Summary of responses to the Call for user views on the Statistical Data Return

Private registered provider social housing stock in England

September 2019

Contents

1. Summary

In June 2019, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) launched a call for user views on proposed changes to the publication timetable and products which make up the national statistic Statistical Data Return (SDR): Private registered providers of social housing in England.

Overall, 11 responses were received from private registered providers (PRPs), local authorities (LAs), key industry stakeholders, consultants and a legal firm.

Respondents were supportive of the plans for redeveloping the publication to make the publication of the data timelier and more accessible. They favoured shorter briefing notes and additional analytical tools, but stressed the need to ensure technical notes and clarity in commentary was retained. The continuation of access to the underlying data and the manipulation of this within easily accessible tools was considered essential, with the look-up tools and raw data tables the most utilised and highly valued.

Following the review of feedback, RSH proposes to implement the following changes:

a. Introduce briefing note style publications for key thematic areas

b. Introduce technical notes (including notes on data quality and methodology) to support understanding of the data set and thematic briefing notes

c. Develop the look-up tools to include additional analysis and features to improve accessibility

d. Retain the full data set, but increase the number of additional tables and calculated fields available to better meet user needs

e. Publish notes and data in a phased pattern to allow earlier release of key data (stock numbers and rent information)

Further information relating to these proposals is provided in section 5.

2.   Introduction

RSH produces the national statistic (publication and data) Statistical Data Return (SDR): Private registered providers of social housing in England in October each year. The publication covers the topics for which data is collected as part of the SDR data collection. Some of this data is also currently used and reported in other statistical bulletins published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The full SDR data file is published at the same time as the publication document each year and includes the underlying data[1] provided to RSH via the SDR collection. Additionally, since 2018 we have included two look-up tools which allow users to interrogate the data set at either a provider level or at a geographic (local authority) level.

In June 2019, RSH launched a call for user views on proposed changes to the publication timetable and products which make up the national statistic, based on informal feedback on the existing suite of documents and tool. As detailed within the call for views, this document provides information as to the outcome of the review.

A chance to provide views on the 2019 release will be provided following its publication.

3.   Background

Since 2012, RSH has collected a large amount of information from private registered providers[2] (providers) of social housing through the SDR data collection. This annual survey (collected in April and May) collects data on housing stock owned by providers, much of which is collected at a local authority level, including number and size of dwelling and average weekly rents. The survey also collects information on the gains and losses from the social housing sector, with a balance sheet introduced in 2017, providing greater insight into the way in which stock moves around in and out of the provider ownership.

This data is published in autumn alongside a statistical publication, which provides additional information and insight on the data collected and the trends regarding changes in stock owned, rent levels and activity within social housing owned by private registered providers.

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[1] However, contact information and text fields with personal details are suppressed from the raw data.
[2] Private registered providers are separate from Local Authorities registered providers. LA providers submit data on social housing to the Local Authority Housing Statistic (LAHS) collected by MHCLG. RSH will begin a pilot data collection (Local Authority Data Return (LADR) from 2019, however data from this collection will not be published by RSH but will be included alongside data collected through the LAHS return by MHCLG.

Over the last few years, in response to increased complexity in the policy environment and diversification in the social housing sector, the size of the publication has increased (to nearly 90 pages in 2018). Feedback obtained from some users had suggested that the increase in the size of the document had made it more difficult for users to navigate and to identify key data and trends. The size of the publication and associated analysis had also increased the amount of time and resource required to reach publication, pushing the publication time back by over a month since 2012. RSH was concerned that increasing the length and complexity of reporting and the delays in publication of key data was reducing its value for users.

RSH had already sought to improve the SDR publication, based on feedback from users in earlier years, with the introduction of the look-up tools in 2018 to allow easier access to, and instant presentation of, the SDR data on a provider and geographic (local authority) basis. RSH then sought feedback on suggestions to:

a. Reduce complexity and increase usability

b. Increase the accessibly to data (particularly to non-expert users)

c. Ensure a timely release of data.

4. Proposals

The key change proposed was the replacement of the large SDR publication with smaller, individual briefing notes about key topics. Alongside each of these shorter briefing notes, the key data fields to which they relate would also be published. The full data set would be published shortly after the publication of these notes along with the interactive look-up tools.

By creating shorter briefing notes and focusing analysis on the key areas of interest, the proposals aim to make the publication of the data timelier and more accessible.

Overview of proposed changes

The table below outlines the key proposals for the publication of the SDR from autumn 2019.

Current	Proposed
SDR publication document	Stock briefing note This would cover a large section of the current 'Total stock' section, with details about stock type, distribution and change. This would not include specific Decent Homes Standard (DHS) commentary, but existing tables and maps would continue to be published. Rent briefing note This would cover the key areas of the current 'Rents' and 'Affordable Rent' sections. All current tables and maps would be available within the briefing note or within the additional tables and maps. Stock movement briefing note This would cover most of the key areas of the current 'Stock flow' section. This would not include specific Eviction or Mutual Exchange commentary, but existing tables would continue to be published. **Note:** An annual production of commentary relating to Decent Home Standard, vacancies, evictions, mutual exchanges nor sector characteristics would not be undertaken, due to continued stability across these areas over a number of years. However, if key changes occur within these thematic areas then additional briefing notes may be produced on an ad hoc basis.
Additional tables and maps	Additional tables – greater range of tables, covering all those currently available in the SDR publication document. Additional maps – showing key themes on a larger scale than those included in briefing notes (including those within the current SDR publication).
Look-up tools	Private registered provider (PRP) look-up tool Geographic (regional and LA) look-up tool Geographic (regional and LA) trend look-up tool [from 2020].

Data quality report	Data quality and methodological note: this would cover the current data quality report and the methodology, technical and other associated notes in the SDR. This would be published alongside the first data released.
Missing or late submitters list and pre-release access notes	These would remain the same and would be published alongside the first data released.

5.   Outcome and changes to be adopted

Responses were supportive of the proposed changes, with most happy with the move to smaller briefing notes and additional information in the look-up tools and tables. The earlier release dates were welcomed, although most did not see this as being a fundamental improvement to their use of the data.

Users were keen to stress the need to retain technical notes (methodology and comparability information) and the need to ensure the retention summary trend and headline information within the notes. The removal of DHS, vacancy and eviction commentary was seen as detrimental to the value of the publication.

The updates proposed to the look-up tools were well received, and respondents suggested improvements to tool operation and data manipulation. Additional tables, aligning data to other (local authority) published tables and to allow easier reference to 'total stock' figures were also considered important. Users also suggested producing PRP group-level summaries.

Continued access to the raw data set was viewed as essential, with suggestions for additional guidance on the raw data use and better labelling of data columns being made. Suggestions for additional analytical tools (such as new data cuts, amended filtering systems and web-based interrogation tools) were also put forward.

Respondents also noted areas for further data collection. RSH will review these but has a key duty to collect only the data that is of direct relevance to the regulation of providers and is not collected through other means.

The table below summarises the key areas for development and implementation timescales.

Development	Implement by 2019 release	Implement by 2020 release	Potentially implement in or after 2021
KEY ✓ Implement ✓ Implement if possible, within constraints of technology and resource			
Timescales			
Phased delivery of briefing notes to allow for earlier delivery of stock and rent data will be adopted.	✓		
Release documents			
Move to the shorter briefing note style.	✓		
Retain headline information and key trend information	✓		
Focus on stock, rents and stock movement briefing notes and commentary	✓		
Introduce a short, sector characteristics briefing note	✓		
Retain data and commentary on DHS, evictions and vacancies	✓		
Ensure methodological information and commentary is continued	✓		
Introduce separate technical notes	✓		
Ensure no loss of information relating to methodological and technical issues	✓		
Include additional information on comparability and relationship between the various tables/worksheets in the statistical release	✓	✓	
Raw data release			
Retain the excel based raw data output	✓		
Seek to rename columns within the data set to enable easier referencing and manipulation	✓	✓	
Explore potential for web-based interrogation tools for future release		Review	✓
Look-up tools			
Retain and develop the existing LA and PRP look-up tools	✓		
Combine all tools into a single document	✓	✓	
Add regional level analysis to the LA look-up tool	✓		
Add LA and regional stock breakdown information to PRP look-up tool	✓		
Implement at regional/LA trend look-up tool	✓	✓	

Explore the potential for multiple LA selection and adapt selection method	Review	✓	✓
Additional analysis			
Publish weighted average rents by property size and tenure by local authority areas	✓		
Create additional pivot tools to enable easier manipulation of the data sets	✓	✓	
Ensure 'social rent' figures are collated to align with LA data publications	✓		
Create PRP and LA level breakdown tables showing various 'total' stock summaries.	✓		
Explore the possibility of group level summaries	Review	✓	✓
Data collection			
Review additional requests for data collection (see p12 for details)		Review	✓

6.   Detailed review of responses

RSH asked stakeholders to complete a survey or submit email responses to the call for views, structured around key questions about the proposals. Responses have been reviewed and are presented below.

Response levels

RSH received 11 responses from users of the SDR. Responses came from private registered providers, local authorities, key industry stakeholders, consultants and legal firms.

Summary of responses to individual questions

Each question asked within the survey is shown below. Responses have been anonymised. The summary of responses may include details from other questions where relevant to ensure all relevant views have been captured.

> Q1. What use do you currently make of the SDR publication document, and would anything be lost if the large publication was no longer available in future (given that all underlying data and short briefing notes would still be published)?

Over 50% of respondents confirmed that they either didn't use or only infrequently used the publication document, favouring the raw data for analytical purposes. Use of the document for key headlines and trend information was reported, and the use of methodological and context commentary to accompany the raw data was considered critical.

Whilst the move to a briefing note style seemed broadly welcomed, with one respondent confirming "the document is very long", the existing document was seen as "useful in highlighting and summarising changes in operating environments" and there was concern that the "brevity of the briefing notes is not achieved at the expense of explaining important technical or policy developments."

One response indicated a preference for the continuation of a single document, with a concern that information would be spread across multiple sources in the proposals.

RSH proposed outcome

 a. Move to the shorter briefing note style, with raw data and tables

 b. Retain headline information and key trend information in briefing notes

 c. Ensure methodological information and commentary is continued within briefing notes (potentially as supplementary notes).

> Q2. Are the key topics we've suggested (stock levels, rents and stock movement) the most appropriate areas for briefing notes? Are there other areas of the SDR data you would like to see analysed and published in briefing note format?

All but one response concluded that the three key areas were the most appropriate, although additional suggestions included:

- Retaining information and commentary about sector characteristics

- Adding information specific to organisations using the data

- Including information on rental arrears (not collected in the SDR 2019)

- Including a combined 'social rent' (i.e. combining all social rental categories akin to data presented for LAs).

The response stating 'no' did not provide further suggestions.

Exclusion of particular topics was broadly understood, although the inclusion of brief information stating why excluded (i.e. lack of any significant change) was felt helpful to users, as was providing direction back to previous commentary in earlier publications.

For further reference, see responses to Q3.

> Q3. Do you have any concerns or comments on the proposal to remove commentary on vacancies, sector characteristics, Decent Homes Standard, evictions or mutual exchanges (noting that data and tables would still be published)?

Several respondents felt the removal of commentary on vacancies and evictions was not appropriate, particularly in light of the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (April 2018). One respondent proposed that the collection of evictions data be made mandatory for future collections.

These areas were also noted by one respondent as being particularly interesting to tenants and that they should definitely be included in the data look-up tools, allowing tenants easy access to this data at a provider level.

RSH proposed outcome

a. Retain data and commentary on DHS, evictions and vacancies within the stock briefing note

b. Ensure a 'social rent' figure is collated to align with LA data publications

c. Ensure these areas are also within the PRP data look-up tools to allow easy tenant access.

> Q4. At what time of year is the SDR information most valuable to you? Is the proposed acceleration of the timetable for stock and rent data likely to be helpful?

The change to a slightly earlier publication was broadly welcomed, although respondents did not feel that this would be of significant benefit to their use. The production of the full data and suite of documents was seen as the key with providers happy with the September / October publication. One respondent cautioned against earlier release due to potential reduction data validation and thus in overall quality.

One respondent suggested that the return deadline should be extended to the end of June to allow PRPs more time to complete the return.

RSH proposed outcome

a. Timetables currently proposed will be adopted

b. Exploration of a longer submission period will be considered by RSH.

> Q5. Are there any other additional tables or cuts of the data that you would like to see which are not currently available?

There were several specific data tables (relevant to individual organisations) suggested by respondents. It is likely that these will not be possible within the overall main release. RSH will work with these organisations to review these.

Information to aid the identification of benchmarking groups was also noted by respondents as being a helpful addition.

However, the Regulator already publishes sector analysis on an annual basis as part of its continuing work to help stakeholders contextualise the performance of individual organisations more easily and to help boards compare themselves to peers. In light of our co-regulatory approach it is the responsibility of boards of registered providers to determine and be transparent regarding their selection of peer group. The latest data sets can be located at [Global Accounts Data Set and Value for Money metrics](#)[3].

However, respondents also suggested several overall additions that are more widely applicable:

a. More closely align rent tables to MHCLG rent tables (including a single rent data on 'social rent')

b. Breakdowns of stock by bedspace (unit) and bedrooms (dwellings)

c. Total stock figures for PRPs

d. Weighted average rents (by property size and tenure) by LA area

e. Aggregate LA stock owned (including owned and managed) by PRP by tenure

f. Aggregate regional figures on stock owned (including owned and managed) by PRP by tenure.

RSH proposed outcome

a. Ensure 'social rent' figures are collated to align with LA data publications

b. Create a 'total stock' figure(s) showing different groupings (social rental, all social (including Low-cost home ownership (LCHO) and social leased), all stock (including non-social))

c. Publish weighted average rents by property size and tenure by LA areas

d. Additional LA and Regional summary data to be included in look-up tools.

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[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2018-global-accounts-of-private-registered-providers

> Q6. Are the maps that are currently produced of use to you? Are there other graphical representations of data you would be keen to see?

The maps produced as part of the main publication appeared to be underutilised, with many commenting that they were able to produce their own maps from the raw data.

Requests for more granular geographic level information (i.e. Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) were made. This addition is not possible at this time due to the underlying data collected.

RSH proposed outcome

    a. Maps will be produced for use in briefing note publications, but no additional mapping will be undertaken.

> Q7. Do you find the current publication of the full SDR data file in one excel file helpful, or are there any other formats that you would prefer or be more useful?

Overall the Excel file output was regarded as very useful. Suggestions were made that additional (SPSS or other file types) might be useful, but not at the determent of the Excel format, but there was no firm request on additional formats received.

One response suggested that a slimmed data set with just information on the stock profile should be produced and one suggested that a web-based interrogation tool might be considered to ease access to the large data set.

RSH proposed outcome

    a. Retain the large excel data set

    b. Include worksheet within the large data set which shows all stock information by PRP (including all social, non-social, LCHO and leasehold products)

    c. Explore potential for web-based interrogation tools for future release.

> Q8 and Q9. (Combined responses)
> Have you used the PRP or LA look-up tool in 2018; if so was it useful? Are there any improvements you'd like to see in the provider **or** LA look-up tool?

Approximately half of the respondents had seen and used the PRP and/or the LA look-up tools. The remaining respondents stated that they used their own tools to conduct bespoke filtering and analysis on the raw data.

Those who had seen or used the tools confirmed that these interactive spreadsheets were useful, allowing "easy filtering and exploration of the data and quicker access to information for particular PRPs [and] LAs". This was seen as particularly useful for tenants to be able to review their own PRP information.

Some areas for improvement were suggested:

    a. Group filtering (displaying data aggregated to group level)

    b. Allowing typing of PRP or LA name, rather than the current drop-down list selection

    c. Combining the PRP and LA workbooks into a single document.

RSH proposed outcome

    a. RSH will explore the possibility of group-level summaries, but it is unlikely that these will be available in 2019

    b. The operation of the selection tools and the combination into a single document will be explored and implemented if possible.

> **Q10.** Do you have any views on the intended addition of regional summaries to the current geographic (LA) look-up tool?

> **Q11.** Do you have any views on the proposal for a regional/LA trend look-up tool (likely to be published in 2020)?

Those who had seen or used the tools were in general agreement that the addition of standard regions (as opposed to organisation operating areas) would "complement the LA analysis tool that is already available".

Further suggestions were that the PRP look-up tools should contain stock breakdowns showing "how much [stock] each PRP owns across a local authority and region for each tenure".

Overall, the potential introduction of trends within a regional/LA tool was well received, with one respondent stating that "this is an excellent idea and will complement the LA look-up tool that is already available". Another referred to having the trend tool available as a map.

The ability to select multiple LAs / regions / PRPs in the tools was also suggested as a potential for future development.

RSH proposed outcome

a. Add region level analysis to the LA look-up tool

b. Add LA and regional stock breakdown information to PRP look-up tool

c. Implement a regional/LA trend look-up tool

d. Explore the potential for multiple LA selection (unlikely for publication in 2019).

General comments about the statistics

We also asked users for more general comments on the statistics.

> Is there anything we currently do which you would not want changed, and if so why?

There were six responses, all agreed that the publication of the large raw data sets (in Excel format) was an essential part of the release.

> Is there anything that the figures do not cover which you would find useful, and if so why?

The ability to split data by both LA and PRP at the same time and being able to pull out units within a local authority area and determine which provider owns/manages this was requested.

Group-level summaries of information were requested by two respondents, with one asking for additional information on the arrangements of ownership/management within and across groups particular to their organisation.

Requests for additional data collection were also provided:

a. Stock data being collected at postcode or LSOA

b. Small providers providing more information on supported housing and housing for older people (including LA breakdowns for this)

c. Information on stock let at the "London Affordable Rent" in addition to Affordable Rent and other social rent

d. Additional information regarding in-year merger activity

e. Information regarding lettings to harmonise the PRP data release with that released by MHCLG for LAs

f.   Information on rent arrears to be collected

g.   Data on evictions to be a mandatory submission (rather than optional as it is in the SDR 2019).

Are there any other suggestions you have which you think could improve the publication of the SDR data, and if so why?

The need for clarity within the raw data was emphasised by two users. One called for more information on the relationship between tables (as to whether worksheets represent a subset of data contained in another) and confirmation of how totals are derived from the data. Another called for "more imaginative use of the data field headings."

More information was also requested on the relationship and comparability with Local Authority Data in England (and the devolved administrations).

RSH proposed outcome

a.   Create additional pivot tools to enable easier manipulation of the data sets

b.   Include additional information in the technical notes as to comparability with other data and relationship between the various tables/worksheets in the statistical release

c.   Seek to rename columns within the data set to enable easier referencing and manipulation

d.   The user calls for additional data collection will be reviewed by RSH, but these will not be included in the 2019 or 2020 collections or release.