



 Riverside

Annual Report to Customers

2019

North region

Welcome to our Annual Report to Customers for 2019



As I look back on the past year I think there is a lot to highlight and celebrate. We are working more closely with customers through the Riverside Customer Voice Executive, your representative body, which I hope will result in a stronger relationship and, importantly, better quality services. As part of this we've relaunched our approach to involving customers in scrutinising our services. You can read more about the Riverside Customer Voice Executive and how we have been working with customers in this report.

I am also delighted to see the positive work taking place within our Care and Support services and believe that our health and wellbeing work will continue to make a genuine impact on our customers' lives.

In last year's Annual Report, I told you that we were making changes to the way we provide services but this was going to be a long journey with bumps in the road. Whilst we're making progress, unfortunately this is taking longer than we first thought and our customer satisfaction levels are not where we want them to be and have actually declined since last year. I would like to sincerely apologise for this.

Whilst we have introduced a number of new services, too often it seems to be basic things we're not getting quite right – like returning calls promptly and following up on complaints. I am also disappointed to see there has been a decline in how many of our customers believe their rent and service charge provide value for money. I want to assure you that the Board takes this very seriously and so to address these issues we have put a Customer Plan in place, which we will use to deliver and monitor improvement until we can be sure that we've turned things round.

Over the coming months Riverside will be developing its new Corporate Plan, which will set out our priorities for the next three years. Customers will be at the very heart of this plan. We will also remain true to our social purpose and long history, by continuing to maintain high quality and safe homes, investing in communities through regeneration activities and building more homes.

As this will be my last year as Riverside Chair I will not be able to see directly the implementation of this new plan, but I look forward to seeing Riverside grow and prosper as it continues to deliver the great homes and services that customers and communities deserve.

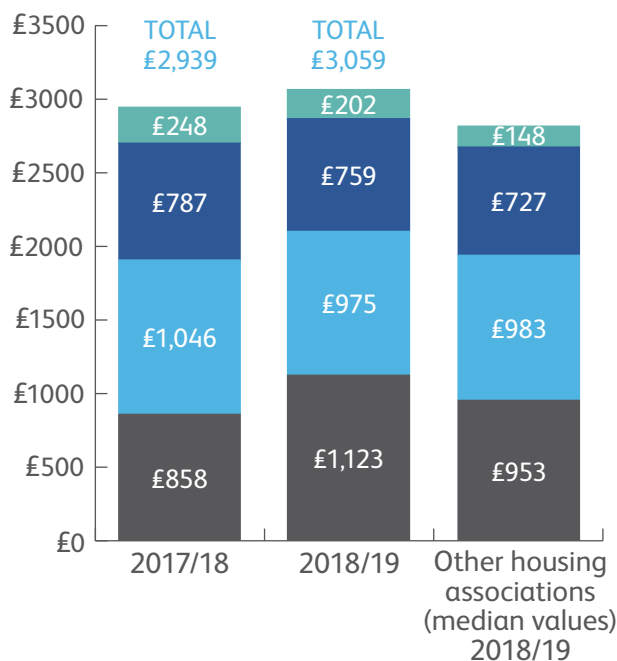
Max Steinberg CBE, Riverside Group Chair

How we spend your rent

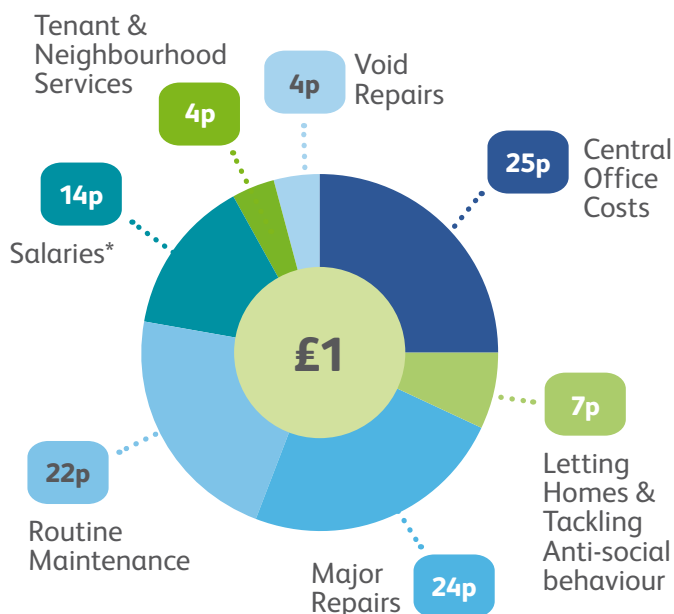
The overall cost of managing your home has increased slightly this year, in line with inflation. Our housing management cost per property has increased mainly as a result of extra investment we have made this year as part of our long-term approach to improving our services. To help comparison, we have taken out service charges which are distorted by high costs in some of our Care and Support schemes.

Average costs of managing your home

- Housing Management
- Major Repairs
- Routine Repairs
- Other Costs



How every £1 of rent is spent



These figures exclude service charges, non-cash items and interest costs. *Includes costs linked to functions such as repairs and managing Anti-social behaviour.

£84.64

was our average weekly rent for general needs homes in 2018/19



Reduced by 82p from 2017/18.

83%

of you think your rent provides value for money
↓ 5% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 95% Average 85.5% Worst 78.1%

71%

of you think that service charges are value for money
↓ 8% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 93.5% Average 74.4% Worst 64.7%

To help us compare how we are doing, we share information about our performance with a group of 62 housing associations of a similar type and size. We compare ourselves to the worst, average and best performers and use the latest available published information.

What's been happening in North region?

As you will read in the rest of this report we've got some way to go in ensuring we provide the best service to you every day. We have been talking to customers across the regions and are taking on board what you are telling us – that we're not always getting the basics right. We are absolutely determined to continue working with you to make improvements so that we consistently give you the service you deserve. We introduced a new way of finding out and acting on local priorities in 2018/19 and in this section you can read about some of the things we've already done in your region and what we've got planned for next year.

“ Putting customers first has been at the heart of the work of my teams this year. We have focused on talking and listening to you about how we can improve our services and the neighbourhoods where you live. Thank you if you've helped us with this. We'll be building on the work we've started over the next 12 months, but for now, I hope you enjoy reading about some of the things we've been doing in the North region.”

Sarah Paton,
Regional Director



Involving customers in our Neighbourhood Plans

In 2018/19 we developed Neighbourhood Plans for Wakefield, Newcastle East, Rochdale and Hull. Our social housing teams have been out in force in these areas during 2019/20 talking to as many customers as possible, carrying out customer surveys about how they view their neighbourhood and what improvements they'd like to see. As well as finding out more about neighbourhood priorities from our customers' perspective, this has also given us a great opportunity to meet customers who we wouldn't normally have met.

Customers in Neighbourhood Plan areas will all receive a local newsletter to tell them what we're doing in their neighbourhood.

We'll be working our way around the North region in 2019 and 2020 so most areas will eventually be covered by a Neighbourhood Plan.

We also meet regularly with local residents' groups in Hull, Rochdale and Cheshire East. We'll be happy to work with you if you want to set up a group but there are lots of other ways to make your voice heard. You can join our Online Customer Panel, respond to our regular customer surveys or just talk to your housing officer about local issues. We've also revamped our housing services with more housing officers working in your neighbourhoods. They are working more flexible hours so they can support you when it better suits.



Money, employment and training advice

We provide support to customers to help them maximise their income. In 2018/19 we helped 136 customers to find jobs; supported customers to claim an additional £841,580 in benefits, and gave energy advice which saved customers £78,187 on their gas and electricity bills.

We helped one customer who had rent arrears and was struggling to sort it out due to mental health issues. Our Income Maximisation team supported them with money advice and help with bills resulting in the customer receiving £2,550 extra to which they were entitled.

Please let us know if you need help with benefits, debt, energy bills or if you want to talk to us about getting into training or work.

£14 million Extra Care Scheme in Rochdale

Our new Extra Care Scheme will provide much needed housing for older people in the area, which is currently limited, and is the latest project in a successful regeneration partnership between Rochdale Council and Riverside that goes back more than 15 years.

Work started on the site at Keswick Close in Langley in February 2019. The scheme will be completed by Spring 2021 and will have 88 one and two bedroom apartments for affordable rent, and 10 two bedroom bungalows for shared ownership.

New sports programme in Carlisle

We have teamed up with Richard Rose Central Academy, Carlisle United Community Sports Trust and Manchester United Foundation to provide a new three-year sports programme in Carlisle.

Students at the Academy will be offered sports activities and leadership and mentoring programmes. Many of our customers' children attend the academy, and joint funding for this project is a great way for us to support you and your families.

Transforming lives

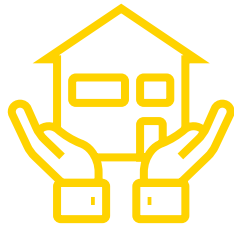
We are helping customers living in temporary accommodation to 'move on' and settle in a permanent home. One customer called Billy (pictured below with his housing officer Cheryl) had been living at The Crossings in Hull, which provides temporary accommodation for homeless people. Thanks to our 'move on' scheme, Billy has been able to move into his own flat.

Billy, said:

“ I was amazed at how quickly I got a flat – the transition was good with help from Riverside, family and friends. It means so much to me to have my own place to call home. I have my own independence, and more freedom. I felt fully supported by my housing officer who assisted me and I was grateful to Riverside for the kettle, toaster and light bulbs. I have settled in the area well, have great neighbours, and couldn't ask for any more. ”



Our Service to You



It's important that we communicate well with you, listen to you and involve you in what we do. We are well aware that Riverside customer service and satisfaction levels are not as good as they should be. We want 2019 to be a turning point and are taking action to provide better customer service.



76%

of you are satisfied overall

↓ 5% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 99.3%

Average 87.6%

Worst 64.2%

64%

think that we listen to your views and act upon them

↓ 11% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 96.8%

Average 73.5%

Worst 55.2%

90%

of calls to our Customer Service Centre (CSC) were answered

↑ 1% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 98.7%

Average 92.3%

Worst 67.4%

Customer Plan

Our new Customer Plan includes:

- Actions to improve our service standards and how we deal with complaints
- Ways to strengthen how we engage with customers
- Making our online services easier to use
- Increasing customer service training for staff.

This will all be underpinned by our new IT system, which over time will ensure that when you contact us we resolve your query first time.



Complaints

We received 7,427 complaints between April 2018 and March 2019.

We resolved nine out of ten (6,661) complaints at the first stage of our process; 2,733 complaints were upheld and 843 partially upheld.

We resolved all other complaints at the second stage of our process; 404 were upheld and 130 partially upheld.

Two-thirds of the complaints we received were about repairs; just over one in ten were about customer care; and one in twenty were about tenancy management.

Complaints satisfaction

It's really important that we get feedback on how we handle complaints, so we can identify where we are falling short of customers' expectations and how we can improve. In 2019 we are trialling a new satisfaction survey to enable us to reach more of our customers and from August 2019 customers started to receive the survey by text message.

Learning from complaints

We aim to learn from complaints to improve our service. Some examples are:

We noticed a trend of complaints from customers not happy with our approach to gaining access to their homes to carry out gas appliance servicing. In particular some customers felt that the content of our letters was too threatening and did not take account of individual circumstances or why access had not been provided. We have reviewed how we gain access and changed how our letters are worded.

Another complaint trend was how long it takes to complete a repair. We have started a review of how repairs are prioritised and our target times. We will consult customers and aim to have a new approach in place by January 2020.

As a result of customer feedback our repairs team Evolve identified plumbing repairs were receiving the most complaints and customer call-backs so they rolled out extra training to staff.

Riverside Customer Voice

The Riverside Customer Voice Executive (RCVE) is a group of customers who provide a representative voice for customers in over 55,000 Riverside homes. We are listening to what matters to you.



Getting involved locally

We have Riverside Customer Voice local groups in Cumbria, Liverpool City Region and Langley Estate in Manchester so that we can represent almost **40,000** customers across those areas. If you live in one of these areas please consider joining in.

We will continue to work in the South East, North East and London areas to improve customer engagement and be a national voice for customers.

You may currently attend a local meeting within your area or scheme, but if you would like to be part of the wider work we do please get in touch and we would be happy to talk to you.

Scrutinising Riverside's services

The RCVE Scrutiny Working Group looks in depth at Riverside services to recommend how they can be improved for customers. It has completed its first exercise on customer complaints handling. Here are some of the recommendations made that Riverside is now acting upon:

- Introduce standardised training for all staff on the system as well as standardising the language used to deal with complaints.
- Address communication issues between Riverside and Riverside Direct (the repairs provider in South and Central region) and improve inter-departmental liaison over complaints.
- Review the system of logging service failures in all departments. Not all service failures are currently being recorded, so Riverside does not have an accurate picture of where the problems lie or the full extent.
- Review the complaints response times set out in the complaints procedure as they are too rigid/unrealistic, placing unnecessary pressures on staff and detrimentally affecting the quality of the customer's experience.

The full report including summary and recommendations will be available online in the near future. We will let you know where and when.

Once the RCVE has agreed the next scrutiny project we will let customers know.

Robert Lowther – Chair of Customer Complaints Handling Scrutiny Working Group



Working together with Riverside

In July this year, the RCVE and other involved customers met with the Riverside Board and Committee Members, and senior directors. We discussed how we can further improve upon working together with customers, given the recommendations contained in the Government's Housing Green Paper following the tragedy of Grenfell.

I truly felt it was a collaborative and engaging day between Riverside and its customers, with RCVE playing an important role in the organisation and delivery of the event.

Personally, I have seen positive first steps following the day and am looking forward to next year's event so that we can chart success and improve on any areas that have proved challenging.

I am appealing to you to get involved and let us be a strong, united voice together. If you need advice on where a group is in your area or you would like to know more about how you can be involved please get in touch.

You may not have the time to be involved in meetings but we still want to hear from you and you can feed back through surveys via our Online Customer Panel. You can choose how many you do and it only takes a few minutes.

We are looking forward to working with you, our members, and the exciting year ahead.

Victor Andrews
Chair, Riverside Customer Voice Executive



For more information on customer involvement please visit www.riverside.org.uk/getinvolved, phone us on **0345 111 0000**, email involvement@riverside.org.uk or join the conversation via our **social media channels**:

 **rcustomervoice**

 **VoiceRiverside**

 **rcustomervoice**

Your home

We're continuing to invest in homes, and eight in 10 of you are satisfied with the quality of yours. Keeping you safe in your home remains a fundamental priority.

2018/2019 was a year of change for asset services with the introduction of a new way of working focused on improving your safety and satisfaction.

We are continuing to invest in your homes; this includes improvements in energy efficiency and adaptations to support specific needs. We make investment decisions in a way that seeks to also improve your wider neighbourhood, and sometimes we have to make tough decisions about the future of empty and older homes.

We have introduced a new way for you to book repairs online, through the My Riverside online service, to improve your access to our service.

Our repairs providers have introduced improvement plans to improve your experience of our services and drive up performance.

We are aware that satisfaction with our repairs service has declined over the past 12 months. We take this very seriously, as we know how much having a well maintained home means to you.

The majority of our repairs are undertaken by two companies owned by Riverside: Evolve and Riverside Direct. Staff and tradespeople at both organisations are working hard to ensure they can improve satisfaction and the time taken to get to your repairs.

To support this we have refreshed our values making clear how we expect all of our colleagues to work with customers. Staff are being trained to offer you a better service, which we believe will have a positive impact on our repairs service. We are also taking steps to recruit more staff to Riverside Direct following its launch last year.

69%

of you were satisfied with our repairs and maintenance service

↓ 7% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 96.2%

Average 82%

Worst 65%

82%

of repairs appointments were kept

↓ 5% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 100%

Average 96.9%

Worst 87%

79.7%

of repairs were fixed at the first attempt

↓ 7.1% compared with 2018





Improving Homes figures:

In 2018/19 we spent £35 million improving homes, including replacing

824 bathrooms

667 kitchens

1,313 boilers.

We also installed 305 major adaptations and 1,014 minor adaptations to make homes more suitable for customers with specific needs.



Your tenancy and neighbourhood

We recognise that how well we manage your tenancy and neighbourhood is important to you and we are taking action to address our decline in performance in 2018/19.

83%

of you are satisfied with your neighbourhood

↓ 2% compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 94.3% Average 85.3% Worst 76%

Our focus has been on making sure we are engaging with our customers and understanding your priorities for the neighbourhood in which you live. As a result, we expect to see improvements in satisfaction. In areas where we are not the largest provider of social housing, we are building our relationships with other associations and developing joint plans for local neighbourhoods.

43.2 days

average time taken to re-let our empty properties

↓ 16 days longer than 2018



Compared to others:

Best 12.9 Average 25 Worst 61.2

We have continued to repair a large number of homes that have been empty for long periods, to bring them back into use. This has impacted on the time it has taken for us to re-let homes. The average re-let time for homes that became available for letting between January and March 2019 has significantly improved. It has reduced the time to 27 days, matching our performance last year.

1.17%

Empty homes

↑ 0.6% lower compared with 2018



Compared to others:

Best 0.27% Average 1.14% Worst 3.12%

We have reduced the number of empty social housing properties, making more homes available for the customers who need them and increasing our capacity to invest in building new homes and improving our existing housing stock.

4.6%

Rent arrears as a percentage of total rent due

↓ 0.1% higher than 2018



Compared to others:

Best 0.5% Average 3.5% Worst 5.5%

In February 2019, we introduced a new way of working, which is helping us improve our performance. We are identifying customers moving onto Universal Credit as early as possible and providing intensive support and guidance to help them make important rent payments and other essential living costs.

Care and support

We continue to develop innovative services to help people live independently, in a home of their own. In 2018/19 we supported over 12,000 people with diverse care and support needs.

Health and Wellbeing

Our health and wellbeing service provides initiatives across over 200 Riverside Retirement Living schemes for the benefit of our customers and wider communities.

The service's overall aim is to support people to age healthily, be resilient, independent, and maintain a feeling of physical and mental wellness.

In 2018/19 the health and wellbeing service delivered its first full 12 month programme with over 1,300 initiatives being held and over 10,000 customers attending. The service is currently working with over 80 external organisations. This includes Specsavers who visited 38 Retirement Living schemes to deliver eye deterioration prevention sessions, resulting in 122 home eye tests. The British Red Cross also delivered 44 first aid sessions in schemes across the country.

Retirement Living Investment Programme

In 2018/19 we modernised seven Retirement Living schemes to bring the total of schemes which have received investment since the programme started up to 21. Extensive works have been carried out at each scheme including refurbishment and redecoration of communal areas with a modern, dementia-friendly approach to design.

Volunteering – give it a go!

In 2018/19 we had 76 active volunteers who contributed 3,405 hours of volunteering for the benefit of our services across the country.

We've worked hard to make it quick and easy to sign up as a volunteer with Riverside. We've cut down on the paperwork and introduced new, speedier Disclosure and Barring Service checks, which means that new volunteers can be up and running within a week of getting in touch.

We've also created a new training offer which provides new volunteers with everything they need to know in a simple format which can be accessed from the comfort of their own home.



This year, we're really keen to see an increase in the amount of volunteering that takes place in our Retirement Living schemes. We've introduced a new Community Buddy role which aims to provide potentially socially isolated customers with someone to pop in for a cup of tea and a chat. We're also working with colleagues to help them spot where volunteers might be able to enrich or extend the services we provide.

We've also seen a huge increase in the number of colleagues who have volunteered at our schemes and in the communities we serve. In 2018/19 an incredible 265 colleague volunteer days were logged and we're on course for even more in 2019/20.

97.6%

of customer needs and risk assessments delivered on time

↓ 0.2% compared with 2018



92.2%

positive customer outcomes

↑ 1.4% compared with 2018



Responsible Business

Our commitment to being an ethical and social business informs all our activities and we also contribute through specific initiatives. This supports our overall vision to transform lives and revitalise neighbourhoods.

Supporting customers through Riverside Foundation funding

Our Riverside Foundation charity supports projects that provide practical support to customers to help maintain their tenancies. It engaged with over 3,500 people or households in 2018/19.



We helped **282 people** into employment through our training advice and guidance project



185 people received grants to support them in gaining employment or onto training courses through our Helping Hands and Ladders of Aspiration programmes



We had **1,340** referrals to our money advice service and created **£2.2m cash gains** for customers



Our affordable warmth advice service had **796 referrals** and generated **£219,692 cash gains** for customers



148 households in crisis were helped with energy top ups



102 customers have been supported through our Intensive Intervention Service



25 households benefitted from help with essential furniture

Ladders of Aspiration



We set up our Ladders of Aspiration scheme in 2018 as part of Riverside's 90th birthday celebrations. It is a fund to help customers achieve an educational or professional goal to assist their move into employment.

Ladders of Aspiration has meant Riverside customers have had the opportunity to do a wide range of things - from undertaking a project management course to starting their own cake baking company.

One group of customers living in Carlisle came together to participate in a unique training programme with free driving lessons, which they deemed a lifeline and a passport to gaining employment.

Driving Back to Work was a month-long course which provided employment training and 14 driving lessons to help Riverside customers gain their driving licence and get a job at the end of it. There were 10 customers who signed up to the course, which was delivered in partnership with local provider PHX. The group is pictured above with our Chair Max Steinberg.



Thanks for reading our Annual Report for customers. In the report we talked about our Customer Plan – we'll be telling you much more about this throughout the year. You can find out more about the plan on our website.

Did we get it right?

We'd love to know what you think about this Annual Report. Please go to **www.riverside.org.uk/annualreport** to complete our short questionnaire, with a chance to win £50 in shopping vouchers.



Get in touch or find out more

www.riverside.org.uk



email: **info@riverside.org.uk**

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We are happy to accept



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(NGT) calls. Press '3'
once connected

The Riverside Group Limited

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A charitable Registered Society
under the Co-operative and
Community Benefit Societies Act 2014

All facts and figures in this
report are correct at the
time of publication and relate
to the financial year ending
31 March 2019. They do not
include Home Ownership data.