

## Our report to you

Full annual report to tenants 2010

Transforming **lives**  
Revitalising **neighbourhoods**



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## Contact us



**[www.riverside.org.uk](http://www.riverside.org.uk)**

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



### **Customer Service Centre**

**24** hours a day, **365** days a year

**0845 111 0000**

With inclusive call packages or mobile phones,  
it may be cheaper to call **0345 111 0000**



We are happy to accept **Typetalk** calls

Minicom: **0845 111 7766**

# Welcome to your annual report

I would like to welcome you to our first annual report to tenants. The last year has been a period of huge change and I am pleased to have this opportunity to tell you about some of the things we have achieved in partnership with our tenants, and explain about some of the things we would like to improve. We will also share this report with the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the current regulator of social housing.

This report will give you information about the standards we work to and the services we provide. It tells you how we measure up to the new standards recently published by the TSA for all social landlords. It also looks at the quality of services, concentrating on what tenants and residents have told us. We know that you are concerned about our basic services, such as repairs and how we deal with anti-social behaviour, and we explain what we are doing to improve these and other core services.

I am delighted to report that the overall picture is very positive. We think that our existing service standards generally fit well with the TSA's approach, and we are making good progress in meeting them. Customer satisfaction with our services overall has increased to 82% from 67% over the last three years. However we still have much to do and it is important that we are always looking to improve services and deliver real value to tenants and residents.

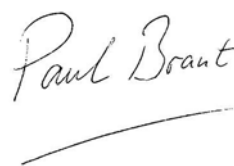
At each stage in the production of this report we have worked with groups of tenants and residents to agree what information would be of interest. We have worked closely with our Tenants' and Residents' Federation to agree the content and design of the report, and held meetings in local areas to find out what you think about how we are doing. We have also been able to draw on other things which tell us what you think about our services, such as the results of our recent satisfaction survey which was carried out in April and May 2010.

This is a long report and it provides a full picture of how we are performing against the TSA's standards. We have also prepared a shorter summary version which is available on

our website and on request, and we will be sending local versions to every tenant and resident to provide information on the services provided by your division. Let us know what you think about this report so we can consider your comments for next year.

Finally I would like to thank those of you who have helped with the preparation of the report either by completing a survey form, attending one of our workshops or commenting at a more formal meeting. Your efforts are very much appreciated.

I hope you find the report interesting and informative.



**Paul Brant**  
Group Board Chair

October 2010



# About Riverside

Riverside is a charitable housing association. We are one of the UK's leading social housing organisations, owning or managing over 50,000 properties throughout England. We work to improve the homes we own and the neighbourhoods where they are situated. Our vision is 'transforming lives, revitalising neighbourhoods'.

More than 85,000 people live in our affordable rented homes. We have also helped some people to get on the property ladder through our shared ownership homes.

We work closely with local authorities and other partners to deliver services for our tenants, residents<sup>1</sup> and communities, from support for the homeless to transforming entire neighbourhoods. In most areas we have a network of neighbourhood offices for our tenants, where we offer services that make a real difference.

Riverside ECHG is our specialist provider of services to older people and vulnerable people throughout England.

We have a long history of working in partnership with tenants and residents and there are a number of ways you can help shape your service delivery. These are covered in detail in the 'Tenant involvement and empowerment' section of this report.

## How we work

### Who runs Riverside?

For any organisation to deliver great services, it needs effective leadership. At Riverside, this is the responsibility of the Group Board. Its job is to:

- set the direction of the organisation
- make sure we operate within the law
- ensure we manage risks properly
- check that we are accountable to the communities we serve.

This is called the **governance** of the organisation and this is one of the key areas that the TSA looks at when checking whether we are doing our job properly. The TSA looks at this every year and thinks that governance at Riverside works well.<sup>2</sup>

We also have local boards who are responsible for planning and overseeing local services. We call these Divisional and Area Boards. They are made up of tenants, independent people appointed because they bring particular skills, and in some cases local councillors.

We have agreed with tenants that they should be involved in all of our Boards. There is a tenant on the Group Board and a second tenant who observes meetings.

### What shape are we in financially?

We need to manage our money and other assets carefully to keep services running. This means keeping firm control of our spending and making regular checks on how this money is spent.

We look at future risks to our financial plans and take steps to protect ourselves from money problems. To do this we use the best information available to plan and organise our finances. We have to satisfy the organisations that lend us money and the TSA that we do this well.

We use a number of different ways to make sure we are financially healthy and well run, including committees that meet quarterly and take particular responsibility for scrutinising risks, investments and our spending plans. Performance, income and spending are looked at regularly by the senior management team, the Group Board and the Housing Services Committee, which involves members from local boards and tenants.

The TSA has told us that we meet all of its expectations on financial viability and have an effective approach to managing risk.

Our financial statements for 2009/10 are available on our website.

## Responsibility to the wider community

We are actively committed to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – embracing our wider responsibilities as a business and looking at how we can make an impact on the broader community. We have a wide-ranging action plan to help us fulfil our CSR aims. This includes varied initiatives, such as ensuring that our homes are as energy efficient as possible, reducing our use of private transport, encouraging the use of Fairtrade goods and ensuring that our employees are given a fair deal and treated with respect. Our annual CSR report is available on our website.

We support our tenants and their neighbours to improve their personal, social and financial well being through the projects we are involved in. We either pay for these ourselves or apply for funding from grant making bodies. We set out more details of our approach and our achievements in the ‘Neighbourhood and community’ section of this report.

## How well are we performing?

We have developed a set of measures to help us check that we are meeting our service standards. Over the last year we have talked to tenants about what matters most to them and, using this information, have developed a ‘top ten’ of tenant performance indicators. These are explained in more detail on page 14.

We have included results against these indicators throughout this report to tell you how well we are doing and where we need to improve.<sup>3</sup> Look out for the ‘top ten’ symbol\* highlighting these. We have also included some key results from our recent tenant satisfaction survey. Where we can, comparisons with similar organisations have been reported. If this is not available we have compared ourselves with all the organisations for whom we can get information.

## Local offers

We have minimum standards of service delivery and these are applied across all our areas of operation. If there is a clear reason to have a different approach, and the tenants affected agree, then we can develop what is called a ‘local offer’ to reflect local circumstances or the needs of a particular group of tenants and residents.

There is more information about our approach to developing local offers on page 45 of this annual report.

\*This symbol highlights which performance measures are part of the ‘top ten’.



1 This report is addressed to tenants and residents living in shared ownership homes. This is why we use the term ‘tenants and residents’ throughout the report.

2 In its last regulatory judgement the TSA said: “The governing body gives effective leadership and control, has a wide range of skills and experience and, supported by appropriate governance and executive arrangements, is improving its own performance and that of the organisation.”

3 This report looks at performance for our financial year from 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010. This is what we mean by ‘last year’. When we refer to ‘next year’ we mean the year from 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011.



# The standards

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) has set out five service standards that it expects social landlords such as Riverside to meet.<sup>4</sup>

The standards are:

- tenant involvement and empowerment
- your home
- your tenancy
- your neighbourhood and community
- value for money.

These standards have been developed by the TSA after talking to tenants, residents and landlords across the country, and at Riverside we have welcomed their introduction. For most of our services we believe that we meet the standards, however there are some areas where we need to improve.



The following pages look at each standard in more detail. For each standard, we set out three actions.

- **What we say we will do:** what level of service do we offer to you? We call this our 'service offer' and where this does not meet the TSA's expectations we make this clear.
- **How we are doing in delivering the services we offer:** based upon discussions with tenants and residents at both a local and national level, and a close look at survey information, complaints and the figures we use to measure our performance.
- **Our plans to improve over the coming year:** we provide examples of where we have changed the way we do things because of what you have told us and show how tenants and residents are already making a real difference.

To see a summary of the TSA standards, please visit [www.riverside.org.uk/performance](http://www.riverside.org.uk/performance)



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4 There is a sixth standard which is about governance and viability – the way our Board provides leadership and the strength of our finances. We report directly to the Tenant Services Authority on this standard.

# Tenant involvement and empowerment

This TSA standard requires us to:

- provide services which meet the full range of needs that our tenants have
- communicate well and keep tenants informed about what we offer and what we do
- provide tenants with the opportunity to check and influence our services.

The three parts of the standard are:

- i. customer service, choice and complaints
- ii. tenant involvement and empowerment
- iii. understanding the diverse needs of tenants.





## i. Customer service, choice and complaints

### What do we say we will do?

We have worked with our Tenants' and Residents' Federation to develop a written service pledge.<sup>5</sup> This sets out what we do, and how and when we do it.

Our service pledge explains:

- the different ways you can contact us – by telephone 24 hours a day, email, in writing or by visiting one of our offices
- how quickly we will respond – we aim to:
  - answer telephone calls in 45 seconds
  - return calls within 24 hours
  - reply to your letters within ten working days
- what to expect if you visit one of our offices, where we will see you as quickly as possible and in private if necessary
- how to arrange for a member of staff to visit you at home within five working days

- arrangements for tenants and clients who live in sheltered and supported schemes who have direct access to staff, either face to face at the scheme or with a 24 hour alarm call system, or an out of hours phone number
- what to do when things go wrong – by talking to a member of staff informally or making a formal complaint if we do not sort out the problem to your satisfaction
- the type of information you can expect to receive from us, such as rent statements and regular newsletters
- how you can get involved in shaping the way we manage and maintain your home.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of the Service Pledge and all of our customer leaflets are available at local offices and can be found on our website [www.riverside.org.uk](http://www.riverside.org.uk)

How are we doing?

We are committed to providing excellent services which are as easy to use as possible. For example, we can send you information in a variety of different formats depending on what suits you best. In our sheltered and supported housing schemes we deliver services to meet individual needs, and our staff are trained to listen to and work with tenants and service users to help them achieve their personal goals.

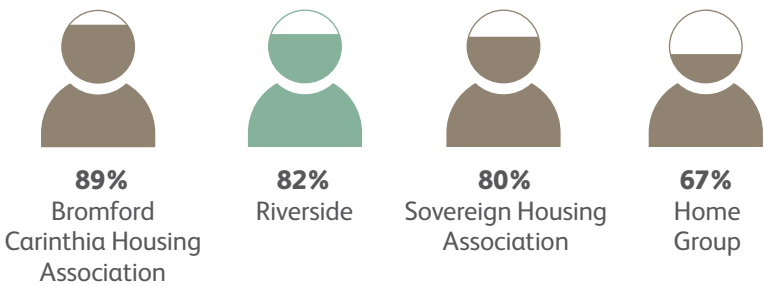
To make sure that our staff meet the service pledge, we have introduced a customer service standard called the Riverside Service Style, and nearly all of our staff have been trained to meet this standard. Tenants help us check this by monitoring calls and making sure any problems are followed up.

We are making good progress in meeting our pledge and last year:

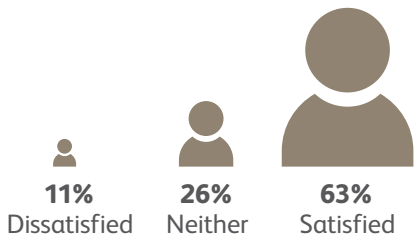
- our 24 hour Customer Service Centre answered 78% of calls within 45 seconds with callers waiting an average of only 34 seconds
- we launched a new system for checking our response to letters which shows that 78% of letters were responded to within our target.

We think this is having a real impact and more than eight out of ten of our tenants are now satisfied with the overall service provided by Riverside<sup>6</sup>, a huge improvement since our last survey in 2007 when only two thirds of tenants were satisfied (see diagrams, right). Nearly eight out of ten tenants also say we are good at keeping them informed, although we would like to improve this.

Customer satisfaction with overall service provided by landlord\*



Satisfaction with the outcome of most recent contact with Riverside



Responding to your letters within 10 working days



We responded to nearly 8 out of 10 letters (78%) within ten working days, just short of our target of 9 out of 10.

6 Riverside survey of tenant and resident satisfaction (STATUS) May 2010.

\* Comparisons are with selected organisations similar in size or nature.

Our commitment to tenants and residents has also been recognised by outside bodies and we have achieved the independently judged Customer Services Excellence Standard.

We welcome feedback on our services and understanding how and why things go wrong helps us improve. Last year:

- only 3% of our tenants had cause to make a complaint
- nearly 8 out of 10 tenants who had made a complaint say they found it easy (see diagram, right)
- 99 out of every 100 complaints were resolved satisfactorily at a local level.

### What do we need to do better?

Whilst most tenants are satisfied with the services we provide overall, just six out of ten tenants say they are happy with their last contact with us and we are determined to improve this.

Over the next year we will:

- use the feedback from our recent tenant inspection programme to help us improve the way we communicate with tenants. This will focus on the way we greet customers and being clearer about when things are going to happen
- improve our performance against the service pledge by checking how quickly we respond to your letters, telephone calls and emails
- develop our new website to enable you to do things like order a rent statement or repair online.

### How easy customers found it to make a complaint to Riverside



Nearly 8 out of 10 tenants who had made a complaint say they found it easy.



#### **You said, we did. How tenants make a real difference!**

Within our sheltered and supported housing schemes we do an audit which tenants and clients are encouraged to take part in. These audits help us to identify any problem areas and produce an action plan to improve the service.

We consult with tenants about our leaflets and make changes to the way they are written and designed – 90% of tenants say they are happy with them.

A group from our Tenants' and Residents' Federation is looking at complaints made by tenants and will be making recommendations for service improvements.

## ii. Tenant involvement and empowerment

### What do we say we will do?

Our 'Get involved' leaflet sets out a range of ways that you can be involved in shaping the service you receive. It says that:

"There are lots of ways for you to get involved, from completing the occasional survey to sitting on a local board. It's important you find a way that suits you and your lifestyle. To help you, we offer advice and support to tenant, resident and community groups and provide training if you want to get involved at a higher level."

In our recent review of resident involvement we worked with tenants to provide as many different options as possible to influence the way we provide services and support.

You can:

- respond to our surveys – we carry out a survey of tenant satisfaction every year
- become a tenant inspector, to check how we are delivering local services in more detail
- become a member of the 'Count Me In' panel, taking part from the comfort of your own home via email, telephone interviews, comment slips or even choosing to attend the occasional focus group
- set up and get involved in local neighbourhood forums or other residents' groups
- participate in local issues group meetings to shape our services
- volunteer at our Tenant and Resident Resource Centres
- take up training and development opportunities
- put yourself forward to become a member of a local Board or even the Group Board which oversees the direction of the whole organisation. We agree arrangements for the nomination of Board members with the Tenants' and Residents' Federation.

Tenants who live in sheltered and supported accommodation can get involved in a number of other ways. Examples include attending scheme meetings, helping to recruit new staff, becoming a tenant volunteer and attending the Older Persons' Advisory Group or supported housing forums.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.



## How are we doing?

Tenants and residents are involved in influencing services at every level in Riverside.

We have a formal involvement structure, with tenants' groups in each area and at every level of Riverside. The Tenants' and Residents' Federation covers the whole of Riverside and aims to bring together what is happening in each area.

We have dedicated and trained staff to support you and there are Tenant Resource Centres in Merseyside, Carlisle and Rochdale where tenants' groups can access office space, faxing and photocopying facilities. In other parts of Riverside (divisions) resources can be provided on request.

Over 40 tenants have trained as inspectors and they are supported to carry out checks of services using tenants' priorities and information from tenant surveys.

Tenants and residents have played a key role in shaping this report, both through the Tenants' and Residents' Federation at a national level, and through local meetings to consider the quality of the services we provide and priorities for improvement.

Two thirds (67%) of our tenants are now satisfied that we take their views into account (see diagram, right). This is an improvement compared to 57% in 2007 and is above average for other social landlords. However we want to do better, and have set ourselves a target to improve this to 70% by the end of 2011.

## Satisfaction that landlord takes tenants' views into account\*



**73%**  
Midland  
Heart



**67%**  
Riverside



**63%**  
Wakefield  
and District  
Housing



**45%**  
Southern  
Housing  
Group

## Customers rating their landlord as good at keeping them informed\*\*



**85%**  
Best  
performing  
associations



**82%**  
Above average  
performing  
associations



**79%**  
Riverside



**78%**  
Below average  
performing  
associations

\* Comparisons are with selected organisations similar in size or nature.

\*\* Comparison with all social landlords.

## What do we need to do better?

We need to ensure that more of you are happy that we take your views into account and keep you informed.

Over the next year we will:

- consult with tenants and residents to develop a new 'Involvement and Empowerment' policy
- find a way of measuring how tenants and residents are involved in a way which helps us work out the impact of involvement and report this to you in next year's annual report
- find a more effective way of involving residents in decisions about the way that money is spent and incorporate this into our financial planning.



**You said, we did.**

**How tenants make a real difference!**

We have consulted with tenants about the matters that are most important to them. From this, we have agreed ten things that tenants want us to measure – what we call Key Performance Indicators.

These are:

- customer satisfaction with repairs service
- repair appointments made and kept
- customer satisfaction with overall service
- repairs completed on the first visit
- satisfaction with most recent contact or service
- aids and adaptations completed on target
- letter response within ten working days
- satisfaction with anti-social behaviour case handling
- satisfaction with value for money of service charges
- keeping properties safe through gas safety checks.

We are using this annual report to tell you how we are performing against these ten measures and will continue to do this each year.

### iii. Understanding the diverse needs of tenants

#### What do we say we will do?

We aim to treat all customers with fairness and respect. Our service pledge says:

“We value diversity and do everything we can to make our services available to as many people as possible. This commitment to equality is at the heart of everything we do.”

We have a written ‘Equality and Diversity’ policy and have developed gender and disability equality schemes which set out in detail how we are promoting equality for men and women, and tenants and residents with disabilities or limiting illness.

This affects the information we collect from tenants and residents, and how we deliver all of our services, including how we let our properties, how we maintain them and how we look after the areas and communities they are situated in.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA’s standard, although we need to make this clearer to tenants and residents next time we review our service pledge.

#### How are we doing?

To make sure we are not excluding or discriminating against any particular group of people, we look at the impact of our work across seven strands. These are: gender, religion, age, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, and transgender.

This means that we need to collect information on how individual tenants or residents fit into these strands, if they are willing to provide this, and we have started this process.

We know most about the ethnic origin and disability of customers – although our information is by no means perfect – and we set targets for lettings to tenants from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are disabled, reflecting the mix of the local population. Generally we have performed well against local targets for lettings to tenants from minority backgrounds and those with disabilities.

As well as looking at the needs of particular groups of tenants and residents, we also recognise that each customer has individual needs. We offer you the chance to tell us how we can make our services better for you through an initiative called ‘Your services, your way’. For example, do you need extra time to answer the door, or would you like to receive letters in large print? 86% of tenants have now signed up for ‘Your services, your way’ and we are currently translating our most frequently used letters into the nine most asked for languages.

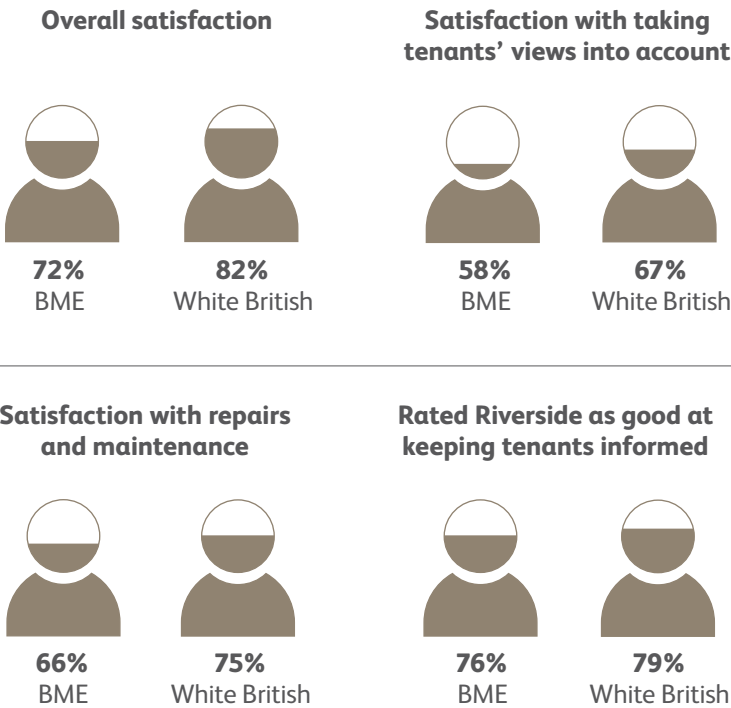
If you are a tenant or client of our sheltered and supported schemes we go even further in delivering a personalised service. You can expect your support plan to reflect your individual needs and enable you to access all the opportunities available to you. It will help you to overcome any barriers or obstacles you might encounter.

**What do we need to do better?**

We know that we have good information on the age and gender of our tenants. However we need to improve our records, particularly about sexuality, religion and ethnic origin, so that we can tailor our services to meet their needs.

We also know from our recent tenant surveys that, as a group, tenants from minority ethnic backgrounds appear to be less satisfied with services and involvement than tenants as a whole (see diagram, right).

**Satisfaction by ethnicity**





Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Improve the information provided by customers by carrying out a comprehensive survey of general needs and sheltered tenants. This will help us check that we deliver all our services in a fair and equal way.
- Investigate whether tenants from minority groups are genuinely less satisfied with aspects of our services, rather than this being related to other things such as age and family makeup. If we find that particular groups are dissatisfied, we will put plans in place to tackle this and tell you how we are progressing in the annual report next year.
- Develop a new approach to identify groups of tenants who would benefit from particular services, or who would prefer to communicate with us in a certain way. This is called Customer Insight and over the next year we will show you how we are using this information to improve and target the existing services we offer and communicate more effectively.

We will also update our service pledge when we next come to review it, to explain more clearly how we will understand and meet the diverse needs of tenants and residents.



**You said, we did.**  
**How tenants make a real difference!**

One of our tenants suggested that we should provide simple window stickers so that tenants can indicate that they have requested special arrangements for the delivery of their services to visiting contractors or staff. We have now printed and distributed thousands of stickers and this simple but effective idea is being rolled out across Riverside as part of the 'Your services, your way' initiative.

# Your home

This TSA standard covers the:

- quality of your home, and in particular the need for us to maintain it to the Government's Decent Homes standard
- quality of the repairs service we provide, and whether we are able to get it 'right first time', provide a service which is cost effective and meets all health and safety standards
- need to work with other partners such as local councils, to provide adaptations to your home if you need special alterations or equipment because of health or disability problems.

The two parts of the standard are:

- i. quality of accommodation
- ii. repairs and maintenance.



## i. Quality of accommodation

### What do we say we will do?

In our Corporate Plan, we have stated that by the end of 2010 all of our homes will meet the Government's Decent Homes standard.<sup>7</sup> This is a national minimum standard to make sure rented homes are safe, warm and in good repair. For example, your home should be centrally heated and insulated, have a kitchen that is well laid out and no more than 20 years old, and a roof and windows that must not be old and needing repairs.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.

### How are we doing?

At Riverside we have chosen to improve and maintain your home to a higher standard than this minimum. We normally renew kitchens after fifteen years, renew and upgrade fire safety and security fittings, and improve energy efficiency with higher levels of insulation and double glazing.

We expect all of our properties to meet and exceed the Decent Homes standard by December 2010, and we have plans in place to maintain the quality of our homes at this level. We have made better progress than the average landlord at meeting this standard.

This year, we are planning to spend around £47 million on improving your homes, and we publish five year investment plans for most areas, following discussions with tenant and resident groups about priorities.

Our recent satisfaction survey shows that around eight in ten tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home, which is close to average for all social housing landlords.

### What do we need to do better?

Whilst we are providing better information to our tenants about our improvement plans, we recognise that we could do more to publicise our investment programmes and involve tenants and residents in setting priorities.

Over the next year we will:

- bring all of our homes up to the Decent Homes standard, and maintain them at least at that level after that
- make sure that every part (division) of Riverside publishes a five year investment programme, after involving tenants and residents in discussing priorities
- deliver energy efficiency improvements to a further 1,900 homes.

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### Quality of our homes



Nearly 8 out of 10 are satisfied with the quality of their home, which is close to average for all social housing landlords.

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<sup>7</sup> The only exception is a small number of properties where we have an extension from the TSA because we are planning to sell or demolish them.

## ii. Repairs and maintenance

### What do we say we will do?

Our service pledge sets clear standards for our repairs service.

- You can report a repair at any time. Our customer service centre is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Alternatively call into your local office or visit our website.
- We will put your repair request into one of five categories and tell you how quickly you can expect it to be done. Health and safety repairs where there is a serious risk to you or your home will be dealt with on the same day, whereas some non-urgent jobs will be grouped together and dealt with as part of a programme.
- We will tell you when you can expect our contractor to call. If we need to send someone to see what needs to be done, we aim to do this within five working days.
- We offer appointments for a morning or afternoon visit and try to make sure that it is at a time that is convenient to you. If we cannot offer an appointment when you first report the repair, our contractor will phone or leave a card at your home to arrange a more convenient time.
- Our contractors will arrive when we say, respect your home, minimise inconvenience and clean up when the work is finished. If possible we try to complete work in a single visit, we call this a first time fix. However, if follow up work is needed, we will tell you what will happen next.



Some repairs need to be carried out on a cyclical basis. For example gas appliances, lift and fire alarms systems (where fitted) are serviced every year. We also aim to decorate the outside of your home and the shared areas in flats every five years. We will always write to you before we start work.

If you are a tenant and need alterations to your home because of an illness or disability, we have a specific service standard for carrying out aids and adaptations. We will consider all requests for adaptations, reply to your request within ten days, and agree what is needed and if the work required can be done. Where an adaptation is practical we aim to do minor work (such as grab rails) within 15 days and major work (such as a walk-in shower) within six months of your request.

Although we cannot always agree to every request we set specific target times for responding to you and, where we do carry out work, we commit to using specialist contractors. We work closely with local authorities who arrange for specialist assessments of tenant needs through trained occupational therapists. They often help with the funding of larger adaptations.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard, although we need to explain our approach to keeping the number of visits needed to complete a repair to the minimum – referred to as a 'first time fix'. We will do this when we review our service pledge.



## How are we doing?

We know that tenants and residents consider repairs to be the most important job we do and that you are most likely to judge us by the quality of this service.

Over the past few years we have changed our approach to delivering our repairs service, and we have now entered into longer term relationships with large companies who can work closely with us to improve the service and save money every year, using the latest technology and well trained staff. We believe that we are making great progress in improving the service and providing a modern, efficient service which offers great value for money.

We can see that:

- our last satisfaction survey shows that three quarters of our tenants are now satisfied with our repairs service, an increase of 14% since 2007
- when we asked our tenants detailed questions about satisfaction with different aspects of the repairs service, these had also improved since 2007
- almost 94% of repair appointments made in 2009/10 were kept, an improvement from 90% in the previous year
- 67% of repairs were completed on the first visit, less than our target of 85%
- in March 2010, over 99% of our homes had a valid gas safety certificate to show that appliances had been serviced and were safe. In every case where a tenant has not allowed us access to carry out a service on their gas appliances we are taking enforcement action.

Each year, we spend around £2 million on disabled adaptations to your properties, sometimes with the help of funding from local councils. Last year, 73% of adaptations were completed within the target times we have set. We have carried out research into long-term demand so we can make sure that funding is available to meet future needs.

## Our last satisfaction survey shows:

### Repairs service satisfaction



75% of you were satisfied with our repairs service, an increase of 14% since 2007.



### Repairs appointments kept



94% of all repairs appointments were kept, just under our target of 95%.



### First time fix



67% of repairs completed at the first visit, lower than our target of 85%



### Gas safety certificates



99% of our homes had a valid gas safety certificate on 31 March 2010.



### Completing adaptations within six months



More than 7 out of 10 aids and adaptations (73%) were completed within 6 months, lower than our target of 9 out of 10.



## What do we need to do better?

Although we are pleased that more tenants are now happy with our repairs service, we know there is still work to be done. In particular we need to find out why tenants in some areas are less happy, for example in the South East.

Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Complete our new approach to working in long-term relationships with larger repairs contractors in all areas, with the possible exception of Carlisle where we may continue to employ our own workforce.
- Improve our appointments service so that 95% of appointments are kept by our repairs contractors, using text reminders where possible to tell tenants they are on the way.
- Introduce a system to tell tenants how many visits we think a repair will take to complete, and then measure how contractors perform, reporting on progress in next year's annual report. We will aim to complete more jobs first time.
- Test out an annual 'MOT' style inspection visit to properties that have reported either a high number or no repairs during the past year. By doing this we can make sure we know what repairs are needed, do more to prevent repairs and reduce the number of times we need to visit, spending your money more wisely.
- Improve our communication with tenants whilst they are waiting for aids and adaptations to be completed, and improve the number of jobs completed within our target times to 90%. Tenant inspectors will also test the quality of our repairs and aids and adaptations services to make sure they meet your needs.



**You said, we did.**

**How tenants make a real difference!**

Three years ago we carried out a major review of the repairs service to improve quality and value for money. As a result we have been introducing new contractors who are able to work with us to offer an improved service. Tenants have played a big part in choosing the right contractor for their area and then monitoring how well they perform on the things that really matter to you, keeping appointments, doing a good job and providing excellent customer care. The new contracts we have in place now cover more than half of our homes.

You have told us you are concerned at rising fuel costs and keeping your home warm. Last year, we allocated around £800,000 towards improving energy efficiency of our houses over and above work done to meet the Decent Homes standard. We also have advice on the cheapest energy suppliers on our website.

# Your tenancy

This TSA standard expects us to:

- let homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way<sup>8</sup>
- charge rents that meet Government rules
- offer the most secure tenancy conditions appropriate for the type of housing and the needs of the neighbourhood.

The three parts of this standard are:

- allocations
- rents
- tenure.



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<sup>8</sup> Lettings should take account of the needs and wishes of applicants whilst making the best use of our housing. We should also allocate our homes to help local authorities in tackling homelessness and supporting communities.



## i. Allocations

### What do we say we will do?

We have a clear and up to date lettings policy which ensures that we let our homes in a fair and transparent way. The policy balances our aim to let homes to those who have a genuine need for affordable housing, with offering as much choice as possible to ensure people can settle in neighbourhoods where they want to be.

We have developed lettings strategies for each part (division) of Riverside which describe how we will allocate and let our homes to reflect local circumstances and partnerships.

We have different arrangements for allocating and letting our homes in different areas. Details are set out in a series of leaflets called 'Finding a home with us'.

We are committed to working with other providers and the local authority to offer choice to applicants through joint lettings schemes and nominations. We aim to be members of local lettings partnerships in all the areas where we work by the end of 2010. Where this is not practical, for example where we own very few homes which rarely become vacant, we will find other ways to offer choice to applicants.

We will make best use of our properties by letting them to family sizes to which they are best suited. If you apply for supported accommodation, we will work with you and any other agencies you are involved with to ensure that this is the best option for you.

We will work with our choice based lettings partners to provide clear advice on housing options whilst supporting the most vulnerable clients. We will also take part in the House Exchange scheme and support tenants who need to move outside of their local area.

We will explain why someone may be refused housing and give a timed framework for appeals with details set out in a leaflet called 'Why have I been refused a home?'

We will reduce the time properties are left vacant between lettings, but take into account the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties.

We will publish details of the standard that all our properties should meet when offered for letting in a leaflet called 'Your new home – what to expect' and we will check that this standard is achieved. We will also give new tenants a welcome pack containing a number of essential items and a brochure explaining the services we provide. All items in the pack are from ethical or Fairtrade suppliers. We try to visit all new tenants within four weeks to check they have settled in.

We also operate an incentive scheme offering a cash reward to encourage people to give four weeks notice and allowing us to advertise and re-let their home more quickly.

We will provide information to applicants in the format and language they require.

**We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard, although we will look at ways of improving our approach to tackling the under-occupation of larger family homes by single people or couples in some parts of the country, without forcing people to move.**

### How are we doing?

We have a clear approach to the way we let our properties and have been instrumental in establishing local letting partnerships and a choice based approach to lettings in many neighbourhoods. We are now in partnership, or have nomination agreements, with 47 choice based lettings schemes and local authorities. Where we are not part of a local partnership, we are in active discussions with local authorities and other landlords about setting them up. For example, we are working towards joining Cumbria and Merseyside sub-regional schemes by summer 2011.

Where we own few properties or where there are no lettings partnerships available, we continue to let our properties by advertising them on our website, through our Customer Service Centre and in local offices and community centres.

We have been able to help many of our existing tenants move into homes which are more suitable for their needs and last year we carried out 267 transfers and supported 124 mutual exchanges.

We have improved our approach to managing and repairing vacant properties, reducing security costs through joint working arrangements with other landlords. However, we still need to improve the speed with which we re-let them.



- At 44 days, our properties take slightly longer to re-let than those of similar organisations, and longer than the national average for all housing associations which is 29 days.
- 3.4% of our properties are empty. Some are undergoing major repairs and others are ready to be let to new tenants. We have slightly more empty properties than the average housing association.
- Our tenants' satisfaction with the quality of their new home is high, but in our recent survey only 61% were satisfied with the support we provide to new tenants after they have moved in and only half with our advice on moving home.
- We measure how many times our properties are refused by prospective tenants and are concerned that this increased last year (57% accepted on first offer last year compared to 63% in the year before).

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#### 44 days to re-let a vacant property.



This is better than the worst performing housing associations (85 days) but longer than the national average of 29 days.

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#### Satisfaction with support provided to new tenants



6 out of 10 of new tenants are satisfied with the support offered.

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#### Advice on moving home



Only half of you are satisfied with our advice on moving home.

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#### Properties refused by prospective tenants



57% accepted on first offer last year compared to 63% in the year before.

## What do we need to do better?

Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Improve information to applicants on our new website and enable people to register for accommodation online.
- Promote the notice incentive scheme and make sure that we advertise vacancies as soon as we get notice. We will aim to reduce the average time it takes us to re-let a property to 35 days.
- Increase the number of new tenants visited within the four week target from our current performance of 70% to at least 80%.
- Improve our understanding of why tenants leave us and if there is anything we can do to encourage them to stay. We know that younger tenants are more likely to leave within twelve months and are looking at why this is and how we can support them to stay in their home.
- Reduce the total number of long term empty properties, which we know can have an impact on the wider neighbourhood. We are currently developing an empty homes strategy and will be able to report clear targets in next year's annual report. We have set aside £4.5 million of extra funding to bring more empty properties back into use, or in some cases demolish ones which no longer provide suitable homes.
- Develop local strategies and targets for overcrowding and under-occupation.
- Increase the numbers of people who move from our supported housing schemes into their own tenancies, changing their lives in a positive way. We aim to increase the proportion of tenants moving into their own tenancies from 54% to 60%.



### You said, we did.

#### How tenants make a real difference!

Our tenant inspectors have carried out a number of quality checks on properties before they are offered. Based on what they found we now make sure that letterboxes are sealed and our local decoration strategies mean that the 'finish' to each property is improved.

You said that we needed to improve the decorating choices for new tenants. We are introducing better guidance on decoration allowances for new tenants and working with external suppliers to offer a flexible and cost effective service.

## ii. Rents

### What do we say we will do?

We have a rent policy which meets the Government's rules on the levels of rents which social housing landlords can charge and how they should be increased each year. These complex rules are set out in detail in the TSA's standards, and are based upon setting a target rent for each property based upon its size, value and what people earn in the area it is located.

We have been reviewing our rents each year so that all homes will have a rent which is close to the target rent for the property by the end of March 2012.<sup>9</sup> After that rent increases will be linked to the yearly rate of inflation, as measured by the Retail Price Index (RPI).<sup>10</sup> This means that for most Riverside tenants rents will increase each year by RPI + 0.5%.<sup>11</sup> If the rent system changes, we will apply any new rules agreed by the Government so long as the terms of your tenancy agreement allow us to do this.

If you have been a tenant for a long time, then you may be a secure tenant. In this case staff in your local office will apply to the Rent Officer for any increases to your rent which is called a 'fair rent'. We may apply for rents in line with target rents levels in your area, but we will never charge more than the Rent Officer allows.

For shared owners we will give the minimum notice of any change to your rent set out in your lease, and will provide the information required by your lease.

In our service pledge we set out standards for other aspects of your rent and service charge. We say:

- we will provide you with a rent account statement every three months, or on request within 24 hours
- if we need to make changes to your rent charge, we will always tell you at least 28 days in advance
- we will provide you with details and an annual statement of any service charges you pay for services to communal areas or shared gardens, and discuss any proposed changes to these services with you.

In addition, where we are certain that you are in receipt of Housing Benefit, we will supply information about the increase to the local council: but if we are not certain we do not guarantee to provide this information. We always remind tenants that it is their responsibility to keep the council informed of changes to rent and service charges.

**We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.**

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<sup>9</sup> Rents should be within 5% of the target rent for general needs housing and 10% for sheltered and supported housing, so long as they are below the Government's rent cap. Also the date by which rents should 'converge' on target rents for sheltered and supported housing is a year later.

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<sup>10</sup> The RPI tracks prices on a wide range of goods and services to see how the cost of living has changed over a year.

<sup>11</sup> Properties which were owned by ECHG prior to merging with Riverside may have an increase of an extra 0.5% for a period of time: this was agreed as part of the merger with the Housing Corporation, which was our regulator before the TSA.



How are we doing?

Each year we send out rent increase letters for assured rents in time for the change to take effect on the first Monday in April. We provide details of the new rent and service charges and give you details of who to contact if you have any questions.

We report our progress towards the target rent to our Board each year. We agree the proposed rent increase with the Tenants’ and Residents’ Federation, and staff have attended local tenants’ meetings to explain the rent increase.

All of our rents are increased following the correct notice period.

The chart gives some examples of rents charged by other social landlords; rent levels vary according to property type and area. This shows that we charge less rent on average for a two-bedroom property than the average social landlord charges.

Our recent satisfaction survey shows nearly 8 out of 10 of our tenants are satisfied with the value for money that they get for their rent. This is very close to the average for housing associations across the country. Fewer tenants and residents are satisfied that service charges provide value for money (62%).

For every £1 that we receive, we spend 22p on improving your home, 19p on supporting vulnerable tenants, 18p on routine repairs and gas servicing, 11p on neighbourhood services, 7p on refurbishing empty homes, 6p on letting homes and tackling ASB and 17p on business costs such as offices and IT.

For every £100 of rent that we should get for our properties, £6 is overdue. We have continued to improve from previous years but we need to get better at collecting the rent for our properties on time to be as good as the average landlord across the country.

What do we need to do better?

Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Complete a major review of the way in which we deal with charges for services to communal areas called ‘service charges’. This review involves talking to tenants and residents and we will set out improvement actions in next year’s annual report.
- Improve the service charge information we provide for all our tenants by breaking down cost details, providing itemised details of income and expenditure in an easy to read format.

Average rent charged for a two-bedroom property

££££££££££££££££	£112	AmicusHorizon Group
££££££££££££££££	£84	The Guinness Trust
££££££££££££££££	£71	Riverside
££££££££££££££££	£58	Wakefield & District Housing Ltd



You said, we did.  
How tenants make a real difference!

Tenants have been asking for more detailed information on their service charges. We have started to give an itemised breakdown of each service charge with the rent increase letter. We are now working on how we can provide information with your rent increase letter on what each service costs against what the tenant has paid each year.

We have improved the look of the rent increase letter so that it is easier to understand. Reducing the amount of text in the letter has helped us to use less paper and make it easier for tenants to identify the key information.

### iii. Tenure

#### What do we say we do?

We have a clear 'Estate and Tenancy Management' policy which says that:

"Riverside's aim is to provide the highest possible security of tenure and service standards to its tenants..."

Our aim is to help you stay in your home and maintain your tenancy. In our policy we say that we will:

- use tenancy agreements with appropriate rights and obligations, suitable to the purpose of the home and which contain no unfair terms
- establish effective relationships with new tenants by conducting tenancy sign-ups and settling in visits
- check for any specific support needs and put in place support packages including translation and interpreting facilities
- take early action to deal with breaches of tenancy but only consider eviction as a final resort. However we will act swiftly, effectively and legally to remove unauthorised occupiers.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.

#### How are we doing?

We offer different forms of agreement, issuing licences, assured shorthold, starter, assured and secure tenancy agreements to meet tenants' different circumstances. Agreements have been modified for our tenants on estates which have been transferred from local authorities to ensure they have the correct level of protection and security. House rules can be added to agreements in supported housing schemes.

In 2004, following extensive consultation with our tenants, we introduced a standard form of tenancy agreement which has since been adapted to make it suitable for different tenancy types and client groups.

We offer a range of support to help tenants settle and thrive. This is explained through staff visits once tenants have moved in, and through leaflets covering subjects such as rent arrears, welfare benefits and crime and anti-social behaviour. We have developed arrangements for welfare advice in all of our areas, and we have introduced a low cost loans service in the North West, which we are looking to extend to other parts of the country.

#### What do we need to do better?

All new tenants now receive a tenancy agreement based on the standard format. Some of our long-standing tenants may be on older agreements and over the coming years we will replace these agreements with more standard versions. We will only do this after consultation with the tenants concerned and anyone affected will be contacted individually.



#### You said, we did. How tenants make a real difference!

Following our consultation on the tenancy agreement a number of changes were made. For example, a clause about repairing obligations was omitted along with a clause requiring departing tenants to allow prospective tenants to view their home.

We have trialled a DVD for new tenants in Carlisle which explains the rights and obligations of a tenant and other useful information about our services.

# Your neighbourhood and community

This TSA standard expects us to:

- work in partnership with tenants and other agencies to keep communal areas and the neighbourhoods where we work clean and safe
- co-operate with partners to help promote the well-being of tenants and residents in the neighbourhoods where we own homes
- work with other agencies such as the police to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour.

The three parts of this standard are:

- i. neighbourhood management
- ii. local area co-operation
- iii. anti-social behaviour.



## i. Neighbourhood management

### What do we say we will do?

Our service pledge is very clear about our approach to managing your neighbourhood. It says we will:

- carry out regular estate or neighbourhood inspections, giving you the opportunity to get involved
- meet tenant groups to discuss what is important to them
- consult and inform tenants about major works programmes
- respond quickly to all reports of anti-social behaviour we receive
- ensure our services are delivered to a good standard and offer value for money
- take part in the house exchange scheme and support tenants who need to move outside of their local area
- encourage tenants to get involved in managing their neighbourhoods.

We have a clear policy on 'Estate and Tenancy Management' which was drawn up following consultation with tenants. This says we will:

- adopt a neighbourhood management approach to facilitate neighbourhood renewal where this is appropriate
- provide effective and efficient estate management services with particular reference to caretaking, cleaning, grounds maintenance and security, where and when this is required
- work with other agencies and share information particularly with regard to support requirements or the reduction of crime and disorder.

We aim to make clients in our sheltered and supported schemes feel part of a community and help develop good relationships with their neighbours.

**We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.**

## How are we doing?

We believe we are making really strong progress in our approach to neighbourhood management, which is having a positive impact on the places you live.

We are carrying out regular neighbourhood and estate inspections across most of the areas where you live, encouraging as many tenants as possible to take part. We think they are an important way for us to identify your concerns and agree what needs to be done. We collect information about your area and have identified which neighbourhoods need more attention so they are visited more frequently. This targeted approach ensures better value for money.

Tenant inspectors have designed and carried out their own independent inspections of communal areas and neighbourhoods. We have tendered contracts for cleaning and gardening to improve service levels and value for money, involving tenants and residents in the appointment of contractors.

We have around 30 neighbourhood wardens who work on many of our estates, and have introduced a new service called 'Your Place' in four neighbourhoods where we need to make the biggest difference. 'Your Place' co-ordinates the work of wardens and environmental clean-up teams in a way which puts local tenants in the driving seat.

Our latest satisfaction survey shows that eight out of ten of our tenants are now satisfied with their area as a place to live, making them almost as satisfied as the average housing association tenant across the country. You have said that that litter and car parking are the main problems in your neighbourhoods. However more of you are satisfied with where you live than you were three years ago with a 6% increase to 79%.

## What do we need to do better?

Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Work with you in your own area to address what needs to be done in your neighbourhood. Every team will publish a local plan by December 2010, to deal with local priorities.
- Introduce warden services in two additional areas (Botcherby and Currock in Carlisle, and Braunstone in Leicester).
- Review our abandoned properties procedure to ensure empty properties that could be targeted by vandals are dealt with more quickly.
- Produce a new procedure to deal with pets, ensuring issues around responsible ownership and dog fouling are addressed.



### **You said, we did. How tenants make a real difference!**

Our joint neighbourhood inspection approach was developed and tested with tenants. Results and follow up actions are fed back after each inspection. As a result of inspections we may arrange skip initiatives, clean-up days or follow up refuse collection problems with the local authority.

You said that our standard for communal areas was not very clear or challenging. We worked with our tenant inspectors to agree a new standard and then used this as the basis for their inspections.



## ii. Local area co-operation

### What do we say we will do?

Our 'Estate and Tenancy Management' policy says that:

"We will promote community cohesion and take positive action to reduce the effects of social exclusion and create mixed sustainable communities."

This means that we look to help local communities with wider issues which improve the quality of people's lives, using a mixture of our own funding and money we can secure from Government initiatives or other charities. We think this is important because it helps to create places where people want to live.

This goes to the very heart of what we do. Our organisational vision is 'transforming lives, revitalising neighbourhoods', and we have a Corporate Plan which includes aims such as:

- help make our tenants more prosperous
- manage places so they are cleaner, greener and safer.

As a national organisation, we know that our services must be delivered locally and in partnership with local organisations. Each area is different and we are committed to working with partners as varied as local authority departments, voluntary organisations and groups of tenants.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.



## How are we doing?

Last year, we invested over £2 million in community projects. These were shaped by the needs of our tenants and aimed at improving the quality of life in neighbourhoods and helping tenants become more prosperous through finding work or accessing low-cost loans or advice.

Last year through Riverside-backed schemes:

- over £800,000 of low-cost loans were provided to over 2,000 people
- we provided financial advice to nearly 3,000 people
- we opened over 350 home contents insurance policies
- we provided employment and training advice to over 1,600 tenants, with 218 entering work
- 18 trainees from our communities started work at Riverside.

We rarely achieve these things on our own, but rather by working in partnership with local councils, other housing associations, the voluntary sector and tenants and residents. We are active in strategic housing partnerships in areas where we have major concentrations of homes, working with the council and other landlords to co-ordinate our services and provide more homes.

## What do we need to do better?

Over the next year we will continue our current approach to local area co-operation, aiming to achieve the specific targets set out in our Corporate Plan.

We will keep our focus on:

- helping tenants to become more prosperous through initiatives to tackle financial inclusion and worklessness
- managing places so they are greener, cleaner and safer through 'Your Place'.

One of the aims of 'Your Place' is to increase tenants' satisfaction with their area as a place to live by 10% by the end of the programme in March 2012. We will continue to check on progress and a final assessment will be carried out in 2012.

### iii. Anti-social behaviour

#### What do we say we will do?

We have a comprehensive policy 'Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour' and a customer leaflet called 'Dealing with crime and nuisance' that set out our approach.

- Prevent nuisance and anti-social behaviour to minimise the potential for disputes by sensitively letting properties and ensuring tenants are fully aware of the conditions of their tenancy relating to anti-social behaviour.
- Work with other local agencies to deliver a co-ordinated approach and take firm action to stop cases escalating using the full range of tools and legal powers available to us.
- Make it easy for you to report any neighbourhood problems – you can call us 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We will respond to reports of anti-social behaviour and harassment within two days or 24 hours if there is violence or the threat of violence, treating all information in confidence.
- Provide support to victims and witnesses. Where we are responsible for taking action we will keep you informed of progress, and where we are not responsible we will explain this and let you know who is.
- Investigate and resolve the case within 20 working days unless the case is more serious and needs to be resolved through legal processes.
- Manage any issues of anti-social behaviour within our sheltered and supported schemes through local staff and, if necessary, address these through support plans or tenancy agreements and house rules.
- Ensure staff are highly trained to deal with anti-social behaviour – for example 18 members of staff have already completed a professional qualification.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard in full.



How are we doing?

Our recent satisfaction survey shows that only 16%<sup>12</sup> of tenants in general needs (rented) housing have had to report anti-social behaviour in the last year, and more of you are satisfied with where you live now than you were three years ago.

We have also had many successes resolving anti-social behaviour issues, including some very challenging and complex cases, and we have secured evictions for serious anti-social activities.

However where tenants and residents do have to report incidents of nuisance and anti-social behaviour, the survey shows that satisfaction with various aspects of our handling of cases is disappointing and does not compare well with other landlords. This may be because it is not always within our power to remove a problem, even where we follow all our procedures.

Overall only five out of ten of our tenants are satisfied with the way their report was handled. This does not compare well with the performance of other landlords.

Reports of anti-social behaviour



Only one in six of tenants (16%) in general housing have had to report anti-social behaviour in the last year, and more of you are satisfied with where you live now than you were three years ago.

Handling anti-social behaviour cases



Only half of you who complained about anti-social behaviour were satisfied with the handling of the case. This is a poorer performance compared to other landlords and below our target.

<sup>12</sup> For sheltered and supported housing schemes the figure is 12.8%

## What do we need to do better?

Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Investigate why some tenants who have reported anti-social behaviour are unhappy with the way we have handled their case through a more in-depth survey reporting in December 2010.
- Develop a range of measures by December 2010, that can be used to support victims and perpetrators.
- Ensure that all specialist staff are professionally qualified in dealing with anti-social behaviour by December 2011.
- Develop our website to allow confidential reporting of anti-social behaviour.
- Create closer links with our partner agencies, such as the police and environmental health.
- Change our procedure so that we explain more clearly to tenants what we will do to resolve the problem reported, and agree how frequently they want to be contacted while the case is being dealt with.



### **You said, we did. How tenants make a real difference!**

41% of tenants think handling anti-social behaviour is an important service.

In response we:

- invested in new systems to ensure consistent and better case management across the organisation
- continued to invest in projects that help to reduce anti-social behaviour, for example the Merseyside based Glaciere project teaching disadvantaged young people the basics of sailing, in a bid to motivate and inspire them to maintain improved standards of behaviour
- set up a specialist anti-social behaviour team in North Merseyside to assess the impact this has on customer satisfaction
- developed local strategies which include action plans for local neighbourhoods where anti-social behaviour is a factor.



# Value for money

This TSA standard expects us to:

- have a comprehensive approach to managing our resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' needs
- demonstrate to tenants how we decide what to spend money on, whether it is services or other things such as building new homes
- allow tenants and residents to influence services (and their costs) that result in a service charge, including the cleaning of communal areas and the maintenance of shared gardens.



## What do we say we will do?

The Riverside Board has recently agreed a 'Value for Money' policy. This sets out an approach which:

- understands what tenants want and what their priorities are
- offers tenants opportunities to influence the services delivered and the cost of those services, particularly where they result in service charges to tenants
- makes the best use of existing resources
- ensures that we buy goods and services as economically as possible
- understands our costs and performance and how they compare to others
- takes timely action to address areas of weakness
- makes sure value for money is a fundamental part of our annual budget setting process
- reviews our services and looks for improvements in both performance and cost
- makes sure that our boards, staff and tenants understand value for money and build it into the way they work.

We believe that this service offer meets the TSA's standard, although this is the first time we have explained it to tenants and residents in detail. We need to make our approach clearer to tenants and residents next time we review our service pledge.



## How are we doing?

We have some very positive examples of improving the value for money of our services at Riverside.

We have looked at how our staff teams are structured to make sure that we spend less on administration and more on front-line services. In the last two years we have merged different parts of the organisation to produce a more streamlined structure and saved £556,000. We have spent some of the savings on funding an anti-social behaviour team and two energy advice officers in Merseyside, consulting tenants and residents on these proposals.

Another way we deliver value for money is to look at how we buy goods and services. We spend over £140 million a year on goods, work and services and have a central procurement team whose job it is to get the best deals. In the last year this team has helped us save over £800,000 on things such as postage, business rates, office equipment, telephones, electricity and gas. These savings will continue each year.

Through an organisation called Housemark, we are able to compare our costs with other similar organisations. For the year before last, this shows:

- that our overall cost per property was significantly lower than the average for comparable large housing associations
- our back office costs were a smaller proportion of our financial turnover than the average for comparable large housing associations, meaning we can put more money directly into front-line services.

Although our costs are lower than other similar associations, we are still achieving satisfaction levels that are slightly better than average.

We are currently carrying out a major review of service charges and this involves discussions with the Tenants' and Residents' Federation and 'Count Me In' panel. We know that for many services, such as gardening and cleaning, we could get a better price for you if we make use of our purchasing power as a large, national landlord. However we also need to make sure that the details of any work being undertaken is agreed with you and that costs and choices are discussed before a contract is finalised.

Tackling waste is also about reducing our environmental impact. We have reduced business mileage by introducing a passenger mileage rate and are improving video conferencing to cut unnecessary travel.

Tenants are having more of an influence on our investment priorities, and how we spend any savings we generate. We have set up a Group Investment Committee (GIC), which involves members of the Group and Divisional Boards and representatives from the Tenants' and Residents' Federation. This helps to prioritise how we invest the money we create through savings to our core services. We can spend the savings on programmes such as building new homes, investing in community services and even investing in commercial ventures which aim to generate long term returns to plough back into improving services. This year the GIC prioritised over £15 million of planned investment over the next three years, with nearly £10 million being allocated to support neighbourhood management, financial inclusion, worklessness and other community projects.

However, the true test of whether we deliver value for money is how tenants feel. Nearly eight out of ten of our tenants are satisfied with the value for money that they get for their rent, a 10% improvement on satisfaction in 2007. The picture for service charges is not as good, with just over half of tenants feeling satisfied that their service charge represents value for money, though this is a big increase on 2007 (see diagrams, far right). Our review of service charges should help us tackle this gap.

## What do we need to do better?

It is fair to say that we have some way to go in developing our approach to value for money at Riverside. We know we are good at measuring how our services perform, managing our finances and driving down our costs. But we haven't been so good at joining this together so we understand how the value we deliver to tenants compares with others, and involving residents in agreeing how we should prioritise any investment.

Listed below are the measures we will take to assess and improve our services over the next year.

- Finalise a value for money strategy and action plan to deliver our policy. We will report progress against this in our next annual report.
- Offer a wider range of self-service options through our website. This will allow you to order repairs, look at your rent account and see properties available to rent, giving our customer service advisors' time to deal with the more complicated enquiries that they receive.
- Set a number of performance targets that will help us cut costs and increase income. These include:
  - reducing overall vacant stock to 3% by April 2011
  - reducing the time it takes to re-let properties to 35 days by April 2011
  - cutting the cost of legal action on anti-social behaviour cases by working closely with partners and reviewing legal services.
- Continue to cut the cost of goods and services through the work of our central procurement team, going part way to saving a further £2 million per year by April 2013.
- Test a new way for tenants to help prioritise spend on services at a local level, and influence how savings are spent in our Carlisle division. We will evaluate this with an aim of rolling out the approach from April 2011.

## Service charges



10

Just over half of tenants are satisfied that their service charge is value for money, an increase since 2007 but still not as good as we want it to be.

## Value for money



Nearly 8 out of 10 of you feel that your rent gives value for money, a 10% increase since 2007.



**You said, we did.**

**How tenants make a real difference!**

Every year we survey our tenants to make sure your rent is spent on the services that matter most to you. You have told us that the three most important services are repairs and maintenance, the overall quality of your home and dealing with anti-social behaviour.

These concerns were taken into account when we agreed our tenants' top ten performance indicators and are reflected in our action plans.



# Local offers

## What is a local offer?

The TSA has set minimum standards for all social landlords, but it also expects us to explore whether there is a need to deliver services in different ways in particular areas or for groups of tenants or residents to meet local priorities. It calls these 'local offers'.

The TSA requires landlords such as Riverside to consult with tenants on the introduction of local offers for the following standards:

- tenant involvement and empowerment
- home
- neighbourhood and community.

## The Riverside approach to local offers

The idea of a local offer is not new to Riverside. We have always aimed to combine the benefits that come from being a large organisation with the effectiveness associated with local service delivery. We have an established track record of offering services that reflect the specific and varied needs of our customers and neighbourhoods.

We have discussed the idea of local offers with tenants and residents through the Tenants' and Residents' Federation. They agree that it is important that we have a consistent set of standards which all Riverside tenants and residents can expect to receive – these are set out in this annual report.

However they have also agreed that there can be a case for a different local approach provided there is clear evidence of the need for it.





For a local service offer to be developed, it should be for one of the following reasons:

- **Place:** where a neighbourhood or area has a particular problem, which means services should be delivered in a different way. For example a problem with anti-social behaviour which suggests a more intensive approach is needed.
- **People:** where a specific group of customers has a requirement, perhaps based on their age, customer profile or common concerns. For example older people living in general needs properties.
- **Performance:** where a distinct lag in performance in a particular 'place' or for a particular group of 'people' warrants additional attention.
- **Partnership:** where a joint approach to solving a problem would deliver a better result for a particular group of tenants.

Our standards should be the same for all tenants and residents – it is our approach and activities that might change. In other words, we could look at introducing a local offer where we need to do something different to achieve the common Riverside standard because of the challenges of a particular place, or because performance has dropped behind. Local offers should therefore aim to deliver the same standard of service to all tenants.

Local offers should normally only apply for a limited amount of time. They will be developed to solve a particular problem, and once the problem has been solved, the normal service offer should apply. This means that we will need to carefully monitor and review local offers, agreeing performance measures with tenants and residents and regularly reporting on the progress made.

Local offers should start with what we are already doing. We have already identified a range of things which could be seen as local offers. In most cases, tenants and residents are heavily involved and it would be wrong to stop doing these things and develop an entirely new set of offers.

We have already discussed the possibility of creating local offers around these initiatives with local tenants and residents, and will continue to develop these ideas with a view to discussing a final list with the Tenants' and Residents' Federation by December 2010. Ideas that we are considering include:

- the 'Your Place' approach to neighbourhood management
- services to provide low-cost loans and improved financial advice to tenants
- a comprehensive approach to helping tenants back into work
- developing a neighbourhood approach to delivering services for older people living in general needs (rented) housing linked to specialist sheltered accommodation in the same area
- the development of estate agreements, setting out details of how we have agreed to deliver local services with tenants and residents
- tackling under-performance in our South East division
- developing a special approach to tackling anti-social behaviour in the Mersey North division, where our tenants and residents experience the greatest problems
- developing a common approach with other housing associations to letting properties in Halton, Cheshire.

We need to have a wider debate about local offers in all the areas where we work to see if there is a need to develop other offers in a second phase. We will start these discussions with Divisional tenants' and residents' groups in January 2011, with a view to setting out an updated approach to local offers in our next annual report.

## More information

We hope you found this report useful.

If you would like more information about becoming more involved as a Riverside tenant, please visit **[www.riverside.org.uk/getinvolved](http://www.riverside.org.uk/getinvolved)**

If you would like more information on this report, including a series of localised summaries and a DVD version, or if you would like to let us know your views on the content and layout of this report, please visit **[www.riverside.org.uk/performance](http://www.riverside.org.uk/performance)**



If you need this information in another format (such as large print, audio or another language) please contact us.

☎ **0845 111 0000**

অনুবাদের জন্য আমাদের টেলিফোন করুন।

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برای ترجمه بما تلفن نمائید

## Contact us



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### Customer Service Centre



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