



Richmond

Campaigning Update No.5 2021

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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In May 2021 we helped nearly 900 Richmond people with advice about 2,100 issues. Benefits (640 issues) and housing (260 issues) generated the most enquiries, while debt (215 issues) featured prominently. In just one month we helped local people gain £265,000 to which they are entitled.

No Recourse to Public Funds risks destitution



No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a condition attached to the visas of some migrants who are living legally in the UK. One of our clients came to the UK on a spouse visa to join her British husband. When the marriage broke down, she went to live with a friend. She cannot return to her country of origin because she has been rejected by her family. She urgently needs help with finding somewhere to live and applying for a new visa. Because of NRPF, she is not entitled to benefits or rehousing, and she is not allowed to work. She faces destitution.

Our Call for Action: Citizens Advice is about to launch a national campaign on this issue. All migrants should have access to the welfare safety net if they fall on hard times. It is unacceptable that, because of NRPF, some people living legally in the UK face destitution, hunger, debt and eviction with no legal way of accessing resources to meet their most basic needs. NRPF must be abolished.

Tenants fear losing homes as eviction ban ends



No fault evictions were paused during the pandemic, but the ban on evictions ended on 1 June 2021. Several of our clients who are renting privately have been told by their landlords that they will be evicted in the next few weeks. Landlords often use a mechanism called “Section 21”, which means they can evict good tenants who have always been up to date with their rents and who are within their tenancy periods (if there is a break clause in the rental agreement) without needing to give reasons for the eviction. Two of our recent clients who face eviction have children in local schools. They fear they will not be able to find or afford new homes near to their children’s schools.

Our Call for Action: National charities such as Citizens Advice and Shelter worry that 100,000s of renters face a cliff edge. We’re already seeing the first cases here in Richmond. High rents in the Borough mean families are genuinely worried about keeping their children in local schools. It is over two years since the then Secretary of State for Housing announced that the government would abolish Section 21 “no fault” evictions. It is now time for the government to act on this commitment.

Inaction on damp and mould causes health problems



We regularly see health problems and distress caused to renters by damp and mould in their homes. Landlords frequently ignore complaints and too often blame tenants' lifestyles rather than repairing the causes of damp. Clients tell us that some landlords do not recognise that damp causes problems such as asthma, damage to belongings and higher heating bills.

Our Call for Action: Richmond people tell us that it can sometimes be very hard to get Landlords to act. We will continue to support campaigns to increase landlords' awareness of the health and welfare damage caused by damp and mould. Landlords must provide better and timely support to tenants living in damp conditions.

Our Current Campaigns

- **Adequacy of welfare support** – We are researching the extent to which local people who receive benefits can make ends meet and 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 have discussed with Richmond Council and local housing associations 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 developing 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 Richmond Council's Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme.
- **Housing benefit loophole** – We have become aware from recent casework that some unscrupulous landlords (private and social housing) appear to be exploiting a loophole in the way Housing Benefit and the housing element of Universal Credit are calculated for single people aged over 35. We are assembling evidence on this issue with a view to contributing to a national campaign to prevent this cynical exploitation of vulnerable people.

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](#).