

**Housing**  
Ombudsman Service

# Business Plan 2019-20

# Introduction

The Housing Ombudsman has a twin role to resolve disputes involving members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, including making awards of compensation or other remedies when appropriate, as well as to support effective landlord-tenant dispute resolution by others. The Housing Ombudsman Service does this on behalf of the Ombudsman. We deliver the former role by undertaking the fair and impartial investigation of complaints that have completed the landlord's complaints procedure. We deliver the latter role in two ways:

- by supporting landlords and residents to resolve individual complaints themselves within the landlord's complaint procedure
- by delivering a range of wider sector development and engagement training and tools aimed at improving complaint handling and housing services.

[Our website](#) sets out our process and provides more detail.

This business plan covers year one of our three year '**Making a Difference – on individual complaints and across the sector**' strategy, set out in our [2019-22 corporate plan](#). Our corporate plan reflects the key demands of residents and landlords – faster and effective redress, hearing residents' voices and greater transparency.

The biggest challenge we face in delivering our ambitions over the next three years is the on-going rise in demand for

our service – we have seen an average 17% year on year increase in demand for formal investigations since 2013-14. That is a significant increase in the most resource-intensive part of our process. To date, we have achieved substantial service improvements but we expect that the size of our formal caseload will continue to grow and further productivity gains will not be sufficient to enable us to deliver the level of service we all desire.

To tackle this issue, our year one activities are focussed on delivering a change programme that takes a two-pronged approach: first, we will review our operating models so that when a complaint comes to us, we deal with it in the most effective and efficient way possible; and secondly, we will review our strategy for supporting landlords to improve their complaints handling so they can resolve more complaints locally and, consequently, reduce the demand on our service.

We are keeping our subscription rate at £1.25 per housing unit for 2019-20 under our previous commitment to landlords and residents. As well as the charge to landlords, this represents the annual cost to each household for access to an Ombudsman service at any point in their complaint journey.

We will carefully monitor our progress over the year to ensure that we are 'making a difference'.

# Strategic objective 1: Deliver a fair and impartial service, resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<p><b>1.1 Support greater local resolution of complaints (ie supporting the resolution of more complaints while they are within the landlord's complaints procedure)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Landlords and residents are supported to resolve more complaints within landlords' procedures</b></li> <li>• <b>Earlier mediated redress within our formal remit</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and agree our local resolution operating model to effectively manage demand</li> <li>• Temporarily increase the number of caseworkers supporting the local resolution of complaints while we determine our target operating model</li> <li>• Begin to mediate suitable cases prior to completion of the democratic filter stage</li> <li>• Discuss additional powers with MHCLG to improve complaint handling and redress</li> </ul>	<p><u>KPI</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80% of complaints closed without a formal investigation</li> </ul> <p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised operating model developed and agreed</li> <li>• Scheme under discussion with MHCLG</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.2 Enable faster access to redress once a complaint enters our formal remit for investigation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Faster complaint investigations within our formal remit</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and agree our formal resolution operating model to effectively manage demand</li> <li>• Begin to request evidence as soon as the landlord's complaints procedure is completed (rather than waiting for completion of the democratic filter stage)</li> </ul>	<p><u>KPIs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average determination time for cases in our formal remit is less than 6 months</li> <li>• 99% of cases determined within 12 months</li> <li>• 95% of orders implemented within 3 months</li> </ul>

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit a flexible pool of staff to provide support as needed</li> <li>• Discuss additional powers with MHCLG to improve complaint handling and redress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 99% of orders implemented within 6 months</li> </ul> <p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised operating model developed and agreed</li> <li>• Scheme under discussion with MHCLG</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.3 Improve the quality and consistency of our service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our work remains fair and impartial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review our quality standards to ensure our work remains fair and impartial</li> <li>• Continue to regularly quality assure a sample of our work at all stages and act on findings</li> <li>• Update our casework system to better analyse our work, including on orders and recommendations</li> <li>• Develop a casework library to capture and share practice more effectively</li> </ul>	<p><u>KPIs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained customer feedback scores for Did we help? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 65% at local resolution</li> <li>○ 65% at formal resolution</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated quality standards published on our website</li> <li>• Casework library is set up</li> </ul>

## Strategic objective 2: Promote positive change in the sector

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<p><b>2.1 Continue to work directly with landlords and residents to improve complaint handling through a range of sector development and engagement activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise the profile of our work in the sector</li> <li>• Directly support improvements to the speed and effectiveness of landlord redress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and agree a new strategy for sector development and engagement</li> <li>• Continue to work in partnership with others to raise awareness of our service</li> <li>• Increase awareness of complaints handling issues amongst landlord senior management and boards (eg send determinations to Chief Executives, advise where Scheme requirements not met, advise where compliance is slow)</li> <li>• Trial bespoke development programmes with a small selection of landlords to improve their complaints handling linking with local resolution work</li> </ul>	<u>Deliverables</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy developed and agreed</li> <li>• Impact KPIs devised based on strategy and trial</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.2 Use our knowledge to improve housing services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support improvements to housing services across the sector</li> <li>• Complaint handling standard developed, promoted and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and agree a strategy for sector development and engagement</li> <li>• Raise awareness of, and add to, our suite of online tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ template letters and other guidance for landlords</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>KPIs</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of two template letters, two pieces of guidance, one e-learning video, podcasts or other tool, and one thematic report</li> <li>• Increased website usage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10% increase in page views</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<p><b>accepted as best practice across the sector</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ case studies</li> <li>○ e-learning, videos, podcasts, webinars, videos and other tools</li> <li>● Produce one thematic report</li> <li>● Develop a knowledge and information management strategy to capture and share insight effectively and inform future work</li> <li>● Discuss additional powers with MHCLG to support improved complaint handling</li> <li>● Develop a best practice complaint handling procedure in partnership with residents, landlords, the Regulator of Social Housing and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Align with other sector standards developed as part of MHCLG's Redress Reform Working Group</li> </ul>	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strategy developed and agreed</li> <li>● Impact KPIs devised based on strategy and trial</li> <li>● Knowledge and information strategy developed and agreed</li> <li>● Scheme under discussion with MHCLG</li> <li>● Best practice complaint handling procedure developed</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.3 Influence the sector and shape the landscape</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Influence debates to achieve the best redress outcomes for residents and landlords</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Seek platforms to shape the debate on the future of redress in the housing sector, e.g. responding to consultations, speaking at conferences, seeking more media coverage</li> </ul>	<p><u>KPIs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Secure conference platforms at two targeted events</li> <li>● Two interviews/articles in housing press</li> </ul>

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<p><b>2.4 Work effectively with the Regulator of Social Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate data is shared to support effective regulation and dispute resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the communications and stakeholder engagement strategy</li> <li>• Continue to engage with individual landlords and representative groups</li> <li>• Work with others (e.g. CIH, NHF, LGA, LGSCO) to raise cross-sector issues and share learning</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate data and insight is shared between the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman Service</li> </ul>	<p><u>Deliverable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular bi-lateral meetings held with the Regulator</li> </ul>

## Strategic objective 3: Provide a service that is professional, accessible and simple to use

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<b>3.1 Increase access to, and the availability of, our service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased accessibility for residents and landlords</li><li>• Increase awareness of our service amongst residents and landlords</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deploy video content and enhanced signposting for housing complaints</li><li>• Trial an extension to our service hours alongside webchat</li><li>• Engage in the Redress Reform Working Group to raise awareness of the Housing Complaints Resolution Service</li><li>• Continue to analyse demographic and geographic complaint data and take appropriate steps to address disparities</li><li>• Discuss Scheme changes with MHCLG to strengthen accessibility requirements, aligning with Redress Reform Working Group proposals</li><li>• Raise inaccessible complaints procedures with landlords</li></ul>	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outcomes of webchat and extended hours trials evaluated</li><li>• Scheme under discussion with MHCLG</li></ul>
<b>3.2 Improve signposting to our service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cross-referral arrangements with other Ombudsman schemes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss cross-referral arrangements with other Ombudsmen to enable immediate transfer and 'no wrong door' approach as part of the Redress Reform Working Group</li></ul>	<p><u>Deliverable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participation in the Redress Reform Working Group</li></ul>

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>support a ‘no wrong door’ approach for residents</b></li> <li>• <b>Improved sign-posting to our service/the Housing Complaints Resolution Service by advice and support agencies, and designated persons for residents</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to work with advice and support agencies, DPs and others to improve signposting to our service/ Housing Complaints Resolution Service</li> </ul>	
<p><b>3.3 Improve our customer journey, customer care and communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We deliver a high-quality service to residents and landlords, guided by their feedback</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a customer panel to provide insight into the customer journey</li> <li>• Customer journey mapping to inform the local resolution and formal resolution process reviews</li> <li>• Continue to act upon customer feedback and complaints data to improve our service</li> <li>• Review our customer communications to ensure consistency and clarity</li> </ul>	<u>KPIs</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained customer feedback scores for Did we treat you well? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 80% at local resolution</li> <li>○ 80% at formal resolution</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>3.4 Invest in the learning and development of all colleagues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>We recruit and retain sufficient colleagues to deliver our service effectively and efficiently</b></li> <li>• <b>Our colleagues are appropriately skilled</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan recruitment activity to support achievement of full permanent headcount</li> <li>• Develop succession plans</li> <li>• Continue to invest in our systems</li> <li>• L&amp;D plan to give all colleagues core skills to perform their role, including new areas of complaint</li> </ul>	<u>KPI</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained colleague engagement score</li> </ul>

# Strategic objective 4: Ensure our service is open and transparent

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<p><b>4.1 Publish the Ombudsman's decisions, individual landlord's complaints data and our policies, procedures and guidance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Publication of the Ombudsman's decisions increases transparency about the outcomes our service can deliver</b></li> <li><b>Data on landlord complaint handling helps residents to hold their landlord to account</b></li> <li><b>Our approach to delivering our service is transparent and increases our accountability to stakeholders</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparatory work for the publication of decisions including system changes</li> <li>Prepare systems for publication of individual landlord performance data</li> <li>Publish our policies, procedures and guidance as these come up for review</li> </ul>	<u>Deliverables</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>System changes made to support future publication of decisions</li> <li>System changes made to support future publication of data</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.2 Appoint an independent reviewer of complaints against our service and publish their findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>We are transparent about areas where we need to improve and we learn from outcomes</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>Note: no year one activities (appointment to take place in year two)</i></p>	
<p><b>4.3 Benchmark our performance against relevant best practice</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benchmark our service against Ombudsman Association best</li> </ul>	<u>KPI</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report the results of benchmarking</li> </ul>

Strategic priorities and outcomes	Year one activities	Measures of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We can demonstrate where our service meets best practice and actions we are taking where we need to improve</li> </ul>	<p>practice and take action to address areas for improvement</p>	