



COMPLAINTS: ANNUAL PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT

YEAR 2023/24

The Riverside Group Limited



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01. Foreword

As Group Board Member, Chair of the Riverside Customer Experience Committee, and the Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), I am delighted to be able to present our first Annual Performance and Service Improvement Report.

The report provides you, our customers, with information about complaints activity throughout the year and how we have performed in dealing with those complaints. More importantly, the report shows what we have learnt as a result of the complaints we have received and what we intend to do to use this learning to improve the services we provide.

Customer satisfaction with the management of complaints is not where we want it to be and it is clear that we need to do better. This report hopefully provides you with some assurance that we understand the reasons for dissatisfaction and have plans in place to transform our approach to complaints management and improve our services.

That said, we have already made some significant steps forward to improve. During the year we have invested in a new central complaints team to improve the consistency in how we deal with complaints and have also reviewed all of our complaint policies and procedures. We are investing in and re-training our people to develop a strong customer focussed culture where we positively embrace customer complaints and feedback as a means to learn and improve. There are also clear examples of how we are using data and insight to identify complaint trends and common service issues, allowing us to make improvements to our services. Delivering an improved repairs service is, and will continue to be, a key focus for Riverside as a direct response to the feedback we have received through complaints.

The Customer Experience Committee, as the governing body for complaints within the group, has independently scrutinised, challenged, and supported Riverside on its approach to the management of complaints and compliance with the changing expectations from our regulator and the Housing Ombudsman Service. We have also worked with the Riverside team to start to develop a more positive culture towards complaint management. Riverside has engaged positively with the Housing Ombudsman Service and shown a real commitment to understanding and meeting the requirements of the new Complaints Handling Code.

The scale of the challenge to get to where we need to be should not be underestimated but the Customer Experience Committee, with full support of the Group Board and Executive Team, are fully committed to deliver on the improvement promises we have made.

On that note, I welcome the publication of this report, and am confident that next year we will be in a position to report improvements in our approach to complaints management and services to our customers.

Sam Scott

Chair of Customer Experience Committee and
Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC)



02. Introduction

Welcome to our Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report for 2023/24.

The report, the first of its kind, is a new annual requirement put in place by the Housing Ombudsman Service to support performance and service improvement. On 1 April 2024, the new Complaint Handling Code for social landlords came into effect, making it a legal obligation to comply. You can read more about this directly from the Housing Ombudsman Service website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

Our purpose is to transform lives and revitalise neighbourhoods, build trusted customer services and ensure transparency when our service falls short. Complaints give us an opportunity to understand how customers feel about our services and put things right. This report tells you how we have delivered our complaints service, along with your feedback, whilst showing how we performed against your expectations.

It is important to point out that this includes information about the whole of The Riverside Group (TRG), including One Housing Group (OHG).

Both companies are currently undergoing a service integration process to become one single, organisation with single systems, governance and operating structures, processes, and procedures.

That work is not yet complete across all areas of the business but is well underway.

During 2024/25 the complaints teams in both Riverside and One Housing Group will be integrated to create a single, consistent approach to complaint management and continuous service improvement across the group.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, please email complaints&disputeresolution@riverside.org.uk.



03. The new Complaint Handling Code



Sam Scott
**Chair of Customer
Experience
Committee
and Member
Responsible for
Complaints (MRC)**



Sandra Williams
**Head of Service
Transformation**



Kelly Nasr
**Head of Customer
Experience**



Justine Lennon
**Complaints
Manager**



04. Our Performance

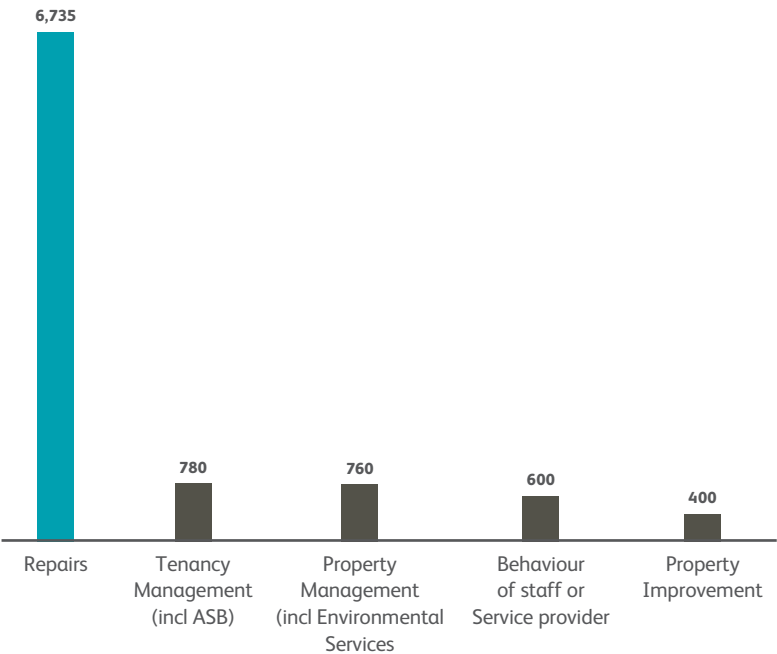
Riverside Performance

Stage 1	Complaints received 7,878	Responded to within timeframe 78.2%	Average time to resolve complaint 9.3 days
Stage 2	Complaints received 910	Responded to within timeframe 77.9%	Average time to resolve complaint 18.12 days

One Housing Group Performance

Stage 1	Complaints received 2,297	Responded to within timeframe 80.3%	Average time to resolve complaint 19.8 days
Stage 2	Complaints received 578	Responded to within timeframe 77.8%	Average time to resolve complaint 33 days

Top 5 reasons for complaints Riverside and One Housing Group combined 2023-24



Customers are telling us they are unhappy with the repairs service they are receiving.

Across both companies the volume of complaints relating to repairs ranges from 60 % to 80 %. Customers are telling us that they are generally unhappy with the quality of work, the time taken to complete the repair and communication.

Performance – refusals

One issue we're asked to report on within the new Complaint Handling Code is how many complaints we refuse to respond to or refuse to handle.

If we decide not to accept a complaint an explanation will be provided to our customer, setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and explaining their right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

We provide information on any complaints we are likely to exclude in our Complaints Policy, however, we do not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints and would always consider the individual circumstances of each complaint. More information on our complaints policy can be found below:

For Riverside:

www.riverside.org.uk/about-us/our-policies/complaints-policy

For One Housing Group:

www.onehousing.co.uk/about-us/our-policies

If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may direct us to take on the complaint.

During the year, One Housing Group refused to accept 12 complaints. Data is not available for Riverside as this is not something that we have recorded and reported on previously. However, now we know this is a requirement of the Complaint Handling Code, we will do so going forwards and report on this next year.

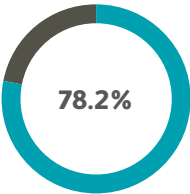
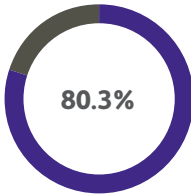
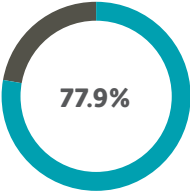
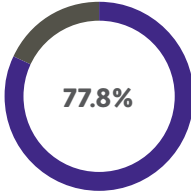
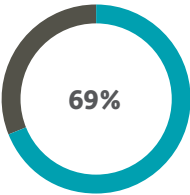
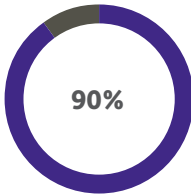
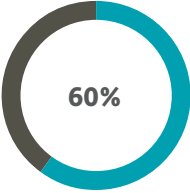
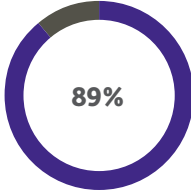


Our performance against the Housing Ombudsman code

Timeframes

In line with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code, our target timeframe for complaints is to respond within 10 working days. With a stage two complaint, that extends to 20 working days.

So, how have we performed when it comes to meeting those targets?

2023/2024	Riverside	OHG
Stage 1 Complaints responded to on time	 <div>78.2%</div>	 <div>80.3%</div>
Stage 2 Complaints responded to on time	 <div>77.9%</div>	 <div>77.8%</div>
2022/2023	Riverside	OHG
Stage 1 Complaints responded to on time	 <div>69%</div>	 <div>90%</div>
Stage 2 Complaints responded to on time	 <div>60%</div>	 <div>89%</div>

Through the integration process between our two groups, we'll be studying best practice when it comes to replying more quickly to inform a new and unified groupwide approach.

Customers told us how we could improve our complaints handling service:

“It was difficult to find the cause of the problem and there was no need for any improvement in the way it was handled”.



“By listening to the customer. By having independence on instructing repairs and confirming said repairs have been performed to the right standard. By not using subcontractors to do this job for them”.



“Inform me of the outcome before closing as it is not resolved”.

“Listen thoroughly, keeping people informed and when passing on to another handler make sure all the facts go with it”.

“I am still waiting for the main issue to be resolved”.

“It’s not resolved and the whole system is a nightmare”.





“Stop using evolve staff to deal with complaints about evolve work practice I have worked in building industry and there is a **conflict of interest** with your complaints process”.



| “Treat your customers with a bit **more respect**”.

“I had an appointment, the guy who came out to fix the problem went to the wrong house in the wrong street, **apparently that was my fault** because I never answered”.

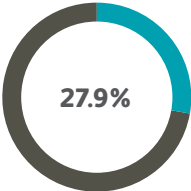
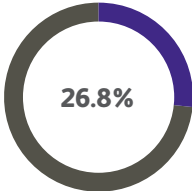


I don't think they could have done better; they held their hand up and sorted it. In a way I would say on the behalf it was a breakdown of communication.

| “Handled my complaint **very quick**”.

| “The complaints team was **fantastic**”.

Performance – customer satisfaction

Transactional complaint handling satisfaction	
	
Riverside	One Housing Group
Whilst Riverside’s complaint handling satisfaction ended at 27.9 % for 23/24 - up from 22.4 % for 22/23 – it is still well below our target of 35%.	Similarly, One Housing Group’s complaint handling satisfaction ended at 26.8 % for 23/24 – a very minor decrease of 0.2% from the previous year.

We continue to scrutinise the reasons for dissatisfaction and work with the operational teams to drive improvements. Satisfaction is also reported throughout the year to our Customer Experience Committee. They support us with their views and ideas on shaping our services, we also have representation from the Riverside Customer Voice Executives and Residents Scrutiny Panel who we share updates with on a quarterly basis.



Housing Ombudsman cases and outcomes

This year, we've seen an increase in the total number of referrals and have received 86 determinations compared to 67 during 22/23. However, several determinations showed that we had given reasonable redress and that there was no service failure. These cases will support us in identifying best practice.

Outcome	Brief description	Quantity
No maladministration	Landlord has following relevant policies / procedures / legislation. Minor or no service failings.	8
Service failure	The lowest level of maladministration, minor failings where some action is required to put things right.	20
Maladministration	Where the landlord, for example, has failed to comply with its legal obligations, its policies and procedures or unreasonably delayed in dealing with the matter.	39
Severe maladministration	Where failings have had a significant impact on customers or have occurred over a long period of time.	5
Mediation	Where the Ombudsman has acknowledged a breakdown in communication and an independent mediator would assist in repairing relationships.	3
Reasonable redress	Where there is some level of failings, but the landlord has already acknowledged this and put things right before the Housing Ombudsman have completed their investigation.	5
Withdrawn	Determination has been redacted.	1
Outside jurisdiction	Where the Ombudsman considers it quicker, fairer, more reasonable, or more effective to seek a remedy through the courts or other tribunal or procedure.	5
Total		86

Whenever we receive a determination from the Housing Ombudsman, we review it to help us learn and to drive improvements and enhance customer satisfaction. In addition, we report to our Board Members and our Customer Experience Committee, with a mix of customers and a wealth of experience across various sectors.

Our centralised complaints team review lessons learnt for stage 1 and stage 2 complaints each month and work with the business areas to share findings and take action.

Below are just some of the improvements we have made this year as a result of complaints:

- Understanding the customer experience for damp and mould and how we can put things right for our customers. Focusing on getting things right first time and stopping any reoccurring issues within the home.
- Created ownership through specialists in our repairs teams. They focus on making sure we keep our promises to resolve our customers' issues.
- Home Ownership and Shared Spaces teams have worked collaboratively to agree improvements on a scheme-by-scheme basis following estate services and mechanical and electrical repairs complaints.
- Following feedback from residents about our previous lift contractors, we procured the services of two new specialist lift contractors. We improved our contract management monitoring system with the new contractors to include increased performance meetings and improved servicing schedules.
- Our Home Ownership team worked with our Knowledge Management team and Maintec to provide front line staff with the correct information to relay to customers when logging repairs.
- We have undertaken a review of our Asbestos Management plan and have improved our systems, procedures, and guidance notes. Staff have also received training in asbestos handling and reporting.
- A trend was identified around complaints relating to Mutual Exchanges as sometimes not all work is completed after occupation. A joint inspection with contractors and Asset Services now takes place in addition to the Gas and Electrical checks to ensure the home is safe and meets our Empty Homes Standard.
- Our Compensation Policy has been reviewed and updated in line with the Housing Ombudsman's orders to ensure there is sufficient flexibility to allow awards to be calculated to provide the right level of redress based on an individual complaint and impact.
- Following feedback from the Ombudsman we reviewed the information held in our Sales & Marketing guide and the information held on our website. We developed a new Shared Ownership Sales procedure and guidance notes. This was to manage expectations and improve the transparency of information shared immediately after the sale.



- Cleaning contractor reviewed because of complaints relating to quality of cleaning. Toolbox talks took place with all the team to ensure mops were wrung out and to ensure the correct level of chemical was being used within mop bucket. Cleaning product has also been changed to avoid the 'sticky' floors.
- Delivered complaint handling training to lead officers. This included investigation skills and letter writing.
- To achieve consistency with our record keeping, Evolve, our repairs and maintenance team, attended a masterclass to understand how to use the group wide Customer Relationship

Management system. The team are now training this out to the operational leaders in the organisation to ensure that we are capturing all accurate record keeping.

- The succession process has now been built into our Housing Management system from the previous manual process. This enables the effective handling of succession applications allowing for greater transparency and clearer accountability for handling cases.

Performance - Trends

This year we've seen an increase in the total number of referrals and have received 86 determinations compared to 67 during 22/23.

In summary:



Our communication around complaints needs to improve

- complaints are sometimes closed prior to being fully resolved leading customers to feel they have not been listened to or treated with sufficient respect.



Our timeliness needs to improve - around one in five complaints are not responded to within our target timeframes. This can lead customers to having to chase up responses, increases the effort required and causes customers to feel disrespected and not listened to.



There are clear areas of focus

- Repairs, as our most frequent service, are naturally the highest area of complaint. Tenancy management, service charges and behaviour of colleagues also lead to a high volume of complaints.

We have done extensive work in this area throughout the year to understand the issues our customers are facing and have implemented improvements. We will continue to focus on the reasons for customer dissatisfaction and take action to improve.

05. Making improvements - Feet on the street

The first and most obvious way of trying to understand the root cause of customer dissatisfaction is to speak to customers to try and understand why they are dissatisfied; and this is exactly what we've done.

Our Communities & Livelihoods Strategy, one of the nine strategies underpinning our corporate plan, seeks to increase engagement with our customers at a local level.

Here are just a few initiatives that seek to get our feet on the street and start that conversation.

Proactive visits (general)

Our Housing Services teams have proactively contacted our customers who have had no contact with us over the last 12 months to check on their welfare, understand challenges, complaints and issues and provide support.

Proactive contact (with complainants)

Our Housing Officers have been using our data to identify customers who have repeat issues and have proactively made contact to support and understand the issues experienced.

Increased local communications

Our customers often tell us that they want local communications that tell them what is happening where they live, rather than national newsletters that may feel too distant. So we are changing our focus and have started to develop communications focusing on smaller localised communities – with information that our customers tell us that they want to hear about.

Local offers, updates, and newsletters

How we engage with customers is important to us, so we have produced local communication plans in consultation with customers. We update them every year on the plan through different channels. Creating a sense of community is also a focus area, so we are now starting the process of producing regular housing officer-led local newsletters.

Events, surgeries, and patch walks newsletters

Our Customer Involvement & Engagement team also support teams across the business to hold regular face-to-face events. From surgeries and patch walks by housing officers to events on specific topics – like consultations on planned works on homes, we carry out a huge number of these events each year; and that is increasing. This too helps us to connect more with our customers to help us to better understand them, identify reasons for dissatisfaction and tailor our services accordingly.

Making improvements - interventions

We have implemented several complaints specific interventions throughout the year which we hope will help to prevent complaints and lead to greater customer satisfaction. These include:

- **Further investment in complaints training, initially focusing on complaints handling and customer services colleagues.** This will be expanded to include other colleagues around the business.
- **Improved repairs information for operatives and customer services colleagues.** A new repairs management system will give these colleagues better visibility, improve communication and deliver a more efficient repairs service.
- **Our Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) is being improved on a regular basis.** This allows us to improve the customer experience and gather meaningful insight.
- **Creating a positive culture and accountability by collectively reviewing complaints as a group.** We have put in place complaints meetings and we use this time to scrutinise, share best practise and increase awareness on where we fall short in our services.
- **We continue to use the feedback from complaints to drive the actions in our customer experience improvement plan.** Focusing on how we can get things right first time, improving our services and reducing the volume of complaints.



06.

Next steps - Our focus for the year ahead

Last year we set our corporate plan “Forward Together” which included our key objectives and priorities for the period of 2023-2026.

One of those objectives, and the key one relating to complaints, was **“Trusted Customer Services”**.

This continues to be our focus, as we are committed to improving customers’ experiences and strengthening trust, through listening and acting on what our customers are telling us.

We will continue to remain transparent when our services fall short. Complaints give us an opportunity as an organisation to understand when things don’t go well, how we can improve our services for our customers and shape our services moving forward. With this in mind we will be focusing on:

- Establishing an integrated complaints function for the combined Riverside and One Housing Group which gives us alignment across processes, policies, and practise.
- Widening our insight to capture levels of dissatisfaction earlier on in the customer experience, allowing us to proactively drive through improvements. Particular focus on service failures, where we have not kept our promises or resolved issues at first point of contact.
- Investing in front line colleagues, customer experience training that focuses on our core values, creating a culture of collective responsibility by ensuring with listen and act on feedback. Whether it’s a call into the Customer Services team, a conversation with your Housing Officer or an Engineer doing a repair in your property.
- Exploring technologies that allow us to understand what is happening in your home virtually. Reduced disturbance for customers and better diagnostics, supporting first time fix.

To read decisions and performance data published by the Housing Ombudsman Service visit:


www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/decisions

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords

Get in touch or find out more

 **www.riverside.org.uk**
email: **complaints&disputeresolution@riverside.org.uk**
Follow us on Twitter @RiversideUK

Customer Service Centre

 **24** hours, **365** days a year. So you can call
at the weekend or even on Christmas Day
0345 111 0000


 Speak to a member of our team

 We are happy to accept **Relay UK** calls.


 **www.onehousing.co.uk**

 **Telephone: 0300 123 9966**

Customer Service Centre

 Our customer service centre is open
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm apart from
Wednesday, when we are open 9am to 6pm.

Residents in **Berkshire** should call Housing Solutions
on **0800 587 9941** to report a repair. Their customer

 service centre is open from 8.45am-5.15pm on Monday,
Tuesday and Thursday; 10am-5.15pm on Wednesday;
and 8.45am-4.45pm on Friday.

The Riverside Group Limited

Registered Office:
2 Estuary Boulevard,
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Liverpool L24 8RF

A charitable Registered Society under
the Co-operative and Community
Benefit Societies Act 2014
(Reg No 30938R)

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