

# CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

Customer Service: All Group

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

GENERAL - EXTERNAL

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. Riverside aims to deliver high quality customer service across all business streams, operating areas and subsidiaries, and within all activities whilst meeting all legal and regulatory requirements. This involves putting the customer first, respecting their rights, needs and views.
- 1.2. Our customers are all different, with different circumstances and needs, but our aim is the same: to deliver consistently good services to everyone.
- 1.3. This policy applies to all services and subsidiaries in delivering all elements of the corporate plan and business plan needs.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy is owned by the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Customer Officer. It is subject to approval via the Customer Influence Assurance Committee and Customer Experience Committee.
- 2.2. The Customer Care Policy will be utilised by all employees who have contact responsibilities to ensure we are delivering the right level of service for our customers. This includes all Directorates, and all forms of contact including face to face, telephone, written or internet based.

## 3. Principles

- 3.1. This Policy aims to ensure compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Transparency, Influence & Accountability [Consumer] Standard in respect of Fairness & Respect and Diverse Needs, and equivalent regulatory requirements as set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator. We will:
  - Treat all customers with fairness and respect.
  - Assess our service to deliver fair and equitable outcomes, using data to understand the diverse needs of our customers.
  - Communicate and provide information clearly, in accessible formats, ensuring all communications are relevant and appropriate to the needs of our customers.
  - Support customers to use our service, ensuring that our services are accessible to all, including enabling our customers to be supported by an advocate or representative.
  - Engage with customers when reviewing and updating this Policy, creating meaningful opportunities to influence our service. We will tailor these opportunities to meet the needs of customers wishing to participate.
  - Keep customers up to date on progress, next steps and outcomes on services that affect them.
  - Clearly set out our decision-making criteria, setting these out in the Roles and Responsibilities section below and in any associated procedures.
  - Provide customers with information about how we are performing against this Policy and the actions we are taking to improve performance if required. Performance measures will be set out in any associated Procedure(s).
  - Self-refer to the RSH if we fail to meet any of these principles in a material way and put improvement actions in place to minimise recurrence.
- 3.2. Working with customers, we have established a set of key principles which have been adopted across our business:

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**3.2.1. Rule 1 – We will get things right first time**

- We will deal with all enquiries efficiently and effectively and resolve them without customers having to follow up or chase for a response.
- We will tell customers what we will do to resolve their enquiry and how long it will take.
- We will tell customers who is responsible for dealing with their enquiry.
- We will keep customers informed of what we are doing to put things right if their enquiry cannot be resolved easily or is more complicated.

**3.2.2. Rule 2 – We will provide services our customers need and want**

- We will take time to ensure we understand the needs of all our customers.
- We will regularly ask our customers how we are performing and what we could do better.
- We will always take the special needs of our vulnerable and disabled customers into account when designing and providing services.
- We will adapt our services to ensure we are meeting the needs of all customers.

**3.2.3. Rule 3 – We will learn from our mistakes**

- We will listen to what our customers are telling us.
- We will investigate complaints about our services quickly.
- We will apologise when we make a mistake and compensate customers where appropriate.
- We will fix any problems or mistakes that we identify
- We will make improvements to ensure we don't repeat our mistakes.

**3.2.4. Rule 4 – We will make sure our employees have the knowledge, capability and resources to do the job**

- We will train our employees to undertake their role with competence and confidence.
- We will provide our employees with the resources they need to do their jobs well.
- We will trust and value our employees and create a working environment they are proud to be a part of.
- We will train our team, so they are better able to support customers with additional needs.

3.3. In addition, we will:

**3.3.1. Manage performance by:**

- Adhering to our values, “We Care, We are Trusted and We are Inclusive”.
- Setting clear and meaningful performance and service standards in consultation with customers.
- Publicising those standards and our performance against them utilising the corporate plan and annual reports produced.

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- Working with customers to scrutinise service areas utilising transactional and perception-based feedback as well as scrutiny through our recognised customer involvement body and other forms where appropriate.
- Tell customers about our services, the help that is available and how they can get the most out of what we provide in line with our corporate plan and the Social Housing Regulation Act 2024.
- So far as is possible, aim to deal with queries at the first point of contact and ensure that services are delivered “right first time”.
- Continuing to develop systems that measure performance and provide useful service intelligence against the requirements of the corporate plan and the Social Housing Regulation Act 2024.

### 3.3.2. Facilitate ease and equality of access by:

- Treating all customers with fairness and respect, respecting their privacy and servicing their needs through their channel of choice.
- Publicising and ensuring that access to services is available in a variety of formats and media’s including telephone, face-to-face, and via digital communications.
- Providing choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of customers. This includes but is not limited to those requiring service options when communicating with us such as translation services, screen reader and providing guidance around software capability to support accessibility needs.
- Making additional services available if required, such as hearing enhancements and translation services for both contact by phone and digital content.
- Continuously improving our systems to make service preferences easily accessible for colleagues and contractors.
- We offer a range of ways for customers to contact us and will provide a personal and professional service, regardless of the method chosen.
- Our websites <https://www.riverside.org.uk> and [www.riversidescotland.org.uk](http://www.riversidescotland.org.uk) are easy to use, simple to navigate with customised content so that customers can quickly find what they need.
- The MyRiverside App is our online self-service portal which can be accessed at any time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week to:
  - View and manage account details
  - View rent and service charges
  - Make secure payments
  - Report repairs for homes and communal areas
  - Report concerns such as anti-social behaviour, tenancy fraud, safeguarding etc.
- Our Customer Service Centre is available at any time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We can be contacted on 0345 111 0000 (Riverside Scotland customers can call 0345 112 6600), or chat with us via live chat

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- You can write to us or visit our offices by appointment.

### 3.3.3. Deliver services through a workforce that:

- Is informed, well trained, caring, and polite, does not make assumptions, and acknowledges customers' needs; delivering services in a way that is convenient for the individual, respecting equality and diversity.
- Is positive in their responses, takes ownership of issues and provides solutions or options for resolution which are best fitting for the customer, their situation and their needs.

### 3.3.4. When communicating and consulting with our customers, we will:

- Keep them informed of progress with their query, whilst being honest, clear and realistic about time frames, confirming service level agreements and remaining within their channel of choice.
- Engage with our recognised customer involvement body in relation to business decisions that impact upon them and explain the reasons for our actions, providing opportunities to express their views and listening to them where a change is proposed that has a significant impact on services.
- When customers contact us via our website, MyRiverside, email, or in writing, we will:
  - acknowledge the query within 2 working days and be clear around what happens next
  - aim to resolve the query at the first point of contact
  - make sure we update customer information, including any communication preferences and any needs the customer may have (if provided)
  - ensure the query is referred to the most appropriate team if it requires specialist help
- When customers phone our Customer Service Centre we will:
  - introduce ourselves by our first name
  - make sure we respect customers' time and offer the option of holding their place in the call queue with our call back service
  - record our calls to help us to monitor and improve the quality of the service we provide.
- When we visit customers at home, we will:
  - arrive on time or, if delayed, call to let our customer know why and when we will get there
  - respect the customers' home and be mindful of any customs
  - show Riverside identification.
- We will monitor our performance by:
  - carrying out regular satisfaction surveys
  - record calls to our Customer Service Centre for training, monitoring and feedback purposes
  - benchmark our service with other comparable housing organisations.

### 3.3.5. Encourage feedback by:

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- Telling customers how they can communicate with us and provide feedback, which includes comments, compliments and complaints.
- Making it easy for customers to provide their views about our services and use this feedback as a tool for service improvement.
- We do our best to always provide the best service possible but accept that sometimes things go wrong, and we may occasionally make mistakes. If customers are unhappy with the standard of service, they can make a complaint. See Section 7 Appeals & Complaints for more details.

### 3.3.6. Shape our services by:

- Using insight information to better understand customers' behaviours, needs and aspirations.
- Giving value for money by budgeting carefully and using affordable resources efficiently and effectively.
- Continually seeking ways of improving the quality of the services we provide.
- Respecting customers' privacy and handling all data in accordance with data protection requirements.
- Working with other relevant external agencies to ensure a continuous improvement approach for our customers' "end to end journey".

## 4. Further Information & Support

- 4.1. Customers and other stakeholders can access our Policies through the Riverside website at Our policies - Riverside and Our policies - Riverside Scotland. Internally, Policies are available on the Policy Management System at Riverside Policies.
- 4.2. We aim to identify and support customers who, because of a protected characteristic, vulnerability or diverse need require extra support or an adjustment to access our services, in line with our organisational values of 'We Care', 'We are Inclusive' and 'We are Trusted'.
- 4.3. This Policy has been written in collaboration with our customers through our approved customer panels. Reviews will be undertaken every three years, or as required when new legislation or regulatory requirements are published, and customers will be given the opportunity to influence the way we work within the requirements set out in the relevant housing law and regulations described above, and in conjunction with our Customer Involvement and Engagement Strategy and Policy.
- 4.4. This Policy supports the 'Trusted Customer Services' theme of our Corporate Plan (Forward Together 23-26) in which we aim to strengthen trust in us as a landlord by improving our customers' experiences, making it quick and easy to have queries resolved and repairs completed. We'll listen to the views of our diverse customers and shape our services to reflect their needs and aspirations, keeping our promises and being transparent when our service falls short. Our Customer Experience Strategy and associated Improvement Plan sets out the specific actions we are taking to achieve these objectives and are supported by this Policy.
- 4.5. Here we share a passion and a vision to make a difference for our customers by transforming lives and revitalising neighbourhoods. To achieve our vision,

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we consistently look for ways of improving the way we work, and how we deliver our services so we can always put our customers first. Our Riverside Way represents who we are, what we stand for and guides how we work, treat our customers, and each other.

- 4.6. Data Protection and Privacy are at the heart of the services we offer and are the foundations of our relationships with our customers, colleagues, partners and stakeholders. Personal data is valuable, and we must always act fairly, ethically and with integrity when dealing with it. The fair and lawful handling and protection of personal data is critical to developing trust and confidence and building and sustaining long term relationships with those we provide homes to, and care for. We are dedicated to safeguarding the personal data under our care and to the continual development of a Privacy and Data Protection framework that is effective, fit for purpose and demonstrates an understanding of, and appreciation for Data Protection and the opportunities it brings. We are committed to the continuous cycle of improvement and enhancement of our compliance and governance framework.
- 4.7. We are looking into how we can make our Procedures more access to Customers and other stakeholders, in the meantime requests for information can be made through the CSC (processed as a STAIRS request). Internally, associated Procedures are available on the Processes and Procedures Hub at Riverside Processes.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

Executive Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sponsor business change activity as appropriate</li> </ul>
All Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adhere to the policy at all times when engaging with customers</li> <li>Complete all mandatory and role specific learning within required timescales</li> </ul>
Information Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provider the relevant data in order for us to identify trends in customer behaviour and help drive efficiencies</li> </ul>
Customer Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage and support customer scrutiny</li> </ul>
Customer Experience Squad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>User knowledge gained from working with customers to improve processes</li> </ul>
Business Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out reviews to obtain assurance that services are meeting quality standards</li> </ul>

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**Customer Experience**

- 6.1. We acknowledge that there are some gaps in our delivery of consistent high-quality service that customers trust. However, our risk appetite for adverse experience is reducing and therefore our focus on closing those gaps is increasing. We will be less tolerant of service failure and/or any actions that negatively impact customer satisfaction and trust. We will only accept changes that have a temporary adverse service impact where there is a clear articulation of the potential impact and an agreed action plan to return to acceptable levels.
- 6.2. We are aware of increasing customer expectations regarding service levels, which are further encouraged and strengthened by the Social Housing Regulation Act 2024, and we want to respond positively to those higher expectations. We are also mindful of the potential for greater visibility of any service failure and the associated reputational risks, partly because of greater use of social media (which we are actively promoting both as a service channel and a route to improved engagement) and also due to the imminent industry wide publication of service performance results.
- 6.3. We acknowledge that we don't always get things right first time for customers; whilst doing so will always remain our aim, we will also seek to put things right at the earliest opportunity through our complaints handling process and have a zero tolerance of adverse finding by the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 6.4. We have a full suite of Customer Experience Key Performance Indicators which are scrutinised by Executive Directors, Boards and both our Care & Support and Customer Experience Committees.

**7. Appeal & Complaints**

- 7.1. As detailed in the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and by the Scottish Housing Regulator, customers are invited to hold us to account for the decisions we make, that impact upon them, under this Policy.
- 7.2. If a customer wishes to complain about the service they have received under this Policy, this should be handled through our Complaints Policy and Complaint Handling Procedure, which is governed by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of Practice and the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman Service.
- 7.3. These associated Policies and Procedures are available on our website at:
  - England: <https://www.riverside.org.uk/you-your-home/customer-feedback/> or <https://www.riverside.org.uk/about-us/our-policies/>
  - Scotland: Customer feedback | Complaints | Riverside Scotland or <https://www.riversidescotland.org.uk/about-us/our-policies>
  - and are also available by contacting our Customer Service Centre.

**8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

- 8.1. We are committed to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. We strive to be fair in our dealings with all people, communities and organisations, taking into account the diverse nature of their culture and background and actively promoting inclusion. This policy aligns with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

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