

# NHS England EPRR Core Standards Overview for Boards

Applicable to – NHS organisations in the North East & Yorkshire and North West regions

Content – Overview of changes to the NHS England EPRR Core Standards assurance process in the North East & Yorkshire and North West for the 2023/24 assurance cycle

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Contact – [england.eprney@nhs.net](mailto:england.eprney@nhs.net) or [england.eprnw@nhs.net](mailto:england.eprnw@nhs.net)

## The rationale for change

Over recent years the Emergency Preparedness Resilience & Response (EPRR) world has seen both significant disruption and major change – from our exit from the European Union to the COVID-19 pandemic, Manchester Arena attack, and the recent series of industrial action. The demands on Accountable Emergency Officers, EPRR professionals and Boards in ensuring robust, resilient systems for patients and communities, has never been greater.

In the wake of lessons identified from recent incidents and a number of public inquiries (Manchester Arena, Grenfell & the ongoing COVID-19 inquiry – as well as the recent verdict in the Letby trial and the announcement of the Thirlwall Inquiry), it is clear that the standard which organisations must achieve, and the burden of proof in regard to robust governance, proactive planning and tried & tested plans is one which requires a dedicated assurance framework which can ensure our collective system resilience

## The 2023/24 EPRR Assurance model

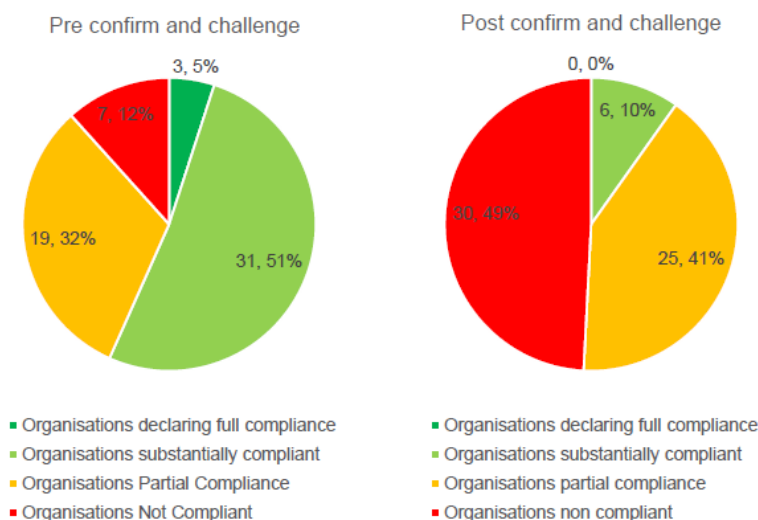
In 2022, colleagues in the Midlands Region undertook an amended EPRR assurance process. This pilot, involved a new and detailed analysis of compliance evidence against each core standard, alongside the organisations self-assessment.

This model required commissioners and providers of NHS commissioned care to submit evidence, which went through a formal review and subsequent check and challenge, whereby they were given the opportunity to submit supplementary evidence against any challenges before finalising their assurance position.

The Midlands results, as detailed in the diagrams below, clearly demonstrated that despite the efforts of organisations in delivering their EPRR responsibilities, there were substantial differences between the self-assessment results and the evidential review of the organisations documentation.



## Levels pre and post confirm and challenge



The position before and after the confirm and challenge shows the value in this step of the process in assuring the wider NHS of the positions being self reported.

NHS England recognises several organisations were already very open with the positions they had with 5 organisations not moving in position.

The highlighting of issues assists the whole of the system manage and improve.

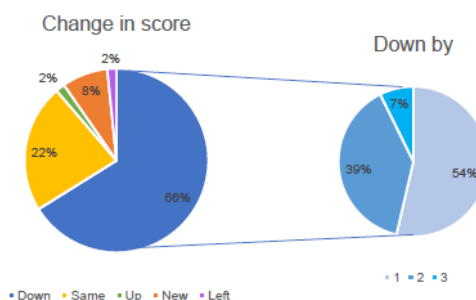
The maximum of accepted challenges to an organisational assessment was 30 standards.

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## Change from 2021/22

Breaking down the change into positive or reduced positions.

- 8% of organisations had a first assessment
- 2% increased in position
- 22% remained in the same assessment position
- 66% decreased on the previous assessment, of these:
  - 7% dropped three compliance levels (full to non compliance)
  - 39% dropped two compliance levels (full to partial or Sub to non)
  - 54% dropped one compliance level (Full to Sub, Sub to partial or Partial to Non)



The changes in assurance levels indicated that there were areas of collective and individual action which would improve resilience at both an organisational and system level for patients and communities. This enabled Midlands colleagues to identify areas for collaborative working in delivering key actions associated with their resilience.

Implementation of the same model within the North East & Yorkshire and North West regions was agreed with the intention to undertake an open, honest and transparent, review of evidence associated with the core standards in order to assess evidential compliance with the objective of improving our collective resilience for patients and communities.

NHS England worked with ICB colleagues through the summer to provide guidance and clarity on the assessment requirements and highlighted that it was likely we may see the same compliance shift that Midlands colleagues had seen in 2022.

Introducing this model in the regions was about establishing a baseline compliance level – a hard reset of our readiness following protracted periods of response and in order to identify greater opportunities for collaboration and system improvement.

## The way forward

Following completion of the evidence reviews, provider organisations will undertake a check & challenge via their Local Health Resilience Partnership (LHRP), this will give an opportunity for peer discussion and for ICBs to seek assurance ahead of their own system level check & challenge via the Regional Health Resilience Partnership (RHRP).

Organisations will be required to participate in ongoing assurance against their action plans, this will follow pre-existing arrangements that are well established across both regions –

- **Fully compliant** – formal updates annually, with any changes or reduction in compliance reported 6 monthly.
- **Substantially compliant** – formal updates against action plans every 6 months.
- **Partially compliant** – formal updates against action plan every 3 months.
- **Non-compliant** - formal updates against action plan every 3 months, and monthly progress discussions to take place between the provider and their lead ICB.

The intention of the revised process is absolutely intended to be constructive, and to allow organisations to reflect on the robustness of the plans they have in place, what more they could or should be doing to improve their resilience, and to demonstrate that position to their Boards.

The collective focus over the coming months, will be to identify common themes and the NHS England EPRR teams will continue to proactively support opportunities to collaboratively address areas for improvement in order to enhance system preparedness, patient outcomes, and opportunities to share best and notable practice. This will deliver greater resilience at provider level, for place based systems and across the regions, with greater interoperability and opportunities to undertake collective planning.

It is recognised that the change in process has come at a very difficult time for EPRR professionals across organisations given the competing pressures, and that Boards may be concerned by the reduction in compliance ratings. However, it is important to note that this does not signal a material change or deterioration in preparedness but should be considered as a revised and more rigorous baseline in which to improve plans for preparedness, response and recovery.

Following completion of this years process, it is important to take time to come together and reflect on the lessons identified through this process. This will enable opportunities to collectively provide greater guidance to colleagues where questions have been raised (e.g. annual review of plans and policies), ensure that areas which have worked well in this process are embedded in future years, and to identify improvements in the assurance process ahead of next year's assurance cycle.