



Locked Out: The Housing Crisis Facing Disabled People in Richmond

A co-produced framework for change

2026



RAID (also known as Richmond AID) is a user-led organisation run by and for Deaf and Disabled people. We support more than 4000 Disabled people each year through advice, information and support services, and we use what people tell us to highlight the issues that matter most to our community.

See our website for information www.raid.charity

Acknowledgements

We are especially grateful to the Disabled people who shared their lived experiences with openness and generosity. Your voices, insight and determination are the foundation of this work, and it is a privilege to reflect your experiences here.

We also thank the RAID advice team for their commitment and support throughout the project. We are sincerely appreciative of the guidance and backing of Inclusion London and Trust for London in making this project possible.

Authors

Andrea Rosés Novella, Campaigns Officer, RAID

Laura Kent, Campaigns Officer, RAID

Ethics and data protection

This report was co-produced with people with lived experience and conducted in line with ethical best practice. We provided all interview and focus group participants with clear, accessible information about the purpose of the project and how we would use their contributions. We obtained informed consent from all participants prior to their involvement, including consent to collect, store, and use their data for this report. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms have been assigned to all individuals featured in case studies.

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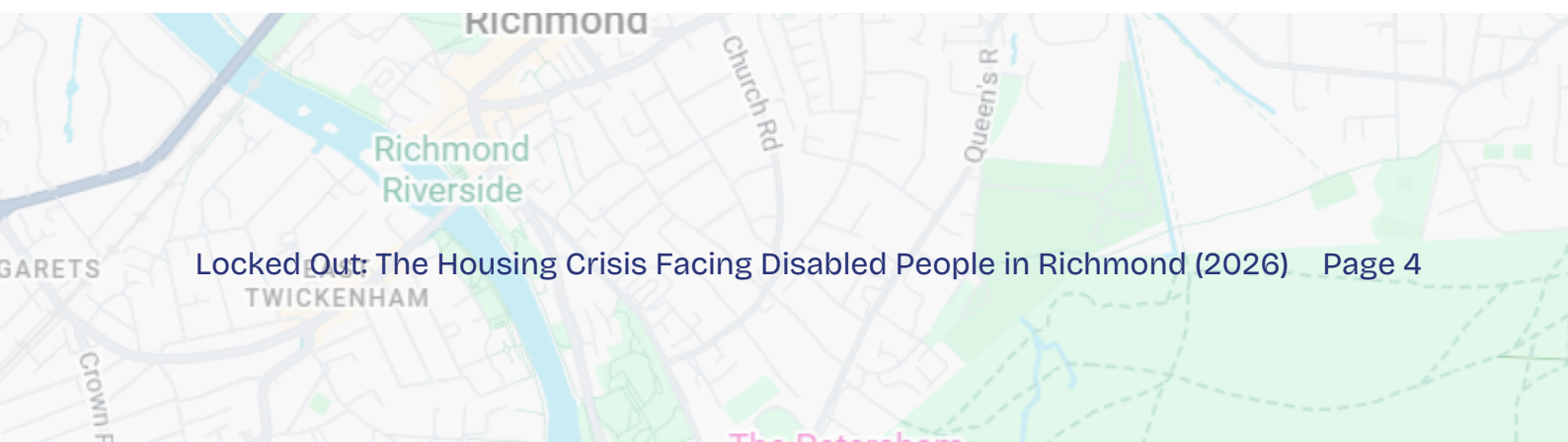


Executive Summary

Across Richmond, Deaf and Disabled residents are navigating a housing system under increasing pressure. As the availability of suitable, affordable homes declines, the impact on people's health, independence and ability to plan for the future is becoming increasingly clear. These challenges are often compounded by accessibility barriers like those within the social housing allocation process and homelessness forms themselves, making it harder for people to secure the homes that meet their needs. At RAID, we hear every day from residents striving to live well in homes that often fall short of what they need.

Over the past two years, **more than 350 Disabled people living in the Richmond borough have engaged with this campaign**, with over 50 participating in our housing forum, workshops, focus groups, and case study interviews to share their experiences, ideas, and priorities for change. Drawing on these contributions, alongside insights from our advice work, this report brings together lived experience, frontline evidence, and local data to better understand the barriers people face and how these affect their everyday lives.

This report centres the **voices and lived experiences of Disabled people**, highlighting key challenges and identifying practical, achievable steps for improvement. We recognise that partners across the borough, including the Council, housing associations, voluntary organisations and community services share our commitment to improving the system and want to see better outcomes for Disabled people. Together, we recognise that we can and must do more.



This report outlines the main challenges affecting daily life and sets out opportunities for meaningful, long-term change. Our recommendations focus on:

- **Stronger accountability and collaboration** between the Council, housing providers, voluntary organisations and residents.
- **Clearer communication and co-production** with Disabled people at every stage of decision-making.
- **Immediate, short-term actions** that can improve people's living conditions now, alongside **longer-term reforms** to create a more inclusive and accessible housing system in Richmond.

Through shared commitment and coordinated action, we can strengthen Richmond's housing system. By working alongside Disabled people and local partners, we can create a borough where every Disabled person can access a home that provides safety, stability, and the foundations for independent living.



Introduction

Housing shapes every part of life. It influences a person's health, independence, daily routines, and ability to feel connected to the community. For Deaf and Disabled people in Richmond, having the right home is often the difference between thriving and simply coping. Yet what we hear, time and time again, is that **too many people are still struggling to access housing that meets even their most basic needs.**

"I live in a flat with my son. We only have a bath, so I can't shower on my own anymore. My son has to wash me with a cloth and wipes while I'm lying in bed [...] It's hard not to feel like I've lost my dignity."

— Social housing tenant, interview

Across the borough, the housing system is under significant strain. Demand for affordable, suitable homes far outstrips supply, and Deaf and Disabled residents often face limited options before they even begin the process. Many residents struggle to navigate the housing options pathway, and when services lack accessibility, clarity, or flexibility, they face even greater barriers to securing a home that supports their independence.

Despite these challenges, residents, the Council, housing associations, voluntary organisations, and community partners across Richmond continue to show **strong commitment and determination**. We share an understanding that the system must work better, and we know that **meaningful solutions** will come from listening to those most affected and working collaboratively to deliver change.

There are reasons to be optimistic. Richmond Council's Social Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP) is helping to build stronger relationships with housing providers and strengthen accountability for their actions, while Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) bringing its repairs service in-house presents a real opportunity to improve both accountability and responsiveness.

Since the release of the disrepairs report led by RUILS, in collaboration with RAID and other organisations, there has been a noticeable improvement in relationships between local organisations and tenants of RHP and PA Housing, alongside better communication and more proactive initiatives. Disabled residents are ready to work alongside these partners to ensure these changes lead to meaningful and lasting results.

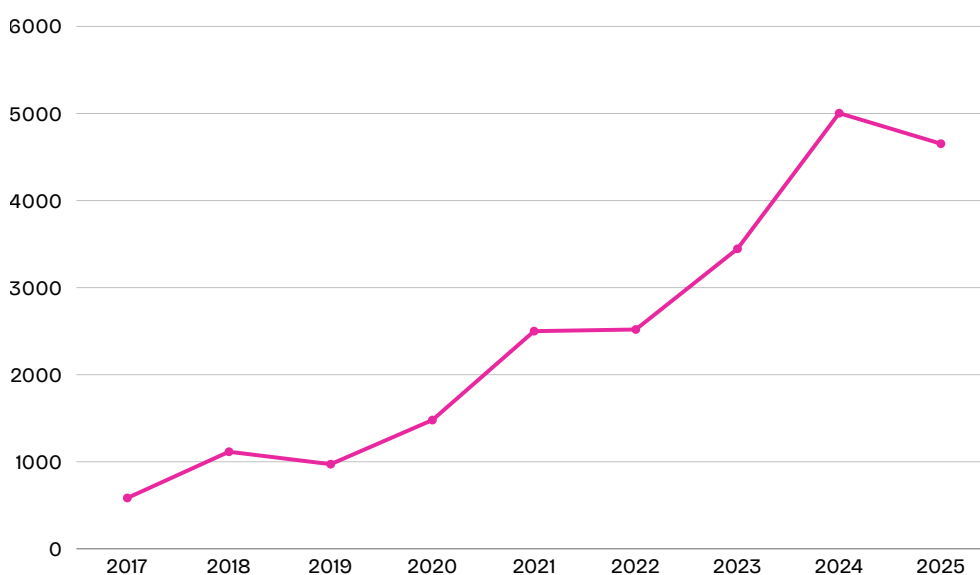
This report brings together the experiences of Deaf and Disabled people who have engaged with RAID through our advice work, forums, workshops, interviews and focus groups. Through their contributions, we highlight not only the **barriers** within the current housing system, but also the **strengths** within the borough and the areas where improvements are both possible and necessary.

Accessible, suitable housing benefits everyone. With Richmond's strong community networks, active voluntary sector and shared desire for progress, there is a real opportunity to make lasting positive change. By addressing the barriers within the system and **working together** with clarity, accountability and compassion, we can ensure that every Disabled person in Richmond has a home that supports their independence, dignity and wellbeing.

About our research

In recent years, housing has emerged as the most urgent and complex issue faced by the people we support. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, **demand for housing-related advice has increased** dramatically and now represents the largest area of our work. Between 2017 and 2025, RAID's overall client interactions grew by 189%, while housing-related contacts rose by more than 756%.^[1] This sharp increase reflects the growing number of Deaf and Disabled residents living in accommodation that is inaccessible, unsafe, or fundamentally unsuitable for their needs, often with very limited options to move elsewhere.

Number of housing-related client contacts with RAID, 2017-2025



As a result, RAID has become a key source of specialist housing support within the borough. We help residents navigate homelessness, Disabled Facilities Grants, disrepairs, and the housing register and allocation systems—processes that are often inaccessible without dedicated support. In 2024, we advised **550 Deaf and Disabled residents** on housing issues.^[2]

[1] Data obtained from RAID's records

[2] Data obtained from RAID's records

This increase coincided with the government releasing its plans for the Rent Reform Bill, which created further **demand** on already overstretched services. Local people faced homelessness as landlords used Section 21 notices to evict tenants in order to sell their properties, while Richmond's competitive rental market and high rents left many with no choice but to seek support. In 2025, we saw a decrease— **supporting 433 people** through the year- but this remains a significant number, and the situations people present with have often reached a crisis point.

The impact of **local and national legislative changes** on the housing market continues to place pressure on both our clients and our small team of advisors. Recent developments such as **Awaab's Law**, which aims to ensure faster action on dangerous damp and mould in social housing, are a welcome step forward in protecting tenants' health and improving living conditions. We are hopeful that the **Renters' Rights Act**, coming into force on 1 May 2026, will bring positive change by ending Section 21 'no-fault' evictions, banning rental bidding wars, and removing blanket bans on people in receipt of benefits. However, meaningful progress will require sustained action and ongoing scrutiny.

The demand we see highlights both the severity of the housing crisis for Deaf and Disabled people and the vital role RAID plays in offering direct support while advocating for long-term improvements. As more residents sought help, we observed recurring patterns. To build a clearer and more robust understanding, we combined evidence from our advice work with desk research, policy analysis, and **co-production**.

This report aims to highlight the key issues and themes facing Deaf and Disabled people and to propose **practical, collaborative solutions**. Disabled people must continue to be central in shaping the local responses that will determine their future.

More than ever, our community's experiences show that genuine progress is only possible when Deaf and Disabled people lead the way in designing a housing system that finally works for everyone.

Accessible Housing

Accessible housing remains one of the most significant challenges facing Disabled residents in Richmond. While this is a local issue, the experiences shared with us reflect a wider London-wide and national **shortage** of homes that are genuinely accessible or adaptable. For many people, this is not simply a housing issue, but one that affects **independence, health, wellbeing and connection to the community.**

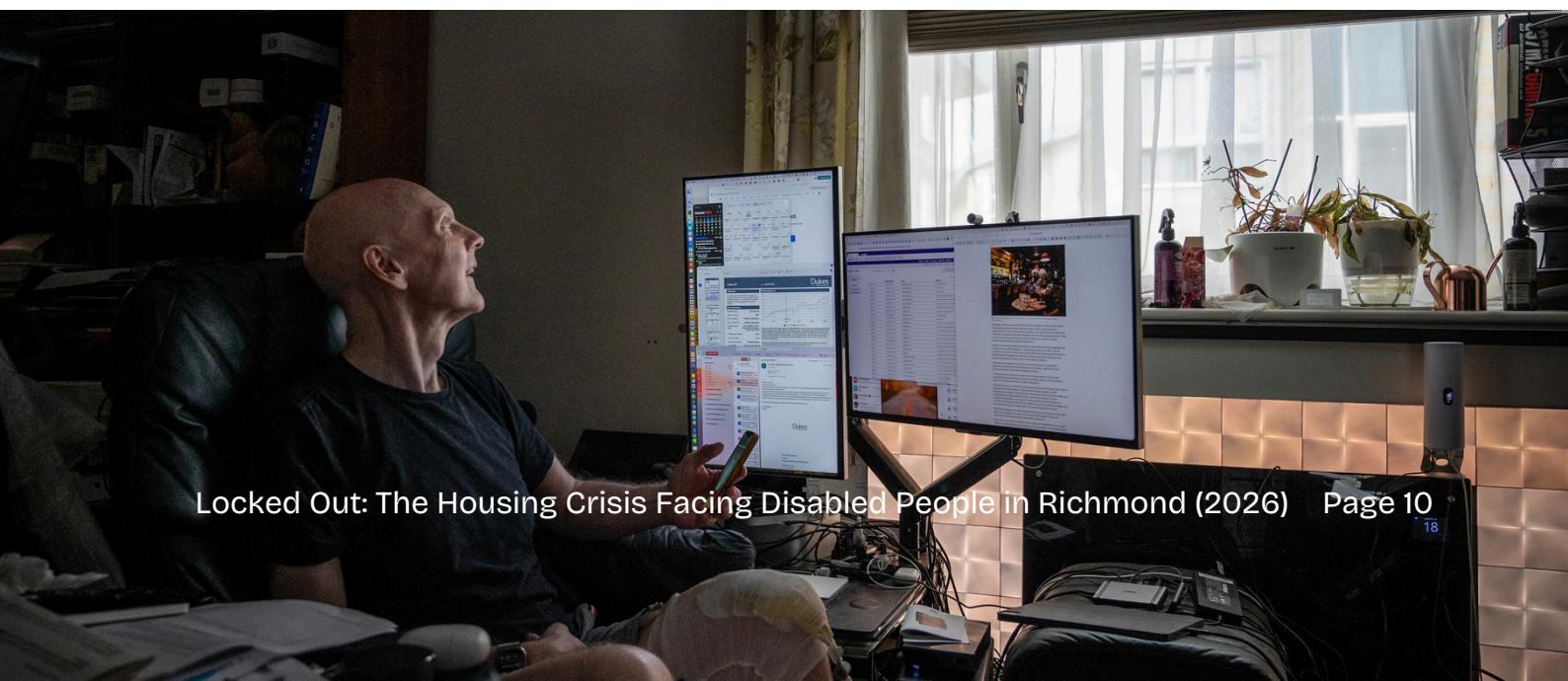
“My flat is on the third floor with no lift. After my stroke, I feel trapped and helpless. I just want to be able to sit outside when the weather is nice.”

— Social housing tenant, interview

Participants consistently told us that suitable housing feels **out of reach**, regardless of tenure. Many described living in homes that do not reflect their access needs, while facing long waits and limited options when seeking alternatives. Several people spoke about the **emotional toll** of feeling “stuck” in properties that restrict daily life.

“Being stuck in an unsuitable home wears you down.”

— Social housing tenant, interview



The scale of future need is also significant. Richmond Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2021) highlights a **growing requirement for wheelchair-user homes over the coming years**.^[3] Participants told us they worry that, without changes to delivery and allocation practices, more people will continue living in homes that limit independence and increase reliance on family or services.

Case Study: Anna's story

Anna is a wheelchair user in her late 20s who has lived for many years in a social housing property described as "level-access". In practice, the home does not meet her access needs. Doorways are too narrow, there is no downstairs bathroom, and there is insufficient space for essential equipment. The property does not meet M4(3) wheelchair-user standards and does not support independent living.

The kitchen presents the greatest barrier. There is not enough space to manoeuvre her wheelchair, and worktops, appliances and taps are all out of reach. "I'm forced to rely on my parents to meet my basic needs."

Anna is currently on the waiting list for an accessible property where she can live independently. She described the process of waiting for suitable housing as long and frustrating. While she remains hopeful, she has now been on the waiting list for several years, with no clear indication of when a move might be possible. Her experience reflects what many participants told us: that living in unsuitable housing can quietly erode independence over time, even when people are technically "housed". Until a more appropriate property becomes available, Anna continues to rely on family support to manage daily life.

While adaptations and accessible design are essential, participants emphasised that their effectiveness depends on **ongoing maintenance and timely specialist repairs**. One participant explained that equipment installed to support independence became a source of stress when it stopped working and it wasn't treated as urgent.

[3] London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (2021) Local Housing Needs Assessment 2021. Available at: [Local Housing Needs Assessment 2021](#)

Case Study: Debbie's story

Debbie is a social housing resident with a mobility impairment. Eight years ago, her bathroom was converted into a wet room, including an adapted toilet with built-in washing and drying functions.

Debbie's adapted toilet was not working for several weeks. Despite clearly explaining the urgency of the situation, the landlord did not arrange the specialist repairs required for 2 weeks. As a result, Debbie's pain worsened and other everyday tasks became harder to manage.

Debbie's experience shows how quickly an accessible home can become inaccessible when adapted features are not maintained. While the original adaptation was a positive step, the lack of a responsive repair process left her without the support she relies on. Her story underlines the importance of treating specialist repairs as urgent and ensuring accessible environments remain accessible over time.

At the same time, we recognise areas of progress and opportunity. We welcome the Council's decision to employ a specialist Occupational Therapist focused on new-build accessible housing, particularly for supporting early consideration of accessibility in the design process. We also view commitments to align with the Mayor of London's accessible housing requirements as an important framework for improvement.

Many participants emphasised that lasting change will require **shared ownership of the challenge**. Accessible housing cannot be delivered by any one organisation alone. Progress depends on collaboration between the Council, housing providers, developers, planners, health and social care professionals, and Deaf and Disabled residents themselves. Participants made it clear that we must meaningfully embed lived experience throughout this work, rather than consulting it only at the end.

Participants have consistently told us that accessible housing works best when Disabled people are involved early, meaningfully, and continuously – from design through to allocation. They simply want to feel heard about decisions that will tremendously impact their lives.

Next Steps We Can Take Together

- ▶ The Council will seek to secure high quality accessible homes in all new developments:
 - At least 10% of new housing must meet Building Regulation requirement M4(3) 'wheelchair user dwellings'. 'Wheelchair user dwellings' should be provided in proportion to the tenure mix of the development.
 - All other dwellings must meet Building Regulation requirement M4(2) 'accessible and adaptable dwellings'.

- ▶ Improve data collection on accessible housing need and supply. Require the Council and local housing associations to routinely collect and publish data on existing accessible housing stock, allocations, refusals, and unmet need, to inform planning and allocation decisions. Publish an Accessible Housing Registry.

- ▶ Embed co-production with Disabled residents. Involve Disabled people at early stages of the design of new developments to ensure homes reflect real, lived access needs.



Disabled Facilities Grant

For many Deaf and Disabled residents living in inaccessible homes, the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) represents an important route to making **homes safer, more accessible and more supportive of independent living**. The DFG is a national grant, administered locally by Richmond Council, and plays a vital role in a borough where there is a significant shortage of accessible housing.

Participants told us that the DFG has the potential to make a meaningful difference to daily life. When adaptations work well, they can reduce reliance on informal care, improve dignity, and prevent health issues from worsening. However, many also described challenges in accessing the support in a timely and straightforward way. Through conversations with Richmond residents, we have found that **many did not know that the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) was an available option for adaptations**. Some said that if they had known that this grant existed, they wouldn't have had to spend their savings adding ramps, stairlifts or making other modifications to their home.

“I had no idea this was available; my GP didn't tell me about it. They didn't tell me at the hospital either.”

— Social housing tenant, interview

Increasing demand and wider system pressures have affected how quickly DFG-funded support can be delivered. Data from 2023–24 shows that the average wait for adaptations to be completed in Richmond was around 10 months, with some residents waiting up to 22 months.^[4] For people already living in unsafe or unsuitable conditions, these delays can have a significant impact on wellbeing and independence.

Several participants highlighted the role of Occupational Therapy (OT) assessments within this process. **Long waiting times for assessments, combined with staff turnover and limited continuity**, were described as particularly difficult. Some residents told us they had to repeatedly explain their needs to different professionals, adding to feelings of frustration and uncertainty.

Case Study: Rohan's story

Rohan is a visually impaired Richmond resident who is registered as blind. While living in temporary accommodation, he was placed out of borough in a second-floor HMO accessed by narrow, winding stairs. The layout made moving around unsafe and Rohan fell twice during this period.

When Rohan moved into permanent accommodation, it offered little improvement. The flat was handed over without any adaptations, and the bathroom contained only a bath that he could not use safely. For two years, Rohan relied on a gym or relatives to wash, an expensive and undignified alternative to a basic facility in his own home.

He later described applying for an OT assessment to support a walk-in shower adaptation. He was told the wait could be up to a year.

"I felt like seeing the Prime Minister would have been easier than seeing the OT."

When the assessment eventually took place, it lasted less than 25 minutes. For him, this raised questions about whether the time spent waiting reflected the level of need or complexity involved in the process.

[4] Data obtained by Freedom of Information request from RAID

Despite these challenges, participants were clear that the DFG remains a vital and valued mechanism. Many expressed appreciations for individual professionals who worked hard within constrained systems, and for the principle of adaptations enabling people to stay in their communities. Participants emphasised that improving communication, continuity and timeliness within the DFG process would significantly improve experiences and outcomes for Disabled residents.

Next Steps We Can Take Together

- ▶ Increase awareness and early support for DFGs. Improve information and signposting so Disabled residents understand what support is available, how to apply, and what to expect from the process, with targeted outreach for those most likely to benefit.
- ▶ Reduce waiting times for Occupational Therapy assessments. Invest in expanding the OT workforce and Housing Improvement Agency (HIA) capacity to ensure assessments and adaptations are delivered within timescales that reflect people's health and safety.
- ▶ Commission an independent evaluation of the DFG process. Undertake a review led by an independent body to identify delays and barriers within the current system, and to recommend practical improvements based on lived experience.
- ▶ Strengthen data and evidence to inform planning. Improve local data collection on DFG demand, outcomes and unmet need, working with organisations such as Foundations to support evidence-based decision-making.
- ▶ Improve access to DFGs in the private rented sector. Provide clearer guidance and support for tenants and landlords on how DFGs can be used to make private rented homes safer and more accessible.

Homelessness and Housing Register Applications

“I don’t understand the housing register... The form was very confusing for me. I needed help, otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to complete it.”

– Social housing applicant, interview

An area that repeatedly surfaced in our research is the accessibility challenges of housing application processes, across both the Housing Register and through the Homelessness Prevention pathway. We believe that improving this process is a fundamental and practical step that would have a tangible impact on Disabled people’s experiences, enabling greater **independence** and would deliver knock-on benefits across **housing stability, wellbeing, and service demand**.

Over the past year, RAID have supported approximately **100 Disabled people with the housing options enquiry form**, addressing a critical gap in accessible advice within the borough.

We also worked in partnership with Inclusion London, to facilitate focus groups with Deaf and Disabled applicants and our front-line advice staff which gave a clearer shared picture of how the application stage is currently functioning and how it could be strengthened.

Residents described a **lack of awareness** of different routes available to them and the overwhelming **complexity** of the process as immediate barriers. Organising the focus groups themselves highlighted how some voices are already excluded from the system. Several people we approached encountered **communication barriers** that limited access to information, made informed consent difficult, and restricted participation.

“The main thing that I need is [an] adaptation to the bathroom... In the form there wasn’t any section asking this.”

– Housing register applicant, interview

Case Study: Rebecca's story

Rebecca has a learning difficulty and had been living independently in a privately rented flat in Richmond since 2015. In November 2024, she was served a Section 21 eviction notice but when she tried to register as homeless, she found the online process confusing and overwhelming and needed support from RAID to complete it.

Communication with the council was slow and unclear, leaving Rebecca unsure about what was happening. By April 2025, she was issued a possession order and had to move back in with her mother, resulting in a long commute and making her 4am shifts to work extremely difficult. She was offered a place on the New Generation Scheme^[1], however, the scheme was not clearly explained, and she received no easy-read information to help her understand it, leaving her feeling her life had been “uprooted” without a clear pathway to regaining independence.

Rebecca shared that she feels deeply unhappy about having to move back into her family home and worries about the impact on them, particularly due to the council's unannounced home visits. She misses her space, her routine, and the life she had built for herself, leaving her feeling disempowered and unsupported.

Many participants described significant **difficulties with the online application form**, a concern echoed by frontline staff. The system was widely described as rigid, complex, and built on the assumption of digital access and confidence.

These barriers are not limited to older residents or those unfamiliar with technology. **Inaccessible language, significant document requirements and time pressures of a 10-day window** to submit documents were also reported. While some support from council housing officers was available, we encountered cases where assigned officers were on leave during this critical period, leaving applicants without guidance and at risk of their application being closed.

[5] A housing initiative that helps people prepare for independent living by staying with family or friends for 12 months while working towards long-term housing.

Case Study: Dan's story

A 27-year-old Richmond resident with complex mental health and mobility needs described the challenges of applying to the Housing Register. Despite digital confidence, he struggled to complete the application due to its complexity and the tight deadlines. When he was unable to provide all the evidence quickly enough, his application was closed, and he had to start the process from scratch. He described a "lack of flexibility in our borough" and felt frustrated by the unintuitive online-only process.

These challenges are particularly acute for people with **complex or intersectional needs**, including multiple impairments, language barriers, mental distress, or additional barriers. The absence of a clear, inclusive, and trauma-informed homelessness and housing application process left many residents feeling disempowered, anxious, and unsupported at a time of crisis, with **Disabled people disproportionately affected** by these barriers.

However, residents were keen to suggest constructive improvements. One focus group participant noted:

"I use a speech software on my computer that reads the screen to me. I just basically did that all by myself."



This highlights that **when accessibility is prioritised, Disabled people are able to engage with the process independently**. Many emphasised the importance of humanising the process, including clearer communication, flexibility around evidence deadlines, and a proactive approach to check and support accessibility needs.

These changes would not only improve individual experiences but also reduce mental strain, prevent applications from failing unnecessarily, and **support a more efficient use of council resources**.

Next Steps We Can Take Together

➤ Ensure the application process is accessible and available both online and on paper, with in-person guidance and support offered at every stage, including BSL interpreters, Easy Read version, large print, and translation service.



➤ Provide training for front-line staff to develop a trauma-informed approach which understands the intersection of mental health and disability-related needs, including anxiety, cognitive overload, and communication barriers.

➤ Simplify the online system with clear instructions, labelled document uploads, a visual progress tracker, and the ability to save progress. Integrate accessibility tools such text-to-speech, screen readers, hover-over explanations, font adjustments, and translations.

➤ Use clear, jargon-free instructions and ensure all questions are understandable and reflect applicants lived experiences.

➤ Reduce documentation burden with lengthened windows to submit evidence and enable caseworkers to verify missing documents directly where possible, with a dedicated and backup contact available. Offer checklists with practical examples of acceptable evidence.

➤ Provide regular updates and send plain-language reminders and confirmations.

➤ Co-produce with Disabled Residents in designing forms and systems, as well as testing them with neurodivergent users before launch.

The current social housing system

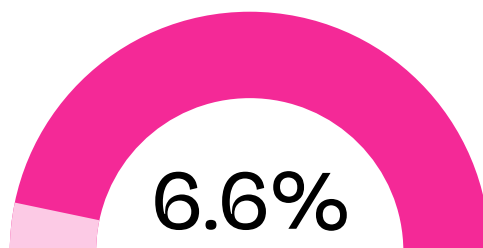
Skyrocketing rents and a shrinking supply of social housing have left many residents with few realistic alternatives. For Deaf and Disabled residents in particular, the social housing system is often the only viable route to secure and affordable housing. In 2023-24, according to Local Authority Housing Statistics, there were **5,327 households** on Richmond's housing register, reflecting both rising need and limited availability.^[6]

Many Disabled people that use our advice services have told us that while they understand the pressures the social housing system is under, navigating it can feel **confusing, opaque and overwhelming**. Across interviews and focus groups, three themes emerged consistently: **long waits on the housing register, lack of clarity around banding decisions, and pressure to accept unsuitable offers**.

The Housing Register (Waiting list)

Richmond, like many others local authorities, is only able to offer a **limited number of properties every year**, around 350 properties per year. ^[7] Overwhelmed with applications to the housing register with many unable to be housed for several years even if placed in higher priority bandings.

Annual Percentage of Households on the Housing Register Allocated Social Housing



[6] UK Government (2025) Local Authority Housing Statistics data returns for 2023 to 2024. Available at: [Local Authority Housing Statistics 2023 24](#)

[7] London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (n.d.) Housing allocation and waiting lists. Richmond Council. Available at: [Housing allocation - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames](#)

Many participants described spending years on the housing register with little sense of progress or understanding of their position. Many of the social housing applicants that have sought our advice have told us that they were **unsure how long they might wait, what types of properties they could realistically expect, or whether their circumstances had been fully understood.**

“I’ve been on the housing list for years, waiting to be moved to a bigger home. I have 3 teenage sons and we live in a 2-bedroom flat, the flat is just too small. When I ask when we might be rehoused, no one can tell.”

– Private rented tenant, interview participant

A recurring issue was **lack of information** about specialist queues for Disabled residents. A focus group participant said that, despite their physical disability, they had not been made aware that a **“Physical Disability Queue”** existed at all.

“I didn’t know that a physical disability list even existed, no one told me about it”

– Social housing tenant, focus group participant

Without clear information, participants felt unable to make informed decisions or advocate effectively for their housing needs. For some, this meant remaining in **unsuitable housing** for long periods, unsure whether change was possible. They said that they would have liked to receive regular updates on their position on the waiting list.

Banding and allocation

Banding decisions are a particular source of frustration. The housing register presents serious challenges. It currently lacks transparency, with many applicants feeling left in the dark about how their position is determined or why their banding may have changed. Communications from the Council are often inconsistent, and the process for challenges decisions is complex and poorly explained.

“The band they put us in, I didn’t agree with it. When I contacted them, they just said, ‘that’s how it is, that’s how we work it out.’ They said I could appeal, but that would take longer.”

— Social housing applicant, focus group participant

Even where people submitted supporting evidence from GPs or other medical specialists, some felt this had little impact on outcomes. **The appeals process was described as lengthy and daunting**, particularly for residents already dealing with health conditions or accessibility barriers.



Research by Inclusion London highlights wider challenges affecting how accessible homes are allocated across London. Their 2025 report, **Barriers at Home**, found that most London councils do not hold comprehensive **data on accessibility** of their existing housing stock, and Richmond upon Thames was one of them.^[8]

Without this information, it becomes much harder to match available properties to residents’ specific access needs. Some felt that this lack of information could lead to allocation decisions that feel arbitrary or poorly aligned with lived experience.

[8] Inclusion London (2025) Barriers at Home: Disabled people’s experiences of inaccessible housing. Available at: Barriers at Home Report 2025.

Pressure to Accept Unsuitable Housing

For some participants, the combination of **long waits and unclear processes** created pressure to accept homes that did not meet their needs.

Case Study: Olivia's story

Olivia described her experience applying for social housing as a wheelchair user. She felt that decisions were made about her rather than with her. As a teenager, she and her family felt pressured to accept a property that was unsuitable for her access needs.

"I didn't feel listened to. If we refused, we were told we'd lose our place on the list. I had no choice."

Others described being given **little information** about the properties offered to them, with little or no time to consider whether they were able to accept it. Some said that they were not shown pictures of the property before moving in.

Case Study: Natasha's story

Natasha shared feeling under pressure to make a decision about a housing offer with very limited information, describing how the process did not account for her neurodivergent needs. She was contacted by phone and told that a property was available, but was not given basic details such as the address, photographs, or information about the layout or accessibility.

She was told that she had to make a decision immediately, without the opportunity to view the property or consider whether it would meet her needs.

"I said to them, 'Would it be possible to view it?' They said, 'No, you have to make a decision right now'. And I said, 'That's very strange because I don't know anything about that property...'. When I did request [the address], she couldn't tell me."

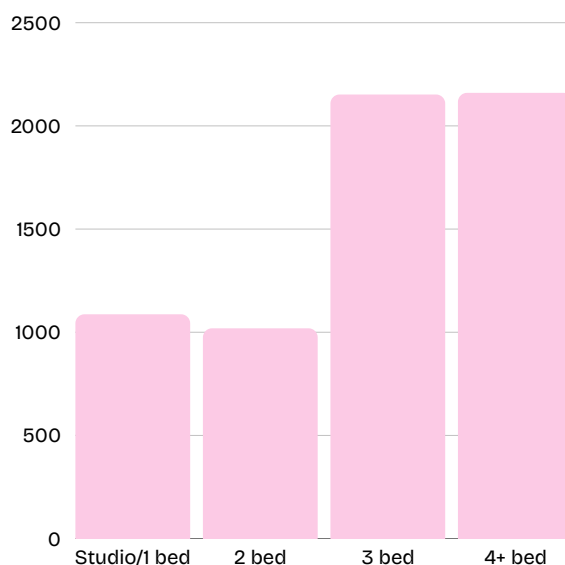
Together, these experiences highlight how pressures within the social housing system can inadvertently disadvantage Disabled residents. Participants were clear that greater transparency, clearer communication and earlier, more meaningful engagement about needs would make a significant difference, helping ensure that allocations are made with people in mind, not just for them.

Next Steps We Can Take Together

Housing Register (Waiting list)

- ▶ Improve transparency about the housing register. Publish clear, accessible information explaining how the register works, typical waiting times by property type, and what applicants can realistically expect.
- ▶ Strengthen communication with applicants. Provide regular updates on application status and ensure applicants understand whether their needs have been fully assessed and recorded.
- ▶ Increase awareness of specialist housing pathways. Ensure Disabled applicants are proactively informed about physical disability queues, sheltered housing, and other relevant pathways.

Housing waiting list by number of bedrooms, 2023-24



UK Government (2025) Local Authority Housing Statistics data returns for 2023 to 2024. Available at: [Local Authority Housing Statistics 2023-24](#)

Next Steps We Can Take Together

Banding and allocation

- ▶ Publish clear and accessible criteria for banding and allocation decisions. Make the evidence used to determine banding transparent, including how medical information and access needs are assessed and weighted. Clearly explain how applicants can move between bands.
- ▶ Introduce clearer routes to challenge or review decisions without fear of delay or disadvantage.
- ▶ Strengthen data on accessible housing stock through an accessible housing register. Develop a clearer picture of the accessibility of existing social housing to ensure properties are allocated according to need.

Pressure to accept unsuitable housing

- ▶ Guarantee informed decision-making. Provide full property information in advance, including photos, layout details and accessibility features, and allow time for applicants to consider offers and request property viewings.
- ▶ End practices that pressure applicants to accept inappropriate homes. Ensure applicants are not threatened with loss of priority or removal from the register for refusing properties that do not meet their access needs.

Disrepairs

Disrepair remains a persistent issue for many tenants living in housing association properties in Richmond. Participants described living with ongoing problems such as leaks, damp, mould and unresolved structural issues. These conditions are not minor inconveniences; they can have a serious **impact on health, wellbeing and day-to-day independence**. For Disabled residents, the consequences can be particularly severe, exacerbating existing health conditions and limiting people's ability to live safely in their own homes.

"I've been sleeping in the living room since August of 2023 because of the mould and damp that's in my bedroom and the housing association still hasn't fixed the problem. I feel ignored and exhausted."

– Social housing tenant, interview

Several participants told us that repair issues were reported repeatedly but not resolved, leaving them to live in **unsafe or deteriorating conditions for extended periods of time**.

"I had water coming on top of me for two years, brown water infiltrations. [The contractor] came, but he didn't fix the ceiling, which was my problem. He did whatever he liked in my property, and that was with the agreement of the council."

– Social housing tenant, focus group participant

A local report produced by Ruils (2024), alongside other voluntary organisations including RAID, highlights how repeated failures to address disrepair are leaving tenants stuck in homes that are not only unsuitable, but actively harmful.^[9] Participants described a **lack of urgency** in responses from housing providers, as well as feeling unheard or dismissed when raising concerns. Some tenants also spoke about hesitation to pursue complaints further, fearing they might be labelled as “difficult” or face negative consequences.

Case Study: Gabriella's story

Gabriella has lived in her housing association property for nine years. For the past five years, she has experienced ongoing disrepair that has not been resolved. A major leak in her living room caused significant damage to her home and belongings. Although the leak was eventually repaired, it took two years to address.

After following the landlord's complaints process, Gabriella had to resort to the Housing Ombudsman who issued a determination in 2022 requiring compensation and further action. While the compensation was paid, the remaining actions were not completed. Gabriella told us that repeated promises were made and broken, leaving her feeling exhausted and dismissed. - “Someone needs to hold them responsible.”

Despite continued efforts to resolve the issue, Gabriella feels her concerns have not been taken seriously.

Participants consistently emphasised that prolonged disrepair has consequences far beyond the physical condition of a property. Poor housing conditions, uncertainty and repeated delays were described as taking a serious **toll on mental and physical health**. For some, as the following case study shows, disrepair directly interfered with access to essential medical treatment and recovery.

[9] Ruils (2024). Decaying Homes, Forgotten Lives: The impact of inaccessible and unfit housing on Disabled people in south-west London. Available at: Decaying Homes, Forgotten Lives Report 2024.

Case Study: Susan's story

Susan has lived in her social housing flat in Richmond for over 40 years. She has serious heart disease and is awaiting open-heart surgery, but doctors have repeatedly postponed the procedure because her home is not safe for recovery. For several years, Susan has lived with ongoing disrepair, most recently a severe bathroom flood that has left her unable to wash safely or use basic facilities. Despite repeated reports and formal complaints, the issues remain unresolved. Repairs have been temporary or ineffective.

"They don't realise the impact they have on tenants or the stress that it's causing me."

"My landlord is failing me on every level. Your home is supposed to be your sanctuary, but it hasn't been that for a very long time."

At the same time, we recognise areas of progress. The Social Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP) has been a positive step in strengthening accountability and increasing the Council's involvement in oversight of housing association performance. Regular engagement and challenge have led to improvements in some cases, although participants noted that not all housing associations have demonstrated the same level of commitment.

Increased collaboration with local voluntary organisations has also been welcomed. Face-to-face opportunities to discuss disrepair, including sessions led by Richmond Housing Partnership (RHP) and PA Housing, were highlighted as particularly valuable in helping residents feel heard and supported. Participants emphasised that continued partnership working, clear communication and consistent follow-through will be key to ensuring homes are safe, healthy and fit for purpose.

Next Steps We Can Take Together

- ▶ Strengthen accountability through the Social Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP). The Council should continue to use SHIP to hold social landlords to clear standards on repair times, communication and outcomes, with regular monitoring and transparent reporting.
- ▶ Improve communication with tenants. Housing associations must provide clear, consistent updates on repairs, including realistic timescales, named contacts and follow-up after works are completed. Introduce online system that updates after every call or visit to be able to follow up on the progress of a repair.
- ▶ Introduce access-aware repair systems. Ensure contractors are informed of tenants' access needs in advance, including mobility, sensory and health requirements, so repairs can be carried out safely and effectively.
- ▶ Introduce a requirement for all builders, plumbers and contractors to carry an ID badge displaying their name and the organisation they work for. This will help tenants identify who is entering their home and feel more at ease.
- ▶ Appoint Disability Champions or specialist leads. Each housing association should have a named disability lead to oversee complex cases, escalate delays and ensure repairs do not create further barriers for Disabled tenants.
- ▶ Increase face-to-face engagement opportunities. Expand in-person repair surgeries and joint working with local charities to help tenants raise concerns, understand their rights and resolve issues earlier.
- ▶ Ensure learning from complaints and Ombudsman findings. Landlords should demonstrate how they are acting on complaints, determinations and compensation cases to prevent repeat failures.

The project's impact

This project has positively impacted Disabled people in Richmond by amplifying their voices and ensuring their experiences are reflected, including through Housing Forums and workshops. It also shows the importance of co-production, showing that lasting change is achieved when Disabled people are actively involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

“The service overall, it has been informative, it allows us to voice our lived experiences, it has been supportive and our voices have been heard at every step.”

“The campaign has been run by great staff, who listen to my issues and try to support me in any way possible. They have shown me that my story & views matter. Reassuring me in my knowledge of rights & needs as well as expanding them.”

“I was enormously impressed by the knowledge and contributions provided by the regular members and the level of support provided by RAID”.

“I have been informed, involved, felt valued and respected by the organiser and the forum throughout my engagement.”

“We gained a much clearer understanding of housing procedures – where to go, what to do, and how to navigate the system. For those of us with lived experience, this knowledge was invaluable.”



www.raid.charity
info@raid.charity
020 3393 7011