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# A new beginning

**Riverside Housing is changing – but we will still offer our tenants the same service as before.**

From the beginning of April, we will be known as Riverside, but other than changes to our logo and name there will be very little difference to the way we operate.

Our staff will still be based at our office in Dartford and we will still have a local focus to the organisation. The idea behind the re-organisation, called Better Together, is to make savings that will allow us to invest more money into improving our homes and the services we offer to tenants.



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We'll be better together

PART OF



The Riverside Group has been awarded



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## A new beginning

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It also means that we are in a strong financial position despite the credit crunch. Last year, we wrote to you about our future vision for The Riverside Group and our plans to create one combined organisation. In the last newsletter we explained how only a very small number of residents were opposed to the plans. However, a number of you also made some comments and raised concerns, such as whether the service we offer would be affected and whether the association would lose its local identity. We do not expect there to be any changes to our overall service. Director Sasha Harrison said: "The idea behind Better Together is to improve the running of the organisation and ultimately the service we offer to tenants. "We understand the importance of keeping a local presence in the communities we serve and hope tenants will feel their views, opinions and concerns have been taken into account."

• Turn to page 8 to read all about our new phone number for all your needs.

# All about the CSC

**Members of the Tenants' Advisory Panel were recently given an insight into the workings of The Riverside Group's 24-hour Customer Service Centre.**

Team Leader Barry Wood and Performance and Development Coach Ian Johnson, who are based at our head office in Speke, attended the panel's meeting to talk about their roles.

They told the meeting that the 24-hour CSC was set up in 1997 and now has 88 advisors and 15 temporary staff members working a variety of shifts round the clock. In the last financial year they took 561,231 calls, an average of 12,000 each week or 2,000 to 3,000 a day. As well as Riverside Group calls, the CSC took 104,203 calls from external customers' tenants, who are reporting their repairs outside normal office hours.

The CSC has a specialist repairs team and also offers a Helpline service to more than 4,000 vulnerable and elderly customers giving them support at the touch of a button 24 hours a day. This year so far, Helpline advisors have dealt with 265,158 calls providing an essential service to its users.



CSC advisors are ready to take your calls 24 hours a day

Barry manages a team of 10 general advisors and a separate team of five specialist repairs advisors. Ian is part of a team that looks after all staff training and monitors the quality of the service we provide.

Tenants who attended the meeting found the insight very useful and were amazed at the sheer volume of calls.

# How to get involved

**Here at Riverside Housing, we have a number of ways for you to get involved.**

## **Become a tenant inspector**

Tenant inspectors monitor and review the quality of services offered by Riverside Housing and make recommendations for improvements. They are expected to carry out six inspections a year. These could include checking the quality of homes before they are let, inspecting communal areas in blocks of flats and checking the work carried out on estates.

## **Volunteer as a support worker**

DATRA – the Disabled Tenants' and Residents' Association – is looking for tenants to train as volunteer support workers.

The post requires people with good



Why not become one of our tenant inspectors?

communication skills and an interest in helping others. Full training and ongoing support will be given by DATRA, and volunteers will be paid out-of-pocket expenses.

The role involves speaking to people to find out what we can do to help, and then feeding back this information to DATRA. If DATRA can assist, the volunteer will then liaise with the housing association or relevant partner to help resolve the problem. All positions will be subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and signing the DATRA Constitution and Confidentiality Agreement.

## **Get involved with your local newsletter**

We are setting up a series of local newsletters to tell you what is happening where you live – with news about site inspections, major works and community events. We are looking for tenants who would like to take an active part in producing the newsletter, by telling us about local events or even writing articles to be considered for publication.

• **If you are interested in getting involved with any of these programmes, write to Community Initiatives Officer Jane Wiseman using the business reply envelope or call on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6500.**

## **BME views needed**

**Tenants from black and ethnic minority (BME) backgrounds are being sought to help set up a national BME forum.**

There will be two free BME events to seek views of tenants on housing services. The first takes place on Wednesday 22 April in Leeds and the second is Thursday 23 April in London, both running from 10.30am to 2.30pm.

The Tenants' Services Authority (TSA) is the new independent regulator for housing associations. It is currently undergoing a tenant consultation – called the National Conversation. It is keen

to hear the views of BME tenants and wants to establish a BME Tenants Forum to find out what services are most important to you as a tenant.

**Let us know if you are interested in attending the events by contacting Jane Wiseman through our business reply envelope, on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6500 as well as calling the organisers on Tel: 0161 868 3540 or Email: [conferences@tpas.org.uk](mailto:conferences@tpas.org.uk) indicating which event you are interested in attending.**

## Adaptations to your home

**If a long-term illness or disability is making life around the home difficult for you or someone in your family, installing an aid or adaptation could improve your quality of life.**

An adaptation is a piece of equipment, extra fitting or minor alteration in your home. Examples include grab rails/hand rails, walk-in shower/over-bath shower, door entry system, hoists/lifting equipment, vibrating smoke alarms and access ramps.

### Who can apply?

If you are a Riverside Housing tenant you can apply for an adaptation for anybody who lives in your home, provided there is a recognised need for the changes to be made. If the adaptation is major, we may ask for a report from an occupational therapist to back up your request. And, if the work needed could change the structure or design of your home, it might be better for you and your family to move to a property more suited to your needs. If this is the case, we will try our hardest to find another home in which you are happy to live.

**If you would like to learn more about aids and adaptations and find out how to apply, call Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or Tel: 0151 295 6500.**

# Making a co

**We are committed to delivering a high-quality service and aim to be approachable and accountable to anyone who contacts us.**

However, we are realistic – we know things go wrong from time to time. When things don't go according to plan, we need to know so that we can put it right and make sure we don't make the same mistakes again.

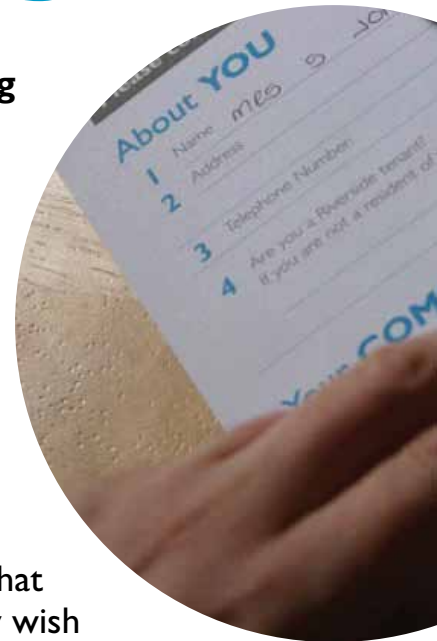
If you are unhappy with something that we have done, or not done, you may wish to make a complaint. You can do this:

- in person, for example, when visited by your housing officer or another member of staff
- by calling our 24-hour Customer Services Centre on Tel: 0845 111 0000
- by e-mail via the website: [www.riverside.org.uk](http://www.riverside.org.uk)
- in writing.

Our complaints process has three stages and complaints remain open until they have been resolved to your satisfaction.

### Stage one

We always try to resolve complaints within 20 working days.



## Learn a trade with us

**Riverside Housing is offering tenants and members of their family who live in our properties the chance to learn a trade through an apprenticeship scheme.**

The apprenticeships, in general building repairs and maintenance, offer on-and off-the-job training in areas such as carpentry, plumbing, brickwork, and gas repairs and servicing. The scheme provides the skills you need and leads to nationally recognised qualifications.

Apprenticeships typically take between one and four years to complete, so it is important that you are committed to see it through.

# Complaint?

At this stage a complaint is either upheld (we agree that something went wrong), partly upheld (we agree with part, but not all, of the complaint) or not upheld (we do not agree that anything went wrong).

## Stage two

If your complaint is not resolved within 20 working days to your satisfaction a manager will look into it. If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction within 20 working days then it can progress to stage three.

## Stage three

You can appeal against a stage two decision by writing to our Managing Director. A committee of high level staff and tenants will usually hear the appeal within 28 days of the date of your letter and will write to you to tell you their decision.

If you are still unhappy with our response then you can seek advice from external bodies, including the Housing Ombudsman Service.

• We will be sending you one of our new, re-branded complaints leaflets with our next newsletter, which will explain the procedure in more detail. If you require any further information before then, please let us know.

## How to apply

The selection process for an apprenticeship is like any other job application – you will have to convince your potential employers that you are the right person for the job.

**To express an interest, write to Olajide Akintelure, Riverside Housing, 3rd Floor Regus House, Victory Way, Crossways, Dartford, Kent, DA2 6QD. All we need is your name, address and age at this stage – we will then contact you to discuss the opportunity further.**

## Improving your neighbourhoods

**Riverside Housing recently gave each housing officer £1,000 to spend on their patch. Here's how they decided to brighten up your communities.**

On the Lambeth estate, Housing Officer Sue Sheehan decided to bring some

greenery to the inner city suburb. With advice from the Tenants' Association, she arranged for two large planters filled



The run-down area at Boswell House

with palm trees to be set up on a paved area outside Geoffrey House.

Antoinette DeSouza, Housing Officer for Bromley, put her £1,000 towards the landscaping of an area of land at Boswell House that had been used as a dump for many years. Adding her cash with £3,000 from our Community Chest, she was able to transform this area into a level grassed area. We hope to be able to add planters to make the area even more spectacular during the next financial year.

Our new Housing Officer Shirley Taylor, who covers North London, has split her funds between two different projects. She bought picnic tables for the communal gardens at Leeming Road and Baldock Way in Boreham Wood and also arranged for landscaping to be carried out at our Star Road scheme in Fulham.



The transformation at Boswell House

## Meet the staff



### Barry Wood is Team Leader in our Customer Service Centre

#### What do you enjoy most about your job?

I enjoy helping people, both tenants and staff members. Working in the CSC is a very demanding job. We deal with information from all the different parts of The Riverside Group and everyone has different ways of working so we have to be very reactive and adaptable when dealing with different situations.

#### What is your biggest work-related achievement so far?

Gaining promotion to my secondment position of Team Leader. I had worked in the CSC for over four years and felt it was the right time to move on.

#### What would be your one desert island item and why?

I would probably say a football. I'm a big football fan – a Liverpool supporter – so having a kick around on the beach would keep me entertained for a while.

#### What is your favourite book or film and why?

I don't really read much but I when I do, I enjoy an autobiography more than anything (it's usually one about a former footballer). I quite like action films and would say that the three Bourne films are among my favourites.

#### Who would play you in a film about your life and why?

This is a tough one, I would like to say someone like Brad Pitt or Daniel Craig but I'm not on their level. Anyone really who is easy going and gets on with life.

## Help us to help you

**The Riverside Group has commissioned research by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) to gain a better understanding of the needs and situations of its tenants.**

This will help us to understand what sort of support you may need and the best way to get that help. During spring 2009 researchers from the PSI will interview a small number of tenants on three of our estates across the country. Tenants will tell researchers about their work and family life, and their experience of living on the estate. Researchers will contact a selection of tenants on those estates and ask if they would like to participate in the research. We hope those of you who are contacted will take part, as it will help us to help you.

**If you have any questions about the research contact Riverside Research Manager Amy Redman on Tel: 0151 295 6031 or Rebecca Taylor at PSI on Tel: 0207 911 7533.**

# Tackling anti-social behaviour

**Riverside Housing is committed to reducing anti-social behaviour and wants to ensure every resident enjoys the right to a safe neighbourhood.**

While we can react to individual cases as they arise, we also need to tackle the underlying causes. So, how are we doing this? Housing officers in our largest areas, including Bromley, Thanet, Enfield and Newham, attend regular meetings with local authority staff and other landlords, working together to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Our housing officers are soon to begin studying for a nationally recognised qualification to equip them to deal with more serious cases. We also hold fun days and community involvement events

and, where possible, provide recreation facilities for children and young people.

Your local authority can help if you are suffering from problems with noise nuisance, underage drinking, abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping.

Any criminal behaviour should be reported to the police.

We will deal with graffiti if it is on our properties, including walls and fencing, but it should be reported to the local authority if it is elsewhere.

**If you are suffering because of anti-social behaviour and you feel that as your landlord we should intervene, please call our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6500.**

## HANDY HINTS

Here are some steps you can take to deter burglars from targeting your home and minimise the risk to your property.

- Don't leave windows open or doors unlocked, even if you are in the garden or near your house. A thief can get through the smallest window and might often try to open a door if there seems to be no-one around.
- Never leave car or house keys within sight of the letterbox or a window.
- Never leave spare house keys under a plant pot or doormat – burglars know all the 'secret places'.
- Security mark all your home and garden equipment with full postcode using a UV marker pen or permanent marker.
- Use internal timer switches for lamps and radios. This gives the impression that someone is at home which is particularly important during the dark nights.

**Be aware of 'bogus callers' to your home:**

- Use your door viewer (spy hole) and door chain before opening the door to anyone.
- Make sure visitors are who they say they are by asking to see their identity card.
- If in doubt, phone the visitor's company and check their details.



# Thinking of improving your home?

If you are thinking of carrying out improvements or alterations to your home make sure you are not in breach of your tenancy agreement.

We always ask tenants to ask for our permission in writing before changing any aspect of their property. We do this for a number of reasons:

- we have to make sure that all work carried out in our properties is done to a high standard
- our properties need to conform to certain Health and Safety criteria, so we need to be aware of any changes to buildings to be certain they comply with the law
- there can be dangers from a wide range of substances in the home, including asbestos in older properties. Our contractors are specially trained in how to handle these.

**If you are thinking of carrying out any alterations to your home, please contact our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6500.**

## BRAINTEASER

**A few simple security tips can help to keep you safe in your home. Can you find the 10 words in the grid below? Have a go – it's just for fun this time, but we will be running prize competitions again soon.**

The words are:

Security	Steering lock	Police	Break in
Fingerprint	Window locks	Safety	Beware
Thief	No doubt		

S	T	E	E	R	I	N	G	L	O	C	K
E	D	R	K	L	P	O	N	D	W	Z	F
C	J	F	Y	L	O	D	R	A	Q	C	B
U	U	I	E	L	P	O	L	I	C	E	D
R	T	B	H	I	Y	U	C	S	W	F	B
I	A	R	R	E	H	B	E	W	A	R	E
T	L	E	K	H	J	T	U	I	T	Y	V
Y	C	A	U	F	W	D	A	S	H	T	J
U	I	K	G	R	E	E	B	M	P	E	O
T	N	I	R	P	R	E	G	N	I	F	O
T	G	N	W	P	I	F	A	S	G	A	I
W	I	N	D	O	W	L	O	C	K	S	H

## NEWS IN BRIEF

- **Riverside Housing is set to carry out its annual estate inspections – and you are invited to come along and have your say.**

We will soon be writing to all tenants to tell them when your housing officers will be in your area and how you can join in. Estate inspections are a chance for residents to get involved in the upkeep and maintenance of their estate. It's an opportunity to meet your housing officer and discuss issues, including repairs and contractors.

- **If you have any ideas for your community and would like to apply for Community Chest funding then contact us using the business reply envelope provided with this newsletter or call Community Initiatives Officer Jane Wiseman on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6500.**

- **From April 1, Riverside will have one telephone number for all tenants to contact us on.**

You can contact our Customer Service Centre, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate). Tenants with inclusive call packages or mobile phones may find it cheaper to call Tel: 0345 111 0000

## Estate services update

Riverside Housing is always striving to improve the services it offers, and has recently been assessing a number of contracts.

- We are consulting with residents to assess their satisfaction with the cleaning service delivered by Connaught Environmental Services during a six-month



Our grounds maintenance contract is under review

- pilot. Any recommendations will be fed back to Connaught before the contract is rolled out across other properties in the Division in April 2009.
- We are looking for a new gardening and grounds maintenance contractor. We are currently interviewing contractors, with an anticipated start date of April 2009.
- We have just entered into a six-month contract for the delivery of window cleaning services with Acorn Environmental Ltd. This will start in April 2009.

**We welcome feedback on the quality of services, or any other issues affecting the maintenance of your estate. To comment, E-mail: [estates.services@riverside.org.uk](mailto:estates.services@riverside.org.uk) or call our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on Tel: 0845 111 0000 (local rate) or on Tel: 0151 295 6500.**

If you require this magazine in another format e.g. large print or audio cassette or in another language, please telephone ☎ **0845 111 0000**

अनुवाद माटे अमने फोन करो

अनुवाद लयी सानुं फोन करो।

Appelez-nous pour vos besoins en traductions

Ina soo wac sidii aan kuu turjimno

अनुवाद के लिए हमें फोन करें

ترجمہ کے لئے ہمیں فون کریں

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اتصلوا بنا للحصول على الترجمة

We are happy and able to accept Tynetalk calls.