Regulator of Social Housing

Coronavirus operational response survey results

March 2021 data and overall summary

14 May 2021

CORS since April 2020

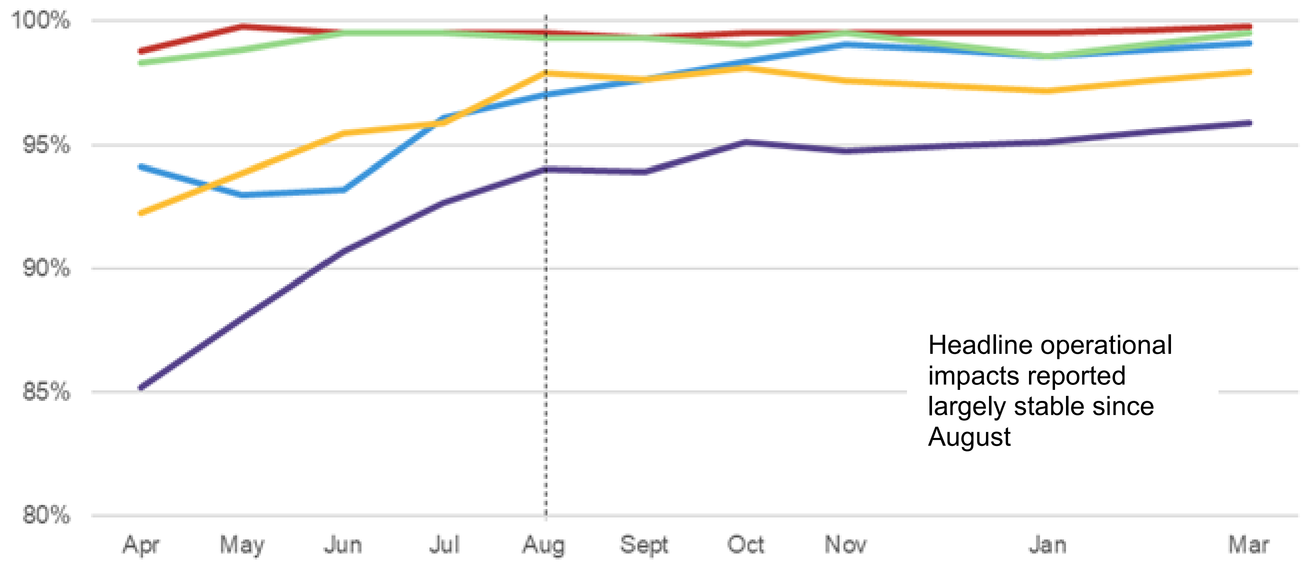
We launched the Coronavirus operational response survey (CORS) in April 2020 to better understand the operational risks to providers' essential services arising from the pandemic and the necessary public health response to it. The objective of the survey has been to ensure that we had up-to-date information from providers on key operational risks. The full questions from the survey are in appendix 1.

We have used the survey results, alongside other information, to identify where risks are emerging, what potential mitigations might be necessary, and identify any regulatory support needed. We have continued to collect data regularly, tracking providers' responses.

Overall, social housing providers have responded well to the unprecedented challenges they have faced.

The graph below shows the trends in survey responses since April 2020 where providers indicated that all or most checks were complete without a material backlog OR that they were maintaining safe staffing levels and essential service delivery in care and support settings, despite some pressure.

Trends in survey responses since April 2020 (as a % of total submissions)



Key

- Emergency repairs
- Gas compliance checks
- Fire compliance checks
- Asbestos, electrical, legionella and lift checks
- Care and support staffing levels

Operational impacts were most severe in the early stages of the pandemic, when for example less than half of providers (37%) were able to complete all gas safety checks without backlogs. These impacts were caused by a range of challenges including being unable to access tenants' properties, reduced contractor capacity, staff absences due to sickness or self-isolation and shortages of materials and equipment. Providers addressed the challenges with a range of mitigating actions and even in the most difficult early stages, the majority of providers were able to continue without material backlogs in essential safety checks and were able to ensure staffing remained at a safe level in care settings. As a result of what we found in the survey, we engaged with the providers reporting the most difficulties, to get assurance from them that they were appropriately managing their risks.

Throughout 2020, providers' performance continued to recover as the first wave of COVID-19 infections receded and they were able to develop new ways of working and begin addressing backlogs. Since August 2020, the delivery of services has remained broadly stable, and for example, by October 2020 most providers were reporting that all gas safety checks were in-date.

Providers have largely continued to deliver essential services without further disruption during later lockdowns and CORS results have remained reasonably constant over the last six months.

However, COVID-19 has had a fundamental impact on most areas of providers' operations. Many providers have started to address some of these wider impacts and transition to more normal ways of working, enabled in part by the successful rollout of the national vaccination programme. Wider regulatory intelligence suggests that capital investment programmes have been curtailed somewhat during 2020/21[1], but that providers are planning for some level of catch-up maintenance and major repairs spend from 2021/22[2].

Given the operational position across the sector is now stable in the essential services that CORS measures and the improving wider position nationally, we are now withdrawing CORS. We are grateful to all providers who have responded throughout this period.

If either now, or in the future, a provider believes tenant safety is threatened or viability is under strain, they 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 March 2021 survey

This is the summary from the tenth and final collection of our temporary survey about how providers are managing some of the challenges they face as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Providers were asked to submit survey responses covering the period from 1 February up to and including 31 March by 5 April. This includes the period under the national

[1] Quarterly Survey for Q3 (October to December) 2020 to 2021

[2] Global accounts 2020: Annex – Financial forecasts

lockdown announced on 4 January 2021 and the relaxation of some restrictions on 8 and 29 March. The response rate was 95%.

The majority of providers reported completing all or most safety checks. The January dip in completing all, rather than most, gas safety checks has recovered. Across the sector, the reported gas safety compliance continues to be broadly back to pre-coronavirus levels, and a number of providers report decreasing backlogs on health & safety checks since the last CORS return.

Almost all providers reported they had no material backlog in emergency repairs. Providers that had reported moving to emergency repairs only during the national lockdown are now starting to undertake routine repairs again. There is some evidence that an increased number of routine repairs are being reported by tenants but survey responses suggest that backlogs in non-emergency repairs are not as severe as during the first lockdown.

Most care and support providers reported that staffing was at normal levels. Some providers continue to report staffing pressures while others are reporting lower levels of staff absence which they are attributing to the continuing vaccine rollout. Providers are continuing to use practices such as restricting access to communal areas and remote delivery of services, where appropriate. However, a number of providers are beginning to phase in greater face-to-face support, home visits, and bring back staff that were working at home.

About half of providers reported being unable to access a small number of properties where vulnerable tenants continue to voluntarily shield. Alongside provider capacity, this remains one of the leading constraints on providers, but both have reduced markedly since the end of January.

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

We asked private registered providers with 1,000 or more homes, local authority social housing landlords and those providers with fewer than 1,000 homes which have a high proportion of supported accommodation to respond to the survey. The information in this report is based on our initial analysis of registered providers' survey responses.

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.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us via enquiries@rsh.gov.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.