Planning for the end of a PFI

With the clock is ticking on dozens of PFI contracts, Swiftclean's **Martin Hembling** advises on what to look out for when preparing to hand properties back to commissioning authorities

Private finance initiative (PFI) agreements, first introduced in 1992, funded a range of public infrastructure – from schools and hospitals to prisons and office buildings – through long-term private investment and facilities management provision. Now, after decades in operation, many of those deals are coming to an end.

Over the next four years alone, around 70 of the UK's 700 PFI contracts will expire, with hundreds more following in the decade after.

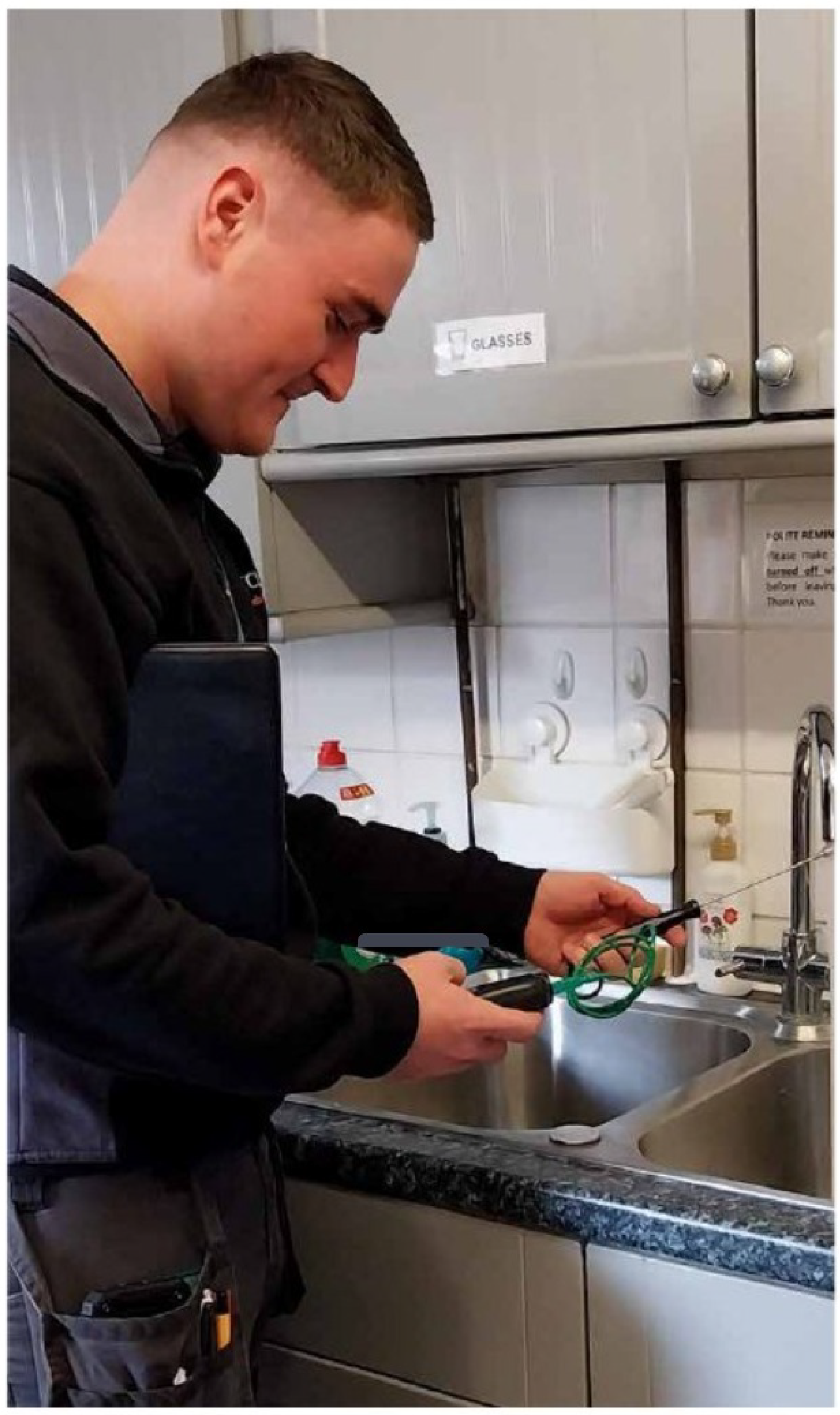
When the handover point arrives, responsibility for these assets typically transfers back to the contracting public authority and, for building managers, this raises urgent questions about condition, compliance and accountability.

For incumbent building managers or facilities and building managers, the end of a PFI contract can feel daunting. Drafting the final building report means collating years of sometimes incomplete records, verifying compliance and often dealing with hidden surprises.

For prospective bidders hoping to take over the maintenance of a relatively complex property, the challenge is different but no less difficult – how to quickly gain a true picture of the building's condition and ongoing obligations.

The team that approaches PFI expiry with strong records, robust compliance and detailed knowledge of the building will be in the best position to ensure a smooth transition.

The building management landscape looks very different to the early days of PFI contracts. Perhaps the most significant change is the



PLANNING AHEAD

With the end of a PFI deal looming for many public sector assets, building managers face a critical period of preparation. However, the process can be eased by creating a checklist to cover the essentials.

- Start keeping compliance records current and auditable.
- Compile and maintain accurate, detailed asset lists.
- Identify and document hidden assets such as fire dampers, and bring them into compliance.
- Use specialist suppliers to identify assets, achieve compliance and generate robust evidence.
- Approach the final audit as an opportunity, not just a duty.

heightened emphasis on compliance and record keeping. Regulations have tightened, guidance has become more prescriptive and expectations around transparency have risen sharply.

This means the most pressing task, when approaching the end of a PFI contract, is to review your key performance indicators, compliance status and supporting records. Are they complete? Are they up to date? Can they withstand scrutiny in a handover audit?

The ultimate goal is to protect the asset but also the Responsible Person. In the event of a compliance failure, it is that individual who may be held accountable. Strong, well-organised evidence is therefore not just best practice, it is essential for protection.

Comprehensive, accurate lists of assets form the foundation of any effective building management strategy. Ideally, you should also hold detailed drawings, or at least schematic drawings, of each building you manage.

Here, specialist suppliers can play a critical role. By surveying aspects of the building while delivering their expert services, they can help to create a robust asset list that supports day-to-day management and forms the backbone of a 'future-proofed' compliance record.

Water safety

Water systems are a prime area where complacency can creep in. It is surprising how often risk assessments are left to gather dust, even when the Responsible Person has changed or the system has undergone modifications.

Under the HSE's L8 Approved Code of Practice, you are legally

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FRONT LINE

- **Records are often patchy** Even diligent property managers can struggle with missing data, particularly where multiple providers have been involved over the years.
- **Compliance gaps can grow unnoticed** A missed fire damper test or out-of-date Legionella risk assessment may remain unobserved until handover.
- **Small omissions can become big liabilities** What seems like a minor paperwork issue can become a major risk when auditors and lawyers become involved.
- **Specialist input pays dividends** Engaging expert providers can help to bring systems into compliance and creates the evidence of compliance needed for a smooth transition.

required to:

- Identify and assess potential sources of Legionella risk.
- Manage the risks identified.
- Implement suitable preventative measures.
- Keep accurate records of all testing, results and remedial work.

Risk assessments must be current and relevant because out-of-date paperwork offers no protection in law. Adding before-and-after photography as part of the records make the record far more robust and provides invaluable evidence should questions arise.

Air and grease

Ventilation systems are another area where compliance cannot be left to chance. Under TR19 Air, ventilation ductwork must be inspected regularly to safeguard indoor air quality.

Meanwhile, kitchen extract systems fall under TR19 Grease – reflecting the fire hazard posed by grease deposits that naturally build up through cooking.

Older systems pose particular challenges. Many were designed without the full remit of access points that would now be required, making it impossible to clean the ductwork fully.

In such cases, retrofitting additional access hatches is the only way to achieve compliance. This is another area where a specialist cleaning provider can make modifications and update the asset list while doing so.

One of the most overlooked – and potentially alarming discoveries during handover preparation is the presence of fire dampers. Incomplete records mean that some FMs are simply unaware of their presence in ventilation systems. When they are identified, it is not uncommon to find several hundreds of them in ventilation systems across buildings under PFIs.

Each fire damper requires annual testing for function and cleanliness, as well as any remedial work that arises. For a new FM inheriting a building, discovering hundreds of untested dampers can represent a huge additional unbudgeted expense.

So, for the incumbent manager, the message is clear: create a robust record of fire dampers now. Do not wait for handover to expose the gaps. Make sure you protect not only the building's safety but also your own professional accountability.

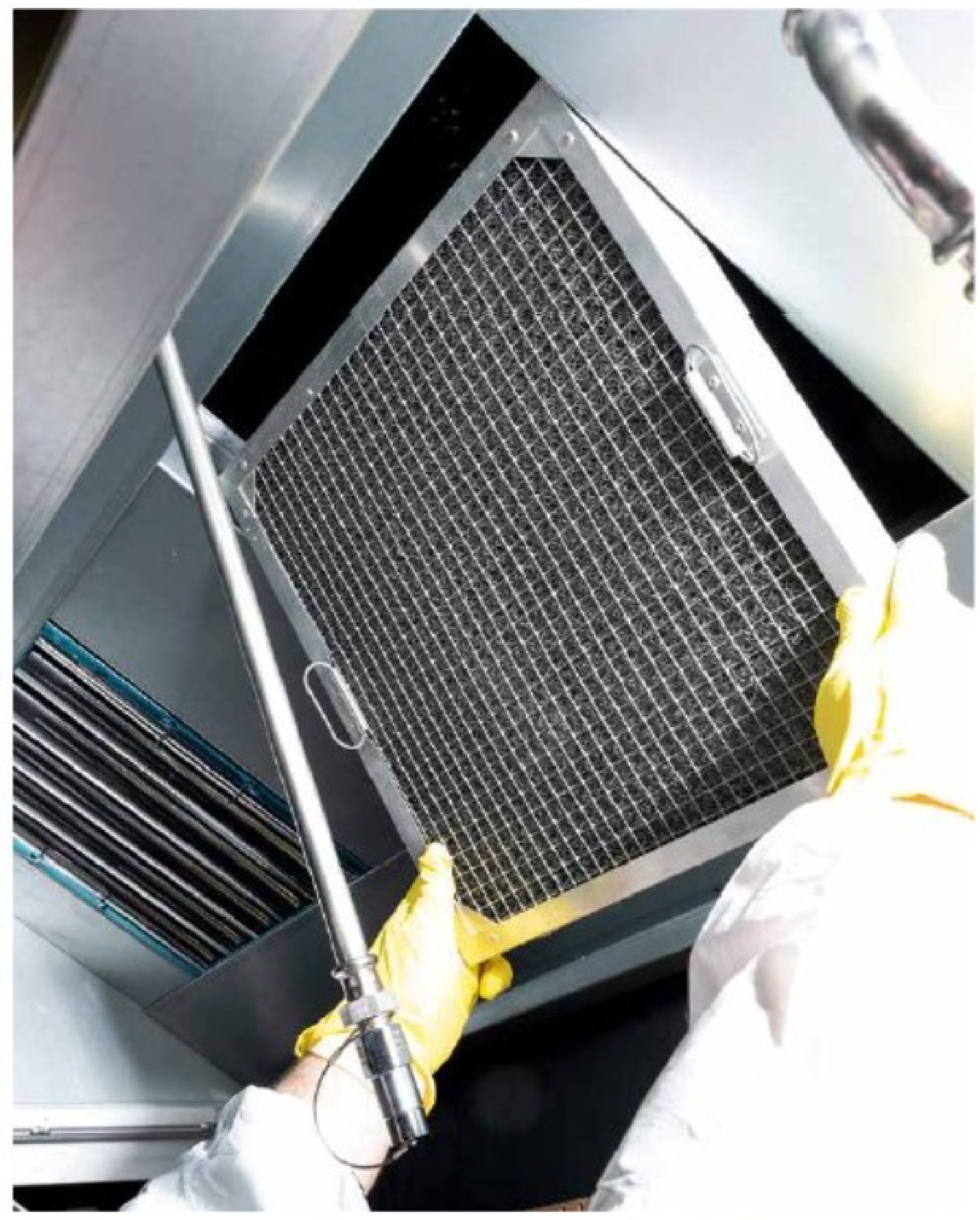
In all these areas – water safety, ventilation, grease removal, fire damper testing – the principle is the same: robust evidence protects the Responsible Person.

This means compiling asset lists, schematic drawings, compliance report, and before-and-after imagery into a comprehensive, auditable record.

During handover, such a report demonstrates diligence, compliance and professionalism.

As a PFI contract approaches its end, nothing beats a full audit of the building. This should cover utilities and mechanical systems, fire safety provisions, ventilation and water systems, asset condition and maintenance history, and compliance status across all relevant codes and standards.

This audit is an opportunity to demonstrate diligence and provide clarity, leaving a lasting positive legacy for both the building and its occupants.



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