

Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs) Policy

Policy Statement

Purpose

This policy aims to ensure that customers are able to access information about their landlord. The policy sets out how Orwell will promote access to information through a formal publication scheme enabling customers and customers' representatives to access information proactively, and to support customers to make information requests.

This policy sets out how Orwell will comply with the government's Policy Statement entitled "Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements", or "STAIRs", ensuring transparency, openness and customer empowerment in being able to hold their landlord to account.

This policy applies to Orwell as a Registered Provider and everyone who works for us. This policy is made publicly available so customers are able to understand how we will make information available.

Legal Obligations

This policy is based on the Social Tenant Access to Information Requirements (STAIRs) introduced under the amended Transparency, Influence and Accountability Consumer Standard issued by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

Orwell's Commitment

New government rules called STAIRs say that social landlords must publish certain information requests relating to how we deliver our social housing activities:

- From 1 October 2026: We will start routinely publishing set types of information, this information can be found without asking us on our website.
- From 1 April 2027: Customers and Customers' representatives will be able to request information from us, any information not already published can be requested. Any information will generally be made available free of charge.

We aim to be open and transparent. We will publish as much information as we reasonably can. We will generally respond to information requests within 30 days.

We will not create new information. Sometimes we must withhold information if it is reasonable for us to do so. We will generally withhold any personal information. If customers want to see their personal data, they can make a subject access request.

If customers think we have not published something that we hold and we should have, they can ask us for a review. Customers can also ask us for a review if they made an information request but are unhappy with our handling of or response to it. Customers can ask for a review within 3 months and we will explain how to ask for a review when we send customers our response. If customers are still unhappy, they will be able to make a complaint by following the advice from the Housing Ombudsman from April 2027.

A senior manager is responsible for this policy, and all colleagues must follow it.

This policy will be reviewed regularly to keep it up to date.

Annex 1 – Publication Scheme

We will publish information about how we run our social housing management services. This is to make sure customers can easily see how decisions are made and what services we deliver.

The information we publish includes different categories, such as how we are governed, how we spend money, and how we manage homes. We will keep this information up to date and publish at least two years' worth unless otherwise stated.

Most information will be published on our website. We can give customers the information in a different format, such as large print or audio, or in a different language upon request.

If customers would like printed copies, we may charge for printing, binding or postage at cost.

Customers can view information at our offices for free by booking an appointment.

We welcome customer feedback about this scheme. Customers can contact us by email, telephone, customer portal, customer meetings, or through their housing officer.

From time to time we may need to redact documents prior to publishing them. If customers think something is missing from our publication scheme, or we have removed too much from a document we have published, customers can request a review.

Annex 2 – Responding to Information Requests

Customers can ask us for information if they are a current customer (including tenants, licensees or shared owners owning less than 100% equity) or if they choose someone to act for them as a designative representative. In all cases we must be able to confirm identity. Former tenants will not be able to make a formal request under STAIRs.

Customers can make a request in writing, including electronic methods such as email. A request does not need to mention STAIRs for the request to count. If a customer needs it we can help them to make a valid request, customers should speak to their Housing Officer or Support Worker.

We will acknowledge requests within three working days and respond within 30 calendar days. If we need more information to understand the request, the 30 days start once the customer tells us the information we need.

In exceptional cases, we may need more time. If so, we will tell customers why and when they can expect a response.

If the information is held by another person or organisation providing social housing on our behalf we will try to get it from them. We will keep a record of our attempts.

We may refuse a request for the following reasons:

- Excessive cost or time – Fulfilling the request takes more than 18 hours of staff time.
- Unclear or vague – The specific meaning of the request cannot be understood.
- Unverified identity – The applicant's identity as a qualifying tenant or representative cannot be established.
- Abusive or repetitive – The communication is offensive, sent in an abusive manner, or is a repeated/coordinated duplicate request.
- Not relevant – The details asked for do not qualify as relevant information concerning the management of social housing.
- Reasonable withholding – Legal exemptions apply.

We will always try to share information unless there is a good reason not to. It doesn't matter why a customer is asking us for information, or how they plan to use it, we won't take this into account.

If we withhold or remove (redact) information, we will explain why. We may need to balance the benefits of sharing with any risk of harm, such as risk to safety, confidentiality, or business negotiations.

We will consider whether releasing information could harm individuals or third parties, or whether it would break data protection rules. We will also take into account any views of relevant third parties if the information relates to them.

We will not be charging for STAIRs requests where it is available on our website, but we may charge reasonable fee for alternative formats and/or multiple copies. Charges will be transparent, justified and kept to a minimum where possible

We are committed to ensuring our information is accessible to everyone. If you require this policy in an alternative format, please let us know and we will make reasonable arrangements to provide it.