more informal arrangement, with representatives from each building and a large WhatsApp group, but this seemed to work for their development. She expressed concern for buildings in which "there is no…cohesive approach to this, I can just see how developers and managing agents will run amok with this stuff" (Priya, female, 45-54, South-East). For leaseholders in buildings approaching remediation, it is therefore important to consider the mechanisms that exist – or may be established – to enable greater influence in the process of building works.

6. Key learning points for good practice in remediation

Introduction

The aim of this final chapter is to draw out key learning points from the remediation projects featured in this report. The aim is not to generate prescriptive rules that must be applied in a uniform way for every remediation project – the realities of each context will differ, as will the range of actors involved, and the boundaries of possibility will look different in different places. Rather, the following sections seek to promote broader principles that make up the fundamentals of good practice for undertaking building safety remediation works. These principles aim to help industry bodies and key stakeholders involved in leading, managing, and undertaking remediation works to improve their practices and better meet the needs of leaseholders and other building residents. Five broad areas are covered: 1) Involvement and liveability in planning remediation; 2) Consultation and choice; 3) Communication; 4) Daily working practices for those working on site; 5) Assurance.

The research that this chapter is drawn from has been specifically undertaken with long leaseholders of flats in England. Whilst the principles discussed here refer to leaseholders, many issues are likely to overlap with the experiences of private and social rent tenants in mixed-tenure buildings undergoing remediation. Therefore, many of the key learning points will be of direct relevance to the remediation of residential buildings regardless of the tenure structure.

1. Involvement and liveability in planning remediation

Key learning

- Those leading remediation works should recognise leaseholders as key stakeholders in the remediation process, promoting a culture which values 'resident voice' and engagement
- In planning remediation, the views, opinions and preferences of leaseholders should help shape the approach to undertaking remediation work
- Promoting a liveable environment should be a core part of decision-making when planning remediation. Those responsible for remediation should be able to evidence that the impacts on liveability have been considered, which may be used to inform choices relating to:
  - Phasing of work
  - Days / time of work
  - Access to common spaces
  - Maintaining ventilation and light
  - Noise mitigation measures
  - Measures to increase privacy
  - Site-security plans
- Measures that have a negative impact on liveability should be in place for the shortest possible time period, with these measures kept under regular review
- Leaseholders should be able to attend an open meeting / open day with contractors and other key organisations involved in remediation, prior to works commencing

In general, leaseholders participating in the research experienced a lack of attention to their needs and preferences in the planning of remediation works. As Harry (male, 35-44, North-West) explained, "we're not really considered…we're not seen to be as much of a stakeholder as we should be". A number of participants expressed the view that problems which arose during remediation may have been avoided if remediation had been planned with residents in mind. Not all leaseholders were given a chance to participate in an initial meeting with contractors and other relevant stakeholders before work began. This type of meeting should be a basic requirement when contracting remediation works, so that people living through remediation can understand channels of communication, view drawings, see timelines, and (where relevant) view sample materials. Alongside information about the work, there should also be attention to the likely impact on those living in the building.

Consideration needs to be given at the outset to how the wider interests of leaseholders may be represented during the planning and undertaking of works, and the mechanisms for communicating this with the relevant stakeholders in the remediation process. For example, there were some positive examples of resident liaison officer-type roles being appointed by the contractor, with a physical presence on site.

In planning work, there should be an emphasis on liveability. Whilst this will be balanced against other factors, such as legal, regulatory, and financial necessities, promoting a liveable environment should be recognised as a core part of decision-making when planning remediation. For example, Priya

(female, 45-54, South-East) explained that maintaining access to common spaces could result in a "safe haven…that people can actually go to and use, because…you feel trapped in these buildings". Whilst this list is not exhaustive, consideration of liveability may include discussions relating to:

- Phasing of work
- Days / time of work
- Access to common spaces
- Maintaining ventilation and light
- Noise mitigation measures
- Measures to increase privacy
- Site-security plans

This will also involve recognition that what is liveable for one individual may differ for another. Consideration should be given to reasonable adjustments that may be made, for example in relation to disabilities. Measures that have a negative impact on liveability should be in place for the shortest possible period. For example, there was clear dissatisfaction with sheeting an entire building when work may not be taking part in a given area for many months. Whilst it is possible that cost or technical challenges may prohibit some approaches to phasing works, there is little evidence that maximising the liveability of homes during remediation has been viewed as an important part of discussions thus far.

2. Consultation and choice

Key learning

- Leaseholders should be given meaningful choices – where these exist – relating to the conduct of remediation works and the materials used
- Those responsible for remediation should communicate the possible advantages and disadvantages of particular choices to leaseholders
- Where choice is not possible, this should be transparently explained and a rationale provided
- There should be transparency around how decisions about moving people from the building during remediation works are made, including underpinning guidance and processes

There is little evidence that leaseholders have been viewed as having a meaningful voice in remediation works. There were some differences with resident-managed buildings in which, for example, an RMC was the client for the works and some leaseholders therefore had de-facto input. Whatever the management structure, and whether remediation is being carried out at no-cost by the original developer, through a Government-fund, or other funding arrangements, it is important for leaseholders to have meaningful input into decisions that affect their homes where this is possible. There may be little choice in some areas, but equally there could be several possible options in others, each with different perceived advantages and disadvantages. For example, when considering weekend work, this may achieve completion of the project faster, but also removes days that may provide needed respite for those living through the work. It may be reasonably expected that leaseholders' views will be taken account of where aspects of the work affect their homes and lives, for example the days and hours of work, or the type of covering used on scaffolding.

However, there is little evidence from this research that leaseholders have been viewed as having a meaningful voice in such choices, nor that the rationale for decisions is made clear. As MP Stephen McPartland argued, "if a building is going to be shrink wrapped in Monarflex, what needs to be done to prove that is the right material? How long can it stay up for, and what measures can be put in place instead?" (Westminster Hall Debate, 2022). Overall, the experiences described in this research create the impression that residents' voices remain unheard and that cultures of indifference persist (see, for example Hackitt, 2018).

3. Communication

Key learning

- A communications plan should be available to leaseholders, setting out responsibilities and expectations around communication between different organisations or parties, and leaseholders, at different stages of remediation; expectations around communication may be included in contracting arrangements
- Leaseholders should have access to regular communications about the nature and progress of remediation works, even during less intensive phases of work
- Leaseholders should have transparent access to 'live' information setting out the work taking place in specific locations on-site at given time intervals, for example week-by-week or month-by-month. This should state the impact the work is likely to have on those living in particular parts of a building
- Timeframes for the completion of different elements of work should be clear and accessible
- Where there are delays, a reasonable effort should be made to make a realistic estimate for the completion of different elements of work, avoiding the use of 'TBC' or 'unknown'

Greater transparency of information and communication is important. Too many leaseholders were struggling to obtain basic information, for example relating to the problems in their buildings and the timeframe for works. A communication plan should form a part of the planning for works, setting out who will be responsible for communicating with leaseholders, and setting expectations around the frequency and format of communications. It may be appropriate to include elements relating to communication in the contracting of works, to clearly set out what information will be required from contractors, at what frequency, and who is responsible for direct communication with leaseholders.

There is demand for more frequent and detailed communication from those managing remediation works to individuals living in the building. Some leaseholders reported that they had never been told what the hours of work would be, but had surmised this information from their observations whilst living in the building. As discussed above, channels of communication should be considered at the outset of projects, with responsibilities and expectations set between the different organisations involved in remediation work, and communicated to leaseholders. The frequency of communication may change during more or less intensive phases of remediation, but it remains important to communicate even "where there hasn't been progress, because if you haven't heard anything for three weeks you're wondering 'why haven't they communicated?'" (Rob, male, 35-44, South-East).

Leaseholders should have access to different levels of detail, to respond to individual preferences around access to information. This may include an overarching project timetable through to more detailed information (e.g. month-by-month or week-by-week) setting out what work is being done, where on the building (e.g. a particular

elevation or certain floors), and what the likely impact will be (e.g. on noise, privacy) – this will help residents to anticipate and potentially minimise disruption. These plans should be kept updated when things change.

Changing timeframes was a considerable source of stress, with many leaseholders reporting projects over-running. This was also linked to communication challenges, with a lack of proactive and transparent communication when things changed during the course of remediation works. As Alana (female, 35-44, South-East) explained, "this is just turning into the never-ending story…If the deadlines aren't being met…communicate them properly". Those leading remediation also need to demonstrate learning where there are frequent delays.

4. Daily working practices for those working on-site

Key learning

- All individuals working on site should be briefed about the wider context of building safe ty remediation and working on an occupied building
- Individuals should make adjustments to working practices that account for working alongside homes which are occupied
- Individuals should use a dedicated lunch and rest area away from people's homes
- Individuals should make an effort to minimise avoidable noise when working in proximity to people's homes
- Individuals should ensure that conversations and language are appropriate for a context in which you can be overheard by others, including children
- Where possible, individuals should avoid looking into people's homes; if travelling up and down scaffolding or using lifts, face outwards to maintain privacy
- Individuals should never smoke on site outside a designated area; this is unsafe and can cause a lot of anxiety for people living with fire safety problems
- All individuals should regularly check for, and clear away, rubbish
- Designated individuals should regularly check communal areas, roads, pavements, and car parks for dropped nails and other hazards
- All individuals should maintain security by closing doors and never leaving fire doors open

Whilst there were some examples of positive practice, in most cases leaseholders expressed the view that many contractors working on site appeared unfamiliar with working on occupied buildings. All those working on remediation projects should be briefed that they are working on homes which are often occupied during working hours. Being attentive to the intrusive nature of works and undertaking small measures to maximise privacy would make a difference to the experience of living through remediation. This may include behaviours such as: facing away from windows when travelling in external lifts, avoiding looking into homes, eating lunch in a designated area away from homes, and minimising avoidable noise on-site.

Given some of the practices on site, including smoking next to cladding, briefings to individuals working on site should also include some short background on building safety issues. Again, because contractors are generally working on occupied buildings, there should be greater attention to the safety of residents, to avoid common problems such as nails on roads and fire doors being left open.

5. Assurance

Key learning

- Quality-assurance mechanisms should be built into building remediation projects, with outcomes being communicated to leaseholders at appropriate intervals

Given the history of many buildings, it is essential in future that leaseholders have assurance about the quality of remediation work. Several leaseholders living in buildings in which remediation was funded by Government funds explained that there were independent surveyors who were inspecting buildings throughout works and providing assurance about the quality of work. As Rob (male, 35-44, South-East) explained, as the contractors were stripping back the outer wall "they're taking detailed photos of what they're finding…it's helping us build a really thorough case of the quality of the build in the first place" – this could be important in case of any future legal action or claims relating to the original development. In this building, the contractor was also taking detailed pictures of exactly what they were putting back to ensure there was an accurate record for the future. However, there were other examples of less positive practice relating to the quality of remediation work (for example gaps around refitted windows and unfilled holes in fire doors), which highlights the importance of transparent quality-assessments.

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