



Richmond

Campaigning Update No.4 2021

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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We helped nearly 1,000 local people with 2,700 advice issues in April 2021. Benefits (820 issues) and housing (350 issues) continue to feature prominently. More people are consulting us about debt and managing their money (260 issues). In just one month we helped local people gain £285,000 to which they are entitled.

Landlords discriminating against people receiving benefits



Some landlords and their agents in Richmond are refusing to rent to people who are claiming benefits. One of our clients, who is facing eviction, is struggling to find suitable alternative accommodation, despite weeks of searching, because of this unlawful policy. Unfortunately, this is happening more frequently – we saw several examples last month.

Our Call for Action: This unlawful discrimination must stop. 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 avoids letting agents' fees. In the meantime, we are encouraging our clients to make formal complaints when they come across this unlawful practice.

Preventing scams



We are too often approached by people who are scam victims. Fraudsters are increasingly plausible. One of our clients, who is a pensioner in his 70s, was contacted by well-informed criminals who told him they were taking over a company in which he has shares. They convinced him to send them money on several occasions to secure his shares. When they requested a further, larger payment, he became suspicious, but had already lost £15,000 of his savings.

Our Call for Action: We will be participating in the nationwide Citizens Advice Scams Awareness Fortnight, which this year is 14 – 27 June 2021. We will continue to promote the Scams Action Checklist, which people can use to see if something is a scam.

Administration by DWP of disability benefits



There was some good news. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is clearly making efforts to improve the way it handles appeals by disabled people claiming benefits. In a recent case, where we had appealed on our client's behalf, DWP called our office promptly. After discussion, DWP agreed that an existing assessment for a disability

benefit would be valid for the client's application for the Personal Independence Payment benefit. This was an enormous relief for our client. Unfortunately, other cases were less positive. One vulnerable client had a very difficult telephone assessment – the assessor was rude, uncaring and dismissive. Another client, applying for the disability element of Universal Credit, was unable to get DWP to send the correct form, even after numerous emails and phone calls.

Our Call for Action: It is an excellent step forward to see some improvements in the way DWP handles disability benefit applications. We would like to see this good practice spread more widely so that it becomes the norm.

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](#).