



Report on the communication process of the property MOT service

**Liverpool City
Scrutiny Panel**



February 2017

In partnership with
Riverside



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1. Introduction

Riverside Liverpool City Region Tenant Scrutiny Panel consists solely of tenant members. Administrative support is provided by Riverside's Scrutiny Officer and it works closely with Riverside in a co-regulatory approach to the scrutiny process.

In conducting a scrutiny review of the communication process within the Property MOT Service, the Panel has taken an in-depth look at the offer, acting as 'critical friends' and reporting back to tenants and Riverside.



2. Background

Tenants access the Repairs and Maintenance Service on a daily basis. The service they receive from Riverside reflects on their overall impression of their landlord. Of the top three complaints made by tenants and published in the Riverside annual report, 62% were about repairs.

The cost of the repairs service increases every year and, in an attempt to improve the response rate to repair requests, Riverside has introduced a property MOT programme to reduce the number of repair transactions and improve the overall quality of housing stock.

Property MOTs are carried out on individual properties identified through stock condition surveys. It's a four to five year rolling programme and, to date, over 1,200 properties in the Liverpool City Region have either undergone or been identified for an MOT.

Following less than positive feedback received from tenants, both via the complaints process and through word of mouth, this review aims to investigate the effectiveness of the communication process between Riverside and its tenants, as well as how their landlord keeps them informed from when their property is identified for an MOT through to its conclusion.

3. Scope of the review

In considering the communication process within the Property MOT Service, the Panel examined data and existing practice through interviews with tenants, staff and relevant documentation including:

1. identifying areas where positive or negative practices are in operation and can be improved
2. issues needing to be addressed
3. review of equality practices
4. tenant feedback
5. social value

The intention of the review has been to look at ways to improve the communication process within the Property MOT Service and not the MOT itself or the follow on repairs to the tenant's property.

The information given in this review is correct at the time of the scrutiny exercise.

4. Overview

The Property MOT Service is an innovative and value for money service for Riverside tenants. However, this scrutiny review has found that some improvements are needed.

It is becoming apparent through the review that channels of communication are not good between tenants, Riverside and Evolve. There is a process, but it is rarely followed productively. At times, staff and tenants are frustrated with both Riverside and Evolve. The fact they work from different database systems adds to this frustration. However, there is light ahead as a new in-house communication system will link all services together.

For this review, the Panel has made a number of observations and recommendations and will monitor these over the next 12 months.

5. Key findings

5.1 Open day

The initial documentation given to tenants goes some way to explaining the process. However, the information is quite limited, and it doesn't fully explain the formal process for tenants to ask questions. When asked, tenants said an open day, like the ones for the planned maintenance programme, would provide a chance for tenants to ask any questions they may have and give Asset Officers the opportunity to reassure tenants and get the lines of communication set up from the start. This was done in Mersey North but the response was low, so future open days would need to be tailored.

The Panel also saw the benefit of letters being tailored to meet different needs e.g. large print, Braille, audio and translated into languages other than English.

5.2 Missed appointments

As missed appointments are an issue, tenants suggested that the cards left by Asset Officers or operatives should state the date and time they called. Tenants were in favour of a booklet that described each part of the process simply with contact information, calendar and a named Asset Officer. It was also felt that strong links with other agencies would help to meet needs and strengthen the communication process, something that would also involve Housing Officers.

5.3 Call back

There needs to be clarity as to who tenants can contact during the MOT. Some Asset Officers give a personal contact telephone number, some don't, and some say to contact the Customer Service Centre. While Riverside has a commitment to respond to customers within 24 hours, this does not happen often enough for the Panel or tenants to feel they can give positive customer satisfaction.

5.4 Stock surveys

There were concerns that stock surveys were used to determine if properties were a valuable asset or were to be placed on a disposal list. There was no evidence to back this.

There seems to be a disjointed approach between Riverside and Evolve (covered later in the report). The Panel strongly recommends that this is improved.

There is also a feeling that the equality and diversity process is not clear enough – there are a number of issues highlighted in the report that need immediate attention.



6. Internal communication

As stated before, the relationship between Riverside and Evolve seems disjointed. Problems with access to properties, over programming, extended turnaround for completion of work, lack of post inspections and a shortfall in customer satisfaction, all highlight the need for a more joined up approach.

Access issues are a major concern and our findings have identified a 'blame' culture. The communication process within Riverside needs to be improved and an information gathering exercise completed to make sure all tenants' contact details are up to date. It seems clear to the Panel that these issues can be sorted through a joint weekly meeting between Asset Officers, Evolve operatives and Housing Officers. This way any problems, planned work, access issues and general concerns can be sorted out in one meeting rather than several phone calls and emails. This would then lead to increased satisfaction levels for staff, contractors and tenants.

Riverside should also make out of hours appointments to reduce the number of complaints from tenants having to take time off work at unsuitable hours. Evolve already follow this procedure.

Over programming is a cause for concern. Stock surveys and improvements are on target, but the repairs programme is currently running behind. The turnaround time for completion of jobs has risen from 28 days to 56 days, which the Panel found unacceptable.

Another recommendation was for a central site office, probably in an empty property, once an area had been identified for the MOT programme. Asset Officers, Evolve staff, Housing Officers and administrative support could co-ordinate the process more effectively from this central location. Tenants would also be able to contact staff more quickly, and issues could potentially be resolved within the turnaround time. A central site office would allow a better approach to post inspections – the Panel found the current rate to be below the acceptable level.

Evolve has recommended that a list of properties and the work to be done should be sent to the MOT Manager and shared with tenants to keep them informed and lessen any frustrations.

7. Tenant experience

The experience of tenants has been paramount in this review. Findings from the tenant questionnaire and complaints logged highlighted a number of issues. These should have been captured at post inspections and as part of meaningful customer satisfaction data.

The five tenant feedback responses received from Evolve did not show a balanced satisfaction result, as all responses were limited in what was asked. The Panel recommend that the forms ask for more in depth responses from tenants. The Riverside text recommends that tenants received to assess satisfaction is also limited and this should not be seen as a conclusive 'thumbs up'.

The feedback from tenants, both from the questionnaire as well as anecdotally from tenants who wished to remain anonymous, was negative. However, not all tenants had a bad experience. In fact, some welcomed the MOT programme and praised the process and professionalism of the staff. This tenant feedback plays a vital role in improving the MOT process.

The Panel recommends the creation of a Tenant Panel to report to the weekly operational meetings. This would help to deliver a much improved and insightful service – one that offers value for money.



8. Results from tenant questionnaires

A total of 150 questionnaires were sent out to a completely random sample of tenants who have had an MOT carried out on their property. There were 27 questionnaires returned; a success rate of 18%.

8.1 How did you find out about the MOT?

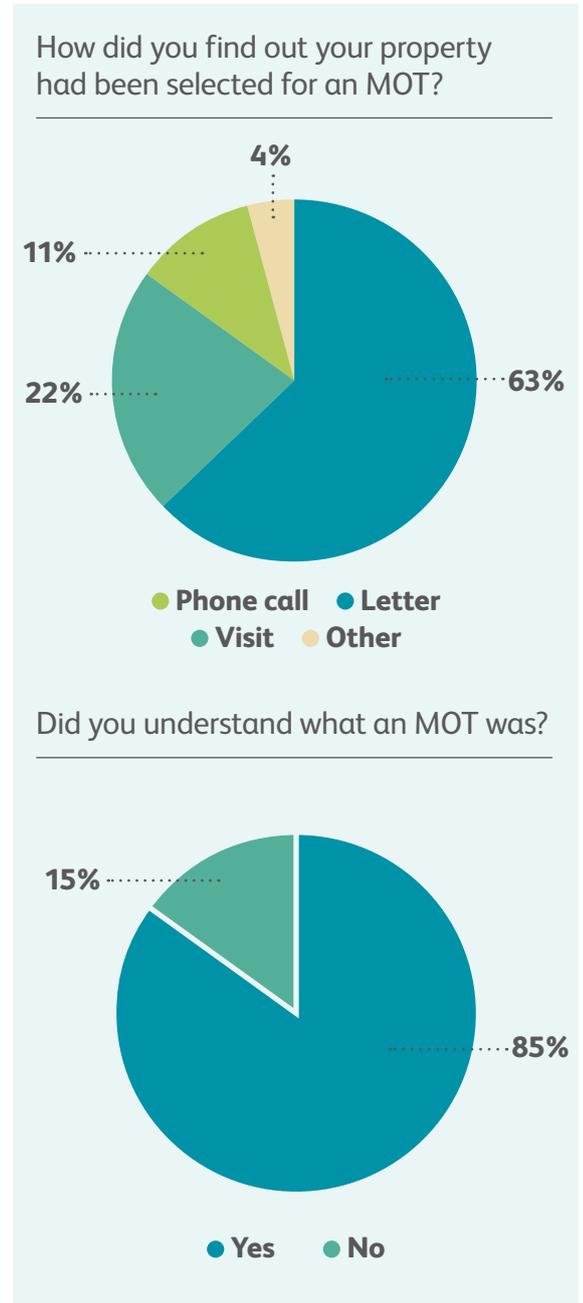
The most common way for people to find out about their MOT was by letter, although many people received a visit from an Asset Officer to let them know about the MOT. One person said: “Letters should be sent out before the officer visited, as I did not believe him at first”. This is something that needs addressing. There are numerous cases in the media about bogus cold calling, so some people maybe wary of letting people into their homes.

8.2 Understanding the MOT

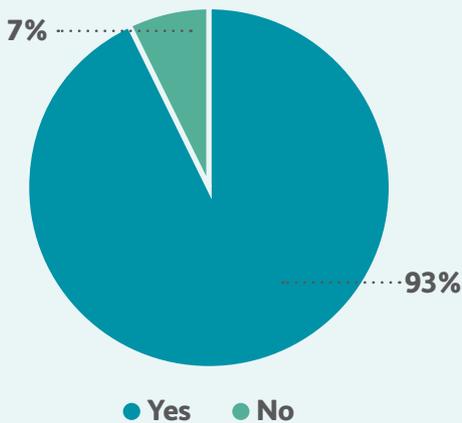
The majority of people (85%) understood what an MOT was; 15% said they did not understand.

8.3 Did you agree with the works?

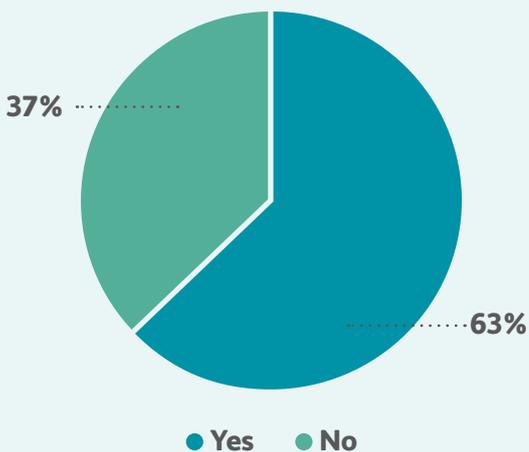
The majority of people (93%) agreed with the works to be carried out; only 7% did not agree.



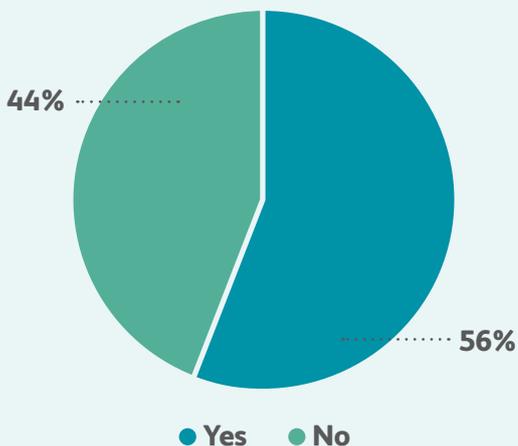
Did you agree with what works were to be carried out?



Were you assigned an Asset Officer you could contact?



Have you needed to contact Riverside regarding your MOT?



8.4 Assigned Asset Officer

Most people (63%) were assigned with an Asset Officer they could contact; 37% were not assigned an officer. However, some tenants said that they weren't able to contact them or didn't receive call backs. Comments from tenants included: "I was assigned an Asset Officer but cannot contact him" and "Trying to contact the officer in charge is a difficult task, and when you finally do speak to him it takes months for any repairs to be done if they ever do".

8.5 Contacting Riverside

Most people (56%) needed to contact Riverside regarding their MOT. The majority of contact was made to chase repairs. One tenant said: "To be honest the service provided by Riverside is bad. I have had to make numerous phone calls to them regarding repairs in my property, they have come out a few times but still not fixed it. After four or five visits there are still things outstanding".

8.6 Missed appointments

Most appointments made were kept (67%); but a significant number (33%) were missed.

8.7 Post inspections

Most properties (59%) did not have a post inspection. This is an important issue for tenants, who then have to chase Riverside and Evolve for incomplete repairs, as issues should be picked up on the post inspection.

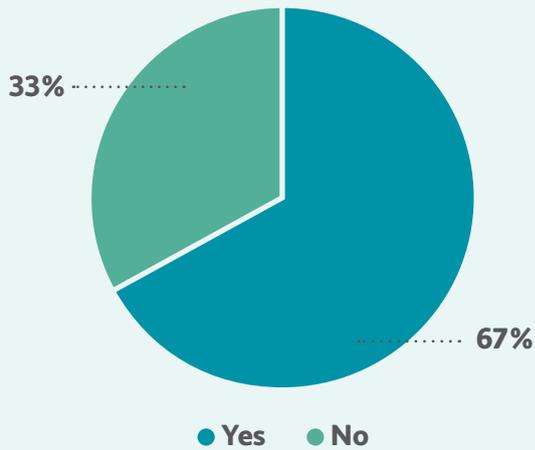
8.8 Individual needs

Most people's individual needs were met (70%); but 30% of people said that their needs were not met.

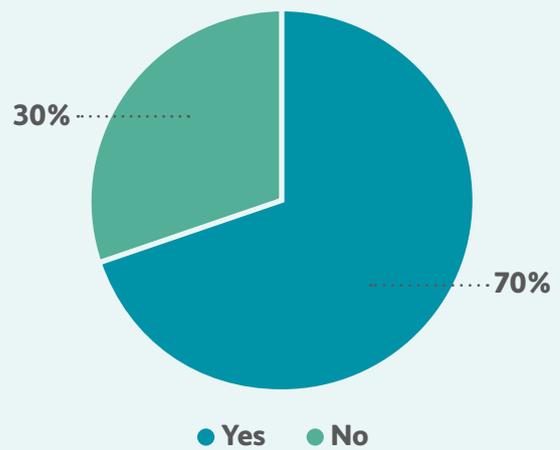
8.9 Overall experience

From the responses received, 56% of tenants said that they had a positive experience; 44% did not find it to be positive.

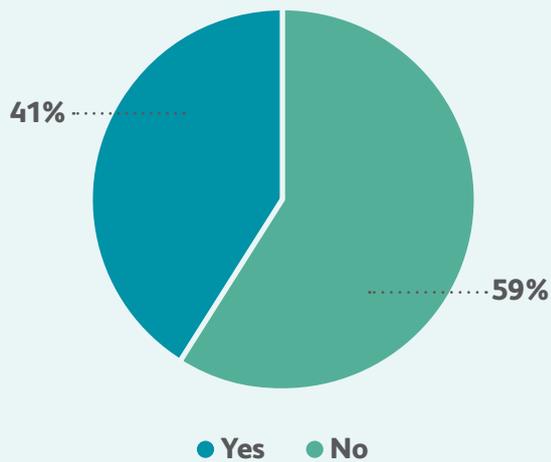
Were all appointments made and kept?



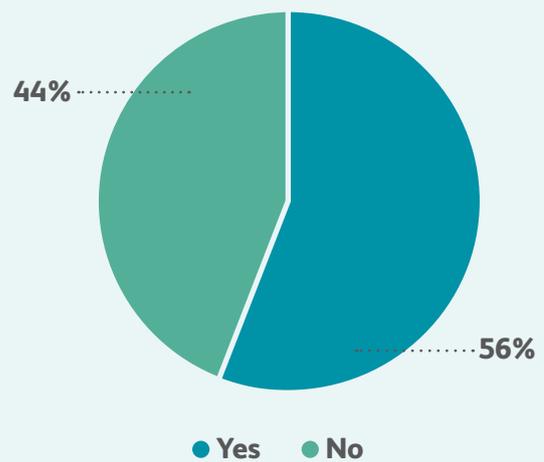
Were your individual needs met?



Was a post inspection carried out and did you fill out a feedback form?



Was your overall experience of the MOT positive?



“We felt comfortable with the workmen in the house. All really excellent workers and nice men.”

8.10 Feedback



“I am still waiting for parts of my MOT to be carried out. Previous repair requests were put on the MOT and took 12 months to be done. Due to this, other repairs now need doing. The process is frustrating as you cannot report and get work done if it’s under the MOT, even if it’s not getting repaired. Complaints are also ignored.”

Some of the comments that have been received back included:

“Was expecting bigger jobs to be done, such as radiators needed repairing but they weren’t checked. They also replaced a bathroom light, which I was grateful for, but the replacement bulbs are impossible to buy.”

“Very good service, I think an MOT should be done every year or two.”

“Had a leaking roof for years and I’m sick of waiting for scaffolding. I’ve got to sleep on the couch in the living room sometimes. Hardly any repairs have been done. I ring up but just get put onto someone passing the buck all the time. Been waiting 12 months for repairs, just promises after promises.”

“I was a great proponent of the MOT... it enables Riverside to know how its properties are maintained and the state of each tenant whilst maintaining the quality of the housing stock. Riverside is an excellent landlord and the MOT is a sensible idea... it just needs tuning.”

“The Asset Officer tells you what jobs need doing then tells the contractor something different. Riverside’s email and message service are exceptional.”

The images below were passed on by a tenant who had recently received an MOT. They said the Asset Officer did not pick up on the trees growing out of the roof and chimney stack.



9. Equality impact

Understanding equality and diversity is integral in the delivery of the MOT programme. It is important that every effort is taken to tailor the service offer to vulnerable tenants and to make sure lines of communication are clear so tenants understand the process. Liverpool City Region has a diverse tenant population and the Panel wanted to know how the process was communicated to vulnerable tenants.

Evidence from Riverside was anecdotal. The Panel was told that every effort was made to ensure the needs of vulnerable tenants were met. However, no clear evidence was produced. There was no method for identifying tenant issues in order to prioritise work, such as taking into account the age of the tenant and the level and requirements for working in properties with people with disabilities.

When working with people who have English as a second language or tenants who were profoundly deaf and needed a sign language interpreter, the Panel was told that Asset Officers would contact a suitable outside agency for advice. However, there was no evidence of this. Evolve produced a document, 'Translation Book for Contractors', which they had adapted from another contractor. This translates the process for work to be done into eleven languages. It provides limited information with small images and lettering and, although it does say that a translation service is available, it does not say how or when this would happen.

This resource falls short of what is required and needs to be addressed.

Riverside has a Tailoring Your Service green triangle system for identifying vulnerable tenants, which can only be updated by Housing Officers. This means that unless it's updated on a regular basis the information is worthless. On top of this, Riverside and Evolve do not have access to the same systems, which causes a breakdown in communication.

There was no evidence of any needs assessment having been carried out, although a risk assessment is part of the process. The Panel was not given any information as to whether this was done on the property, but it has to be completed as a matter of urgency at the first point of contact with tenants.

Given the limited evidence of any equality procedure, the Panel recommends the introduction of a comprehensive training programme for both Riverside and Evolve staff. This needs to include issues around equality and diversity, including the use of communication tools, identifying needs and understanding barriers.

The Panel also recommends that a full Equality Impact Assessment be carried out with the Equality and Diversity Manager.

10. Social value

The Property MOT Service offers a long-term solution to a rising costly repairs service. In neighbourhoods where social value is evident, it communicates to tenants and residents that Riverside is committed to bringing benefits to local areas.

The Property MOT Service should also provide employment and work experience for local people; work with local organisations that understand local needs; and include a social value element within all of its tenders.

Although no evidence was presented to support this, the Panel would hope that adding social value to the MOTs forms a major part of its future.

11. Conclusion

There is no doubt that MOTs are an innovative way for Riverside to provide value for money. However, there is no evidence to show this and, after the length of time the programme has been running, the benefits should be evident.

A collaborative and co-ordinated approach will improve the service and develop better communication processes between Riverside, Evolve and tenants.

12. Recommendations

1. Improve documentation

Arrange open days in each identified area

Produce calendar of agreed appointments with tenants

Tailor information to meet different needs

Produce an information booklet

Update website and populate with targeted area information

Produce a template to be signed by tenant and Asset Officer on agreement of repairs list

2. Programme development

Increase post inspections

Introduce weekly operations meetings

Introduce out of hours visits

Devise programme to eliminate over programming

Identify long term void properties as local site office

Create spreadsheet to update all work

3. Improve access protocols

Housing Officers to make sure tenant information is up to date

Produce missed appointment cards with time and date stamp facility

Ensure systems are linked

Respond to tenants within 24 hour timescale

4. Evaluation and satisfaction

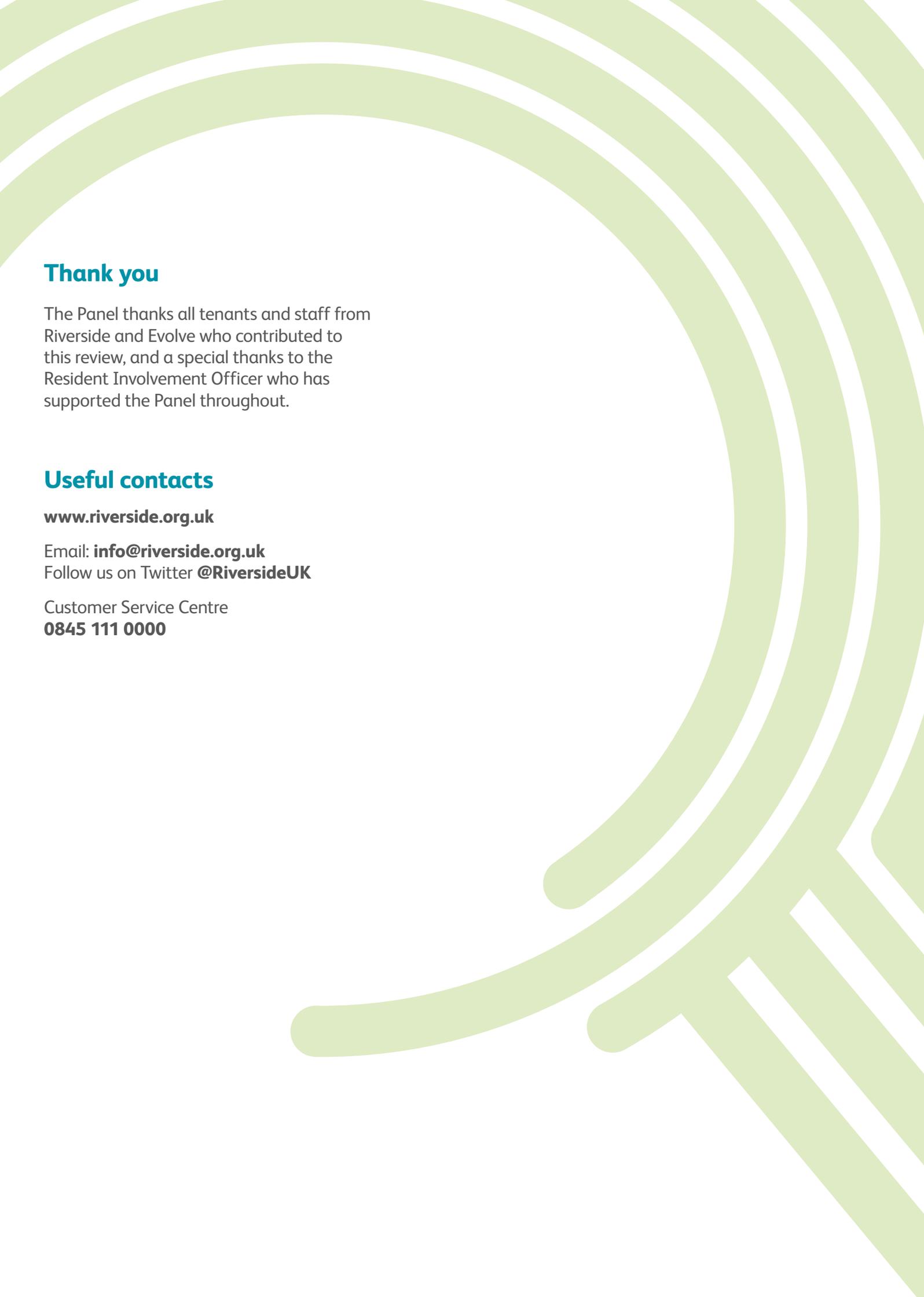
Recruit Tenant Panel to monitor and inspect

Increase feedback

5. Equality and diversity

Develop a training programme for staff

Instigate Equality Impact Assessment



Thank you

The Panel thanks all tenants and staff from Riverside and Evolve who contributed to this review, and a special thanks to the Resident Involvement Officer who has supported the Panel throughout.

Useful contacts

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