

RIVERSIDE INQUIRERS

Review of Digital Inclusion in Supported Housing

Scrutiny Report

December 2016:



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## 1.0 Introduction

We are the Riverside Inquirers (RI's), the Scrutiny Panel for Riverside Care and Support (RCS). We were formed in 2012 and this is our fourth report. This review was undertaken by the following Inquirers

- ✚ Michael Pells – Chair
- ✚ Sharon Joshi
- ✚ Dawn Foxley
- ✚ Shirley Ifield
- ✚ Sioux McNally
- ✚ Nigel Roberts (local Inquirer)
- ✚ Liam Rothwell



We also received advice and guidance from Louise Thompson, our independent mentor.

## 2.0 Selection of Topic

For this review, we decided to focus on issues and concerns coming directly from tenants via neighbourhood forum meetings, scheme meetings and pop up involvement events. From these sources, we discovered that some Riverside supported housing customers are struggling to access vital on line services, which is causing them significant hardship and challenges. We therefore agreed to undertake a review of digital inclusion, focusing on these key areas

1. Understanding the digital experience of tenants living in supported Housing.
2. Investigating the provision of Wi-Fi in Riverside supported housing schemes and exploring the current customer and staff satisfaction with it.
3. Examining Riversides current approach to digital inclusion and identifying areas of good practice, as well as those areas requiring improvement.

### 3.0 Methodology

Our methodology was a mix of desktop work and reality checking, as outlined below:

#### Desk top papers examined included

1.	Riverside Support Worker job description April 2013
2.	Riverside Digital Inclusion Strategy March 2015
3.	Riverside Digital Business Strategy October 2016
4.	Government Digital Service- A checklist for digital inclusion- if we do these things, we're doing digital inclusion
5.	Cottsway Housing – Digital Inclusion Statement
6.	CHS people Digital Inclusion Training resources

#### Reality Checking methods included

✚ Face to Face Survey – a total of 97 supported housing tenants were interviewed at the following schemes

- ✓ Wakefield Marshway House
- ✓ Springs
- ✓ Regent House
- ✓ Towers Point
- ✓ The Beacon
- ✓ Cambridge Youth Foyer
- ✓ Victoria Project
- ✓ Peabody
- ✓ Hilltop
- ✓ The Quays
- ✓ Boundaries
- ✓ The Crossing

✚ Tenant Stories

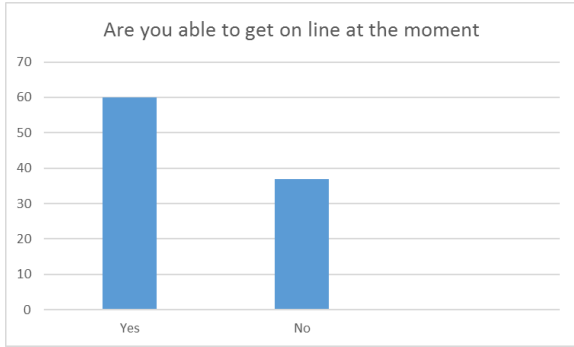
✚ Staff survey and interviews. We had survey responses from 15 scheme staff plus a written response to questions put to Sally Nicholson, Head of Operations.

### 4.0 Results and Findings

The main findings from our research are outlined below. The detailed results of all our reality checking can be found in our evidence folder which is available for inspection on request

#### Tenants Survey Results:

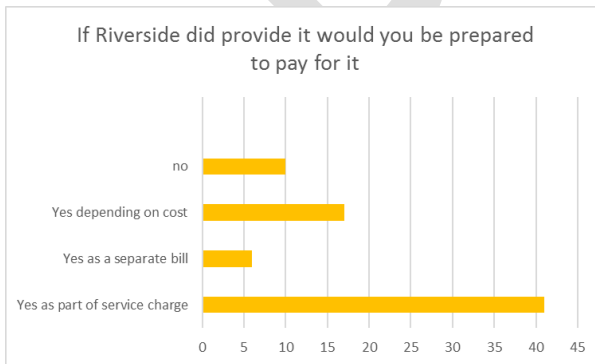
37 tenants (38%) are not on line at the moment



Of those who were not on line, 21 or 57% said the reason for this was affordability, with the remaining stating it was down to the lack of provision



**Most** tenants would be prepared to pay towards good quality internet access, with most preferring to do this via their service charge

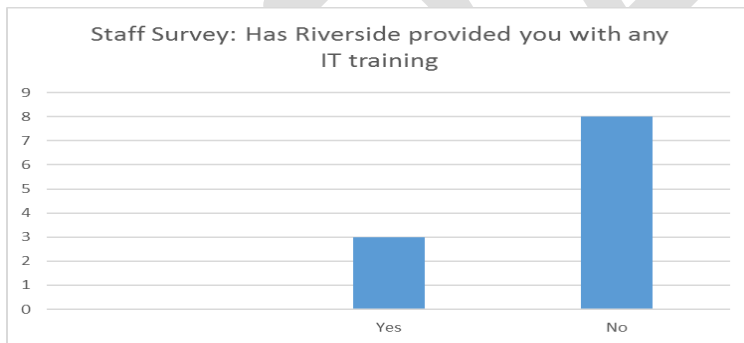


### Key Comments from tenants

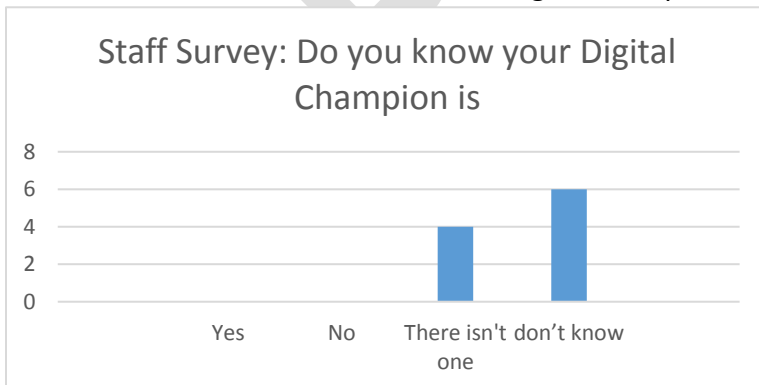
- Wi fi is available everywhere – why not here!
- Would prioritise WIFI rather than rent as we need it for benefits (universal credit)
- I am paying £41 per month for internet access and when I moved and it cost £50 reconnection fee within the same scheme. I didn't pay my rent as a result
- They charge a cancellation fee if you try and cancel the contract, and even if I go over by 1mb I get a standing charge of £15
- Not having access makes it harder to bid for properties – you have to hope someone is at reception to show you the website and then bid. Sometimes they are too busy to do this to help, and when staff are there to help, we have to do the bidding in full view of everyone.
- Internet has become a necessary factor in life
- It's increasingly difficult to function as a human being without it!
- Been asking for wifi for 4 months but had no response
- How long before we get this internet access?
- When I was half way through a benefit claim, the Wi-Fi crashed and I lost it all

### Staff Survey

Most staff had not received any digital training from Riverside



Most staff did not know if there was a digital champion



## Staff Comments

- ✚ If a customer asks me how to get on line I would say go to the council
- ✚ I advise them to use the pc suite to bid but the Wi-Fi can be temperamental
- ✚ If they need to bid – I ask them to give me log in details and come to me in the office
- ✚ I advise them to go to the library if they need the internet
- ✚ I advise to log onto our laptop – we have 1 laptop for 48 customers
- ✚ It would have a huge impact for lives of customers to have stable Wi-Fi in the whole of building.

## In depth Interviews

### Tenant Story 1

Michelle (not her real name) is in her fifties and lives in supported housing. She doesn't own a smartphone as cannot afford it but has a laptop which she was given. This is her story

*I am not able to access the internet at my scheme because there is only one computer and that is for staff use only, there is also no Wi-Fi available. This meant I couldn't bid for properties or keep in contact with my son. I had heard about portable internet so rang a well-known communications company to ask them about it. They advised that I buy a dongle at cost of £26 per month for 10 GB of data. To be honest I have no idea what a gigabyte is but assumed it meant I would be ok to use face book, play games and connect with my family. I therefore gave them my bank details and they set up a Direct Debit for the amount.*

*After a few months, I noticed that my bank balance was down, and I got to the point where I didn't have any money at all in the account and I went overdrawn for the first time ever in my life. I asked my bank for the statements to see where my money was going. They gave me a massive sheet of payments taken from the Phone Company. The highest monthly charge was £363.74. I was shocked. I had nothing left for food or rent money and had to ask my son for help. He said that this was a huge amount and something was wrong, so we phoned the phone company. They said I had used additional gigabytes and this was charged at as pay as you go rate so I had racked up additional costs. I have no idea what a gigabyte is, and what that means in terms of using the internet. I am not that good at using the internet anyway but have been told that instead of saving the games I play to use them off line, I was downloading them every day using loads of data.*

*It would have made such a difference to me if I had had someone to support or advise me re this as part of my support package. If they had, I don't think I would have ended up in this debt.*

*Some people say you should have used WIFI, well there is no Wi-Fi in my scheme and I am not able due to my mobility problems to get out and about very easily. All I wanted to do was to connect with my son and the outside world and try and get my life back on track, but instead I ended up owing a huge amount of money.*

## **Tenant Story 2**

John (not his real name) is in his thirties and lives in supported housing. He needs internet access for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). John cannot afford the internet in his own flat and does not own a mobile phone due to cost. This is his story:

*I am not always able to access the internet at my scheme since there is only one computer which is not always working, or is very slow. When it is working there is always a queue and I am unable to complete my job search requirement of 34 hours per week on time. I was therefore sanctioned for 6 weeks and had to apply for a hardship allowance, which is only £40 every two weeks and must cover my food shopping. This meant I was unable to pay my service charges so I got in to rent arrears which over 6 weeks came to 48 pounds. I am still struggling to repay this debt, while still having to pay my weekly service charge as well.*

*I have also been sanctioned because I have limited internet skills, and the staff at my scheme had little knowledge of how the JSA works on line. The staff that did have experience in benefits were only at the scheme every three weeks or so I had no one to help or advise me.*

*In total, I have had my benefits sanctioned on three occasions. I shut myself off, became depressed and ended up on medication. I do not have any family members which meant I had no one to ask for money, and I even had to ask other tenants for a small loan which I had to repay out of my £40 per fortnight. This left me with even less money to live on.*

*I find myself very anxious when I know I have to meet job search targets, and I always worry if I can get on the internet in time. If Riverside had more updated internet access, and trained staff in benefits and JSA skills and knowledge, they could have supported and advised me, and I wouldn't have got into debt and been sanctioned. It is a Government requirement to complete my job search and apply for Benefits on line, so it would make more sense to have up to date and more reliable internet service and access. It would make a great difference to people like me.*

## **Tenant Story 3**

**Calvin (Not his real name) is a supported housing tenant in his twenties. He needs the internet for his studying. Here is his story**

*I moved into Regent House on 14/12/2016. I attend university four days a week studying art and design and am in my second year. When I moved into Regent House, I expected to be able to do research for my course work and communicate with my university, especially during the Christmas break, but found it impossible, as there is no internet access for customers living at Regent House.*

*I am writing to the scrutiny panel, to express my concern and disappointment, that Riverside does not enable customers to have full electronic participation in society.*

*I would be grateful, if the Scrutiny Panel could bring this to the attention of those at Riverside, whom*

*listen to customers' concerns. I feel individuals and groups should have the ability to access and use information and communication technologies and this is not the case for customers at Regent House.*

### Overall Summary of Findings

Key Line of Inquiry	Key findings
<p><b>To identify and understand the digital experience of tenants living in Support Housing</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tenants are getting into debt to pay for expensive pay as you go and contract data packages.</li> <li>2. Tenants are struggling to conduct job searches and apply for benefits because they are not able to get on line.</li> <li>3. Tenants are missing out on bidding for properties. Some properties are offered on a first come first served basis so tenants need to be on line when the new bidding cycle opens at midnight. However schemes tend to close their IT suites at night.</li> <li>4. The survey showed that most tenants are happy to pay an additional charge for good quality WIFI provision, either as a stand-alone cost or as part of the service charge.</li> <li>5. There is no private space for tenants in IT suites to talk to family and friends using SKYPE or similar video servers. Some tenants told us this impacted on their ability to communicate effectively with people and increased their feeling of isolation.</li> <li>6. Most tenants and staff said they were not aware of digital champions and they had no idea if they had one or not.</li> <li>7. Tenants are directed by staff to other places to get on line such as libraries or cafes. However, we found that this wasn't an ideal solution. Some tenants told us they did not live close to such facilities and couldn't afford the cost of getting there. Others told us that the library often had a time limit on usage and the connection was not private.</li> <li>8. There are on-going issues with the repair and maintenance of Riverside's public PC's and laptops. Tenants and staff reported long waits for repairs to be undertaken, further adding to the frustrations.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Mapping the provision of Wi-Fi in Riverside schemes and investigating current</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is no consistent digital "offer" for supported tenants in Riverside, provision varies considerably across schemes and it appears to very much a postcode lottery arrangement.</li> <li>2. There is poor digital hardware across schemes. WIFI systems are for domestic use rather than business use which means the signal strength is weak, it cannot support multiple users so it regularly crashes and boosters</li> </ol>



<p><b>customer and staff satisfaction with it</b></p>	<p>don't always work. In one scheme, we found tenants sitting in reception in their pyjamas so they could access the WIFI, as they were unable to get online in their rooms. (depends where your flat is)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. The laptops and PC's provided in schemes are also slow or do not work at all. Response time to fix any problems are lengthy as there doesn't appear to any service standards relating to IT repairs. For example, a scheme in Manchester has three computers but only 1 works, the other two have been out of action for over 9 months with no indication of when they will be repaired.</li> <li>4. Staff are not able to offer enough, or the right kind of digital advice or support to assist tenants to get on line or make good digital decisions.</li> <li>5. Staff and tenants are frustrated with the current digital provision, and feel it needs to be given priority and urgency given the impact that it has on tenants' quality of life.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Examining Riversides current approach to digital inclusion</b></p>	<p><b>The Riverside Digital Inclusion Strategy March 2015.</b></p> <p>This provides a good all round summary of the digital inclusion issues and challenges facing Riverside and its tenants. Indeed, we found that much of the content chimed quite closely with our own findings. However, we could find very little evidence to show that any progress has been made on the key strategic areas particularly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop divisional capacity</li> <li>○ Building organisational digital competence</li> </ul> <p>Given that the strategy is over 20 months old, and the significant negative impact digital exclusion has on tenants' lives, we feel this is simply unacceptable.</p> <p><b>Support Worker job description.</b></p> <p>We feel that this fails to capture or reflect the skills needed to help tenants function in today's digitally driven world. For example, it says assisting clients' needs with day-to-day tenancy issues, payment of rent, claiming benefits, preparing units to let but the only digital skills reference is in another section where it states they should be "able to use appropriate IT systems". This is vague and fails to make the important connection between support and digital skills.</p>

	<p><b>Riverside Digital Business Strategy</b></p> <p>This is Riversides’ 2-3-year plan for the digital channels it will use to deliver services to, and interact with customers. It uses several personas created from customer insight to inform/influence the digital service redesign. These “personas” are critical to understanding Riversides’ customers – see section from strategy below</p> <p><b>Understand our customers</b>      The customer personas have been developed to reflect the needs and concerns of the key customer groupings. Riverside should fully exploit these personas to ensure that the maximum impact is obtained from them. This should include developing communication strategies for each and reviewing them every two years to ensure that they accurately reflect the customers and stakeholders.</p> <p>As supported Housing customers, we feel both these personas fail to accurately represent the digital needs and concerns of the average supported housing tenant. Despite both supported personas (see appendix 1 and 2) being unemployed, one has both an iPad and a smart phone, and both are reported as having heavy internet usage, yet no reference is made to the affordability issue or the absence or poor quality of WIFI provision in schemes. Our research has shown that these are real issues for supported housing tenants and if Riverside wishes to understand its tenants, it needs to make sure the personas highlight this. We have therefore created our own supported housing persona that we feel is a more accurate reflection of the digital experience of a supported housing tenant. (see appendix 3)</p>
<p><b>Areas of positive practice</b></p>	<p>Staff clearly understand the issues and are very supportive of the need to improve the digital offer to supported tenants.</p> <p>Riverside’s digital strategy has already identified many of the issues that need to be addressed.</p>

## 5.0 Recommendations

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Why this is needed</b>	<b>How should this be implemented?</b>  (to be completed at challenge meeting)	<b>Suggested Timescales</b>  (to be completed at challenge meeting)
<b>Staff Training and Development</b>				
1.	Develop an internal digital training package for scheme staff	To build scheme staff's digital knowledge and understanding of on line benefits applications, job search and housing applications, to ensure they can provide effective support in today's digital world.		
2.	Update and modernize the support worker Job description to include specific reference to the digital skills and benefits knowledge required to support tenants.	See above		
3.	Until all staff are digitally skilled, a specific member of staff should be appointed as a Digital Inclusion Champion to give support and provide advice sheets (example available)	To provide effective digital support and advice.		
<b>Tenant Training and Information</b>				
4.	Provide a digital resource pack to give advice and information to tenants (see example)	To raise awareness of digital terminology and cost of internet packages		

5.	<p>Relaunch new digital champions volunteer programmer - tie to training and apprenticeships opportunities</p> <p>Use these not only to provide training but also to carry out simple PC maintenance tasks.</p>	<p>To provide tenants with digital training and support.</p> <p>To provide a prompt response to low level maintenance problem</p>		
Access and Affordability				
6.	<p>Create an action plan for the Digital Inclusion Strategy and get on with it!</p>	<p>The lack of internet access is adversely affecting Riverside's most vulnerable tenants. <b>This cannot be parked for another 2 years</b></p>		
7.	<p>Ensure the digital inclusion strategy is implemented before Riverside makes it switch to digital channels as outlined in the digital business strategy</p>	<p>Failure to do this will mean that Riverside is in danger of putting the cart before the horse and leaving its most vulnerable tenants unable to participate or access its digital offer.</p>		
8.	<p>Source a telecommunications partner to work with to provide low cost internet packages.</p>	<p>To provide low cost affordable internet packages for tenants</p>		
9.	<p>Develop a clear set of service standards for repairing and maintenance of computers that includes timescales.</p>	<p>To ensure a transparent and accountable repairs service for public PC's and laptops</p>		
10.	<p>Develop a digital inclusion statement</p>	<p>This will ensure tenants know what Riversides digital inclusion offer is, and ensure that this offer is applied consistently across the country</p>		

11.	Make provision for tenants to access the IT suite, if there is one, 24 hours a day.	To ensure tenants can bid for properties at the right time		
12.	Investigate feasibility of short term tablet/laptop dongle loan scheme with inclusive data being made available to supported housing tenants.	To overcome the affordability issue and poor Wi Fi provision in schemes.		

**6.0 Conclusion**

We feel we have undertaken a fair and robust review of Digital Inclusion within Riverside Support housing. Our main conclusions are

- Affordability, limited Wi-Fi provision, and inadequate support are the main barriers to digital engagement for supported housing tenants
- The impact of digital exclusion is severe and is resulting in benefit sanctions, rent arrears, and failed housing bids.
- Riverside is fully aware of the importance of digital inclusion but has failed to implement its own strategy written in March 2015
- There is a huge variation across the country in terms of internet provision and facilities

To ensure that the above issues are addressed effectively, we have identified several recommendations that we feel will improve Riverside’s digital offer to its tenants.

Finally, we would ask that Riverside provide us with a quarterly written updates to indicate what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations, and ask that they track any impact our recommendations have made.

**7.0. Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to all tenants, residents and members of staff, who took part in this review and provided us with valuable information as to how they perceived Digital Inclusion in Supported Housing. Special thanks also to the tenant Inspectors for helping us with the surveys.

## Appendix 1



Persona: Robbie from London — single, supported

	<b>Name:</b>	Robbie
	<b>Age:</b>	21
	<b>Lives:</b>	London
	<b>Residency type:</b>	Supported housing
	<b>Occupation:</b>	Unemployed
<b>Tag line:</b> <i>Vulnerable needs guidance.</i>		

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**Other places that this person could live:**

Merseyside, Manchester, Cambridge, Ipswich, Hull and London

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**Description:**

- Robbie's family told him to leave their home in Bedford after a series of arguments about his lack of employment and 'lifestyle'.
- He moved to London hoping to find work but has had problems finding somewhere to live and work.
- He lived in London (staying with friends or sleeping rough) for 4 months before getting help from a homeless charity.
- With their help he secured supported accommodation from Riverside and hopes to secure employment within the retail industry.
- Robbie is now hoping to move out into his own flat once he can afford to and has secure employment.

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**Hobbies and interests:**

- Robbie is interested in graphic design and would like to do a course to further his knowledge and skills.
- He also enjoys fashion and would like a job in the clothing industry, initially in retail but eventually perhaps linked to design.
- Robbie is a keen cyclist.
- He also enjoys a wide range of music which he downloads on to his phone. If he had more money he would like to attend festivals each summer.

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**Computer usage:** Very high, especially social media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

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**Channel preference(s):** Smartphone – for webchat, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.  
Robbie uses free Wi-Fi when possible. He does not have a landline.

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**Web experience:** Robbie searches the internet for answers to most of his queries.

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**Scenarios/ reasons to interact with the organisation:**

- Robbie has used the internet to search for accommodation Riverside may have available.
- He also uses the website to find out what support services are available for younger people and to get signposts to other organisations.
- In particular he has looked for information about employment and training.
- As he lives in supported housing he speaks to site based staff about day to day matters.

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**Tag line:** Vulnerable needs guidance.

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**Key quotation:** **I was desperate but things are slowly turning around.**



*Persona: Martin from Cambridge — Single person in Supported Housing*



<b>Name:</b>	Martin Shawcross
<b>Age:</b>	59
<b>Lives:</b>	Cambridge
<b>Residency type:</b>	Supported
<b>Occupation:</b>	Not working at present

**Tag line:** *Struggling survivor.*

**Other places that this person could live:**

Merseyside, Manchester, Cambridge, Ipswich, Hull and London

**Description:**

- Martin left school and went straight into the navy. It was great – he had structure, friends and a purpose in life. He was in the Falklands war and his ship was bombed and he saw his friends killed and maimed. Martin was one of the 'lucky ones' who survived but he started to drink because of the trauma.
- Martin was discharged from the navy and moved back home with his wife in Hull.
- He got a job on the fishing boats but because of his drinking his marriage broke up, he lost his job and home.
- Martin drifted around the country looking for work and ended up being street homeless in Cambridge.
- He was arrested for disturbing the peace and because of the doctor in the police station Martin was referred to a GP and diagnosed with PTSD and got a place in a Riverside scheme.
- They are helping Martin stop the drinking and he has got back in touch with his son who is 30 and has a family. Martin is hoping to meet him soon and if all goes well see his grandchildren for the first time.
- Martin's daughter is 23 and doesn't want to know him, but he lives in hope.

**Hobbies and interests:**

- Martin loves playing the guitar and his favourite music is Spanish classical which he heard a lot in South America.
- Martin has started painting as part of his therapy – he likes oils.

**Computer usage:** Martin uses an iPad and has a mobile phone. He wants to 'Facetime' his son and his family, if all goes well.

**Channel preference(s):** Martin is really self-conscious because he has a hearing impairment due to an accident, so he prefers to use the internet.

**Web experience:** Martin uses the internet a lot at the moment to look for a move-on property and for general information about his interests and concerns and also uses Facebook to link up with old Navy friends.

**Scenarios/ reasons to interact with the organisation:**

- Martin receives support in the scheme to help stop his drinking and provide him with lifeskills.
- Martin hopes to get a move-on property with Riverside as he trusts us to help him.
- Martin currently pays his rent and reports repairs to the staff at the scheme, but when he moves on he would prefer to use the internet and web chat to engage with us.

**Tag line:** Struggling survivor.

**Key quotation:** **I will get my life back on track.**

### Appendix 3

#### Persona: – Claire from Essex single living in supported housing

Name: Claire

Age: 43

Lives: Essex

Residency Type: Supported Living

Occupation: Unemployed

Tag Line: Focused and Determined Fighter

Other places this person could live: Any supported scheme up and down the country

#### Description

- Used to be a singer in a band when younger
- Grown up kids 2 - boy and girl,
- Substance abuse, on streets, sofa surfing went to Council who referred her to Riverside
- Cleaning and Bar work but can't work at moment due to mental health issues, been forced to claim JSA until sickness benefit claim sorted.

#### Hobbies and Interest

Soap operas

Music

Computer Use: Has an average range smart phone on a two-year contract and pays £40 per month for 100 mins, unlimited texts, 2 GB of data. Uses to stay on contact with son via Facebook, fulfill JSA claimant commitment of 35 hours a week.

Channel Preference: Has no option but to use smart phone

Web Experience: Needs to use the internet to keep in touch with son and to fulfill JSA job searching requirements. Her scheme has a communal computer but she cannot use it as it either doesn't work or someone else is using it. There is WIFI but it is poor and only works in certain areas.

#### Scenarios/reasons to interact with the organisation

- Training opportunities
- Local Events
- Involvement Opportunities
- Rent statements

Key Quotation: Grateful for a new beginning