



Research summary

Building Safety Regulator insight: iterating and improving building control body inspections

Applied Analysis and Insight Group, Health and Safety Executive
Research conducted by Verian

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Glossary of acronyms

- ABCA – Association of Building Control Approvers
- BSR – Building Safety Regulator
- BCB – building control body
- RBIs – registered building inspectors
- RBCAs – registered building control approvers
- OSRs – operational standards rules
- KPIs – key performance indicators
- PCRs – professional conduct rules
- LABC – local authority building control
- CICAIR – Construction Industry Council Approved Inspectors Register
- ISO – International Organization for Standardization
- HSE – Health and Safety Executive
- BICoF – building inspector competence framework

Commissioning

This report is a summary of the findings of qualitative research conducted by Verian between October 2024 and November 2025. The research was commissioned by the Applied Analysis and Insight Group in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The contents of the report, including any opinions and/or conclusions expressed, are the views of the agency alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the HSE.

Background and objectives

Business context

The building regulations are standards for design and construction that ensure that buildings support life safety, health and provide appropriate amenities. For building work, it is the building control profession that ensures duty holders in England comply with the building regulations.

Building control functions are carried out by around 400 organisations across England, including local authorities with a building control function (some of which operate under a shared service or partnership agreement) and private sector companies.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Hackitt Review identified a range of issues with how building control functions were being discharged in both the public and private sectors; including conflicts of interest, structural incentives to reduce intervention and enforcement, and a confusing join between the public and private sector.

In response, the Building Safety Act empowered the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) to regulate the building control profession, including the development and implementation of:

- a building inspector competence framework (BICoF)
- registration and competence assessments of individual building inspectors
- a code of conduct for registered building inspectors (RBIs)
- registration and assessment of building control approver organisations
- professional conduct rules (PCRs) for registered building control approvers (RBCAs)
- operational standards rules (OSRs) and monitoring arrangements (KPIs) for building control bodies (BCBs)
- inspection of BCBs against OSRs, PCRs and KPIs
- investigation of BCBs and RBIs (separate from inspections), where there is intelligence to suggest this is necessary
- enforcement action when contraventions are identified

Research objectives

BSR's Professional Standards Unit (PSU) started inspecting BCBs in Q1 2024 to verify information to ascertain the efficiency and effectiveness of BCBs in exercising their building control functions.

The delivery of BCB inspections is completely new, and this research was commissioned to support HSE to iterate and improve the inspection of BCBs in terms of user experience, compliance and efficiency, for both BSR and the building control profession.

Key objectives were to explore:

- BCB's expectations and preparedness for inspections
- inspection delivery (from both the BSR and BCB perspectives)
- indicators of good and poor BCB practice
- whether inspections are driving early progress towards delivery of the regulator's short-term outcomes

Research methodology

The study was qualitative and included four phases, described below. A theory of change of the inspection process was also developed, in collaboration with BSR.

Phase 1: October to December 2024

- a document review of 18 documents (HSE strategic, communication and policy documents)
- 8 x 60-minute stakeholder interviews (with BCB representative bodies and BSR/HSE)
- 1 x 90-minute workshop with 7 BSR inspections auditors

Phase 2: January to March 2025

- A short online qualitative questionnaire with 27 x BCBs not yet inspected: (22 public BCBs and shared services, 5 private BCBs)

Phase 3: August to September 2025

- 6 x 60-minute interviews with BSR inspections' auditors and managers
- 11 x 90-minute online discussion sessions with BCBs who had been inspected (3 private, 2 shared services and 6 public BCBs; all BCBs interviewed had no contraventions or some contraventions)

Phase 4: November 2025

- 1 x 90-minute workshop with BCBs, BCB representative bodies and BSR colleagues

Caveats

This qualitative study represents the views of 38 building control bodies (across phases 2 and 3), and all participants opted into the research.

This means that participant views reported here need to be treated as indicative, rather than fully reflective of the views of a wider audience.

Main findings

Expectations and preparedness for inspections

Ahead of the inspection process, experiences with BSR communications were mixed; while some BCBs found it informative, others reported limited or unclear communication. Support from representative bodies like the Association of Building Control Approvers (ABCA) and Local Authority Building Control (LABC), as well as peer-to-peer information sharing, played a helpful role in supporting BCBs get ready for inspections.

Most BCBs felt confident in evidencing OSRs for inspections. Confidence was generally stronger in key building control functions but weaker in areas such as business planning and risk management. However, BCBs felt that some KPIs and OSRs were unclear and open to interpretation. There was also uncertainty about how certain KPI data demonstrates good or bad practice. As a result, BCBs wanted more guidance and clarity on KPIs and OSRs from BSR, including their rationale.

Additionally, BCBs said that the manual data collection, that was needed for some KPIs due to insufficient IT systems, was burdensome and might result in inaccurate data. They also expressed uncertainty and concern about the inspection process, including its costs and length.

To prepare for inspections and evidence OSRs, BCBs involved in the research described undertaking a range of internal actions. These include developing new policies and documents, updating project management systems (such as inspector classes on reports and geotagged images), running training sessions on new legislation and processes, conducting internal audits to identify areas for improvement, reviewing LABC quality assurance and ISO information, and attending conferences. Auditors felt that private BCBs were generally better prepared for inspections, benefiting from previous audits such as the Construction Industry Council Approved Inspectors Register (CICAIR) and generally having stronger resources.

Inspection delivery

BCBs said that evidence gathering during inspections was largely straightforward, though it could often be time-consuming, especially for shared services. The data requested was more detailed than BCBs expected, requiring rapid compilation at a granular level, and the specific format for evidence uploads sometimes added to the workload.

Inspections tended to last longer than BCBs anticipated (often several months instead of the expected one month) but costs were lower than expected. However, BCBs encountered invoicing issues, such as delayed and unclear invoices from BSR. BCBs

expressed a desire for a more compressed inspection schedule, clearer advance notification of upcoming inspections and improved invoicing.

Auditors said that BCBs engaged well with the inspection process, attending meetings and providing evidence as requested. Auditors said that private BCBs were typically better positioned to respond quickly to inspection requests, while public BCBs could face challenges due to short staffing.

Auditors were widely described by BCBs as supportive, professional, approachable, and empathetic. This approach was valued by BCBs, who appreciated the reassurance and flexibility shown by auditors, which helped ease nerves about being inspected. While most feedback about auditors was positive, some BCBs highlighted weaker post inspection communication and noted occasional gaps in auditors' building control knowledge.

Indicators of good and poor practice

The most important indicator of good practice, reported by BCBs, was felt to be OSR 2 (persons), especially:

- OSR 2.1 – building control functions appropriately resourced and allocation of competent persons
- OSR 2.2 – persons delivering building control functions act within their competence and relevant registrations

The second most mentioned indicator of good practice by BCBs was OSR 1 (systems and controls), especially:

- OSR 1.4 – systems and controls must identify, manage and mitigate risk
- OSR 1.6 – policies, procedures and persons must be recorded and up to date

Underperformance in these areas was therefore considered to be indicative of poor practice.

Inspection feedback and outcomes

BCBs saw auditors as reaching appropriate outcomes (it is worth noting that all BCBs interviewed for this research had either received no contraventions or some contraventions). However, in some instances, outcome requirements could feel unachievable (for example, requiring geotagging on all site photos where service isn't available).

BCBs viewed participation in inspections as beneficial because they highlighted areas for improvement and enabled BCBs to strengthen their practices. Although outcome letters were expected to be high-level, BCBs were disappointed not to receive more detailed

feedback, including: information on their good practices, detail about contraventions, and practical guidance on improving poor practice. BCBs were proactive in addressing non-compliance, often creating the required documentation during inspections.

Impact of inspections

Ahead of their inspections, interviewed BCBs had undertaken a wide range of preparatory activities to improve compliance with the OSRs, including developing new policies and documentation. Many BCBs reported that they found the inspections valuable for identifying areas where improvements were needed. Auditors also observed that practices across organisations are strengthening.

However, BCBs noted that additional practical guidance on how to comply with the OSRs would be beneficial. They also felt that the current KPIs could be refined and grouped so they link to specific OSRs and help target improvements more effectively.

Peer-to-peer sharing has played an important role in supporting BCBs that have not yet been inspected. However, information sharing about inspection outcomes is not yet systematic, limiting the wider learning that could be gained across the sector.



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