

# Business Plan 2026-27: Consultation feedback report summary

## Introduction

Our Business Plan provides detail on planned activities between April 2026 and March 2027. The plan sets out clearly what we're prioritising and why. Our vision, mission, values, and strategic objectives laid out in our [Corporate Strategy 2025-30](#) remain unchanged. Our strategic objectives are:

1. Provide an excellent, person-centred service
2. Drive positive local complaints handling cultures
3. Support better services through insights, data, and intelligence
4. Extend powers and engage with partners to support closing gaps in redress

The consultation on our draft Business Plan 2026-27 ran from 5 to 26 March 2026 inclusive. We promoted the consultation through various channels including newsletters, landlord forums, Resident Panel emails, stakeholder meetings, social media posts, and with our colleagues through internal communications. We reached a total audience of over 10.3 million people.

Consultees could respond by completing the online survey, email, or post. In addition, they could ask for support in completing the surveys with our phone service.

The consultation focused on whether respondents supported and agreed with our proposed 3-year caseload reduction strategy which is designed to achieve 4 clear outcomes:

- cases are investigated through the fastest, most proportionate route
- landlord complaint handling improves so fewer cases come to us
- we significantly reduce the age of our oldest open cases
- we increase our efficiency and reduce our cost per case

## Consultation questions

Our 5 consultation questions were set out as follows.

1. Do you support the prioritisation of activities to deliver our Corporate Strategy 2025-30? If not, what should we prioritise instead?
2. Do you support our strategic approach to bringing down the volume and age of cases awaiting investigation? If not, what should we do differently?
3. Are there any tools, products, or particular topics we should explore that could help to reduce the demand on our service across the sector?
4. Are there any approaches we could explore to reduce demand from individual landlords?
5. Do you have any other comments or observations on our Business Plan 2026-27?

## Summary of responses

At close of consultation on 26 March 2026, we had received 106 responses. A further 25 responses had been received as of 7 April 2026 and were included in this analysis. The overall number of responses (131) was slightly higher than for the Business Plan 2025-26, when 126 were received.

Our full consultation feedback report will be published alongside our final Business Plan in the week commencing 27 April 2026. This will include an analysis of responses to individual questions and a full list of respondents. This summary report is being published as an interim measure, to provide our members, residents, and stakeholders with the thematic insight and feedback that have been considered and used to inform decision making and refine our Business Plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Of those who responded to this consultation, 56 (42.7%) were residents and 67 (51.1%) were landlords.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The remaining responses were from representatives (n=2), those who work or are interested in the sector (n=3), and those who work for the Housing Ombudsman Service (n=3).

Submissions from representative bodies included, but were not limited to, those from the Chartered Institute of Housing, the National Federation of ALMOs, and the National Housing Federation.

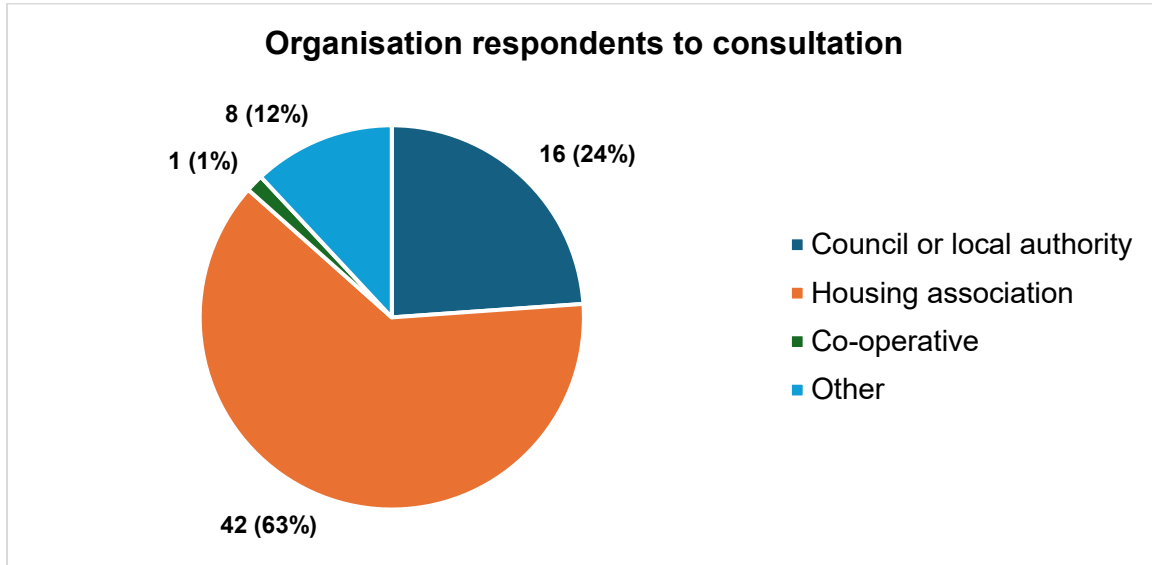


Chart 1: Organisation respondents to consultation

## High level sentiment and support for our proposals

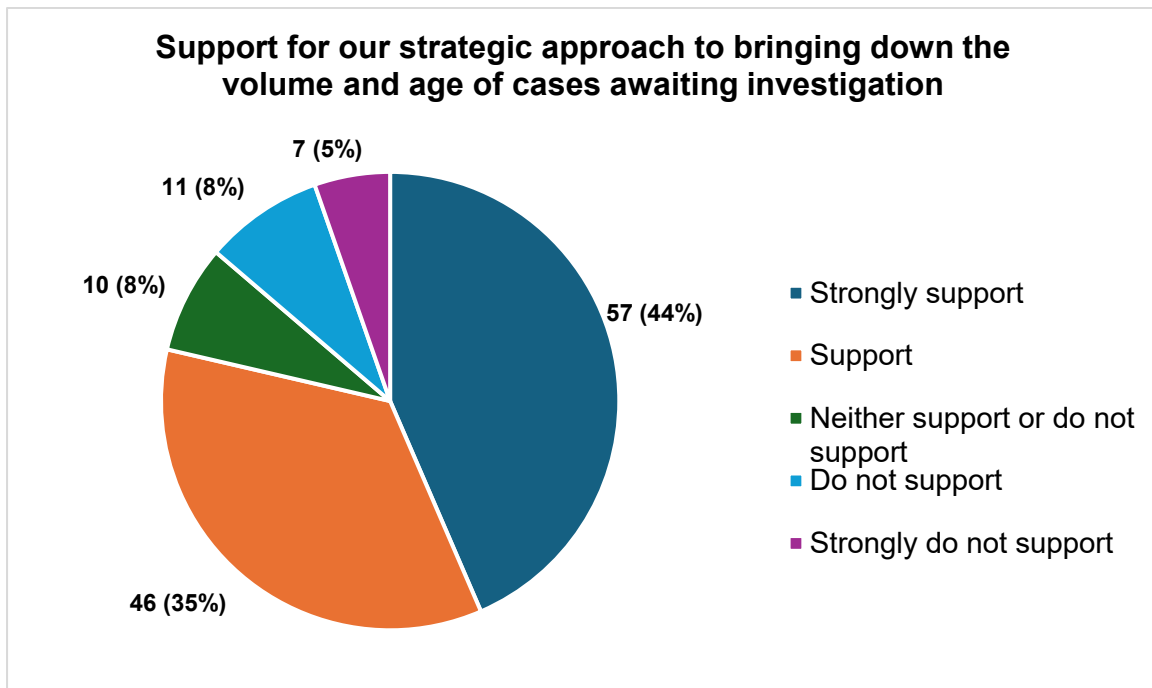
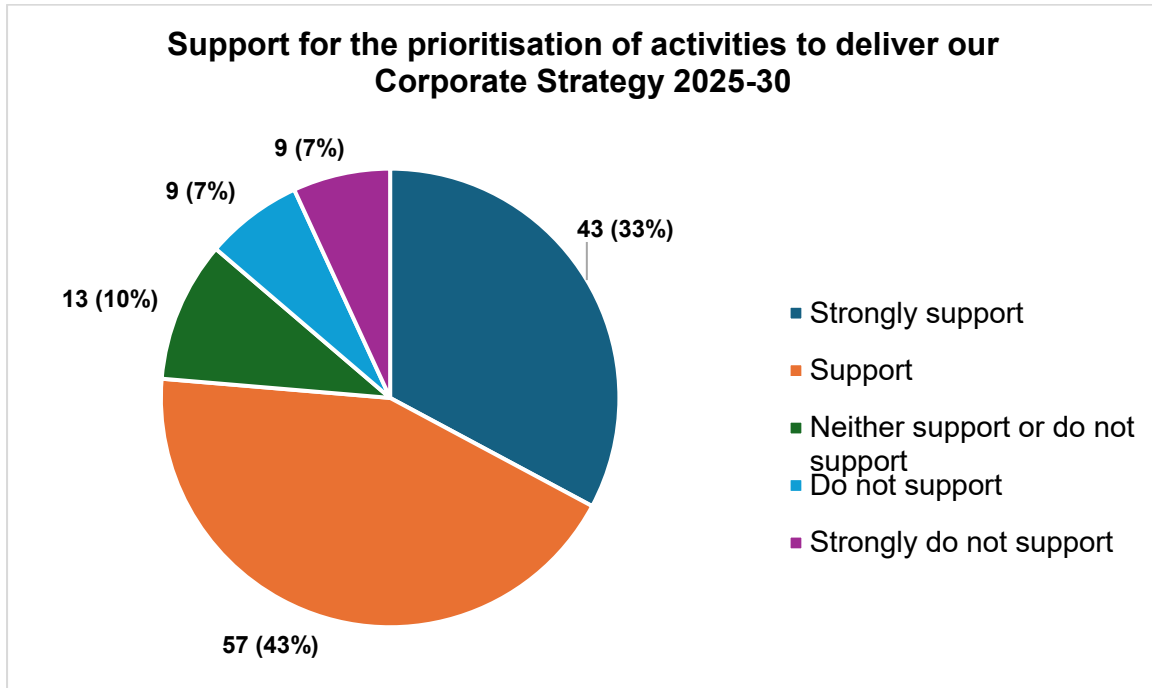


Chart 2: Support for our strategic approach to bringing down the volume and age of cases awaiting investigation

The overarching sentiment based on analysis of responses towards the actions proposed in our Business Plan 2026-27 and 3-year caseload reduction strategy was supportive, with 78.6% of all consultees either strongly supporting (43.5%) or supporting (35.1%).



**Chart 3: Support for the prioritisation of activities to deliver our Corporate Strategy 2025-30**

There was also broad support for the proposed prioritisation of activities in 2026-27 to deliver our Corporate Strategy 2025-30, with 76.3% of respondents either strongly supporting (32.8%) or supporting (43.5%).

## Key themes

There were consistent themes in the qualitative responses across the consultation survey questions. The main themes are outlined below.

### **Business plan prioritisation and strategic direction**

**There was broad support for the strategy but some concerns by respondents that investigation speed may come at the expense of fairness and quality.**

Respondents agreed that older cases needed to be addressed sooner, as delays limit learning and damage landlord-resident relationships. At the same time, they emphasised the need to maintain high-quality redress. Landlords suggested focused investigations should have clear and transparent criteria, quality assurance mechanisms, expected timelines, and an option for a full investigation where cases are uncertain or complex.

Our response:

We treat quality and timeliness as equally important. We've retained the quality assurance key performance indicator (KPI) this year. New approaches that we introduce are monitored during trial periods to provide assurance that there is no impact on quality or landlords' ability to learn from cases. Where appropriate, we include customer voices and/or customer satisfaction data in evaluation activities.

**There was a perception that the plan sets out a wide range of activity but could be clearer about what will be delivered in 2026-27 and how success will be measured.**

Respondents indicated that prioritisation, sequencing of activities, and more measurable commitments would help increase transparency regarding the plan's effectiveness and value for money. Landlords and residents also requested greater clarity on the proposed KPIs, including how performance will be reported publicly and assessed over time. This would support confidence in the service's improvement trajectory.

Our response:

Our Business Plan is intentionally outcome-focused, and progress will be measured against defined KPIs. We intend to publish performance information during 2026-27 for transparency. Some activities are also at discovery or design stage so the future direction cannot be confirmed yet.

**There was a call for a greater focus on the root causes of increasing case volumes.**

Respondents suggested that investigating why disputes are remaining unresolved within landlords' internal processes is key to sustainable demand management and taking meaningful action as a result. Respondents gave their views on key areas to be tackled, including removing procedural 'loopholes' in the complaints process, repeat service failures, and a poor repairs culture.

Our response:

We agree that we have a role to play in supporting landlords and do this through our Centre for Learning and making best use of our systemic powers, including the Duty to Monitor and our Insight reports. We'll make use of the Good Practice power for the first time in 2026-27. We're commissioning work this year to understand how we can maximise our system-wide impact.

**There was a desire for us to focus on where most impact can be achieved from practical changes for residents through improved complaint handling and resident voice, particularly for the most vulnerable.**

Respondents were seeking to understand how priorities will translate into practical changes for residents, including how vulnerable residents will be supported, how early resolution will work in practice, and how resident voice/experience will shape decision-making. In addition, residents supported case triage according to safeguarding risk and vulnerability.

Our response:

We seek feedback from our Resident Panel where appropriate in designing our services. The intention of the caseload reduction strategy is to enable faster

determinations for residents through a customer-centric approach that prioritises high-risk cases. We offer reasonable adjustments to support residents and representatives through our processes.

### **Reducing demand from individual landlords**

**There was a desire for movement towards more collaborative relationships where improvements are driven together to improve complaint handling and reduce demand.**

Respondents noted that closer collaboration with the sector could improve local complaint handling and support efficiencies once cases are identified for investigation. Enhanced triage and early engagement with providers through a 'light touch' or 'rapid review' system was mentioned as a way to promote swift and effective resolution. Several high-volume landlords referenced the benefits of the portfolio management initiative in improving their service and reducing the number of escalations.

Our response:

As an ombudsman service, we must be careful to maintain our impartiality when working with landlords. We make use of our landlord forums in developing our services where it's appropriate to do so. We are evaluating a trial of the portfolio management approach and continue to produce content for all member landlords through the Centre for Learning. Our casework reduction strategy will identify other opportunities to improve complaint handling and reduce demand across the sector.

**Targeted intervention with high-volume or repeat failure landlords would support continual learning and reflection.**

Respondents felt landlords should be closely monitored, be required to demonstrate learnings from Ombudsman decisions, and be subject to effective oversight and meaningful consequences – including escalation to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) if required.

Our response:

We review complaint handling policies for all landlords through our Duty to Monitor. We inform and refer to RSH through a memorandum of understanding when escalation is appropriate.

## Technology and tools

**Greater investment in AI and technology was expected, whilst still recognising that final decisions should be subject to expert assessment.**

Suggestions included a web-based self-service platform to share evidence and communicate with residents. Respondents believed technology should be used to enforce landlord compliance at the earliest stage and that decision making should not be delegated to AI platforms.

Our response:

We intend to use AI to support caseworkers in understanding chronologies and key documents in cases. However, all decisions are and will be made by a person. We're investigating other AI solutions to enable more efficient working, with discovery work with a digital delivery partner planned in 2026-27. This work also includes a new customer relationship management system. We'll review what information we publish on our use of AI in discharging our functions this year to ensure we are transparent about this.

**More training for complaint handling staff to build communication skills, empathy, and promote effective dispute resolution was desired.**

This included the provision of sector-wide learning resources and guidance for landlords on positive complaint culture, as well as practical tools for landlords such as example contractor logs, evidence logs, and repairs records.

Our response:

We offer CPD-accredited training through our Centre for Learning in the areas that landlords find the most difficult. Training will likely be mandated for some employees as part of forthcoming competency and conduct regulatory requirements. Our thematic reports and recommendations also promote effective dispute resolution.

We're working to further improve the accessibility and reach of our reports and training.

### **A need for practical guidance to enable sector-wide consistency in complaints-handling and interpretation was highlighted.**

This would promote a clearer and more consistent approach from both landlords and caseworkers, helping align practices across the sector and support more predictable, efficient complaint-handling. Several landlords indicated our existing learning offer is extensive but more practical tools and guidance would bring additional value.

Our response:

We provide a clear framework through the Complaint Handling Code which describes the procedures members should have in place to handle complaints. We also provide targeted guidance in the areas that landlords find difficult, while allowing flexibility for innovation and tailoring approaches to different sizes of landlord organisations.

### **System-wide approaches**

#### **A whole system joined-up approach to improving complaint handling between landlords, the Housing Ombudsman Service, RSH, and MHCLG was desired.**

Respondents suggested this should include joint communications explaining clearly when escalation is appropriate, supporting landlords as being best placed to resolve issues early and within the complaints process, and minimising messages that unintentionally encourage premature escalation. Further work was suggested to ensure the different roles of the Housing Ombudsman Service and RSH are clear for the public and stakeholders. A significant number of responses were concerned with introducing stricter regulations and greater landlord accountability. This indicated that there is some confusion on the role and scope of our powers and duties compared to that of RSH.

Our response:

The Housing Ombudsman Service and RSH each have different statutory powers and need to exercise these accordingly. Not all of the matters raised are in our remit.

We have memorandums of understanding in place with other partners to achieve joined-up approaches. Feedback on the regulatory regime and accountability from this consultation has been shared with MHCLG.

### **Summary**

While none of the feedback above received necessitates a material change to the Business Plan 2026-27, the Housing Ombudsman Service has reviewed and considered all feedback in the development of its operational plans that sit beneath. In addition, the feedback received will be used to inform future business planning cycles.

### **Additional feedback of note**

#### **Handling and size of the fee increase**

Whilst this was not the subject of the consultation, feedback relating to the impact of the fee increase on both landlords and residents was strong and dissatisfaction was raised about:

- the timing and length of the consultation, given the budget approval cycle for landlords
- the cumulative impact on landlord budgets funding regulatory activities and knock-on impact on funding other priorities that benefit residents
- concern that a uniform fee increase has been applied to landlords with varying complaint performance and volumes
- concern about the impact of costs passed onto residents
- no clear performance metrics or mention of reporting mechanisms to show how additional funding will reduce the backlog and deliver better outcomes for residents and landlords

A minority of comments relating to fees were from residents. These generally focused on introducing higher case handling fees for high-volume landlords to incentivise early dispute resolution. Only 2 residents acknowledged that their landlords were likely to pass on the fee increase.

It's important to note that sector feedback on fees must be balanced against resident feedback, where there is a desire to preserve quality and timeliness in the determinations we issue. We operate on a full-cost recovery basis. Our fees are currently charged on a cost per home basis. We recognise other models may be possible based on volume and performance.

### Our response:

We recognise the impact of the late consultation on landlords' budgets and will work closely with MHCLG next year and beyond to ensure consultation takes place in quarter 3 (October to December) of the preceding financial year. An activity has been added to our Business Plan in this regard.

In addition, to mitigate the impact in 2026-27, we've agreed a phased fee increase. The subscription charge for 2026-27 will be £9.64 per home, rising to approximately £10.56 per home in 2027-28 if the expected benefits and performance improvements from increased caseworker resources and process changes are achieved.

Furthermore, we recognise the current fee model does not take into account the volumes of cases coming to us from individual landlords and positive complaint handling performance. We've previously consulted residents and landlords to ask if they would like us to explore alternative models, but this did not receive strong support. Given the feedback this year, we've added a commitment to the Business Plan to explore alternative fee models that recognise good complaint handling. We will engage with residents and landlords as part of this work.

We've also committed to publishing more regular data about our performance and the value for money of our services in 2026-27, supplementing our Annual Report and Accounts.

## Consultees

From or on behalf of residents:

- we received responses from 56 individual residents

Trade bodies and other organisations:

- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
- National Housing Federation (NHF), representing approximately 570 landlords, covering approximately 3 million homes
- National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), representing 15 arm's length management organisations, covering 170,000 homes
- Councils with ALMOs Group (CWAG)
- NHF West Midlands Regional Committee