

Housing

Ombudsman Service



Business Plan 2026-27

April 2026

Healthier homes,
fairer services,
and trusting
relationships



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Who we are

Our role

Our role is set out in the Housing Act 1996 and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme (the Scheme) approved by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The Ombudsman:

- makes the final decision on disputes between residents and member landlords
- sets and monitors compliance with a statutory Code of Practice for complaint handling by its members which promotes a positive complaint handling culture
- may issue Good Practice on the delivery of housing activities and order self-assessment against this
- orders reviews of policy and practice where the Ombudsman believes an issue in an individual complaint may give rise to further complaints
- investigates the root causes of complaints at both member- and sector-level, producing reports to share learning, improve services, and prevent recurrences

Our service is free to households eligible to use it. Our decisions are independent, impartial, and fair.

Our membership

Membership of the Scheme is compulsory for social landlords, primarily housing associations who are or have been registered with the Regulator of Social Housing, and local authority landlords. Additionally, some private landlords are voluntary members. The activities of members who are managing agents or selling some new homes fall within the Scheme. The Scheme is funded by subscriptions from members paid on a per housing unit basis.

We investigate complaints across a range of tenures, including social and private tenants, shared owners, and leaseholders of member landlords.

Membership as of 31 March 2025



1,647
member landlords
(2023-24: 1,596)



5 million
households
(2023-24: 4.9 million)

1,352
registered providers
(2023-24: 1,268)



3.3 million
households
(2023-24: 3.2 million)

186
local authorities
(2023-24: 175)



1.7 million
households
(2023-24: 1.7 million)

109
voluntary members
(2023-24: 153)



19,000
households
(2023-24: 26,000)

Foreword

Most social landlords have transformed their approach to complaints over the last 6 years.

They have adopted the Complaint Handling Code, increased resources for complaint handling, recruited and trained more staff, and put in place stronger policies and processes. This has been accompanied by more engaged governance, including proactive learning from complaints. It is important to recognise this hard work.

But landlords' services remain under pressure. Problems are still emerging and there is still a long way to go before trust with some residents is rebuilt.

Which means complaint volumes will continue to grow. The latest Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) show more complaints are being escalated to stage 2 and referrals to us remain extremely high. By the end of 2025-26 we forecast a 500% increase in casework compared to our position 5 years ago. It is also more complex casework.

This means the sector's investment in complaint handling is unlikely to be able to reduce in the short term without a detrimental impact on residents.

It also means we require more resources and innovation to deliver our remit and provide faster outcomes.

Recent years have seen an increase in our investigation output and improved value for money. We now complete over



800 investigations a month and are heading towards 1,000, with 30% more decisions completed in 2024-25 compared to the previous year. In 2025-26 high-risk cases have been completed 8 weeks faster and over half of cases within 6 months. The cost of each investigation has reduced by 27% since 2023-24 and we are forecasting that this will fall further. This is vastly different from where we were and has not been at the expense of quality.

But rising demand means we are unable to reduce our fee despite these efficiencies.

For 2 years we have frozen our subscription rate despite an 87% increase in demand and delivering new duties over that period.

We are proposing an increase in our fee for 2026-27, both to respond to these higher volumes and to reduce investigation times. This is matched with some stretching targets that will see us continue to deliver half of our cases within 6 months and drive reductions to the size and age of our caseload this year and into the future.

This investment will be accompanied by new ways of working which we have adopted over this year. This includes the earlier resolution of complaints, as well as vital investment into our core infrastructure, including digital, data, and technology.

But the impact of this investment could be undermined without further improvement in local complaint handling. Here we face a twin-challenge of high volumes from a small number of mostly large landlords and poor outcomes from a wide range of landlords. In our current caseload, 10 landlords represent 30% of our investigative work. The landlord presenting the most cases is not the largest and other landlords here are outliers given their number of homes. We need to work differently with these high-volume landlords as well as work to improve complaint handling performance across the sector.

Combining strengthened local complaint handling, reduced need for our intervention, modernised infrastructure, and new ways of working will lay the ground for a fee reduction in this Corporate Strategy period.

Social housing is vital to the success of this country. Our work can support a virtuous cycle of alternative dispute resolution, providing insight to help prevent complaints, improve services, and strengthen trust. This is important to help landlords and residents manage a challenging and changing environment.



Richard Blakeway
Housing Ombudsman



Our work can support a virtuous cycle of alternative dispute resolution, providing insight to help prevent complaints, improve services, and strengthen trust.



Demand on our service

The demand for the Housing Ombudsman Service continues to grow at significant rates. We expect to see an almost 500% rise in the number of cases duly made (accepted for formal investigation) over the last 5 years – from 2,253 cases in 2020-21 to a forecast of over 13,000 in 2025-26. This is a compound average annual growth rate of 43%.

We are forecasting growth of 60% next year. This is based on historical increases, higher standards applying to the sector, and increasing volumes of complaints escalating to stage 2 of landlords’ processes as reported in the TSMs. The remaining effects of existing efficiency and streamlining activities prior to case investigation stage will also create a small, one-off increase.

While the number of duly made cases is more difficult to predict in the longer term,

we anticipate that demand will continue to increase in 2027-28 at, or around, our compound average annual growth rate.

We have expanded and increased our output significantly over the same period. But despite expecting our determination numbers to increase by 320% over the same 5 years from 2020-21, we have not been able to keep pace with the exceptionally high year-on-year increases to demand we have experienced.

As a result, the volume of cases awaiting investigation (our open caseload) continues to grow and it is taking us longer to allocate all of these cases for investigation. Without resolution, landlords’ and residents’ ability to repair their relationship is also delayed. Without intervention, we forecast our open caseload to reach over 21,000 cases by the end of 2027-28.

Determination deficit and cumulative open caseload without intervention

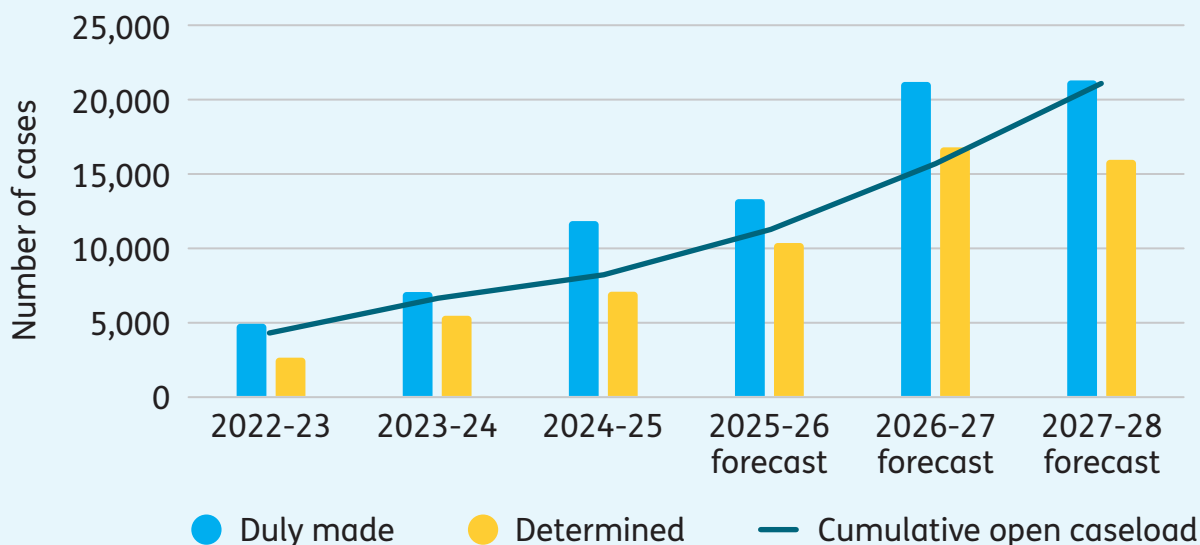


Chart 1: Determination deficit and cumulative open caseload without intervention

Efficiency and value for money

Our ambition is to get the best value for money for the fees we charge our members. We are continuously implementing changes to increase our efficiency while maintaining the quality of our work. During 2025-26 we introduced a shorter form determination report, centralised casework activities, and redesigned our enquiries and casework assessment services (implemented in January 2026).

As a result, our cost per case is expected to reduce by 27% from £3,020 in 2023-24 to £2,220 in 2025-26. We have invested these efficiencies into additional resources which have helped us to mitigate fee increases for the sector.

In 2026-27 we will do more by:

- rolling out focused investigations to new low-risk cases (excluding antisocial behaviour and service charge cases) as part of our earlier and faster resolution approaches
- implementing a one-off targeted application of focused investigations to existing older, low-risk cases (excluding antisocial behaviour and service charge cases)
- continuing to centralise casework activities to create efficiency and release caseworker capacity
- trialling new technology to increase efficiency in casework preparation and investigation



Our plans have been costed and modelled to understand their impact and to compare with current practices. Chart 2 shows the cost per case is decreasing from £3,020 in 2023-24 to a forecast £2,220 in 2025-26 with a further decrease to £1,730 in 2026-27. This is a 43% fall across 3 years. At the same time our output is forecast to increase significantly by investing in sufficient casework resources to meet demand.

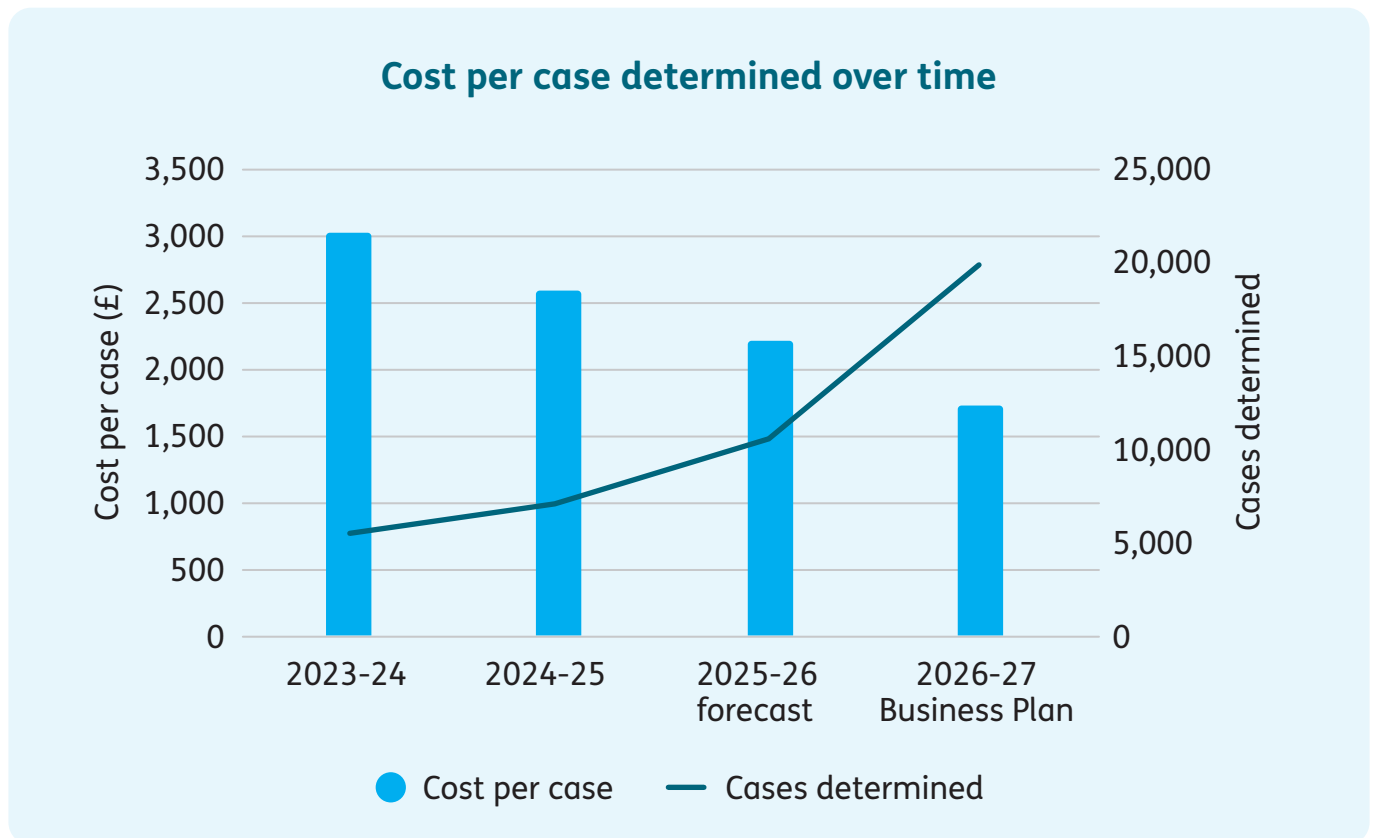


Chart 2: Cost per case determined over time is decreasing

Please note: This chart is based on our latest forecast modelling, which is highly sensitive to small changes in demand and a range of other factors.



Our plans for 2026-27

Caseload reduction strategy

The forecast volumes of cases awaiting investigation across the next 2 years are unsustainable. This will lead to excessively long delays for residents and landlords before complaints are resolved. To address this, we have developed a multi-year caseload reduction strategy designed to achieve 4 outcomes.

Outcome 1

Cases are investigated through the fastest, most proportionate route.

Outcome 2

Landlord complaint handling improves so fewer cases come to us.

Outcome 3

We significantly reduce the age of our oldest open cases.

Outcome 4

We increase our efficiency and reduce our cost per case.

The measures of success will be:

- maintained and then improved timeliness of determinations
- reductions to the age of the open caseload
- reductions to the cost per case

As well as demand, open caseload volumes are driven by the availability of effective resources and the efficiency of our processes and systems. Our caseload reduction strategy tackles each of these factors in 3 phases.

1.

Stabilise

Move out of annual 'determination deficit' (more cases received for investigation than are issued) by increasing our workforce to meet expected demand and rolling out more focused and proportionate approaches to our investigations.

2.

Reduce

Decrease the size and age of the open caseload through systems and process efficiencies.

3.

Maintain

Keep the open caseload to a manageable size and age in line with our resource base into the future through demand management.

Our 2026-27 plan includes the costs of the additional headcount to move towards stabilising the open caseload and investment in system solutions (including AI).

We expect to start rolling out initial system changes towards the end of the year. These should have a more significant impact on caseload reduction from 2027-28 onwards.

Existing resources will also design and start to trial new ways of combining our powers to reduce the volume of cases received at a sector and individual landlord-level for those members that create the biggest demand on

our service. Case volumes are not uniform nor proportionate across the sector. Our top 10 landlords represent 30% of our open cases but just 23% of total homes. This approach will allow us to maintain the open caseload at acceptable levels.

Chart 3 shows the impact of increased resources and early system changes in 2026-27 is forecast to support a 92% increase in determinations. This will take us to nearly 20,000 cases issued for the year. This will reduce the determination deficit in 2026-27 and we plan to begin to reduce the caseload size in successive years.

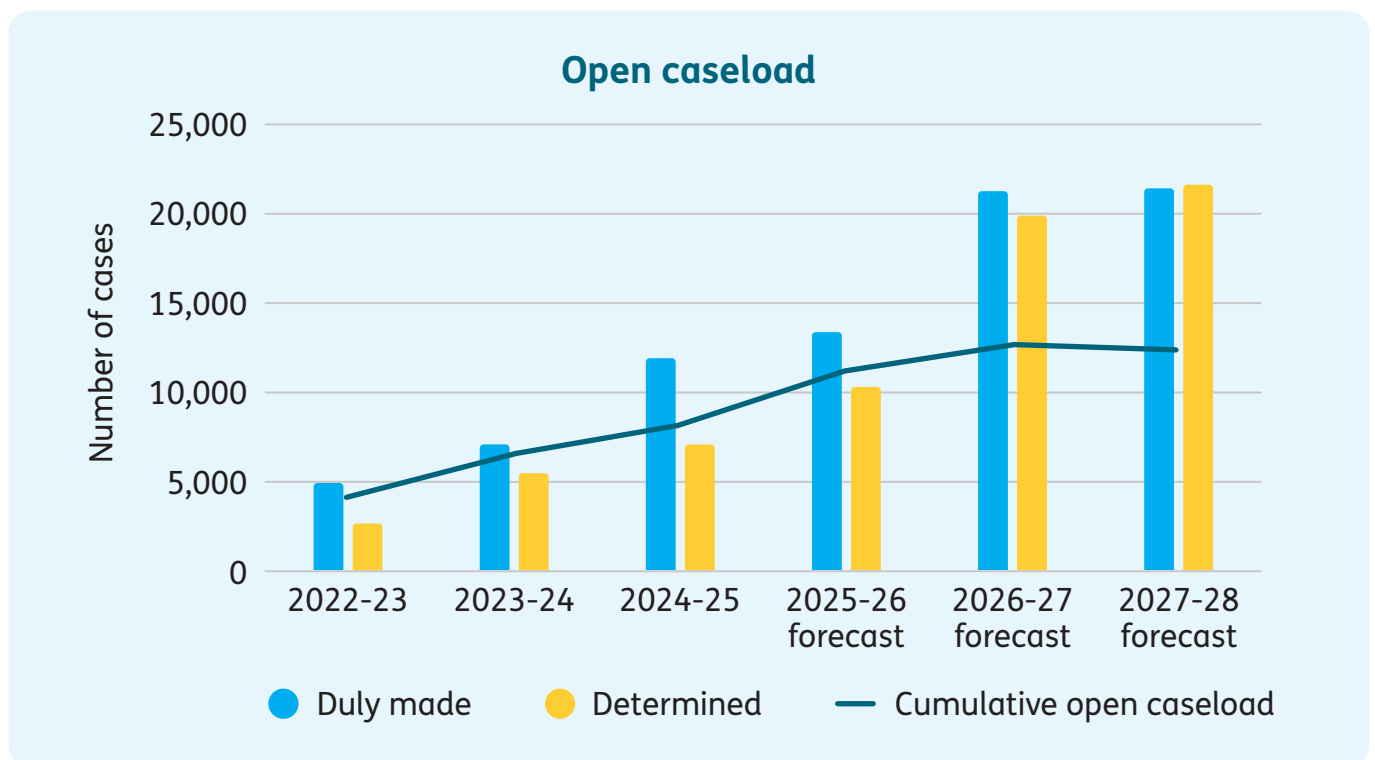


Chart 3: Open caseload

Please note: Chart 3 is based on our latest forecast modelling, which is highly sensitive to small changes in demand and a range of other factors.

We have identified the risks in delivering this strategy and have mitigations in place or planned to manage these to acceptable levels. In particular, we want to ensure our recruitment and induction approaches support the planned growth. These also look to the longer term to ensure that our workforce planning and forecasting approaches continue to align resource levels to demand.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) for 2026-27

The KPIs for 2026-27 maintain continuity with our Business Plan 2025-26 and Corporate Strategy 2025-30 aims. They also reflect the ‘stabilise’ phase of our caseload reduction strategy as we seek to stop this from growing and ageing.

Maintained from 2025-26:

- 90% of high-risk cases are determined within 4 months
- 50% of cases are determined within 6 months

Amended from 2025-26 – stabilisation phase of the caseload reduction strategy:

- no more than 20% of the open caseload is over 12 months old at year-end (replaces 80% of cases determined within 12 months)

New target for 2026-27 – stabilisation phase of the caseload reduction strategy:

- no case is older than 18 months at year-end



Other changes

We expect several other significant changes to happen during 2026-27 and have included these in our Business Plan.

We will move to the next phase of our service modernisation and commence the initial activities set out in each of our 3 key change strategies:

- customer experience
- digital, data, and technology
- people and culture

These are reflected across our strategic objectives and strategic enabler. Together, these will make our service more customer-focused, effective, and efficient. They will be delivered by colleagues who share our values and are fully engaged in their work.

We will begin to take complaints under the Social Tenants Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs). Initially, these will be related to publication schemes and

expand to all information requests at the start of 2027-28.

We expect to welcome a new Ombudsman as Richard Blakeway reaches the end of his permitted 2 terms.

We expect to transition our governance from a corporation sole to a body corporate (legal structures of corporate governance).

We have been planning and preparing for these changes for some time and are well-placed to deliver these effectively.

We may also be designated as the Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman (PRSLO), which is to be established under the Renters' Rights Act 2025. Our contribution to any design and implementation activity would not be funded by our social housing subscription fees, and we will ensure there is no detrimental impact on our performance in the social housing sector because of this change.



Budget and fees

The fee per unit has remained static for the past 2 years at £8.03 per home and we are required to operate on a full cost recovery basis. We now need to increase the fee we charge to deal with ongoing increases in demand. We also need to be able to restrict the growth of the open caseload and then maintain it at a sustainable level.

The proposed fee (cost per home) is shown in the table below.

Budget	2026-27 fee
2025-26 budget	£10.06
Deferred income reduction	-£2.03
2025-26 chargeable fee	£8.03
2026-27 budget increases:	
Inflation	£0.32
Increased caseworker resource	£0.92
Transformational change activity and investment	£0.34
Other movements	-£0.12
Underlying 2026-27 budget	£11.51
2026-27 budget reductions:	
Deferred income reduction	-£1.28
Reserve release	-£0.59
2026-27 chargeable fee	£9.64

The underlying budget has grown since 2025-26. The increase relates to investing in further caseworker capacity to meet demand, plus system changes that will support more efficient ways of working and allow us to issue determinations more quickly. It is also linked to a broader portfolio of change activities across all aspects of the business. We must also account for inflation and consider an anticipated pay award.

We are using deferred income and cumulative reserves to reduce the 2026-27 fee paid by our members. These reductions are not expected to repeat in 2027-28. In future years, we will aim to reduce fees through:

- reducing headcount if growth in demand is not sustained – we can do this through both natural attrition and/or redirecting some resources to Private Rented Sector (PRS) work if we are designated
- completing our change journey and reducing the level of investment required to support this



In 2026-27 we will undertake a discovery exercise on alternative fee models that recognise positive complaint handling to potentially replace the per home charge. We will also work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to support an earlier consultation.



Corporate Strategy 2025-30 on a page

Vision

Healthier homes, fairer services, and trusting relationships

Mission

Improving landlords' services and residents' lives through housing complaints

Values



Fairness



Learning



Openness



Excellence

Strategic objectives

Provide an excellent, person-centred service

Drive positive local complaint handling cultures

Support better services through our insights, data, and intelligence

Extend our powers and engage with partners to support closing gaps in redress

Strategic enabler

Organisation design

Enabling strategies

People and culture

Environmental, social, and governance

Digital, data, and technology

Customer experience

Communications and stakeholder engagement



Business Plan 2026-27



Strategic objective 1

Provide an excellent, person-centred service

Aims and measures of success



Aim 1.1: Our services are human-centric, trusted, and provide a positive customer experience for residents.

Measure of success:

- increased resident satisfaction with our service provision

KPIs:

- 5% increase to resident satisfaction scores at enquiry from 2025-26 target (moves to 68%)
- maintained resident satisfaction scores following investigation (80% for cases upheld, 60% for cases not upheld)
- quality assurance scores for investigations are maintained at 95%

Activities



- begin to implement the priorities within our new customer experience strategy and associated programme of work to deliver a better resident experience

Aim 1.2: Our service uses a range of techniques to provide resolution at the earliest opportunity.

Measure of success:

- reduced casework timescales

KPIs:

- 90% of high-risk cases are determined within 4 months
- 50% of cases are determined within 6 months
- no more than 20% of the open caseload is over 12 months old at year-end
- no case is older than 18 months at year-end

- expand our casework teams to support the continued growth in demand and make progress with the stabilise phase of our caseload reduction strategy
- implement our focused investigation approach to low-risk cases and other learning from our trials into earlier resolution conducted during 2025-26
- continue to streamline our casework operations ways of working, processes, systems, and structures to maximise our effectiveness and efficiency

Aims and measures of success



Aim 1.3: Our remedies are effective, appropriate, restorative, and complied with by landlords.

KPI:

- 99% compliance with our orders by the target date

Aim 1.4: We continue to develop our approach to casework to drive fairness in service delivery and reflect changes to landlord duties.

Aim 1.5: Our investigations support landlords to understand what led to service failure, prevent future complaints, and fulfil their obligations.

Measure of success:

- our individual investigations lead to fairer service delivery

KPIs:

- target to be confirmed following impact work with an independent, external partner
- this includes engaging with residents and members to understand what fairer service delivery means to them, and to set a baseline and an appropriate trajectory for 2029-30

Activities



- no priority activities in 2026-27

- continue to develop and publish our casework guidance

- work with an independent, external partner to develop the methodology to measure the impact of our investigation work on the housing sector and produce a baseline



Strategic objective 2

Drive positive local complaint handling cultures

Aims and measures of success



Aim 2.1: We evolve our duty to monitor compliance with the Complaint Handling Code.

Aim 2.2: We expand our Centre for Learning content to support better local complaint handling.

Aim 2.3: We focus on leadership and governance, in particular the role of the Member Responsible for Complaints in supporting positive complaint handling cultures.

Measure of success:

- social landlords demonstrate positive complaint handling cultures

KPIs:

- target to be confirmed following impact work with an independent, external partner
- this includes engaging with members to understand the impact of our work on local complaint handling and to set a baseline and an appropriate trajectory for 2029-30

Aim 2.4: Residents are aware of their right to complain, adequately supported in accessing the complaints process, and signposted to the Ombudsman.

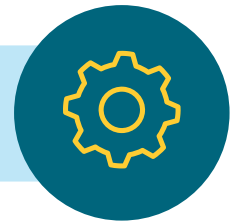
Measure of success:

- maintained resident awareness of their right to complain

KPI:

- target to be confirmed after a baseline measure is established

Activities



- use learnings from Duty to Monitor activities to date and evolve our approaches to support landlords to resolve more cases within their own complaints procedure at a sector-level and reduce the volume of cases reaching our service
- design approaches to demand management at an individual landlord-level and begin to test their effectiveness
- undertake a discovery exercise on alternative fee models that recognise positive complaint handling to potentially replace the per home charge
- work with MHCLG to support an earlier consultation
- review and develop our user experience to ensure that our services are accessible to all

Strategic objective 3

Support better services through our insights, data, and intelligence

Aims and measures of success



Aim 3.1: We hold individual landlords to account where there are repeated service failures by engaging with them to address root causes.

Aim 3.2: We promote fairer outcomes in services where systemic failings are identified.

Measure of success:

- our work drives fairer services and healthier homes

KPIs:

- target to be confirmed following impact work with an independent, external partner
- this includes engaging with members to understand the impact of our work on service delivery and to set a baseline and an appropriate trajectory for 2029-30

Activities



- issue our first sector Good Practice document on compensation
- review our products and services to understand their impact on landlord service improvement at a sector-level
- target future work at activities that create the most impact in reducing the volume of cases reaching our service
- design approaches to demand management at an individual landlord-level and begin to test their effectiveness



Aims and measures of success



Aim 3.3: We share information with regulators, enforcement bodies, and other delivery partners to promote accountability.

Aim 3.4: We are proactive in sharing our work with elected representatives, think tanks, and public policy makers to inform debate and policy proposals.

Aim 3.5: We help to stimulate debate and support better understanding of the social housing sector by allowing open access to our casework data.

Measure of success:

- our work is referenced by a range of stakeholders (no KPIs for 2026-27)

Activities



- finalise our communications and stakeholder engagement strategy and deliver the year 1 commitments
- work towards our 'open data' ambitions by reviewing and futureproofing our data environment so it supports sharing proactive access and sharing of information with others



Strategic objective 4

Extend our powers and engage with partners to support closing gaps in redress

Aims and measures of success



Aim 4.1: We will discuss gaps in independent, impartial, and accountable Ombudsman-level redress for residents, supported by straight-forward customer journeys and consistent outcomes with partners from across the sector.

Measures of success:

- providing subject matter expertise to MHCLG on the design and implementation of the PRSLO
- raising gaps in redress with partners

KPIs:

- none for 2026-27

Activities



- continue to provide MHCLG with subject matter expertise to support the design of the PRSLO

Aim 4.2: We design and implement the STAIRs appeals service for housing associations.

Measure of success:

- an effective STAIRs service from the go-live date

KPIs:

- detailed KPIs to be confirmed in advance of go-live

- go-live with STAIRs complaints related to publication schemes from 1 October 2026 and continue preparations for complaints about information sharing from 1 April 2027



Strategic enabler

Organisation design

Aims and measures of success



People

Aim E1.1: We are a learning organisation, delivering continuous improvement and innovation.

Aim E1.2: Our people processes are values and behaviours-driven, health and wellbeing are prioritised, and we are inclusive and value the benefits that diversity brings.

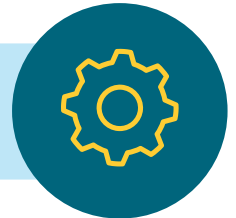
Aim E1.3: We provide colleagues with clear pathways for career and skills development.

Aim E1.4: Colleague engagement is regularly checked and actively managed in our remote organisation.

Measure of success:

- increased and/or maintained engagement score

Activities



- initiate our people and culture programme of work on the back of our new strategy, focusing on projects supporting our employee value proposition and colleague engagement



Aims and measures of success



Structures and processes

Aim E2.1: We develop our governance, organisation design, and management practices to meet the needs of a larger and more complex organisation.

Aim E2.2: We build trust in our service through ethical practices and gaining external accreditations in key areas.

Aim E2.3: We develop our approach to environmental, social, and governance and increase our reporting.

Measures of success:

- our organisation is more effective and efficient, while continuing to meet the expectations of an arm's length body
- stakeholders can trust the quality of our work and the insights this provides
- we are transparent about the impact of our organisation on the world

KPIs:

- 40% reduced cost per determination over the lifetime of the strategy from 2024-25 baseline
- reduced cost per enquiry over the lifetime of the strategy from 2024-25 baseline (target to be confirmed following completion of team restructuring)

Activities



- deliver our projects within our corporate and enterprise programme, focusing on the expected transition to a body corporate and governance activities for a larger organisation
- meet the requirements of any future legislation, for example, code of ethics or climate-related financial disclosures
- undertake a discovery exercise on alternative fee models that recognise positive complaint handling to potentially replace the per home charge
- work with MHCLG to support an earlier consultation



Aims and measures of success



Systems

Aim E3.1: We seek digital, data, and technology developments which drive efficiency, support scalability, ensure compliance, and meet customer needs.

Measure of success:

- systems and technology are efficient to use and effectively capture information

KPI:

- overall positive return on investment for all systems, data, and technology projects

Activities



- work with a digital design and delivery partner to support our technology ambitions focusing on key business systems replacement
- continue to implement the prioritised projects from our digital, data, and technology strategy and associated programme (including trials for the use of AI and automation efficiencies)



Housing Ombudsman Service

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