

Building Safety Research Group

Executive summary

October 2021

As the leading data and insight company for the UK housing sector, we are here to help our customers make decisions that make a difference. We have been talking to landlords about the challenging landscape and complex operating environment, and our 2021 data offer and research programme responds to what you have told us matters. We identified two research priorities – building safety and decarbonisation, today we are publishing the headline findings from our first specialist research group: building safety.

200 landlords and other experts including G15, Building a safer future, Chartered Institute of Housing, Electrical Safety First and the National Federation of ALMOs were part of our research and volunteers from the wider research group took part in our detailed research survey. Experts from 36 landlords representing a cross-section of the sector each answered around 100 questions about building safety, which forms the basis of this primary research. The full report is available exclusively to participating organisations.

Our research confirmed that safety specialists and governing bodies are looking for comparable safety metrics. Compliance is high – but we have found that underlying data often requires human intervention to make calculations.

Headline findings include:

- Compliance is high across the sector but the underlying data often requires human intervention to make calculations, increasing the risk of data accuracy
- Safety specialists and governing bodies are looking for comparable safety metrics to support assurance
- Landlords use an average of five different IT systems to monitor building safety, only 1 in 8 use a single system, this complexity creates inefficiency and data quality challenges
- Most landlords are using existing lines of communication to inform residents about building safety. Few reported proactive conversations with residents – 39% said they had raised awareness through personal visits and only 1 in 4 reported formal discussions with resident representatives about safety, highlighting this critical issue for the sector.

In response, we have developed a suite of eight safety compliance measures specifically designed for social housing – covering gas, electrics, fire, asbestos, water and lifts in response to sector demand. Given the evolving landscape we have taken existing regulation and set out consistent definitions so landlords can make like-for-like comparisons.

Housemark building safety KPIs from April 2022

Gas	How many times in the reporting year did you not meet your statutory obligation to complete a gas safety check within 12 months of a gas appliance being fitted or last checked The total number of properties that require a valid gas safety record (whether or not they have one) at the end of the period
Electrical	Percentage of domestic properties with a satisfactory Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) up to five years old Percentage of non-domestic properties with a satisfactory Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) up to five years old
Fire	Percentage of non-domestic assets covered by a valid FRA (Fire Risk Assessment)
Asbestos	Percentage of non-domestic assets covered by current asbestos survey Percentage of known asbestos locations re-inspected within benchmarked period (communal areas)
Water	Percentage of relevant water installations covered by a risk assessment
Lifting equipment	Number of communal passenger lifts How many times in the reporting year did you NOT meet your regulatory obligation to complete a compliant LOLER examination within the manufacturer's recommended timescale.

Headline findings

Higher Risk Residential Buildings

The risks associated with people living in Higher Risk Residential Buildings (HRRBs) present significant challenges , although HRRBs make up just 0.7% of all blocks. While all landlords involved in the research have defined evacuation procedures, many report outstanding actions including drawing up replacement plans, revising in line with forthcoming guidance and applying standards to low rise.

Strategic priorities

Fire and gas safety are top priorities for landlords over the next 12 months as the sector builds in new fire safety requirements alongside recovering from the effects of the pandemic on gas servicing programmes.

Resident engagement

The majority of landlords are using existing lines of communication to inform residents about building safety – this includes general newsletters, residents' groups and website information.

Few reported proactive conversations with residents – 39% said they had raised awareness through personal visits and just 1 in 4 reported formal discussions with resident representatives about safety.

The messages coming from this research project are:

- Be proactive to raise awareness of building safety with residents
- Make building safety reporting part of formal resident scrutiny

Managing data

Landlords use an average of five different IT systems to monitor building safety, only 1 in 8 using a single system. With over 40 different systems mentioned by participants, there is no software market leader. Inter-operability is the key, with participants finding that specialist systems talking other databases more valuable than a single interface.

The sector's data requirements for building safety reflect other landlord activities with:

- Specialist systems built or developed around responsibilities and smooth interfaces with related data
- A centralised data source combining safety records and remedial actions alongside spatial information about location in a format that can be extracted for reporting.

Comparability

In the absence of standardised KPIs for the sector, the most popular method of comparison is internal. We found that comparisons with peers is taking place – through membership organisations and informal networks. However, without standardised measures defining specific time and location parameters, the usefulness of such comparisons is limited.

Around two-thirds of participants specified comparable building safety measures as key to improvements. Comments include:

Standardisation is key, there appears to a great deal of different approaches for reporting and calculating the data.

The standardisation of building safety compliance measures across the board so that everyone is reporting upon the same measures to allow for accurate benchmarking to be carried out.

Ensure everyone is working to the same definitions and use measures that are already being collected or are easy for all organisations to collect.

Building safety baseline results 2020/21		Median compliance	Fully compliant
Gas	Percentage of properties that had a gas safety check and record completed by the anniversary date	99.53%	13%
Electrical	Percentage of domestic properties with a satisfactory EICR up to five years old	95.3%	9%
	Percentage of non-domestic properties with a satisfactory EICR up to five years old	100%	71%
Fire	Percentage of non-domestic assets covered by a valid FRA (Fire Risk Assessment)	100%	87%
Asbestos	Percentage of non-domestic assets covered by current asbestos survey	100%	91%
	Percentage of known asbestos locations re-inspected within benchmarked period (communal areas)	100%	84%
Water	Percentage of relevant water installations covered by a risk assessment	100%	88%
Lifting equipment	Percentage of communal passenger lifts with compliant LOLER examination at the end of the benchmarked period	100%	100%

Six key actions

Looking forward, we identified six key actions for landlords to focus improvement work based on input from participants:

1	Take responsibility Change organisational culture so that safety is everyone's job. Accurate and accessible data supports organisation wide buy-in and understanding of your current position.
2	Communicate effectively Ensure effective two-way communication with residents that is transparent and provides clarity about responsibility.
3	Procure safety Reduce value engineering by ensuring that quality and safety is sufficiently represented in tender processes.
4	Value technical expertise Use technical experts to undertake audits rather than relying on generic organisations.
5	Work towards standardisation This will reduce the need for individual interpretation and increase standards.
6	Share and compare Share best practice with a consistent form of reporting, working through grey areas open to interpretation.