2026

Purpose | Pressure | Place

What does it mean to be a large urban social landlord as we move towards 2030?



Altair

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L&Q

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Executive Summary

This report was written by Dr Bekah Ryder, Research and Insights Manager at social housing consultancy, Altair. Bekah is an experienced social researcher with extensive knowledge of social housing.

What does it take to be a good landlord in a modern city?

Over the past two decades, much of the social housing sector's focus was shaped by growth and expanding housing supply. Today, housing associations are navigating a more testing environment. Balancing essential investment in existing homes alongside a persistent housing crisis requires careful navigation. Add in evolving regulatory expectations and reduced financial headroom, and the challenge becomes harder still.

The key challenge for the sector is deciding how best to focus limited resources to deliver the greatest impact. For L&Q, those decisions are influenced by the realities of operating as a large landlord in dense urban areas across London and Greater Manchester. This specific operating environment brings its own distinct set of pressures.

This report, the first in a series on what it means to be a large urban landlord, looks at how L&Q is managing competing priorities through its new strategy, Our Future Shape 2026-31. By refocusing on its core purpose of providing safe social homes and reliable landlord services, L&Q aims to show how scale can support a local, responsive and accountable service to residents and partners while addressing acute housing need.

Every provider manages a unique context, and there is no single right answer. By sharing its experience, L&Q hope to start a practical conversation about what works, where and why.

Key points

1. **Balancing priorities:** Operating in a high-pressure urban environment involves thoughtful strategic choices. This research shares insights on building an effective framework to balance investment between existing homes and new supply.
2. **Urban focus:** Operating in London and Greater Manchester, where housing need and affordability pressures are particularly acute, is a deliberate choice. L&Q is focusing its footprint where it can make the most difference - using its scale, specialist capacity, and purchasing power as effectively as possible.
3. **Local operating models:** Maintaining high-density urban housing at scale brings unique operational considerations. Managing older homes, building safety, and varied tenure relies on strong partnerships, tailored financial models, service designs, and governance arrangements. L&Q's specific operating context necessitates a specific response.
4. **Clarifying roles and partnerships:** As public services adapt to funding constraints, L&Q is strengthening local partnerships and referral routes so residents get the support they need while maintaining clear boundaries around the landlord role.
5. **Supporting regulation:** The research highlights the value of a regulatory approach that aims for consistent outcomes while recognising that differing operating realities naturally require different organisational responses.

Competing pressures

The housing sector continues to manage a wide range of priorities amid a difficult economic climate, political uncertainty and an increasingly demanding regulatory environment. Many social landlords are grappling with how best to balance investing in existing homes to improve quality and meet standards or developing new homes to meet housing demand.

Alongside this, providers are balancing their core responsibilities of providing safe, secure and affordable homes and reliable landlord services with growing resident support needs, often linked to pressures on public services. This highlights the importance of working closely with local partners while keeping clear operational boundaries, ensuring landlords support their communities without taking on statutory roles.

The importance of place and purpose

Place and scale fundamentally dictate how any landlord operates. Managing dense urban housing stock in major metropolitan areas, particularly London and Greater Manchester, comes with higher operating costs, complex building safety requirements, diverse resident needs, and greater competition for labour and specialist skills.

L&Q's trajectory over the last decade reflects wider changes in the sector. A period of sustained growth expanded housing supply but stretched its operational capacity and squeezed maintenance budgets for existing homes. High-profile service failings and resident feedback made it clear that service quality was, in some areas, falling short. Recognising that priorities needed to be reset, this marked an important turning point towards a stronger focus on L&Q's existing homes and services.

L&Q remains committed to London and Greater Manchester - the places where housing need is often most acute and where the advantages of scale can maximise impact. Whilst still committed to growth, L&Q has refocused on its core purpose by investing in existing homes and services. The new strategy builds on the direction set in 2021 by establishing a coherent framework for delivery, enabling more consistent services and making better use of scale through purchasing power, specialist capacity, influence and long-term partnerships. The task is to use the strengths of size while feeling more local, visible and responsive.

Delivering on ambition

The research shows how scale, urban footprint, property profile and resident needs shape the choices available and the way social landlords deliver services. L&Q's response is ambitious but practical: using the strengths of scale while feeling local, focusing investment on existing homes and services to improve residents' day-to-day experiences. The report also considers how providers balance competing priorities, work effectively with partners, and adopt different approaches to achieving consistent standards in different, and changing, operating contexts.

The research shows how scale, urban footprint, property profile and resident needs shape the choices available and the way social landlords deliver services.

Discussion points

The research highlights how operating conditions can shape priorities, service models and strategic responses. It also contributes to sector debates on the role of social landlords, the effective use of scale, local partnership working and how a national regulatory framework applies across very different operating environments.

The following discussion points are designed to continue that conversation:

- How can regulation maintain consistent expectations for outcomes while recognising the flexibility providers need to adapt their operating models and investment decisions to local contexts?
- Where does the boundary of the landlord role sit in practice when statutory services are under strain? When does resident advocacy become direct service delivery, and how do social landlords manage that line?
- How can social landlords build effective partnerships across multiple local authority areas with varying capacities and priorities?
- As the sector consolidates, how can large social landlords leverage the benefits of scale, including purchasing power, specialist capacity, data and influence, while ensuring services feel local and responsive to residents?
- How can governance structures in large housing associations maintain robust strategic oversight, while ensuring resident experience and local partner perspectives continue to drive decisions on the ground?
- How can housing associations maintain a clear long-term direction against competing financial, regulatory and political pressures?
- Will regulation need to adapt with devolution? How will regional devolution affect housing association accountability, local partnership working, and reporting requirements as power shifts away from the centre?



1. Introduction

About L&Q

L&Q is a large urban social landlord, providing homes for around 250,000 people, primarily across Greater London and Greater Manchester. As a not-for-profit housing association, it reinvests any money it makes to house and support those in greatest need[1].

L&Q was founded in Greenwich, London in October 1963 when a group of young professionals established Quadrant Housing Association with the aim of ending homelessness[2]. It has grown from a handful of social rented homes to over 106,000 homes of different tenures serving cities' housing needs.

Why this research matters

Social housing providers are balancing an increasingly complex set of competing priorities. Against a backdrop of rising costs and constrained finances, the sector is weighing investment in existing homes and services against the need to deliver new supply. Housing associations cannot do everything at once; so difficult choices are inevitable.

This research examines how a large urban landlord can manage these tensions, and what it means in practice to focus on core purpose with limited funding and competing demands. For L&Q, this reflects its judgement that, in the current operating context, focusing on existing homes and reliable landlord services is the most effective way to deliver better outcomes for residents while maintaining long-term viability.

About this research

The research draws on a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence to build a comprehensive picture.

This included:

- **Primary qualitative research**, including 21 interviews and 7 focus groups with L&Q staff, and one stakeholder interview with a large, London-based housing association. We did seek wider input from another large provider, the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman, who all declined to take part
- **Survey of L&Q staff** on L&Q's main role and priorities as a housing association, which received 118 responses
- **Analysis of internal data**, including performance and operational information
- **Review of wider sector evidence and policy context** to situate L&Q's experience within broader trends.

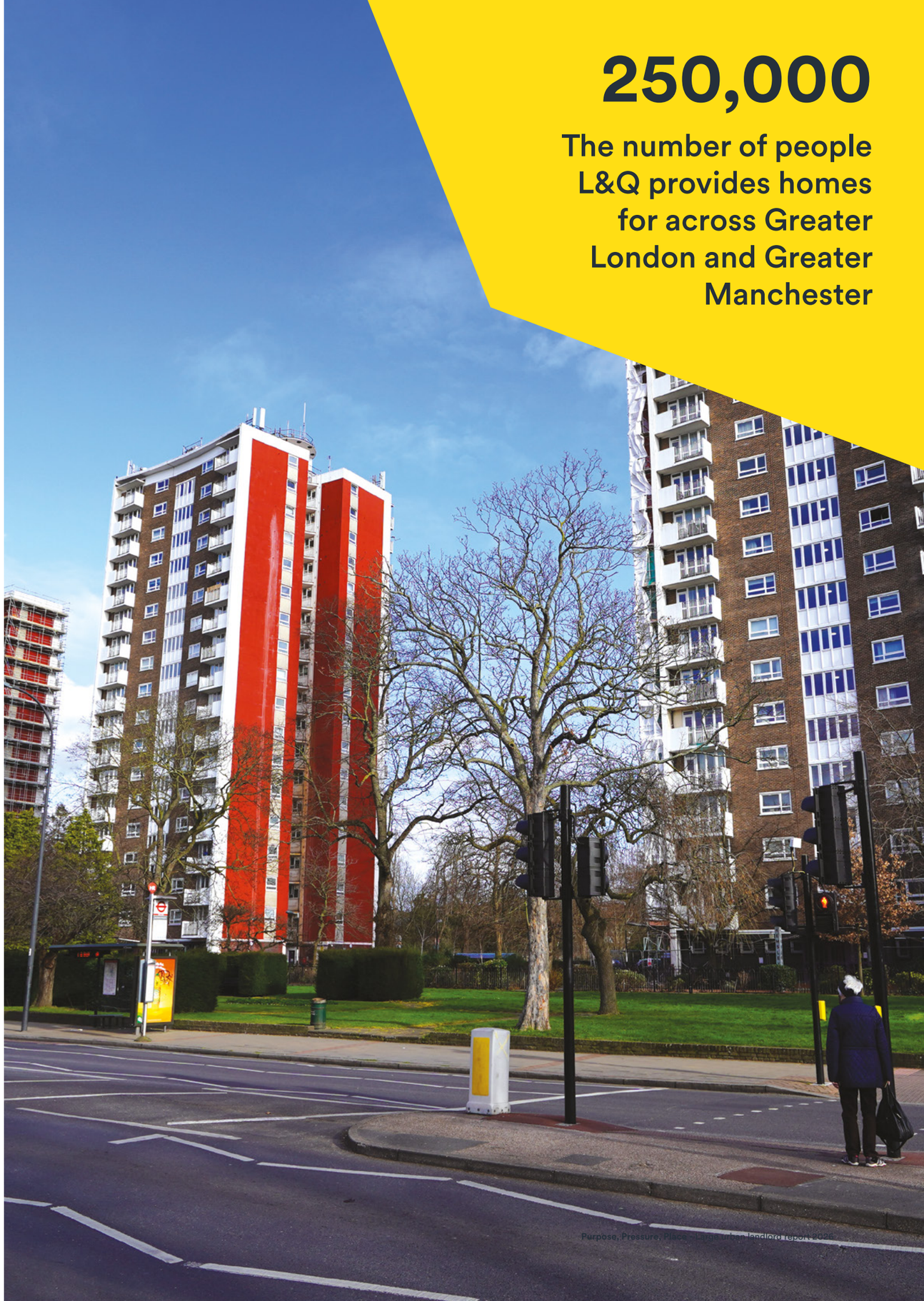
About this report

This report explores what it means to be a social landlord as the sector looks towards 2030, using L&Q's experience as a large urban landlord as an example. It explores core purpose, shaped by resident experience, sector pressures and the realities of providing social housing at scale in Greater London and Greater Manchester. In doing so, it contributes to wider sector discussion about how providers can respond to similar challenges and the extent to which regulatory standards and intended outcomes recognise differences in operating realities.

The report is structured around purpose and priorities, the influence of location and size, the role of a social landlord, the changes being made to deliver the strategy, and what success looks like for the sector, residents, colleagues and partners.

The report is for L&Q residents and leaseholders, sector peers, the Regulator of Social Housing and social housing stakeholders.

1. L&Q (2026) **Financial Statements 2025.**
2. L&Q (2026) **Financial Statements 2025.**



250,000

The number of people L&Q provides homes for across Greater London and Greater Manchester

2. Purpose and priorities

Introduction

The wider purpose and priorities shaping the social housing sector influence the strategic direction of registered providers. Pressures facing providers include the need to invest in existing homes, improve services, strengthen resident accountability, respond to regulatory change and continue contributing to new affordable supply. Large urban landlords are responding to these pressures by prioritising safety of existing homes, with L&Q's strategy outlining a clear core purpose focused on existing residents and their homes.

Priorities for social landlords

Housing associations are balancing several competing priorities. The Regulator of Social Housing's sector risk profile highlights the importance of providing safe, decent homes and services, empowering residents, delivering new affordable homes and ensuring long-term sustainability[3]. The government has also signalled a renewed emphasis on housing supply, supported by significant investment, long-term rent certainty and rent convergence[4].

As Fiona MacGregor, former Chief Executive of the Regulator of Social Housing, observed, the sector is balancing two essential objectives: maintaining existing homes while building new ones[5]. The National Housing Federation similarly emphasises the importance of being good landlords, delivering quality homes and services and working in partnership to improve outcomes for communities[6].

These priorities are being pursued in a challenging economic environment amidst political instability. Rising inflation, higher interest rates, increased maintenance requirements and higher employment costs have placed pressure on finances across the sector[7]. Providers are managing higher costs while relying on debt to invest in existing and new homes[8]. One sector response to address the impact of higher costs on credit quality is to merge, with consolidation in the sector expected to continue[9].

The experience of larger housing associations can differ from sector averages. The largest providers manage a substantial proportion of social homes, often with higher investment needs, resulting in tighter margins and higher debt levels. While scale can create challenges, it can also provide greater financial capacity to manage risk and sustain investment[10]. This highlights that organisations will need to pursue different strategies and responses depending on their context.

Many of these larger providers are concentrated in London and the South East, where higher labour costs, complex property profiles and building safety requirements drive higher costs per home. 75% of providers with homes in blocks of at least seven storeys are based in London[11]. London providers continue to invest more in existing homes than any other region, reflected in higher headline costs (£8,720 per home compared to £5,688 across the sector), with L&Q at £6,929[12]. This increased investment in existing homes has contributed to lower levels of new supply in London, where new supply was the lowest of any region in 2024/25[13]. More detail of how large providers in London compare with sector average can be seen in **Table 1**.

Given the limited financial headroom in the sector to deliver all priorities simultaneously, the Regulator of Social Housing states that good governance and financial resilience are essential to managing trade-offs among these responsibilities[14].

Table 1

Key value for money and global accounts metrics from the Regulator of Social Housing for L&Q in, the median for the G15 (the largest registered providers operating in London) and not-for-profit private registered providers, for 2025.

	L&Q	G15 median	Not-for-profit private registered providers median
Reinvestment	4.8%	5.3%	7.5%
New Supply (Social)	2.2%	1.2%	1.3%
New Supply (Non-Social)	0.12%	0.12%	0.0%
Gearing	46.0%	50.3%	45.5%
EBITDA MRI Interest Cover	91%	82% (68% aggregate)	113% (87% aggregate)
Debt to turnover	5.0	4.6	3.9
Headline Social Housing Cost per unit	£6,929	£6,929	£5,688
Major repairs and maintenance per unit	£4,126	£3,524	£3,382
Operating Margin (SHL)	34.2%	22.3%	20.0%
Operating Margin (Overall)	25.0%	15.1%	17.4%
Return on Capital Employed	3.1%	2.4%	3.0%

3. Regulator of Social Housing (2025) **Sector Risk Profile: November 2025.**
4. Reed, S. (2026) 2026) **Letter to the Chair and Chief Executive of the Regulator of Social Housing.** 21 April 2026.
5. Regulator of Social Housing and Fiona MacGregor (2026) **Fiona MacGregor's speech at the CIH Northern Housing Festival - 18 March 2026.**
6. National Housing Federation (2025) **Housing associations in 2025: a strategic review.**
7. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Value for Money metrics and reporting 2025.**
8. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Global Accounts 2025.**
9. Lloyd, M. (2023) **Moody's: mergers offer greater scale but present credit risks**, Social Housing. 10 August 2023.
10. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Global Accounts 2025.**
11. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Value for Money metrics and reporting 2025.**
12. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Value for Money metrics and reporting 2025.**
13. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Value for Money metrics and reporting 2025.**
14. Regulator of Social Housing (2025) **Sector Risk Profile: November 2025.**

How are large urban landlords addressing these issues

Against this backdrop, many large landlords are adjusting their strategies in similar ways, with a stronger focus on existing homes, services and financial resilience.

Recent annual reports from large providers show a clear focus on safe, decent homes, improved services and stronger resident involvement[15]. Strategic priorities have refocused on existing homes and the "core offer", with some organisations reducing or pausing development ambitions[16]. Others continue to pursue development through partnerships and joint ventures that can share risk and support delivery at scale. Some providers are also broadening their focus beyond housing management to include wider housing, property and community services[17].

Providers emphasise more locally tailored, place-based service models (with Southern Housing, for example, positioning itself as "large and local") that respond to residents' priorities, often delivering services in-house rather than through third-party contractors. This is often accompanied by expanded resident engagement, including local forums and increased resident representation in governance.

Sustainability remains a major priority, with investment focused on improving the energy efficiency of existing homes, delivering retrofit programmes and making use of available funding opportunities. Providers are also seeking to improve organisational efficiency through investment in people, systems and operating models, enabling more proactive, data-informed and locally responsive services. Some are also undertaking strategic disposals to strengthen financial performance and focus on core geographies. These large providers often frame their role as extending beyond housing, including support for residents' wider wellbeing through welfare advice, employment and training support, and community development (through charitable foundations).

While priorities vary according to local circumstances, property profile and financial position, resident safety remains a consistent and "non-negotiable" priority across the sector[18]. London-based providers are more likely to highlight pressures linked to development viability and building safety[19].



15. Bromford Flagship (2025) **Annual Report and Accounts 2025.** Clarion Housing Group (2025) **Annual Report and Accounts 2024–25**. Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (2025) **Annual Report 2024–25.** Notting Hill Genesis (2025) **Annual report and financial statements 2024/25.** Peabody (2025) **Investing in homes and services: Annual report and accounts 2025.** Places for People (2025) **Annual report 2025**. Sanctuary Group (2025) **Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024–25**. Southern Housing (2025) **Annual report 2024-25**. The Riverside Group Limited (2025) **Financial Statements 2025.**
16. A2Dominion Housing Group Limited (2025) **Annual Report and Financial Statements. Year ended: 31 March 2025.**
17. Hyde Housing Association (2025) **Annual report and financial statements, 31 March 2025.**

L&Q's purpose

L&Q's strategic direction should be understood in this wider context as well as its own history. L&Q launched its new corporate strategy, Our Future Shape, in April 2026. Covering the period 2026 to 2031, it sets out L&Q's refined purpose as "to provide social homes and landlord services that everyone can be proud of [20]".

Over the life of the strategy, L&Q will focus on three key commitments to enable it to deliver on this purpose:

1. We'll provide **social homes to meet housing need** – our core focus will be providing secure, social housing in the Greater London and Greater Manchester areas
2. We'll provide **good landlord services** – we'll be relentless in driving operational excellence, creating services that are reliable, repeatable and consistent
3. We'll be **efficient and maximise our impact** – we'll run L&Q in a responsible way, which allows us to reinvest as much as possible in existing and new social homes and services.

It was developed with residents, through Resident Assemblies[21], Resident Services Board and an online panel, alongside performance measures, such as service satisfaction. Resident feedback has been central to the new strategy, with a focus on delivering what matters most to them: reliable repairs and maintenance, proactive communication, and help with the tenancy when needed.

The new strategy is described as an evolution from the previous corporate strategy 2021-26, Future Shape, which focused on operational excellence and providing homes and neighbourhoods everyone can be proud of [22]. During the previous two decades, L&Q had a very different strategic focus. For many years, growth was the defining feature, whether through becoming one of the sector's largest developers acquisitions of other social landlords, or expansion into other tenures and housing-adjacent businesses. The new strategy places greater emphasis on existing residents and their needs, while maintaining more modest development ambitions to ensure the housing needs of future residents aren't forgotten.

Our three commitments



We'll provide social homes to meet housing need



We'll provide good landlord services

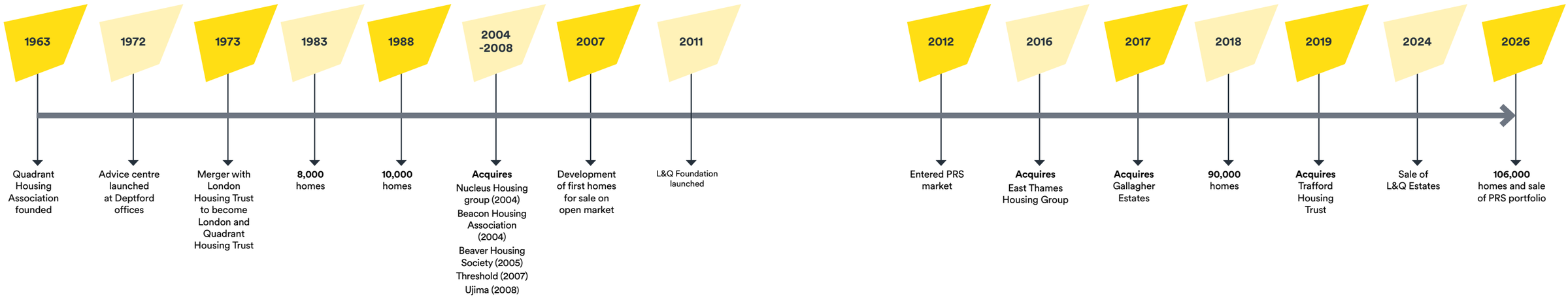


We'll be efficient and maximise our impact

18. Clarion Housing Group (2025) **Annual Report and Accounts 2024–25.**
19. Peabody (2025) **Investing in homes and services: Annual report and accounts 2025**. Notting Hill Genesis (2025) **Annual report and financial statements 2024/25.** Southern Housing (2025) **Annual report 2024-25.**
20. L&Q (2026) **Our Future Shape: Five year corporate strategy 2026-31.**
21. These events bring residents together with L&Q colleagues, including Group Board, Resident Services Board and Executive Group to focus on discussion, collaboration, learning and decision-making on future priorities.
22. L&Q (2021) **Future Shape: Our five year corporate strategy 2021-2026**.

Figure 1 - L&Q's history

Figure 1 L&Q's history, sourced from **https://www.lqgroup.org.uk/about-landq/our-history**



Why change was needed

In 2015, L&Q's five-year strategy, L&Q 2020, set out an ambition to bring 50,000 homes of all tenures to the market over the next ten years, doubling L&Q's annual output of homes[23]. This prioritisation of growth was partly in response to changes in public funding, which meant L&Q adapted to new ways to generate income[24].

L&Q grew to meet many housing and housebuilding needs, including acquiring a strategic land business and becoming a private rented landlord, as shown in **Figure 1.** This rapid growth without a clear service blueprint introduced organisational complexity: "you've got layer upon layer of complexity that's built up over time as a result of organic growth and merger and acquisition activity and subsidiary creation" (Interview 3). The speed of growth also meant integration didn't always happen: "in a 12-year space of time, L&Q took over seven organisations, and it didn't integrate them" (Interview 13). This has led to the use of multiple different systems and processes.

The focus on growth also affected investment. Maintenance funding was diverted to urgent safety works: "when we were having to make tough calls over what budgets to cut, we cut the maintenance budget, not the development budget." (Interview 4).

Following the Grenfell Tower fire and the death of Awaab Ishak, national policy and regulation shifted towards resident services, building safety and the quality of existing homes. Shortly afterwards, operating costs rose rapidly, interest rates increased and a downturn in the London housing market weakened the cross-subsidy model.

For L&Q, this marked a turning point. Alongside a number of high-profile service failures, described by one colleague as "a massive wake-up call" (Interview 4), this prompted a reassessment of priorities and a strategic shift towards existing homes and service quality.

L&Q's experience over the past decade played an important role in shaping this change in direction. A prolonged period of growth brought significant benefits, but also increased complexity and placed pressure on systems, services and investment priorities. These factors led to a fundamental rethink in strategy, framed around the idea of being a 'corporate citizen'. L&Q has prioritised existing homes and services, with growth returning only when financial capacity allows, particularly given the impact of building safety costs, and "not at the levels seen in recent years" (Interview 8). At the centre of this change is a stronger emphasis on service quality: leaders described a renewed focus on "thinking more deeply about how [to] deliver that [landlord] service to residents" (Interview 7). Interviewees consistently talked about "getting the wiring right", "fixing the foundations", and establishing the right "building blocks". There is a shared recognition that current service issues reflect underlying design challenges and historic patterns of investment. Through its transformation and service design work, L&Q is seeking to address these root causes, designing and delivering better services for tenants and leaseholders.

In this sense, ambition has been redefined: the priority is delivering core landlord services well for existing residents. If this is achieved, it will create the capacity and platform for future growth, rather than growth being the primary objective in itself.

23. Cross, L. (2015) **L&Q looks to grow in the South East.** Social Housing, 7 July 2015.
24. Fletcher-Smith, F. (2023) **Blog: 60 years on, housing associations like L&Q remain critically important.**

What this means

Housing associations are operating under tighter financial conditions, rising costs, higher regulatory expectations and growing pressure to improve the quality, sustainability and safety of existing homes while still responding to acute housing need through building more.

In response, many are rebalancing priorities: investing more in existing homes, strengthening resident services and accountability, scaling back or slowing development, tightening geographic focus, and improving organisational efficiency and resilience.

L&Q's strategic reset mirrors this wider pattern but is also shaped by its own history. Its move back towards core purpose reflects both sector-wide pressures and a deliberate choice to focus more clearly on existing residents through safe homes, reliable landlord services and maximising impact. Doing this successfully and in the right conditions also creates the potential for future growth.

The next chapter considers how far choices on investment, services and organisational priorities are shaped not just by the wider policy and financial environment, but by the specific realities of operating at scale in Greater London and Greater Manchester.

Its move back towards core purpose reflects both sector-wide pressures and a deliberate choice to focus more clearly on existing residents through safe homes, reliable landlord services and maximising impact.



3. The influence of location and size

Introduction

Social housing strategies and operating models cannot be understood separately from the conditions in which they work. Place and size matter, from density, type of home and affordability to pressures affecting residents, service demand and the practical realities of managing homes and services in large cities (see **Appendix** for facts and figures around this).

For a large urban social landlord, location and scale influence cost, risk, resident experience and the choices that can realistically be made about service design, investment and priorities. Understanding these factors helps explain how residents experience homes and services in dense urban areas, as well as the constraints large, urban providers face and the distinctive strengths they can draw on as they look to the future. For L&Q, its urban focus and organisational scale shape the way it operates and have driven its new strategic direction. It also draws attention to the role of governance and regulation in supporting effective delivery in different operating environments while maintaining consistent expectations.

Density

Concentrated in London and Greater Manchester, L&Q operates in dense urban contexts shaped by "the consequences of density… the types of things that can go wrong in those properties" (Interview 2). Density supports efficient land use, viability and access to jobs[25], but also amplifies challenges such as pollution, inequality and wellbeing impacts[26]. L&Q staff described how issues like lift failures or pest infestations affect more residents at once, which increases service demand.

Delivering repairs and major works is more challenging and costly in cities due to higher wages, congestion and logistical considerations: "for the operatives, parking costs, travel costs, deliveries, skips, everything is more complex and more expensive" (Focus Group 5). As a result, urban delivery is structurally more expensive: "managing and maintaining higher density homes comes at a higher cost" (Interview 1). Recent research on rural social housing provision found specialist rural providers had headline housing costs of £4,921 per home, over £2,000 less than L&Q's[27].

"Managing and maintaining higher density homes comes at a higher cost"



At the same time, scale enables efficiencies. For example, L&Q can leverage purchasing power and long-term partnerships to secure better value from contractors: "leverage better prices… accelerate delivery and set really clear quality standards" (Interview 18). Its long-term, multi-billion bound Major Works programme supports collaboration and investment, making L&Q a more attractive partner and helping to mitigate competition for contractors: "the longer term the contract, the more invested partners become" (Interview 18). Alongside in-house commercial expertise, it enables better value, with rates for major works potentially up to 23% below market.

Working in urban areas also means a registered provider is more likely to operate or supply a heat network, with greater regulation of this currently underway[28]. This includes new processes and systems for pre-occupancy heating checks, complaints and billing: "now with the new regulations, that heating has to be checked before residents are moved in" (Focus Group 2).

Urban concentration also drives complexity in partnership working, with estates often spanning more than one local authority and requiring extensive coordination: "stakeholder management in London is a full-time job" (Interview 6). In L&Q's case, within each of its estates, different people and directorates are managing multiple relationships, with "10, 20 people across L&Q that have relationships with 10, 20 different people within that local authority" (Interview 8). This heightens the risk of issues being overlooked, potentially leading to service failure.

However, concentration also creates opportunities for place-based working and social value. Estates act as focal points for understanding system pressures: "you see the system, you feel it there and break it down. But then you scale it out and see that's why the system is overwhelmed." (Stakeholder interview). Density also enables place-based community development: "if we've got a lot of properties in an area then working very closely with our contractors, we've been able to bring a lot more social value forward." (Interview 10). Over three years, this approach has generated £100 million in social value through the L&Q Foundation, extending the impact of investment beyond physical improvements to include community development, financial inclusion and targeted wellbeing programmes, adding "value to what L&Q does" (Interview 16). Three of the contractors have won awards for their commitment to social value[29].

Overall, density raises costs and complexity but also enables scale, efficiency and greater social impact if well managed. This reinforces the need for a simpler operating model, clearer roles, consistent standards and stronger use of scale in procurement and delivery. It also highlights the practical challenge of demonstrating performance, efficiency and value for money when organisations operate under very different conditions.

Reflecting this, L&Q's strategic response is therefore not just to become more efficient, but to reduce avoidable variation so that services can be delivered reliably in places where small failures can quickly escalate. This means simplifying systems, standards, processes and roles, making operations "as simple, straightforward and efficient as possible" (Interview 18), while making it "really easy for colleagues to understand what we're doing" (Interview 9). Density also creates opportunities, with social value from long-term contractor partnerships and place-based investment where homes are concentrated.

25. See discussion in Homes for the North (2026) **The social and economic case for housing-led regeneration.**
26. Ahlfeldt, Gabriel M. & Pietrostefani, Elisabetta (2019) **The economic effects of density: a synthesis** Journal of Urban Economics, 111, 93-107, referenced in Homes for the North (2026).
27. English Rural and Acuity (2026) **No more excuses: Affordable rural housing works.** Though Rural social housing also faces its own challenges, including the cost and availability of land for development and bringing homes up to standards – see Moore, T., Dunning, R., Gallent, N. and Purves, A. (2025) **The case for rural affordable housing.** Longleigh Foundation in partnership with Stonewater, the Fusion 21 Foundation and the University of Liverpool.
28. **https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/energy-regulation/low-carbon/heat-networks**
29. **https://www.lqgroup.org.uk/media-centre/news/success-for-major-works-investment-programme-partners-at-social-value-awards**

Type of home

Linked to density, urban housing is also defined by type of homes, which tend to be older, higher-risk, and more multi-tenure. This fundamentally shapes urban social landlords' operating costs and service models.

Age affects condition and costs, with dwelling age associated with a greater likelihood of failing the Decent Homes Standard[30] and older housing being more expensive to maintain[31]. L&Q has also found that it may not be suitable for modern living: "some of the stock we have is Victorian. We still have homes where the kitchens are so tiny you can't get a fridge and a washing machine in them." (Interview 13).

Despite this, regeneration is expensive and comes with little to no government funding, and can be both emotionally challenging and disruptive for residents. Redevelopments must often create higher density to ensure viability but it has many benefits, including improved housing quality, better health outcomes, job creation and lower operating costs[32]. It is easier to fund through cross-subsidy in higher value areas like London and the South East: "it's both a challenge, but also an opportunity if you can unlock it" (Interview 1).

Urban areas are also more likely to contain high-density, flatted developments, including high-rise buildings, making them disproportionately affected by building safety requirements and associated costs. Nearly a quarter of flats in higher-risk buildings (18 metres or over or at least 7 storeys) in the sector are owned by London providers Peabody, L&Q and Notting Hill Genesis[33]. L&Q's building safety programme is forecast to cost around £450m over its lifetime. To date, £26m has been funded through the Building Safety Fund and a further £100m invested directly[34].

L&Q's building safety programme is forecast to cost around £450m over its lifetime.

Flatted developments are also more likely to be leasehold. London has higher levels of mixed tenure than the rest of England. This creates complexity from a housing management point of view: "we've got different landlords, different freeholders, you've got managing agents, you've got superior landlords and head leases… on rare occasions you might have different management arrangements even within the same block." (Interview 19). Multiple parties will be responsible for different elements, making accountability and coordination difficult: "There may be repairs that the managing agent or the freeholder are responsible for, but we are held publicly accountable for that" (Interview 19).

The type of home also affects meeting future energy efficiency regulations and net zero. When talking to L&Q colleagues in Property and Investment, they discussed how solutions to treat high-rise buildings in dense urban areas are not as simple or established as for detached, semi-detached or terrace homes: "From an investment point of view, it's almost the hardest to treat across all of the different elements that we do, and the costs increase as a result." (Focus Group 5).

Yet due to its size, L&Q can spread investment costs and support major programmes and release greater financial capacity through debt. These factors also make it an attractive partner, whether for joint ventures, investors or as a community anchor.

Urban landlords like L&Q operate with a property profile that is older, more likely to be high-rise, and more frequently mixed tenure, increasing the cost and complexity of managing homes. These different structural conditions affect both the risks and costs faced, illustrating why organisations may need different operating and investment responses to deliver the same regulatory and resident outcomes.

L&Q is responding by prioritising investment in existing homes, so residents have safe, affordable and good-quality homes, with repairs treated as the foundation of a good landlord service. The aim is to get "the basics right" through timely, accessible and consistent services that "help you with your tenancy… repair your home… help you with housing options" (Interview 7), recognising that "seven out of 10 of our complaints are repairs… the foundation of good landlord services is a good repair service" (Interview 18). This ensures a better experience for residents and investment capacity to manage a complex property profile over the long term.

L&Q is responding by prioritising investment in existing homes, so residents have safe, affordable and good-quality homes, with repairs treated as the foundation of a good landlord service.



30. MHCLG (2025) **English Housing Survey 2023 to 2024: drivers and impacts of housing quality.**
31. Acolin, A. and Walter, R. (2025). **Magnitude and variation of maintenance expenditures in rental properties in the United States.** Journal of Housing and the Built Environment. 40. 1019-1035. 10.1007/s10901-025-10191-4.
32. Homes for the North (2026) **Unlocking over 500,000 good quality homes in the North**.
33. Regulator of Social Housing (2025) **Private registered providers data release** – data is low cost rented homes and for large providers only.
34. L&Q (2025) **Financial Statements 2025.**
35. IFF Research (2023) **Understanding Mixed Tenure in English Social Housing.**

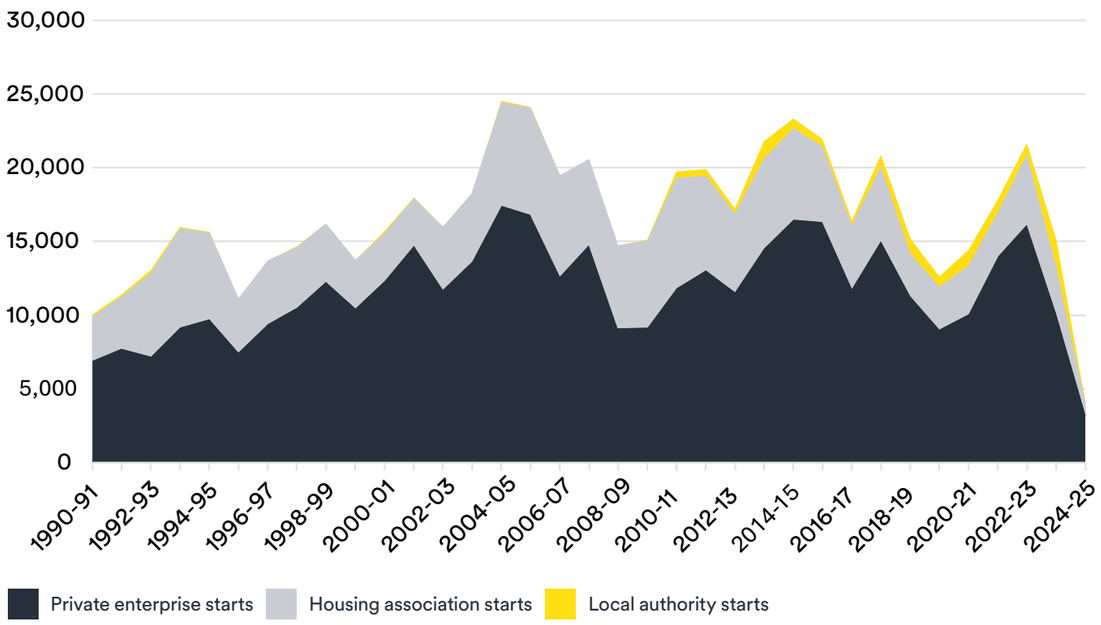
Affordability and the housing market

Affordability challenges and housing market conditions in London and Greater Manchester influence both the demand for social housing and the financial capacity of landlords like L&Q to deliver and maintain homes.

The capital's housing is amongst the least affordable in the country[36], and Trafford is the least affordable area in Greater Manchester[37]. Housing costs are a major driver of poverty, with over one million more Londoners in poverty once housing costs are taken into account[38]. Despite high demand for affordable housing, London's housing market has weakened in recent years, which has contributed to a fall in housebuilding **(see Figure 2)**[39]**.** London is "in the midst of the most difficult period for housebuilding since the global financial crash[40]". Affordable housing starts show signs of improving, rising from 3,221 in 2023/24 to 11,743 in 2025/26[41], likely reflecting uplift in delivery from the end of the 2021–26 Affordable Homes Programme[42].

Figure 2

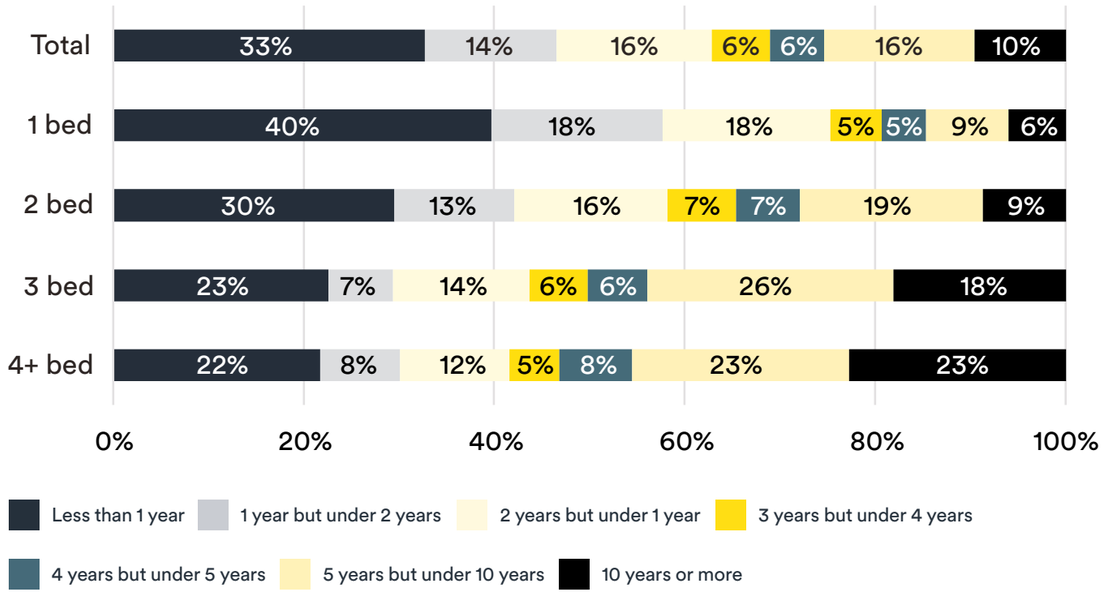
House building: permanent dwellings started, by tenure in London, by financial year. Source: MHCLG, Table 217: Housing supply - indicators of new supply, England, 1990 Q1 to 2025 Q4



36. ONS (2026) **Housing Affordability 2025.**
37. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2026) **Housing Market Monitor**.
38. Households Below Average Income, Weighted Sum of Income Distribution - Whole Population by location: FYE 2025 (admin-linked), downloaded from Stat-Xplore. A household is said to be in relative low income if their net equivalised disposable household income is below a threshold set at 60% of median income that year.
39. GLA (2026) **Housing in London 2025.**
40. MHCLG (2025) **New measures announced to ramp up housebuilding in London.**
41. GLA (2026) Table 1: **GLA Housing Starts on Site and Completions by Financial Year, Programme and Tenure.**
42. MHCLG (2025) **Affordable housing supply in England: 2024 to 2025.**

Figure 3

Length of time on local authority waiting list for General Needs lettings to households in London by bedroom size, CORE 2024/25. Source: MHCLG (2025) CORE subregional lettings data, 2024/25.



For L&Q, while its size and new financial plan give it greater headroom to absorb risk, London's weakened housing market constrains the cross-subsidy model for new homes: "you've got a mismatch between capital values, sales values and the cost" (Interview 1). In response, L&Q is exploring alternative funding and delivery models to "help unlock and create greater capacity" (Interview 5), including joint ventures that share development risk. Partnerships with the Mayor of London are also important - Barking Riverside[43], for example, will create 20,000 homes in what Homes England calls "one of Europe's largest placemaking projects [44]". L&Q also anticipates the easing of building safety costs to release more development capacity over time "so we can be more ambitious with growth" (Interview 8).

As the numbers of people on social housing registers increase, their wait time will depend on the size of the property needed **(see Figure 3)** and the needs of the household. Pressures caused by housing affordability are amongst the worst in the country in London, with Manchester at the "cutting edge"[45]. Although London continues to face acute housing pressures, similar challenges are becoming more pronounced across other parts of the country, particularly Manchester[46].

43. **https://barkingriverside.london/**
44. Homes England (2024) **Barking Riverside secures government backing for more homes.**
45. Manchester Social Housing Commission (2026) **It's time for a social rent revolution: final report of the Manchester Social Housing Commission.**
46. Cheshire, P. and Hilber, C. (2024) **Housing and planning.** Centre for Economic Performance Election Analysis No. 61. London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

Housing associations like L&Q exist to address housing need, by providing social homes at rents generally 50–80% below market rent. As one L&Q colleague said, “We’re part of what makes London work… without the people who live in the homes we provide, London would be a worse place” (Interview 2). Demand for L&Q’s homes remains strong: as of May 2026, 98.3% of L&Q’s London homes were occupied, compared with 96.6% outside London. Its high-value homes also support borrowing and investment capacity.

Linked to this, the government rightly seeks to maintain the affordability of social housing through formula rent and, on certain occasions, limiting annual increases through rent caps. L&Q estimated that the 7% limit on annual rent increases for 2023/24 mean “a reduction of £142m in re-investable rental income over five years[47]”. In interviews for this research, rent certainty and rent convergence were seen as hugely beneficial for long-term financial planning and increasing revenue for reinvestment, including new supply once capacity allows.

Affordability pressures underline the importance of core social purpose. In London and Greater Manchester, social housing provides a vital buffer against unaffordable private rents and housing insecurity, while helping sustain cities where many residents would otherwise struggle to afford to live[48].

This is why L&Q has chosen to concentrate in these areas. At the same time, weaker development viability and higher costs limit the extent to which new supply can be delivered through traditional cross-subsidy. The strategic implication is that social landlords like L&Q must focus development and investment choices on where they most clearly support social purpose, while maintaining financial resilience so they can continue to reinvest in existing and future homes. This makes efficiency and financial sustainability vital for balancing the urgent need for more social housing with ensuring the quality and safety of the homes it already provides.

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47. L&Q (2024) **Financial Statements 2024.**
48. Cebr (2026) **A city that works for everyone: How social housing supports London’s economy and communities. G15.**
49. Defra (2026) **Key findings, Statistical Digest of Rural England.**

Nature of need

While cities offer strong employment and transport links (an advantage in terms of talent and specialist skills available from a large population), the urban environment also shapes residents' circumstances and any additional support needs.

Compared with rural areas, urban areas tend to experience higher recorded crime rates, lower confidence in the police and weaker attachment to neighbourhood, all of which can shape resident experience and perceptions of place[49]. Urban issues can increase the number of high-risk cases compared to rural areas:

"when you're dealing with vulnerable people, especially in an urban community, these things pop up even more. There's going to be more anti-social behaviour, more crime, more cases of mental health." (Interview 12)

In turn, these situations heighten risks to staff safety and wellbeing, especially for lone workers in resident-facing roles. Urban inequality also shapes residents' experience of place, opportunity and trust. Interviews and wider research highlight the visible gap between aspiration and reality in London, and how density and inequality can affect community cohesion, neighbour relations, antisocial behaviour and safeguarding pressures[50]. This broadens L&Q's role beyond simply managing homes and services, requiring clear communication, consistent support and joined-up local partnerships.

The turnover of social housing in London is very low[51]. This restricts access for new applicants and limits movement for existing tenants, including through mutual exchange, leaving family-sized or accessible homes underused and some residents in unsuitable homes for longer. Overcrowding is a growing problem with rates in social housing in London high relative to both other regions and other housing tenures. Overcrowding has health and wellbeing impacts on residents[52], and may also lead to greater wear and tear of homes, though there are no published studies on this.

In L&Q's case, it has built institutional expertise in managing complexity, risk and meeting the needs of diverse residents ("an expert in the provision of your landlord services" Interview 14). It has identified around 32,000 residents in General Needs housing who may require additional consideration or support in some circumstances, "and what Neighbourhood Housing Leads (Housing Officers) are picking up in General Needs is far more complex than in Supported Living" (Interview 12). It cannot do this alone. Partners, particularly statutory services, are vital to supporting residents' health and wellbeing, but interviews clearly laid out the strain these services are under, from police to social services to mental health.

This broadens L&Q's role beyond simply managing homes and services, requiring clear communication, consistent support and joined-up local partnerships.

50. Pickett, K.E. and Wilkinson, R.G. (2015) **Income inequality and health: A causal review.** Social Science & Medicine, vol 128: 316-326.
51. MHCLG (2025) **Table 1ei: Social housing churn by the region property located in, 2024/25 (re-lets only).**
52. National Housing Federation (2020) **Housing issues during lockdown: health, space and overcrowding.** Pierse N, Carter K, Bierre S, et al. (2016) **Examining the role of tenure, household crowding and housing affordability on psychological distress, using longitudinal data.** J Epidemiol Community Health 2016;70:961-966. Baird J, Marsh R, Crozier S, et al. (2019) **The association of crowding within households and behavioural problems in children; longitudinal data from the Southampton Women's Survey.** J Epidemiol Community Health 2018;72:A8.

As with social housing, statutory services face more demand and higher costs, while available funding has not kept pace[53]. Between 2010/11 and 2024/25, The Institute for Fiscal Studies calculates that funding per person in the most deprived tenth of councils fell by 35%, compared with 15% in the least deprived[54]. While the government has increased the Local Government Finance Settlement, core spending power is about 9% in real terms below its 2010/11 levels in England[55]. Local government finance has been described as being "in a perilous state[56]". The same funding pressures face the National Health Service[57] and the police[58].

The result of under-resourcing combined with high demand is that cases referred to statutory services are delayed, closed too quickly, or pushed back onto housing providers who are often left managing the consequences of delayed or limited support. This can leave staff isolated when seeking urgent support: "there are moments where you just feel you are alone in this, because the NHS is saying that's not my responsibility and rehousing [are saying] that's not my responsibility" (Focus Group 3). Roles and responsibilities become "blurred", with frequent "back-and-forth" over who should act on concerns, leaving residents without timely support. L&Q staff described this in stark terms, reflecting their experience of acting outside of their landlord role: "We don't house people, we are social services" (Focus Group 4). They said residents sometimes turn to L&Q on issues that sit outside the landlord role, particularly where routes to other services are unavailable, unclear or slow. Supporting needs beyond the landlord remit creates operational, reputational and capacity pressures, as well as safeguarding risks that social landlords must manage.

Partnership effectiveness also varies by geography and organisation: "our relationship with boroughs is varied, some are more active, some demand more, some are more partnership-based" (Interview 16). Interviewees described weaker relationships where L&Q has fewer homes and stronger alignment with other councils, where "we collaborate, we share information, we work together. Greenwich Council, for example, we use some of the same supply chain, we share practice, we're in discussions about a new skills centre" (Interview 18). Health partnerships were felt to "work better in Manchester. London is too big, too complicated to get it to work" (Interview 13).

Overall, the nature of need reinforces why social landlords must be both focused and responsive. L&Q operates in places where residents may face overlapping pressures linked to poverty, overcrowding, health, safety, antisocial behaviour and limited access to statutory support. This does not mean social landlords like L&Q can or should become a substitute for public services, but it does mean the role of a social landlord must be delivered with enough local knowledge, professional judgement and partnership capacity to respond effectively when risks arise.

In this context, clear expectations and accountability around the service offer and landlord responsibilities, both for residents and partners, is essential: "Anchoring down exactly what that service offer looks like… and delivering what we say we're going to deliver" (Interview 15). Stronger referral routes, signposting, safeguarding practice and local partnerships are therefore essential to maintaining focus while ensuring residents are not left unsupported between organisations.

53. Committee of Public Accounts (2025) **Local Government Financial Sustainability. Thirty-First Report of Session 2024–25 HC 647.**
54. Institute for Fiscal Studies (2024) **How have English councils' funding and spending changed? 2010 to 2024.**
55. House of Commons Library (2026) **Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 to 2028/29.**
56. Committee of Public Accounts (2025) **Local Government Financial Sustainability. Thirty-First Report of Session 2024–25 HC 647.**
57. The King's Fund (2026) **NHS funding deficits.**
58. National Audit Office (2025) **Police productivity.**

Services and satisfaction

Large urban landlords operate in a context where resident satisfaction is shaped by more than service quality alone. In dense, high-cost cities, complaints and dissatisfaction can also reflect pressures on households, places and public services. For a large landlord like L&Q, this context has been central to how it has redesigned its approach: combining the consistency required of a very large landlord with the local insight needed to respond to different homes, tenures and neighbourhoods.

The Housing Ombudsman recognises that London landlords face additional pressures outside their control, contributing to higher complaint volumes and lower satisfaction. However, it also emphasises that landlords must ensure they are "equipped to respond to these operational complexities and neither allow them to obscure poor performance nor be overwhelmed by them[59]". This distinction indicates that while context matters, it does not remove the need for clear, responsive and reliable services.

The National Tenant Survey found lower satisfaction in London "is evident even after controlling for all other factors such as age, property type or neighbourhood deprivation[60]". This is reflected in the differences between L&Q's Tenant Satisfaction Measures results when compared to the sector average, shown in **Figure 4** and **Figure 5.** Rural social housing research points the other way: rural tenants are more satisfied than the sector average on every single measure and have 70% fewer initial complaints per 1,000 homes[61]. While location does not explain lower satisfaction on its own, it is part of the operating context within which service performance is experienced and judged. Scale intensifies these pressures.

Figure 4

Low Cost Rental Accommodation (LCRA) perception Tenant Satisfaction Measures results for L&Q, G15 and median average landlord, 2024/25. Source: Regulator of Social Housing, Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2025 – Dataset.

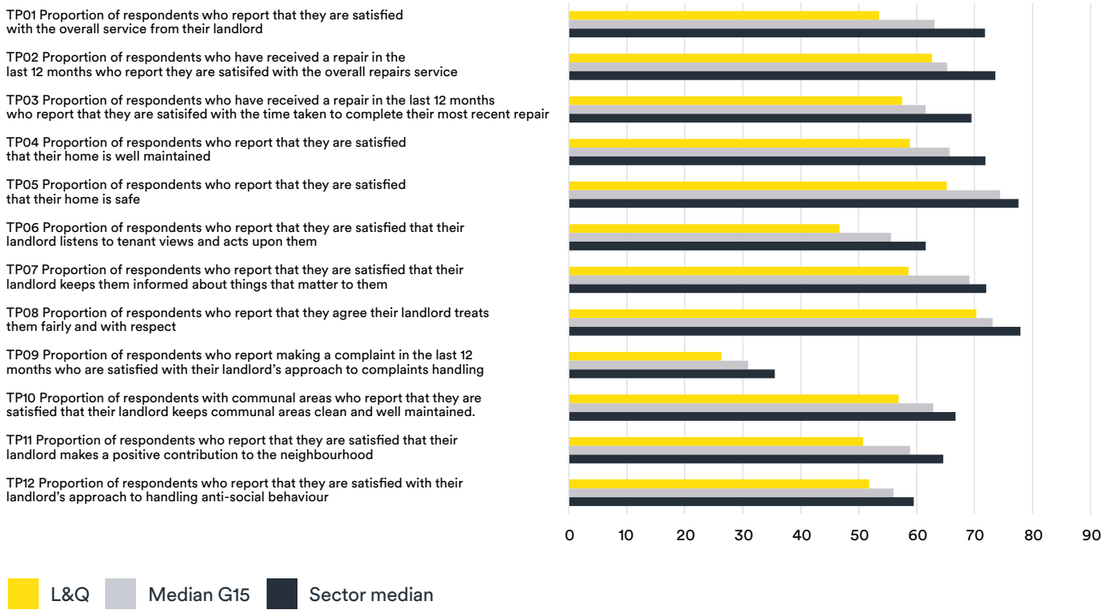
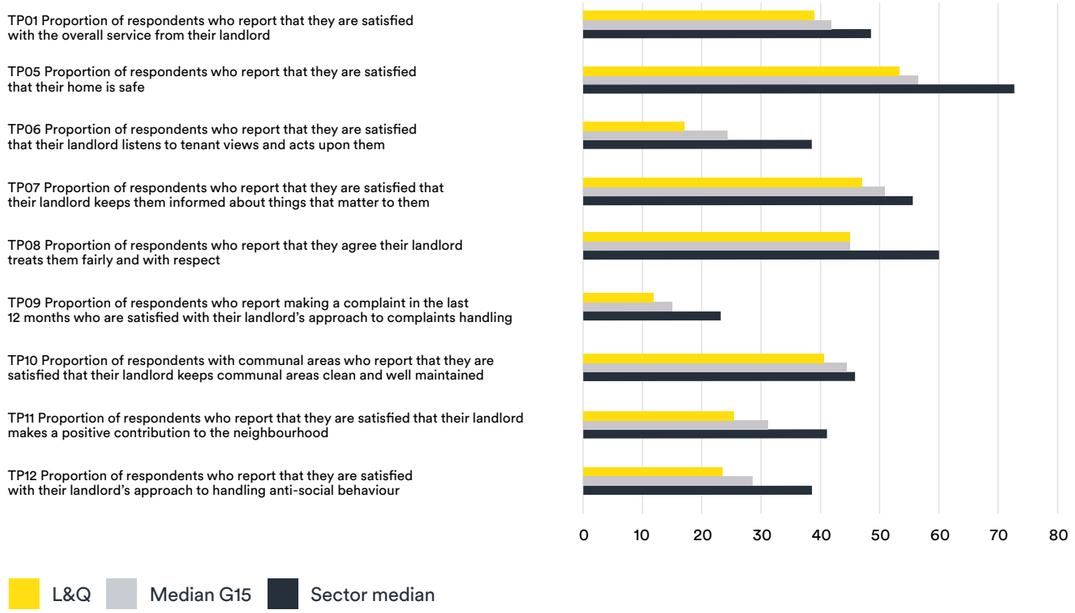


Figure 5

Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) perception Tenant Satisfaction Measures results for L&Q, G15 and median average landlord, 2024/25. Source: Regulator of Social Housing, Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2025 – Dataset.



59. Housing Ombudsman Service (2024) **Insight report: Insight on data and individual cases relating to London, Issue 17.**
60. BMG (2024) **National Tenant Survey: Findings Report.** Regulator of Social Housing.
61. English Rural and Acuity (2026) **No more excuses: Affordable rural housing works.**

L&Q's Customer Service team received over 656,000 calls in 2025/26. There were 17,050 Stage 1 and 2 complaints in 2025/26, an increase from 15,723 in 2024/25, with a backlog of 1,500 cases with the Housing Ombudsman Service. Working at scale, individual issues can quickly multiply. A case-by-case basis increases the resource needed, while consistency of messaging and communication (such as on service offer) can more easily break down. Due to their size, larger providers have more visibility to regulators, the Ombudsman, media and politicians but also a reason to use more influence as a corporate citizen, a long-term partner in places, and as custodians of their futures.



Mixed tenure housing creates additional coordination and accountability challenges. Landlords have different responsibilities to tenants, leaseholders and shared owners, while residents in the same flatted development may have different expectations and liabilities for charges[62]. Social landlords such as L&Q do not provide the same service model as a private developer or landlord. This can create a gap between expectations and what is affordable through rents or service charges.

Service charge issues are increasingly contested[63]. Charges have risen sharply, driven by inflation, higher interest rates and building safety costs, with recorded increases of 41% from 2019 to 2024, compared with 23% inflation[64]. Pre-Covid, L&Q received around 50 requests each year for service charge breakdowns. Last year, they received 280. L&Q's leaseholder satisfaction is also lower than the wider sector, at 28.6% compared to 48%. During interviews, this was linked to the quality of services being charged for and transparency of these charges, similar to findings from the National Tenant Survey[65]. Improving leaseholder satisfaction is part of L&Q's transformation plans, as well as forming part of government policy[66].

Systems and good data are integral to good service delivery, particularly when operating across a large number of homes. Good service at scale depends on consistency and visibility across the organisation. Where systems or data are limited, services can become more variable as they rely on personal relationships and manual processes. Interviewees described this as a challenge for a very large landlord: "You get away with it if you're 10,000 homes. You can't get away with it when you're 110,000. It costs you" (Interview 11). Simplicity also matters: if policies, service offers or internal processes are too complicated, they are harder to understand and apply consistently.

Satisfaction is shaped by both controllable service quality and the wider pressures of operating in dense, high-cost and mixed-tenure urban settings. This makes clarity, transparency and consistency especially important. Residents need to understand what service they can expect, how decisions are made, what they are being charged for, and how issues will be resolved when things go wrong. Improving satisfaction depends on reducing avoidable failure, strengthening communication, making access easier and using systems and data to identify problems before they escalate. Large social landlords can use their scale to achieve a more dependable resident experience: one that is consistent enough to build trust but informed enough by local insight to feel responsive to different homes, tenures and neighbourhoods.

This is who we are

Operating in Greater London and Greater Manchester brings higher costs, greater complexity and more intense pressures on homes and services. It also creates a setting in which some residents may face more acute pressures or risks, scrutiny is higher, and the margin for service failure is lower. In response, large providers can draw on the advantages of their size, including economies of scale, specialist expertise, stronger purchasing power and the ability to build long-term partnerships and delivery models.

L&Q is rooted in the realities of urban areas and wants to use the advantages of scale and its urban focus in its role as a social landlord. Its goal is to serve residents and partners as effectively as possible, despite operating in tougher structural conditions. It is proud of its role as a social landlord, meeting people's housing need in cities and wants to stay true to this: "If not us, who? We were born in a dense urban area in Woolwich in the 60s. We're becoming quite expert at issues of how you help people to live well together in dense urban areas." (Interview 13).

Throughout this chapter, the evidence has shown how location, property type, organisational size, resident need and partner capacity shape both the challenges providers face and the resources required to respond. This does not mean different providers should be held to different standards; rather, different operating conditions may require different responses, investment choices and delivery models to achieve the same outcomes for residents.

The wider question for discussion is therefore:

How can regulation maintain consistent expectations for outcomes while recognising the flexibility providers need to adapt their operating models and investment decisions to local contexts?

These contextual drivers have directly shaped L&Q's strategic and service design choices and explain why a more focused, disciplined model is not only preferable but required. The next chapter explores the tensions this creates in practice for the role of a social landlord.

62. Burgess, G. and Karampour, K. (2019) **Leasehold and Freehold Charges Appendix B: Analysis of stakeholder interviews.**
63. IFF Research (2023) **Understanding Mixed Tenure in English Social Housing.** Housing Ombudsman Service (2023) **Insight on service charges and the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.** First-tier Tribunal Property (2025) LON/00BE/LSC/2024/0329.
64. The Property Institute (2024) **Service Charge Index (April 2024).**
65. BMG (2024) **National Tenant Survey: Findings Report.** Regulator of Social Housing.
66. See, for example, RICS (2026) Service Charge Residential Management Code and Greater London Authority's **Service Charges Charter,** mirrored in Homes England's **Capital Funding Guide** for shared ownership homes delivered through Social and Affordable Homes Programme 2026 to 2036.

4. The role of a social landlord

Introduction

Operating at scale in dense urban areas has practical implications for the role of a social landlord. This chapter explores how this role has been defined and designed by L&Q. When explored through interviews, there was strong alignment on the core purpose of a housing association though it was less clear how far this role extends in practice. The findings show a consistent strategic direction towards focus, clarity and consistency in the role of a social landlord, but also tensions between this and the realities of delivery. This includes the need for consistency, simplicity and efficiency alongside being responsive, local, and an effective partner.

A focused core role

Wider factors, operating conditions, organisational experience and regulation are influencing the role and strategic choices of social landlords. For L&Q, its role can be summed up as providing safe, affordable, good-quality homes and delivering reliable, consistent landlord services efficiently.

Across the interviews, there was a picture of a landlord role that was both practical and purposeful: “we’re here to provide something that we all need that helps people actually live a good life… I’m really proud of what we do as an organisation” (Interview 17).

The interviews and survey were consistent around the role and priorities of a housing association, with some small differences around the emphasis placed on existing homes and services compared to building more homes, and between the core landlord role compared to a broader social and community role.

From the survey, which asked an open question on personal views of L&Q’s main role and priorities as a housing association, key differences include:

- **Directorate:** Property and Investment mentioned maintaining/improving homes most, Customer Service mentioned supporting residents/communities most, and Governance and Transformation meeting housing need and safe homes
- **Speaking to residents:** Those speaking to residents more regularly were more likely to mention role and priorities as supporting residents/communities, while those who never spoke to residents talked of providing affordable homes
- **Management status:** Managers are higher on safe homes (50% of all managers said this was the role and priority of housing associations vs 28% of non-managers), landlord services (36% vs 24%), and maintaining/improving homes (36% vs 19%). Those who weren’t managers most commonly talked about providing affordable homes (40% of responses).

These are not new debates. Hills’ Ends and Means (2007) argued for “increasing the attention given to the existing stock and tenant population”, warning that focusing on new supply risks neglecting current residents[67]. Similarly, What Tenants Want (2006) emphasised getting the basics right, choice and accountability, language echoed in our research interviews[68]. Hills noted that “mistakes in managing and looking after the existing stock can entirely offset the benefits” of new supply.

Creating a good landlord means ensuring core purpose is apparent in everyday resident experience. This is being delivered at L&Q through the new strategy, new values, and a 3 year transformation and change portfolio coordinating investment in new systems, service redesign, data, culture, and process and continuous improvement

The following sections explore the main trade-offs that sit beneath this model: balancing service consistency with responsiveness to individual and local need; maintaining financial discipline while sustaining service ambition; using the advantages of size while still feeling local to residents; working effectively with partners while holding clear boundaries around the landlord role; and bringing strategy to operational reality in a large, urban organisation.

Service consistency vs responsiveness

One of the central challenges facing social landlords is how to deliver a consistent, reliable, efficient service to residents while remaining responsive to local circumstances and diverse and changing resident need. L&Q staff emphasised that standardisation is essential for quality, fairness and efficiency, with consistency enabling a dependable service: “we can keep getting that right again and again” (Focus Group 1). This is being delivered through shared values, training, clear policies and standard processes, alongside consistent communication: “getting everyone talking about the same thing in a consistent way” (Interview 3). However, overly rigid standardisation does not reflect operational reality. Resident-facing teams regularly deal with unplanned and complex situations, from safeguarding cases to emergency repairs, requiring flexibility: “something will pop up… the idea that a housing officer can have a planned diary to the letter is ridiculous” (Interview 12). Services must also evolve with the pressures faced by residents: “we change our processes and policies continuously… we’ve constantly got to evolve faster to meet the needs of residents” (Focus Group 1). Different residents may also wish to access services in different ways, which is why L&Q is expanding its self-service digital offer.

Delivering at scale requires an operating model that is consistent but can also meet difference: “the trick is to make sure that your operating model can manage variation” (Interview 11). Too rigid an approach risks failing to meet need; too ad hoc can undermine fairness and efficiency. L&Q seeks to balance this by defining and delivering clear, consistent standards while equipping staff to exercise informed judgement and handle exceptions in practice.

It is worth reflecting that this mirrors the challenge facing a standard regulatory framework: it must be robust enough to maintain consistent expectations for outcomes across the sector, while remaining flexible enough to recognise different organisations will need different delivery models and responses to achieve those outcomes.

67. Hills, J. (2007) **Ends and Means: The future roles of social housing in England.** London School of Economics.
68. Referenced in Hills (2007), with the basics classed as commitment to delivering a quality service, competent and polite service from tenant-facing staff, speedy repairs completed to a high standard, listening to tenants, security, and affordable rents. A “dream landlord” would first and foremost get the basics right but would then “go the extra mile”.

Financial discipline and service ambition

Across the sector, delivering better services and homes for residents increasingly depends on making difficult choices about how finite resources are used. Financial discipline therefore is not in tension with service ambition, but the condition for sustaining it. Strategically, at L&Q, restricted financial capacity must be used in ways that improve resident outcomes, reduce avoidable cost and protect long-term resilience:

- **Investment in existing homes:** As noted, the sector is balancing two competing priorities, investing in building new homes or existing homes. L&Q's strategy and financial plan prioritise existing residents, while continuing to build or acquire homes where this is viable and supports core purpose. Due to its previous emphasis on growth, L&Q carries more debt than sector peers, which restricts financial capacity. Loan covenants have been renegotiated to remove the impact of major works from interest cover calculations, in line with wider sector practice as safety and decarbonisation costs increase[69]
- **Improving service experience:** Focusing on existing resident experience also makes financial sense. Avoidable service failures create additional complaints, disrepair, repeat contact and operational cost: "all failures from a resident perspective are also financial failures" (Interview 1), as outlined in **Figure 6.** A good service rather than exemplar also delivers more impact: "because we can have a wider impact… we've got more capacity; we can put more weight behind that." (Interview 1)
- **Proactive services and investment:** Services that "intervene at an early stage" and prevent escalation are better and less costly in the long term: "If you replace components before they break, you'll have less responsive repairs, better resident satisfaction… disrepair cases [are] expensive, time consuming" (Interview 21). In L&Q's case, this reflects both the scale of activity and service performance. L&Q completes around 230,000 repairs each year, around 70% of which are routine. In 2025/26, 81% of complaints compensation related to repairs and maintenance. Its reprioritisation of financing to proactive investment is clearly seen in **Figure 7**, which shows that spend on capital works has quadrupled between 2020/21 and 2024/25
- **Prioritisation and procurement discipline:** Providers are increasingly having to make difficult decisions about where limited resources will have the greatest impact. L&Q is using financial prioritisation tools, commercial expertise and procurement discipline to decide where investment will have the greatest effect, including "where to invest to have the biggest impact on [resident] satisfaction" (Interview 5). The Commercial Team has saved, or avoided costs, of at least £30 million over two financial years, without reducing services for residents
- **Limits to tailoring:** A consistent service model requires limits on tailoring, both to control cost and to protect fairness: "we can't tailor, if we tailor for everybody, A, the service is more expensive and B, those that need it don't get it" (Interview 15)
- **Social impact through investment:** Financial discipline also creates scope to use investment for wider social value, particularly through major works and charitable foundations, so that spending on homes also supports communities, employment, skills and long-term opportunity.

Robust financial planning, efficiency and different models of investment are all required for achieving social outcomes, with Finance as "a partner in enabling the better decision to be made" (Interview 21).

69. Lloyd. M. (2023) **Covenant waivers continue to rise, as RPs prioritise investment in existing homes.** Social Housing. 12 April 2023.

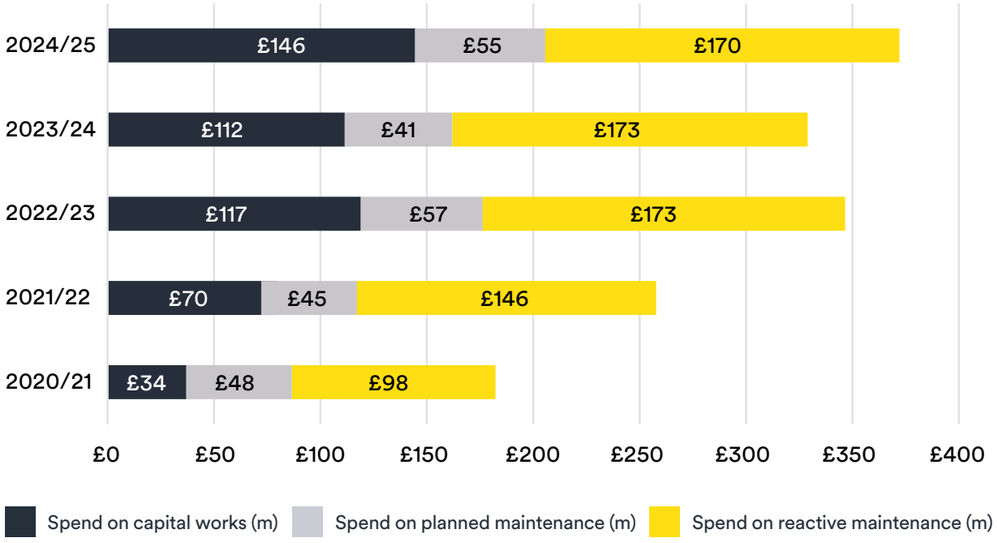
Figure 6

How service failure creates financial failure



Figure 7

Spend on capital works, planned maintenance and reactive maintenance by financial year. Source: L&Q financial statements.



Large in size, local in feel

The sector continues to see mergers and acquisitions creating large social landlords. As they grow in scale, larger housing associations face a common challenge: how to realise the benefits of scale without becoming distant from the residents and communities they serve.

L&Q wants to use the advantages of its size without losing the local touch. Operating across hundreds of thousands of homes over more than 100 local authority areas, L&Q can drive efficiency, resilience and professional expertise, but it risks appearing remote or unresponsive to neighbourhood issues: “some of the feedback we received from our residents was that we weren’t as responsive on individual matters to residents” (Interview 19). L&Q’s solution is to focus on specific geographies, increase its presence on estates and work more closely with partners at a local level.

The need for flexibility to respond to housing management issues while maintaining a presence in communities makes role design and understanding of local need particularly important. L&Q has a median patch size of 469 homes in London (i.e. number of homes a neighbourhood housing officer is responsible for). While there is no sector measure of this, and roles of housing officers will vary depending on organisation, Housemark data indicates that smaller patch sizes lead to better performance[70], with some providers operating patch sizes as low as 350[71].

Within L&Q’s housing management team, Neighbourhood Housing Lead roles have been redesigned using a Start, Stop, Continue exercise to focus on core tenancy services: “it all now feels like stuff that should sit within housing management does and anything outside of that doesn’t” (Focus Group 4).

This role review has enabled time for more staff presence in communities: “We want our Neighbourhood Housing Leads to be on their estates… around three days of the week, making sure that they’re estates we’re proud of, being the eyes and ears on the ground… we want (residents) to know them by sight, we want (staff) to know (residents) by sight” (Interview 12).

L&Q’s presence is strongest in Trafford and ten London boroughs[72]. Through service design, teams are “shaped centrally once and then deployed locally… the experience in London and Manchester should be exactly the same” (Interview 11). These changes are intended to help “deliver that local feel at scale” (Interview 19), bringing better resident experience and stronger community partnerships without sacrificing the benefits of scale.

Partnerships and boundaries

One of the key areas in maintaining core purpose is about strong and clear boundaries of responsibility. Social landlords work closely with several partners in their communities to support residents, as shown for L&Q in **Figure 8.**

To establish an agreed distinction, L&Q’s strategy states that responsibilities and support boundaries will be clear and well communicated. This helps to shape partnerships and support better resident outcomes: “The service design and our strategic plan helps us to really shape when there are specific instances where we will partner, we will refer, we will lead or we will be very clear that it’s not our responsibility and here’s the reason why… We want to work together to make sure the residents get the better outcomes.” (Interview 19).

Figure 8

Partners mentioned by L&Q during interviews.



70. Cox, J. (2023) **The Better Social Housing Review: what the data says about challenges facing landlords.** Inside Housing. 27 January 2023.
71. Robertshaw, R. (2025) **How to overhaul the patch system.** Inside Housing Management. 15 April 2025.
72. London and Quadrant Housing Trust (2025) **Financial statements 2025.**

When something is within the responsibility of a statutory service, L&Q sees its role as advocating and signposting for residents and escalating through a referral where required. While enforcing these boundaries in practice may be difficult given continuing demand and cost pressures for statutory services (as noted above), it is looking to achieve this in a few ways:

- **Active partnerships,** with open discussion of challenges while respecting each partner's remit. L&Q wants to be "there to help" (Interview 8). For example, the Chief Executive chairs Croydon's Housing Association Partnership Group, facilitating collaboration with the council and other agencies to develop mature, two-way working relationships and shared objectives. To enable more active partnerships in all local authority areas, L&Q is concentrating the geography of its homes
- **Keeping contact details updated**, "You need to know exactly who you're escalating it to, i.e. a minimum, a team, but most likely when you're looking at local authorities, it's probably a person." (Interview 20)
- **Partnership agreements**, giving clarity and accountability to partners about the role of L&Q: "we're looking at what the service offer is with partners… what is our core role and what is our expectation of (local authorities) and at the same time what should their expectation of us be, and clearly defining those roles and those handovers." (Interview 20)
- **Being persistent in referrals and managing handovers,** "it's incumbent on us to make sure that a referral has been accepted, and if it isn't accepted, we keep at it until it is. So we've got to be very sure of our ground… explaining the ecosystem so that they can be proper, well-informed referrals… and that it's okay that someone else is responsible for it. Because as a profession, [social housing] attracts lots of people who just want to fix everybody's problems." (Interview 13)
- **Training for colleagues and council staff on roles and responsibilities,** L&Q conducts regular induction sessions for new councillors in Trafford to clarify the housing association's role, powers, and responsibilities, supporting effective partnership and mutual understanding
- **Community development,** working with residents to shape priorities and build capacity to improve areas.

There are some early impacts from this. L&Q made nearly 900 safeguarding referrals in 2025/26 for General Needs residents, up from just under 400 the year before: "we've more than doubled our safeguarding referrals, which is good because it means people are recognising where there are safeguarding risks and they're reporting them. And where we are not getting the response that we need to see, we're really pushing it, we're escalating it." (Interview 4).

The challenge is not whether L&Q works with partners, but how it does so. Effective partnerships require clear expectations, referral routes and escalation processes, and a shared understanding of roles, especially where pressures on statutory services risk residents going unsupported and service gaps being absorbed by landlords. Good-quality, affordable housing also underpins public health; failure to deliver core services can increase demand on those same services.

Finally, many trends related to worsening housing need point to structural limitations, such as low supply and low turnover of housing, that require systems-wide change rather than just addressing at an individual landlord level. This makes collaboration and partnership working vital for better outcomes.



Strategy and operational reality

The final tension is where strategy meets operational reality. A major theme from interviews was moving from reactive, quick fixes to proactive, system-wide improvement. Staff described challenges with responsiveness and visibility, working across siloed systems and manual processes that limit end-to-end oversight. As one put it, “There’s lots of different systems… it’s time consuming… it’s like turning into Miss Marple” (Focus Group 1). This reduces capacity to act proactively and address root causes.

The wider system can also affect the root cause analysis. Delays with resolution of Housing Ombudsman Service cases, for example, affects the usefulness of learning: “cases are coming in from 2023 or 2022. You’re asking a business to learn from something four years ago, and we’re not the same business.” (Focus Group 4).

L&Q is addressing operational issues by consolidating fragmented systems into no more than 50 core systems and improving data visibility. This gives staff clearer visibility of homes, residents and service failures. This includes dashboards for a more strategic view of homes’ performance. For example, Property Insight, uses asset and housing management data for “RAG rating properties that typically are bad for us and are bad for residents” (Interview 10). These ratings highlight underperformance and proactively inform decisions on investment, regeneration or sale, while also helping to coordinate works programmes more efficiently: “it’s really important that A. Our data is accurate and B. that we use it so that we get the most efficiency out of it when we’re visiting or when we’re undertaking works to any particular estate or block” (Focus Group 5).

While L&Q is working to simplify its roles, processes, and standards within shared values and one corporate strategy, improvement in repairs, a critical landlord role, is heavily dependent on the new IT systems: “A lot of it is very dependent on… delivering the system improvements, because the visibility will drive down the avoidable contact, the failure and so on and so forth.” (Interview 15). L&Q is rolling out new IT systems in phases, “based on risk and ability to deliver” (Interview 18), postponing higher-risk services (like repairs) until later to enable learning from earlier rollouts. It is aiming for a unified asset management platform by 2028 and is taking a conservative approach to AI, using it as the technology evolves and matures rather than being at the ‘vanguard’.

L&Q has invested in systems thinking workshops and a new target operating model to redesign processes end-to-end, as well as system improvements to increase visibility and identification of root causes. It has award-winning wellbeing programmes and celebrates staff success through L&Q Values Awards. The ‘golden thread’ at L&Q aligns strategic plans, business operations, and individual appraisals, ensuring that organisational goals are consistently reflected in daily actions and communication of “why we’re doing what we’re doing… and what this means for you” (Interview 17).

Service design has also got to “put the resident at the heart” (Interview 7) to ensure they see improved performance and consistency of service. This makes resident voice central to both the direction and accountability of change, as “residents often hold the mirror up to our senior leaders more effectively than anyone, any other body” (Interview 11). This also applies to governance; L&Q has already embedded resident voice at Board level and is now making this more systematic, such as the link between Resident Assemblies and Board decision-making cycles. Over time, this will extend to learning from transparency requirements and stakeholder participation in governance to strengthen wider accountability. They want to get to a place where resident views are “so knitted” into governance that “it becomes virtually impossible for our governance to make decisions that aren’t in the best interests of residents.” (Interview 2).

Finally, L&Q is considering how to report on progress to board. Operating at L&Q’s scale means that governance, oversight and senior scrutiny work differently from a smaller sized landlord. This is a structural reality, not a weakness. Board capacity is finite, and the volume of operational and regulatory detail in a large organisation can risk a board losing focus on the decisions that matter most. L&Q is redesigning corporate reporting so that its Board has enough assurance that risks are understood, managed and escalated without being overwhelmed by operational detail. This is determined on “what does Board absolutely need?… its top-level report will (need to) give it enough oversight to know that someone knows that and if anything is going wrong with that” (Interview 2).

They want to get to a place where resident views are “so knitted” into governance that “it becomes virtually impossible for our governance to make decisions that aren’t in the best interests of residents.”



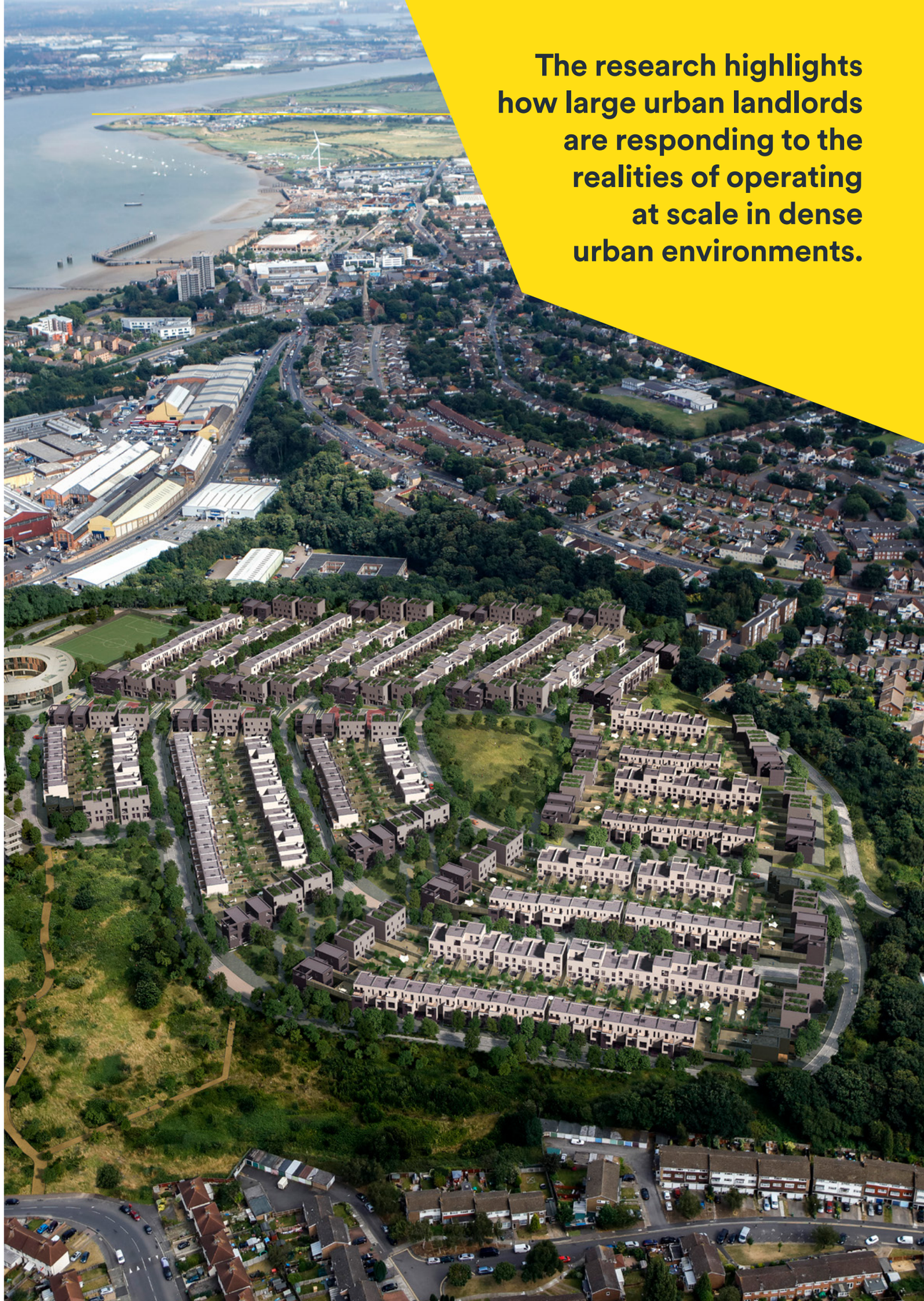
What this means

Using L&Q as an example, the research highlights how large urban landlords are responding to the realities of operating at scale in dense urban environments.

The challenge is not about narrowing the role of a social landlord, but about delivering core landlord services effectively while balancing consistency, responsiveness, partnership working and long-term organisational resilience.

Staying true to that focus will depend on how well individual providers (and the wider system) address several practical questions:

- Where does the boundary of the landlord role sit in practice when statutory services are under strain? When does resident advocacy become direct service delivery, and how do social landlords manage that line?
- How can social landlords build effective partnerships across multiple local authority areas with varying capacities and priorities?
- As the sector consolidates, how can large social landlords leverage the benefits of scale, including purchasing power, specialist capacity, data and influence, while ensuring services feels local and responsive to residents?
- How can governance structures in large housing associations maintain robust strategic oversight while ensuring resident experience and local partner perspectives continue to drive decisions on the ground?



The research highlights how large urban landlords are responding to the realities of operating at scale in dense urban environments.

5. Delivering the change

Introduction

Having considered place and purpose, this chapter explores what it takes to put strategy into practice – shifting leadership, culture, systems, processes and resident involvement on the ground. It then considers how to keep a relentless focus on core purpose when financial capacity remains tight, regulation is expanding, and wider social pressures on residents continue to grow.

Turning purpose into progress

Across the sector, many landlords are moving from strategic reset to delivery, translating new priorities into services residents actually experience. For L&Q, their Our Future Shape 2026–31 strategy marks the next stage of an improvement journey that began in 2021. The strategy is clear about L&Q's improvement journey, what it has achieved so far and what it aims to achieve in future. A key part of this improvement journey is service design.

L&Q's approach to service design is to move the organisation away from an operating model that had grown organically toward one that is consciously and intentionally designed. The aim is operational excellence that delivers reliable, repeatable and consistent services to every resident, backed by clear accountability and proactive data. Taken together, these should contribute to higher resident satisfaction, fewer complaints, and better value for money.

To achieve this, L&Q is organising the business around three distinct layers:

Layer 1 - Customer Access Management

Handling the majority of contact through online self-service and a single set of access points.

Layer 2 - Service and Product Delivery

Delivering core housing, property and development services through regional and centralised specialist teams.

Layer 3 - Support Services

Providing the central backbone, including People, Finance, and Governance and Transformation.

Services are designed around resident personas and journeys, mapped against Portfolio Accountabilities to give clear, single-point ownership, and refined using practical tools, capability mapping, core-process mapping, and RACI matrices (a responsibility assignment tool with four roles, Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed), to remove duplication and align every change to the wider target operating model.

By mapping every service around resident journeys and assigning clear, single-point ownership across leadership portfolios, it is removing duplication and ensuring every operational change aligns directly with the target operating model.

The aim is operational excellence that delivers reliable, repeatable and consistent services to every resident, backed by clear accountability and proactive data.

The reality of transforming at scale

Change is more difficult in a large organisation because even small changes can have wide-ranging effects across people, processes, systems and services. Transformation therefore needs to be carefully planned, sequenced and paced to avoid disrupting day-to-day operations, overwhelming colleagues, or creating unintended service gaps. Large organisations often have complex structures, multiple teams, established ways of working and significant interdependencies, meaning successful change requires clear communication, strong leadership, investment in capability and time for new approaches to become embedded.

Delivering on L&Q's strategy, for example, requires a multi-year transformation, while managing expectations and maintaining performance in the interim. Leaders acknowledged that bridging the gap between strategy and reality needs time and major investment: "You can't just fiddle around the edge, it requires fundamental change in culture, structures, technology, policy, process, procedure, every element of the way we work" (Interview 3).

Maintaining focus under pressure

For large social landlords, defining core purpose is only half the battle; sustaining it within a complex, under-resourced and highly regulated environment is where the real challenge lies. L&Q's aim is to stay aligned to this purpose despite external pressures.

Persistent inequalities, driven by poverty and poor housing, alongside an ageing population are affecting residents' health, wellbeing and housing stability, while also increasing demand on housing and statutory services at a time of rising costs. Clarity on core purpose means focusing on what social landlords can control – the safety and quality of homes - while working alongside local partners to help address wider systemic issues.

However, competing priorities regularly challenge that focus. At L&Q, while financial resilience across the sector has improved, significant resources are being necessarily diverted towards immediate compliance, limiting investment in service improvement: "We've spent £11 million on Transformation and Change this year… If you assume 50% of that has been spent on compliance projects, and therefore all of our organisational effort associated with that, means 50% has not been [on] moving the organisation to a place where it can be more relied upon to deliver performance for residents." (Interview 11). Looking ahead, meeting evolving regulatory and compliance standards is estimated to cost L&Q £195 million by 2030.

Policy and regulatory change, covering building safety, Decent Homes and minimum energy efficiency, climate targets and local government reform, create further uncertainty and the need for agility. To manage this within tight budgets, L&Q is streamlining major investment by coordinating work geographically (e.g. aligning safety, repair and retrofit programmes). This improves efficiency and minimises disruption for residents, though it relies heavily on long-term policy certainty from central government.

Upcoming policy reforms, from devolution to local government reorganisation, will fundamentally affect the environment within which housing associations operate and the partnerships they need to build. As the Regulator of Social Housing reviews the impact of the consumer standards and considers changes to the economic standards, this highlights the challenge of ensuring a standardised regulatory framework continues to support effective delivery where local variation shapes providers' operating models and strategic responses.

What this means for the sector

Social landlords continue to consider their core purpose and how this is reflected through their vision, values and services. L&Q provides one example of how these ambitions can be translated into practice, with its transformation programme embedding new ways of working. Progress has been significant, but this remains a long-term programme rather than a quick fix. It requires careful pacing to ensure service performance remains stable while new systems take root.

For social landlords, this research indicates that the task is to stay focused on providing safe and reliable homes and services, while acknowledging the limits of what a landlord can solve alone.

L&Q's approach illustrates how one large urban provider is prioritising existing homes and residents while supporting new supply where possible. However, sustaining this focus under external pressure remains uncertain.

L&Q's experience leaves several vital questions for the wider sector to consider:

- How can governance structures in large housing associations maintain robust strategic oversight, while ensuring resident experience and local partner perspectives continue to drive decisions on the ground?
- How can housing associations maintain a clear long-term direction against competing, financial regulatory, and political pressures?
- Will regulation need to adapt with devolution? How will regional reform affect housing association accountability, local partnership working, and reporting requirements as power shfits away from the centre?



6. Conclusion

This report has explored what it means to be a large urban social landlord as the sector looks towards the next decade, using L&Q's experience as an example. Across the country, housing associations are balancing competing priorities alongside political uncertainty, economic pressure, a more demanding regulatory environment, constrained partner capacity and wider social challenges that are increasing the pressure on residents, communities and landlord services. As the sector continues to consolidate, affordability and housing need pressures are no longer confined to London. They are increasingly being felt across England, particularly in other major urban areas such as Manchester.

This makes the core questions explored in this research increasingly urgent: how can social landlords provide safe, good-quality and affordable homes, deliver reliable landlord services, use scale well, remain locally connected and sustain resident trust in a more demanding operating environment?

Success is about experience, not activity

L&Q's strategic direction is both a response to external pressures and a deliberate return to core purpose. By focusing on London and Manchester, it is directing energy and resources where it believes it can have the greatest impact.
Its strategic direction is not a retreat from ambition. It is redefining ambition around delivering good services for residents, while continuing to help meet housing need in cities by building new homes where capacity allows.

Success should not be judged by the delivery of a strategy, transformation programme or internal milestones alone. The real test is whether residents, colleagues and partners experience a landlord that feels fundamentally different in practice.



For residents

This means services that are easier to access, clearer about expectations, more consistent in delivery, and more responsive when things go wrong.



For colleagues

It means having the systems, information, authority and confidence to deliver quality work without relying on workarounds or crisis management.



For partners

It means clearer expectations about the landlord role, stronger referral and escalation routes, and more consistent collaboration.

A focused role in a complex system

The research points to a shared view of the core role of a social landlord: to provide safe, good-quality and affordable homes, deliver dependable landlord services, and work with partners where residents' needs extend beyond the landlord role. This focus lies at the heart of L&Q's strategy, which is a considered and proportionate response to the realities of operating at scale in dense urban environments.

However the wider lesson is that defining core purpose is only the starting point. The harder task is holding to that purpose in a system shaped by mounting housing need, constrained public services, expanding regulation, rising costs and restricted financial headroom.

Using scale without losing local connection

L&Q's size and urban focus create both pressures and possibilities. Dense, logistically demanding operating environments, older and higher-risk homes, mixed tenure, diverse resident needs and multiple local partnerships all increase the cost and complexity of delivering reliable landlord services.

At the same time, scale gives L&Q purchasing power, specialist capacity, richer data, stronger influence and the ability to build long-term regional partnerships. The wider consideration for large providers is how to leverage these advantages while ensuring residents experience a landlord that is visible, responsive and locally informed - rather than distant or hard to navigate.

From strategy to everyday experience

The report also shows that true operational improvement depends on sustained organisational change, not quick fixes. L&Q has already made significant strides through a single corporate strategy, increased capital investment, redesigned roles, stronger resident involvement, commercial discipline, leadership alignment, systems thinking and transformation work. The next phase is embedding these changes at a pace the organisation can absorb, so that strategy is realised in residents' day-to-day services.

The clearest evidence that L&Q's model is working will be fewer avoidable service failures, faster resolutions, stronger resident trust, better systems and smarter use of data insight, improved staff confidence and a lower cost to serve. L&Q's strategy sets out clear mechanisms for residents and governance structures to monitor this performance and hold the organisation accountable to its commitments.

What this means for the wider sector

L&Q's experience reflects the central trade-off facing many providers: how to invest in existing homes and improve services, while continuing to contribute to new supply where financially and operationally sustainable. Providers are expected to deliver higher standards across existing portfolios, improve services, adapt to evolving resident needs and support housing growth at a time when delivery costs are higher and debt capacity is constrained. These pressures make clarity of purpose, financial resilience and good governance essential.

They also raise a broader question about how providers operating in different environments can be supported to achieve consistent outcomes when facing different local costs, risks and delivery challenges.

In short, success means making core purpose evident in everyday experience: providing social homes and landlord services that residents, colleagues and partners recognise as dependable, fair and something to be proud of. The approach taken by L&Q is not a one-size-fits-all template. Every provider's history, size, geography, risk profile and financial capacity will shape its choices. But by sharing this trajectory, L&Q hopes to spark a constructive wider sector discussion about what good landlord services look like in different operating contexts, and how regulators and partners can support providers to deliver them.

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Appendix

Facts and figures on the influence of location on housing providers

Density

London has England's highest dwelling density, at 24.52 dwellings per hectare in 2025, compared with 21.10 in Manchester and 1.98 across England[73].

London homes are smaller than elsewhere, averaging 80.7m2 per dwelling compared with 90.4m2 across the rest of England, or 32.6^{m2} per person compared with 38.1^{m2}. Manchester averages 36.2^{m2} per person[75].

Pest infestations are more common in dense urban areas, with at least 118,500 reported rat infestations in London between 2023 and mid-2025[76].

In high density urban areas, the government says heat networks are often the lowest cost, low carbon heating option. London accounts for 30% of communal and district heat networks and the North West 13%[78].

L&Q is working with over 100 local authority areas and across nearly 1,700 estates, completing nearly 33,000 estate visits in 2025/26.

24.52

Dwellings per hectare in London.

1 in 21

children in London currently living in temporary accommodation

33,000

Estate visits in 2025/26

73. MHCLG (2026) **Dwelling Stock Estimates, England 31 March 2025.**
74. Gleeson, J. (2021) **Housing Research Note 6: An analysis of housing floorspace per person.** Greater London Authority.
75. Breach, A. and Sells, T. (2019) **Making room: How and why living space varies between cities.** Centre for Cities.
76. Drain Detectives (2025) UK's **Rodent Problem: FOI Data Reveals The Biggest Hotspots for Rat Infestations Since 2023.**
77. **https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/heat-networks**
78. DESNZ (2023) **Table 1.2a - Number of registered heat networks by region and network type, United Kingdom, January 2019 to December 2022.**

Type of home

London has some of England's oldest homes: 21% were built pre-1900, compared with 15% across England, rising to 34% in inner London[79].

Nearly half of L&Q's social rented homes were built before 1980 (48%), below the private registered provider average of 54%, likely due to level of development in the last decade[80].

1.6% of L&Q's homes failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard compared to 0.5% of private registered providers homes across England (1.2% in London)[81].

In April 2026, 4,378 buildings of 11 metres or more in England had unsafe cladding; 2,344 (54%) were in London and 483 (11%) in North West England[82].

L&Q has one of the sector's largest building safety remediation programmes, comprising 32,000 homes in 1,850 buildings[83].

MHCLG estimates London had 1.442 million leasehold homes in 2024/25, equivalent to 39% of its homes and 29% of England's leasehold homes; 97,190 were social housing[84].

48%

Of L&Q social rented homes built before 1980

4,378

Buildings of 11 metres or more in England had unsafe cladding

32,000

Homes involved in L&Q's safety remediation programmes

79. Valuation Office Agency (2024) **Council Tax: stock of properties background information.**
80. Regulator of Social Housing (2025) **Private registered provider social housing stock and rents in England 2024 to 2025.**
81. Regulator of Social Housing (2025) **Private registered provider social housing stock and rents in England 2024 to 2025.**
82. MHCLG (2026) **Building Safety Remediation Data Release, England: 30 April 2026.**
83. L&Q (2025) **Financial Statements 2025.**
84. MHCLG (2026) **Leasehold dwellings, 2024 to 2025.**

Appendix

Affordability and the housing market

First-time buyers in London pay an average deposit of about £134,000, 22% higher than ten years ago[85].

GLA analysis shows average rent for a one-bedroom London home (£1,673) exceeds the cost of a four-bedroom home in five of the eight other English regions[86].

In Trafford, average rent for a one-bedroom home was £936 in April 2026, up 3% year on year. It is the least affordable area for renting or ownership in Greater Manchester[87].

London recorded 4,170 new build housing starts in 2024/25, a record low compared with 21,660 in 2022/23[88].

London is the epicentre of the temporary accommodation crisis, with 21.2 households per 1,000 in temporary accommodation, compared with 2.8 across the rest of England and 12.4 in Manchester[89].

341,421 London households are on social housing waiting lists (2024/25), with 89,226 in Greater Manchester, up 15% and 45% since 2020/21[90].

Average social rents in London in 2024/25 are £150.24 per week[91] compared to £518 per week in the private rented sector[92].

In 2024/25, 28% of new General Needs lettings in London and 35% in Trafford went to statutorily homeless households[93].

£134,000

Average deposit for first time buyer in London

4,170

New build housing starts in London in 2024/25 a record low

341,421

London households are on social housing waiting lists (2024/25)

Nature of need

Only 2.7% of London's social housing homes were let to a new resident in 2024/25, compared with 5.5% across the rest of England[94].

In 2023/24, 16% of London social rented households were overcrowded, compared with 8% of private renters and 2% of owner occupiers; England-wide figures were 9%, 6% and 1%[95].

The English Housing Survey estimates 61% of social rented households had someone with a disability or long-term illness in 2024/25, up from 49% in 2015/16[96].

Lettings data shows 46% of new lettings included someone with a long-term health condition, up from 44% in 2023/24[97].

By 2040, major illness among working-age adults in the most deprived regions is expected to be more than double that in the least deprived, partly driven by anxiety and depression[98].

16%

Of London social rented homes were overcrowded

61%

Of social rented households had someone with a disability

46%

Of new lettings in England had someone with a long-term health condition in 2023/24

85. Greater London Authority (2026) **Housing in London 2025.**
86. Greater London Authority (2026) **Housing in London 2025.**
87. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2026) **Housing Market Monitor.**
88. MHCLG (2026) **Table 217: Housing supply - indicators of new supply, England, 1990 Q1 to 2025 Q4**
89. MHCLG (2026) **Table TA1 - Number of households by type of temporary accommodation provided, England, 31 December 2025.**
90. MHCLG (2026) **Local authority housing statistics data returns for 2024 to 2025.**
91. Regulator of Social Housing (2026) **Private registered provider social housing stock and rents in England 2024 to 2025.**
92. ONS (2025) **Private rent and house prices, UK: April 2025.** Altair calculation based on average monthly rent.
93. MHCLG (2025) **CORE subregional lettings data, 2024/25.**
94. MHCLG (2025) **Table 1ei: Social housing churn by the region property located in, 2024/25 (re-lets only).**
95. UK Housing Review (2025) **Table 34 Overcrowding, by ethnicity, tenure and country/region, 2019/20 -2023/24** with data sourced from English Housing Survey 2023 to 2024.
96. MHCLG (2025) **English Housing Survey 2024 to 2025: Headline findings on demographics and household resilience.**
97. MHCLG (2025) **English Housing Survey 2024 to 2025: Headline findings on demographics and household resilience.**
98. Health Foundation (2024) **Health inequalities in 2040.**

Appendix

Services and satisfaction

London accounts for 17.9% of homes under Housing Ombudsman Service jurisdiction but 47% of cases received[99].

Since 2021/22, 13 of the Housing Ombudsman Service's 16 further investigations have focused on London landlords[100].

The National Tenant Survey found lower overall satisfaction among London tenants (61%) than those outside London (70% nationally)[101].

L&Q tenants' overall service satisfaction is 18.3 percentage points lower (at 53.5%) compared to the sector median (71.8%)[102].

Building height and age are associated with higher service charges, with buildings under 25 years old averaging £2,508 per year in service charges, compared with £5,208 for buildings over 50 years old[103].

17.9%

Of homes under Housing Ombudsman Service jurisdiction are in London

61%

Overall satisfaction among London tenants compared to 70% outside London

£5,208

Per year in service charge for buildings over 50 years old



99. Housing Ombudsman Service (2024) **Insight report: Insight on data and individual cases relating to London, Issue 17.**
100. https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/reports/further-investigation-reports/
101. BMG (2024) **National Tenant Survey: Findings Report**. Regulator of Social Housing.
102. Regulator of Social Housing (2025) **Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2025: full data set.**
103. The Property Institute (2026) **Service charge index report 2026**

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