



 Riverside

# Annual Report to Customers

2019

South and Central 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.

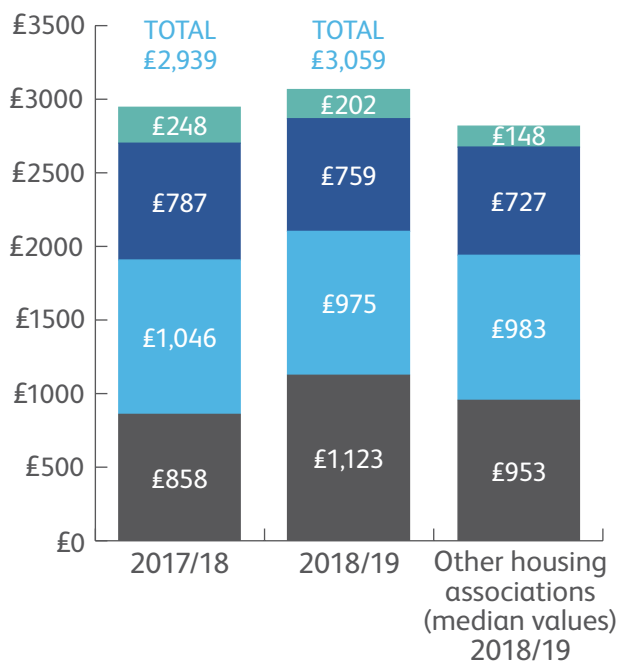
**Max Steinberg CBE, Riverside Group Chair**

# How we spend your rent

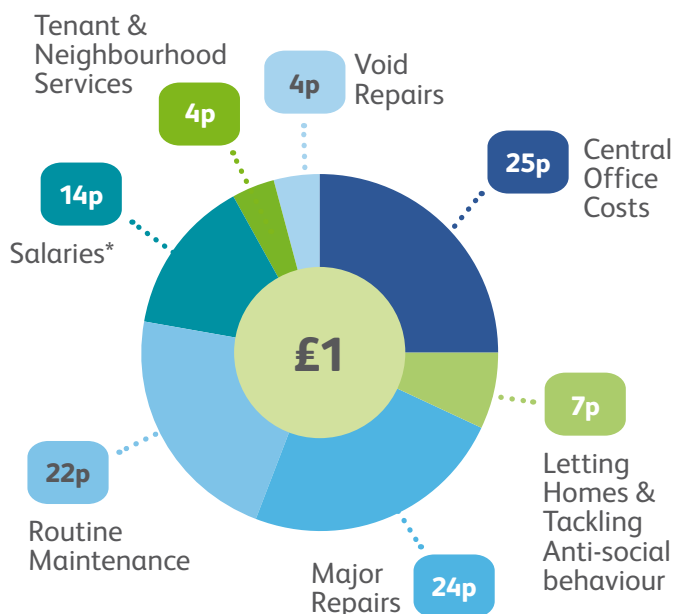
The overall cost of managing your home has increased slightly this year, in line with inflation. Our housing management cost per property has increased mainly as a result of extra investment we have made this year as part of our long-term approach to improving our services. To help comparison, we have 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 South and Central 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 the customer first has been at the heart of the work undertaken by my teams over the past year and we have focused on talking to customers about how we can improve our services and deliver some new and innovative projects. I look forward to further improving the way we talk to you as we start to work on developing our plan for 2020-23. ”

**Stephen Elliott,**  
**Regional Director**



## Riverside Direct

The biggest visible change in 2018/19 was the launch of a new repairs service, Riverside Direct. Riverside Direct is a new company wholly owned by Riverside, employing Riverside colleagues. This change was prompted through customer and stakeholder feedback and involved customers working alongside colleagues throughout the change. We did unfortunately experience some teething problems when the new service started but have taken action to solve them. Riverside Direct will continue to improve its service as they get to know you and our homes. They are being held to the highest standards of service by us.

## Neighbourhood Plans

We have created neighbourhood plans to help improve life for customers in our communities. So far we have produced plans for Thanet, Derby, Stoke and Leicester.

If you would like a copy please contact us.

In the past year we have proudly helped:

- 40 people into work through our employment & training officers
- Customers claimed £334,664.27 in missing benefits, through our money advice service
- Customers saved £27,212 off heating bills, through our affordable warmth service

We wish to grow our work in our communities, so if you think you could benefit from one of these services or you know someone who could then please do contact us.

## New Homes

We are really excited by the steps being taken to modernise two of our largest estates in Lambeth and Bromley in London. Colleagues have been working alongside our customers to develop exciting plans to create sustainable and affordable homes in an attractive and secure environment. The results of this work have been borne out in two successful ballots where customers voted overwhelmingly in favour of the redevelopment plans.

In the East Midlands, over the past year we have built 88 much-needed homes for social rent and shared ownership, and we are aiming to build 174 homes in 2019/20. We have also signed an exciting partnership deal with Bovis to build 3,500 homes in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.



## Work to improve our customer service

We are making progress in improving our customer service to you. Our housing officers now have a more flexible working schedule to offer you more suitable appointment times.

We have rolled out free Wi-Fi to all our supported housing schemes to ensure customers have free and easy access to online services.

In 2019/20 we will finish the rollout of free Wi-Fi to our Retirement Living schemes and we will be piloting the Helpline Plus service in Moss Green, Stoke. This service will be based around helping older people in the community live independently.

## Working with you

We are always interested in what you tell us. If you missed out on the exciting work we have been doing with our customers, here are some highlights from over the year:

**400+**

customers in the Margate and Ramsgate area had the opportunity to get involved with Riverside



**250+**

of our customers in London are involved in the redesign of their homes and community



**146**

of our customers in the region are members of the Online Customer Panel



**18**

customers from the region attended free training in 2018/19 (Introduction to Housing Law – Skills to represent others)



## Look out for the Customer Voice minibus

Do you know that we have a minibus for our customers?

We are using the bus to consult with you and get your views on what matters to you most in your neighbourhood. So look out for us in your area by checking the website and our Customer Voice Facebook page.

## New approach to tackling homelessness

Riverside is playing a significant role in tackling homelessness, including being at the forefront of initiatives, such as Housing First in Medway, Kent. This is aimed at tackling homelessness and supporting those who need accommodation in a much more coordinated way.

Here's what one of our customers, Carole, said about our training on housing law:

“ I would recommend the training. I have enjoyed meeting other Riverside tenants. I liked that an expert trainer was provided who was able to answer all my questions. I learnt lots I didn't know about social housing and Riverside. ”



# 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](http://www.riverside.org.uk/getinvolved), phone us on **0345 111 0000**, email [involvement@riverside.org.uk](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.riverside.org.uk)**



email: **[info@riverside.org.uk](mailto:info@riverside.org.uk)**

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#### **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.