



Regulator of
Social Housing

Coronavirus operational response survey results

June 2020 data

9 July 2020



OFFICIAL

Overview

This is the summary from the third of our temporary monthly surveys to establish up-to-date information about how providers are coping with some of the current challenges they face as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Appendix 1 sets out the survey questions.

We asked private registered providers with 1,000 or more homes, local authority social landlords and those providers with fewer than 1,000 homes which have a high proportion of supported accommodation to respond to the survey. The response rate was good (99%) and we are grateful to all the providers that responded.

The evidence suggests the sector is continuing to maintain adequate levels of service delivery in the areas surveyed and has begun work towards recovery. Emergency and urgent repairs are being completed; where lower priority health and safety checks had been paused they are being rescheduled; repair backlogs are stable and plans are being made to address them; and care and support settings continue to maintain safe staffing levels and essential services.

While the number of providers reporting gas safety check compliance remains above 99%, a slightly increased number of providers are reporting that they are currently completing most, rather than all, gas safety checks. This is mainly due to continuing challenges with accessing properties. Although providers are now starting to address backlogs, this is balanced by the number of properties where the gas safety check has just expired.

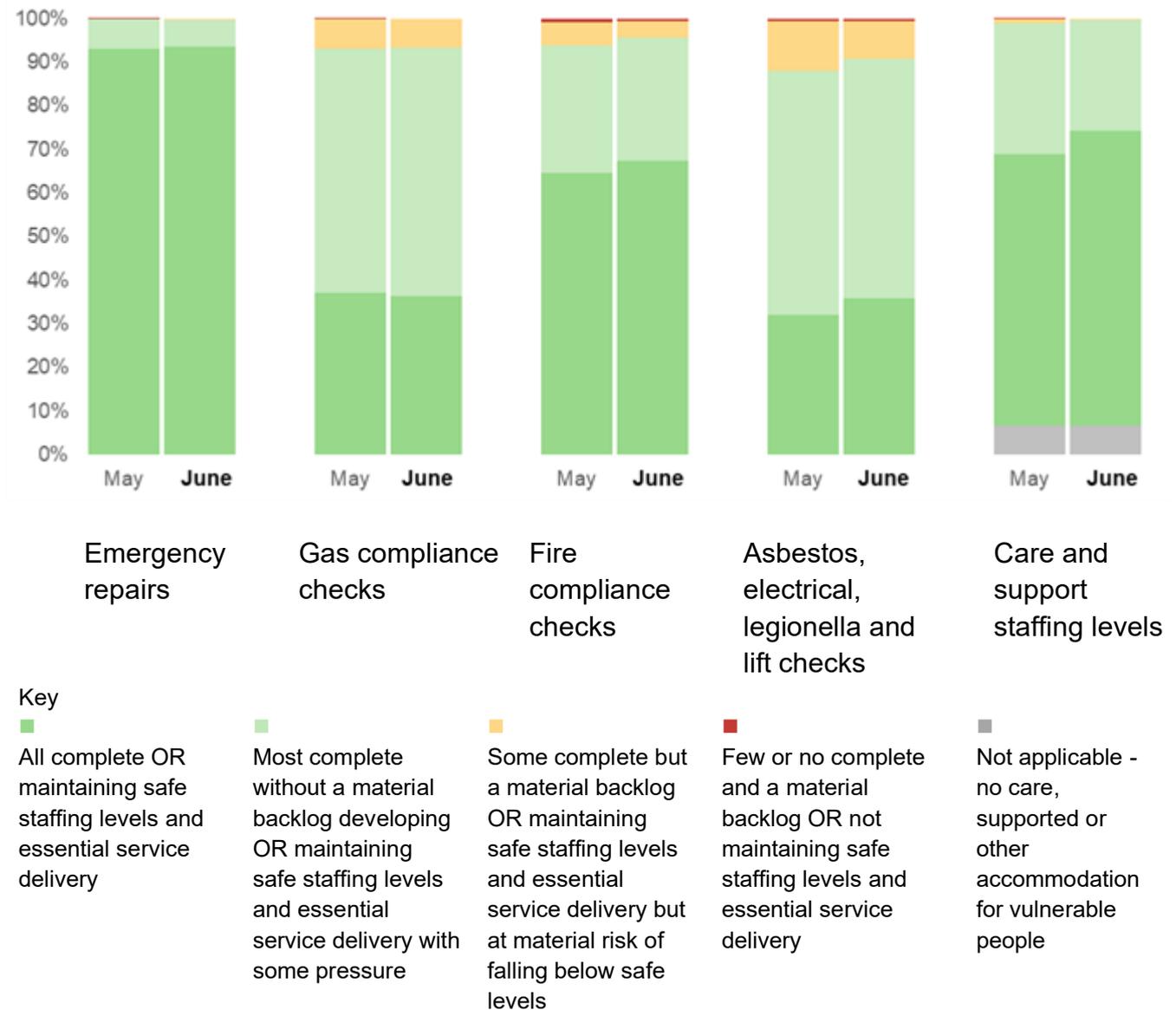
Demand for repairs remains lower than usual and a number of providers are now taking action to encourage tenants to report non-emergency repairs. They are making plans for completing these, in some cases with additional contractor resource.

We will repeat this survey for the period to 17 July; with returns due by 24 July, and we will publish our analysis of the responses shortly afterwards. However, if providers believe tenant safety is threatened or viability is under strain, they should not wait for the survey but should speak to their key contact at the regulator, or our Referrals and Regulatory Enquiries team, via enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or 0300 124 5225. Providers with fewer than 1,000 homes should use our dedicated email address SmallProviders@rsh.gov.uk.

Results from the June survey

The survey responses are shown below. The survey questions are shown in full in Appendix 1.

Survey responses for May¹ and June (as a % of total submissions)



Providers' written responses show that the delivery of critical services is stable, and that work towards recovery has started. While the picture looks similar to both April and May survey data, overall providers cited fewer risks in the most recent survey than previously, suggesting that mitigation strategies have been effective and the operating environment is improving.

¹ Note that figures for May have been updated since the last report to take into account late returns.

The Government published revised landlord and tenant guidance about repairs and maintenance on 1 June. Most providers have reported restarting non-emergency repairs in line with this guidance and that backlogs of non-emergency repairs are decreasing. Demand for repairs is now rising, but is still 15% to 30% lower than usual. This means that providers may see higher demand for repairs in the future which would add to existing backlogs. As part of their recovery plans some providers are encouraging tenants to report non-emergency repairs and are making plans for completing these including using additional contractor resource. This has been helped by further improvements in contractor availability and access to materials, although some providers have reported challenges with specific materials.

Alongside completing emergency and urgent repairs, some providers have started making plans to address backlogs of other repairs and health and safety checks, particularly those that do not require access inside properties. Where lower priority fire safety checks, electrical testing, lift inspections, asbestos and legionella checks had previously been paused, these are now being rescheduled and resumed.

Providers report that restricted access is continuing to affect their ability to carry out health and safety checks within properties. In most cases restricted access is either because tenants have been shielding or self-isolating and unable to let people in, or because tenants have other concerns about contractors entering their homes. The Government has announced that it anticipates pausing shielding from 1 August; it plans to then advise individuals who have been shielding to follow strict social distancing. This may increase the number of tenants who feel able to allow contractors into their homes. Providers report making risk-based decisions on a case-by-case basis about whether it is appropriate to resolve access issues through court action (where they have been unable to resolve access issues through negotiation and discussion with the tenant) and that courts are moving towards resuming normal service.

Access to properties has also been the key constraint on providers' ability to complete gas safety checks. As with last month, almost all gas safety certificates are in date for most providers, but the number of providers reporting that they are currently completing most, rather than all, gas safety checks has risen slightly. Last month's report stated that expired checks were likely to continue to increase until more tenants are both able and willing to let people into their properties. Providers are reporting that they can access and complete checks in properties which were previously non-compliant, as tenants' self-isolation or shielding periods end and they allow access. But, this is balanced by the number of properties where the gas safety check has just expired, including reaching the end of the contingency period generated through operating 10- or 11-month gas servicing cycles, rather than the 12-month statutory cycle. This means we expect it may take time before increased access is reflected in an overall net increase in the number of gas safety checks completed.

Providers report that the increased availability of testing and completion of risk assessments that follow Public Health England guidance has enabled care and support staff to return to work. Most providers now report that care and support staffing is at normal levels, with the rest reporting recovery towards normal levels. Providers continue to express concerns about the health and safety of staff working in care and support. Some providers report that staff have cancelled leave and worked longer hours to cover absences, and that there may be staffing pressures later in the year as a result. Providers continue to maintain adequate stocks of personal protective equipment, but some continue to report concerns about future access and costs.

Providers are continuing to use alternative methods of service delivery to address challenges, and increased communication with tenants who may be struggling with the effects of lockdown.

The results of this third survey show that the sector is both continuing its efforts to ensure tenant safety, and at the same time working towards resuming normal levels of service. We will address specific challenges directly with individual providers where we need to.

Appendix 1: About the coronavirus operational response survey and our analysis

The information in this report is based on our initial analysis of registered providers' survey responses. Our full analysis is still in progress.

The survey asks providers to answer a single multiple-choice question on each of five key areas. For each area it also asks them to identify any key constraints, risks and mitigating actions and the scale of any backlog and how this has changed since the previous survey.

1. Emergency repairs

- All complete
- Most complete without a material backlog developing
- Some complete but a material backlog
- Few or no complete and a material backlog.

2. Statutory gas safety checks

- All complete
- Most complete without a material backlog developing
- Some complete but a material backlog
- Few or no complete and a material backlog.

3. Statutory fire safety checks

- All complete
- Most complete without a material backlog developing
- Some complete but a material backlog
- Few or no complete and a material backlog.

4. Asbestos, electrical, legionella and lift checks

- All complete
- Most complete without a material backlog developing
- Some complete but a material backlog
- Few or no complete and a material backlog.

5. Care and support staffing levels

- Maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery
- Maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery with some pressure
- Maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery but at material risk of falling below safe levels
- Not maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery.

The survey is hosted on our data collection portal NROSH+², for all private registered providers with 1,000 or more homes, local authority registered providers and some registered providers with fewer than 1,000 homes to complete. Providers were asked to submit survey responses covering the period up to and including 19 June, by Friday 26 June.

We will open the survey for a third round of responses between Friday 17 July and Friday 24 July.

² <https://nroshplus.regulatorofsocialhousing.org.uk/>



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RSH regulates private registered providers of social housing to promote a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs.