

How to Run an Efficient Council Estate to Achieve Compliance and Maintain Safety



SFG20

DRIVING FACILITIES EXCELLENCE

Across the UK, councils are under immense pressure to improve the quality and responsiveness of building maintenance, with legal risks on the line should your obligations not be met.

The risks you take on are substantial, and not only affect your council, but also the safety of those who use your building(s).

Financial constraints, fragmented building data and ineffective contract management are all making it harder than ever to meet your building safety duties, but with the right tools, you can repair the cracks.



Top 5 FM Challenges for UK Councils Right Now

1. Ageing Buildings

Many ageing council-owned buildings are in urgent need of repairs to their roofs, windows, heating and water systems. However, due to budget constraints, this is leading to an inefficient cycle of costly and potentially hazardous deferred maintenance. This also means the value of these capital assets are substantially negatively affected.

2. Limited Budget

Budgetary constraints are also forcing you to make difficult choices between maintaining existing buildings and investing in new ones. Budget constraints may also affect the level of staffing which then places more emphasis on having a good CAFM system utilising effective maintenance and recording regime. SFG20 can form the backbone of this regime.

3. Mounting Legislative Pressure

Recent legislation, for example Awaab's Law and scandals surrounding unsafe cladding are further increasing scrutiny, requiring costly remediation and upgrades among your already stretched resources.

As an enforcing authority, councils are expected to set the standard for compliance – imagine a council having to prosecute itself for non-compliance!

4. Government Devolution of Councils

Adding to these challenges is the government's devolution of councils, which is creating compliance and asset data issues for some, especially when assets are not being consistently tagged or where effective change management processes have not been put in place.

Mismatched records and incompatible systems can all lead to gaps in building information, resulting in uncertainty around knowing what is in your estate and what maintenance needs to be carried out.

5. Staff and Contractor Shortages

All of these issues are happening among staff and contractor shortages, meaning that you and your team may be taking on more work without enough resource in both money and manpower.

How to Manage Ageing and Unfit Council Buildings with Limited Budget

The first action to take to manage ageing and/or unfit council estates with limited funds is to **understand and prioritise your statutory maintenance tasks as well as those that are critical to the day-to-day functioning of your building.**

Using knowledge of your estate, you can then begin to take a risk-based approach by prioritising your assets based on risk as opposed to the volume of tasks. For example, rather than tackling 20 small problems, focusing on one task that will mitigate a major risk can make the most difference.

Taking a risk-based approach involves conducting an honest assessment of the current state of your building(s) and identifying gaps in maintenance and safety practices. Then, where necessary, you can seek expert advice to prioritise and address the most critical risks in your building(s).

If you're not aware of statutory tasks, i.e. maintenance work that must be carried out to stay compliant with the law, or are not completing them, this can open up your organisation to significant risk.

SFG20, the industry standard for building maintenance specification, prescribe what maintenance tasks are statutory and non-statutory, meaning you don't have to translate complex legislation into actionable tasks yourself.

By following the SFG20 standard, each built on the latest legislation, regulations and best practices, you can prioritise resources and avoid unnecessary tasks, i.e. prevent both under and over-maintenance, which can be equally costly.

The long-term benefits of this are maximised asset lifespan alongside minimised unplanned repairs, replacements and downtime.

How Councils Can Secure Additional Maintenance Budget

You can base your proposal for extra maintenance budget on the amount required to carry out all statutory tasks first, and disarm any questions by clearly laying out how much you need and justifying what you need it for – making it a no-brainer for extra money.

Few points are more powerful than highlighting the risk of legal non-compliance. Put simply, it's very hard for a Director, Chief Finance Officer or Executive Board to say that they can't allocate you the money.

This is because they will have all the necessary information to make an informed decision and are taking on the risk of breach of legislation.

Top 5 FM Challenges Arising from Council Devolution

The UK government is reorganising local government structures by replacing existing two-tier systems (county and district/borough councils) with single-tier unitary authorities.

While this merging of councils is intended to reduce duplication and allow resources to be managed at a larger scale, it may come with challenges.



1. Varying Standards and Practices

Merging teams from different councils involves bringing together different working cultures, historic practices and management styles, risking potential friction and resistance to new ways of working.

More specifically, devolution can result in varying interpretations of national FM standards across regions.

Councils may adopt different approaches to maintenance priorities, compliance, procurement and risk tolerance, creating inconsistencies and complicating benchmarking.

This may even lead to variable service quality and increased compliance risk, especially in multi-site or regional portfolios.

2. Skill Gaps and Capacity Constraints

Devolved councils inherit expanded responsibilities without a proportional uplift in resources or FM-specific expertise.

This places pressure on small or overstretched FM teams to make strategic asset decisions, manage contractors and ensure statutory compliance, often without adequate support or tools.

Recruiting and retaining skilled FM professionals becomes more challenging at the local level, but using an industry standard such as SFG20 with a suitable CAFM system can provide a sound foundation on which to allow these teams to deliver a more robust service.

3. Complex Asset Portfolios

Devolved councils are often responsible for large, diverse and ageing estates including schools, libraries, social housing and leisure centres.

These assets frequently require significant capital investment or remedial work,

but devolved budgets are typically constrained.

FM teams must balance reactive maintenance, planned preventative regimes and capital investment planning with limited funding.

4. Procurement and Supply Chain Inconsistencies

Devolution leads to increased autonomy in FM procurement, but often without centralised frameworks or economies of scale.

Councils may duplicate procurement efforts, face higher costs or engage inconsistent suppliers. This can be compounded by overlapping contracts expiring at different times, having varied SLAs and using different CAFM systems.

Ensuring service quality, social value delivery and compliance across fragmented contractor networks becomes a key challenge.

It then becomes essential to record this in the Risk Register to ensure stakeholders are aware of potential hazards and funding priorities can be determined recognising that risk.

5. Loss of Asset Data

As councils attempt to centralise and rationalise property data across increasingly complex estates, the aggregation of data across buildings and inevitable changes of staff may result in the loss of granular detail about assets.

It may even be the case that there is loss of the existence of some assets and of existing upgrade or maintenance projects.

For example, details such as maintenance history, condition or regulatory status may be incomplete, outdated or missing entirely.

This can mean that some councils may be lacking up-to-date, complete records of assets that are under their control, causing friction during and after a building handover between departments, service providers or ownership transfers.

This can result in delays, duplication of work and an increased risk of non-compliance.

You can't expect a smooth building handover and won't be able to implement an effective maintenance strategy if you don't have a strong understanding of your building and its assets.

This is why it's important to **create or repair your already existing asset register** with accurate information in a readily available, digitised format as opposed to static, paper-based documents.

An Asset Audit, combined with rationalised asset tagging becomes fundamental to understanding what and where maintenance and insurance inspections need to be focused.

Getting Your Asset Register in Order

Working with complicated asset registers is a common challenge for many. In fact, according to SFG20's State of Facilities Management Report, only 1 in 10 organisations have an accurate and up-to-date asset register.

Too often, assets are recorded with vague descriptions such as "boiler" or "pump", making them incredibly difficult to identify and understand the specific maintenance tasks which need to be carried out on the asset. This leads to inefficiencies, increased risk and compliance challenges.

By 2025, the Government Property Function (GPF) has pledged to ensure that all buildings have an FM asset register compliant with the Asset Data standard.

The government has created facilities management standards to set minimum requirements for delivering FM services across the UK public estate.

Two of the main standards are:

- FMS 001 - Management & Services
- FMS 002 - Asset Data

The Management & Services standard sets out the minimum requirements for managing and delivering FM services across the UK public estate.

SFG20 is recognised within FMS 001 as a benchmark for industry best practice.

Its usage directly supports the Maturity Assessment Guidance on Standards and Best Practice which demonstrates how well FM delivery is standardised, compliant and aligned to industry expectations.

The Asset Data standard, the companion standard of the Management & Services standard, provides the framework for creating accurate and up-to-date asset registers.

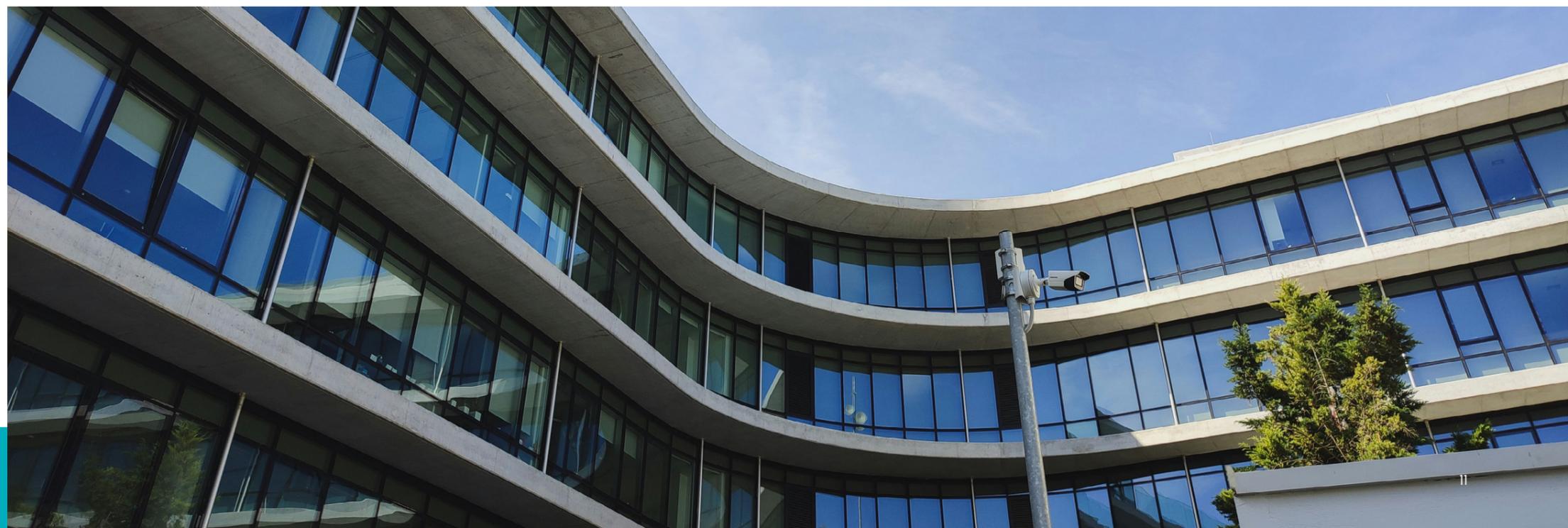
FMS 002 cites SFG20 as a key tool for standardising asset data and maintenance within government estates.

SFG20's codes, task schedules and criticality ratings are embedded in the Asset Data standard, ensuring that asset registers are directly aligned with industry best practice.

Using the SFG20 standard provides government organisations with the ability to apply a consistent, risk-based approach to asset management, reinforcing compliance, safety and value for money across facilities management.

The FMS 002 standard can be used in tandem with SFG20 to manage asset register data and include the correct criticality code ratings.

Ensuring that asset data is consistently structured, complete and digitally maintained in a single source of truth is paramount – not only for compliance, effective planned maintenance and long-term cost savings, but also for the Golden Thread.



Understanding The Golden Thread of Information

The lack of proper fire safety measures and poor maintenance played a major role in the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy in which 72 people lost their lives.

Investigations found that cladding materials installed during a refurbishment were highly flammable, while fire safety equipment such as fire doors and smoke ventilation systems were poorly maintained/inadequate.

The disaster led to massive regulatory changes including the Building Safety Act 2022 and stricter fire safety enforcement in higher-risk buildings.

Under the Building Safety Act 2022, all buildings that fall within scope must maintain a digital audit trail of all key details related to a building known as the "Golden Thread", a critical part of the post-Grenfell world.

This means ensuring that you have detailed maintenance records showing both timings and the level of activity that was carried out, rather than what was planned to be carried out.

Starting from the design phase and continuing throughout a building's lifecycle, this includes the creation and management of a digital record of crucial building information that is accurate, traceable and easily accessible.

If you cannot provide evidence of compliance with safety regulations, you may be held liable for any resulting incident.

How to Manage Maintenance Contracts Effectively

Without clear, standardised service level agreements in place, councils can face significant challenges not only when transitioning between maintenance providers or during building handovers, but also when managing existing contracts.

This is because ambiguity over responsibilities, performance expectations and compliance requirements can lead to disputes, service gaps and increased operational risk.

A common consequence of this is the loss of building information. Not only is this inefficient, but it's also a legal issue for buildings that fall within scope of the Building Safety Act 2022.

To manage maintenance contracts effectively, it's equally important to keep your asset registers up to date with accurate data. If not, this can cause a lack of clarity over assets, making drawing up a precise, detailed specification of works for a tender harder than it needs to be.

Combined with good knowledge of your building and its assets, SFG20 can help to smooth out contract negotiation by allowing you to draw up standardised specifications of work.

This ensures that all Contractors or Service Providers can quote on the same work, allowing you to compare quotations on a like-for-like basis.

As everyone is on the same page, this also reduces the chance of both contractual breaches and complexity further down the line.



Preparing For a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Contract Expiry

If your council's PFI contract is coming to an end, you'll need to ensure that there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

After PFI contract expiry, assets are typically returned to a council, and a key consideration here is ensuring they have been well maintained and that adequate lifecycle maintenance has been carried out.

It's also important to identify any potential governance issues and specific clauses related to the return of assets at the end of your PFI contract.

Outsourcing the work doesn't mean outsourcing risks and responsibility – you'll need to carefully assess and manage any residual risks and liabilities associated with the PFI contract, otherwise it could land you in trouble.

The Reality of Inaction

For those responsible for buildings, compliance and safety are a non-negotiable part of the job.

Without strong knowledge of your assets and how they need to be maintained, it becomes virtually impossible to ensure the safety of your building's occupants.

Building safety negligence can result in serious consequences, including fines in the millions, reputational damage and even prison time should someone be injured or lose their life.

In 2020-2021, Croydon Council was exposed after severe damp, mould and structural disrepairs were found in council flats at Regina Road.

A housing ombudsman report found the council guilty of severe maladministration, with residents suffering health problems due to neglect. The scandal led to government intervention, forced resignations and financial oversight of the council.

In 2023, Newham Council had 9,000 overdue fire risk assessments and 5,400 open repairs. More than 40% of the council's homes had not had an electrical condition test for more than 11 years.

The Regulator of Social Housing issued a severe warning, and the council faced potential fines. They were forced to create a task force just for damp and mould which cost them £25 million.

These aren't just fines, but examples of negligence costing councils far more than carrying out the correct maintenance in the first place.

The majority of building safety incidents are caused by critical lapses of judgment – that is, a poor understanding of your building(s) and the responsibilities of those who own and manage them.

Compliance with statutory requirements, informed risk-based approaches as well as clear lines of prioritisation, competence and accountability are all integral cogs in the machine of safe building management.

Ultimately, you need to understand what assets you have and what maintenance tasks you need to be completing in line with the latest legislation. This will allow your building to keep on serving the function it's intended for and to keep the public – and your council – out of harm's way.

To find out more about the common risks of non-compliance in building maintenance and learn how you can mitigate them, make sure to download our e-book below – your next step to safeguarding your buildings and protecting those who use them.

[Read Top 5 Risks E-book](#)

Building Maintenance: Top 5 risks of non-compliance

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info@sfg20.co.uk



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