

SHAL's Community Chat 2023-06

Boiler efficiency project

Simon White led a chat about the innovative ways we've been working with other companies.

We've seen repairs to gas boilers increase over the years and we've been looking into ways in which we can work more effectively and reduce the time tenants are not left without heating and hot water. We've looked into the following technology and trialled it in a small number of homes:

"FaultFinder"

This will enable us to diagnose faults more efficiently when you contact us to report a repair. We'll be able to identify the fault using the make and model of the boiler as well as the fault code. This will also recommend a part that's required to get it working again – and can even identify where that part may be available to pick up if we don't have it in stock.

Autofill

Many faults in our boilers relate to a drop in water pressure. This can be rectified easily by the tenant but we appreciate people may not be comfortable topping up the pressure themselves – the words "gas" and "pressure" are enough to scare anyone! It costs money to attend and top up the pressure, even more out of hours.

This bit of kit attached to the boiler is able to do the job for you as soon as it detects a drop in the pressure – you won't even know it's done it. However, if it needs to do it a few times in a short period of time it will alert us that there's a wider problem with the system (possibly a leak). Leaks like these can often go unnoticed causing damage to the property.

MagnaCleanse

Over time the water in our heating systems becomes dirty as it's polluted with sludge and corrosion from the pipes and radiators. Often when you bleed a radiator you see the black water from inside. This, ideally, should be nice and clear. The dirtier the water, the more inefficient the heating system is – and it causes damage to the boiler over time.

This bit of kit attaches to the pipes and the magnet attracts the metal within the sludge and stops it travelling further around the system causing damage. It can be cleaned easily.

Alongside this there is a water tests that can be performed to determine the balance of chemicals in the water that can cause the corrosion. Chemicals can be added to restore and maintain the balance and ensure the system stays clean and remains effective and efficient.

Monitors

There are also monitors we can place around the home to monitor temperature and humidity levels. This helps to determine if the boiler is working effectively – and if there’s likely to be a problem with damp, condensation and mould in the home. high humidity levels could indicate the extractor fans aren’t working effectively and may need to be upgraded.

This highlighted a number of issues with how some of the boilers were performing. The main one was boilers not being in “Eco-Mode” meaning that the pre-heating function was on and hot water was available on demand. **Turning “Eco-Mode” on means you save energy, the boiler doesn’t work as hard and could potentially last longer.**

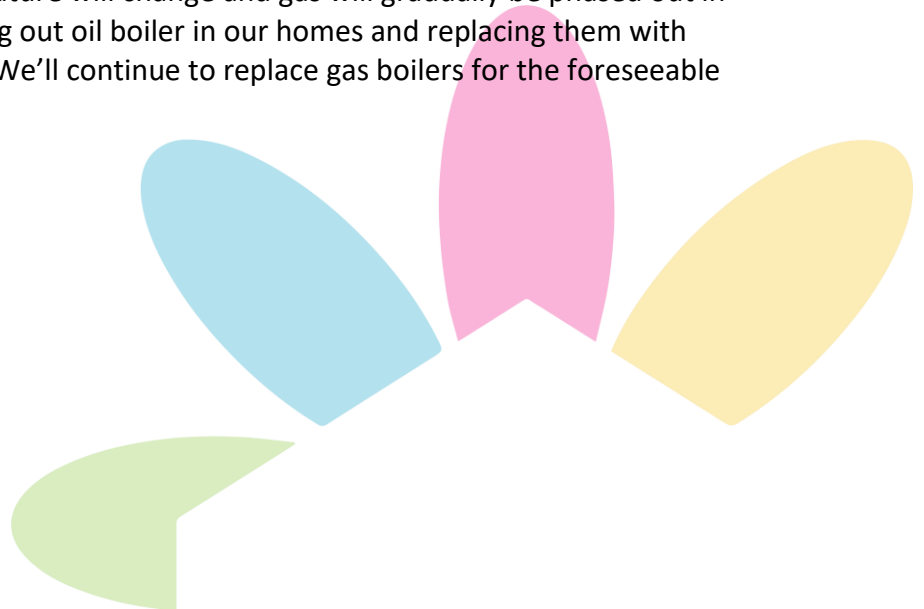
Likewise, monitors on the boiler alert us to faults within the system meaning we can contact you about a fault before you even realise there is one!

All this work has been carried out alongside Somerset Gas and a number of other companies. It’s not cost SHAL a penny, apart from our time.

What next?

We’re now monitoring all the different equipment and analysing what it’s telling us so we can decide what we want to roll out in the future. The Board will need to decide what’s most effective. We could roll it out in a number of ways including as part of a programme or case by case. We’re really pleased we’re able to improve the energy efficiency of our gas homes as they are often overlooked when it comes to government targets.

The way we heat our homes in the future will change and gas will gradually be phased out in new homes. We’re gradually phasing out oil boiler in our homes and replacing them with electric heating if they breakdown. We’ll continue to replace gas boilers for the foreseeable future.



There was a wider discussion about installing showers instead of baths as part of our bathroom refurbishment programme. It was agreed it was preferable to have a shower as baths are increasingly unpopular because of the cost, energy efficiency and water shortages. However, it was agreed it's never "one size fits all" and families with young children, for example, would need a bath.

We've been replacing electric showers with thermostatic showers for quite some time and this has reduced the need and cost of repairs to showers – it costs around £400 to repair/replace an electric shower.

Adjustments

We also chatted about minor adjustments that we can make to people's home to make them easier to live in. We have a budget of £10,000 allocated for minor adjustments (i.e. those that don't need an Occupational Therapist referral or Disabled Facilities Grant).

If you need some minor adjustments made please get in touch and we can discuss it with you and, if necessary, arrange for the adjustments to be made.

