



Regulator of
Social Housing

Coronavirus operational response survey results

May 2020 data

9 June 2020



OFFICIAL

Overview

This is the summary from the second 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 (98%) 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. Almost all emergency repairs are being completed, and care and support settings continue to maintain safe staffing levels and essential services. This has been achieved by the sustained and committed efforts of providers and their staff in adapting to the changing circumstances.

Many of the constraints that providers identified in the first survey have improved slightly, including availability of personal protective equipment (PPE), the robustness of the supply chain, and staffing levels in care and support services.

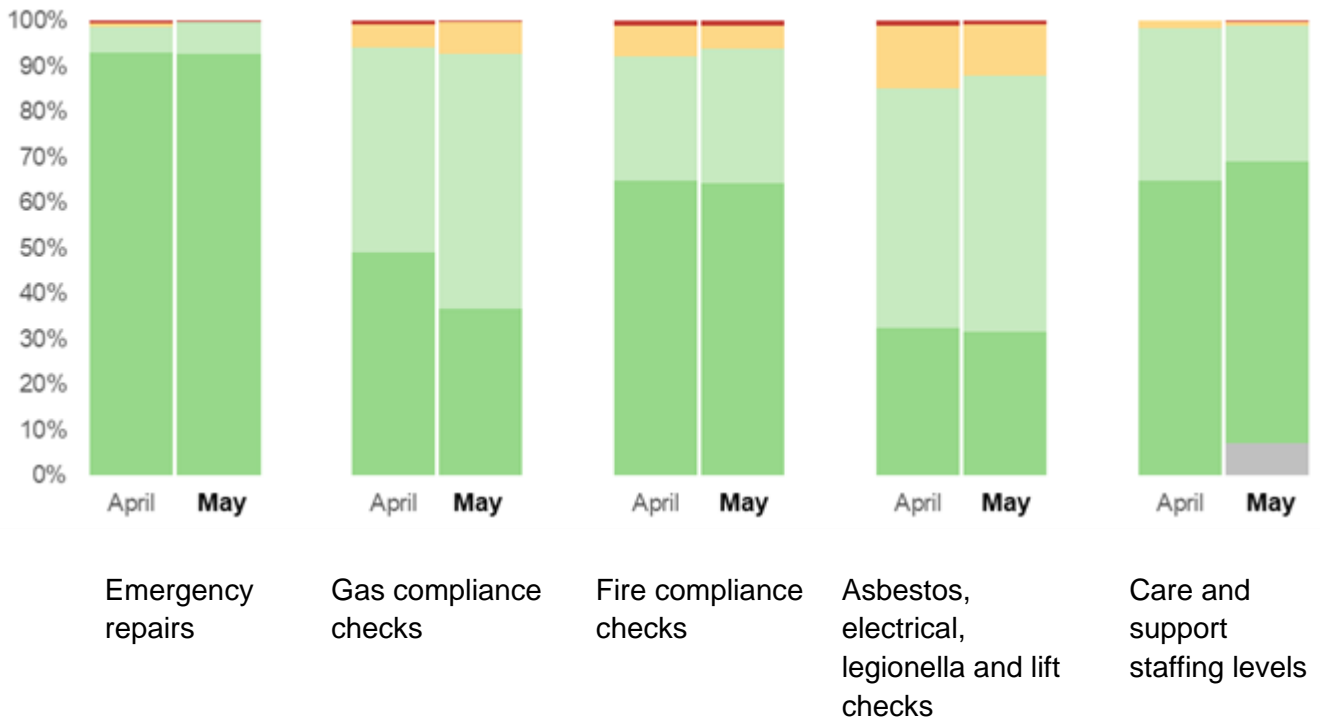
However, compared to April, a higher number of providers are reporting that they are currently completing most, rather than all, gas safety checks. Many providers tell us that they normally operate a 10- or 11-month gas servicing cycle to mitigate against the risk of failing to meet the 12-month statutory cycle should problems arise. In the current circumstances the effectiveness of this mitigation is diminishing and as a result the backlogs of gas safety checks are rising and are likely to continue to rise. Challenges with access to properties and the reduced reporting of repairs also mean that backlogs of routine repairs and some safety checks continue to rise. Many are now starting to plan and implement recovery plans.

We will repeat this survey for the period to 19 June; with returns due by 26 June, and 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, 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 May survey

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

Survey responses for April and May (as a % of total submissions)



Key

- All complete OR maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery
- Most complete without a material backlog developing OR maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery with some pressure
- Some complete but a material backlog OR maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery but at material risk of falling below safe levels
- Few or no complete and a material backlog OR not maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery
- Not applicable - no care, supported or other accommodation for vulnerable people¹

From providers' written responses, it is clear that some of the challenges identified in April are beginning to ease as providers have adapted to the new circumstances and some restrictions are lifted.

¹ In April responses in this category were included in 'All maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery'.

On 11 May, the Government published new guidance about COVID-secure working practices², including working in people's homes. Although it is too early to see an overall change in responses following this, providers are reporting restarting more work where safe working practices can be put in place. Some providers have reported increasing the numbers of asbestos and legionella checks, and resuming non-emergency repairs, lift inspections and servicing.

External contractor availability remains an issue for a minority of providers but appears to have improved since April. This is either because providers' usual contractors are resuming services or because providers are successfully using alternative contractors. Providers are also reporting that the reopening of suppliers means they have better access to materials. However, supply chains have not yet recovered to pre-coronavirus levels of operation and efficiency.

In April some providers expressed concerns about future risks to their ability to maintain care and support service staffing levels. The vast majority of providers have since reported a stable situation with no deterioration in staffing levels. In their comments, several providers report that although absence rates remain higher than normal, these now appear to be recovering. Concern for staff safety remains high, as do concerns about future availability of PPE. However, improvements in the supply chain mean that more providers appear to have successfully identified stable supply lines for PPE and are maintaining sufficient stock.

Providers continue to report problems accessing properties. In most cases this is either because tenants are shielding or self-isolating and unable to let people in, or because tenants have other concerns about contractors entering their homes. Providers are making risk-based decisions on a case-by-case basis about whether it is appropriate to resolve access issues through court action and in some cases have mentioned reduced court capacity as a constraint.

Reduced access to properties is the key constraint on providers' ability to complete gas safety checks. 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 increased and so it appears that the number of properties with an expired gas safety check has generally increased. The survey indicates that this situation is now being affected by providers which operate 10- or 11-month gas servicing cycles, rather than the 12-month statutory cycle, reaching the end of that contingency period. Expired checks are likely to continue to increase until more tenants are both able and willing to let people into their properties.

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes>

Alongside challenges accessing properties, demand for repairs remains lower than usual. In some cases, tenants are reporting 85% fewer issues for repairs than would normally be expected. Providers report that they may not currently know the full extent of the backlog in repairs that they face. This means that the repairs backlog may continue to increase further in future before it reduces.

The Government published revised landlord and tenant guidance about repairs and maintenance on 1 June, after the close of this survey. The revisions reflect amended regulations and changes to wider government and public health advice. It will take time for the impact of the revised guidance to be fully reflected in the data we collect.

Providers are continuing to take the mitigating actions they identified in the first survey to address the challenges they face such as remote working, continuing alternative deployments of staff and increased communication with tenants. They are also now thinking about strategies for recovery. Some report that they are developing plans to manage backlogs of repairs and health and safety works. Some are securing additional contractor resource to manage future demand.

The results of this second survey show that despite the continuing challenges, the sector is sustaining its efforts to ensure tenant safety and is adapting to the changing circumstances.

We will address specific challenges directly with individual providers where we need to and we will also continue to use this information, at aggregate level, to help inform government's response to the pandemic.

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+, for all private registered providers with more than 1,000 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 15 May, by Friday 22 May.

We will open the survey for a third round of responses between Friday 19 June and Friday 26 June.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us via enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

or write to:

Regulator of Social Housing

1st floor – Lateral

8 City Walk

Leeds LS11 9AT

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.