STAIRs readiness kit

Checklists and letter templates for housing associations in England

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Words in [yellow brackets] are for you to fill in or choose. Delete the brackets when you do. This kit summarises the government's STAIRs policy statement and the Housing Ombudsman's guidance. It is a practical aid, not legal advice.

Before 1 April 2027

Tenants can make information requests from 1 April 2027. The publication scheme has applied since 1 October 2026.

Job	Done
Publish your publication scheme in the seven classes and tell tenants where it is (in force since 1 October 2026).	
Decide who handles review requests about published information (tenants can already ask).	
Publish your policy on when you withhold information.	
Tell tenants how to make a request, for example in your tenant handbook and on your website.	
Set up a request log, and decide who logs requests and who answers them.	
Decide who carries out reviews.	
Train staff to spot a request (tenants don't have to mention STAIRs) and to tell it apart from a subject access request.	
Train staff on the refusal grounds, the 18-hour limit and redaction.	
Check contracts with managing agents and contractors so they give you information you need to answer requests.	
Plan how you will provide information in accessible formats.	
Plan how you will publish your request figures in the Performance class.	

Publication scheme checklist

The policy statement lists seven classes of information to publish. You publish what you already hold; you don't have to create new records. Review what you publish regularly.

Class	What the policy statement lists	Where we publish it	Last reviewed
1. Governance and decision making	Senior staff names and roles, organisational structure and governance arrangements. Decision-making processes and policies, including how complaints are prioritised. Tenant consultations and the methods used. Tenant meeting minutes and agendas.		
2. Spending	Spending, grants, use of service charge revenue.		
3. Housing stock management	Plans, maintenance work, progress towards net zero, stock transfers.		
4. Performance	Inspection outcomes, ratings, performance reviews, evaluation reports. Tenant Satisfaction Measures, media releases, complaint metrics, information request data. Health and safety performance and assessments, maintenance work, number of evictions.		
5. Housing services	Description of services, advice and guidance for tenants.		
6. Lists and registers	Information held in registers required by law, and other lists and registers relating to the management of social housing.		
7. Social housing management	Policies and strategies relating to the management of social housing.		

Wording adapted from the STAIRs policy statement (Table 1). Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

Letter templates

Seven letters cover a request from start to finish. Each one includes what the policy statement says the tenant must be told.

1. Acknowledgement

When to use: Send as soon as a request arrives. The policy statement says acknowledgement must be prompt.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Your request for information: [reference]

Thank you for your request, which we received on [date received]. We are dealing with it under the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs).

You asked for: [short summary of the request].

We will reply by [due date] at the latest. That is 30 calendar days from the day we received your request.

[If you need to confirm who is asking: Before we can share information, we need to confirm that you are one of our tenants, or that you are acting for one. We will write to you about this separately.]

If you have any questions, contact [team] at [email or phone], quoting the reference above.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

2. Asking for clarification

When to use: Use when it is clear the tenant wants information but not which information. The policy statement asks you to make reasonable efforts to help the tenant make a clear request.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Your request for information: [reference]

Thank you for your request of [date received]. We want to find the information you need, but we are not yet sure what you are asking for.

[Explain what is unclear, for example: Your request could cover [option A] or [option B]. / It does not say which building or which period it is about.]

Please reply to tell us [what you need to know]. [If useful: We hold [type of information], which may be what you are looking for.]

We will deal with your request as soon as we hear from you. If we need longer than [due date] to reply, we will tell you why and when to expect an answer.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

3. Confirming who is asking

When to use: Use when you need to confirm the person is one of your tenants, or is acting for one. You may confirm tenant status, but you must not refuse because of who the tenant is, why they want the information or how they will use it.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Your request for information: [reference]

Thank you for your request of [date received]. Requests under the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements can be made by our tenants, or by someone a tenant has named to act for them. Before we can share information, we need to confirm that this applies to you. Please send us:

- [If you are a tenant: your tenancy reference number and the address of your home.]
- [If you are acting for a tenant: a note signed by the tenant that names you as their representative, with their tenancy reference number and address.]

You can reply by [email or post] to [contact details]. We will deal with your request as soon as we have this. If we need longer than [due date] to reply, we will tell you why and when to expect an answer.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

4. Extension notice

When to use: Use only in exceptional circumstances, such as deciding whether it is reasonable to withhold information or getting information from a contractor or managing agent. Send it before the due date.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Your request for information: [reference]

We received your request on [date received] and told you we would reply by [due date]. We need more time, because [choose one: we are considering whether it is reasonable to withhold some of the information you asked for / some of the information is held by [contractor or managing agent], and we are getting it from them / [other exceptional reason]].

We now expect to reply by [new date].

If you have any questions in the meantime, contact [team] at [email or phone].

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

5. Response

When to use: Use when you are providing some or all of the information.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Your request for information: [reference]

Thank you for your request of [date received], asking for [short summary].

[In full: We enclose the information you asked for.]

[In part: We enclose most of the information you asked for. We have [removed / withheld] [describe what, for example other people's personal details] because [reason]. [Explain the reason in plain words, and why it outweighs the interest in sharing the information.]]

[If some of it is already published: [Describe it] is available at [link or place].]

If you are unhappy with how we handled your request, you can ask us to review it. Write to [contact details], quoting the reference above, and tell us what you are unhappy with. We normally complete a review within 30 calendar days.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

6. Refusal

When to use: Use when you are not providing any of the information. Rely only on the grounds the policy statement allows, and explain your reasons. Keep the ground or grounds that apply and delete the rest.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Your request for information: [reference]

Thank you for your request of [date received], asking for [short summary]. We are not able to provide this information, because:

- [Reasonable to withhold:] We have decided it is reasonable to withhold the information because [reason]. We weighed the interest in sharing it against the harm that could follow[, and took account of the views of [third party]].
- [Who is asking:] We have not been able to confirm that you are one of our tenants, or that you are acting for one.
- [Unclear:] We have not been able to work out what information you are asking for.
- [Not relevant:] The information is not about how we manage social housing. [Or: You can get this information through [another legal route, such as a subject access request], and this is how to ask for it: [details].]
- [18 hours:] Answering would take more than 18 hours of staff time. [If you narrow your request, for example to [suggestion], we may be able to help.]
- [Repeated:] This request repeats [an earlier request / requests from other people acting together] that we answered on [date].
- [Offensive or abusive:] The request is offensive or abusive.

If you are unhappy with this decision, you can ask us to review it. Write to [contact details], quoting the reference above. We normally complete a review within 30 calendar days.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

7. Review outcome

When to use: Use after a tenant asks you to review how you handled a request, or to review information in your publication scheme. Reply normally within 30 calendar days, and always tell the tenant about the Housing Ombudsman.

[Your letterhead]

[Date]

Our reference: [reference]

Dear [name],

Review of your request for information: [reference]

Thank you for asking us, on [date review requested], to review [how we handled your request / our decision on your request / information in our publication scheme].

[Name and role of reviewer] carried out the review[, and was not involved in the original decision]. They looked at [what was considered].

[Upheld: We have kept our original decision, because [reasons].] [Changed: We have changed our decision. [We enclose the information. / We will [action] by [date].]]

If you are still unhappy, you can ask the Housing Ombudsman to look into it. The Ombudsman's service is free and independent.

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Phone: 0300 111 3000
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Post: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Job title]
[Organisation]

Sources

STAIRs policy statement: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/social-tenant-access-to-information-requirements-consultation/outcome/social-tenant-access-to-information-requirements-policy-statement

Housing Ombudsman STAIRs guide: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/centre-for-learning/support-guides/stairs/

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