



Richmond

Campaigning Update 10 2021

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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We helped 650 local people in Richmond with 2,200 advice issues during October 2021. Benefits (840 issues) and housing (330 issues) continued to generate the most enquiries, while debt and money (200 issues) featured prominently. In just one month we helped local people gain £165,000 which they were due.

Universal Credit cut begins to hurt Richmond people



The Government cut Universal Credit by £20 a week at the end of September. We welcome the October budget's announcement that some workers receiving Universal Credit can keep more of their hard-earned cash. But we know from many of our clients that this doesn't cushion the blow of the £20 weekly cut for those still looking for work or unable to work because of disability, health issues or caring responsibilities.

A young woman under 25, who lives alone and is looking for work, came to us for help and advice because nearly two weeks before her next Universal Credit payment she had no money to buy food. Before the cut she was just about managing to get by on £80 a week for all her living costs. That has now been cut to £60 a week, so she is struggling. Without food vouchers from us, grants from Richmond charities and help from friends, she would be completely destitute.

Our Call for Action: The Government must reverse the disastrous decision to cut this lifeline. The £20 cut to Universal Credit is pushing people into hardship, even though they are looking for work, or can't work for reasons that are not their fault. This is a real blow when people are just beginning to have the chance to get back on their feet.

The disability benefits system is failing vulnerable people



Too many clients with disabilities or long-term health issues continue to face unacceptably poor administration of their disability benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). There are long delays, communication is poor and DWP makes too many sloppy mistakes which take time to sort out. This is a long-term problem — unfortunately, we think it is getting worse not better.

One of our disabled clients recently reached state pension age. DWP ended payment of her working age disability benefit promptly, but failed to pay the client's pension, even though an application had been made four months before. The client approached us in

some distress for advice, since she was struggling to pay bills with the sudden and unexpected loss of income. We tried to contact DWP on her behalf but after numerous calls, long waits on the line, and failure of the DWP to call us back as promised, nothing had been done.

Another of our disabled clients had applied for the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) disability benefit three months ago but approached us because he had heard nothing back. After many phone calls, we eventually got through to someone relevant. They told us that it could be several more months before the application would be processed because of a backlog of applications. In the meantime, our client is struggling to make ends meet because of the cut in his Universal Credit payment.

The administrative backlog at DWP has now got to the stage that another of our disabled clients has been waiting over a year for an assessment of his capability for work. This is totally unacceptable, and we have helped him make a formal complaint. In the meantime, he is struggling to afford basic essentials.

Our Call for Action: DWP is too often failing to meet its obligations because of a lack of adequately trained and supervised staff. The Government must allocate more funding and more efficient resources to the disability benefits system.

Our Current Campaigns

- **Stop “no DSS” policies** – We are developing a campaign to increase private landlords’ and prospective tenants’ awareness that it is unlawful to discriminate against people who receive benefits. We also want tenants to know how to challenge this unfair practice and how to demonstrate to landlords that they can afford to pay the rent, even though they receive benefits.
- **Inadequate income** - We are actively monitoring the impact of recent changes to Government financial support on local people. The £20 a week cut to Universal Credit and the end of furlough alongside increasing energy bills will make it difficult for many families on low income to make ends meet over the winter.
- **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. We have regular meetings with the major social landlords in Richmond to find practical ways to address these concerns.

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](#).