Opening the door: Changes to support necessary access to social tenants' homes

DECEMBER 2025

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1   Introduction and summary

- Difficulties in gaining access is a growing problem for social housing providers and is very costly. This is in part due to the increasing regulatory and legislative requirements for accessing homes

- Alongside safety and property concerns, providers are increasingly concerned that they will attract regulatory or legal action if they fail to gain necessary access

- Many providers are looking to improve their governance of 'no access', though only a minority have yet adopted a formal definition and an even smaller number have any metrics in place to measure it

- There is a cultural shift underway toward a combination of more empathetic relationships with tenants, with clarity over the necessity for gaining access and the consequences of non-compliance

- There is increasing recognition of the reasons tenants may not provide access, or be unable to comply

- Improved practice generally involves setting up specialist teams or multi-skilling local housing officers to work with tenants

- Landlords are also improving the data they hold on households and properties, which will support them to better tailor access

- Many organisations are improving their communications with tenants, including explaining the need for and benefits of allowing access

- Some landlords have benefited from engaging with tenants in drawing up/updating 'no access' policies and procedures, which is clearly best practice

- Some providers have analysed the reasons for 'no access' and are also monitoring what works in achieving access. All landlords should adopt an evidence-informed approach on 'no access' policies and updates

- Technology is supporting better approaches to appointments, though outdated systems are a hindrance. At the same time, providers need to bear in mind that people with vulnerabilities and low incomes may also be digitally excluded

- Legal action is expensive and complex. There are many calls for a government-endorsed simplified route to gaining access in complex and persistent cases.

Gaining access for safety checks, repairs, improvements and tenancy audits is part of the routine work of social housing providers. But there is increasing concern about cases where access has not been possible. These cases are highly problematic because they involve risk: the tenant could be in danger; their neighbours could also be at risk; the provider has legal and regulatory obligations to meet and the cost of failed attempts to gain access is very high. The risk of programme slippage is also significant.

Our desktop review for this research found no specific studies of 'no access' and very few that discussed it at all.

The Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals (ASCP) produced a useful White Paper which estimates that in the social rented sector, the cost of failed access attempts for gas servicing alone is £49-£65m a year. Some £14m is spent on court cases and £35m on multiple failed visits. It believes the total cost of failed access for all reasons could reach £1bn over the next decade on current trends.

The ASCP report also provides data on the scale of 'no access':

- First-time access rate overall: 73%
- Difficult to access properties: 0.25-2.5% of stock.

As the report notes, this is a small percentage but a large number – if we assume there are four million social housing homes, then there may be 10,000-100,000 difficult to access properties.

Most substantive studies list the likely reasons for refusal and emphasise that an individual tenant is likely to have a multiplicity of overlapping reasons. The ASCP report makes this useful observation:

> *"There are many factors which can all have an impact on if, when and how homes are accessed including:*
> - *The number of stakeholders involved, often with conflicting needs, interests and priorities – including; residents, landlords, regulators, judiciary, government, employees and contractors*
> - *The interplay between human, technical, political, legal, economic and logistical factors all add layers of complexity*
> - *A complicated legal position in which there are numerous areas of law to be considered including contract law, criminal law, civil law, human rights law and housing law as well as health and safety laws."*

A study of decarbonisation capital works in social housing by Birmingham University reported on tenant refusals and providers' perception of their reasons. It also suggested ways to reduce refusals, including:

- Advance publicity and promotion about the works
- Minimising disruption and offering practical help
- Education, advice and guidance for tenants, especially where new systems are involved
- Offering support for residents with vulnerabilities.

The Housing Ombudsman (HOS) is also concerned about 'no access' and has written extensively on the issue, including in the major Spotlight report '[Repairing Trust](#)' this year. This report called for an empathetic approach from landlords and highlighted some good practice, including an 'invisible need' campaign to make tenants aware that not all repairs and maintenance issues can be seen.

The report identified a range of failures by providers that are likely to exacerbate access problems. These include multiple communication errors:

> *"Incorrect information or recording errors can disrupt repairs and safety checks. Poor communication about repairs and maintenance visits, contractors arriving late or on the wrong days, 'cold calling' and the inability to prove attempts to gain access is common."*
>
> **- HOS report 'Repairing Trust'**

Sometimes there is a gap between procedures and practice. HOS special investigations have found, for example, that while many of a provider's policies (including 'required access') may set out clear processes and procedures, these have not been followed in practice.

The University of Birmingham researched the emotional effects of home visits for tenants. [The Home Encounters – Understanding and Improving the Emotional Impact of Home Visits](#) report identified key emotional dynamics:

- Anxiety and distrust
- Invasion of privacy
- Feeling judged and belittled
- The complexity of help.

Some tenants may be reluctant to allow access because they have mental health problems including hoarding behaviour; or because there is something to hide, such as illegal activity. Some struggle with appointments or with the complexity of their lives. Some may be digitally excluded. These issues can be compounded by landlord systems that are not easy to navigate.

The Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group produced a report on [access for fire safety work](#). It identified six access principles: trust, explanation, communication, delivery, impact and a personalised approach (Diagram 1). The report includes best practice guidelines for situations when a tenant has complex needs.
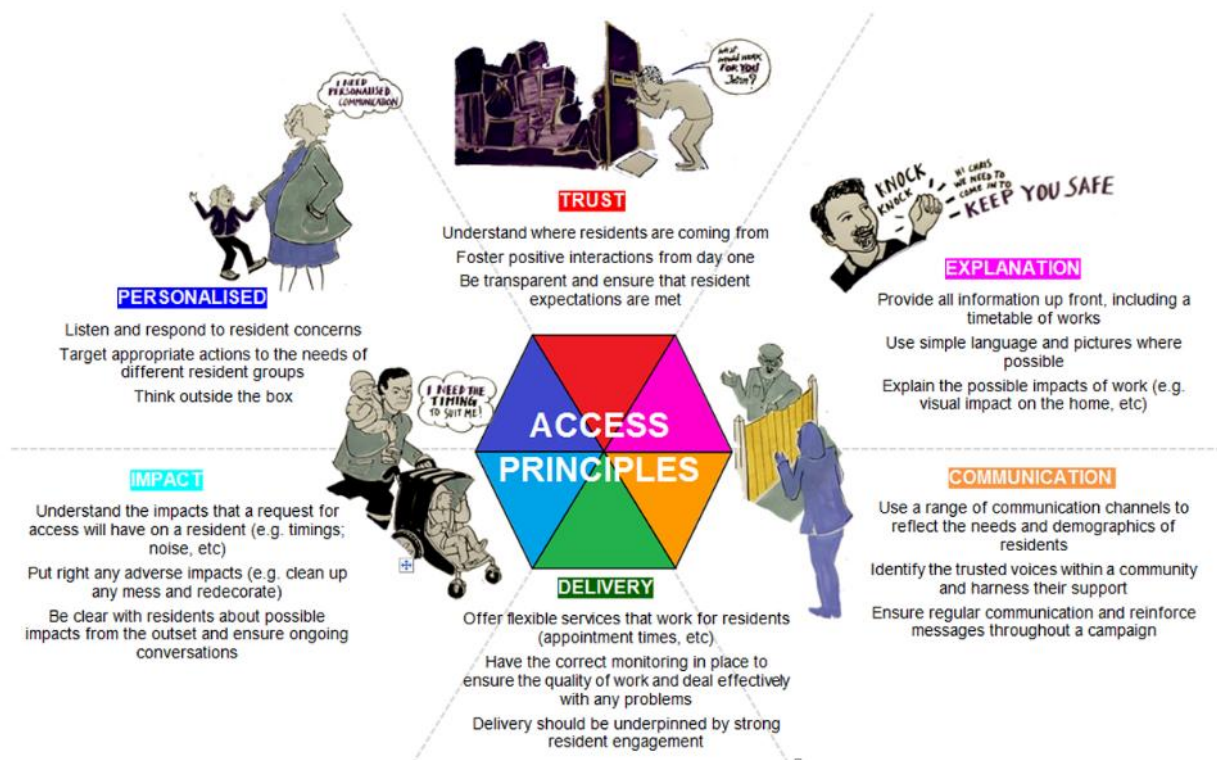
Diagram 1: Access principles

Providers can and do work to overcome the difficulties identified. Our research finds them stepping up the pace of change in order to meet the challenges of the consumer regulations, a tight financial environment and the implementation of Awaab's Law from October 2025 which requires access within strict timeframes.

2 Our research

Our project was commissioned by the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), Councils with ALMOs Group (CWAG), Local Government Association (LGA), Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH). These organisations represent the majority, if not all, of stock-holding local authorities and arm's length management organisations (ALMOs). The brief for the research asked us to focus on the experiences of local authorities (LAs) and their tenants, but also to include housing associations (HAs) as they face the same issues around access and Awaab's Law and could contribute good practice.

Our approach included a brief desktop review of previous research and documentation, a survey of LAs, ALMOs and HAs, a series of focus groups involving staff, residents and governing body members, related meetings and a series of case studies with LAs, ALMOs and HAs. Field work was conducted during August, September and October 2025, immediately before Awaab's Law came into effect.

More details of our approach can be found in Appendix 2. We are grateful to all those who took part in the research and to the project steering group for advice, contributions and contacts.

A word on terminology

Anecdotally, we heard that some tenants feel that 'no access' is a pejorative term that should not be used. This was borne out in our study. It is true that this is a term coined by providers. However, despite listening for alternatives we found little evidence of more neutral terms currently in use. We offer two possibilities here.

We suggest that there are two stages involved in 'no access'. The first stage of the tenant not being in or not answering the door for a pre-arranged visit could be termed a 'missed appointment'. This term is in everyday use for NHS appointments and suchlike. The second stage, where three or more visits have been made and escalation of actions is mooted, could be termed 'visit not achieved' or VNA.

We suggest that individual organisations and representative organisations canvass tenants, staff and governing body members to explore alternative terms. Coining a new agreed term would of course involve changing marketing campaigns, documentation and official guidance. For this report therefore we have used the established term 'no access' that is currently in widespread use.

3   Summary of our survey findings and case studies

About 60% of organisations in our survey said they had growing or considerable concerns about 'no access'. This is not necessarily because it is a widespread problem, but more because it is growing and is very costly. It is clear that most tenants do allow access and cooperate with home visits. Estimates of the percentage of access not gained on responsive repairs first visits varied from under 10% to 30%. Some organisations noted that access rates vary according to the reason: gas safety had higher success rates, routine repairs lower. Only a small percentage of these cases end up with legal action.

Perhaps surprisingly, only about 40% of participating organisations had adopted a formal definition of 'no access'. The most cited definition was that a case would be recorded as 'no access' after three attempts to gain access had failed. Most said these would be pre-booked attempts, in writing (pre-arrangement is necessary to substantiate legal action). Some made calls or sent messages in addition to this.

Most respondents placed emphasis on hazard/safety checks and inspections, including damp and mould and essential repairs, rather than general tenancy visits which were mentioned only by one.

The case studies

We include four case studies in this report (see Section 11): Dacorum Borough Council, Homes in Somerset, St Leger Homes and Stockport Homes. Together they offer a detailed and nuanced sense of the challenges faced by providers and the numerous ways organisations can adapt their approach and practices to achieve better results. We offer brief summaries here.

Dacorum Borough Council

Dacorum has a safe homes team which is responsible for delivering all statutory duties around building safety and compliance. The team recognised a need to change the narrative to focus on 'the person behind the door'. A lead officer for access within the team works with both internal and external agencies (such as adult social care and mental health teams) and developing a trusted relationship with the tenant.

The focus on access has fed into a number of areas of organisational improvement, including improving communication with tenants and reducing communication barriers; improving data and record keeping and looking at how information on households is captured and used.

Homes in Somerset

This ALMO has taken a different approach, with its multi-functional teams with smaller patch sizes so that officers can get to know tenants. A frequently raised point from tenants is the multiple visits each year for different reasons and the impact it has on their lives. They also sometimes don't see the value of some of these visits. Improving the communications strategy is on the agenda, so that tenants can better understand why compliance visits are important for them, as well as the organisation.

St Leger Homes

The Doncaster based ALMO recognises that there is often something else going on behind failed attempts to access, with many tenants living in increasingly complex circumstances. Coming at the issue from a supportive point of view allows the team, who are based in tenancy support, to focus on other 'hooks' for the landlord and tenant to develop a relationship. That can be linking in to the help that St Leger Homes can give with finances, support with benefits, writing a CV or getting back into work, helping with energy bills or prepayment meter vouchers and support around language barriers and hoarding, etc. Taking enforcement action is seen as a last resort and as a failure of the process. However, St Leger Homes has strengthened the tenancy agreement to make it more explicit about the tenant responsibilities around access for compliance checks and safety, carefully balancing this with the tenant's right to a peaceful home.

Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes has added more dedicated resources around capturing and monitoring performance, including setting up a Power BI dashboard to track progress. The data from this is used to track trends and identify whether there are certain characteristics or groups where 'no access' is more of a problem. The organisation is working hard on capturing data such as changed mobile numbers. A doorstep guide for operatives sets out clearly Stockport Homes' expectations; for example, that operatives must attend within 30 minutes of the scheduled time and call ahead if delayed. A complex case team consisting of teams from across the business meets weekly and 'no access' is considered as part of this. Overall, the organisation is trying to embed a culture that recognises the importance of gaining access and the cost of not achieving it.

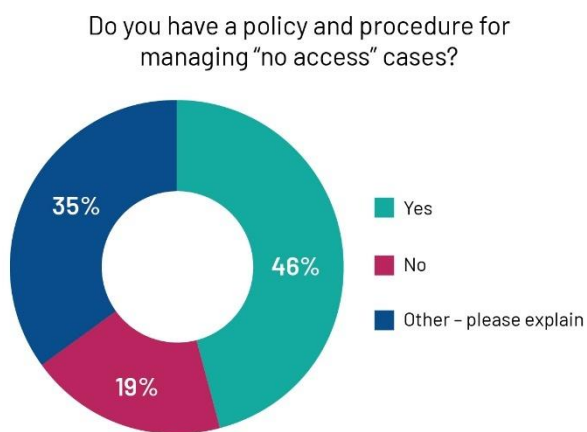# 4   Governance

Policies and procedures

Do you have a policy and procedure for managing "no access" cases?

35%   46%   19%

Yes
No
Other – please explain

Figure 1: Policy and procedure for managing 'no access'

Have you updated your policy/procedure over the past couple of years to improve your approach to "no access"?
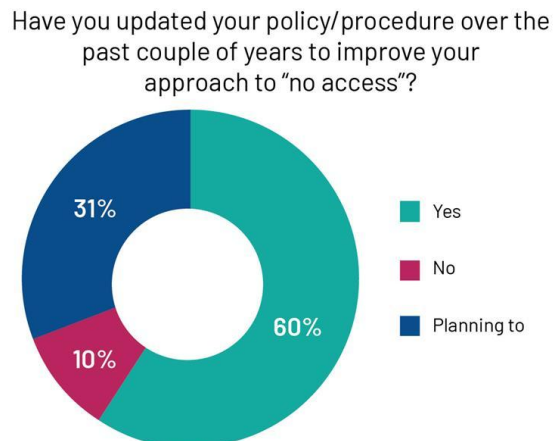
31%   60%   10%

Yes
No
Planning to

Figure 2: Updating policies and procedures to improve approach

While around half said they do have a policy and procedure, most of those who ticked 'other' said they are in the process of developing their policies. This therefore encompasses the great majority of respondents, with under a fifth having no policy or procedure (see Figure 1).

The great majority of organisations that commented on this had updated their policy and procedures recently, were in that process, or had created a policy for the first time (see Figure 2). Generally the changes reflected greater emphasis on use of legal powers where deemed necessary and greater emphasis on tenants' responsibilities. Overall, there was a move toward 'getting on the front foot' and setting out clear policies and procedures, rather than reacting to situations. One had updated its policy to reflect its new use of Environmental Protection Act powers (a type of warrant, only available to councils). A number of organisations have published their policies online, though our desktop review found these were in the minority. Greater clarity for tenants could be achieved by all organisations doing this.

In our focus groups and case studies, it was clear that participants were putting much effort into ensuring the organisation had clear lines of responsibility and action. Here, they were balancing set protocols about numbers of attempts to gain access and guidelines on when to escalate with a more nuanced, customer-centred approach that requires at least some flexibility. In a similar vein, providers were trying to respond to individual needs but at the same time were making clear to tenants their responsibilities and the potential consequences of refusing access.

In parallel a number of organisations were ensuring their tenancy agreements were updated to reflect the policies and to make tenants' responsibilities to allow access clearer (see Figure 3). The fact that most organisations ticked 'no' to this question may well suggest that access provisions were already included. Two respondents included for the first time the fact that the tenancy could be at risk if access was not granted. One organisation said it had also included clear information on what methods it could use to gain access, with the timescales.

Are your tenancy agreements being updated to include stronger access provisions?
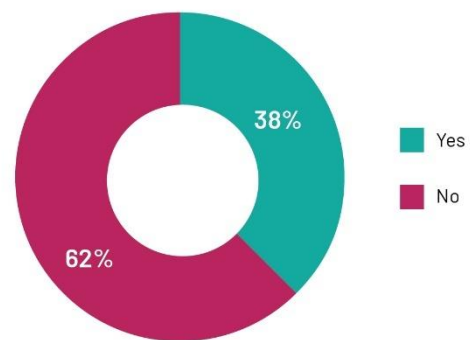
38% Yes

62% No

Figure 3: Updating tenancy agreements

One organisation had *"updated (policy) to reflect Awaab's Law guidance and greater understanding of vulnerabilities and working with tenants rather than enforcement"*. Another said it was *"pulling data for hard to reach customers, those with known vulnerabilities and no repairs orders"* to deal with these situations proactively.

These measures reflected a cultural shift toward a combination of clearly set out rights and responsibilities, appointments in line with modern standards and understanding the difficulties tenants face.

One HA was working on a group-wide 'no access' procedure to incorporate all its different operational teams; an LA was doing the same across council services. Another LA updates its policy/procedure every 12 months in partnership with legal services, statutory and voluntary agencies. In our linked report on preparations for Awaab's Law we highlight work to coordinate hazard reporting across different LA services and with ALMOs. It is worth noting here that while some unitary local authorities have usefully published their access policies for housing online, these do not necessarily line up completely with their access policies for safeguarding or mental health interventions.

Procedural changes

Efforts to understand better why some visits fail have uncovered a number of issues concerning providers' procedures. This is in line with the HOS findings in its 'Repairing Trust' report. In some cases the remedy can be fairly straightforward. We explore these types of issues in the next section.

Several organisations said they are now employing a specialist 'no access' officer. Some had created a new access team to support tenants to permit access to carry out essential inspections and works. One organisation said it had successfully trialled and is currently rolling out a formal procedure for obtaining warrants to gain access where 'no access' to complete EICRs (electrical checks) occurs. Our four case studies in Section 11 give experiences of the different potential approaches and their merits.

> *"A new access team has been created which sits within our tenancy sustainability team, enabling various support to be offered to those tenants who struggle for a variety of reasons, we are also able to discuss various arrangements and adjustments we can put in place for the works/surveys etc to take place. We hope this friendly and supportive approach will result in access being permitted more often without recourse to legal remedies and enforcement and provide an opportunity for any other difficulties or vulnerabilities to be identified and addressed. This should result in these types of cases reducing year on year."*
> - ***Survey respondent***

> *"Created a team for 'no access' to tackle this issue going forward, the team will be responsible for all aspects of 'no access' for gas, electrical, DMC, structural, etc"*
> - ***Survey respondent***

A provider undertook resident consultation to gain insight into how it can better communicate with residents ahead of appointments. It admitted though that routine repairs and other non-legal compliance areas remain a challenge.

A number of providers said they had strengthened their reporting systems to senior and governing body level, to support 'buy-in' and ensure that the approach is embedded into the governance structure. For some this also extended to involving resident bodies – see Section 6.

5   Tailoring the service

As noted in the previous section, our research found a change in culture underway that involves providers taking a more empathetic approach with tenants and making a stronger attempt to get to know them – to build a rapport. To that end, some have set up specialist teams to deal with access issues, while others have multi-skilled local teams, sometimes reducing patch sizes to give staff time to talk with residents. Again, our case studies in Section 11 are relevant to this culture change.

Comments from the survey included:

> *"Introduced Resident Liaison Officers who can engage with tenants to build stronger lines of communication/stronger relationships and may also be able to attend with an operative if this may encourage access."*

> *"Provide support for hoarding."*

> *"Building trust and avoiding blame narratives."*

As the HOS noted, providers may have set out processes, procedures and systems but these have not always been followed. Organisations need to analyse their actual practice and make changes accordingly.

In our survey, only a minority of organisations had studied any association between 'no access' and tenant satisfaction data (see Figure 4).

However, many more had either had reasons reported to them by formal or informal means, or intuitively sensed reasons. The chief reason, reported by more than four in five organisations,

Have you linked tenant satisfaction scores/feedback with properties where you have struggled to gain access?

- Yes — 12%
- No — 71%
- Not sure — 17%
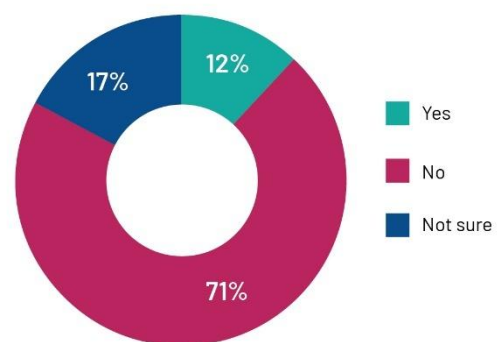
Figure 4: Linking tenant satisfaction scores with 'no access'

concerned tenant vulnerabilities (see Figure 5). Other frequently cited issues were tenant concerns about disruption and damage (echoing the Birmingham University research, see Introduction), stigma and tenants not being aware of their obligations.

Which reasons for 'no access' have been reported at your organisation? (Tick all that apply)

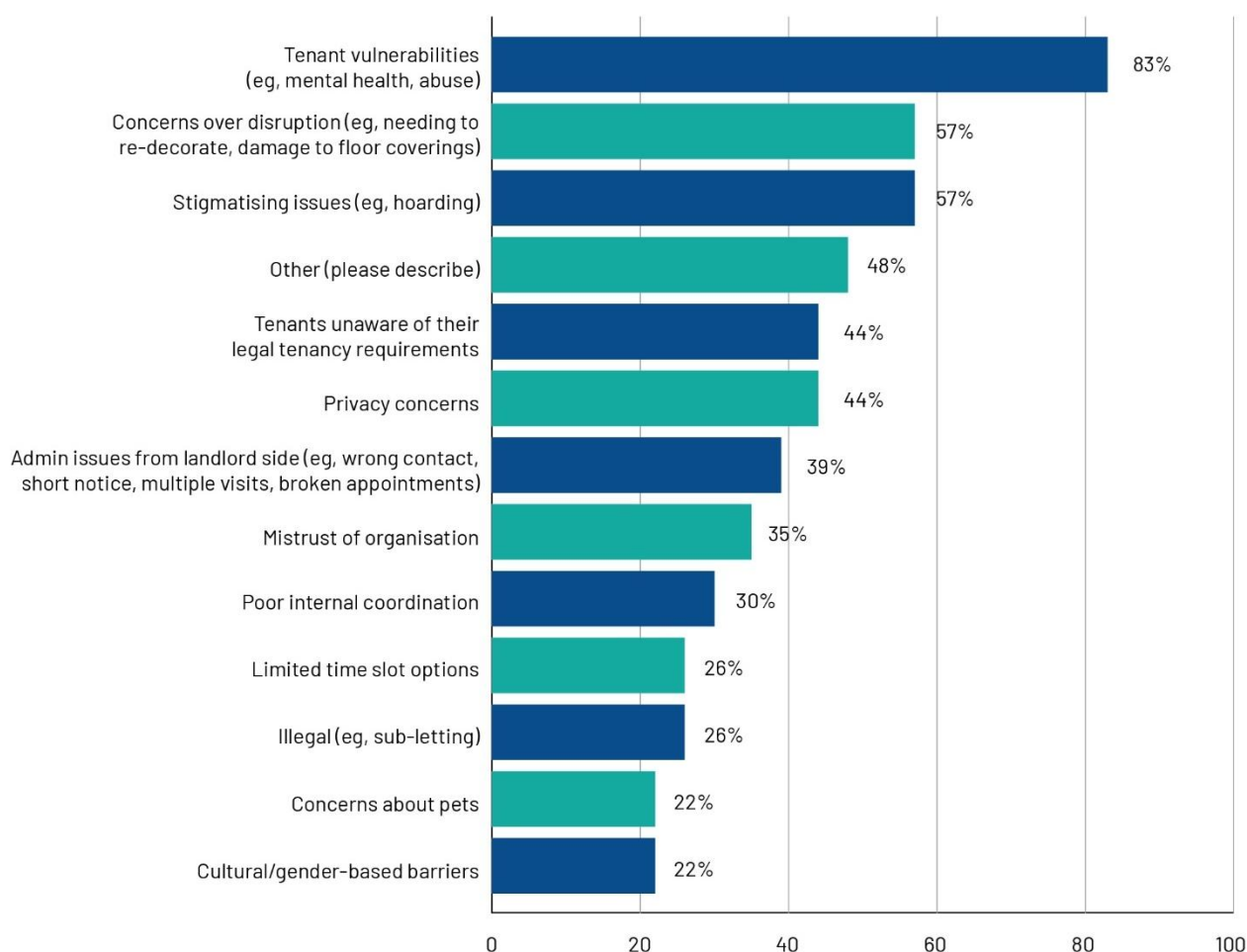| Reason	Percentage
Tenant vulnerabilities (eg, mental health, abuse)	83%
Concerns over disruption (eg, needing to re-decorate, damage to floor coverings)	57%
Stigmatising issues (eg, hoarding)	57%
Other (please describe)	48%
Tenants unaware of their legal tenancy requirements	44%
Privacy concerns	44%
Admin issues from landlord side (eg, wrong contact, short notice, multiple visits, broken appointments)	39%
Mistrust of organisation	35%
Poor internal coordination	30%
Limited time slot options	26%
Illegal (eg, sub-letting)	26%
Concerns about pets	22%
Cultural/gender-based barriers	22%

Figure 5: Reasons reported for 'no access'

A variety of issues were raised under 'other', including the age profile of tenants (some older tenants not wanting disruption, being unwell or not having family or friends to help them), 'claims harvesters' telling tenants not to allow access and some cases where tenants were said to be deliberately uncooperative and not wanting their landlord to come into the property.

A number of organisations did examine their own performance, especially around appointments and found problems:

- Appointment slots for too long a time period (all day/half day). About 80% of responsive maintenance tasks, primarily plumbing and electrical work, can be completed in less than an hour, presenting opportunities for efficient scheduling

- Some organisations were using technology that made it easy to book an appointment for a tenant, but not for the tenant to change or cancel

- Lack of automated reminders

- 'Visit fatigue': too many appointments
- Staff were not knocking loudly enough or taking enough steps to make their presence known.

Tenants at a meeting for our research also felt access was a fundamental issue with many points raised, eg:

- Failures of the landlord in organising visits to homes – too little notice, difficult to rebook, officers and contractors fail to attend or attend unannounced
- Too many single purpose visits was raised by a couple of participants whilst a small number of participants also said they never have had a visit or a booking
- Threatening legalistic letters from the landlord was raised by several participants when gaining entry had not been possible after one visit (and in one case even when there had been no visit)
- Little attention paid by the landlord to people with disabilities, language issues, hearing impediments, etc, even though the landlord has had this information multiple times (but this was contradicted by some participants)
- People attending with no identity badges.

Remedies of various kinds around appointment scheduling had been put in place or were being trialled (see Figure 7):

- Where access is only needed for a short time, eg, 15 minutes, it was felt that very short appointment slots should be offered, provided that technology allows (as recommended by the CIH "rethinking repairs" report)
- Operatives should be able to give texted updates on their arrival in similar ways to delivery firms. An ALMO said one of its major contractors has an online tracking system that customers can access to see when the operative is likely to arrive at the property.

Other changes reported in our survey included better communications, consideration of support needs and personalised contact (see Figure 6). These measures were balanced with more robust use of legal procedures where necessary.
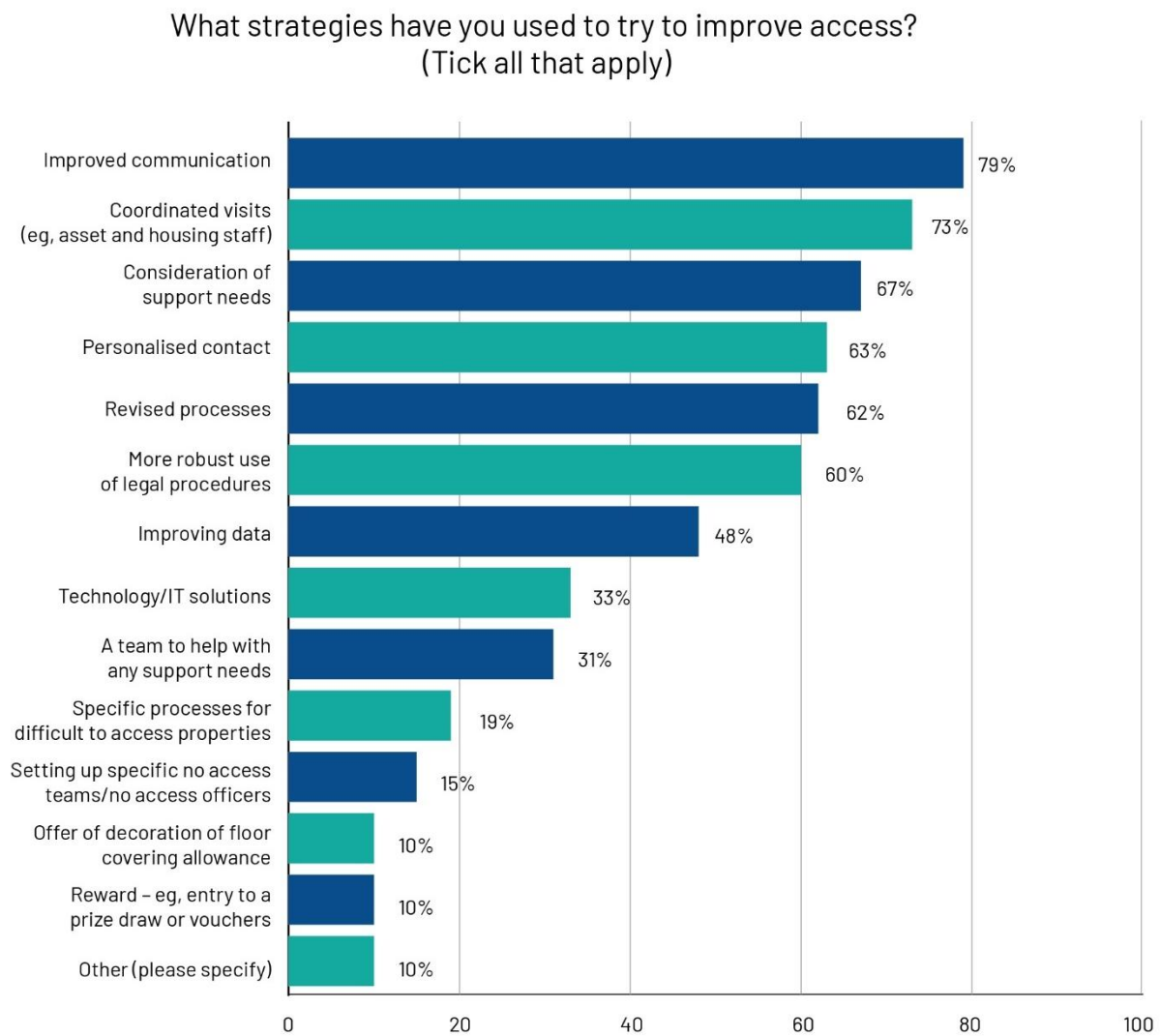
What strategies have you used to try to improve access?
(Tick all that apply)

Strategy	%
Improved communication	79%
Coordinated visits (eg, asset and housing staff)	73%
Consideration of support needs	67%
Personalised contact	63%
Revised processes	62%
More robust use of legal procedures	60%
Improving data	48%
Technology/IT solutions	33%
A team to help with any support needs	31%
Specific processes for difficult to access properties	19%
Setting up specific no access teams/no access officers	15%
Offer of decoration of floor covering allowance	10%
Reward – eg, entry to a prize draw or vouchers	10%
Other (please specify)	10%

Figure 6: Strategies to improve access

An example from a focus group:

> *"We've introduced a formal "doorstep guide" to ensure thorough efforts are made to gain access:*
> - *Operatives must attend within 30 minutes of the scheduled time and call ahead if delayed*
> - *Upon arrival, they must knock confidently, check windows, shout over the back gate, speak with neighbours and spend at least five minutes trying to gain access. A follow-up call is also made*
> - *If access is still not gained, a card is left, a time-stamped photo is taken and detailed notes are entered into the system."*
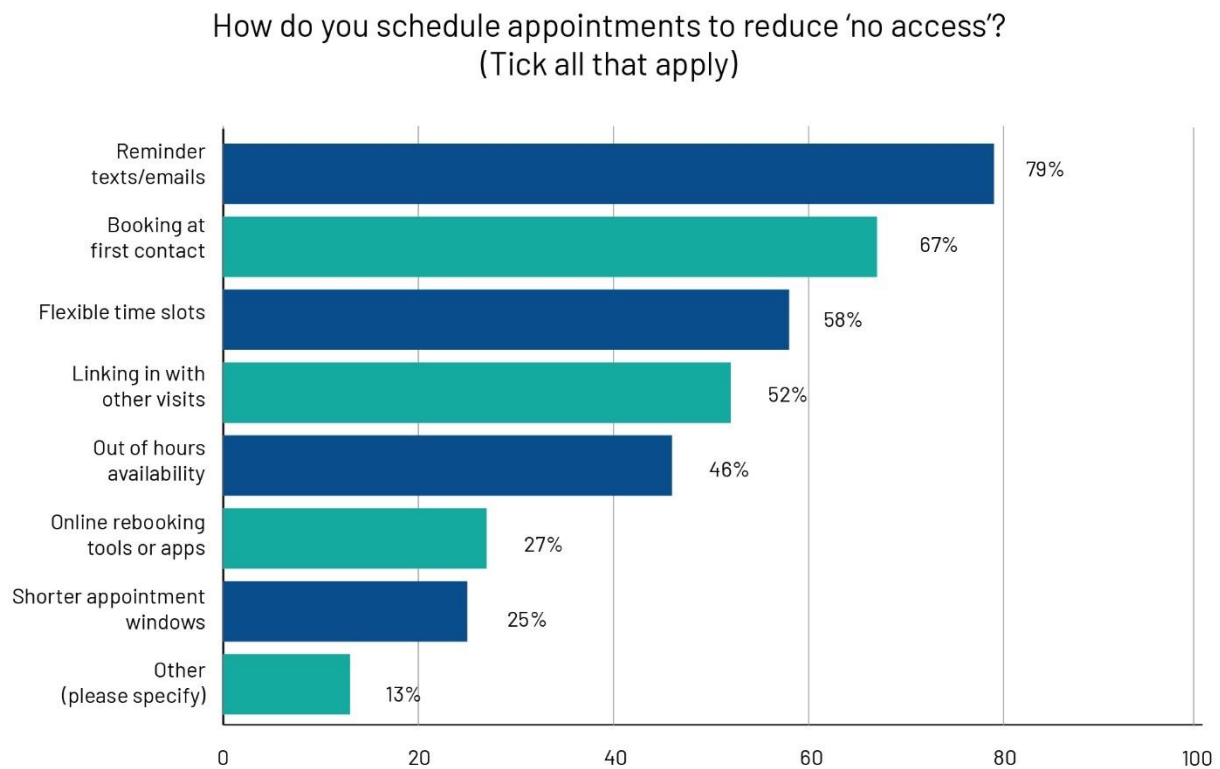
How do you schedule appointments to reduce 'no access'?
(Tick all that apply)

Category	Percentage
Reminder texts/emails	79%
Booking at first contact	67%
Flexible time slots	58%
Linking in with other visits	52%
Out of hours availability	46%
Online rebooking tools or apps	27%
Shorter appointment windows	25%
Other (please specify)	13%

Figure 7: Scheduling appointments to reduce 'no access'

Communications

Many had looked at their communications, including web pages and newsletters, with some running campaigns to explain the need for and importance of gaining access. Invariably these messages focused on safety, stressing that the visit was in the tenant's interest or to their benefit. In our desktop research we found only a minority of providers had published their access policies online. For clarity many more could do so.

Attention to language was important and quite a number of providers had consulted resident groups or panels on this. As a result, for example, several had renamed 'stock condition survey' as 'home safety visit' or similar.

This finding echoes the Birmingham University recommendation on major works. It said providers should prepare tenants early for forthcoming work and include them with consultations and panels, minimise disruption and ensure tenants understand what is happening and why.

Combining visits

There was a growing awareness that tenants may be asked to allow access too many times, by different teams. The need to access homes is likely to grow with each new piece of legislation (including later phases of Awaab's Law) and with the increased focus on Decent Homes and stock condition, presenting added complexity. Awaab's Law carries strict deadlines so may further increase the number of visits for those reporting problems, as the imperative is to act quickly rather than coordinate.

A significant number of providers were trying to streamline visits, including for a single 'home safety check' each year. The logistics of this were proving difficult for some and there was a recognition that 'silo working' needed to be overcome. There are budget implications. It also requires flexibility and careful planning to ensure that access requests are timed well ahead of deadlines such as the annual gas service. As HOS has pointed out, this may mean doing some checks before strictly necessary.

> *"Joined-up data across departments and contractors."*
>
> - ***Survey respondent***

> *"Combined "health-check" visits to minimise disruption."*
>
> - ***Survey respondent***

A focus group participant said they had become aware of problems arising from having separate booking systems for different types of appointment. These need to be overhauled to give visibility and allow future 'piggybacking' of visits.

Another focus group participant commented:

> *"Obviously there has been an increase in various different reasons as to why we're having to get into properties now. I was just writing them down, I've got a list of about seven or eight, at least, separate reasons. I think one of the challenges that we have is obviously sort of pulling all of that together. Because an organisation has to try and actually make a way forward."*
>
> - ***Focus group participant***

In general, providers were striving to reduce the number of separate visits where feasible. It also helped to have a local housing officer coordinating in cases where a tenant might have vulnerabilities, to advocate and organise visits in the best way possible.

Quite a number of participants mentioned a 'make every visit count' type of approach where operatives going into a home for any reason would be asked to look out for DMC or other repair issues. Some had set up easy reporting systems for this, so that operatives could feed back information efficiently. Longstanding problems of contractors working smoothly with the housing service remained but a number of providers were paying attention to this. Two had brought the repairs service back in-house for better control as Awaab's Law implementation approached.

In support of this type of approach, IT that works smoothly across the organisation and possibly with external contractors as well was important but difficult to achieve. This was acknowledged as an area of weakness that requires ongoing focus.

> *"Cross-department meetings to share data on hard-to-reach tenants."*
>
> - ***Survey respondent***

A small number of participants mentioned that they were exploring alternatives to in-person visits for checks, where feasible. This would involve use of technology such as sensors and video and would require co-operation from the tenant. Similarly, one provider was looking at whether they could carry out inspections or works when the tenant was out, with their permission. Operatives would wear body cams to ensure security and trust.

Overcoming previous experiences

Among reasons cited for tenants refusing access for repairs and major works were concerns over disruption, damage to property and the cost of, for example, putting in new flooring or carpets after fittings were changed. Some landlords' access policies state that compensation will not be given. But this risks alienating those residents who already have this type of concern. A minority in our study said they did offer allowances. Other research suggests that tenants' past experience of poor workmanship could also result in reluctance to allow access in future so attention to high quality of works is essential.

There was debate about whether residents should be offered incentives to allow access. Some participants felt it would be wrong to reward people for doing what they already should do and what the great majority of tenants do already comply with. But others felt this could help and a few were offering a prize draw. At least one organisation is exploring the use of nudge theory to improve access rates.

6   Resident views and involvement

Survey respondents offered a wide range of examples of how they have involved residents in their approach to gaining access. A further significant number said they are in the process of updating policies and procedures and plan to involve residents in that process.

Sixteen respondents said their tenant scrutiny panel, service improvement panel or similarly named group had scrutinised the 'no access' policy/procedure, or was about to. In addition, several said they were encouraging discussion among engaged residents in other groupings and one is consulting with a resident focus group.

Two organisations plan to report performance by specialist 'no access' teams to engaged residents including governing body members. One said asset management teams will deliver a presentation to resident panels reviewing performance, which highlights 'no access' rates, trades in question and costs.

Two organisations had widely consulted via online surveys, sounding boards and established customer forums. Another had conducted more than 100 community drop in sessions to seek views.

The importance of asking residents was highlighted by the insights and improvements some organisations had gained as a result. One said the repairs focus group had helped shape the wording on cards put through doors. Another asked residents to comment on all of its access letters and had made adjustments as a result. One organisation had gained insights from listening to a tenant directly affected by the issue:

> *"We met with a tenant who had experience of not allowing access for electrical safety checks in which an injunction for access was applied for. He provided his feedback which has been considered and will be taken into account when we are implementing new processes."*
>
> *- Survey respondent*

And two further insights that brought change:

> *"Tenants have told us that good communication ahead of attending appointments and ease of rearranging appointments is key to them. We anticipated that providing more flexible appointments (outside of normal working hours) would be a key driver but whilst there is a need for appointment flexibility, this is much less of a priority than we had anticipated."*
>
> *- Survey respondent*

> *"Tenants were feeding back through customer satisfaction surveys/complaints that they were in the property when "no accesses' occurred. This is why we implemented the requirement of contractors to call our office before leaving site so we can attempt to contact the customers. More often than not, the customer is home and has not heard the door."*
>
> - ***Survey respondent***

Tenants in our study were strongly supportive of the principle that access should be allowed for health and safety reasons. This was not only for the sake of the resident themselves, but also for the safety of neighbours and more broadly for the wellbeing of the community. Occasionally tenants took a harder line than the provider: *"Our service improvement panel have strong views … including an appetite for recharging for 'no access' visits, although unreasonable and unlikely to recover debts."*

7   Complex and persistent cases

There was almost universal agreement among participants that a small number of cases where access has not been possible take up a very large amount of organisational resource and energy and are costly. A single failed callout of an operative could cost £60 for example and some cases involved a dozen or more attempts to gain access.

A good proportion of participants in our study have set up special teams or appointed a specialist officer to deal with the most difficult cases where access has not been achieved. Some have taken an alternative route of multi-skilling existing local housing officers who are already in a good position to form a relationship and have local knowledge of tenants who may be in difficulties or have particular needs.

A first step with either route is to begin to understand why a visit might fail. As noted above, only a minority of organisations had completed any formal analysis of the reasons for failed access, though most had an intuitive sense of possible reasons built from experience. More worryingly, less than half of survey respondents could definitely say they track persistent cases (see Figure 8).

Do you track persistent "no access" cases?

- Yes: 43%
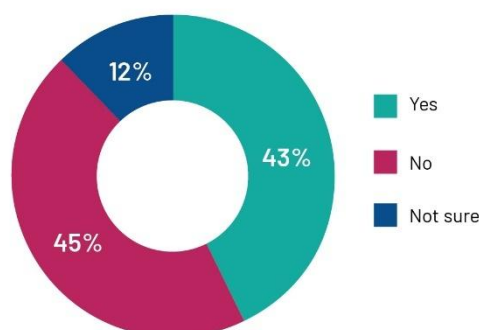- No: 45%
- Not sure: 12%

Figure 8: Tracking persistent cases

Here again, the cultural shift underway among providers came to the fore in our study. Many were asking housing and specialist officers to try to form an empathetic relationship with tenants. Crucially, this would involve listening to what the tenant's concerns were, taking them seriously and negotiating for operatives to be allowed access. Below are some examples of the remedies found.

Pressured lives, no phone, no calendar

Some residents have nowhere to record a scheduled visit so that they will remember it. Multiple reminders, including a local officer calling the day before if wanted, can help.

> *"Proactive customer contact:*
> - *We've assigned dedicated team members to call customers the day before their appointments. This is triggered automatically if a customer has a history of 'no access' in the last 48 months*
> - *When 'no access' occurs, operatives used to leave a card with a new appointment. We've enhanced this process by also calling the customer between the card being posted and the appointment slot to confirm availability."*
> - ***Focus group participant***

Variable health conditions, health appointments

Some residents may not be able to predict whether they or their family members will be well enough to accept a visit at a fixed time ahead. Others may have a complexity of different health and/or social services appointments that they understandably prioritise. Some organisations try to help by making it as easy as possible for the tenant to change their appointment, even at short notice.

> *"We find we have best success with the personal approach by our difficult access officer, complex needs officer and housing support officers. They take a problem solving approach and can advocate for the tenant which often ends in a positive solution which allows us access. However, this is very staff resource heavy. Government must appreciate that resources need to be allocated to do this effectively without detriment to our must vulnerable residents (those lacking capacity, hoarding etc)."*
> - ***Survey respondent***

Hoarding, stigma and shame

Anecdotally many housing providers report that more cases of hoarding behaviour are coming to their attention. This does not necessarily mean that it is more prevalent but rather that increased stock condition surveys and campaigns encouraging people with problems to come forward are having an effect. Providers that have successfully built personal relationships with tenants report some success in supporting people with hoarding behaviours to allow access. This would be part of a wider empathetic approach that treats hoarding as a mental health issue requiring multi-disciplinary and trauma-informed support.

Gaining access at least over the threshold would be seen as a first step, though a full survey may not be possible at this stage. Resources are available to assess health and safety risks and to help tenants recognise their own difficulties, including the Hoarding Disorders UK clutter image ratings. Housing providers need to work with social services, mental health and safeguarding teams and outside agencies including the fire service to support tenants showing hoarding behaviour and other mental health problems, including over questions of access.

Women subjected to violence, cultural issues

Housing organisations and local authorities must work within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and providers must comply with the RSH Neighbourhood and Community Standard requirements on domestic abuse. Some organisations have responded to sensitivities of this type by asking the tenant what arrangements they would find appropriate. One provider has appointed female staff to the direct labour organisation (DLO) who can be requested. Others can provide a female housing officer to visit along with operatives. The measures are part of wider conversations around making reasonable adjustments, as required under the Equality Act 2010 and the general move toward patch-based housing management with local knowledge. Some organisations are reviewing their reasonable adjustment policies, in partnership with tenants.

Criminal or unauthorised actions

In a smaller number of cases, access fails because there is criminal activity at the property (drugs, illegal sub-letting, etc), the tenant has undertaken unauthorised DIY, or the home has been abandoned. Organisations should also be alert to possible 'cuckooing' of a vulnerable tenant (where someone takes control of a person's home and uses it for criminal purposes). This will become a specific offence for the first time under the Crime and Policing Bill currently in Parliament.

Incidents of this type highlight the principles of good housing management: officers need to know their patches well, ask the right questions, show professional curiosity and review all data available in order to get to the bottom of fraudulent or illegal behaviour.

Some organisations are using their IT systems to flag properties where there has been no contact, so that this can be investigated. One organisation was placing stickers over the locks as well as invitations to the resident to get in touch; this would establish if anyone was living there. Officers can then establish what the situation is and begin legal action where necessary.

An example from a focus group attendee:

> *"One route we use is a breach of tenancy where we look at abandonments. So, if a tenant's not responding to a letter, or where they've been reported (because) of their property conditions or something like that, we'll send a letter to say, please contact us within seven days. If they don't respond, then we look to do a notice to quit to see if we can proceed on the basis of an abandonment. We'll look at the rent … are they: in prison, in the hospital, etc? We'll try to find out where they are … and then do a notice to quit and a lock change to gain entry to see if they are living at the property. Usually by that point, the deal comes. They do put their hands up and say, we are here.*
>
> *"On the reasons … 'why we've been avoiding you is because of these issues, property conditions, we were embarrassed.' Or 'we didn't want to reach out', that kind of thing, so that usually works for us."*
>
> - ***Focus group participant***

Disrepair cases

Some participants said that solicitors and claims firms sometimes advise tenants not to allow access while a case was ongoing. This was particularly resented by providers as they are increasingly seeking to resolve cases quickly and properly. Some wanted government action to deal with this problem.

8   Legal issues

Legal issues were cited as a problem universally across the study, summed up as:

- The law has ambiguities and some staff are not clear on what legislation should be used in which circumstances
- There can be very long delays in the court system
- Some staff are very clear on what legal routes they can and should use – but opinions can be strongly divergent
- Case law can add a further dimension of uncertainty

- Practice and rulings in courts can vary according to geographical location
- Even when injunctions are granted, this does not necessarily resolve the problem.

There was acute awareness that legal remedies should be a last resort when all other attempts to gain access have failed. Participants talked of legal action to gain access to tenants' homes only in relation to health and safety issues and this was borne out in our survey, where more than half of participants said they would take legal action on very few service areas and mostly on legal or regulatory requirements only. Where a home is found to be abandoned, illegally sub-let or there is illegal activity happening, of course, this is a separate matter and appropriate action is taken.

Legal action is highly resource intensive and therefore costly. It carries risk: the outcome is not guaranteed. So providers are doing all they can to minimise the number of cases. In addition, they must keep careful and comprehensive records, including photos/video where needed, to ensure they can evidence every action.

Establishing the parameters

Providers first needed to establish what the situation was. Where attempts to access a property had failed and all attempts to contact or negotiate with the tenant had also failed, most providers would issue a legal warning that action may be taken.

Some warned tenants that they could apply for legal costs to be awarded as well. Often this was enough to persuade the tenant to allow access. One council has introduced a policy to allow recharges for the cost of damage to the home, for example where DMC has spread, that could have been eliminated sooner. The policy has not yet been tested in practice.

It is not clear from our research whether participant organisations were actually making recharges: one commented that this would be unlikely to succeed, given the precarious finances of some residents.

About 30% of providers in our survey had issued notices seeking possession for breach of tenancy conditions over access. The great majority of organisations in our survey, almost four in five, said they would only enter a property without consent having obtained a warrant or injunction. About one in seven would never enter a property without consent.

Controlled access

This is a controversial practice that is used by some providers but not others. Where all attempts to gain pre-arranged access for safety-critical work have failed and the tenant is clearly not there, officers send a warning that they intend to gain 'controlled access' (also known as guaranteed access or controlled entry) at a certain time and date. They then attend with a locksmith and gain entry without permission. The work is completed and the locks changed. The tenant is left clear information on what has happened and invited to get in touch to obtain keys for the new locks.

A focus group participant commented:

> *"We will write and warn people, over a few letters, or the contractor will contact them as well beforehand. But we will force access, we won't look at going down a legal route if there's repeated attempts that have failed, because we deem it as a serious reason to get into that property. And also with court delays and other issues, we deem it as emergency access required.*
>
> *"Probably the majority of people, once they've had that letter saying that we're turning up within the next 48 hours to gain access, they will either contact us beforehand or be there on the day so it's very rare that we do actually have to have a locksmith gain access to the property."*
>
> *- Focus group participant*

A policy of using controlled access must be established at governing body level and senior management should approve every case where it is used. It must be included in the tenancy agreement. It is only used in cases where safety-critical work or checks such as gas inspection are needed.

Controlled access is a well-established practice in some organisations. But others do not use it at all. Where it is used, providers must ensure that the action is lawful by giving proper warning and documenting all their actions. A recent court ruling involving Southern Housing has added further complexity. Here, a county court judge ruled that the provider could not use 'forced entry' to carry out gas servicing. He said: *"trespass into a home, including breaking a lock, is a tortious wrong and potentially a criminal offence"*. Such rulings are significant but not binding on other cases.

Moving on to legal action

The law is undoubtedly complex. Relevant legislation includes:

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985: allows access to inspect and make repairs, but only with reasonable notice (at least 24 hours for non-emergency work)
- Housing Act 1988 section 16: affords landlords an implied right of entry for assured tenancies in order to undertake repair
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 section 9A(8): also allows access to make repairs etc, with reasonable notice
- Contract law: can be used to enforce the tenancy agreement where access requirements have been included and the agreement is signed

- Environmental Protection Act 1990: allows LAs to apply for a warrant to allow them to gain access. This is already in use to gain access for gas servicing. Some local authorities are beginning to use it in DMC cases where there could be a risk to neighbouring properties. This is not available to other types of provider though there is provision for properly authorised delegation of powers

- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 SI No 2451: regulation 36 requires landlords to maintain gas fittings and check them every 12 months

- Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) (Amendment) (Extension to the Social Rented Sector) Regulations 2025: came into force on 1 November 2025 but for all tenancies granted before 1 December 2025, comes into force on 1 May 2026. This extends the responsibilities set out within s122 Housing and Planning Act 2016, as amended by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 which requires landlords to keep electrical installations in good repair. Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), must be checked every five years.

Balancing these requirements is a series of protections for tenants. They include:

- Protection from Eviction Act 1977: protection from harassment and right to quiet enjoyment of the property

- Human Rights Act 1998: under article eight, tenants (and everyone else) have the right to respect for private and family life and home

- Equality Act 2010: requires due consideration to vulnerabilities and disabilities as well as other protected characteristics in line with the public sector equality duty (s149). This includes appropriate communication and reasonable adjustments

- Injunctions must be served on the tenant in person. In persistent cases landlords can apply for a 'lifetime' injunction but it is not guaranteed that this will be granted. Courts in some areas are reported to be reluctant to grant these.

Pitfalls and good practice with legal action

A statutory breach of tenancy occurs when a tenant has been given at least 24 hours' notice in writing (letter, email, text dependent on their preferred form of contact) that access to their property is required to identify and/or undertake repair and the tenant fails to give access.

There will also be a contractual right of access, signed by the tenant upon commencement of their tenancy, that they will allow access to the property upon at least 24 hours' notice in writing, as above.

There is also a contractual right of access, signed by the leaseholder upon commencement of their lease, generally set out within the schedules of the lease, that they will afford access to the freeholder of the building and/or the social housing provider if they are not the freehold owner, upon at least 24 hours' notice in writing to identify and/or undertake repair and maintenance and in some leases, improvements.

There is no reference within any of the above as to whether that should afford a specific appointment time but there are risks where appointments are across a day or half day, that a person may not be able to meet that requirement. For example, if the household has children at school, then at certain times that person will not be present at the property. Equally, if someone is working and making themselves available, dependent on the nature of their employment contract this could mean they either do not get paid or they lose holiday entitlement.

These are just two examples that, added to others set out above, would be mitigating factors for not giving access if due regard had not been paid to the circumstances. Therefore, where possible, specific time slots for appointments are always preferable. Of course, if an appointment is made then the landlord should attend.

There are circumstances where, in an emergency, less notice is required but landlords still need to make an effort to contact the tenant prior to attending to give them an opportunity to provide access.

There is a difference between someone not being in and someone not letting the provider in. Where access is not given, consideration needs to be given to whether the tenant 'cannot' or 'will not' give the provider access.

The provider will need to consider whether this is due to a physical or mental health condition, such as a disability. If so, reasonable adjustments must be made. For example, if a person is deaf, then a full morning/afternoon appointment is not necessarily reasonable. Either an appointment at a fixed time is required so they can feel the door being knocked and/or a doorbell that lights up would be a reasonable adjustment to enable that person to comply with their tenancy. Without these adjustments they could not comply. However, if they subsequently did not give access, then their disability would no longer be relevant to the fact that they are breaching their tenancy.

Often, officers and operatives will do unannounced visits to see if they can catch the tenant in. Consideration needs to be given to the frequency of this approach in terms of breach of quiet enjoyment, but it should also be noted that if a tenant is not in or if they are but will not give access, they are not in breach of either the contractual duty under their tenancy or the statutory duty to give access, as 24 hours' notice has not been given.

Landlords should look to whether it is just certain parts of the business that are not being given access, which would suggest a tenant is choosing not to perform to their tenancy. But if the tenant is not giving access to anyone, then it might be that they no longer have the ability to undertake their tenant responsibilities.

Where possible, medical evidence may be necessary, as well as referral to other statutory agencies, such as social services, for assessments of whether that person can undertake the responsibilities required of them within their tenancy agreement, a fundamental part of that being the ability to give access. If they cannot then either care may be required to enable this. If that is not sufficient, then action may be required to end the tenancy as the tenant may no longer be able to live in 'ordinary' housing and may require the provision afforded to them under the responsibilities of the Care Act 2014.

One organisation faced difficulties because local judges were reluctant to grant injunctions and particularly lifetime injunctions. The provider had set up a system of recording all actions, with photos/video, to form a date order briefing pack for presentation to the judge or magistrate dealing with each case. This provided both clarity and solid evidence of exactly what had happened in the case and bolstered requests for injunctions.

Toward a more streamlined and transparent legal approach

A large majority of participants wanted a clearer and more straightforward route to gaining access. Most of the survey responses could be grouped into a few categories:

- Clarity in law around the meaning of terms like 'all reasonable steps'
- Simplified legal route(s)
- Fast track legal process for access on safety critical issues
- A public campaign by government to stress the importance of allowing access.

There was much complaint about the confused and confusing legal processes around 'no access'. Awaab's Law, several felt, brought more confusion because government had required providers to take certain actions but not specified the legal route to comply. The guidance itself was thought to be unclear in some respects. Delays in court proceedings added to the difficulties. A few wanted more powers but mainly the demand was for existing processes to work better. Long delays with court processes were a common theme, with providers feeling trapped by the legal and regulatory requirements on them versus the ponderous court system.

> *"The existing process is just not fit for purpose and places others at risk. It must be speeded up."*
>
> - *Survey respondent*

There was also some comment on the role of partner organisations, though LA efforts to coordinate effectively across departments should be noted.

> *"Landlords face challenges in accessing properties when having to rely on other third party organisations for support, ie, mental health teams/social workers, etc. These organisations have other priorities which in turn affect landlords' ability to access homes."*
>
> **- Survey respondent**

There was also comment on the role of claims firms/solicitors, as noted in previous sections. Several participants wanted action to clamp down on claims farming. Another said:

> *"A harder line needs to be taken on solicitor's costs during periods of the claim in which their client is not allowing access, they should not be entitled to build costs during this period."*
>
> **- Survey respondent**

9 Metrics

Only a small minority of organisations in the study were using a defined metric to monitor 'no access' rates (see Figure 9). As the majority also had no agreed definition of 'no access' this is perhaps not surprising.

A larger number of participants were indirectly tracking performance in this area, for example via completed gas servicing rates, EICRs (electrical checks) and tenancy audit rates. The concern here is that the data might not be shared across the organisation and persistent or complex cases could be missed.

Figure 9: Metrics to monitor 'no access'

Given the level of concern in the sector about this issue and increased level of interest from governing bodies, upward reporting systems will require tracking of cases more comprehensively.

One survey respondent that is tracking cases said:

> *"Generate weekly reports identifying any inadequate descriptions used by the contact centre, as this is the first point of contact and must be accurate. The findings are shared with the contact centre manager to arrange retraining or call shadowing for the relevant handlers."*
>
> **- Survey respondent**

The HOS 'Repairing Trust' report warns that cases should be carefully recorded on IT systems. It suggests situations where 'no access' is not an appropriate code, eg:

- Medical condition or mental health issue as part of a failure by landlords to respond to tenant's circumstances
- Contractors turned away by tenants because of a lack of a job number, etc and then being coded as 'no access'.

And as we have seen in this study, failed visits must only be recorded as such when proper notice has been given.

Providers should devise metrics for levels of 'no access', the business costs involved and record the reasons for it. This enables benchmarking to analyse and compare data across time and assess performance compared with peer organisations. Understanding the scale and reasons for the problem are key to putting in place the right solutions. This type of data is also vital to securing buy-in from senior leaders to invest in new technology or approaches.

10   Conclusions and recommendations

Social landlords, including local authorities and ALMOs, face significant challenges in gaining access to a minority of tenanted properties for essential maintenance, inspections and safety checks. The cost of dealing with such cases can be very high and the problem is growing. It is also regarded as urgent, because of the increasing regulatory and legal demands on providers.

Here we recommend actions to support good practice, drawn from our research and previous reports:

1   **Create a culture of support and empathy toward tenants that seeks to understand individual circumstances.**

Providers in our study that have begun to shift their approach toward personalised, individual contact and adjusting their processes for vulnerabilities have found success in reducing rates of 'no access'. For some tenants there is undoubtedly stigma to be overcome and getting to know local residents before requesting access can help to build trust.

2   **Adopt a definition of and term for 'no access' that is blame-free in tone, that residents, staff and contractors alike can work to.**

Some feel that the term 'no access' implies blame. Shifting the organisational culture will involve finding mutually acceptable terms. A clear, shared definition is a foundation for setting out expectations and responsibilities around access. It helps to avoid some visits being wrongly recorded as 'no access'.

3   **Create policies and procedures derived from the definition. Monitor their use in practice.**

A clear policy and procedure, published online and made widely available in other formats, brings clarity for both staff and tenants. It is also the basis for monitoring whether the policies and procedures have actually been followed and whether they are achieving success in reducing 'no access' cases.

4   **Test out and refine approaches by involving tenants at an early stage. Reflect on the reasons for failed visits and in particular any areas in systems or processes that may be causing or exacerbating the problems.**

Resident involvement in all aspects of social housing providers' activities is a regulatory requirement. We found examples in our study of improvements made to communications, practices and policies that were built on resident feedback and engagement. More providers need to adopt this approach.

5   **Be clear with tenants about their responsibilities to grant access and the consequences of not doing so.**

Most tenants cooperate with their landlords' requests for access. But some do not and the costs to the provider and to other residents can be very significant. By setting out tenants' responsibilities clearly from the start, providers can help to minimise persistent and difficult access cases.

6   **Ensure that contractors and contracts are managed effectively for a seamless service to tenants.**

Tenants have a right to expect the same high level of service, whether it is delivered by an in-house team or contractors. Where contractors and sub-contractors are involved, they must be trained and briefed to ensure that the provider's policy and procedures are delivered in full, within the spirit of the organisation's culture. That includes offering support and reasonable adjustments to tenants where appropriate.

7   **Use all available technology to create a modern, fit for purpose system for booking, changing and cancelling appointments.**

Our study found evidence from both providers and tenants that getting the right technology in place to support the high quality appointments systems that providers want to offer is not easy. But progress is being made in this key area which drives residents' satisfaction and may affect access rates.

8   **Streamline visits wherever possible.**

Providers are increasingly aware of the number of access requests they are making. These will only increase with new legislation, including Awaab's Law. It is therefore imperative to combine visits wherever possible, though it is acknowledged that there will be some cost involved.

9   **Use multi-media marketing campaigns to alert tenants to the importance of allowing access.**

Specific campaigns to alert residents to forthcoming work to their homes have been used effectively to boost co-operation. More general campaigns focusing on health and safety can help tenants to understand that allowing access is for a reason and is in their best interests.

10 **Adopt patch-based housing management that allows local teams to develop knowledge and professional relationships with tenants and other stakeholders.**

Creating a culture of support means getting to know 'who is behind the door', as one participant in our study said. Other providers have set out to overcome 'the silences' – when tenants have not been in touch. In practice that means housing officers getting out and about to build a relationship with tenants. Patch sizes need to be realistic to allow this.

11 **Create a single database of all sources of information on a property and residents to enable access (including, for example, cross-referenced information on rent arrears, tenancy management visits, repairs, vulnerabilities).**

'One version of the truth' is the aim for data management. Systems must enable cross-referencing, both to find any gaps in the data and to ensure that any tenant vulnerabilities or needs are recognised. Data must be kept up to date, particularly to ensure tenants can be contacted quickly.

12 **Focus on persistent and complex cases with flexibility and the human touch.**

Some organisations have set up special teams to deal with complex cases; others have brought a new focus via existing patch housing officers. Whatever the route, providers have found success by talking with residents. This allows them to understand and respond to tenants' difficulties (including establishing whether the tenant has capacity to comply), while at the same time clearly setting out the tenant's responsibilities.

13 Hold legal action or controlled access in reserve.

Most social housing providers in our study are using a combination of empathy for tenants' genuine difficulties and firm action where, even after appropriate support has been offered, a tenant still does not allow access. Increasingly, providers are making their reserve powers and their regulatory duties clear via their policies, procedures and the tenancy agreement. Providers rightly move to legal action only reluctantly, but it is considered essential in a minority of cases. Where there is illegal activity, legal action also becomes necessary,

14 Ensure high quality record keeping from the start of a case, which will assist with legal action or controlled access at a later point.

The importance of evidence cannot be stressed enough. When taking legal action, providers must be able to demonstrate what has led to that point, so accurate data that includes all attempts to gain access, appointment bookings, evidence of conversations and action/decision trails is essential right from the start of a case. Assembling the evidence in a properly structured pack for judges can help when cases come to court.

15 Use metrics to track cases effectively, compile organisation-wide data and learn from successes.

Tracking the level of access problems and the success or otherwise of measures to reduce cases is important in taking effective action. Some cases may remain open over a long period, especially where they involve mental health problems such as hoarding behaviour. These cases should not be closed prematurely: residents may need further help over time. Analysing to establish 'what works' helps to build on success.

16 Benchmark to understand levels of 'no access', the business costs of 'no access' and the reasons for it.

Using established and agreed measures covering 'no access' facilitates comparison, both within the organisation over time and with other organisations facing comparable issues. This type of benchmarking can be used as a tool to unlock insights into costs, the reasons for 'no access' and potential remedies. It facilitates sharing of good practice.

Government action

There were many calls for government to promote a more straightforward, single type of legal route covering all types of essential checks and works. This would be equally applicable to the different types of provider across the sector. In our linked research on Awaab's Law, some participants commented that government had created new duties on providers but had not provided a clear legal route to ensure the required outcomes could be achieved.

Long delays in the court system, costs and uncertain outcomes to cases also prompted calls for government to create a 'guaranteed access' route for social landlords. This could have features in common with 'controlled entry' but would explicitly grant providers right of access. The complexity and lack of clarity on the issue is starkly illustrated in the recent county court judgement referred to above.

We therefore endorse participants' calls for clarity, simplicity and reduced costs on legal action, while respecting tenants' rights.

11   Case studies

Dacorum Borough Council

Dacorum Borough Council owns and manages around 10,000 properties, including just over 1,000 blocks of flats, five of which are over the 18m threshold.

> *"Housing is very multi-layered and complex and having someone from a housing management background who understands that complexity and coordinates for us has really assisted the compliance team."*

In common with many local authorities, Dacorum BC has an effective process for managing 'no access' for statutory gas safety checks. However, the increasing number of property visits that the landlord has to make to ensure statutory and regulatory compliance has meant a need to review 'no access' processes and extend the good practice from gas servicing to other areas, including electrical safety checks, door inspections and stock condition surveys.

Dacorum has a safe homes team which is responsible for delivering all statutory duties around building safety and compliance. The team recognised that the focus on property compliance can drive staff to look at 'no access' cases purely as numbers and there is a need to change the narrative to focus on the person behind the door and answer the question as to why the tenant is not letting the landlord in.

To achieve this, a role was created in the safe homes team for a lead officer for access who has a housing management background. This role takes a tenancy-management approach, working with households to understand and resolve the barriers to access. The officer will tailor the approach to the circumstances. In some cases, this may involve acting as the key worker between both internal staff teams (such as the compliance team and tenancy sustainment team) and external agencies (such as adult social care and mental health teams) and developing a trusted relationship with the tenant. In some cases, the officer will attend compliance visit appointments with the contractor and support the tenant with accessing other services, such as financial support.

The focus on access has fed into a number of areas of organisational improvement, including improving communication with tenants and reducing communication barriers; improving data and record keeping and looking at how information on households is captured and used.

Dacorum BC has also implemented a six-stage process for electrical and gas safety testing prior to injunction which was agreed with the legal team and has been tested with success for the landlord in court. The process involves:

- Two phone calls to the tenant (the second one after 6pm)
- First letter – hand delivered with a door knock (after 6pm)
- Two more phone calls to the tenant (the second one after 6pm)
- After five working days, second letter sent – hand delivered with a door knock (after 6pm)
- Two more phone calls to the tenant (the second one after 6pm)
- After five working days, third letter sent
- Following no response, proceedings are issued.

However, the emphasis is on resolving the issues before getting to the end of the process.

Top tips from this landlord include:

- A single point of contact that can coordinate staff and external agencies is key. This gives tenants more trust in the organisation, stops tenants being passed between teams and services and helps to resolve complex barriers
- Bringing in a resource to manage difficult 'no access' cases has allowed the organisation to start to really understand who is behind the door
- Making sure tenants are clear what their responsibilities are around access is really important, but thinking about how you frame the language: for example, focus on safety of the tenant and their neighbours and using nudge theory
- As a property services division, try not to focus just on the property and forget about the person.

> *"Where we've got access issues, let's change that from a number to a name and then an understanding of why that person is not letting us in."*
> - **Dacorum Borough Council**

Homes in Somerset

Homes in Somerset is an ALMO. It manages over 4,000 properties on behalf of Somerset Council. It was previously Homes in Sedgemoor but adopted its new title in spring 2025 following the transfer of the Council's development team.

'No access' continues to be an issue which is monitored by the senior management team and the board. The latter take a strong interest in this issue.

From the viewpoint of customers, a frequently raised point is the multiple visits each year for different reasons and the impact it has on their lives. They also sometimes don't see the value of some of these visits.

Various initiatives are being considered including aligning, wherever possible, compliance visits, but this has budget implications. Future actions might include a focus on customer insight. For example, understanding customer access issues could be addressed through use of data – if there was difficulty gaining access in previous years, this could be flagged up subsequently. Improving the communications strategy is also being taken forward, so that customers understand why compliance visits are important for them (as well as for the organisation).

Homes in Somerset use a large number of contractors for compliance visits as well as undertaking repairs, etc. One of the major contractors has an online tracking system that customers can access to see when the operative is likely to arrive at the property.

A wider initiative that was previously introduced is multi-functional teams with smaller patch sizes. This hopefully will result in building better relationships with customers so leading to a better understanding of the reasons for compliance visits and fewer 'no access' cases.

St Leger Homes

> *"It's important to gain trust for people to give us access, because at the end of the day, it is their home and we need to make it as an easy a process for them as possible."*
>
> - *St Leger Homes*

St Leger Homes of Doncaster manages around 20,000 council homes on behalf of Doncaster Council. They have seen increasing issues with failed visits, in part related to the increasing requirements around accessing properties. The organisation is in the latter stages of a five-year stock condition survey and has gradually ended up with a pool of properties towards the end of the cycle which are the hardest to access. They have also been preparing for the changes to electrical safety testing requirements.

The first stage of work around 'no access' has been to develop a better evidence base around the barriers to access. The organisation has set up an access team consisting of a team leader and three officers that are based in the tenancy support team and work on specific areas of compliance. Placing them in this team was a conscious decision to focus the intervention on support and building a relationship with the tenant. The access team picks up cases after the third failed attempt.

Coming at 'no access' from a supportive point of view allows the team to focus on other 'hooks' for the landlord and tenant to develop a relationship; for example linking it to the help that St Leger Homes can give with finances, support with benefits, writing a CV or getting back into work, helping with energy bills or prepayment meter vouchers and support around language barriers and hoarding, etc. It recognises that there is often something else going on behind the failed attempts to access, with many tenants living in increasingly complex circumstances.

The access team takes a global look at the tenancy to identify where there might be barriers and where they might be able to offer support. They also look at who else from the organisation is involved with the tenants and whether they can coordinate visits. A reasonable proportion of 'no access' cases are where tenants are anxious about letting the landlord in (for example because of fear of losing their tenancy or issues with hoarding), so a supportive approach from staff with a housing management/tenancy sustainment background can help and hopefully make the contact a positive one that will encourage the tenant to permit access in future.

Alongside this, the organisation is looking at communications from contractors to make sure that it is clear they are working on behalf of St Leger Homes and updating letters so that tenants know which company will be undertaking the visits. They have also looked at terminology within letters to make it very clear what the visit relates to and minimise the ambiguity around phrases such as 'stock condition survey'.

For those properties at the end of the stock condition survey, where access has been a problem, St Leger Homes is triangulating the information it has on those properties and tenants: for example, has another service been into the property recently, do other teams have any knowledge about the tenancy, have they had a 'keeping in touch' visit recently? This information will identify those properties of real concern which need to be prioritised.

The increasing number of compliance visits to a property is also driving work around how to schedule visits, combine visits and minimise disruption to tenants.

Taking enforcement action is seen as a last resort and as a failure of the process. However, St Leger Homes has strengthened the tenancy agreement to make it more explicit about the tenant responsibilities around access for compliance checks and safety, carefully balancing this with the tenant's right to a peaceful home and recognising the line between cases where the landlord needs to push for access and cases where – whilst it would be good – the tenant can choose to not let the landlord in. They are now investigating lifetime injunctions for those who repeatedly refuse access, as well as recharging tenants for legal fees.

Top tips:

- Obtain a global view of the tenant to try and establish how to connect with them – for example, if arrears are present then perhaps offering advice and support around benefits and grants, etc

- Be clear in communication where the case will end up, ie, warrant, injunction, costs – we will get in to the property, let's avoid the hassle and cost to everyone

- Aim to make the contact with a 'no access' tenant a positive and productive one to encourage access in future.

Stockport Homes

Stockport Homes manages around 12,500 properties on behalf of Stockport Council. In 2024, Stockport Homes developed a business case which set out the operational and financial cost of 'no access' on the organisation; evidence which led to it being seen as a business priority.

In the last year, the organisation has reduced 'no access' for repairs visits from 18% to under 10% through a number of initiatives:

Understanding performance

- Stockport Homes has added more dedicated resources around capturing and monitoring performance, including setting up a Power BI dashboard to track progress. The data from this is used to track trends and identify whether there are certain characteristics or groups where 'no access' is more of a problem

- Alongside this, record keeping has been strengthened.

Cultural

- Embedding the mindset that 'no access' is not just something which happens that gets recorded and forgotten about; it has implications. Operatives are now trained to see 'no access' almost as a failure on the part of the organisation and something that they should be trying hard to minimise

- Development of a doorstep guide for operatives which sets out clearly Stockport Homes' expectations; for example, that operatives must attend within 30 minutes of the scheduled time and call ahead if delayed; upon arrival they must knock confidently, check windows, shout over the back gate, speak to neighbours and spend at least five minutes trying to gain access. A follow-up call is also made. If access is still not gained, a card is left, a time-stamped photo taken and detailed notes are entered into the system.

Removing process barriers

- Stockport Homes uses a texting service for repairs and maintenance. The organisation has made a number of improvements to this. For example, the 24-hour reminder of a visit was going out at 7pm the day before, meaning customers had no chance to contact the organisation to cancel. This now goes out the morning of the day before, with another message when the operative is en route. The content and quality of text messages has been improved by using a customer experience feedback system that allows for more detailed and frequent messaging. Many customers had changed their mobile numbers without notifying the organisation, so data capture processes for each interaction have been strengthened to try and avoid holding old numbers on the system

- Strengthened communication with tenants to keep them up to date on their pending repair so they understand when it is likely to be completed, which is particularly useful for repairs scheduled further into the future

- Dedicated team members have been assigned to call customers the day before their appointments, which is triggered automatically if a customer has a history of 'no access' in the last 24 months

- Where 'no access' occurs, operatives used to leave a card with a new appointment. This process has been enhanced by also calling the customer between the card being posted and the appointment slot to confirm availability.

Understanding customers

- The organisation has undertaken wider work to update the information that it holds on customers and ensure that this shapes service delivery. This includes an annual door-knocking census

- One of the lessons of this is that there are some tenants with mental health conditions whose capacity and condition change from day to day without warning; they might be able to open the door one day, but be incapacitated the day after. This has highlighted the importance of following the 'no access' process and trying on different days and at different times and with a range of different methods (text, phone, email).

Access attempts limits

- The ALMO now limits its attendance to three attempts, spaced appropriately. After three failed visits, it will either:

  – Send a letter informing the customer that the works order has been cancelled

  – Pursue an injunction if the repair is a health and safety risk; if delayed repair could lead to asset deterioration; if there is a financial implication to the organisation.

- During the second and third 'no access' attempts, resources from across the business will be used to try and help with access (including housing management officers and tenancy support teams). A complex case team consisting of teams from across the business meet weekly and 'no access' will be considered as part of this.

Key tips from Stockport Homes

- Sort out your record keeping

- Understand your data, get underneath it and use it to improve 'no access' rates

- Review your processes, unearth any mistakes that may have been baked into processes and ensure they work effectively

- Work on culture – get operatives to understand that 'no access' is clogging up the system and costing money and that they should be trying hard to reduce it.

Appendix 1: 'No access' sources

The aim of this part of the report is to provide some useful and accessible online sources (as of November 2025). It is important to appreciate that, unlike on Awaab's Law, there are relatively few up to date sources.

It does not include material that is only available through subscriptions or membership of organisations. Each source is, where appropriate, briefly annotated to help the reader identify relevant information.

Please note that it is not a reference list of material used in the desktop review in stage one of the project.

Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

- Spotlight report on repairs and maintenance – Repairing Trust (May 2025). Focus on four issues and a recurring theme is that stronger engagement with tenants will improve access issues.

Manchester City Council

- Refusal/no access policy (2024) – an example of a 'no access' policy.

St Leger Homes

- No access policy (2025) – an example of a 'no access' policy.

Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals (ASCP)

- ASCP White Paper on the challenges of 'no access' policy (April 2024).

Bromley County Court judgement

- Courts and Tribunals Judiciary: Bromley County Court judgement on legal entry for a gas safety check – Southern Housing vs James Emmanuel – full judgement
- News item (11 November 2025) on recent legal judgement by Bromley County Court on legal entry for a gas safety check by Southern Housing Group – Recent court ruling highlights ongoing lack of clarity around no-access for safety checks – The ASCP.

Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group

- Report on access for fire safety work.

Appendix 2: List of acronyms and short forms

Acronym	Description
AI	Artificial intelligence
ALMO	Arm's length management organisation
ARCH	Association of Retained Council Housing
ASCP	Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
CWAG	Councils with ALMOs Group
DLO	Direct labour organisation
DMC	Damp, mould and condensation
EICR	Electrical Installation Condition Report
HA	Housing association
HOS	Housing Ombudsman Service
HMO	House in multiple occupation
HRA	Housing Revenue Account
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key performance indicator
LA	Local authority
LGA	Local Government Association
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NFA	National Federation of ALMOs
VNA	Visit not achieved

Appendix 3: Our approach to the research

Because of the importance of the links between our two project topics of 'no access' and Awaab's Law, this appendix provides an overview of our approach on both.

Our joint approach for this project consisted primarily of four activities:

- Brief desktop review of previous research, good practice material and policy documents
- Online survey
- Focus groups
- Case studies.

In addition, because of the fast-moving nature of the issues (especially Awaab's Law with phase one starting on 27 October 2025), news items, briefings, legal judgements and policy updates were reviewed between August and October.

Desktop review

Various search engines were utilised to identify published sources which were then examined for relevance. It was found that there was a proliferation of material on Awaab's Law, but much of this was historic and related to the case itself rather than the introduction of statutory requirements. In relation to 'no access', there were only a few relevant documents.

Online survey

This centred primarily on social housing landlords.

For 'no access', 52 organisations provided quantitative data and 57 submitted qualitative information. Of the organisations, just under half were LAs, a third were HAs and under a quarter were ALMOs. Four submissions were made by residents including a scrutiny panel chair and resident board member. One submission was by a non-resident board member.

For Awaab's Law, 36 organisations provided quantitative data and 40 respondents submitted qualitative data. Of these organisations, just under half were councils, a third were housing associations and just under a quarter were ALMOs.

Focus groups

These took the form of semi-structured online events lasting normally between 60 and 90 minutes. This approach was adopted following the lessons learnt from a face to face pilot focus group held with residents on a social housing estate.

The focus groups covered both 'no access' and Awaab's Law.

Membership of the focus groups was drawn from a diverse range of organisations and geographies.

There were eight focus groups:

- 2x asset management staff
- 2x housing management
- 1x strategic management
- 2x residents (total number of participants – 29)
- 1x staff in various roles.

In total, 105 staff participated in the focus groups.

In addition, there was a meeting of ALMO staff.

Case studies

The aim of our case studies was to obtain primarily qualitative information on the opportunities and challenges of addressing 'no access' and Awaab's Law. The commissioners of these two projects made suggestions on possible social housing landlords and this was added to by links that HQN staff have with organisations.

The final selection aimed to ensure there was coverage of a wide range of types of landlords and geographies.

Information was collected on both 'no access' and Awaab's Law primarily through online interviews with key staff and, in one case, through face to face meetings. This was written up in draft by HQN members and the participating organisations were able to comment on the factual accuracy.

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