



A DOZEN OF THE UK'S TOP 20 BURGLARY HOTSPOTS OVER THE 12 MONTHS TO THE END OF NOVEMBER 2013 ARE IN LONDON. Source: Zoopla (Survey by Moneysupermarket)

BOILERS

GETTING HOT UNDER THE COLLAR

Jonathan Channing explains why the proactive maintenance of communal boiler plant can help avoid frustration

MANAGING AGENTS are often tasked with being a Jack-of-all-trades when in actual fact, one of their primary roles is knowing where to go for help and guidance. A case in point is communal boiler systems most often found in ageing residential blocks that provide hot water and/or heating to the flats in the building.

Most experienced property managers will know what it means to manage a building with communal boiler plant - this is especially memorable if the plant has unexpectedly gone down leaving residents without hot water or heating, or both.

Relying on a maintenance contractor, solely, to maintain the plant is a risk that managing agents and RMC directors should not take. Engaging a mechanical and electrical (M&E) professional to assess the safety, condition

and efficiency of the boilers and associated plant is highly recommended. The M&E expert will put into place a bespoke maintenance contract with the residents' needs in mind, compile an asset register and introduce a strict maintenance regime with regular independent inspections.

While the consultant's fees need to be taken into consideration, these are weighed up against the necessity to fully understand the state of the plant, and the potential savings made by ensuring the maintenance contractor does not have carte blanche to carry out ad hoc repairs, some of which may only have short term benefits. Having a consultant on board can also help the RMC and managing agent to select a new boiler maintenance firm to work as per the bespoke

contract. This would lead to better value for money through competitive tender and a maintenance plan designed specifically for the building and the plant within it, as opposed to the one-plan-fits-all model that is more commonly used.

When it comes to major boiler/plant replacement projects, the managing agent and RMC directors need to be in safe hands with an independent M&E consultant on board who would survey and define the clients' requirements, design the new system, specify the work required, tender, cost manage, oversee the works on site through to completion, and ensure that the contractor attends to any defects within the liability period.

The right consultant can advise on longer term options - for example, switching from oil to gas, installation of

combined heating and power (CHP) systems or the removal of the communal plant and replacement with individual condensing boilers in each flat. However, proceed with caution: individual boilers would no doubt mean lease alterations, an individual flue per flat, planning permission, possible new gas supplies, space to be found for the boiler itself and new distribution pipe-work in each flat.

You can see why the vast majority of residential buildings with communal systems retain and maintain their systems rather than 'go independent'. So how the communal system is maintained is all important. Get an M&E expert in, assess the plant in situ, put a maintenance regime in place, plan for all repairs, and communicate with the residents.

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