

# Housing

Ombudsman Service



## Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs) consultation

Changes to the  
Housing Ombudsman Scheme



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# Foreword from the Housing Ombudsman

Trust and transparency are vital for a positive landlord-tenant relationship.

**W**hether it is in repairs or anti-social behaviour, estate management or rent arrears, the success of those relationships also depends on good communications and accountability.

STAIRs supports those objectives. It will help tenants of private registered providers (PRPs) access information to understand activities that relate to their home, community or landlord. It can help inspire confidence in the actions of the landlord. It can help PRPs understand and debate reasonable challenge on plans.

The success of STAIRs depends heavily on another topic we have spoken about a lot: knowledge and information management. This is something we have highlighted in our Spotlight reports and other investigations. The more effective record keeping is within the PRP, the easier it will be to operate STAIRs.

While STAIRs complaints to us will be handled broadly in line with the handling of complaints generally, this consultation highlights some differences.

Complaints will not go through the Complaint Handling Code. The Government's policy statement sets out a separate process.

Our approach to compensation also means we are less likely to award it for delays. While we will have the ability to order a PRP to release information in some cases, our primary focus will be the handling of information requests and the orders we expect to make will focus on putting right failures in this handling.

We also want to share insights and lessons from our casework early. This may include publishing good practice guidance on STAIRs to support landlords once we have established a body of casework.

A huge thank you to everyone that is reading this and taking the time to participate in our consultation. We will publish feedback as part of wider engagement with PRPs to make the scheme a success.

We look forward to reading your consultation responses. At a time when trust is low, this is an opportunity for PRPs to turn this tide.

**Richard Blakeway**  
Housing Ombudsman





# What this consultation is about

We want to hear your views on changes we are making to the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. These will set out how we will look at complaints about information requests to private registered providers (PRPs), and their publication schemes.

The Scheme is our legal framework. It explains what we do and how we do it.

The government published a [policy statement](#) called the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs) on 30 September 2025.

STAIRs gives social housing tenants of PRPs the right to information about

the management of social housing. It informs PRPs what they must share with tenants.

In the policy statement, the government named us as the official complaints body for STAIRs. We are adding to our Scheme to include these new types of complaint.

STAIRs applies to PRPs. These are generally housing associations. They provide social housing and are registered with the Regulator of Social Housing.

STAIRs does not include councils. Council tenants can already access information through the Freedom of Information Act.

# Our new role



We are taking on a new role to manage complaints about STAIRs. This means we can investigate complaints when tenants are unhappy with how their PRP managed their request for information. We can also investigate complaints where a tenant is concerned a PRP has not published information it should have under its publication scheme.

If a tenant asks their PRP for information and is unhappy with the response, or thinks their PRP has failed to publish information, they can request a review with their PRP. If they are still unhappy after that, they can come to us.

Our role is to decide what is fair in all the circumstances of the case. We generally do this by assessing whether there has been poor, inefficient, or unfair administration – what we call maladministration. This includes a range of failings in how decisions are made or services are delivered. For example, we will decide if there have been unreasonable delays or failure to follow the policy statement, or other relevant policies.

Over the next few months we'll be developing our approach to deciding what is fair in all the circumstances of STAIRs complaints. We'll focus on whether the PRP acted reasonably and followed the rules set out in the policy statement. For example, if someone complains that a PRP didn't share information, our investigation will focus on how the PRP made that decision. We'll check whether they followed the right process, stuck to their policies, and gave a clear explanation. If they did all that properly, we would decide that no further action is needed.

If we decide there have been failings, there will be a range of orders we might make. In some cases, this may include telling a PRP to release information. However, we anticipate that we will more regularly make orders such as telling a PRP to review a decision and provide a full explanation for its position, or to apologise to a tenant for failings.





# Why we need your views



To do this work, we have updated our Scheme. This means adding our new role to our legal framework that sets out how we operate as an organisation.

We have introduced Section 2B of the Scheme for STAIRs complaints. Some minor changes have also been made to other parts of the Scheme.

We are asking tenants, PRPs, and interested social housing groups to tell us what they think about part 2B.

The survey closes on  
**17 March 2026**  
and you can respond by  
online form, email,  
post and phone.

## What we want to know

We have updated our Scheme to include this new area of work. Now we want to make sure our plans are clear and fair.

Through the survey, we would like to hear what you think about:

- whether it's clear who can complain to us
- whether the time limits for complaints seem fair
- whether our planned approach to STAIRs investigations will provide fair outcomes



# What the new policy statement requires



The government's policy statement makes clear what information PRPs must make available to their tenants and how, including:

- publishing information about their social housing services
- sharing information with tenants when they ask for it
- only withholding information when it is reasonable to do so
- being open and honest with tenants

This helps tenants hold PRPs to account.

# Who this affects



## STAIRs affects:

- PRP tenants
- PRPs

## STAIRs does not affect:

- council tenants
- councils

Council tenants can get information using the Freedom of Information Act. For information on making a Freedom of Information request you can visit the government's website '[how to make a Freedom of Information request](#)'.



# STAIRs reviews and complaints



The government has set STAIRs out in the policy statement under 2 chapters:

**1. Publication scheme:**

PRPs must publish key information about how they manage social housing. If they do not, tenants can ask for a review.

**2. Information requests:**

Tenants can ask their PRP for specific information. If they are not happy with the response, they can ask for a review.

The policy statement sets out a simple, one-stage process PRPs must follow for STAIRs reviews, with a 30-day response time. If a tenant is still unhappy after the review, they can bring their complaint to us.

This process is different from other housing complaints. STAIRs complaints do not fall under the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. If a tenant brings both a STAIRs complaint and a housing complaint to us, we will deal with these separately.





# The Regulator of Social Housing



On 30 September 2025, the Secretary of State asked the Regulator of Social Housing to create a new standard for STAIRs. The [Regulator's consultation on its standard](#) opened on 9 December 2025 and runs until 3 March 2026.

The Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator have distinct roles, but we work together.

The Regulator checks how landlords perform. It sets the outcomes landlords must deliver, inspects to ensure

they are met and monitors where improvement is needed. If landlords do not comply with these rules, the Regulator can act.

The Housing Ombudsman looks at complaints between tenants and landlords. We make the final decision on those cases.

This consultation is only about changes to our Scheme. It is not about the STAIRs policy statement itself, or the Regulator's standard.

## Our role



We make the final decision on disputes between residents and member landlords. Our decisions are independent, impartial, and fair.

We also work to improve housing services by sharing our learning from complaints.

Our service is free for the 4.9 million social housing homes in England.

The law sets out our role. This includes the Housing Act 1996, and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. The Secretary of State approves our Scheme.



# Consultation dates

**Starts:** 20 January 2026  
**Ends:** 17 March 2026

## Who can respond



### We want to hear from:

- tenants of PRPs
- PRPs
- groups and individuals interested in social housing in England

## Where this applies

This consultation covers England only.



## What happens next



- **March-May 2026:** We review your responses and update our Scheme
- **Summer 2026:** Secretary of State approves the Scheme, and we publish the Scheme and our response to this consultation
- **1 October 2026:** Phase 1 PRPs follow Chapter 1 of STAIRs
- **1 April 2027:** Phase 2 PRPs follow Chapter 2 of STAIRs

## How to respond

### You can respond by:

**Email:** [consultations@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:consultations@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)  
(Use subject line: STAIRs consultation)

**Phone:** 0300 111 3000  
(Say it's about the STAIRs consultation)

**Post:** Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET  
(Mark envelope: STAIRs consultation)

### Online survey

[www.engage.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/stairs](http://www.engage.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/stairs)

# What to include in your response



**Please tell us:**

- your name
- your email address (if you have one)
- if you represent an organisation, its name
- if you are a tenant, a PRP, or someone else

## Contact us



**Email:** [consultations@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:consultations@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

**Phone:** 0300 111 3000

If you need this document in a different format (like large print, audio, or easy read), please contact us.

**Please note:** This consultation is not for making complaints about your landlord. To make a complaint, use our webform [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/online-complaint-form](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/online-complaint-form) or call 0300 111 3000.

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After the closing date of this consultation, we may publish a summary of the responses we receive. Please do not share any information in your response which you would not be happy for us to make publicly available or that identifies other individuals.

We may be required to publish your response under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. See our [privacy notice](#) for more details.

# Housing

## Ombudsman Service

PO Box 1484, Unit D,  
Preston, PR2 0ET  
0300 111 3000

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