

BESA welcomes 'renewed urgency' in safety regime

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The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) has praised the new team running the [Building Safety Regulator](#) (BSR) for making rapid progress on improving the planning process but called for renewed focus on remediation projects.

Recently appointed BSR chair Andy Roe promised to clear the backlog at planning Gateway 2 for higher risk buildings (HRBs) which had stalled the new build housing market, but without compromising stringent safety standards introduced under the Building Safety Act.

He created a centralised 'Innovation Unit' of planning specialists and a 'batching system' to focus on the biggest new build projects, covering nearly 34,000 homes, which are now being assessed at pace. Most of the 150 plus HRB schemes are now expected to clear the system by the end of the year.

Antiquated IT systems and a shortage of experts, particularly in the computational fluid dynamics required to assess complex fire safety designs, have undermined the planning process, but Roe and his team are now addressing these.

He is also appointing a team of 'account managers' to work with major developers and address their concerns which led to a dramatic reduction in investment in much needed housing projects this year.

"The renewed sense of urgency at the BSR is palpable," said BESA's director of specialist knowledge Rachel Davidson. "This is so important because it is crucial that the industry can have confidence in the process.

"Andy Roe and his team have brought in some innovative changes which appear to be bearing fruit

already. Clearing the backlog of the most significant projects will help the whole sector by getting money flowing back into construction and freeing up resources so more projects can move forward.”

However, she said slow progress on remediation projects remained a serious concern as addressing life safety issues in existing and occupied buildings should be a priority. More than 250 remediation applications, covering over 22,000 homes, are still being held at Gateway 2.

To tackle this, the BSR said it was planning to create a new centralised Remediation Unit modelled on the Innovation Unit and would speed up the batching system for existing building projects.

“Clearly, the Regulator has to find a tricky balance between getting projects moving and ensuring safety standards are upheld,” said Davidson. “Also, remediation work is often technically and logistically challenging because of the constraints involved in improving existing buildings.

“It’s a tough one, but too many people are still living in unsafe conditions and this needs to be addressed urgently.”

Building Safety Regulator CEO Charlie Pugsley said: “The regulator has been learning from the last two years, has listened to industry feedback and acted decisively through these substantial operational changes we are piloting, which have shown immediate, positive results.

“However, we recognise there are ongoing challenges including national skills shortages, and we are committed to using agile problem-solving to work constructively with the wider sector and industry applicants,” he added in a BSR statement.

BESA also launched a Member Pledge campaign during its [National Conference](#) earlier this month. This seeks to embed competence and compliance throughout building engineering supply chains.

Several leading members are pioneering the scheme which encourages their supply chain suppliers to join the Association and use its independent technical audit process to provide evidence of their technical and professional competence, and compliance with the new safety regime.

“Delivering the work approved through Gateway 2 demands a wide range of competent individuals and organisations, each with the capability and accountability to carry out their part of the process effectively,” explained Davidson.

“That is why our Member Pledge is designed to reinforce a shared commitment to competence, compliance, and responsibility across the whole supply chain.”