

## **Scrutiny Working Group - Customer Satisfaction on Complaints Handling**

### **Report issued January 2020**

The Scrutiny Work Group (SWG) made up of members of the Riverside Customer Voice Executive (RCVE) have recently undertaken the examination of Riverside's complaints handling process.

After examining the performance information, weekly and monthly complaints reports, procedure and policies, conducted staff survey and customer intelligence information from Riverside, the SWG made a number of recommendations for Riverside to improve on.

### **Summary and recommendations**

#### **Summary of the finding**

- Riverside has taken several steps to improve complaint handling, including a regular transactional survey, which now asks customers about their views on how the complaint was handled. The feedback is shared with Executive Directors on a weekly basis.
- Asset Services have provided data that demonstrates that they have been proactive in tackling the backlog of complaints around the time of the launch of Riverside Direct in October 2018.
- The decision to benchmark against organisations outside the social housing sector is welcomed, as SWG take the view that much can be learned from the retail and service sectors.
- Riverside has leaned heavily towards a target-driven culture, in which certain actions must be carried out by certain times, rather than necessarily providing the customer with a good personalised experience.
- The IT system used to manage complaints is aging and doesn't have the functionality to meet Riverside's demands.
- Over 190 staff replied to SWG anonymous survey and they provided sensible and practical feedback. Most of the comments focused on solutions and practical fixes, but there was also a sense of frustration at not being listened to. SWG question why Riverside has not tapped into this considerable resource already.
- Training on complaints handling has been inconsistent, and a full training programme needs to be rolled out. The training programme needs to be kept up to date.

- It is clear from the findings that there are costly inefficiencies in the complaints-handling process, and therefore scope to reduce the amount of duplication and waste.
- The findings lead SWG to believe that Riverside can iron out the problems with complaints handling without needing to make radical changes.
- By re-setting the time targets; making some technical adjustments; introducing a thorough and consistent training package and engendering a culture of joint working and learning the lessons, should help to increase customer satisfaction.
- SWG think Riverside will need somewhere in the region of nine months to introduce and embed these changes. If the changes don't work, then SWG can see a case for introducing dedicated complaints handlers.

## Recommendations

As a result of the investigation the following recommendations were made and Riverside will be working on improving these.

1. Introduce unique case numbers.	To ensure the complaints can be easily referenced by the customer as well as staff and notes can be added rather than opening a new complaint.
2. Introduce standardised training for all staff on the system as well as standardising the language used to deal with complaints.	Currently, training is inconsistent, and staff are not following the same procedures across Riverside.
3. Review the process for looking at the lessons learnt from complaints and embed the methodology.	Following on from point two above, the system for reviewing the lessons from complaints is weak and the practice is not applied consistently across Riverside.
4. Review the targets	The 24-hour, 5-minute and 5-day targets are too rigid/unrealistic, placing unnecessary pressures on staff and detrimentally affecting the quality of the customer's experience.
5. Carry out a review of the issues staff have identified with the IT systems and the note-taking function, in particular. Communicate the longer-term plan for the overhaul of IT systems.	There are several glitches in the current systems that are affecting complaints-handling and need to be fixed. It would be helpful for staff to know what plans Riverside has to review/replace these systems so they can see a way forward.
6. 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.
7. Address the alleged communication issues between departments and improve inter-departmental liaison over complaints.	In some cases, staff report difficulties in responding to complaints due to a lack of support from colleagues.
8. Review the role of the Customer Complaints Panel (CCP) and the process for making referrals to the panel members.	To prevent the escalation of complaints to the Ombudsman. Resources could possibly be saved if customers chose the CCP over an Ombudsman referral.
9. Run a further staff survey in nine - months' time	To check if the staff have seen an improvement in the way Riverside supports them to deal with complaints.

Consider Recommendation 10, if there is no improvement in customer satisfaction after nine months.

10. Introduce complaints handlers	If there is no discernible improvement in customer satisfaction, it might be time to consider the introduction of specialists with the powers to ensure that complaints are dealt with expertly and efficiently.
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If you would be interested in the full report or want to discuss any of the summary or recommendation please get in touch with Customer Engagement Team by emailing [involvement@riverside.org.uk](mailto:involvement@riverside.org.uk)