



# Complaints: Annual performance and service improvement report

2025/26



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## 01 Foreword from Angela Lockwood OBE

As a Group Board Member, Chair of the Riverside Customer Experience Committee, and the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), I am pleased to present our Annual Performance and Service Improvement Report.

Having joined Riverside in 2025, I've become familiar with the challenges the group is experiencing in this area, and it is fair to say the headline figures demonstrate there is much more we need to improve on.

We saw a 34% increase in complaints in the 2025/26 financial year alongside a 7.5% reduction in transactional complaint handling satisfaction.

The Housing Ombudsman also found maladministration in 73% of our cases reported to them. Many of those complaints dated back to the previous financial year.

There are, however, some real improvements that we will build on. We responded to 70.9% of stage 1 complaints within the Housing Ombudsman timescales, and 70.8% at stage 2. Whilst there is still work to be done on improving complaints handling, this is an increase in how quickly we are responding to, and resolving complaints, compared to the previous year where 67% of stage 1, and 54.9% of stage 2 complaints were responded within the timescale. This shows that the investment in our complaints service is working and will continue, as we are committed to improving these services.

The group has now published its new five-year corporate strategy, Brighter Future Together, which shapes a very clear path towards improving services. This collaboratively agreed strategy details expectations from the organisation and will be closely monitored and scrutinised. A key element is to improve overall organisational performance of which complaints is one of the key priorities.

A further key part of the strategy is the introduction of a new customer-designed Customer Influence and Accountability Framework, including the creation of the Customer Complaints Panel.

The panel is focused on improving complaint handling and better understanding of the key reasons for complaints including repairs and service charges. Together, we have drafted a new complaints policy with significant other work underway. At the time of writing this report, customers from the panel are involving in helping to recruit new team members to the complaints team and producing a customer quick guide on making a complaint and what complainants can expect to happen next.

On a groupwide-level, our Brilliant at Basics programme - which is designed to carry out root and branch reviews of our services most important to customers, like repairs and complaints, has begun. As a part of this work, we have consulted with more than 600 customers about their experience of making a complaint. Their experiences and feedback are directly influencing and shaping the future of our services.



Brilliant at Basics has recommended a series of changes to how we work, including processes and systems, with changes prioritised for implementation once we have stabilised complaints volumes and operations. We expect our new complaints handling system to go live in December 2026. One of the benefits of this system is that we will be able to have better oversight, management and communications on complaint resolution. Customers tell us this is the most important part of the complaints service and is an example of where customers have influenced how we will deliver and improve our services over the next year.

Alongside those groupwide measures, I know a significant amount of hard work is also going into day-to-day improvement so that our complaints services are easier, quicker and consistent every time a customer makes a complaint.

There has been the implementation of a new e-learning module on complaints, changes to the compensation payment process, additional resources invested in the team and a robust approach to improving how we investigate complaints, the gathering of information from colleagues and contractors, and strengthening of the centralised complaints team.

Whilst this work is ongoing, it has been positive to see that there has also been recognition for the day-to-day work of individuals within the team with several Complaints Officers receiving high levels of positive customer feedback from customers.

Throughout Q1 of this year, our priority focus has been on development of the service by recruiting new team members, establishing clearer processes and a clearer focus on resolving issues. We have also worked hard on rebuilding trust with our customers as key factor on the outcome of reporting a complaint. During Q2, we will be seeking to implement our new improvement plan and progressing recommendations from the review.

Q3 and 4 will see us looking at wider complaint's issues and their root causes, and ensuring that every customer regardless of location, complexity of issue or who you speak to, receive a consistently high level of customer service when reporting a complaint. At the same time, we are working on our services so that we get things right first time, to reduce complaints in the first place.

As a part of that work, we have been reviewing our data and reporting. We found that there were errors with the information we published in

last year's version of this report. We previously published that we received 8,214 Stage 1 complaints. In fact, we received 8,458 in total. We also shared that we responded to 73.5% of stage 1 complaints within the Housing Ombudsman timescales. The actual figure was 67%. Similarly at Stage 2, we reported that we responded to 51% of complaints within timescale when we actually responded to 54.9%. Lastly, we also reported that customer satisfaction with complaint handling had increased by 1.9% throughout the year, when it had actually increased by 3.1% in the transactional survey, and by 0.6% in the perception survey.

Making an error in our reporting is not something we take lightly, and I am confident that the right steps have been taken to ensure that this doesn't happen again. The Board have been informed about the errors, alongside the Housing Ombudsman Service, and an enhanced process has been established internally to make sure that our reporting is accurate and gives customers the opportunity to scrutinise and hold us to account on our performance effectively. I am sorry that inaccurate information was shared, but you have my full confidence, and assurance, that this will not occur again in the future. This is critical to continue building trust which we are committed to.

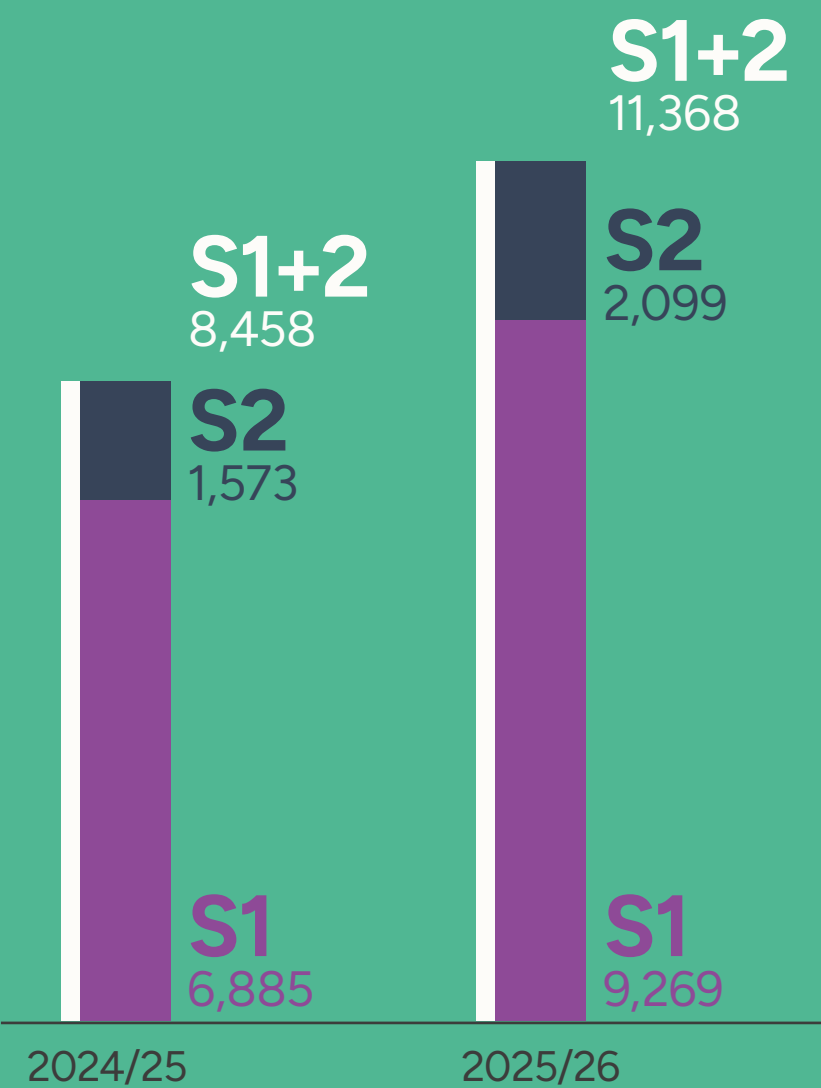
All-in-all, there is much work to do, and we know this is an area we must get right to deliver improvements to the services our customers receive, complaints performance and wider group performance measures.

With an extensive programme of work planned and a firm commitment from Board, management, team members and involved customers to focus on this area and improve, we're confident that the building blocks are in place to drive that change.



**Angela Lockwood OBE**  
Chair of Customer  
Experience Committee and  
Member Responsible for  
Complaints (MRC)

# 02 Our performance



### Year-on-year volume comparison

|      |       |
|------|-------|
| S1+2 | 34.4% |
| S2   | 33.4% |
| S1   | 34.6% |

S1 = Stage 1  
S2 = Stage 2

As the overall volume of complaints increased, there has been times where it has proved challenging to deal with each complaint as effectively as we would have liked. This contributed to a reduction in satisfaction, which has since improved. We have addressed this by increasing resources within the Complaints Team, focusing on reducing reoccurring root causes and delivering new training to the Complaints Team so that they have the skills and tools to resolve issues quickly and effectively for customers.

We also know that there have been times when we have not followed through on the commitments we have made as a part of the complaint. We are currently working on rebuilding our IT system so that we can more effectively track and implement promises made, including repair works and lessons learnt. We expect that this will improve customer satisfaction in the year ahead.

Customer satisfaction through the perception survey (a monthly survey that all Housing Associations carry out where a random sample of customers are contacted to give feedback) has improved to 49.2% compared to the previous year (46.4%) whilst transactional satisfaction (carried out after a customer has complained and their complaint has been closed) has notably reduced by 7.5% from 28.5% in 24/25 to 21.0% in 25/26 based on 1,151 completed surveys.

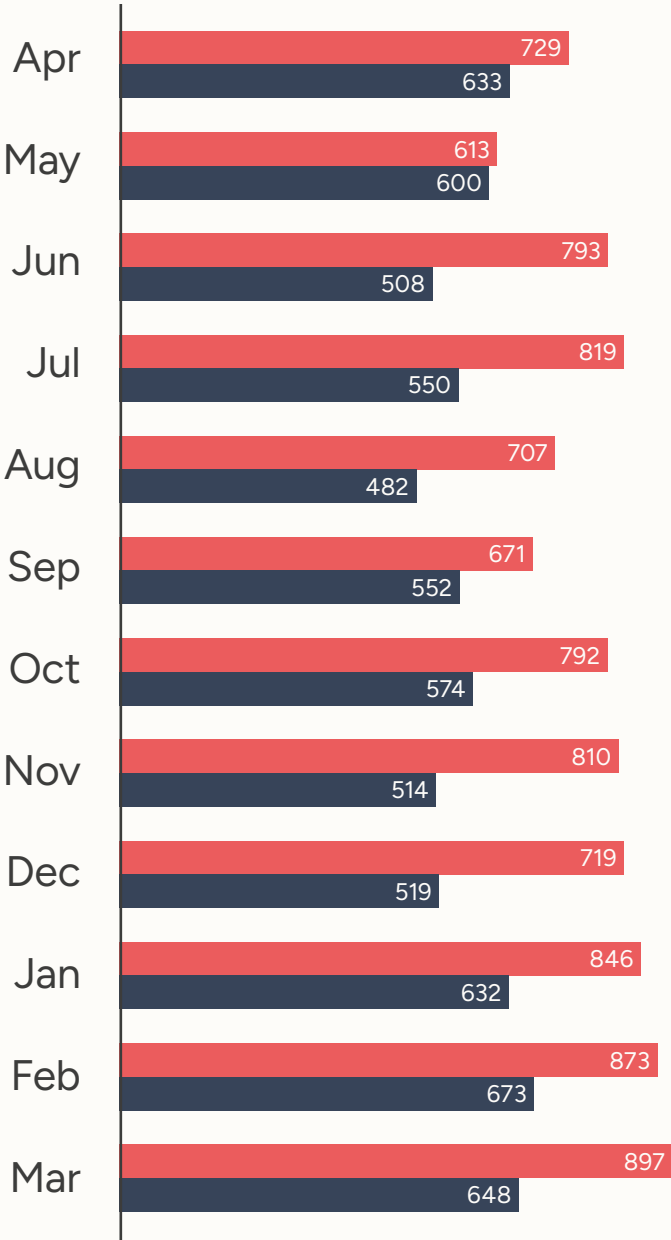
Customers told us that their key complaint handling concerns related to the follow through of actions and commitments made as a part of the complaint resolution. We know that this is an area we must improve, over the next year. We are introducing new functionality to our complaints management system to support this and ensure that every action has an owner, and a clear oversight to ensure it happens.

### Year-on-year satisfaction comparison

| 2024/25                |       | 2025/26                |       |
|------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| Complaint handling (P) |       | Complaint handling (P) |       |
| ↑0.7%                  | 46.4% | ↑2.9%                  | 49.2% |
| Complaint handling (T) |       | Complaint handling (T) |       |
| ↑3.1%                  | 28.5% | ↓7.5%                  | 21.0% |

P = Perception  
T = Transactional

## Number of Stage 1 Complaints by month



2025/26  
2024/25

In 24/25, 1,573 complaints were escalated to stage 2. This increased in 25/26 where 2,099 complaints escalated to stage 2. Customers have told us that their main reasons for escalating a complaint are because commitments at stage 1 were not followed through, because the offer of compensation was too low or we did not resolve it to their satisfaction, and because of unsatisfactory complaints investigations. These are key priorities over the coming year and will be addressed through our service improvement plan.

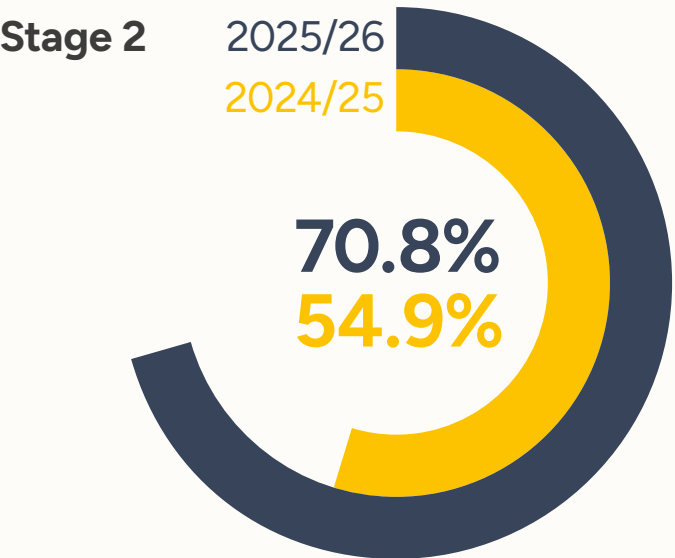
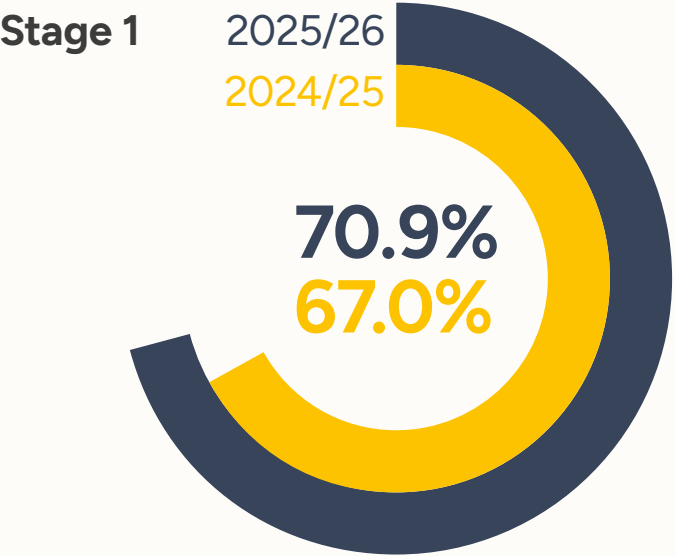


# Timeframes

In line with the Housing Ombudsman Service complaint handling code, our target timeframe for complaints is to respond within 10 working days. This extends to 20 working days when a complaint is escalated to Stage 2.

The number of complaints we respond to in time has increased. The increase in volumes of complaints impacted the speed in which we were able to investigate a complaint. To address this, we increased the number of officers within the Complaints Team and are now focusing on improving ways of working so that we become more efficient whilst delivering high levels of customer care during each investigation.

We will always try to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible, whilst remaining thorough. We will continue to focus on improving how quickly we resolve customer complaints.



# Reasons for complaints

|                                         |       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|
| Works or services not being carried out | 26.8% |
| Poor quality works or service           | 11.6% |
| Behaviour of staff                      | 11.6% |
| Communication with customers            | 11.3% |

London has higher levels of complaints, with 44.8% of all complaints being reported by London customers, despite London only accounting for 22.3% of homes. While works or services not being carried out is often the primary reason for complaints, London customers are more likely to make a complaint about the quality of communication, when compared to customers living in any other area.

The drivers of complaints continue to be addressed by the relevant teams and in shaping our improvement priorities. Complaints and customer feedback from 6 London estates led to the creation of an improvement task force that are focused on reducing the root causes of complaints and dealing with customer concerns, with a dedicated improvement plan, and budget. Improving our repairs service remains a top priority, and communication with our customers and behaviour of staff is being addressed through the Brighter Future Together strategy.

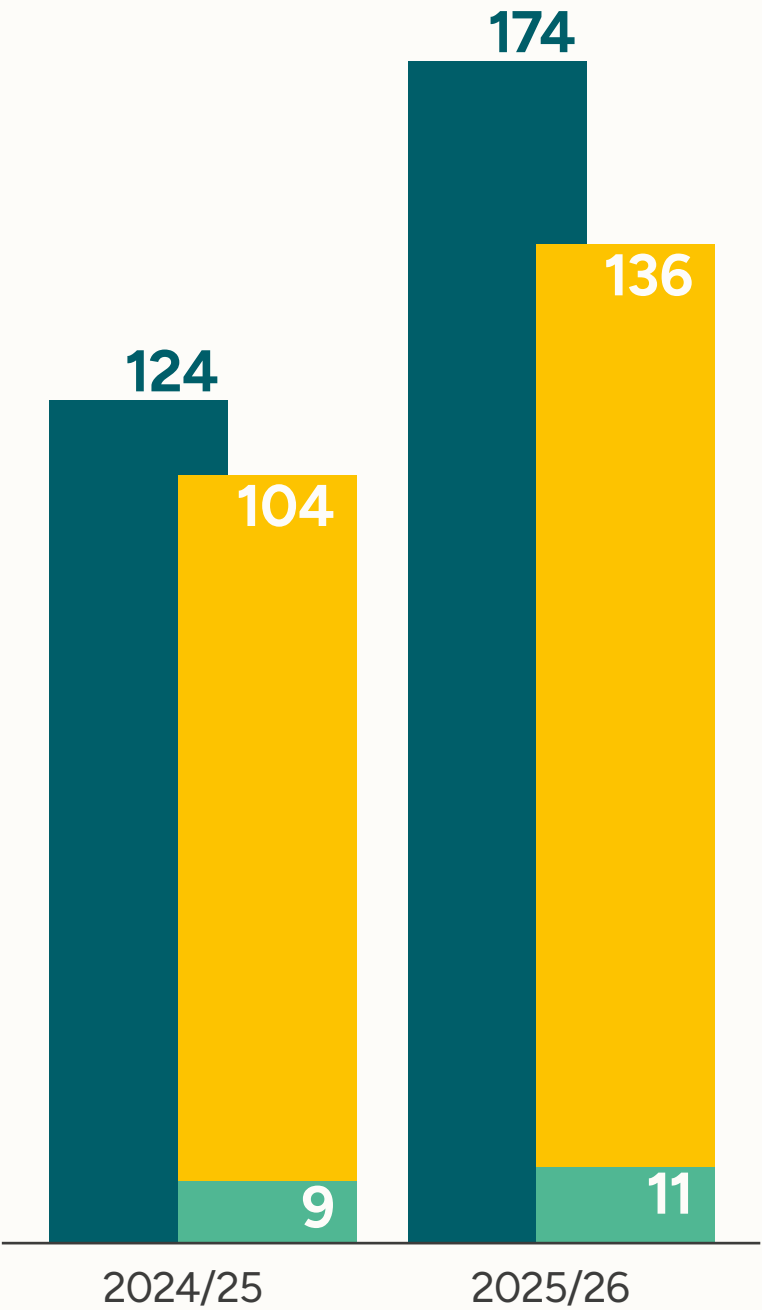
# Housing Ombudsman findings

We welcome the findings and lessons learnt from Housing Ombudsman determinations and feedback. Each severe maladministration determination received is reviewed by the Executive Team and assigned a named owner, to embed lessons learnt and deliver service improvements.

The overall number of cases investigated by the Housing Ombudsman increased with the oldest determination relating to a complaint logged in 2022 and concluded in March 2023. Whilst many of the determinations are from historic complaints, we continue to carry out case reviews on every determination we receive to identify what we must do to ensure that the same issue does not happen again in the future.

The complaint root causes that were most frequently investigated by the Housing Ombudsman were in relation to damp and mould, leaks and water ingress, general repair failures and plumbing issues. These remain key priorities for us to improve through the repairs improvement project.

- Complaints investigated by the Housing Ombudsman
- Findings of maladministration
- Findings of severe maladministration



We received one Complaint Handling Failure Order (CHFO). This related to a complaint that was not initially recognised and recorded under our complaints process. We addressed the issue immediately, accepted the complaint, and ensured the customer received a full complaint response in line with the Complaint Handling Code. Since then, we have also rolled out further complaints training to colleagues and continue to provide regular refresher training so that staff members accurately identify and record complaints.

During the same period, 100 complaints were not accepted into our formal complaints process. We only apply exclusions where it is fair and appropriate, and in line with both our Complaints Policy and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code. Every complaint is considered individually, and customers are provided with an explanation of our decision and information about their right to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if they disagree. The reasons for not accepting these complaints include instances where

the complaint had previously been investigated at Stage 1 and 2 of our process, or where the issue was a first-time service request that we were not previously aware of. If a complaint is not formally accepted, we remain committed to working with customers to get their concerns resolved in a timely and effective way.

Riverside was featured in two Housing Ombudsman Learning from Severe Maladministration publications during 2025/26. These publications provided an opportunity to share our learning and the improvements implemented following detailed case reviews, including changes to repairs oversight, complaint handling, customer communication and damp and mould management. While always want to deliver consistently good services, we're committed to learning from the Housing Ombudsman and improving our services for customers off the back of determinations and learning from complaints reports. Our full learning statements can be found on the Housing Ombudsman website.

# 03 Customer feedback

Every month, we speak to customers who have had a complaint closed to better understand their experiences, and how we can improve working with them to resolve it and put things right.

In addition to this, this year we have spoken to a further 645 customers with :

**622**  
customers completing an in-depth survey

**11**  
customers taking part in in-depth interviews

**12**  
customers participating in a focus group

We have provided a sample of the feedback customers gave us:



“Maybe perhaps a little more understanding how frustrating it can be for a resident to have to make a complaint rather than the repair being done in the first place. The last thing a resident wants to do is complain. We just want repairs to be done.”

“Once I had raised the complaint the matter was dealt with quickly, so I felt it was handled very well.”

“Don’t allow failures to repeatedly occur then there would be no need [to complain].”

“To make sure my repair was dealt with properly the first time.”

“My complaint was very easy to report it was dealt with quickly by Elaine. Within days I had a visit from a supervisor and workmen were at my property. Very pleased with how it was handled and I was kept updated throughout by Elaine. Thanks!”

“Get in touch much earlier after the issue was first reported.”

“Riverside were very patient dealing with me with my mental health difficulties, nothing to improve.”

“In these days of customer service there are sometimes too many bricks and not enough bouquets. I feel Danny should get some sort of recognition for his sterling work ethic and if there is such a thing as Employee of the year, he should be awarded a hundred fold.”

“Answer in time, listen to residents, fulfil their duty, send a response, acknowledge emails, be honest.”

“More communication, honesty. Understanding and knowing a tenants rights more.”



# 04 Listening to and acting on feedback

We recognise that listening to and acting on customer feedback is a key part of improving our performance, generally and in relation to complaints.

Each month, we publish five examples of how we’re doing so on our website at [www.riverside.org.uk/contact-and-feedback/get-involved/you-said-we-did](http://www.riverside.org.uk/contact-and-feedback/get-involved/you-said-we-did)

Here are just a few examples of how we have listened to customers over the past year.

## General listening examples

**My Riverside Masterclass** – Members of our Customer Service Centre team were in London recently to put on a My Riverside masterclass for customers on some of our key estates. It followed feedback from customers that they weren’t confident in using online services to report repairs and other issues. We had a really good number of customers attend and we’re hopeful that they’ll consider using online services on their smartphones in the future, free up on our phonelines for emergency calls.

Our teams have been out and about in the North East this month to speak directly to customers about their homes and neighbourhoods, visiting Hird Close in Gateshead and Homes in Gilesgate Moor, Durham. The teams spent time gathering views, concerns and ideas to help shape new Neighbourhood Plans for the areas. Those plans will now be compiled and sent out to customers. For more on your local plan, visit [www.riverside.org.uk/your-community](http://www.riverside.org.uk/your-community).

A fantastic array of customers attended our local drop in day at the Flower and Dean Community Centre, in London. With anti-social behaviour a clear concern on the estate we listened to a range of problems and suggestions for improvements with Community Safety team members and council officers attending to hear the issues from customers directly. The event was so popular that the local team are now looking to hold the events every couple of months.

Customers in Morton, Cumberland told us that there were several problematic areas which had been subject to fly-tipping. So, as part of our annual Operation Respect Day, which we hold every year in partnership with Cumberland Council, we made a big effort to tackle them and make the estate a cleaner, greener place to live. With help from our Environmental Services team, we filled 2 huge skips and carried out several litter picks. Customers got involved too, coming along to help, and we put on activities for children and free ice-cream to make the day good fun.

## Complaints specific

Following multiple complaints across 6 estates in London, we’ve initiated a project and team to focus on each estate, with a dedicated budget and authority to address the root causes of them. Areas of focus include gardening, cleaning, use of communal spaces and the way anti-social behaviour is being managed. We will monitor the progress and success of this approach through customer satisfaction data, and in the reduction of volume of complaints received.

More than 500 customers have volunteered to be part of our new customer groups and panels. The incredible response is the culmination of more than a year of work by customers and team members to form our new Customer Influence & Accountability Framework. This includes the setting up of the Complaints Panel, who are now working with the complaints team to improve handling and update the complaints policy.

Following reports and complaints about damp and mould in multiple flats in Black Swan Road, a review of the design of the building took place to establish the root causes and put a plan in place. Subsequently, this approach to inspecting the design of properties has been implemented into new procedures now being rolled out by the Damp and Mould working group. The learning from this complaint is being used to improve services for all of our customers.

As a direct result of complaints about lifts, we have introduced a dedicated team to keep customers updated on lift outages whilst we carry out repairs. These communications now explain what has happened, what is being done about it and when the lift is expected to be back in operation. Updates are provided regularly, often daily, so that we’re proactively providing information to customers.

# 05 Our complaints improvement plan – 26/27

Throughout Q1 of this year, our priority focus has been on development of the service by recruiting new team members, establishing clearer processes and a clearer focus on resolving issues. We have also worked hard on rebuilding trust with our customers as key factor on the outcome of reporting a complaint.

During Q2, we will be seeking to implement our new improvement plan and progressing recommendations from the review.

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## Q1

- Recruitment.
- Process review and improvement.
- Focus on resolving issues and rebuilding trust.

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## Q2

- Improvement plan introduced.
- Implement recommendation of process review.

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## Q3/4

- Focus on issues and root causes.
- Working with services to reduce complaints volumes.





## Get in touch or find out more



**[www.riverside.org.uk](http://www.riverside.org.uk)**  
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Speak to a member of our team



We are happy to accept **Relay UK** calls.

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