



Richmond

## Campaigning Update No.3 2021

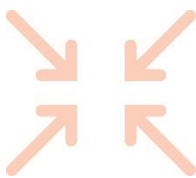
CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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In March 2021 we helped over 1,000 local people with 3,100 advice issues. Benefits (1,100 issues) and debt (250 issues) continue to feature prominently, but we are also finding an increasing number of people consulting us about housing issues (330 issues). In just one month we helped local people to gain £345,000 to which they are entitled.

### Hardship caused by the Benefit Cap



The Benefit Cap limits the benefits people can get, even when they have been assessed as needing a higher level of benefits to meet their essential living costs. The Cap can cause vulnerable people severe hardship. One of our clients is a single mother with a child under 1 year old. The Cap reduces her benefits by £213 a month as well as blocking the £20 a week uplift to Universal Credit. We have helped her to obtain food vouchers for local food banks, and to apply for charitable grants to make ends meet.

**Our Call for Action:** The Benefits Cap should be eliminated so that people can receive the benefits they need.

### Poor Administration of Personal Independence Payments (PIP)



Some of our vulnerable clients wait for unreasonably long periods to hear back from the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) about their claims for the disability benefit PIP – in one case over 9 months. Another client applied in October 2020 and was told her health would be assessed in December. Five months later, in late March 2021, she had still not received an assessment date, and the contractors who handle the process said they were unable to give an estimate of when an assessment would take place.

**Our Call for Action:** PIP health assessments and the appeals processes need urgent reform. It is unreasonable that vulnerable people should have to wait months for a response from DWP and its contractors.

## Unlawful “no DSS” policies in the private rental sector



Some private landlords refuse to rent to people claiming benefits. These so-called “no DSS” policies are unlawful. One of our clients is a single mother with two children, living in private rented accommodation which is now too small for her family. She is trying to move to a larger property but keeps being refused tenancies because she has income from benefits.

**Our Call for Action:** Landlords and their agents must stop this unlawful practice. There needs to be greater awareness of Richmond Council’s Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme which gives private landlords a deposit guarantee, access to a supply of tenants who qualify for housing benefit, and avoidance of letting agents’ fees.

## 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 beyond September. The uplift should be extended to all benefits, and the government should remove the impact of the Benefit Cap on it.
- **Adequacy of welfare support** – We are undertaking research into the extent to which local people who receive benefits can make ends meet. We are also looking at the impact of Richmond’s high housing costs on people on lower incomes.
- **Freeing up underoccupied social housing** – There is a shortage of social housing in Richmond, particularly for families. We are working 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.
- **Stop “no DSS” policies** – We are planning a campaign to increase private landlords’ awareness that it is unlawful to discriminate against prospective renters because they receive benefits. We would like to see a greater uptake of the Council’s Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.

## 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 – [click here](#).

**Free advice:** please call us on Freephone 080 82 78 78 73 or fill in the form [here](#).

**Benefit calculator:** find out what benefits you can claim [here](#).

**Partner organisation referrals:** refer clients to us via [this form](#).