

Corporate Plan 2022-25

**Using our values to deliver an
independent, visible and proactive
Ombudsman**

Foreword

Welcome to our new three-year corporate plan, setting out our strategy for the period 2022-25. We consulted widely on our plan, receiving very strong support and valuable input from landlords, residents and all key representative bodies as well as from our own staff and our Panel of Advisors. The consultation response is available on our [website](#).

This corporate plan comes at a period of significant change for the social housing sector and the Housing Ombudsman. This is reflected in the surge of casework both landlords and we are experiencing, which is unprecedented in our 25-year history as a service and has risen even further since our consultation.

The reasons for this are related to the Social Housing White Paper - increased resident awareness of their right to complain and faster resolution of complaints by landlords in line with our Code - and extend beyond a repairs backlog because of Covid-19. Future policy changes to improve access to complaints and the impact of building safety are likely to sustain higher volumes of casework. The increase also reinforces the changing role and importance of complaint handling itself, which should be an absolutely integral part of a healthy resident-landlord relationship and service development.

So, this plan aims to do two things. It seeks to respond to the increase in complaints that landlords are experiencing which are subsequently flowing through to us; and it sets out ways we will work across the sector to strengthen complaint handling at a local level, sharing learning to improve services and potentially prevent complaints.

At the heart of this plan is our casework and investigations. An Ombudsman's investigation can have profound impact, both putting something right for the resident if it has gone wrong and encouraging organisational learning by the landlord to improve services and prevent future failure. Our plans over the next three years prioritise delivering high-quality, timely and inquisitorial Ombudsman decisions.

We set some ambitious goals for the next three years, reflecting how our role has changed significantly and rapidly since we adopted our revised Scheme last year. It is built around our four values – fairness, learning, openness and excellence. These values express the essence of our work as an independent Ombudsman, promoting fairness, accountability and transparency.

Our previous corporate plan focused on improving our efficiency and internal processes and we will continue to seek further improvements throughout this plan, for example, through digitisation. But the scope of this plan reaches beyond this. This includes plans to achieve earlier, local resolution of complaints in line with our Complaint Handling Code and investigate systemic issues and promote learning from complaints.

Having adequate resources is also integral to our independence as an Ombudsman and ability to fulfil our duties. This plan therefore proposes a revised cap of £5.30 to our subscription rate for the three-year period, and we will advise the fee needed to

deliver our planned work and targets in our annual business plan consultations. If demand increases are less than forecast, these will flow through to reduce the proposed fee.

This period of change will continue with the implementation of the Social Housing White Paper, and government is also considering redress in the wider housing market, particularly the private rented sector. We will work with government to inform the development of policy, particularly with regard to our powers.

We believe social housing is a unique sector deserving an independent, proactive and visible Ombudsman to support it. We believe this values-driven plan delivers that.

Richard Blakeway
Housing Ombudsman

Who we are and what we do

Our role

The Housing Ombudsman makes the final decision on disputes between residents and member landlords. Our decisions are independent, impartial and fair.

We also support effective landlord-tenant dispute resolution by others, including landlords themselves, and promote positive change in the housing sector.



Our service is free to the 4.7 million households eligible to use it.

Our role is set out in the Housing Act 1996 and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme approved by the Secretary of State.

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.

Membership as at 31 March 2021

	2,316 member landlords		4.7m households
1,916 housing associations	329 local authorities	71 voluntary members	
3m households	1.6m households	30k households	

The Scheme is funded by subscriptions from members and is paid on a per housing unit basis.

Our vision, values and process




Our vision

Improving residents' lives and landlords' services through housing complaints

Our values

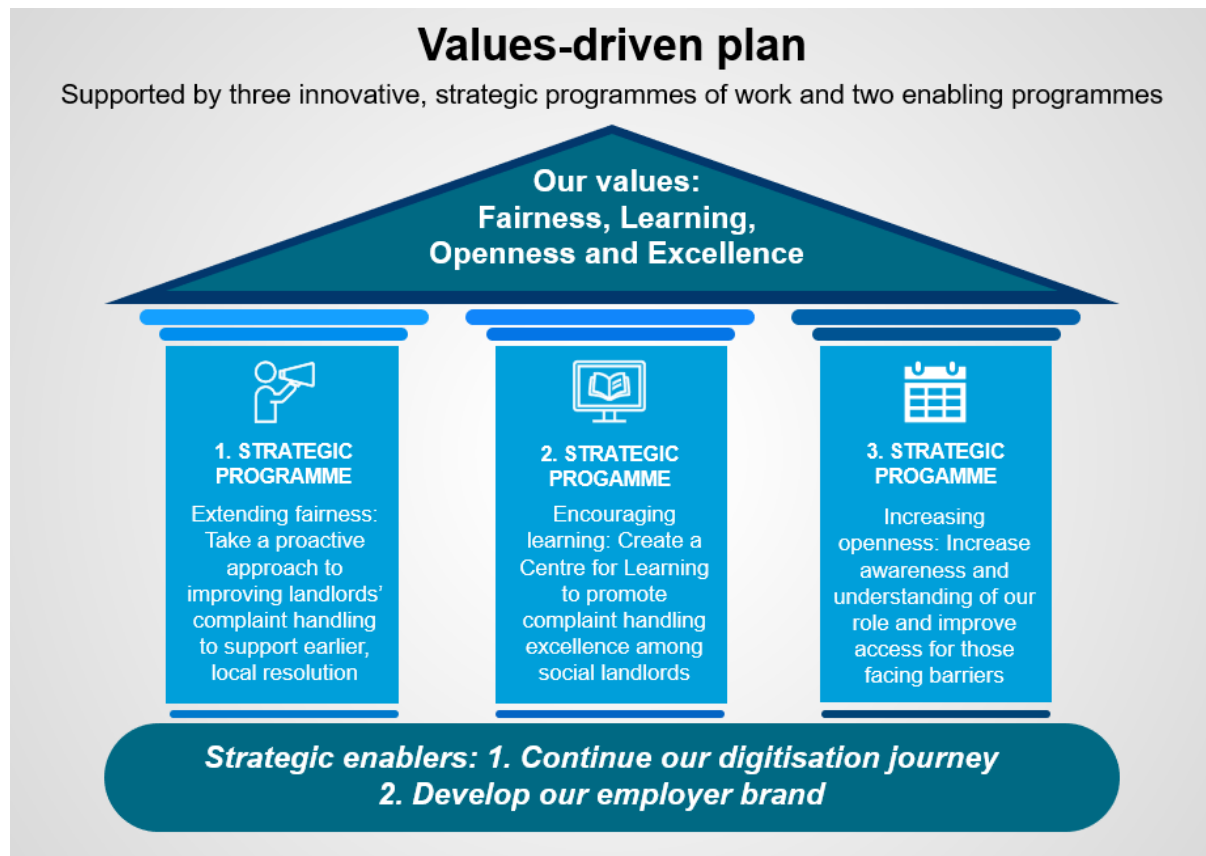
<p>▶ Fairness:</p> <p>We are independent and impartial; we take time to listen carefully and to understand the evidence</p>	<p>▶ Learning:</p> <p>We share knowledge and insights to maximise our impact and improve services</p>	<p>▶ Openness:</p> <p>We are accessible and accountable; we publish information on our performance and decisions</p>	<p>▶ Excellence:</p> <p>We work together to provide an efficient, high-quality service</p>
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Our process

	Dispute support	We support the resolution of complaints while they are within the landlord's complaints process
	Dispute resolution	We make the final decision on complaints that remain unresolved through independent, impartial and fair investigation
	Sharing learning	We use our knowledge and insight to improve housing services by sharing learning across the sector

Overview

Within our values-driven plan for this three-year period are three innovative, strategic programmes of work that will see us offer more to improve residents' lives and landlords' services, and two enabling programmes that will allow us to be efficient, effective and to continuously improve. We will deliver these alongside our core dispute support and resolution work or through redirecting business support activities.



The first innovative programme is to position our dispute support function more strategically by building on the Complaint Handling Code. This will use intelligence from Complaint Handling Failure Orders and information from other sources to identify and support landlords to improve their complaint handling, extending fairness for the benefit of all residents. This will also include promoting earlier, local resolution of complaints through an enhanced enquiries service to provide more advice up-front, backed up with more tools to help residents make or progress their complaint to prevent issues from becoming entrenched. We will continue to support individual cases where we consider there is a need.

Our second programme is to build a 'Centre for Learning' to encourage learning in complaint handling and service delivery amongst social landlords by using insight from our casework, data and intelligence. This will create a platform to share best practice, provide e-learning and facilitate peer-to-peer support across our diverse membership.

The third innovative programme is to increase openness through awareness raising activities so greater numbers of residents access our service. A key part of this programme will be to promote a full understanding of the Ombudsman's role. We will also seek new and innovative ways for our message to reach all residents and seek to improve the accessibility of all complaints procedures.

The first of our two enabling programmes to help us achieve excellence is to develop our employer brand so that we attract and retain the best staff. It will also invest in colleagues' skills development so we continue to provide a high quality service that continuously improves. Under this enabling programme, we will also develop our approach to corporate social responsibility and enhance our work on diversity and inclusion.

Our second strategic enabler is to continue our digitisation journey. This will include providing an online complaint handling channel with real time updates on complaints for landlords and residents who want to interact with our service in this way, but will not be at the expense of other routes into the service. Alongside improvements to our back-office systems, this enabling programme will allow us to improve our efficiency.

Strategic Objective 1: Extending fairness

The Housing Ombudsman is an advocate for fairness rather than an advocate for residents or landlords. The principle of fairness is the basis of all of our work. Our work and investigations should operate at an organisational level for landlords, either to improve complaint handling or to prevent the substantive failure being repeated. Over this corporate plan we will look to extend the reach of the fair outcomes our work delivers by elevating our interventions so they can benefit all residents and landlords, not just those who have brought a complaint to us. We will do this through our three operational pillars of: dispute support; dispute resolution; and systemic learning. This approach will help landlords manage increases in complaints by supporting local resolution and addressing factors which may be driving higher volumes.

We will also seek to deepen and broaden access to fairness for all residents. First, we will gather evidence to support the review of our powers set out in the Social Housing White Paper. And second, we will look to expand our voluntary membership in a steady and sustainable way to provide redress where there may be gaps, particularly in the private rental market.

Through a strategic, intelligence-led approach to dispute support

Formal Ombudsman investigations are a powerful part of our work. However, we will support local resolution before a formal investigation where possible. We achieve this through our work at dispute support, a unique part of our remit as an Ombudsman. Here we empower landlords and residents to resolve their disputes while the complaint is within the landlord's process. This is critical given the higher volumes of complaints landlords are experiencing and the potential for this increase to be sustained.

It is an important principle that landlords are given the opportunity to respond to a complaint before we investigate so whilst we do not investigate or offer remedies at this stage, we do offer advice to residents who are unaware or unsure about the complaints procedure. And if there is evidence that the landlord is not progressing a complaint we intervene to ensure they do, using our powers under the Complaint Handling Code.

This work has traditionally operated at individual complaint level but the introduction of the Code enables a shift to more strategic interventions, using intelligence from Complaint Handling Failure Orders, alongside other quantitative and qualitative information to identify landlords where complaint handling could be improved. We will then work with these landlords using jointly agreed, time-limited action plans to support complaint handling performance improvements for the benefit of all residents, thus ensuring our resources have the most impact. This should help to reduce the demand for formal investigations into unresolved disputes with landlords and provide valuable insight for our wider learning activities across the sector.

We have experienced significantly increased demand for our work in dispute support since January 2021 and we expect this to continue to grow throughout the period of

this corporate plan. In response, we want to deliver an enhanced enquiries service as this is the first point of contact by residents with our service. This will support earlier resolution by providing more advice and guidance for residents up-front and empower them further through a range of self-service tools to support them through making and progressing a complaint with their landlord. This approach will help to prevent issues becoming entrenched and strengthen resident and landlord relationships. We will also continue to provide direct assistance where it is needed, including with the most vulnerable residents.

We also recognise there are benefits to all residents in being able to access independent advice whilst their landlord is considering their complaint. Our dispute support service focuses on improving accessibility and responsiveness in landlord complaint handling; it is important we remain impartial on the substantive issues that have led to complaints as we may ultimately investigate these. There are many excellent advice services available but their resources are often stretched, so we will explore how we could support an increase in the provision of advice and advocacy by others through partnering with other organisations and resident-to-resident support whilst complaints are still within the landlord's process.

Together, this work forms one of our major, innovative programmes for our 2022-25 corporate plan.

Through strengthening the framework for Ombudsman's investigations

Our powers are greatest when we formally investigate an unresolved complaint. Each year the Ombudsman makes thousands of decisions with orders and recommendations to put something right for an individual and promote organisational learning. These decisions also promote sector learning and raise the awareness of complaints.

At the heart of this corporate plan is delivering fair, impartial and timely decisions that achieve our high-quality standards. These decisions are an essential part of the other activities we undertake as an Ombudsman from investigating systemic issues to promoting learning.

It is important to understand our approach to determining complaints. When we investigate a formal complaint, we determine what was 'fair in all the circumstances' using an inquisitorial approach. This means we are not limited to the issue(s) raised by the resident in their complaint, nor the evidence they have submitted. This approach also recognises and addresses the inherent power imbalance between residents and landlords and can rebuild or strengthen that relationship, unlike an adversarial legal process. This also means our decisions are not bound by precedent, but we will consider policy, guidance, legislation, regulation and accepted good practice to determine whether there has been maladministration by a landlord.

Consequently, our findings may have organisational significance; if a landlord has a positive complaint handling culture it will consider the lessons learned from our investigations and see if these could be applied more widely for the benefit of all residents, for example, by reviewing a policy, improving a system, or training staff. This proactive approach by landlords extends fairness to all residents and helps to

strengthen their landlord-resident relationships. Increasingly our investigations are identifying ways in which landlords could improve their approach to prevent potentially recurring issues.

Over this corporate plan, we will strengthen our inquisitorial approach to ensure our investigations have a wider impact for the benefit of all residents – encouraging all landlords towards a more positive complaint handling culture. We will do this by reviewing our approach to orders, recommendations and compliance to ensure organisational learning from outcomes is achieved, and our remedies to ensure they fully account for the severity of detriment where we find maladministration. We will also consider the impact of changes to government policy (such as the review of the Decent Homes standard) and consumer regulatory standards to inform our decision-making.

We also want to expand the routes to resolution we offer. The longevity of the landlord-resident relationship in the social housing sector is unique. When something goes wrong and trust breaks down, it can be very difficult to restore and lead to much negative emotion on both sides. We believe one way of addressing this is through targeted mediation, aimed at cases where the relationship has been damaged and working to restore this for the benefit of both sides. This will be an enhancement to our existing offer and we will trial this on anti-social behaviour cases or those where a number of parties beyond the resident and landlord need to be involved to resolve a complaint. Mediation is a voluntary approach for both the resident and landlord and we undertake full investigations where our assessment indicates that is required. We will also look at other forms of alternative dispute resolution which do not require full mediation, and whether we should refer complaints back to landlords more frequently where this should resolve the complaint and improve their complaint handling to the benefit of all residents.

Finally, to provide overarching assurance and confidence to us, to landlords and to residents on the quality of our inquisitorial approach as we enhance our framework for Ombudsman investigations and extend fairness to all, we will also introduce a 'third line of defence' Quality Board, which will include independent, external representatives. And given the breadth and depth of casework, we will develop our casework liaison with higher volume landlords, a more formal approach to caseworker specialisms and introduce a highly complex casework category.

Through enhanced thematic insights

Complaints are a window into the performance, service and culture of an organisation. A pattern from our casework may indicate an issue for an individual landlord or a collective challenge for the social housing sector; our work here helps to identify root causes and to promote learning. This means fairness derived from individual complaints is extended sector-wide and to the benefit of all residents.

During this corporate plan, we will continue to work in line with our systemic framework, enhancing the extension of fairness by producing a strategic series of thematic spotlight reports that build into an overall picture on the quality of residents' homes and experience of living in social housing. Evidence for these investigations

will be supplemented by wider intelligence to better understand root-causes with the reports focussing on the transparency, accountability and fairness of landlords' policies and approach to put the resident experience at the heart of our work. Recommendations will cover both complaints management and service improvements and each report will be accompanied by a learning package to maximise engagement in the findings and adoption of the recommendations.

We will also revisit thematic report recommendations periodically to see how the sector is progressing and what remains to be done. And we will develop a range of shorter, more responsive publications to address emerging issues in an agile way. This work will be published throughout the year between in-depth reports.

Whilst the issues we report on may not be sufficient for regulatory intervention or confined to regulatory standards, we will continue to work with the Regulator of Social Housing and the proposed Building Safety Regulator to share insight and, where appropriate, refer cases.

Through supporting the review into extending our powers

The Social Housing White Paper committed to keeping our powers under review and considering ways to strengthen them, for example, by putting our Complaint Handling Code on a statutory footing. While many landlords do follow our recommendations, advice and guidance, having more weight behind these would ensure fairness is extended to more residents.

As well as exploring mandatory compliance with our Code, we will build an evidence base to understand if increased powers over awareness raising and accessibility to the Ombudsman, as well as putting remedies from systemic investigations into individual landlords on the same footing as those from complaints, would be beneficial.

Through our growing our membership and closing gaps in redress

Since our service was established under the Housing Act 1996, the boundaries between social and private rented provision have become blurred, interconnected and complex. As a result, there are long-standing concerns over the ability of all residents to access housing redress and the confusion caused in finding the right route. This affects our service with around 25 per cent of enquiries being signposted elsewhere and 10 per cent of our investigations being wholly outside of our jurisdiction each year.

In early engagement on this draft corporate plan, there was a clear and consistent message from landlords and our Resident Panel that our service has a positive role to play in improving the experience and housing conditions of private tenants and other residents. We agree and firmly believe fairness should be extended to more residents so they can benefit from the better redress outcomes that an Ombudsman provides.

An area where we can do this without the need for policy or legislation is by increasing the number of voluntary landlords who join our scheme. There are already around 70 voluntary members of our Scheme, representing around 30,000 homes,

with provision ranging from purpose-built private rent to housing for residents with care needs. Being a voluntary member is a positive statement about the quality and fairness of redress offered to the landlord’s tenants. We will revise our voluntary member strategy and look to grow this part of our service in a steady and sustainable way, targeting landlords who are most similar in culture to our mandatory members and who operate at scale first.

We also welcome the Government’s work to review redress in the wider housing market, including a White Paper on the private rented sector, and during this corporate plan we want to work with government on our jurisdiction to help close gaps in redress and improve the customer journey. As government policy develops, we will consider our role in more depth through future business plan consultations and consider the impact on our Scheme.

The New Homes Ombudsman is one such move which will close gaps in redress for recent purchasers of new homes where access to redress through an existing redress provider is not available. For our member landlords, this means the Housing Ombudsman can consider complaints from residents of social landlords, including shared owners and leaseholders. We will work with the New Homes Ombudsman on a memorandum of understanding which will be a requirement of the legislation. We will also consider complaints which may relate to building safety and work closely with the Building Safety Regulator as it comes into effect.

For strategic objective 1: extending fairness, the priorities and outcomes that we wish to achieve over this corporate plan are summarised in the table:

Strategic priorities	Outcomes achieved
1.1. Strategic, intelligence-led approach to dispute support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted landlord support to improve complaint handling for all residents • Residents and landlords are empowered to resolve complaints earlier and locally
1.2. Strengthening the framework for the Ombudsman investigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate, findings from individual cases benefit all residents • Restoring the landlord-resident relationship through appropriate redress • Remedies, orders and recommendations have impact on landlord services • Our inquisitorial approach is enhanced through specialisms • Quality Board with external members provides assurance over our approach

<p>1.3. Enhanced thematic insights and systemic investigations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Spotlight reports build a picture of the quality of residents' homes • We undertake systemic investigations where we identify serious or repeated complaint handling failure • We are responsive to other issues or themes as they arise
<p>1.4. Supporting the review into extending our powers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a picture of where increased powers would benefit residents
<p>1.5. Growing our membership and closing gaps in redress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic expansion of voluntary members • Informing government policy to reduce housing redress complexity and close gaps for residents

Strategic Objective 2: Encouraging learning

Encouraging learning from complaints is an essential function for any Ombudsman. In a sector where residents have limited choice over their landlord, learning from events where something has gone wrong and providing effective complaints handling is essential to preserve both parties' ongoing relationship. It is also an effective way to prevent complaints escalating, as is increasingly the case at present.

A positive complaint handling culture in member landlords is an essential bedrock and that is why we want to develop our learning resources and embed our Code with landlords. Although compliance with our individual decisions is high and we have significantly increased the volume of learning tools provided over the current corporate plan period, there is much more we can do. This is area of our work that many landlords have asked us to expand.

We intend to reshape our sector development and engagement offer to maximise its learning impact, ensuring it reaches as many members as possible. This approach will add value to all landlords and residents, regardless of whether we have dealt with a complaint during the year. It will be tailored for different landlord types, sizes and locations. Everyone working for a landlord should feel able to contribute to a positive complaint handling culture so our work will engage people performing different roles, whether board members or front-line operatives. We will also extend our engagement with residents in our learning work, so they can see the difference complaints can make and consider whether their landlord is demonstrating learning from complaints.

Through a Centre for Learning

Our first initiative is to build on the positive impact of our Complaint Handling Code to create a facility that champions learning from complaints handling amongst social landlords. This will be called the 'Centre for Learning' and is another of our key strategic programmes. This improved and integrated offer will bring our casework, publications and sector development tools into a single portal. It will also provide us with valuable feedback and intelligence which will inform our work at Dispute Support and our thematic Spotlight reports.

The Centre for Learning content will take a variety of formats, differentiate the audience and be subject to periodic review to ensure it remains relevant. This approach will align with the periods during the year when landlords are more likely to experience increases in particular categories of complaint, for example, heating in winter and service charges in the spring. Webinars will cover a wide range of topics together with a regular series of podcasts. We will develop forums based on region and landlord type and consider annual events. We will review our e-learning offer and develop differentiated complaints handling modules for landlord staff dependent on their role, alongside guidance covering a range of topical issues. We will also provide a platform for landlords to share ideas and learn from each other, as well as seek to partner with existing networks and membership bodies to maximise accessibility to our learning. There will be a strong focus on promoting our casebook which, over the lifetime of this corporate plan, will expand to thousands of cases.

We will also increase our work with councillors and governing bodies as these groups are best able to influence organisational culture, to push it towards a positive approach to complaints by providing opportunities to ensure learning is applied across the landlord from our decisions and our wider work. To help councillors and members of governing bodies in this endeavour we will produce a range of tools to support them.

We know from our Resident Panel and wider engagement that residents want to see that complaints are making a difference and are interested in our learning work. We will also engage residents in our learning work, as we have done with recent Spotlight reports, and residents can consider their landlords approach to the service provision.

We will actively promote the Centre for Learning to drive engagement. It will provide us with feedback on what landlords find useful and inform our wider thematic work.

Driving a positive complaints culture

Our second area of focus will be to drive a positive complaints culture within social housing by embedding our Code’s status as the standard for handling complaints and reporting on landlord performance against the Code. We will produce an annual review into complaints handling across social housing. This would provide learning and insight for all members into the common reasons for maladministration during the year, highlight any good practice, identify where complaints handling could be improved and outline what we foresee as the coming challenges. Annual surveys will incorporate landlord views and the resident voice will come through our Resident Panel.

We will also identify issues we are not seeing in our complaints, despite indicators suggesting there are issues, and any resident demographic which is not reaching us together with good practice or concerns arising from our examination of landlord self-assessments. Each year, this will be accompanied by the publication of our landlord performance reports and, altogether, will provide an opportunity particularly for governing bodies to consider their organisation’s overall complaint handling performance and learn how it could be improved.

For strategic objective 2: encouraging learning, the priorities and outcomes that we wish to achieve over this corporate plan are summarised in the table:

Strategic priorities	Outcomes achieved
2.1. Establish a Centre for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the sector’s complaint handling through an integrated offer, differentiated by role and landlord type
2.2. Driving a positive complaints culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landlords and residents can understand each member’s performance based on the complaints we have investigated

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Landlord governing bodies are better able to hold their organisation to account for its complaints handling• Landlords are aware of current and future complaints handling challenges• Landlords have insight into groups or complaint types that may face barriers in accessing or progressing complaints through their procedure
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Strategic Objective 3: Increasing openness

Our service has never been more open and transparent. During our current corporate plan, we have published the Ombudsman's decisions, annual landlord performance reports and our policies and guidance. Being open promotes accountability, learning and, above all, awareness of the difference complaints can make.

The increased demand for our service suggests there is increased awareness, but a challenge that remains is ensuring that all residents share this awareness, understand the benefits alternative dispute resolution can bring and are willing to access us when they have an issue. It is also important residents are able to access the complaints process instead of considering more costly and adversarial alternatives, such as the courts. Work in this area is another of our key strategic programmes that will take place throughout this corporate plan and will be supported through collaboration with partners.

Another area that will promote openness is the proposal, outlined in the Social Housing White Paper, for an Access to Information Scheme. This will allow housing association tenants to request information on housing management from their landlord. We will act as the appeals service for this Scheme and development of this will take place during the three years covered by this corporate plan.

Through raising awareness and building understanding

Too often we have not been contacted by social housing residents whose complaints about their homes are reported in the national and local media and they are pursuing a legal route to resolution. This may indicate both a lack of awareness of our service and a lack of knowledge of alternative routes to resolution such as an Ombudsman which is independent, free for residents to use and less adversarial - potentially restoring their relationship with their landlord and achieving benefits for their wider community. We want to address this trend by undertaking a step change in raising awareness and building understanding of our role for both residents and landlords. We see this work as benefitting both residents and landlords, and raising awareness as a joint endeavour. During the preparation of this plan, our Resident Panel strongly encouraged more work in this area. Consequently, awareness raising is another of our key innovative programmes of work.

There are a number of strands to our plans across the three years in this area. In terms of awareness raising, we will build on the requirements in the Complaint Handling Code with stronger expectations on landlords to raise awareness of their own complaints handling procedures and our service, testing this through a revised self-assessment and issuing Complaint Handling Failure Orders where access is being undermined. Alongside this, we will provide more tools for landlords and residents to use in promoting our service, for example, downloadable leaflets and posters. We will also work with government and others to improve visibility. And we will promote our service ourselves, raising and sustaining awareness of the Ombudsman through increased stakeholder engagement and ambitious communications plans for our publications to maximise publicity opportunities such

as regional and national coverage, development of a resident newsletter and participation in relevant events and awareness activities.

The next strand aims to promote greater understanding of our role amongst residents and build trust in our work. We will produce leaflets and other publications to set out how we work and the benefits that this can bring, including case examples and resident quotes where possible. We will also look at our communications to ensure they are clear, straightforward and free of jargon. And we will seek to demystify the Ombudsman and our processes, showing that our staff are representative of the population they serve and that accessing our service is simple and straight-forward. We would like to work in partnership with landlords and residents in then distributing this message to all residents. Additionally, we will develop our regional 'Meet the Ombudsman' forums to increase engagement with our service.

We also want to ensure our message is heard by all residents, particularly those who have not accessed our service in the past and this is the final strand in our work here. We will take a targeted approach where we believe there are demographic or geographic groups facing barriers to accessing complaints or our service. This includes residents who may not have access to the internet, where English may not be their first language, or they may have low literacy. We will examine our data to identify any under-represented groups and identify specific actions to improve accessibility for these residents including outreach work and potentially a thematic or systemic investigation. In addition, we will examine if there are any complaint types where volumes appear low and whether any landlords are consistently not progressing complaints effectively. Where issues are identified, we will investigate further and take any necessary action, including issuing Complaint Handling Failure Orders.

Through collaboration with partners

Working collaboratively with partner organisations will increase the reach of our messages on awareness and understanding of our service. Therefore, we will develop and expand our engagement with key national and local advice agencies, the First Tier Tribunal, tenant and resident organisations, and other stakeholder bodies to improve their signposting to us.

We will also seek to build awareness amongst common resident advocates, for example, Members of Parliament, local councillors, through specific communications and relationship building with their representative groups, for example, the Local Government Association. The proposed removal of the 'designated person' filter is key opportunity to raise awareness and direct engagement with our service amongst these groups.

Through the Access to Information Scheme appeals service

We will continue to work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to deliver the Access to Information Scheme appeals service throughout this corporate plan. While progress will be dependent on statutory and

regulatory change, we are currently planning for the scheme to commence during the period of this corporate plan.

For strategic objective 3: increasing openness, the priorities and outcomes that we wish to achieve over this corporate plan are summarised in the table:

Strategic priorities	Outcomes achieved
3.1. Raise awareness of our service and build understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More residents are aware of our service and understand the benefits of alternative dispute resolution • Improved access to the Ombudsman amongst groups that have not used our service in the past
3.2. Work collaboratively with partner organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved signposting to our service
3.3. Prepare for go-live of the Access to Information Scheme appeals service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals under the Access to Information Scheme are delivered on time and in a fair way

Strategic Objective 4: Achieving excellence

We want to provide an excellent service that meets our residents' and landlords' needs. The changes we have made to our service during our current corporate plan period to make it more effective and efficient have helped us to respond to rising demand. Whilst we will require additional resources to effectively manage the substantial rise in casework, we will continue to drive efficiencies through continuous improvement. Our next steps in this journey over the corporate plan are set out in our two key strategic enabling projects, which will also reflect on our experiences during Covid-19. These are developing our employer brand and delivering our digital strategy.

Through building our employer brand

We want to attract and retain the best people; doing so will ensure we can continuously improve through new skills and experience, and help us to achieve excellence. Our colleagues already have a wealth of talent so we will look to maximise their potential by developing a cross-organisational academy to support learning and development. This will include exploring the potential for accreditation programmes for caseworkers which will not only benefit our staff but also residents and landlords in terms of the knowledge and expertise applied to their complaints.

We will also enhance our recruitment so we continue to recruit people with real talent and a desire to make a difference in the housing sector. We will do this by developing our employer value proposition, including career pathways and hybrid working, and promoting and embedding this in our recruitment activities.

A key supporting strand across both activities will be to expand our diversity and inclusion work throughout the organisation, closely involving our colleague-led Diversity and Inclusion Group. We will also build our corporate social responsibility programme to ensure we are accessing the biggest talent pool and maximising colleague engagement.

Through delivering our digital strategy

Enhancing our digital offer will allow greater access to our service and improve our efficiency - key tenets in achieving excellent customer service. This, therefore, forms the basis of our digital strategic enabling programme.

Providing a fully online complaints handling channel for residents and landlords who want to access our service in this way will allow them to see what stage their complaints are at, receive real time updates on their cases, upload information directly and access guidance to progress complaints. We will also explore more user support on our website and smarter ways of accessing our caseworkers through the phone line. The combination of these changes will increase our case handling efficiencies. We recognise that accessibility to all residents is vitally important for our service, so the digital channel will not be developed at the expense of other ways of contacting our service, but rather be complementary to them.

Increasing digitisation in our back-office services will enable us to operate more efficiently by providing access to real-time and joined-up management information for decision-making. It will also support a data driven culture, helping us to work more effectively. Developing our systems and support for hybrid working models will mean that colleagues can operate effectively from the office or home, increasing our resilience and opening our recruitment up to a wider talent pool.

For strategic objective 4: achieving excellence, the priorities and outcomes that we wish to achieve over this corporate plan are summarised in the table:

Strategic priorities	Outcomes achieved
4.1. Develop our employer brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are accredited as a top 100 place to work and regarded as a socially responsible, diverse and inclusive employer • We are an employer of choice • Colleagues are positive about their learning and development opportunities and take advantage of these
4.2. Continue our digitisation journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a fully digital complaint handling channel for landlords and residents • Our back-office systems are more efficient and effective • Our digital office supports effective hybrid working

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