



During May 2022 we helped nearly 700 local people in Richmond with 2,000 advice issues. Benefits (620 issues), housing (280 issues) and debt (190 issues) generated the most enquiries. 110 Richmond residents asked our advice about charitable support and food banks, reflecting the impact of the cost of living crisis on local people.

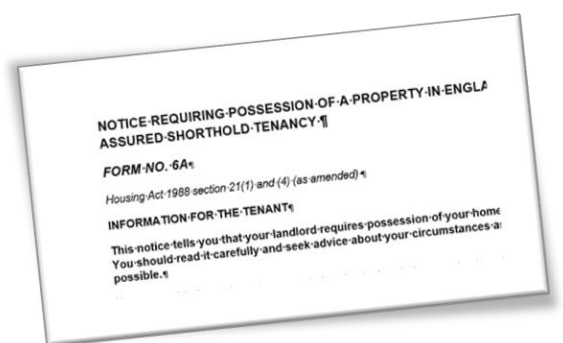
Landlord evicts Richmond family because they can't pay exorbitant 50% rent increase

We continue to see too many cases of Richmond people being unfairly evicted from privately rented accommodation by their landlords, who use so-called "no fault" evictions. For example, a Richmond resident, we'll call him James, contacted us for advice in May because his landlord said he would increase the rent on James's privately rented property by 50% at the end of the rental period in a few weeks' time. James can't afford such a huge hike in rent. Because the family has small children at local schools, the locations they can live are limited, so James would like to stay on in the property at a fair rental. But the landlord is insistent that the rent will increase by half.

James's tenancy agreement states that the rent will increase by the rate of inflation every year, which currently is about 9-10%. James is prepared to pay that, but not the unreasonably large increase the landlord demands. The landlord has said that they will issue a new contract when the current one ends, so they say this clause is irrelevant. Unfortunately, as the law stands, there is nothing James can do about this.

Since James will not pay the unreasonable increase in rent, the landlord has said they will evict James with 2 months' notice from the end of his tenancy period. Landlords currently have the right, under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, to evict tenants without having to prove fault, which is why it is sometimes called a "no-fault" ground for eviction.

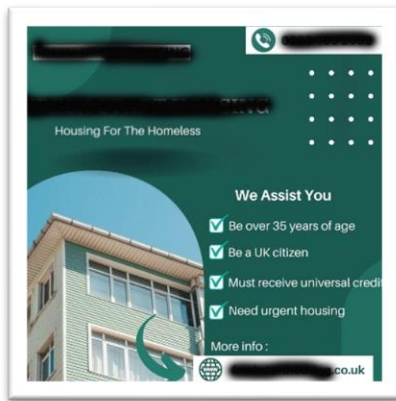
Section 21 means that tenants in the private rented sector feel insecure on short fixed-term tenancies such as James's. It is difficult for them to plan or call where they live a home. Children's education may be disrupted by having to move out of area, there can be an impact on mental health, and the cost of frequent moves can make it difficult for people to save for a deposit on their own home.



Rogue landlords operate with impunity in Richmond

James's landlord is unscrupulous, but unfortunately other clients tell us about landlords and agents which are even worse.

One rogue agency has been operating in Richmond and neighbouring boroughs for 10 years. This organisation operates under a variety of names and one of its companies was registered as a charity until the Charities Commission struck them off in 2016. They target homeless single people, over 35, who are receiving benefits. They can appear attractive to homeless people



without savings because no up-front deposit or references are required, and the landlord helps them to claim benefits. However, the quality of the accommodation provided is very poor, the maximum rent possible is claimed in rental benefits, and the agent pockets the difference between what is paid in benefits and the lower rent they pay to private landlords for substandard accommodation. They make £ millions every year by exploiting vulnerable people in this way, and they've been doing it for years.

One client, who we'll call Peter, rented from this agency for several years. Peter told us that his small studio flat, for which he paid over £1,100 a month in rent plus bills, was damp, the cooker did not work

and was not repaired for many months. When the landlord said he would increase the rent by 22%, backdated by several months, Peter said he was unable to pay. So the landlord evicted him under Section 21. Peter contacted us for advice because the landlord refused to return his deposit, which had been collected by the landlord in 20 monthly payments of £43 in addition to the rent.

Our Call for Action

It is high time that “no-fault” evictions under Section 21 were abolished. We are pleased that the government announced in May that they will introduce the Renters Reform Bill in this parliamentary session. One of the measures in the bill will be to ban Section 21 evictions to protect tenants from unscrupulous landlords such as James's and Peter's. This will allow renters to remain in their homes and communities and prevent landlords from terminating tenancies without giving any reason.

Another very welcome objective of the Bill is to improve the quality of privately rented homes. It is planned to set out a Decent Homes Standard which will place a legal obligation on landlords to improve homes which are of such low quality that they endanger the health of tenants. And a new Private Renters' Ombudsman will be created to settle disputes between renters and landlords quickly, without the cost of going to court.

This is all potentially good news for the private renters of Richmond. But it is vital that Section 21 is abolished as soon as possible, and that this is not delayed by the longer-term measures - such as the Decent Homes Standard and establishment of the Ombudsman - which will take time to discuss and implement.

Our other current campaigns

End Benefit Prejudice – in partnership with Richmond Council, we are campaigning to stop discrimination in the private rentals sector against people who receive benefits.

Cost of living crisis – Energy costs are soaring. In Richmond nearly 1 in 9 people cannot afford to pay their energy bills without cutting back on essential spending. We continue to support Citizens Advice's national campaign to focus more resources on people who are struggling on low incomes.

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@citizensadvicerichmond.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](#).