

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1) The invoice states 'Units as at 31 March 2019', is this correct? Don't you mean 31 March 2020?

Answer: 31 March 2019 is the right date. We have used published data from partner organisations to work out your housing stock and the latest available data is as at 31 March 2019. If you are a voluntary member, we have used your last available return to work out your unit numbers as at 31 March 2019. If you believe this figure is incorrect, please state the total number of units eligible for subscription payment.

- 2) Why has the subscription fee increased?

Answer: The fee has been frozen since 2017-18, although we were operating at a higher cost in 2019-20 by using up excess reserves. The freeze had been applied despite high increases in case volumes. We continue to look for ways to increase productivity and efficiency, which has resulted in performance improvements. However, to deliver the service improvements that landlords and residents have called for when we have consulted them, additional resources are needed.

Our Business Plan for 2020-21 sets out a new and more efficient operating model from April 2020, which will bring improvements to the resident and landlord journey through the dispute resolution process. These include:

- supporting the resolution of more disputes at a local level by encouraging residents and landlords to successfully resolve complaints themselves
- faster determination times for cases entering our formal remit with a new triage approach based on complexity and more cases to be resolved through mediation
- setting clear timescales for the provision of evidence to us so we can make a decision
- promoting positive change in the sector by sharing insights into our casework, creating more tools for landlords to improve their complaint handling and sharing our data and decisions publicly, including individual landlord reports.

We consulted widely on the plan and received strong support for our proposals, which were agreed by the Secretary of State alongside the increased fee to fund the service improvements. The new unit rate of £2.16 will allow us to deliver the ambitious level of performance set out in the plan for the benefit of our customers.

- 3) The invoice looks different this year – what are you expecting me to fill in and why has it changed?

Answer: Rather than invoice based on our historical records and members then adjusting figures for any changes, we have updated our invoicing

process for private registered providers and local authorities to base the invoice on published data that members have already confirmed and returned to partner organisations.

For private registered providers: we have adjusted your return to the Regulator of Social Housing to remove any care home units as these are outside of our remit. We have added in any other units you have previously declared. Adjustments should only be required if there is a change in these other units.

For local authorities: we have recorded the owned units as confirmed to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and added any leased units or other units previously declared. Adjustments should only be required if there is a change in leased or other units.

- 4) I have different bank details on our system.

Answer: We changed our bank details last year. Please make payments to: The Housing Ombudsman. Sort Code: **20-67-83** Account Number: **23700178** remembering to quote your membership number on the payment reference.

- 5) What other methods of payment do you accept?

Answer: Due to the current Coronavirus lockdown we are unable to accept cheque payments. Our preferred method of receipt is by BACS. Please do not send cheques to our London office as we are unable to access our post Please contact use on membership@housing-ombudsman.org.uk If you are unable to pay electronically

- 6) I don't think I've received our invoice for this financial year

Answer: We typically issue invoices following Secretary of State approval of our subscription rate and this is by early June at the latest. We send invoices to the registered 'correspondence' address that was provided at the time of registration or to the address you have asked us to send to. Please check and contact us for a copy invoice if it is still missing after this date by emailing us at membership@housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

- 7) I am paying on behalf of someone else or someone else is paying for me. What do I need to do?

Answer: The invoice contains a tick box to cross dependent on which situation relates to you. Underneath this there is a table to complete to record who you are paying or who is paying for you.)

- 8) Can you send us a copy of the invoice via email?

Answer: This year we have decided to issue our invoices by email. We can certainly send invoices to specific individuals or departments upon request.

Please email membership@housing-ombudsman.org.uk or call 0300 111 3000

- 9) I'm trying to reach your membership team on the number provided but I haven't had a call back yet.

Answer: The membership team is exceptionally busy when both invoices and reminders are sent out. We do endeavour to respond to you as soon as possible and we work our way through contacts in date order. If you have left a message with our call centre, please be assured that your details will have been passed on to us. When contacting us, please leave an email address and phone number.

- 10) I don't understand the charges on our invoice. It says there is an 'under' or 'overpayment'.

Answer: Under payments represent shortfalls in payments for prior years. Overpayments are where we are holding a payment on account. Please call our membership team or email your query and we will be happy to look into your account and advise further.

- 11) What are the types of changes that I need to inform you about in relation to my organisation?

Answer: Typical changes that you should inform us of and can email us about include: address changes, changes to key personnel i.e. the Secretary, Chief Executive, Treasurer, etc.

- 12) My organisation has merged with another. What do I need to do?

Answer: The Regulator will inform us of the change but it is helpful if you can raise this with us in advance so we know to expect notification.

- 13) My query is not covered by the above. How can I get in contact?

Answer: Please call us on 0300 111 3000 or email us at membership@housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

- 14) I am a social landlord and my query relates to joining the Housing Ombudsman Scheme

Answer: All social landlords are mandatory members of our Scheme. As a social landlord, you will be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing. The Regulator provides us with details of its new members on a regular basis and we will contact you directly once we have been notified to complete registration with us. If, you have not heard from us within a month of registering with the Regulator, then please email us at membership@housing-ombudsman.org.uk and we will investigate the matter.

15)I would like to speak to you regarding voluntary membership

Answer: We encourage voluntary members to join our Scheme and our registration process is simple. We have some key requirements that we ask all voluntary members to have in place such as a publicised complaints process and making residents aware that they may take their complaint to the Ombudsman. Information is available on our website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords/membership/voluntary-membership along with a downloadable application form. We look at all applications on an individual basis and will help you through the registration process.