



Communities & Livelihoods Strategy 2024-27

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introduction

This strategy has been developed following our 'Big Conversation' Consultation exercise in 2022 and the feedback Riverside Scotland received from customers as part of this. This strategy outlines our ambition to support our customers through the cost-of-living crisis, going beyond the traditional core housing management services to deliver social value initiatives for the benefit of our customers and local communities.

As part of The Riverside Group, we have adopted the Forward Together Corporate Plan 2023 – 2026. Included within this is a high-level objective:

We will offer a range of services that support our customers to navigate the cost-of-living crisis, as well as empowering communities to become more resilient to challenges. Within Riverside Scotland's Corporate Plan 2023-26, we have set out commitments to support customers through the cost of living, develop neighbourhood plans and ensure that customers have opportunities to engage with us and shape our services. This strategy will set out the framework for how we hope to achieve this.

As a result of our 'Big Conversation' consultation with customers, we changed the way we deliver our services, implementing our new 'Tenant Partner' model, meaning customers can now contact their Tenant Partner directly with any queries or concerns they have.

Furthermore, we increased the number of Tenant Partners working across our estates, to more than 10, meaning that they have more time to support customers and are now more visible across our estates and communities.

As well as this, we created a new Affordability Officer post, to support our customers through the Cost-of-Living Crisis, ensuring that they are making use of all the financial support available to them. We have also implemented regular drop ins surgeries across our estates, so customers can come along and speak to us face-to-face.



As well as this, we are committed to working with our partners to look at social value initiatives we can roll out together, that will benefit our customers, and to put in place evaluation processes for all projects and initiatives. It is fair to say, that we are still at the concept stage on the development of large scale 'added value' services and their impact on customers and communities and we will continue to learn through testing our approach in a variety of locations with effective evaluation and reflection over the life of this strategy.

In recognition of this, we will develop a Year 1 delivery plan which will outline our key priorities in the year ahead. We will consult customers to ensure their views and feedback help form this Year 1 delivery plan.

We will also be testing a range of output and outcome measures for the delivery of projects and initiatives to determine what 'excellent' looks like in terms of return on investment as well as understanding the relationship between primary and secondary impact measures to develop our understanding of the broader social impact that various initiatives bring to customers and communities, and by design, to the business.

To support this approach, we will be strengthening the funding application process and aligning this to other large funders such as National Lottery, to increase opportunities of external matched funding for large scale initiatives. We will also maximise bids to external funding sources to support improvement projects across neighbourhoods and communities.

We have consulted with customers on the content of this strategy and their feedback has shaped our objectives. One of the clear requirements from customers is that we develop interventions that provide dignified solutions for those who need to access help and support and we have, therefore, used language throughout this strategy that focuses on resilience and wellness to frame the products and services that we will design and deliver with customers and partners.

Many of the referrals to the services will be generated by colleagues who are working directly with customers; however, we recognise the importance of marketing these added value services more broadly across all customers and will continue to promote these through our 'Word on the Street' newsletters, as well as making use of online, social media and text messaging to ensure that news about our services reaches all customers.



strategic alignment

This strategy is one of nine corporate strategies which underpin the Group Corporate Plan 2023-26.

Our Communities and Livelihoods Strategy is aligned with the wider Riverside Group Communities and Livelihoods Strategy (2023-26) and is aimed at supporting our customers and communities through the cost-of-living challenges, building resilience and wellness, whilst exploring opportunities to build capacity and capability, we will align to the other strategies to drive out social value opportunities wherever possible.

We will aim to align and drive out maximum opportunities for volunteering, training, apprenticeships, and employment for our customers in the delivery of contracts and services whilst ensuring we capitalise on the social value incorporated into contracts for the benefit of customers and communities.

This strategy will set out our aim to develop more digital solutions to support customers and community involvement. These days, more and more activities can be done online, from accessing information and services, to online shopping and even healthcare. As digital solutions continue to develop, we want to ensure that we can take full advantage of new digital solutions and that our customers have access to these services.

A key objective of this strategy is the prevention of homelessness and the sustainability of tenancies and communities. In addition, we have included specific requirements for retirement living, young people, mental health and complex needs and a focus on tackling social isolation.



Finally, the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy will underpin our projects and initiatives, ensuring they are open to all, offering ease of access with no barriers to participation. An equality impact assessment will be completed for each project and initiative. A key strand of this strategy is to tackle social housing stigma, breaking down barriers to participation and engagement within communities, celebrating and building on the strengths in our communities and celebrating successes to promote positive outcomes.

context

The past few years have presented multiple challenges to social housing customers and the communities in which they live. The impact of the pandemic, followed by steep increases in inflation have tested the resilience of communities, and pushed many to the brink. To develop a strategic approach to supporting customers and communities through these unprecedented times, we have undertaken an analysis of the current operating context, considering the key issues.

The main factors putting pressure on household income are energy and food costs. As a result of the conflict in Ukraine, electricity costs soared by 67% and gas costs increased more significantly by 130% between March 2022 to March 2023. Since then, energy costs have fallen slightly, with a decrease of 25.2% between June and July 2023. However, costs are still much higher than they were prior to the cost-of-living crisis and are forecast to remain this way for some time.

Food inflation has also remained high in the UK throughout 2023, which was at its highest level for over 45 years at 19.2% in March 2023. Inflation has come down since reaching this peak but remains high at a reported figure of 9.2% in November 2023.

The high rate of inflation is causing a cost-of-living crisis, which is having an impact on families across the UK, but for poorer households, particularly those in social housing the impact is even more significant.

Energy and food price inflation disproportionately impacts low-income households because:

- These products take up a larger percentage of their incomes than other income groups; (the lowest 20% of equivalised income households spend 15% of their income compared to 11% for the average income household).
- They cannot reduce spending on these areas without serious impact.
- They have the lowest access to other financial options.



Many of the lowest income households are facing difficult choices as they choose whether to 'heat or eat' let alone pay rent. Riverside's evidence from a cost-of-living survey, carried out in 2023, suggests that over the past year leading up to the survey, over half of customers have worried about paying household bills and expenses all or most of the time, with a quarter saying they will not be able to cope.

The UK Government's recent unprecedented package of energy bill support, cost-of-living payments to those in receipt of certain benefits, and the inflation-linked benefits rise due to take place in April 2024 has provided reassurance to households. However previous welfare reforms - such as the "bedroom tax" and limits to the Local Housing Allowance - mean that for many, benefits still fall significantly short of the cost of housing. Also, the ability of any Government to sustain this level of household support is questionable.

The Scottish Government has also heavily invested in supporting households through the cost-of-living crisis. They have focused on providing support to those on a low income through initiatives such as the Winter Heating Payment and The Cost-of-Living Award, which offers those on a qualifying benefits additional funds to help support them through the cost-of-living crisis – on top of other support they may be eligible for from the UK government. As well as this, the Scottish Government also increased the recently introduced Scottish Child Payment to £25 per week, per child for households who qualify and made a commitment in their recent budget to increase Social Security Scotland benefits in line with inflation.

There has been a focus on local communities and investment in neighbourhoods from the Scottish Government too, who provided funding of £27 million through their Investing in Communities Fund, to tackle disadvantage within communities from 2023-26. The fund was open for applications from local community projects, with a focus on tackling poverty and disadvantage in their area.

There is an increasing focus on the importance of local communities and investment in neighbourhoods. In 2021, a consultation on the Charter Outcomes, carried out by the Scottish Social Housing Charter was held. The Scottish Social Housing Charter reviews its outcomes every five years and in 2021, carried out a consultation with Tenants, Tenants and Resident Groups, RSLs, Local Authorities, Councillors, Governing Body Members and anyone with an interest in the Charter.

Within the analysis of the responses to this consultation was a focus on landlords offering services that take account of individual needs. One respondent asked for a greater focus on the benefits of involving customers in partnerships and using public and community resources to build community wellbeing and resilience. Some participants also felt that improved housing support is required to ensure all customers are integrated into the community and to improve harmony amongst customers. Other key themes included a need for the recognition of the role social landlords, other organisations and tenants in contributing to future placemaking and community wealth building initiatives.

Whilst our customers and communities are facing multiple challenges, there are also several opportunities to be embraced which could create new opportunities and increase the resilience of our communities. We believe that this Strategy will be key in supporting this activity.

objectives

The high-level objectives for Communities & Livelihoods included within the Corporate Plan are:

Over the next three years we will:

- Prevent evictions and homelessness by proactively working with customers to sustain their tenancies.
- Provide advice and support to tenants to increase tenancy sustainment.
- Support the livelihoods of our customers through projects that provide advice and support and build capacity for people to improve their own lives - going beyond the traditional landlord service.
- Explore options to establish a customer health and wellbeing offer.
- Support customers into training and employment opportunities.
- Promote community resilience and empowerment, by supporting new and existing voluntary groups who are trying to make life better in our neighbourhoods.
- Increase customer engagement with customers through a variety of methods to inform continuous improvement.



objective 1

Prevent evictions and homelessness - Proactively engage with customers who are in, or at risk of falling into arrears, wider debt and fuel poverty.

- Advice and support to work proactively with existing and new customers to tackle money, debt, and fuel poverty, leading to a measurable increase in household incomes, lower bills and a reduction in evictions.
- Recruitment of an Affordability Officer, to support customers amidst the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The Affordability Officer will carry out benefit checks for new tenants to ensure that all benefits are correct, and the tenancy can be maintained, as well as supporting existing customers applying for benefits. The Affordability Officer will also ensure that payment arrangements for rent arrears are affordable and manageable for customers.
- Recruitment of an Energy Advisor – as part of a joint funding bid to SFHA Fuel Support Fund with Atrium Homes, Ayrshire Housing and Shire Housing, Riverside Scotland customers have access to a new Energy Advisor. They will be able to offer advice to customers on energy efficiency and support available to them with rising energy costs and will be based at the Citrus Energy Office in Ardrossan.
- Ensure that we are being proactive in applying for any available external funding which can be used to help alleviate fuel poverty, rent arrears, debt and increase financial resilience for our customers.
- Maximise access to Riverside Group 'Helping Hands' welfare fund to ensure maximum benefit for our customers and communities and provide much needed support.
- Utilise customer drop ins to hold financial advice sessions, to be delivered by Riverside Scotland, in partnership with other local organisations to offer advice and support as our customers navigate the cost-of-living crisis.



The cost-of-living crisis

The cost-of-living crisis is having a profound impact on our customers as outlined in the context section of the strategy and we have been working actively with our customers for several years to provide money and benefits advice with the demand for these services increasing substantially over the last 12 months and unlikely to reduce during the life of this strategy.

In the recent cost of living survey, just under half of customers reported low levels of confidence managing money, significantly higher than the national average. Customers who have struggled over the last 12 months reported taking various actions to pay everyday bills. Over two thirds have cut back on household spending and over half have turned off the heating. A quarter of customers state that they will not be able to cope with the rising cost of living.

ONS data shows that households with the lowest incomes are experiencing a higher-than-average inflation rate, whilst higher income households experienced a lower-than-average inflation. The UK government introduced measures to help alleviate the pressure on low-income households. This included measures such as the additional Cost-of-living payments, totalling £900, additional payment of £300 to support pensioners through the cost-of-living and a payment of £150 to support those on non-means tested disability benefits. However, many households couldn't meet the eligibility for this support, and instead have had to make difficult choices to manage their finances.

However, despite this additional support, MPs from the Work and Pensions Committee have identified several shortcomings of the current system. They highlighted that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the government increased Universal Credit by £20 per week, but has failed to do something similar in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. Many claimants were also excluded from this temporary uplift due to being on legacy benefits such as Jobs Seekers Allowance and Income Support – something that does seem to have been resolved with the government's one-off cost of living support payments.



Putting money back in your pocket

Case study
Earlier this year our affordability officer, Cath received a referral from the income collection team for John, a customer who was in high rent arrears, and for whom the next step would be court action.

When Cath visited John, she discovered that sadly John had lost his child a few years back and had struggled with his mental health ever since. John was suffering in silence and not dealing with daily life, including his bills. Cath listened and understood his situation and instantly got to work looking at how we could assist and support John.

Cath suggested that John apply for Scottish Adult Disability Payment (ADP) as his mental health was so impaired that he couldn't go about his normal daily functions. Scottish ADP can take a long time to process, but Cath kept in regular contact with John to make sure he was doing okay and managing with his rent and other household bills. We were able to help John with £100 funding from the Scottish Government's Fuel Insecurity Fund.

John finally got his award from Scottish ADP in October, and he was awarded both rates of ADP which increased his weekly income by £156.90 per week. This was backdated and he received a lump sum of £3957.43 - a brilliant result for both John and Cath.

Now that John is getting the benefits he is entitled to, he has been able to get back on track with his rent and is now able to afford payments towards the rent arrears he had built up. John is now coping better and has regular contact with his tenant partner.

If you are struggling with your rent, please get in touch.

For more information and to book an appointment call our Affordability Officer on **07974 751 084**

The committee also raised concerns with the benefit cap, that has been in place since 2016 – which saw limits being applied to the amount of benefits households could claim. This hadn't been increased until last year, where the government announced that it would rise by 10.1%. This support will be very welcome for claimants, and for the Committee who had concerns that the benefit cap only saved 0.1% of the overall welfare budget but was inflicting increasing hardship for claimants. The Child Poverty Action Group said that “almost all capped households with children are already in deep poverty”.

Taking all this information into account, our Affordability Officer will be targeted towards customers struggling to pay household bills, offering support and advice around benefit entitlement, and working with customers who have fallen into rent arrears, to find an affordable solution to resolve this, with sustainability of their tenancy being the focus.

The Affordability Officer will identify households who will receive SHFA Fuel Support funding , which will provide more vital support to customers who are struggling to heat their homes, especially over the winter months.

As we work to support our customers who are experiencing damp, mould and condensation, inevitably, fuel consumption for heating and ventilating the home will be a primary requirement. As well as the SHFA Fuel Support Funding, we will ensure that customers can access affordable warmth and energy advice, through our new joint energy advice service with other local housing associations.

Riverside Scotland will also continue to maximise funding from the Riverside Helping Hands Fund to develop and introduce support for customers. We will also look at utilising the regular customer drop ins, to provide advice sessions to customers around finances, benefits and support available to them.



objective 2

Provide advice and support to customers to increase tenancy sustainment.

- A Housing First for Families Service that provides wrap around support for households with children who are at risk of homelessness, with a focus on supporting households to sustain their tenancy.
- As part of our new Tenant Partner model, tenancy sustainment is the primary objective for all front-line staff which will be based on trauma-informed practice to help build trusting relationships with customers and increase tenancy sustainment.



Housing First for Families

Our 'Housing First for Families' support service provides direct support to our tenant households with children, who are struggling to maintain their tenancy, or who have previously been through the homeless system.

Housing First is an approach that offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and then provides the supportive services and connections to the community-based supports people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness.

We allocate around 35% of our lets to homeless households and, as part of the Riverside Group, have a strong commitment to tackling homelessness. This dedicated resource will help homeless people not only settle into their tenancies but support them in building a stable future going forward and prevent them from ending up in a cycle of homelessness.

The service will help customers in a range of ways including providing financial and employment advice and assistance, liaising with other agencies to coordinate and manage support provision, facilitate access to required health and social care services as needed, and provide a single point of contact for the household.

We have two full time Housing First for Families Officers, Emma Ward and Amanda Robinson, who are currently providing support to 31 families, who without this support, would be at further risk of homelessness. Overall, they have provided intensive support to 48 families, including 108 children. The service has been well received and demonstrates our commitment to supporting customers and alleviating homelessness.



Our new Tenant Partner model

Following our Big Conversation consultation last year, we implemented a restructure across the organisation, with a renewed focus on tenancy sustainment, proactively supporting our customers and for staff to be visible and accessible across our estates and communities.

Following this, we now have more Tenant Partners on hand to look after customers and their tenancies. We have over ten Tenant Partners, managing smaller patch sizes, giving them more time to focus on supporting customers with any challenges they face in sustaining their tenancy.

Our new approach is based on demonstrating a trauma-informed approach to how we engage with customers, which will help us build productive relationships as we work with customers to support them in their tenancy.

Furthermore, we have also introduced regular customer drop ins across our estates and communities, allowing customers a chance to come and speak with their Tenant Partner face-to-face on a regular basis. We have been trialling these across all estates and communities and will continue to review how we can best utilise these, based on the needs of customers.



objective 3

**Support the livelihoods of our customers -
Develop a coherent approach to poverty
alleviation.**

- Maximising Riverside Foundation and external funding to reduce food and fuel poverty and reduce digital exclusion.



Nutritional Wellness

Riverside Scotland will develop partnerships with local organisations that seek to increase access to affordable, healthy food and alleviate food poverty. This will include local foodbanks and community pantries who operate across our estates and communities. These partnerships will seek to ensure that support is available for our customers, as well as looking at how Riverside Scotland can sustain these crucial services. We will conduct a full review of the services on offer across our estates and communities and produce a directory of support for our customers, that will signpost them to local organisations and groups that can offer support with food insecurity.

Furniture Solutions

Furniture is one of the most expensive items people on low incomes are likely to purchase and while there is extensive support for food and fuel costs, there has been less focus on supporting furniture poverty.

Furniture poverty occurs when people cannot access the basic items that make a home liveable, including white goods, beds, tables and chairs. Living without essential furniture items can have a devastating impact on physical and mental health, and financial and social wellbeing. Social housing tenants are more likely to be affected by furniture poverty.

People can get into unmanageable debt trying to buy items, leaving them unable to buy food or pay their rent. It can lead to isolation as they may be less likely to invite family, or a support worker, into their home if they do not have a sofa for them to sit on.

While there is widespread access to second hand furniture items via charity shops and freecycle type options, local affordable furniture projects are few and far between.

In addition, the fire safety risks of second-hand products need to be considered.

Customers who are taking on a tenancy for the first time will be starting with very little, if anything, and will be more likely to incur loans or debts in the purchase of furniture to enable them to move into their new home. This will be more acute for those customers who were homeless. Riverside Scotland will work in partnership with our suppliers and contractors to ensure that we are maximising their commitments to Social Value.



Riverside Scotland, in partnership with our contractors, will launch a 'Bed Poverty' Campaign, focussed on alleviating the rising cases of adults and children who do not have a bed to sleep on and are instead, sleeping on mattresses on floors, sleeping on sofas or sharing beds. Riverside Scotland will work with partners to come up with new, innovative ways in which we can offer support to our tenants, who are struggling without beds, as well as other essential household items.

N.B. our poverty alleviation activities will not be limited to combating food and furniture poverty. Our Support Directories also signpost customers to other support such as essential baby items, and we will support projects to reduce costs for items.



every household deserves
**a good night's
sleep**



tackling bed poverty in partnership with:  **bell**  **JAMES
FREW**
SINCE 1911

Digital Inclusion

Many industries and services have increased their online presence, and the need for digital connection is increasing as more organisations and services utilise the internet, particularly using smartphones.

Within Riverside, we are also facilitating and accommodating more services online through the portal and Apps, to create a more linear customer service and to record feedback. Whilst it is important that these online services are an addition to existing services, it is self-evident that online services provide greater efficiencies, not only for the organisation, but also for the consumer that chooses to use them.

We seek to enable more people to embrace digital technologies and become more digitally included and ensure the benefits of the internet and digital technologies are available to everyone. As part of this strategy, we will commit to supporting customers to make the most of digital services, and will trial webinars, offering digital training and advice to customers. As well as this, we will trial online and hybrid meetings, allowing customers to get involved with us in a way that suits them and their lifestyle, whilst also maximising digital inclusion.

Digital exclusion can come in two broad forms, and we seek to address digital exclusion due to:

- A lack of skills, confidence and motivation around technology and making the best use of it

- Limited or no access to equipment and connectivity

These two elements individually and together can create additional layers of social exclusion and exacerbate social and economic inequality amongst those that need support to be able to improve their quality of life and increase their life chances particularly when it comes to employability.

Getting online and becoming more confident with IT can be life-enhancing and, through this proposal, we want to ensure that our residents are not missing out.

Riverside Scotland has recently been successful in its bid for Connecting Scotland Funding, in which we were awarded 20 devices (iPads, tablets and laptops) as well as 20 mobile internet devices. This will be used to establish a Device Lending Scheme, which will seek to provide device and internet access to customers who would otherwise be digitally excluded.

Tenant Partners will refer customers who would benefit from this service, or customers will be able to refer themselves. They will be able to loan a device for up to 6 months, and it is hoped this will allow them to have better access to services, information and have further social and economic benefits.



objective 4

Explore options to establish a customer health and wellbeing offer.

- Develop projects to support improved customer health and wellbeing in partnership with local authorities, Health & Social Care Partnerships and community groups.



Loneliness and isolation

Loneliness and isolation are common amongst older customers and lack of socialisation and interaction can have a profound impact on their health and wellbeing.

We will work to implement a programme of health and wellbeing activities to our customers in retirement living complexes. This will be focused on improving socialisation amongst customers and the wider community, as well as ensuring that they have access to advice and support to help with their health and wellbeing.

Our aim is to set up local hubs at our retirement living complexes focusing on health and wellbeing activities to enable older customers to live independently for as long as possible.

Tackling loneliness is not just about older people. The Jo Cox commission on loneliness and the Minister of Loneliness, Baroness Barran, explain that everyone is at risk, and risks increase with factors such as age, disability, poor mental health, care needs and homelessness. Loneliness manifests itself as a sense of disconnection with the community, lack of opportunity to meet and socialise and a lack of access to dedicated space to socialise.

Positive action on social isolation must include:

- Tackling the stigma of loneliness
- Create opportunities for learning
- Create volunteering opportunities to increase social interactions and build community networks
- Provide good quality physical spaces and compelling reasons to meet up and socialise
- Support tenants to organise and deliver sessions themselves - co-produced or fully tenant led activities are likely to be more relevant, more popular, more sustainable and have greater longevity than organisation led activity.
- Cross community group engagement, e.g., Scouts cooking for older people in a community kitchen

Placemaking

Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share - placemaking refers to, 'a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. '

Placemaking is a multi-faceted approach to the planning design and management of neighbourhoods. Placemaking capitalises on local community assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating neighbourhoods that improve urban vitality and promote people's health, happiness, well-being, and aspiration.

Placemaking is both a process and a philosophy that makes use of government and local authority led initiatives, such as the 20-minute city principles or community driven at grassroots in improving local spaces and provision of essential services.

We will develop a plan for each neighbourhood, in partnership with residents, which will set out priority actions to address local issues and be innovative in our ways to address these.

We will test and evaluate several initiatives across various neighbourhoods to determine impact, outputs and outcomes to build our evidence base for longer-term recommendations.

objective 5

Support customers into employment and training opportunities.

- Build relationships with local authority partners and employability and skills organisations across the areas in which we operate, to create a referral pathway for support for our customers.
- Employment and apprenticeship opportunities maximised through social value opportunities with contractors.



Employment & Training

Riverside Scotland is committed to supporting customers to maximise their income by supporting customers into employment and training and is taking a proactive approach to this across its geography.

Riverside Scotland will work with key employers and pursue growth opportunities within our communities to support aspiration and growing community wealth via opportunities in key growth employment sectors including development, retrofit, the green economy and sustainability sectors.

As an employer, Riverside Scotland promotes its own vacancies to customers and aims to maximise the social value from contracts. Riverside will develop a 'Fit for the Future' support programme securing opportunities for customers from retrofit works.

We will work to build relationships with local authorities and employability and skills organisations to establish referral processes in which we can refer any customers in need of support to get into employment, onto the relevant agencies.



objective 6

Building Community Capacity

- A new Participatory Budgeting Fund to be established – establishing a way in which customers can have a say on how money is spent within their community.
- Community empowerment training programme developed with a focus on fundraising and project delivery, supporting people to establish and run a wide range of local initiatives.
- Community directories established, signposting customers to organisations that can offer support and help.



Communities coming together

Riverside Scotland work with a diverse range of customers and communities across the Southwest of Scotland. To harness the diversity and voice of those communities, we need to work with our customers to develop their capacity and provide a foundation from which to improve lives, communities and places; harnessing greater influence and control to shape local services. We will work towards creating strong, diverse communities that can attract and grow businesses and support the growth of community wealth.

We recognise the importance of Communities coming together to work towards common goals within their neighbourhood, ensuring we have places where our customers are proud to call home. By providing more targeted investment and support, we can help to strengthen communities through upskilling customers and supporting local groups to develop, ensuring they have access to the resources and/or support agencies that will empower and enable them to deliver the improvements they want to see.

The need to tackle inequalities, increase opportunities and promote wellbeing has never been greater. By recognising, celebrating, and building on the strengths in our communities we can help challenge and tackle stigma. We will encourage groups to be representative of the communities where they live and seek opportunities to develop multi-generational and inclusive projects.

The support programmes provided by community groups and through organisations' added value have become essential to local people through the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Through this strategy, we intend to support these groups and continue to act as an 'anchor organisation' to provide needed services.

Where possible, Riverside Scotland will hold meetings at local community spaces, such as local community centres. By holding meetings in this way, we can ensure that we are giving back to local communities and in turn, supporting voluntary organisations and services that will support our customers.

It takes effective partnerships and working together with key strategic partners, local organisations, community groups and residents of all tenures to truly transform and empower communities. These partnerships will vary and be diverse based on the community we are working with but, in all cases, will share the same aligned vision and objectives, aiming to grow self-reliance, self-determination and participation.



objective 7

Increasing customer engagement to support improved service delivery.

• Riverside Scotland is committed to listening to our customers and we are keen to hear how we could improve services. We encourage customers to get involved in decision making and welcome feedback on how we could do things better. As part of this, we are committed to ensuring that we have a range of options available to customers to get involved.



Sounding Board

We will review our Customer Panel – a panel of customers who have expressed an interest in providing feedback to Riverside Scotland. We will look to update this to reflect what our customers want from us and will establish a new “Sounding Board”.

Our new Sounding Board will offer customers the chance to provide feedback on decisions we make, any new policies we wish to implement and to provide feedback on our services and procedures.

We will offer customers flexibility in how they engage with us by seeking feedback through a range of methods – such as online surveys, text messaging, newsletters and postal surveys.

Riverside Scotland is also committed to working with customers across our communities and estates to tackle local issues and deliver on local priorities. We will seek to establish task-finish groups across priority areas, which will allow customers to tell us what their concerns are within their community, and work with Riverside Scotland to come up with a plan to address these issues. We will work with local community organisations, Tenants and Residents Associations and our local authority partners to come up with solutions, with a commitment to being flexible and innovative in the way we do this.

An example of this would be our Big Pennyburn Clean Up Event that took place in Autumn 2023. Riverside Scotland listened to the feedback of customers in Pennyburn regarding ongoing issues with fly-tipping, incorrect waste disposal and untidy gardens. We funded a two-day event focused on tackling these issues, with skips being made available to customers to correctly and safely dispose of any household items, as well as working with our contractors and local authority partners to act on untidy gardens and provide advice and support to customers.

Whilst this was a one-off event, it demonstrates how we can be proactive and innovative in the way we support customers to tackle local issues. By working collaboratively with customers, our contractors and the local authority, we were able to offer effective solutions. This could be seen as an example of best practice and this collaborative style of addressing local issues, should be mirrored as we work to drive improvements across our estates and communities.



Service Improvement Group

Our newly formed Service Improvement Group is another example of how Riverside Scotland is including customers in improving services. The Service Improvement Group is a group of tenants, from across our estates and communities, who are committed to working with Riverside Scotland to identify ways in which we could improve our service.

The Service Improvement Group will focus on one project at a time, which will focus on one aspect of our service. The first project focused on our Voids and Lettings Policy, with the aim of identifying improvements we could make to ensure that customers receive the best service possible, whilst also ensuring value for money.

Once the group have carried out a full and thorough review of an area of service, they will provide a report to Riverside Scotland, detailing improvements that could be made. Riverside Scotland has made a commitment to action their recommendations, wherever possible and where we cannot action a recommendation, provide an explanation for this.

Riverside Scotland will seek to be flexible in the opportunities it offers customers to get involved and will make getting involved as accessible as possible for our customers – allowing every customer the chance to engage with us, no matter their background, circumstances or prior knowledge. We will also carry out ongoing analysis of customer feedback and carry out learning exercises from any complaints we receive, to ensure that we are constantly improving our service.



key enablers

Our primary enabler is the Riverside Foundation who will be well-supported, directed and governed to play its role to invest the funding granted to it by Riverside, while maximising opportunities for external match funding.

Our second primary enabler is our robust data sources, and we will maximise the use of data and evidence to inform decision making as well monitoring project delivery against clearly defined outcomes with robust evaluation to identify best practice.

The Riverside Sustainability Index (RSI) along with the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data that we have modelled against all our neighbourhoods, provides us with a very detailed analysis of the issues impacting a particular community and the potential interventions that could be developed to deliver solutions.

Many of the activities delivered by the Communities and Livelihood strategy would benefit from targeted marketing campaigns which would enable Riverside Scotland to actively promote projects and initiatives, particularly employment and training opportunities, to customers. Riverside Scotland does not currently capture and hold data on consent to market non-essential services and a data strategy taking this into account would enable targeted marketing campaigns to those that give their consent and want to hear from us.

Other key enablers to the delivery of this strategy include:

- Existing strategic and operational partnerships with local authority partners and community groups. We will build on these partnerships to maximise opportunities to increase the products and services available to our customers.
- External grant funding secured for several projects which we will learn from and determine how we can maximise our grant funding income streams to deliver more outputs for customers. We will investigate the opportunities to tap into Corporate Social Responsibility funding through our contractors to help us in our aim to supporting customers and communities.
- Ongoing Communications and Marketing to ensure that our message reaches customers and that customers are kept fully informed of the work we are doing. Developing the new Word on the Street newsletters and further utilising the use of online, social media and text messaging marketing campaigns.
- Word of mouth is a powerful tool to get customer engagement in projects and initiatives and we will develop customer testimonials from successfully delivered projects to promote the benefits of these to their peers.
- Customer/Resident Involvement & Engagement will be a priority for the business over the next 3 years and as we build the engagement frameworks with local customers, in local neighbourhoods, it will present opportunities to create community resilience and empowerment initiatives.

communities and livelihoods action plan

Year 1 commitments:

- Within the first year of this strategy, Riverside Scotland, in partnership with the Scrutiny Group, will deliver at least one more scrutiny project with a report outlining recommendations in how we could improve our service in a particular area of the organisation.
- We will implement customer consultations as we embark on new programmes of planned maintenance works in 2024/25 – allowing customers to get involved and have a say on bathroom and kitchen replacement programmes and choose which style of fixtures and fittings they would like to see us use.
- Riverside Scotland will continue to engage with customers across our estates and neighbourhoods, to identify and address local issues.
- Riverside Scotland will develop a new Handyperson Service, that will be available to customers to help them maintain their home. This will focus on carrying out small jobs around the home, that customers may not be able to do themselves, with a focus on vulnerable customers.
- We will establish a rolling programme of Health and Wellbeing activities within our Retirement Living Complexes, working in partnership with the local authority, health organisations and other local groups to help tackle social isolation and improve health and wellbeing of our elderly customers.
- Roll out a Device Lending Scheme to customers, through funding from Connecting Scotland, to offer customers the chance to access IT devices and internet connectivity, ensuring that we are doing all we can to combat digital exclusion.
- Establish working relationships with local employability and skills agencies – creating a referral pathway for Riverside Scotland into these services so customers can be supported into work or education.
- Produce a Directory of Support – providing details of support services and local organisations that may be of assistance to our customers as they continue to navigate the cost-of-living crisis, with a focus on alleviating poverty, food insecurity and isolation.



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