



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Viewpoint 103

Improving installation: How a new standard is transforming group living systems

DECEMBER 2020

Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Lee Stephens**, Contract Manager, Legrand Assisted Living and Healthcare

About Me

For the past 20 years, I've been installing grouped alarm systems into supported housing schemes. To know that I'm playing a part in protecting vulnerable residents but also helping to boost their independence is an amazing feeling.

I began life as an apprentice engineer, but now I manage hundreds of installations every year, right across the country. It's a job I love, but with the outbreak of Covid-19, it's also a job that has changed significantly in recent months.



Lee Stephens

Maintaining connections under lockdown

When the UK first went into lockdown, my phone didn't stop. I manage a team of nine Legrand Project Engineers, three Administrators and over 30 external installation companies, from Land's End to John O'Groats. But I also support housing managers at the sheltered and extra care schemes that use our technology. They wanted reassurance that their grouped living systems could adapt to the new world of social distancing and remote working that we all found ourselves in.

All of a sudden, many site managers had to supervise their schemes from home or look after multiple developments and they wanted to know if they could log in and change the programming on their equipment virtually. Other managers were self-isolating and needed assurance that their system would dial the mobile of a colleague in their absence.

Housing providers also asked us to reduce engineer site visits and, where possible, set up and maintain equipment at a distance.

When your job is all about protecting the very people who are most at risk from a global pandemic you need to take every precaution to minimise exposure. This is something we took very seriously from the outset and I'm proud, not just of the adaptability of our installation and maintenance staff, but the vigilance they've demonstrated around Government guidelines.

From wearing appropriate PPE and sanitising equipment and surfaces before and after works, to regular temperature checks and new hand washing regimes; the daily routine of our installers is very different to pre-pandemic life. Yet the level of care, compliance and motivation of staff has been outstanding. They understand that new installation methods are vital to protecting residents and reassuring site managers.

During the first lockdown, these Covid-secure methods were outlined in a new installation guide, designed to inform and reassure our customers. We wanted to explain the wide-ranging precautions our engineers were now taking, and this guidance gave site managers the confidence to allow engineers on site to complete important works.

Recently we've also contributed to a national TEC industry document on safe working environments, produced by the TEC Services Association (TSA) which provides guidance for commissioners during Covid-19 around specialised grouped living, installation and maintenance of TEC.

Raising the standard

However, there has been another factor giving confidence and comfort to supported housing staff in recent months: BS 8604-1:2019. This is the new social alarms standard for the design, installation and maintenance of specialised grouped living environments and it's a game changer.

How so? Well, BS 8604-1:2019 is a simple set of rules that are having a big impact on the way that grouped call systems are installed.

We all know that technology enabled care (TEC) systems are life critical. Like fire alarms or smoke detectors, they send an alert if someone needs emergency help or assistance. But there hasn't previously been a dedicated BSI specification for the installation of social alarm systems in retirement living, extra care or sheltered housing.

Over the last nine months I've witnessed, first-hand, the difference this new standard has made, particularly to managers of grouped living accommodation and the residents they support. It's important that anyone who commissions, specifies, installs or monitors technology enabled care in this type of housing scheme knows about the new code of practice and the benefits it can bring.

Making it personal

In the past, grouped alarm systems were often installed to a national specification. If an engineer wasn't given much information about residents, they would leave the features of the system at their default setting. So, when new equipment was installed, many housing schemes just received an updated version of what they already had.

The new BSI standard, which launched in 2019, changes this. Rather than using one 'umbrella' approach, it ensures that installers take account of the varying needs of the individuals in question and the responses they might need.

From the moment a housing manager considers a potential alarm system, a risk assessment begins. This process helps organisations such as Legrand Assisted Living and Healthcare to tailor a grouped living system so it meets the specific requirements of the people who will be using it. Feedback from residents must be central to the design to make sure it is user-friendly, even in an emergency.

Take a sheltered development in the Scottish Borders that I've been working with recently. The scheme supports people aged 55 to 85+, many with jobs. Some residents leave for work before the manager comes on site and she relied on them putting a note under her door to say they were alright. We tuned their grouped living system so the manager could spot which residents had acknowledged they were up – giving her peace of mind if she hadn't seen them all day.

At another scheme, we spoke to a busy site manager who was worried after residents complained that they felt they were waiting too long for someone to answer their alarm calls. A default wait

time was in place before their call was moved to an alarm receiving centre and these delays happened regularly because the manager was often busy supporting other residents. We showed the manager that this default wait time could be changed, and he programmed it to suit the needs of his residents.

Guaranteeing integration

It's crucial that grouped living systems are compatible with the other devices managing the safety and security of residents in the same building; for example, fire and lift alarms or door access systems, which are often controlled by external organisations.

Integrating these different products effectively is a complex process, particularly when a large proportion of housing providers are still using analogue equipment and monitoring infrastructure. This is despite the fact that by 2025 the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN), which has connected analogue telecare systems for decades, will be switched off and replaced by a digital all-IP network.

Traditional assisted living alarms won't work in the same way on new digital networks - reliability may be affected, and installation and maintenance won't be so straightforward.

This is where the new design and installation code of practice will play a crucial role. It sets out clear guidelines for the arrangement and operation of grouped living systems to ensure interoperability between different equipment and systems. It ensures that all types of alarm levels are received at the alarm receiving centre (ARC) correctly to optimise the integrity and reliability of onsite and offsite communications. It sets out clear instructions for inspection and testing to ensure that social alarm systems are fully operational and communicating with their ARCs correctly.

Operating remotely - in the cloud

When the UK first locked down, lots of housing managers had to work from home and we talked them through the remote dial-in features on their alarm systems. For instance, one manager was able to communicate with four schemes, managing emergency calls from his kitchen table without the risk of cross contamination. Another manager who was shielding told us what a relief it was to know that the system in her development would transfer resident calls to her colleague's mobile so he could respond.

None of this would be possible without the cloud based digital ecosystem that is the engine room of Legrand Assisted Living and Healthcare's grouped living systems. Our digitally enabled equipment and monitoring infrastructure meant that managers could work from home, safe in the knowledge that their residents were still being supported.

And finally

It's hard to believe that unlike fire alarms or smoke detectors, grouped alarm systems haven't always been installed to a certain standard before. I'm hoping that the BSI's new code of practice will transform set-up practices so housing providers know, whatever manufacturer or product they choose, they are getting a usable, reliable system, personalised to their residents' needs.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About Legrand ALH



ASSISTED LIVING & HEALTHCARE

Legrand are global experts in electrical and digital building infrastructures, with a presence in over 90 countries. The Assisted Living & Healthcare business unit specialises in creating innovative technology based care solutions for health, housing and social care sectors through our brands Tynetec, Jontek and Aid Call. Currently,

we're all living longer and as a consequence, the care and health services we rely upon need to change in order to support more effectively, those who are vulnerable or at risk.

Tynetec's digitally enabled at-home alarms and telecare devices work seamlessly together to empower individuals in their own homes. Our grouped living and access control systems are designed to ensure that local authorities and housing associations have flexible future proofed support for their residents. And we also offer a true digital end to end solution with our Answerlink monitoring and response center software. Aidcall has been a leading



manufacturer of wireless nurse call technology for over 40 years, Aid Call's wireless nurse call solution greatly reduces installation cost and minimises disruption. Wireless configuration offers complete flexibility and mobility, which makes our system infinitely changeable and expandable, allowing for the constant ability to deal with ever changing priorities and demands.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations.

To access a selection of related resources on going digital and technology enabled care and housing, visit our dedicated pages at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/going-digital/>

And for more information about how the Housing LIN can advise and support your organisation on community-led approaches to shaping your 'offer' for an ageing population, go to: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/consultancy/consultancy-services/>

Published by

Housing Learning and Improvement Network
c/o PRP, The Ideas Store
10 Lindsey Street, Clerkenwell
London EC1A 9HP

Email: info@housinglin.org.uk

Web: www.housinglin.org.uk

Twitter: [@HousingLIN](https://twitter.com/HousingLIN), [@HousingLINNews](https://twitter.com/HousingLINNews) & [@HLINConsult](https://twitter.com/HLINConsult)