

Business Plan 2026-27 consultation feedback report

April 2026

**Healthier homes, fairer services, and trusting
relationships**

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Introduction

As a public service funded by subscription from our members, ultimately derived from residents' rent, the Housing Ombudsman Service must be accountable for how we use our resources.

We are responsible for demonstrating that this use of resources delivers value for money. As we are an arm's length body of the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG), we are also accountable to parliament.

It is hugely important to us that we continue to provide our members, and the residents who rely on them, with high-quality reliable services.

We know that behind every complaint that reaches us, there are real people who desperately want to resolve the issue and need our support to do so in a timely manner. Our vision of healthier homes, fairer services, and trusting relationships lies at the heart of our delivery.

This report highlights the main themes and issues emerging from the consultation on our Business Plan 2026-27.

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 in our [Corporate Strategy 2025-30](#) remain unchanged.

Our strategic objectives are below.

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.

These are supported by a strategic enabler covering people, structures and processes, and systems.

The consultation focused on whether respondents support and agree with our proposed multi-year caseload reduction strategy.

This 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

This report does not set out the detail of every response received. Instead, it summarises the feedback, which was broadly supportive of our planned actions and strategic direction.

The feedback offers constructive challenge and helpful suggestions on how we should deliver our work and measure its effectiveness. We have used this feedback to inform our final [Business Plan for 2026–27](#) and the associated operational delivery plans.

We aspire to become a truly person-centred organisation, involving our members, residents, and stakeholders in our decision making wherever possible. Their participation and feedback from this consultation is one example of how we engage and learn.

We have considered all feedback provided and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond.

Consultation process

The consultation ran from 5 to 26 March 2026 inclusive.

We promoted participation through a range of channels, including newsletters, landlord forums, Resident Panel emails, stakeholder meetings, and social media. We also shared information internally with colleagues. Overall, these activities reached an audience of over 10.3 million people.

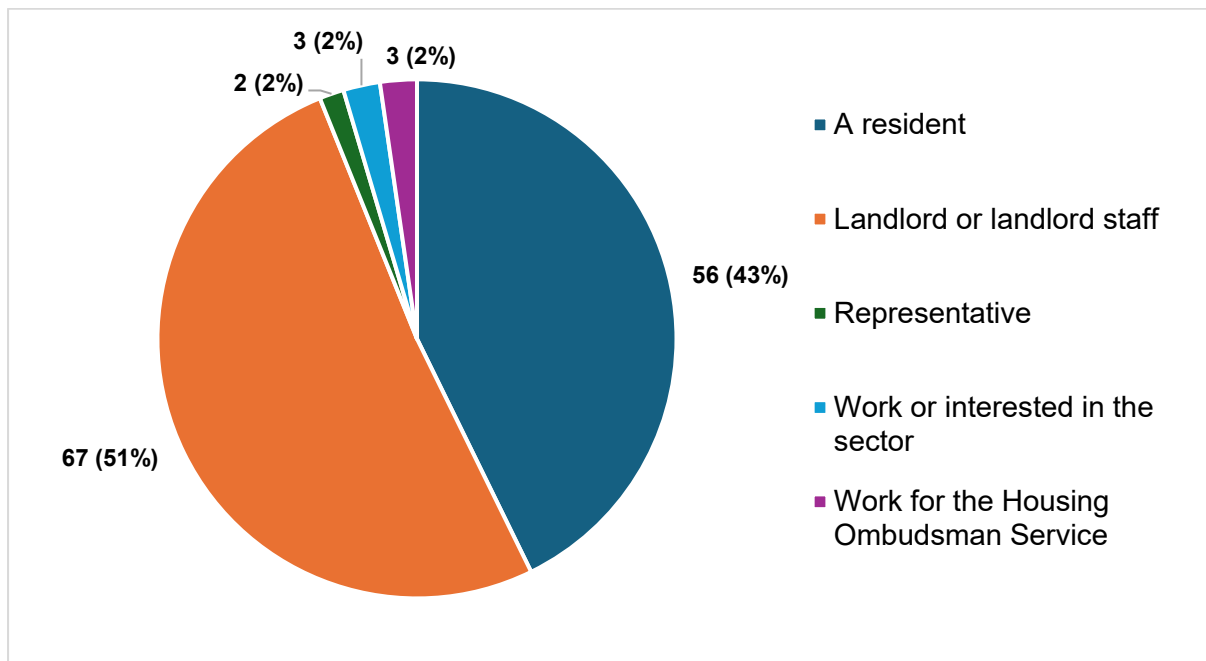
Consultees could respond through completing the online survey, by email, or post. In addition, they could ask for support in completing the survey with our phone service. Overall, 1,063 people visited the consultation online. 131 people completed the survey with an engagement rate of 12%. We would like to thank all those who responded to our consultation. The feedback received has been considered and has informed our final Business Plan.

Respondents by type

At close of consultation on 26 March 2026, we had received 106 responses. We elected to include a further 25 responses received after the closing date for the consultation in the interest of completeness. All feedback received by 7 April 2026 was incorporated. The overall number of responses (131) was slightly higher than for the Business Plan 2025-26, when 126 were received.

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

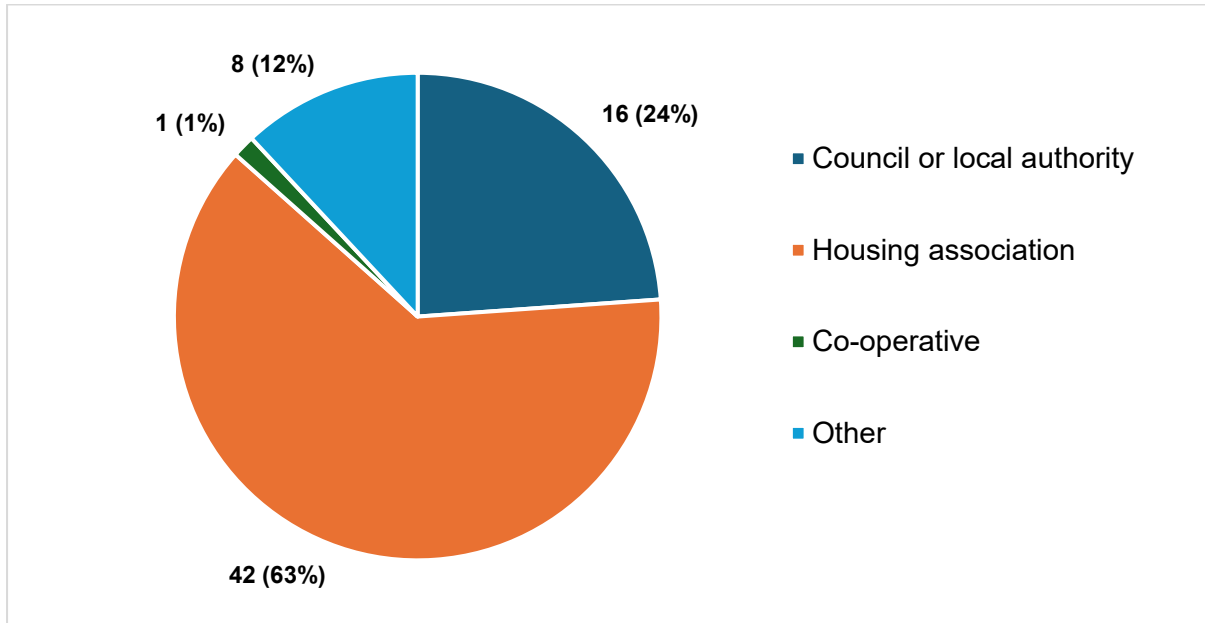
Chart 1: Respondents to consultation



As shown in chart 2 below, of the landlords who responded, 42 (62.7%) were housing associations and 16 (23.9%) were councils/local authorities.

Submissions from representative bodies include but are not limited to those from the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), and the National Housing Federation.

Chart 2: Landlord respondents to consultation



A full list of respondents is provided in the [appendix](#).

Consultations questions

Our 5 consultation questions were:

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?

Key themes

There are consistent themes in the qualitative responses across the consultation survey.

Prioritisation and strategic direction

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

Respondents agree that older cases need to be addressed sooner, as delays limit learning and damage landlord-resident relationships. At the same time, they emphasise the need to maintain high-quality redress. Landlords suggest 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.

There is 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 indicate 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 request 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.

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

Respondents suggest 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 poor repairs culture.

Respondents want to understand how priorities will translate into practical changes for residents.

This includes 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 support case triage according to safeguarding risk and vulnerability.

Reducing demand from individual landlords

There is a desire to move towards more collaborative relationships between landlords and the Housing Ombudsman Service where improvements are developed jointly to improve complaint handling and reduce demand.

Respondents noted that closer collaboration 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.

Targeted intervention with high-volume or repeat failure landlords would support continual learning and reflection. Respondents feel landlords should be closely monitored, be required to demonstrate learnings from our decisions, and be subject to effective oversight and meaningful consequences (including escalation to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) if required).

Technology and tools

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

Suggestions include a web-based self-service platform to share evidence and communicate with residents.

Respondents believe technology should be used to enforce landlord compliance at the earliest stage and that decision making should not be delegated to AI platforms.

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

A need for practical guidance to enable sector-wide consistency in complaints handling and interpretation is 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.

System-wide approaches

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

Respondents suggest 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 is 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 are concerned with introducing stricter regulations and greater landlord accountability. This indicates that there is some confusion on the role and scope of our powers and duties compared to that of RSH.

Question 1 to 5 sentiment and themes

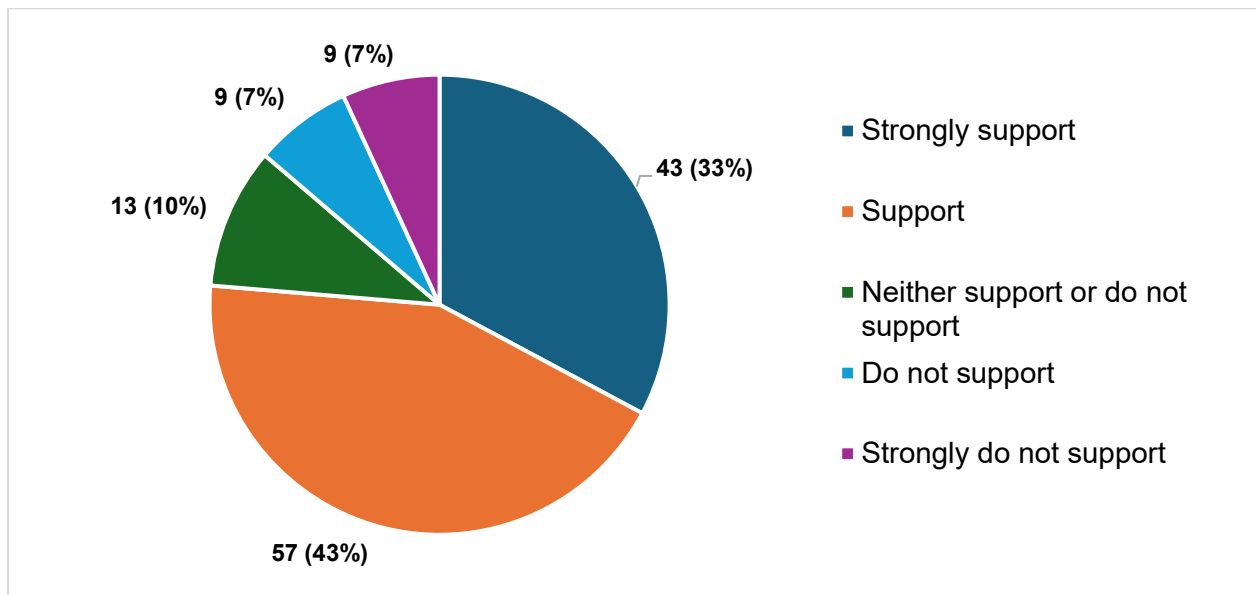
Question 1

Do you support the prioritisation of activities to deliver our Corporate Strategy?

Broad support for strategic prioritisation alongside concerns about demand and accountability

As shown in chart 3 below, the majority of respondents support the activities prioritised in the Corporate Strategy in 2025-30. 76.3% of all consultees either strongly support (32.8%) or support (43.5%) our proposals.

Chart 3: Support for the prioritisation of activities



It is recognised that demand and case complexity is increasing across the Service. In addition, respondents support ambitions to reduce the backlog, improve investigation times, and expand service capacity.

Concerns are expressed that the approach is too focused on internal efficiency and does not address root causes of demand, landlord accountability, or resident protection. There are also concerns that investigation speed may affect quality of redress (there is more information about this in [question 2](#)).

Respondents believe further efforts to reduce demand at source through strengthening landlord-led resolution and preventing unnecessary escalation to the Housing Ombudsman is needed.

In part, this requires a whole-system response but investigating why disputes remain unresolved by landlords and then are escalated to the Housing Ombudsman is seen as a key element of sustainable demand management and taking meaningful action.

“The current approach focuses primarily on speed and volume reduction. However, evidence from casework demonstrates that landlords are still able to delay redress, provide incomplete records, and selectively respond to complaints without facing meaningful consequences. This creates a system where procedural compliance can be strategically managed, rather than ensuring genuine accountability.”

Resident

“I support the strategy in principle, provided that 'prioritisation' does not lead to a 'tick-box' exercise where complex cases are rushed. The priority must be on quality of redress alongside speed. I would like to see a greater focus on ensuring landlords actually learn from mistakes to prevent the same issues from recurring, which is the most sustainable way to deliver the strategy.”

Resident

“We support the HOS’s overall aims and objectives of delivering a person-centred service, strengthening learning from complaints and improving partnership working. Furthermore, we welcome the drive to expedite complaint resolution times and reduce caseload (albeit with the caveat that this must not be to the detriment of quality of decision making). However, there are still concerns about a lack of clear, measurable outcomes linked to priorities. We feel the activities and specific interventions listed in

“The Business Plan 2026-27 fall short of the deeper change that is required for the HOS to support the sector to the extent needed.”

Landlord or landlord staff

Clarity on delivery plans and measurement of success

Many landlords say that the plan sets out a wide range of activity. However, they believe it could be clearer about what specifically will be delivered in 2026–27 and how success will be measured.

Landlords say that clearer prioritisation and sequencing of activities would improve transparency. They also indicate that more measurable commitments are needed to demonstrate the plan’s effectiveness and value for money.

Where there are KPIs, landlords express mixed views with some indicating they are too ambitious given the increased demand and complexity of cases. Others believe they are not ambitious enough.

Our response

Our Business Plan is intentionally outcome-focused, and progress will be measured against defined KPIs. We believe we have a suite of KPIs targeted on the key areas of service delivery for residents and landlords, set at challenging levels given the increase in demand we are expecting in-year. Activities are clear in the plan where possible or noted as at discovery or design stage where we do not know the outcome of this work as yet. We intend to publish performance information during 2026-27 for transparency.

“It would be helpful to clarify the sequencing of digital, data, and technology change, particularly which system replacements will yield the greatest early benefits. Please also provide clearer success measures for activities where KPIs are yet to be agreed (e.g. impact measures for learning and fairness), to ensure transparency and accountability.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“There is a risk that the proposed approach overestimates the pace at which the HOS can realistically reduce its backlog. Demand continues to grow, and current trends suggest that inflow continues to outpace resolution, resulting in a persistent backlog. Without a clearer plan to address this imbalance, there is a risk that targets will not be met and that delays will continue.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“Moreover, on reviewing the proposed KPIs, several seem somewhat unambitious, especially those focused on case resolution timescales and resident satisfaction - the proposed 5% uplift in satisfaction at the enquiry stage, bringing the target to just 68%, appears modest.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“The Housing Ombudsman’s own KPIs are for 50 per cent of cases to be determined within six months, which means that it is considered acceptable for half of cases with the Housing Ombudsman Service to take longer than six months to complete.

“It also states that no more than 15% of the open caseload should be over 12 months old by year-end. Considering the steep increase that tenants are paying for the service, they should not be waiting so long for a resolution to their complaints.”

Representative body

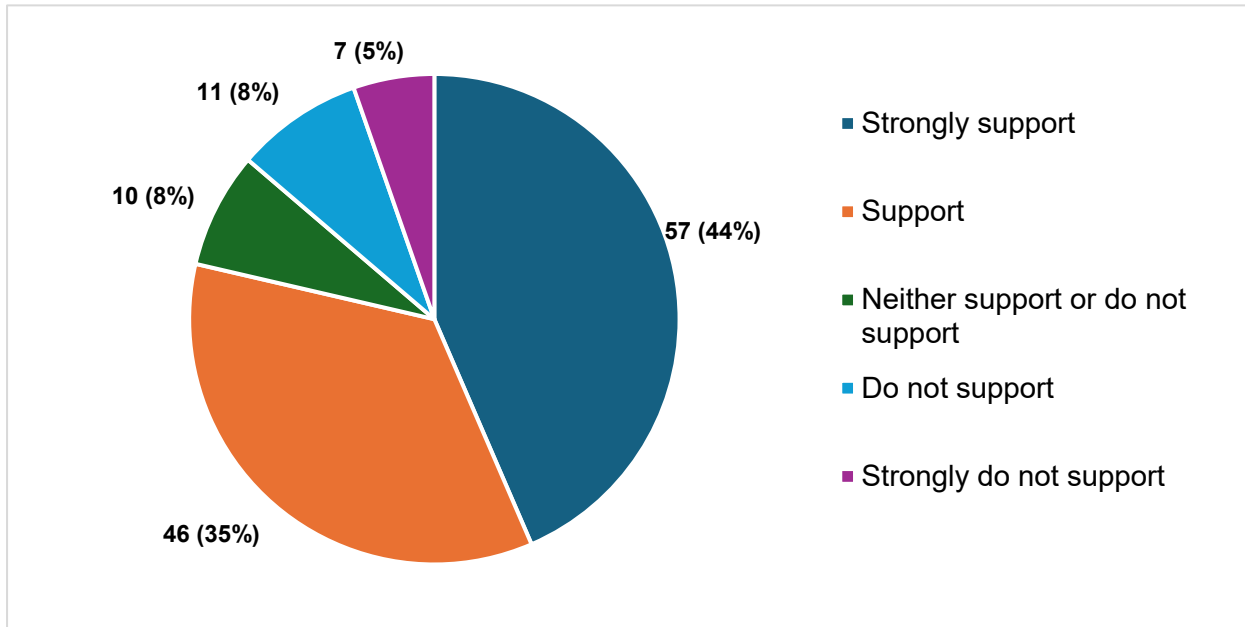
Question 2

Do you support our strategic approach to bringing down the volume and age of cases awaiting investigation?

Broad support for strategic approach however, there is a lack of clarity on how focused investigations will work in practice

The overarching sentiment towards the actions proposed for 2026-27 and our multi-year caseload reduction strategy is supportive. As shown in chart 4 below, 78.6% of all consultees either strongly support (43.5%) or support (35.1%) our proposals and Business Plan 2026-27.

Chart 4: Support for our strategic approach to bringing down the volume and age of cases awaiting investigation



In free text responses, most respondents agree that creating a more efficient service is crucial to addressing issues sooner. This would support timely learning for landlords, improve landlord-resident relationships, and deliver better outcomes for residents.

However, both landlords and residents express concerns about the use of focused investigations and that investigation speed may come at the expense of fairness and quality.

In particular, there are questions about how decisions regarding focused investigations are reached, how quality assurance is applied, and how fairness is maintained where a full investigation has not taken place.

That said, respondents recognise that well-designed, focused investigations could enable us to concentrate more time and resources on the most complex cases. These are the cases where detailed investigation and scrutiny are most needed.

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.

"I do not support this approach in its current form. While reducing the volume and age of cases is important, it must not come at the expense of quality, fairness, or proper investigation. There is a risk that focusing primarily on reducing backlog may incentivise quicker case closures rather than meaningful resolutions, particularly in complex cases involving vulnerability, safeguarding concerns, or maladministration."

Resident

"While some members support the intention behind focused investigations as a means of improving timeliness, there is a shared view that clearer safeguards and consistent application are required... To support confidence in this approach, greater clarity is needed on:

- the criteria used to determine when a focused investigation is appropriate
- how quality assurance is applied to ensure consistent and fair outcomes
- the safeguards in place for more complex or high-risk cases
- clear expectations on how landlords should engage at each stage of the process, particularly where cases have not progressed through stage 2, including roles, responsibilities, and timelines"

Landlord or landlord staff

Clarity on performance metrics and outcomes for residents

Respondents also request greater clarity on the proposed metrics to demonstrate reduction of the backlog. This includes how we will measure performance and report across time.

There is a desire for KPIs to show a demonstrable link between the budget allocated and specific improvements for residents and landlords.

In relation to this, respondents are seeking to understand how priorities will translate into practical changes for residents. This includes how vulnerable residents will be supported, how early resolution will work in practice, and how resident voice/experience will shape decision-making.

Our response

We have set a target to investigate 95% of cases within 6 months by the end of the Corporate Strategy period, and the current targets contribute to achieving this ambition. We will start reporting on performance during the year so residents and landlords can see the progress we are making.

Where appropriate, we include customer voices and/or customer satisfaction data in evaluation activities as part of our customer-first ethos.

“While we are supportive of the strategic approach, we would welcome more information on how the Housing Ombudsman will measure the reduction in the backlog of cases. This should include clarity on the metrics to be used, the reporting frequency, and how performance against those metrics will be communicated to landlords. Tied to this, we would also encourage a phased approach to reducing the backlog, rather than a concentration of activity at year end, for example.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“Reducing the backlog is essential, as long delays often cause residents significant distress. However, rather than just clearing the 'oldest' cases, I suggest a triage system based on the severity of the housing condition (e.g., damp, mould, or safety risks). If the approach relies on more 'early resolution' or mediation, it must ensure that residents don't feel pressured into accepting unfair settlements just to close the case quickly.”

Resident

“The goals don't appear to reflect the real issues that residents face; deal with each case properly and that may take longer for some... It's not clear enough what a high-risk case is; surely it's best to ensure high risk cases are dealt with effectively as opposed to quickly?”

Resident

Question 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?

Strengthening the Centre for Learning and sector guidance

Respondents praise the Centre for Learning materials and wider systemic resources, including Spotlight reports. These are described as acting as “catalysts to organisational change” and helping resolve issues before they reach the Service. Respondents welcome the continued expansion of Centre for Learning resources and indicate they will continue to promote these to their members and networks.

Several landlords note that while the existing learning offer from the Service is extensive, additional value could be gained from more practical tools and clearer signposting. A more targeted and prioritised approach to learning resources, focused on key themes, was seen as important to increase usability and impact.

Our response

Our thematic reports and recommendations promote effective dispute resolution. Learning resources currently have high sector take up and we are working to further improve the accessibility and reach of our reports and training.

Practical tools to support consistent complaint handling

Practical guidance is viewed as essential to enable sector-wide consistency in complaint handling and interpretation. Respondents indicate that this would promote a clearer and more consistent approach from both landlords and caseworkers, helping align practices across the sector and supporting more predictable and efficient complaint handling.

Landlords also express a desire for more opportunities to engage with peers to share learning and highlight variations in practice, supporting continuous improvement.

Our response

We provide a clear framework through the Complaint Handling Code which describes the procedures our members should have in place to handle complaints. We also provide targeted guidance in the areas landlords find difficult, while allowing flexibility for innovation and tailoring approaches to different sizes of landlord organisation. We host webinars through our Centre for Learning which enable complaint handlers to learn from each other.

Training and capability building in complaint handling

Both residents and landlords request further training for complaint-handling staff to build communication skills and empathy, and to promote effective dispute resolution. This includes calls for sector-wide learning resources and guidance for landlords on positive complaint culture.

Residents particularly highlight the importance of effective handling at stage 1 of the complaints process, noting that poor or impersonal first responses can escalate dissatisfaction unnecessarily and lead to avoidable escalation to the Service.

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.

“Standardised templates for responses to complaints, gathering evidence and record-keeping. Templates would improve consistency across the sector and support organisations who vary in size and maturity.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“The current learning offer is extensive but can be difficult to navigate. A more targeted and prioritised approach, with clearer signposting of key themes, would increase usability and impact.

“We would welcome tools that enable landlords to track their own engagement with the Centre of Learning and related outputs. This would support internal assurance, help target further training, and allow the Ombudsman to better evidence the impact of its learning offer.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“We recommend the following areas as opportunities to reduce sector-wide demand:

- the development of an early resolution toolkit and a standardised approach to early resolution, with practical templates and clear guidance, would support landlords in resolving issues quickly and consistently before escalation
- practical training and shared learning of best practice, including Ombudsman-led training modules and best-practice sessions focusing on themes of high demand such as damp/mould, ASB, repairs delays would help improve outcomes and reduce escalations”

Landlord or landlord staff

“More training for staff dealing with stage 1 complaints. Most should never need further escalation. Poor impersonal first responses amplify the anger and dissatisfaction of tenants.”

Resident

Joined-up approaches and clarity across the regulatory system

A significant number of responses focus on reducing demand by addressing the root causes of repeated complaints. Introducing stricter regulations and greater accountability was frequently mentioned, particularly by residents who wanted landlords to face credible and timely consequences for delays and non-compliance.

This feedback highlights some confusion about the respective roles and powers of the Housing Ombudsman and RSH.

Respondents suggest that further work is needed to clarify these roles for the public and stakeholders, supported by joined-up communications that explain clearly when escalation is appropriate and encourage resolution within landlords' complaints processes where possible.

Our response

The Housing Ombudsman Service and RSH each have different statutory powers and need to exercise these accordingly. Not all the matters raised are within our remit. We have Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) 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.

Technology, AI, and digital improvements

Respondents identify opportunities to use technology and AI to improve efficiency across the system. Suggestions include using AI to assist caseworkers in managing incoming information, identifying cases that may be out of jurisdiction, and supporting triage processes.

While AI is recognised as a potentially powerful tool to streamline case management, it is consistently emphasised that final decisions should remain subject to expert human assessment to avoid unintended bias.

Recommendations from landlords are also made to improve our portal. This includes modernising the portal by improving categorisation, increasing visibility of case workflows and high-risk markers, and enhancing self-service capabilities.

Residents also support the use of digital tools, including web-based platforms to submit evidence and communicate more directly with caseworkers. Other suggestions include the use of technology to enforce earlier landlord compliance, for example, through automated escalation triggers where responses are delayed.

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.

"It is important that the HOS is clear on how and when AI will be used (for administration and ordering material for example), and that there is reassurance for residents and landlords that the final review and decisions will be done by expert investigators, so any unintended biases are designed out of the system."

Landlord or landlord staff

"Implement AI and automation tools to handle routine inquiries and streamline case management. Develop self-service platforms for residents to access information and resolve minor issues independently."

Resident

Question 4

Are there any approaches we could explore to reduce demand from individual landlords?

Targeted collaboration to reduce demand associated with individual landlords

Landlords support a more collaborative and targeted approach to working with individual landlords, particularly those generating higher volumes of cases.

Several references to the portfolio management trial model are made, with comments from portfolio landlords indicating this proactive engagement has been successful in improving their service and reducing the number of escalations.¹

¹ Portfolio management forms part of the Service's member engagement strategy and is currently being trialled with a few of the largest landlords. It involves regular engagement with these landlords to share caseload insights and inform improvements on local complaint handling, quality of investigations and impact of remedies.

There is a strong desire for movement towards more collaborative relationships between the Housing Ombudsman Service and landlords, where improvements are driven together to improve complaint handling and reduce demand. Respondents note that closer collaboration with the sector could improve local complaint handling, and support efficiencies once cases are identified for investigation. Several references to the portfolio management trial model are made, with comments from portfolio landlords indicating this proactive engagement has been successful in improving their service and reducing the number of escalations.

Landlords perceive that this approach helps ensure tenants are not adversely affected while they await allocation or investigation by the service. Enhanced triage and early engagement with providers through a 'light touch' or 'rapid review' system is also mentioned to promote swift and effective resolution.

Other possible approaches to reduce the demand from individual landlords include:

- closer monitoring of high-volume or repeat failure landlords
- sharing early data and insights with landlords on their performance
- creating stronger requirements for landlords to demonstrate learnings from Service decisions
- employing more effective oversight and meaningful consequences (including escalation to the Regulator if required)

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 is appropriate to do so. We are evaluating a trial of the portfolio management approach and continue to produce training 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.

We review complaint handling policies for all landlords through our Duty to Monitor compliance with the [Complaint Handling Code](#). We inform and refer to RSH through an MoU when escalation is appropriate.

“Partnership approach to learning including, providing ongoing support, shared insights, quarterly engagement. Currently there is limited contact at HO making it challenging to reach an investigator for clarification/discuss a case query.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“There would be significant value in establishing more consistent named points of contact and building ongoing working relationships. Where this has been achieved on specific pieces of work, such as recent policy engagement, the interaction has felt more constructive and has supported shared understanding. Extending this approach into broader case management would bring benefits for both landlords and the Ombudsman.”

Landlord or landlord staff

“The further development of a partnership approach with social landlords can help achieve this. This could include the expansion to more landlords of the single point of contact at an organisational level at the HOS to help streamline requests for information and improve the quality of decision making in terms of consistency.”

Representative body

“A suggestion we believe could add real value is the introduction of a dedicated “business partner” role within Housing Ombudsman a named point of contact for groups of landlords or regions. This would:

- enable earlier conversations on complex or emerging cases
- help reduce delays caused by process ambiguity
- support consistent interpretation of standards
- reduce unnecessary escalation”

Landlord or landlord staff

Question 5

Do you have any other comments or observations on our 2026-27 Business Plan?

Handling and size of the fee increase

While this was not the subject of the consultation, feedback relating to the impact of the fee increase on both landlords and residents is strong and dissatisfaction is 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 the same cost per home fee 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 are from residents. These generally concern introducing higher case handling fees for high-volume landlords to incentivise early dispute resolution. Only 2 residents acknowledge that their landlords are likely to pass on the fee increase.

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 have 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.

"The Business Plan assumes a per property increase in fees from the current level of £8.08 to £10.56, which represents a 30.69% increase. This is significantly above the rate of inflation and permissible rent increases on social housing which are limited to CPI plus 1% (namely 4.8%) and will come at the expense of resources to build and maintain homes."

Representative body

"Any increase in fee levels 26 – 27 will have to be found from budgets for next year that have already been set. The increase will therefore have to be financed with monies that would otherwise be spent on core housing services or to support the delivery of new homes. The scale and timing of the proposed increase in the subscription fee from £8.03 per home to £10.56 is therefore of significant concern."

Representative body

"My landlord passes the membership fee on to leaseholders via the service charge. There is nothing in the lease allowing them to do so."

Resident

While also not the subject of consultation, there were several comments from landlords about the increasing prevalence of AI-generated complaints coming from residents. These are perceived as being time-consuming for landlords to respond to particularly when AI is quoting the wrong legislation and/or generating large volumes of irrelevant information. Landlords are seeking clear guidance and best practice from the Service on how to manage these complaints.

We will review what information we publish on our use of AI in discharging our functions this year to ensure we are transparent about this.

Appendix

From or on behalf of residents:

- we received responses from 56 individual residents

Representative bodies and other organisations:

- National Housing Federation
- West Midlands Regional Committee
- National Federation of ALMOs
- Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
- Councils with ALMOs Group

Individual landlords:

- 42 (62.7%) of housing associations
- 16 (23.9%) of councils or local authorities
- 8 (11.9%) of other
- 1 (1.5%) of co-operatives

Other respondents:

- 3 (2.3%) Housing Ombudsman Service employees
- 3 (2.3%) who work or are interested in the sector
- 2 (1.5%) representatives