



**Richmond**

## Campaigning Update No.9 2021

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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We helped nearly 600 local people in Richmond with 1,800 advice issues during September 2021. Benefits (703 issues) and housing (278 issues) continued to generate the most enquiries, while debt and money (130 issues) featured prominently. In just one month we helped local people gain over £176,000 to which they are entitled.

### Universal Credit cut threatens tough winter



The Government has gone ahead with its £20 a week cut to Universal Credit raising the prospect of real hardship for thousands of Richmond residents. It is disastrous news for all those on low incomes, coming at the same time as the end of furlough, and when many are seeing large rises in energy bills.

Some clients have lost jobs through no fault of their own and are still struggling to find work. Without the extra money, we expect to see more people coming to us in debt, unable to pay their bills or turning to food banks because they can't afford the essentials.

One client who temporarily cannot work due to ill health has lost her furlough income and UC increase at the same time. She has tried hard to stabilise her situation and manage on a low income but now faces a drop in income of £380 per month from the combination of cuts to her support.

**Our Call for Action:** It is vital to keep the pressure on the Government to consider reversing the disastrous decision to cut this lifeline. The £20 Universal Credit cut risks pushing low-income families into hardship, just as they're getting back on their feet.

### Low-income families excluded from renting homes



Thousands of local people are unfairly locked out of renting homes they could otherwise afford simply because they receive some benefits to pay towards their housing. Many landlords and letting agents refuse to consider people as tenants as soon as they discover that they receive benefits. Not only is this unfair, but it is also unlawful. Clients tell us that they face discrimination, even though they can afford to pay the rent advertised. In other cases, potential tenants are asked for unusually large deposits and guarantor conditions they cannot meet.

One client has been given two months' notice to leave his family's rented property where they have lived for eight years. He is on a low income and is struggling to find a new home. Local letting agents will not deal with him because he is also receiving some benefits. He wants to stay living locally as his son receives specialist support in school.

**Our Call for Action:** All residents need fair and equal opportunities to rent local homes. Many people on benefits are good tenants and we are calling on landlords to assess tenants' ability to pay as fairly as possible and to avoid discriminating against them.

## Disability benefit plans need sufficient funds



The Government must focus on practical outcomes and adequate resources to achieve positive change when it acts on its Disability Benefits Green Paper proposals. Our response to the recent consultation was based on evidence from clients who struggle to cope with a benefits system which is not currently fit for purpose. We support many of the policy proposals, but these are empty words if they are not backed up positive action on the ground. Better decision making is vital. We see numerous problems from sloppy administration causing unnecessary hardship. Incorrect advice, poor communication and lengthy response times leave clients missing benefit payments they are entitled to. Reducing the frequent, long delays when decisions are challenged is also needed as is support for those appealing decisions.

**Our Call for Action:** The Government must allocate more funding and more efficient resources to the disability benefits system if it is to achieve positive outcomes from its Green Paper proposals. You can read our detailed response [here](#).

## 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](#).