



**Richmond**

## Campaigning Update 14 — March 2022

CitizensAdviceRichmond.org

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We helped 950 local people in Richmond with 2,850 advice issues during February 2022. Benefits (1,100 issues) and housing (370 issues) generated the most enquiries, while debt and money (230 issues) again featured prominently. In just one month we helped local people gain over £325,000 which they were due.

### End Benefit Prejudice campaign gathers momentum

Benefit prejudice is rife in Richmond

We are campaigning to stop people who receive benefits from being unlawfully locked out of the private rental market by landlords and letting agents who discriminate against them. We are delighted that Richmond Council has joined our campaign and has highlighted the unfairness of Benefit Prejudice on their website, on social media and with the local press and radio. Our campaign has been gathering momentum, with support from Shelter, Richmond charities and other Citizens Advice bureaux.

The private rented sector is an important source of housing in Richmond upon Thames. Of the 90,000 households in the borough, about 1 in 5 is privately rented: a total of 17,500 households. So if people are locked out of the private rental market by benefit prejudice, it severely reduces their choice of a new home.

There is an acute shortage of social housing in the borough - only about 350 social housing properties become available to rent each year, over half of which are bedsits or 1-bedroom flats, and so are not suitable for families.

Sadly, benefit prejudice is widespread in Richmond in 2022. In the month since our last *Campaigning Update* more people facing this unlawful discrimination asked us for advice about what to do. Here are two examples (names have been changed):



**Adriana** has been given notice to leave her privately rented home. She faces significant discrimination because she receives some benefits. One local agent told her that their landlords would not rent to her, while two others have failed to return calls or respond to enquiries about suitable properties. Adriana and her partner both work and have an impeccable record of paying their rent on time. Unable to find a property to rent, Adriana has been forced to make a homelessness application to Richmond Council.

**Sara** is a single mother who has been living with her three children in a 1-bedroom flat in Richmond borough for many years. As the children grow older, the family's overcrowding becomes more difficult for them to manage. One child sleeps in the lounge, while the other two share their mother's bedroom. Sara has been looking for a 2-bedroom flat in the private rental market, but she says that because she receives Universal Credit letting agents have refused to deal with her. So, for the time being, Sara and her three kids must remain in their overcrowded flat.

Benefit prejudice is based on unfounded myths and prejudices. Many people who receive benefits have excellent records of paying their rents in full and on time. They look after their homes. Two in five people who receive Universal Credit in Richmond borough are in work - 85% of people receiving benefits in Richmond either work or are looking for work.

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## Our Calls for Action

Our campaign to End Benefit Prejudice aims to change the attitudes and actions of landlords and lettings 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. We plan to distribute a list of letting agents in Richmond upon Thames who have told us that they will not discriminate against people who receive benefits.

**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.

## Support the campaign to End Benefit Prejudice

- We have been posting regularly on Twitter (@CA\_RMD) and Facebook (@CitizensAdviceRichmond). 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@citizensadviserichmond.org](mailto:campaigns@citizensadviserichmond.org)

## Our other current campaigns

**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 are campaigning to persuade the Chancellor to increase benefits by today's inflation amount, not the much lower rate from 2021 that he's planning to use.

**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@citizensadviserichmond.org](mailto:campaigns@citizensadviserichmond.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](#).