



Richmond Council's Tenants' Champion

Annual Report

April 2021 - March 2022

Councillor Alan Juriansz

I am delighted to present this annual report reflecting my year in the role of Tenants' Champion.

Over the last year I have spoken to hundreds of Richmond borough residents, bringing me complaints which they were struggling to get addressed by their housing association landlords. I have done my best to listen and represent their concerns as it is in everyone's interests to resolve problems quickly and learn from mistakes. I am particularly grateful to the staff at the housing associations who have helped work towards resolutions.

The Tenants' Champion has always encouraged joint working across agencies to break down barriers to get good outcomes for residents. This year I have continued to do this by hosting the twice-yearly Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum and other meetings to find solutions in complex situations. Understanding and appreciating the different perspectives and working practices of staff from housing associations, the police, mental health services, social services and the voluntary sector can be the key to unblocking barriers and finding solutions.

I have also visited many of the estates around the Borough to see the variety of homes that we have in the Borough for social housing tenants from flat conversions in large older houses which can be difficult to soundproof to estates of family homes where many of the houses have been sold under the right to buy legislation. It was interesting to see how different associations work together. I saw how the support needs of vulnerable residents were addressed in supported accommodation where one association owned and managed the building while another provided the specialist support.

As Tenants' Champion I try to identify themes from my casework, and I have highlighted some of the issues later in my report.

I have also been pleased to note the work started last year, where the Council is "leading the way in resident engagement".



The charts at Appendix 1 have been updated to show how the Borough's housing associations are doing in key areas. In addition, the Community Ambassador scheme has been launched which is a fabulous new initiative to give housing association residents more of a voice and to get things done.

As I move on to become the vice chair of Policy and Performance Review Board, I am handing on the role of Tenants' Champion to my colleague Cllr Paulina Vassileva, but I will continue to support her with ongoing cases to ensure a smooth handover.



Cllr Juriansz looking at a housing scheme in Lion Road, with MTVH's Julie Shuter and Care Manager Marie Tambou

'MTVH continue to appreciate the relationships we have built with colleagues across Richmond Council. A highlight in 2021-22 was the opportunity to work with The Richmond Borough's Tenants' Champion to learn from individual complaints and other themes as discussed in-person and at the Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum.'

Julie Shuter, Regional Director, South and South London, MTVH

How the service works

Residents can access the Tenants' Champion service by filling out a short on-line form found on the Richmond Council website: [Tenants' Champion - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames](#) or they can ring the Council's contact centre on 0208 891 1411 where trained staff will log the enquiry.

Once the form has been received, I will arrange to have a personal telephone call, usually within a week, with the resident. This is vitally important as it enables me to properly listen to concerns, empathise and to assess if and how I can help. Often by the time the resident has contacted the Tenants' Champion service, they are really fed up and the personal contact can make a big difference to them feeling supported. I will then follow things up with their housing association as required and monitor things until conclusion.

Households Helped

This year the Tenants' Champion service assisted 189 households (compared with 164 the previous year). Of these 161 were new cases (compared with 131 last year). The balance consisted of cases from previous years that continue to require ongoing support. 33 of the new cases were forwarded to the relevant ward councillor for help in the first instance.

Of the new cases there were:

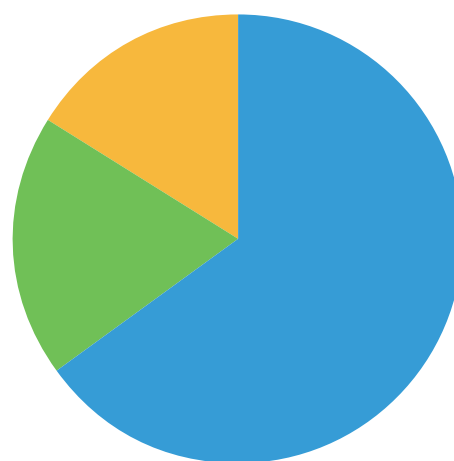
122 Repairs (65%)

30 Transfers (16%)

36 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) (19%)

Total 188

(NB some cases have more than one issue)



65%
122 Repairs

19%
36 Anti-Social
Behaviour (ASB)

16%
30 Transfers

Working with Housing Associations and other partners

Residents from nine different housing associations approached the Service for help this year. These included Richmond Housing Partnership; PA Housing; L&Q; MTVH; Places for People; Home Group; A2Dominion; Network Homes and Mount Green.

Meetings continue to take place with senior staff from the four main housing associations with the most homes in the Borough – RHP, PA Housing, MTVH and L&Q to enable staff and service updates to take place, review specific cases and to pick up on more general issues of

concern. We have also initiated monthly meetings with the complaints managers of RHP and PA Housing who have the largest stock in the borough to work through and resolve the back log of cases formed because of the pandemic.



Cllr Juriansz and Cllr Vassileva with PA Housing's Mohammed Umerji and Brooke Rattledge

“The Tenants' Champion meetings helps PA get a different feel for what our customers' frustrations are and enables the complaints team to work with the business to address any issues. Whilst previously they were twice yearly, through 2022 we have met monthly and gained traction on several cases and managed to close many too. This has helped ensure our residents are not kept waiting and having to chase us and has also highlighted areas for improvement within PA to ensure we respond to queries in full and set clear expectations for our residents. The Tenants' Champion service prompts good discussion, challenging questions and has been great insight in to how we can improve our customer satisfaction’

Ian Watts, Executive Director of Customer Services, PA Housing

The Tenants' Champion service is always happy to work with other partners to provide better outcomes for residents. Over the last year there has been beneficial liaison with advocates from Citizens Advice, RUILS, Richmond Aid and Rethink Mental Illness. The service has also liaised with the two MP's offices covering the Borough (Twickenham and Richmond Park). The Tenants' Champion service tries not to 'double up' on cases at the same time as the MP as we find it tends to duplicate resources and slows down responses.

We have also worked closely with the Council's community safety team attending monthly CMARAC meetings to try to resolve more complex cases and several professionals' meetings with the police; social services; fire service; mental health services and housing associations where ASB has begun to affect multiple neighbours and is a community problem.

'After an informative talk from Cllr Juriansz at the Ruils – Independent Living AGM, Ruils staff have been working closely with him and his team to resolve complex housing issues for Richmond residents. This link has also enabled proactive conversations that we hope will continue to influence practice and processes.'

Cathy Maker, CEO, RUILS



Cllr Juriansz with Cathy Maker CEO RUILS

The Community Ambassador Project / Resident Engagement

Further to the 'Leading the Way in Resident Engagement' report which reviewed resident participation arrangements across social housing landlords in Richmond, progress has been made on the Community Ambassador Project.

This is a new project the Council has introduced to support people living in social housing who want to make improvements to their local area.

For residents living in social housing, there is the opportunity for them to express what they like about the neighbourhood around their home, and any areas where they would like to make improvements.

The Council is helping residents with:

- organising activities to connect with their neighbours
- understanding how to apply for funding from their housing association and the Council
- setting up community gardens, and making other changes to improve the environment on their estates
- accessing a peer support network - sharing ideas, support and advice with other Community Ambassadors
- building better dialogue with the Council and their housing association

The Council is also working closely with Richmond's many excellent voluntary sector organisations to support residents to access advice on finances, rising fuel costs, health and wellbeing.

In March 2021, the Council ran training for our registered Community Ambassadors which covered:

- Working with the Council and housing associations
- Organising small, local events
- Collaborating with community groups

Attendees gave the session an average rating of 9.8 out of 10. Residents that are interested in accessing this type of training and support, can contact the team for information, details of which can be found on richmond.gov.uk/community_ambassadors

For occasional email updates, residents can contact the following email address to be added to a mailing list for information about events, funding and relevant projects: housingcommunityambassadors@richmond.gov.uk

Report on Casework

Repairs

Most complaints to the Tenants' Champion service this year have been in relation to repairs issues. This has been a cause for concern and the Tenants' Champion has raised this in his meetings with the main housing associations. A perfect storm of an increased number of repair requests following the easing of lockdown restrictions, alongside contractors having problems with material supplies and recruiting and retaining good trades people together with turnover and vacancies in the housing association teams, seems to have led to a spike in complaints.

The housing associations have been seeking to address these issues internally with new contractors being appointed and even consideration being given to taking the maintenance services in house. My role as the Tenants' Champion has endeavoured to keep a focus on the detail of complaints and identify themes, so particular areas of concern can be identified. Over the last six months, I have met monthly with the complaints managers of RHP and PA Housing in a joint effort to address these issues.

A key repeat concern has been issues with condensation and mould. This is often exacerbated by overcrowding and the cost of heating and is therefore often linked to someone's desire to move property. We try to focus on what can be achieved reasonably quickly to make the home safer by ensuring damp, condensation and mould issues are dealt with as soon as possible.



Cllr Juriansz meeting with Angelique Banton and Claire Wise, MTVH

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

The Tenants' Champion continues to be contacted by residents who are suffering from ASB.

The Tenants' Champion service takes part in the monthly Community Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (CMARAC). This forum is facilitated by the Council's community safety team and deals with complex, often high-risk cases where information is shared between agencies (such as housing associations, police, NHS mental health, adult social care etc) to safeguard victims and witnesses and prevent further victimisation. As I attend this forum I can listen to the discussion and represent issues of concern. Often in complex cases, because the discussions are confidential, residents that might have been affected by the ASB but are not party to this information worry that nothing is being done. Whilst I cannot repeat confidential information, being part of this process often enables me to reassure residents or local ward councillors that I am scrutinising the process as a relatively impartial third party and can confirm that action is being taken behind the scenes to help resolve issues.

One of the issues I have raised for discussion is around how housing associations deal with noise nuisance. When this reaches statutory levels, this can be more straightforward. However, often it does not reach statutory levels but still causes high levels of distress. The problem of this low-level noise nuisance has increased significantly during the pandemic as many more people are working from home during the day and need a quieter environment than before.

Most of the housing associations now encourage their residents to use the noise app which can be downloaded onto a mobile phone and is a useful tool in assessing the extent of the problem. It can also be used as evidence where enforcement is appropriate. Diary entries are sometimes encouraged too as evidence is the key to successful enforcement. Where there is a difference in lifestyle, I often encourage mediation between the neighbours which the housing associations will offer as a way of trying to come to a compromise. There also seems to be a variation in Tenancy agreements – some say no hard flooring in flats above ground floors, which can help. Encouraging the laying of carpets and rugs can also make a difference and is sometimes supported

financially by housing associations. Full sound insulation and acoustic separation works are less common due to the high cost.

For many this can have a real impact on their mental health with the stress affecting the whole family and often causing an ongoing lack of sleep. We can direct tenants to support from the well-being services and other support services including social services when necessary.

Social prescribing workers have also tried to work with residents – particularly those who have been stuck at home for a long time over the pandemic, to engage in activities outside of the home, which at least gives them a break.

Transfers

The Tenants' Champion service is always concerned to hear from people who desperately want or need to move properties within the social housing sector. It is important to be clear with those who contact the service that I cannot bypass the systems that are in place that are designed to be fair to everyone. However, I do spend some time checking that people are on the right transfer lists and have registered with the home swapping websites and that any relevant medical information has been correctly assessed. To understand the systems properly, I met this year with a range of the Council's own staff who are responsible for administering the housing register. The Head of Housing Services (Assessment and Adaptation) was invited to the Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum to update partners on the service. Unfortunately, the reality is that from 1 April 2021-28 February 2022 there were 5,177 people on the Housing register with only 243 being rehoused.

One area I have been keen to explore is what housing associations do to encourage residents in accommodation larger than their needs to downsize to release larger accommodation. I attended a 'downsizers forum' organised by the Council where there was a real focus on identifying the barriers to downsizing that prevent people moving. The Council does run the Sponsored Moves scheme [Moving or downsizing - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames](#) with a cash incentive and practical help and the housing associations also give priority to downsizers.

'RHP recognises the importance of collaborative working through the Tenants' Champion service to help our customers when they need it most. We have a great working relationship with Cllr Juriansz as the Tenants' Champion and appreciate his work supporting many customers to seek resolutions to issues they have raised. We both recognise the importance of partnership working and seeking resolutions to often complex issues. We would like to thank Cllr Juriansz for his support and assistance and look forward to working with a new Tenants' Champion this year.'

Robert Dobbs, Customer Services Director, RHP

We know there are many tenants registered as wanting to downsize who struggle to find suitable accommodation to downsize to. Finding a solution to this will release a significant number of larger homes that are in great demand for overcrowded families.

I also represent concerns to the Council's administration about this issue and the pressing need for more social housing to be built within the Borough. The challenge in the Richmond Borough is to find sites that our housing association partners can develop on and cover the high cost of acquisition by building in sufficient density to make the finances stack up, enabling the properties to be let at genuinely affordable rents to those who need them while also not damaging the local environment and retaining local support. Despite these challenges, the housing department continues to work with our housing association partners to maximise possibilities and have managed to build up a significant pipeline which will see as many as 500 homes over the next four years.

Housing officers are also working on a scheme to buy back ex council houses with help from Greater London Authority (GLA) grant funding which will have a positive impact on the most serious cases in temporary housing and overcrowded flats.

As a result of the pandemic there was a reduction in the number of new allocations of housing but this year there is expected to be over 400 allocations which is a substantial increase on previous years and will make a real difference to many families that have been waiting on the housing register.

My casework has also highlighted the need for home extensions as an alternative to moving and I have raised this with the Council's development team who are working with the housing associations to develop a scheme to provide funding for extensions which could solve some overcrowding situations without the complication of needing to move.

Communication around complaints

The Tenants' Champion service continues to keep an eye on how clear and easy it is for residents to make a complaint to their housing association landlords as this is always encouraged before they come to the Tenants' Champion service for help.

The pandemic has no doubt been a significant factor in the increase in complaints about communication and I have raised this issue with the housing associations' leadership. Additional staff have been taken on to deal with this problem and progress appears to be being made.

Recent concerns have particularly focused on how housing associations make reasonable adjustments to residents who have mental health concerns, are autistic, have ADHD or other sensory issues. Understanding and awareness of these conditions as well as considerate and clear communication can make a big difference to welfare. This will be something that will be followed up over the next year.

The Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum

The Tenants' Champion service works to encourage good joint working practices with partners by hosting the twice-yearly Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum. This year the September meeting was held on-line over a TEAMS meeting but the March meeting resumed 'in person' at the Council offices in Twickenham, providing an opportunity for some colleagues to meet 'face to face' after two years.

These meetings give an opportunity for agencies including the Council's community safety team, adult social services, housing associations, police, fire brigade, NHS mental health services and voluntary sector organisations to share learning from the cases the Tenants' Champion service has dealt with through the year and to discuss issues and themes that have emerged where a joint approach can make a big difference.

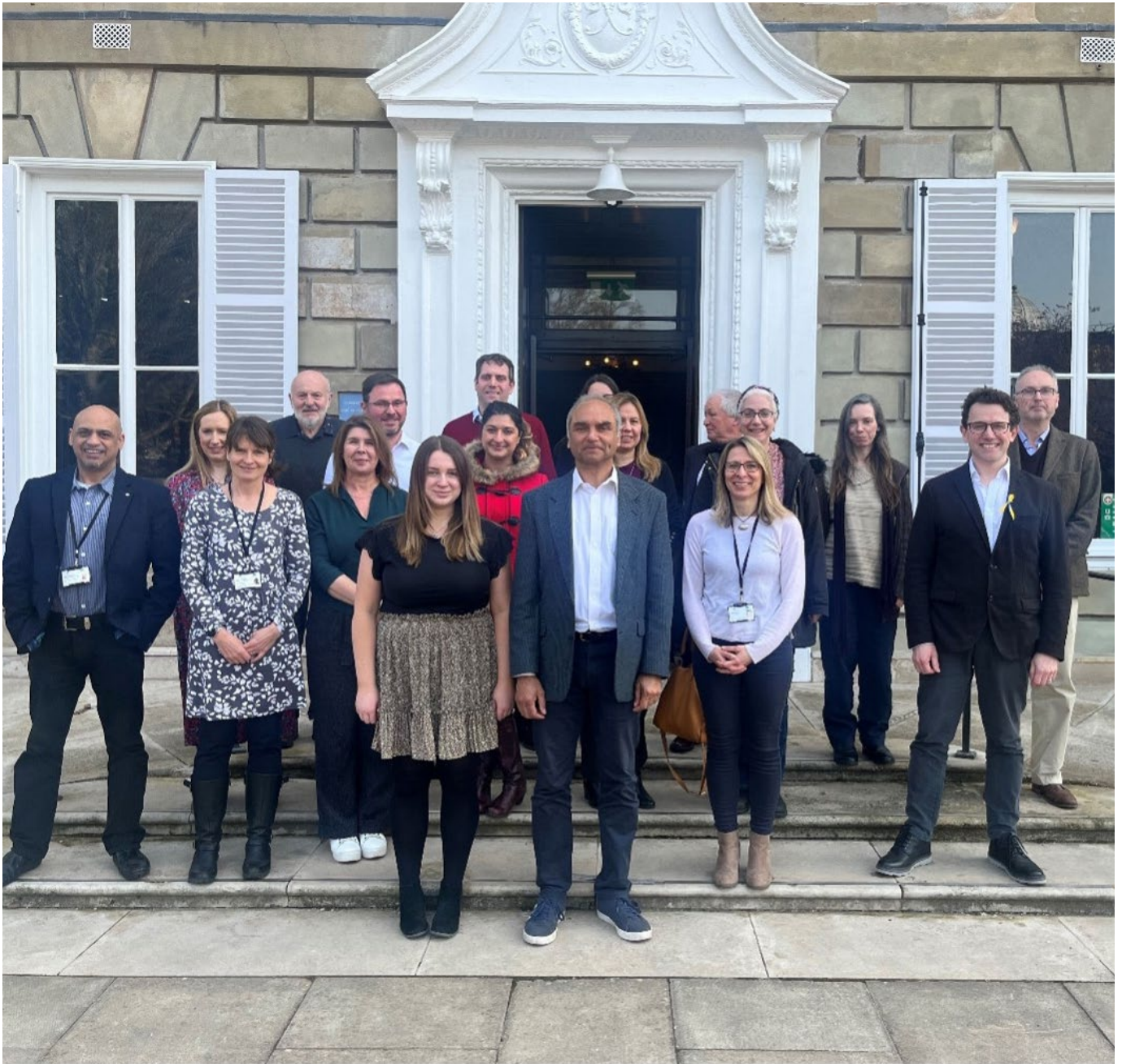
This year some issues discussed have included:

- Updates from the Mental Health Social care teams on how floating support and supported housing was working in the Borough
- Updates from the South West London and St Georges Mental Health trust on how joint working had been

enhanced by the Trust's participation in joint agency meetings such as the CMARAC and housing sub-group. We also heard about a successful bid to fund new mental health worker posts in GP surgeries.

- Ongoing discussions to check that the Hospital Discharge and Mental Health Joint working protocols are working and hearing about how operational groups have been set up to make sure these are working in a practical way.
- We heard about the successful domestic abuse housing alliance accreditation for Richmond Council which has helped change the culture and awareness in the organisation for staff to feel confident to deal with domestic abuse.
- We discussed approaches for tackling noise nuisance where this does not hit statutory levels.

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Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum meeting, March 2022

- We heard from the Council's Community safety team about how the CMARAC and Community Triggers were working
- The Council's Head of Housing Services gave a clear presentation about how the housing register works, explaining that this was not a fast route into housing.
- The Council's Specialist Occupational Therapist explained her role in helping to make sure new homes within the Borough were designed and built to be inclusive and accessible. This includes physical disability but also about how to make the environment more dementia friendly or to enhance the environment for autistic people or those with sensory needs.
- We heard about the Green Homes Grant, aimed at those on low incomes, either owner occupiers or renters to improve homes with poor energy efficiency.

'As a long-standing member of the Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum it has been positive to see how the membership has evolved and grown over time. The importance of partnership working continues to be a particular focus of the leadership under Cllr Alan Juriansz and I have been pleased to see a gradual increase in voluntary & community sector involvement in the forum. Encouraging joint working between statutory and voluntary & community sector services breaks down barriers and improves professional relationships and knowledge which can benefit residents. The opportunity for constructive discussion, increasing understanding and making new connections between services, particularly in areas such as mental health support, is especially valuable and I hope will continue.'

Kathryn Williamson, Director, Richmond CVS

The new Tenants' Champion is Cllr Paulina Vassileva



Aims for the year ahead:

- 1 Continue to offer a Tenants' Champion service for Richmond Borough's housing association tenants and leaseholders
- 2 To host the twice yearly 'Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum'. This will include making sure the multi-agency Mental Health and Housing Joint Working and Hospital Discharge Protocols are working and kept up to date. This may also involve helping to facilitate any training of interest to partners
- 3 To continue to analyse themes, trends and volumes in casework to see how housing associations' management practices are affecting residents and to promote good practice in key areas.
- 4 Maintain a focus on seeking effective joint working to ensure that services are working well together, particularly with unresolved cases involving anti-social behaviour
- 5 Progress work to champion best practice in how housing associations engage with residents and work with them to ensure standards in the Richmond Borough lead the way
- 6 Continue to report back with a yearly update on changes and improvements made by housing associations in tenant and leaseholder engagement as an appendix to this annual report

Appendix 1

Housing associations and tenant and leaseholder engagement – update to the tables included in the Leading the Way in Resident Engagement report first published in 2020.

Housing Association	Residents were consulted on participation arrangements	Residents were actively involved in reviewing participation arrangements	Residents sit on the Board	Residents sit on other Committees which feed directly into the Board	Scrutiny groups for Residents	Publish annual report	Publish regular performance data	Publish Service standards	Mystery shopping scheme	Estate Inspector scheme
A2 Dominion	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Anchor Hanover	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Guinness Trust	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
L&Q	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Metropolitan Thames Valley	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗ (complaint data is published)	✗	✓	✓
Notting Hill Genesis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
PA Housing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	Under review	✓
Places for People	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Richmond Housing Partnership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Under Review	Supporting Tenants Champion Community Ambassador Programme which will achieve this
Shepherds Bush Housing Group	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Under review	✗	Currently being recruited

Housing association	Complaints panel with residents	Feedback from resident involvement provided	Newsletter for residents	Formal support for Residents' Associations	Recognition schemes	Funding streams for residents to access	Periodic surveys	Transactional surveys
A2 Dominion	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Anchor Hanover	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Guinness Trust	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
L&Q	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Metropolitan Thames Valley	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Notting Hill Genesis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PA Housing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Places for People	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Richmond Housing Partnership	✗ No formal panel, however resident views on our Complaints Service sought via our Customer Scrutiny Group during 2021, with Action Plan being implemented in 2022	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Shepherds Bush Housing Group	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓

Appendix 2: Richmond upon Thames Private Registered Provider Stock 2020/21.

Housing Associations	General Needs - self contained units	Housing for older people units	Total:
A2 Dominion	99	0	99
Anchor Hanover	0	39	39
Guinness Trust	146	28	174
L&Q	494	84	578
Metropolitan Thames Valley	349	0	349
Notting Hill Genesis	79	0	79
PA Housing	1425	192	1617
Places for People	145	0	145
Richmond Housing Partnership	5861	391	6252
Shepherds Bush Housing group	5	0	5
Total	8603	734	9337

Thanks from Residents:

"I would like to thank you very much for your assistance, patience and understanding during that time, it was greatly appreciated, and contributed to the outcome." (LS)

"A fair outcome at last. Thank you for your help and advice". (DL)

"Thank you for all your support. I had a lovely night's sleep last night and can finally spend relaxing time in my bedroom. I'll have a lovely Christmas (ER)

"Thank you, I actually had the survey and am now damp free, for now - fingers crossed" (SP)

"Thank you very much for your help which is much appreciated." (SC)

"Thanks very much for your call and follow up email. I appreciate your help with this" (CD)

"Thank you for all your support and assistance. My complaint is now resolved without having to escalate to stage 2". (CC)

"Thanks a lot for your help - I am sure without your involvement I would still be without water today." (KMCP)

"Cllr Alan Juriansz has been by my side all through last year, when having a very difficult time with my housing association. The Tenants' Champion service is still there for me to help me communicate and be heard by my housing association. When needed, Cllr Juriansz pushed the boat out for me and went that extra mile to make sure I was and am being treated fairly. Having the Tenants Champion around to be the middle ground is much needed in this unfair society where people's voices need to be heard and something pushed to be done." (AL)

"Thank you for your help and advice" (SH)

"Thank you and very much appreciated – it's good to know you are there." (JdC)

"Once again, thank you so much for your assistance it is really appreciated." (KW)

"I wish to thank Cllr Juriansz for the help and kind support he has given to me over this dreadful period." (JK)