

What's changing in social housing – and what's changed for you?

STAIRs and Competence & Conduct

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What is changing from October 2026?

From 1 October 2026, there are two important changes to the consumer standards for social housing:

More access to information – Social Tenants Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs)

New requirements for Private Registered Providers to make information available to tenants and, from April 2027, respond to individual information requests.

Competence and Conduct

A new standard about the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours expected of people delivering housing services, with qualification requirements for some senior staff.

Both are intended to strengthen the service tenants receive and landlords' accountability to tenants.

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STAIRs - new rights to information about how your social housing is managed

- STAIRs will require Private Registered Providers, such as housing associations, to:
 - publish more information
 - respond to tenants' requests for information

The aim – greater transparency and accountability

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When does STAIRs start?

1 October 2026 - Landlords must publish information

Private Registered Providers must proactively publish, or routinely make available, specified information about how they manage social housing.

1 April 2027 - Tenants can ask for information

The new right to make individual STAIRs information requests comes into force.

The policy itself separates STAIRs into Chapter 1 (publication) and Chapter 2 (individual requests).

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What information must landlords provide?

From 1 October 2026, landlords must proactively publish information they hold about:

- Governance and decision-making – who makes decisions, policies, consultations and meetings
- Spending – including spending, grants and use of service charge income
- Housing stock management – plans, maintenance, net zero and stock transfers
- Performance – including inspections, TSMs, complaints, health and safety and repairs
- Housing services – information and guidance about services
- Lists and registers – where these relate to managing social housing
- Social housing management – policies about how social housing is managed

Landlords must tell tenants about the publication scheme, make the information easy to find, and keep it regularly reviewed and updated.

What if landlord say they don't hold it?

STAIRs doesn't require landlords to create new records. But if it's information you think they should hold, that may raise a different question about how the service is being managed.

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From April 2027: asking for information

From 1 April 2027, tenants can ask their landlord for information about the management of their social housing

- The request must be in writing
- You do not have to call it a STAIRs request
- Your landlord should help if your request isn't clear
- They must acknowledge your request
- They normally have 30 calendar days to respond
- If information is held by someone managing housing on their behalf, they must make reasonable efforts to obtain it

What could you ask for?

Information about repairs, complaints, health and safety, staffing and training, housing policies, performance, spending or decisions about the management of social housing.

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Can a landlord refuse to provide information?

Yes – but there must be a proper reason.

- A landlord can refuse a request where, for example:
- the information is not about the management of social housing
- providing it would take more than 18 hours of staff time
- the request is repeated
- the request isn't clear – although the landlord should help you clarify it
- there is a proper reason to withhold the information, for example because of privacy, safety or other legal protections
- the information is available through another statutory route

The starting point is disclosure

Landlords should balance the case for disclosure against any potential harm. Reputational damage to the landlord is not a reason to refuse.

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Other rights to information

STAIRs sits alongside other rights to information.

If you already have a statutory right of access, the information isn't treated as a STAIRs information request. Your landlord should make reasonable efforts to direct you to the right route.

Your own personal information → a Subject Access Request under data protection law

Some service charge information → separate statutory rights to information may already apply, with further rights being introduced from 2027 onwards.

Council tenants → can use Freedom of Information rights

You don't need to know which route applies

If another statutory route is the right one, your landlord should help direct you to it.

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What if you're unhappy?

1. Ask your landlord for a STAIRs review

If information hasn't been published, or you're unhappy with the response to an information request.

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2. Your landlord reviews its decision

It should respond within 30 calendar days.

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3. Still unhappy? Go to the Housing Ombudsman

You normally have 3 months from the landlord's review response to complain

A STAIRs review is separate from your landlord's normal complaints process

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What is still unclear?

The requirements are final, but there are still questions about how some of them will work in practice.

What exactly is in scope?

Where are the boundaries of "management of social housing"?

How much must landlords proactively publish?

The categories are broad and landlords have flexibility over what they publish.

When will it be reasonable to withhold information?

The principles are clear, but difficult cases will involve judgement.

How will some practical tests be applied?

For example, the 18-hour limit and "reasonable endeavours" to obtain information held by others.

What happens where different information rights overlap?

Particularly for service charges, personal information and mixed requests

Some of these boundaries will only become clearer as landlords apply STAIRs and the Housing Ombudsman starts publishing decisions.

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What is the new Competence and Conduct Standard?

From 1 October 2026, landlords must ensure that people delivering housing services have the right:

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Experience
- Behaviours

to deliver good-quality services to tenants.

It is about more than qualifications.

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What will landlords have to do?

- Have a written policy setting out how they will ensure staff are competent
- Provide appropriate learning and development
- Appraise staff and regularly review performance
- Have arrangements for managing poor performance
- Adopt and embed an appropriate code of conduct
- Give tenants meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise the policy and code of conduct
- Make the policy and code of conduct accessible to tenants and keep them up to date

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Conduct and behaviours

The framework highlights behaviours including:

- Empathy
- Reliability
- Honesty
- Professional curiosity
- Building respectful and professional relationships with tenants

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Qualifications for senior housing staff

Some senior housing staff will also need a relevant housing management qualification.

Senior housing managers → Level 4

Senior housing executives → Level 5 or foundation degree

Qualifications must be relevant to their housing management responsibilities

Requirements can also apply where housing management services are delivered on the landlord's behalf

Not everyone needs to be qualified by October 2026

3 years for landlords with 1,000 homes or more

4 years for landlords with fewer than 1,000 homes

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What does this mean for residents?

The new Standard should strengthen how landlords can be held to account for staff competence and conduct

- Clearer standards against which to hold landlords to account
- A competence policy and code of conduct that tenants can access
- Meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise these
- Clearer expectations that landlords identify and address poor performance
- Requirements that also reach relevant services delivered on the landlord's behalf

What if things go wrong?

Individual problem or poor service?

Landlord's complaints process → Housing Ombudsman

Evidence of a wider failure to meet the Standard?

This may be a matter for the Regulator of Social Housing

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Further resources

STAIRs

[Housing Ombudsman – STAIRs resident support guide](#)

[Government – STAIRs Policy Statement](#)

Competence and Conduct

[Regulator of Social Housing – Competence and Conduct Standard](#)

[Regulator of Social Housing – Consumer Standards Code of Practice](#)

[Government – Competence and Conduct Policy Statement](#)

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