



Richmond

Campaigning Update 13 — February 2022

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

Twitter: @CA_RMD

Advice Freephone: 080 82 78 78 73

We helped 815 local people in Richmond with 2,600 advice issues during January 2022. Benefits (920 issues) and housing (303 issues) generated the most enquiries, while debt and money (210 issues) again featured prominently. In just one month we helped local people gain over £185,000 which they were due.

Richmond Council backs End Benefit Prejudice campaign



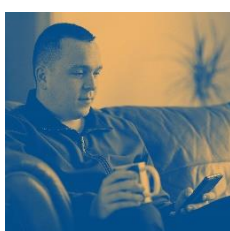
Citizens Advice Richmond has won the backing of Richmond Council for our campaign to end discrimination against renters who receive benefits. Our research shows that many local landlords and letting agents refuse to consider tenants as soon as they discover that they receive benefits. They are often confronted with a blanket 'No Benefits' policy even when they can demonstrate they can afford the monthly rent. This means that hundreds of local families are unfairly locked out of renting homes they could otherwise afford simply because they receive some benefits to pay towards their housing costs.

The campaign to End Benefit Prejudice aims to raise awareness that any policy that automatically outlaws benefit claimants discriminates and is unlawful. 'No Benefits' discrimination can have a direct and devastating impact on the lives of people who receive benefits. It causes stress and anxiety, forces people to remain in unsuitable and unsafe accommodation, and can lead to homelessness. Many Richmond people seek our advice each month because they face this unfair discrimination. Here are some examples of the problems people face (names have been changed):



Richmond resident **Stella**, who lives with her disabled son, had to move out of the borough, supported by a council scheme, after she failed to find local accommodation because of direct prejudice against families supported by benefits. "Doors were shut, there were flat 'nos'. They were not interested just because I was on benefits, even though I had good references," she says.

Rachel lives with her partner and two children and needs to move because of the poor standard of their living conditions, damp and overcrowding. She receives Universal Credit, and her partner works full-time but is on a low income. Letting agents are reluctant to show her any flats as soon as they discover that she claims Universal Credit. The couple has no rent arrears and a good rent payment record.



Sean lived in a rented flat for 18 months but had to stop working and apply for Universal Credit when he became ill. His landlord then refused to fill in the forms required for benefits checks and said Sean would have to leave if he was applying for benefits. Sean put off making his UC application and used his minimal savings to survive as he was worried he would be evicted.

Our Calls for Action

Citizens Advice Richmond helps local residents on low incomes who are facing discrimination and unfair barriers to renting every day. Our campaign to End Benefit Prejudice aims to change the attitudes and actions of landlords and letting agents and to give tenants the information and support they need to challenge prejudice and overcome barriers to renting.



We are calling on local landlords and letting agents to keep an open mind and assess tenants' ability to pay as fairly as possible and to avoid discriminating against them. Many simply refuse to deal with renters who receive benefits, but others put up artificial barriers - such as unreasonably high deposits or unnecessary guarantor requirements - which renters on low incomes cannot meet.



Too many low-paid renters are unaware that the barriers they face finding a safe and suitable home are discriminatory and unlawful. Citizens Advice Richmond advises over 3,000 residents every year on housing issues and the campaign will strengthen the advice given to clients to help them understand their rights. We want to give tenants a stronger voice and provide the tools to challenge letting agents when they refuse to treat them fairly.



We will work with Richmond Council's Landlords Forum to engage landlords and their agents in the campaign to End Benefit Prejudice and to promote the council's existing schemes to support private sector landlords to rent to people on low incomes.



Local media and advice agencies can help to dispel the myths about tenants receiving benefits. We aim to drive out long-standing attitudes that stand in the way of Richmond residents accessing the homes they need and can afford. We know many tenants receiving benefits are good renters - over one in four of the 10,000 people in Richmond who receive Universal Credit are in work.

Support our campaign to End Benefit Prejudice

- We will be posting regularly on Twitter (@CA_RMD) and Facebook (@CitizensAdviceRichmond) in February and March. Please support our campaign by retweeting/reposting, liking and commenting.
- Contact us for more information about our campaign, more case studies and to get involved: campaigns@citizensadvice-richmond.org

Our other current campaigns

Cost of living crisis - We are actively monitoring the impact of recent changes to Government financial support on local people, as part of a national Citizens Advice campaign, to show how Richmond people are really struggling with the triple whammy of soaring energy costs, high inflation and the recent cut to Universal Credit.

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.

Feedback: We welcome feedback and suggestions - campaigns@citizensadvice-richmond.org

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](#).