



Richmond

Campaigning Update No.2 2021

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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In February 2021 we helped 940 local people with 2,707 advice issues. The two main advice areas were the same as in January: benefits and debt. Each month we identify issues which are causing undue hardship and stress to our clients. This month these included the following.

Private sector lettings – discrimination against benefit claimants

We have come across several cases where letting agents or landlords are operating unlawful “no DSS” policies which discriminate against prospective tenants who are on benefits. This blocks a potentially large source of housing for tenants on benefits. We are pleased that, at our suggestion, Richmond Council has included a section in its new Housing Strategy on educating landlords on the unlawful practice of refusing to let to benefit claimants.

Our Call for Action: Landlords and their agents must stop this unlawful practice. We will be exploring ways in which we can support the Council to educate landlords and letting agents about the attractive Council schemes available to landlords who let to benefit claimants on the Council’s housing registers.

Poor Administration of Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

We reported in January that several of our clients were unnecessarily stressed and experienced financial hardship because their claims for this disability benefit had been rejected or stopped because of flawed health assessments. We mentioned that one of our severely disabled clients, who has a deteriorating health condition, had her PIP stopped for a third time, with no reason given and no reference to the evidence of her deteriorating health.

We are pleased to report that we heard in February that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has now agreed to reinstate PIP for this client, with enhanced payments for living and mobility. This followed our request to the DWP for an urgent review of this case. We had also drawn our client’s experience to the attention of the client’s MP. It is clearly unfair that someone with severe and deteriorating disabilities should be treated in this way: in this case, on three separate occasions.

Several of our other clients continue to experience poor administration of their PIP claims. One person received no response to a written request for over 12 weeks, while

another was given contradictory information from DWP about the period of their PIP award, causing considerable distress to a vulnerable person.

Our Call for Action: The way in which health assessments for PIP are carried out needs urgent reform, and, where there is clear evidence of an incurable or deteriorating health condition, PIP awards should be renewed on this evidence without further reassessment. PIP administration also needs improvement so that simple errors, which cause distress to vulnerable people, are avoided wherever possible.

Our Current Campaigns

- **#KeepTheLifeline** – We are contributing to a campaign by national Citizens Advice to retain the temporary £20 a week increase to Universal Credit. Although the Chancellor extended the uplift in the March budget, we will be pressing to make this permanent beyond September.
- **Other problems with the £20 increase** - We have written to our local MPs to ask them to urge the government to extend the increase to all benefits, not just Universal Credit, and to remove the impact of the Benefit Cap for those whose total benefits are limited and therefore prevented from getting the increase.
- **Disability benefits** – We are contributing to national Citizens Advice research on clients' experiences of disability benefits in preparation for the government's forthcoming Green Paper.
- **Freeing up underoccupied social housing** – There is a shortage of social housing in Richmond, particularly for families. We are planning to work with Richmond Council and local housing associations on ways to help tenants to move from underoccupied properties where they wish to do so. This will free up larger properties for families on Richmond's homelessness and housing registers.
- **Social housing tenants' issues** – We are working with local housing associations in Richmond to address recurrent problems with tenants' rent arrears, repairs and neighbour harassment issues.

About Citizens Advice Richmond

Citizens Advice Richmond gives free, impartial and confidential advice to anyone who lives, works or studies in Richmond borough, or cares for someone who lives in the borough. As well as providing advice, we aim to spot emerging problems affecting local people, and to set out new ideas to improve policy and delivery for all.

Feedback

We welcome feedback and suggestions on our campaigning work. Please contact us through our website using this [link](#). **Referrals:** Partner organisations can refer clients to us via [this form](#). **Benefit calculator:** find out what benefits you can claim [here](#). **Advice:** please call us on Freephone 080 82 78 78 73 or by filling in the contact form [here](#).