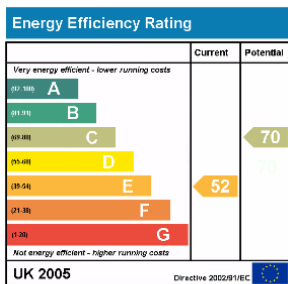


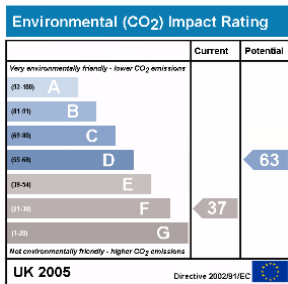


During February 2023 we helped 731 local people in Richmond with 2,100 advice issues. Benefits (530 issues), housing (360 issues) and debt (190 issues) generated the most enquiries. 226 Richmond residents asked us how to obtain charitable support and food bank vouchers.

Energy inefficient homes waste residents' money and cause illness



All buildings need an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) when they are built, sold or rented. An EPC sets out how efficient a property is, from band A (most energy efficient) to G (least energy efficient). An EPC also sets out simple steps that can be taken to reduce energy use and save money. Some things can be done by householders, such as using energy efficient light bulbs, turning down thermostats and using draught excluders. But some things have to be done by the landlord or home owner, such as installing or improving wall or floor insulation, insulating hot water systems, repairing leaks/dampness and improving the energy efficiency of doors and windows.



Unfortunately, many people come to us for advice about what to do when their landlords won't repair faults which reduce the energy efficiency of their rented home. This leads to higher than necessary energy bills, and sometimes to severe illness. It is a problem in both the private and social housing rental sectors.

For example, "Sara" is a young woman who lives in a home in multiple occupation. There is mould in several of the rooms in her home. The landlord has failed to respond adequately, despite many requests. One of the people who shares the house with Sara has developed long-standing respiratory problems. Sara and her housemates are worried that if they complain to their landlord they will be evicted. Sara came to us for advice about what she can do. As the law currently stands there is nothing to prevent her landlord from evicting her without cause (so-called Section 21 evictions). However, we are pleased that the government has confirmed that the Renters Reform Bill, which will abolish Section 21 evictions, will be introduced during the current parliamentary session.

The private rental sector is not the only culprit. Too many people come to us for advice about how to get their housing association landlords to respond to repair issues which reduce the energy efficiency of their homes. Very often people must resort to formal complaints procedures, and involve the Housing Ombudsman and their local MPs, before anything is done. Sometimes not even this works.

"Farah" lives with her children in a flat in the borough. She has been having long-standing problems in getting her housing association landlord to repair various problems in



her property, including damp/mould in a child's bedroom. The response has been so poor that Farah approached Citizens Advice Richmond to ask our advice, and we helped her to make a formal complaint. Farah has mental health issues. She told us that she has found it very hard to cope with the stress of trying to get her landlord to respond. Farah's GP has sent a letter to the landlord expressing concern about the breathing problems one of Farah's small children is experiencing. The GP's view is that mould inhalation is likely to be contributing to the child's health conditions. The child has recently had to be admitted to hospital with multiple chest infections. After a formal complaint, and the GP's letter, the housing association eventually began to act.



Farah's is not an isolated case. "Grace" has had damp issues in her housing association property going back three years, which have not been properly addressed by her landlord, causing her serious health issues. Her bathroom ceiling is black with mould, and the wall of her lounge is soaking wet. Having failed to get a satisfactory response from the housing association, we have, with Grace's permission, raised the issue with her MP.

Our Call for Action

Energy costs have soared, and we were pleased when the government helped by providing energy discounts, the energy price guarantee and other support for low income households. However, for many people energy bills would be lower in the first place if landlords responded adequately to the need to improve energy efficiency by carrying out repairs promptly, particularly to address issues such as damp/mould, poorly fitted windows and doors and inadequate insulation.

We would like to see more pressure put on landlords, in both the social housing and private sectors, to address these shortcomings. One of our local MPs, Sarah Olney, is currently introducing a Private Members Bill in Parliament designed to ensure that all domestic properties achieve at least EPC Band C by 2033. We support this, and other measures which would lead to more energy efficient homes – and hence to lower bills, a lower carbon future and better health.

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.

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.

Cost of living crisis – Energy costs are soaring. In Richmond far too many 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.

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](#).