



Richmond Council's Tenants' Champion

Annual Report

April 2025 - March 2026

Councillor Paulina Vassileva

Welcome to the Tenants' Champion annual report for 2025-2026.

The Tenants' Champion service started in 2011 and since then has built up considerable experience in acting as a local escalation route for the Borough's social housing residents when they have failed to get complaints resolved with their housing association landlords. More than that, the Tenants' Champion service identifies themes from individual cases, highlights these and takes a leading role in promoting better joint working and practice in the borough.

This report highlights the work done in my fourth year as Tenants' Champion.

I would like to thank all the residents who have taken the time to contact me this year. I always make personal contact with residents who get in touch and, by listening carefully to their situations, I gain a first-hand insight into what has gone wrong which can be very helpful when intervening with housing association partners.

My service is small with just a part time support officer and me, but despite that we aim to give a highly personalised response and residents often express deep gratitude for being listened to and properly understood.

Repairs issues continue to dominate my caseload and, while I've seen some good improvements, particularly where dedicated officers have acted as a single point of contact when things have gone wrong, dug into the detail of concerns and communicated well with the residents, there still seems much work to be done. I've constantly



championed the work of some of our voluntary sector partners, such as Ruils and Richmond Aid, who provide such excellent insight into understanding residents' access needs. The best examples of good practice I've seen are where housing associations are open to good joint working, both within internal teams and external partners.

I'd like to thank all the housing associations and other Council and multiagency colleagues who have worked with me this year, with individual casework and by participating in my Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum. My hope is that in doing so, we have all helped make life better for the Borough's social housing residents.

How the Tenants' Champion service works and households helped

To access the Tenants' Champion service, residents must complete a short online form found on the Richmond Council website [Tenants' Champion - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames](#). This enables me to get correct information about the resident and their concerns and to ensure the consent is in place to take things forward. Residents can also ring the Council's contact centre on 020 8891 1411, where trained staff will log their details while they are on the phone. Once the form is received, I make personal contact with them, usually starting with a telephone conversation.

This year the Tenants' Champion service assisted 108 households, compared with 145 households last year. Of these 92 were new cases, compared with 116 last year. The remainder consisted of cases from the previous year that continued to need support.

Ten of the new cases were forwarded to the relevant ward councillor for help in the first instance, and five new cases did not meet the criteria for support, so the residents were directed elsewhere for advice.

Of the new cases there were:

- 66 Repairs (67%)
- 15 Transfers (15.5%)
- 15 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) (15.5%)
- 2 Other (2%)

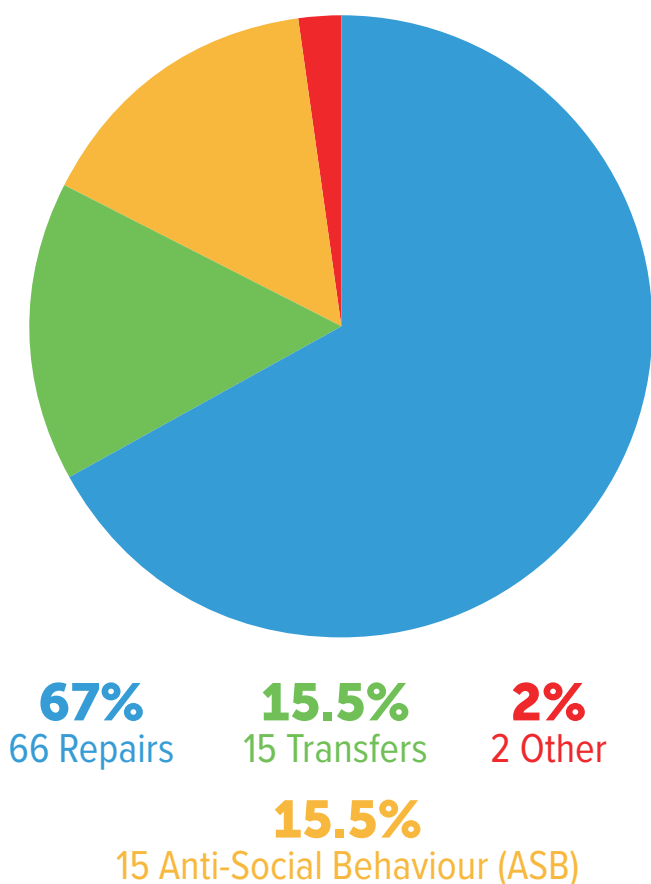
Total 98

(NB some cases have more than one issue)

After many years of increases, the overall casework numbers have gone down slightly on last year, but the complexity of some of the cases remains high. Much effort this year has gone on some particularly difficult situations, which I have highlighted below.



Cllr Vassileva



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, Guinness Partnership, A2Dominion, Sovereign Network Group, Notting Hill Genesis and Places for People.

To maintain relationships with housing associations, I meet with senior staff of the housing associations with the most properties in the Borough at least once a year, with other ad hoc meetings taking place when needed. These are RHP, PA Housing, L&Q and MTVH. The purpose is to enable staff and service updates to take place, review specific cases and identify trends or general concerns.

This year I have continued to hold short weekly meetings with RHP to focus on the detail of complaints and help resolve issues, and monthly meetings with PA Housing. These regular meetings with the two housing associations with the most stock in the borough are particularly helpful in keeping on top of issues, and I

appreciate the willingness of the staff to engage in making things better.

I have also facilitated a series of meetings with another housing association on behalf of two of their residents to try and break down internal silos and encourage different staff to work more effectively with each other. (see case study on page 7 and 8)

As Tenants' Champion I also attend the monthly Community Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (CMARAC). This forum is facilitated by the Council's Community Safety team, which co-chairs the meeting with the police inspector, and deals with complex, often high-risk cases where information is shared between



Cllr Vassileva with colleagues from MTVH and Simon Martin, Community Ambassadors projects officer at the Council offices in Twickenham

agencies such as housing associations, police, NHS mental health services and adult social care to safeguard victims and witnesses and prevent further victimisation. My role in this is to listen to the discussion and represent issues of concern where my cases overlap, often taking part in the problem-solving discussions.

Sometimes in my casework, it seems clear that the issues require a multi-agency response. If necessary, I will lead meetings to bring different professionals together, particularly where the issues are very complex. This year I brought together a team from the Housing Association, Council's Temporary Housing team, Social Services and Achieving for Children on a particularly difficult ASB case. I have shown leadership by bringing people together, chairing the meetings, making sure all the issues are understood and bringing together consensus about actions needed going forward. This is not always easy when there are multiple vulnerabilities and priorities, but a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, and a joint commitment to improvement, are essential to making progress.



Cllr Vassileva with Cllr Varley, Housing Lead Member at the Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum

We're proud to continue our close, collaborative relationship with the Tenants' Champion service, which plays an important role in supporting customers across the borough. Working together has helped us achieve better outcomes for people who may need extra support, and we value the service's strong understanding of both individual and community needs.

We recognise that what makes the Tenants' Champion so effective is its early intervention approach. By stepping in before issues escalate and looking at a customer's wider circumstances, the service helps prevent problems from becoming crises. This not only reduces the need for formal action but also ensures customers receive the right support at the right time.

For us, the Tenants' Champion remains a key partner in our commitment to building strong neighbourhoods, reducing tenancy breakdown and improving overall wellbeing."

Edward Phillips, Customer Experience and Engagement Manager, RHP



Cllr Vassileva and support officer with Edward, RHP officer at the Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum

Tenants' Champion's themes and priorities from casework

As I've come to the end of an electoral cycle and my fourth year in the Tenants' Champion role, I want to bring together the key themes. These observations have come from speaking to hundreds of residents who have requested support and have been shared with housing associations and other partners. I have added some case study examples to help illustrate my points.

The importance of good communication in resolving complaints, taking account of vulnerabilities, including mental health concerns and neurodivergent conditions and the need for reasonable adjustments to services.

Complaints can often be exacerbated by a lack of understanding about residents' needs, and organisations need to make sure reasonable adjustments are implemented and monitored. Often a single point of contact helps so residents don't need to keep retelling their story. Housing Associations need to understand how information on access needs is shared within their teams and with contractors and how staff are trained to understand different conditions.

Case X: A resident had lots of outstanding repairs. They were also managing things in their personal life, had severe dyslexia and high anxiety. The Housing Association had not identified exactly which repairs were needed and there had been many missed appointments due to a faulty doorbell and the housing association contractors not following through on a requested adjustment to telephone the resident on arrival. When the resident contacted the Tenants' Champion service, they were overwhelmed with the repairs that needed doing and managing the number of different contacts and appointments. The Tenants' Champion worked with the Housing Association to make sure all communication was in email format to enable the resident to use software to help manage their dyslexia. The housing association agreed to carry out a site visit with a senior staff member, who was aware of the resident's vulnerabilities together with the contractor, to capture all the concerns. The follow up appointments were then managed at a time when the resident could have their support worker present. Even though this delayed getting the repairs done, this

approach help the resident manage their anxiety and build trust with the Housing Association.

'The Tenants' Champion meetings have provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen communication between residents and the repairs service. The meetings have also helped to build positive working relationships between PA staff and the Tenants' Champion, encouraging greater collaboration, trust, and open communication. On a case-by-case basis, this partnership has provided the opportunity for us to work closer with our residents, better understand individual concerns, and provide more tailored and personal support where required. This has helped improve resident experiences and increase confidence in the service. We greatly appreciate the hard work, commitment, and valuable contributions of all involved. We look forward to continuing this positive partnership and building an even stronger future together for our residents.'

**David Hall, Head of Property Services,
PA Housing**

Housing associations and others communicating effectively with Richmond Borough's residents' advocates such as the Tenants' Champion, Citizens Advice, Ruils, Richmond Aid to make the most of their specialist knowledge and support.

Richmond Borough is hugely privileged to have these organisations working on behalf of social housing residents. I have consistently impressed on housing associations the need to make the most of this extra resource, particularly when trying to understand and communicate with their most vulnerable residents. These organisations can often provide a level of personal advocacy to help residents navigate communication and can be invaluable in improving understanding of vulnerabilities and what needs to be done to help resolve issues.

Ruils highlighted a case study where they were supporting a client in their early 70's with significant memory problems, with no working phone. Ruils were brought into assist as their client had no hot water or heating. Even with the help of an advocate, because the residents access needs were not accommodated as the resident was slow to come to the door and most active in the mornings, contractors came at the wrong time of day or left too quickly so failed to gain access, cancelling repairs in the process. The impact was that their gas was capped off and they were left without hot water and heating for over 21 days. This case highlighted numerous points of concern, about how the housing association cared for vulnerable residents, how access needs were shared with contractors and how it's lack of proper process or communication with the advocate, Ruils, who was trying to help support one of their vulnerable residents, unnecessarily extended a bad situation.

This contrasted with another case hugely complex case involving a resident, on the CMARAC due to their volatile behaviour, because of frustration with unresolved repairs. Ruils came alongside to help advocate for them. Because the housing association and police worked alongside Ruils and the Tenants'

Champion in their approach, progress was made on repairs.

'The Tenant's Champion Service in Richmond is an incredibly valuable resource for residents and organisations like Ruils, offering thoughtful and effective support when it is needed most. Councillor Vassileva is extremely knowledgeable, meeting people where they are in their individual situations and working tirelessly to help residents get their issues resolved. The service, alongside the Interagency Forum, provides a vital conduit for systems change across the borough. By bringing key stakeholders together, it enables us to build rapport and strong working relationships and gives us a place to share trends, areas of improvement and possible solutions. We've seen great success in working together on supporting disabled people with access needs and finding reasonable adjustments. Ultimately, our collaboration has led to better outcomes for everyone involved.'

Hallie Banish, Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils

Using complaints to learn, avoiding escalations and being creative when needed, to put things right for residents.

I have highlighted the need for improvements in the visibility and practices in complaints processes. I've enabled housing associations to share good practice and have worked with them on specific cases to encourage resolutions. I've also reminded housing associations of the need for good communication with residents at all stages of the complaints process.

I've noticed that some of the worst complaints happen when housing association internal organisational silos mean that, particularly on complex situations, staff do not talk to each other as they should. Staff in repairs teams may not share information with housing management staff or vice versa, and no one takes responsibility for overall communication with the resident or advocate.

I've also posed the question of who takes ownership of complaints and communication internally within the

organisation, and with residents and advocates, when policies and practices have been followed but problems remain.

I became involved in a shocking case of two residents affected by damp issues, both with different vulnerabilities, who had been left for a couple of years in dreadful conditions despite going through the formal complaints process. The housing association had not joined up its response between different departments and spent more time 'passing the buck' than addressing the issues. The situation was further complicated by one resident having lost complete trust and being very difficult to deal with.

I have worked hard to expose the issues within the housing association, escalating things with senior management to get the right people in the room and chairing monthly meetings to make progress. I noticed that staff were working in silos within the narrow remit of their roles, and no one was communicating with the residents about the plan to sort things out. Furthermore, the front-line staff were not being supported with the right information from management,

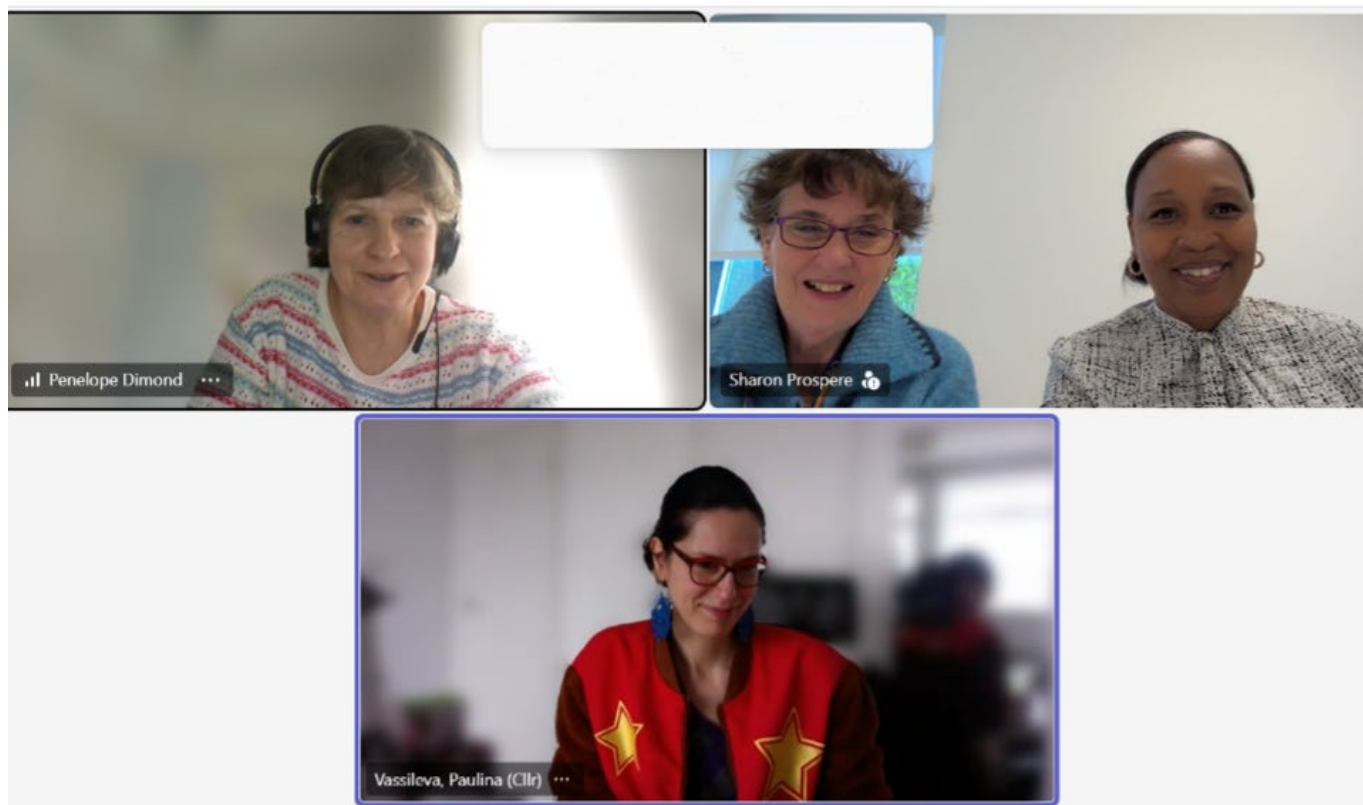
so when they spoke to the residents, they did not have all the necessary details.

I have done my best to expose the issues, spending a great deal of time communicating with the residents to try to rebuild their trust with the housing association and impressing on the housing association the need to work in a more coordinated way.

While the case is ongoing, progress is being made and I hope will result in the repairs issues being resolved and the housing association concerned learning from the experience.

'L&Q appreciate the opportunity to work in partnership with the Tenants' Champion service who act as a critical friend to L&Q to help deliver improved outcomes for our residents. We value the contribution they make and their efforts when working alongside our tenants with us, to help remove blockages and barriers and to work together to achieve a common goal.'

Laura Hallett Head of Housing, L&Q



Cllr Vassileva and support officer at an online meeting with L&Q staff.



Cllr Vassileva with colleagues at the Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum in March 2026

Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum

I take a leading role in the Borough in encouraging joint working. The purpose of my twice-yearly Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum is to bring multi-agency colleagues together to learn from each other and think about how to improve joint working to benefit the residents we jointly serve. This year the October meeting took place online on TEAMS and the March meeting was held in person at the Council offices.

This forum gives me a chance to raise concerns I have identified from trends in my casework, and this year I led discussions on how housing associations deal with complaints when they've gone through Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the formal complaints processes and there are still outstanding actions. Often this is the point at which the Tenants' Champion intervenes to try and make sure any misunderstandings are resolved and resolutions are delivered. This is intended to prevent further escalation to the Housing Ombudsman so it's imperative that housing associations deal with things properly at this stage. Housing Ombudsman

intervention can be resource intensive and costly for the housing association and a lengthy process for the resident, who often just wants things sorted out. As Tenants' Champion therefore, I aim to help to prevent this from becoming necessary. However, on a few occasions, if I have concerns that I do not think have been responded to adequately, I will support the resident to take the matter to the Housing Ombudsman. Using case study examples at the meeting, my aim was to showcase the issues.

The Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum gives regular agenda slots for all partners to update the forum on any significant policy or staffing changes and asks participants to speak on specific issues.

This year, PA Housing led on a discussion about how housing associations helped manage noise nuisance cases, particularly where the noise doesn't reach statutory levels for intervention. We talked about how to increase insulation when properties were empty, the use of floor coverings, use of mediation and tracking cases properly.

RHP led a topic about how housing association tenants can move, with detail about the management transfer option. Because of the huge issues of demand for social housing in the Richmond Borough compared with the limited supply available, it is important that all of us understand the options for people. Partners being aware of routes and timescales involved, and understanding how residents can register for mutual exchanges, Richmond Council's downsizing scheme and other initiatives such as Seaside and Country Homes scheme, can be very helpful. It is also beneficial if professionals understand when and how to support a housing application with the correct sort of supporting information.

Our voluntary sector partners, particularly advocates such as Ruils and Richmond Aid, provide a very useful perspective on residents' lived experiences. This year Ruils has helped keep us up to date on the outcome and follow up of a multi-charity led housing disrepairs campaign, the goal of which was for housing providers to understand the needs of disabled, marginalised and intersectionally excluded residents in relation to disrepair, and we've been very encouraged to hear how some housing providers have been working with Ruils to improve things. Ruils have also shared some case studies where things haven't gone so well, to enable us to think about how to be better.

A vital part of joint working is to understand how poor mental health can affect a resident's experience. We therefore always welcome our colleagues from St Georges and Southwest London Mental Health Trust and the Council's mental health social care team. This year we learnt from a presentation about how mental health services were structured in the Richmond Borough and who the key contacts were.

Understanding the legal process around mental health sections and capacity, key contacts and access routes and how Care Act assessments can take place, together with how supported housing and floating support work, is helpful for all of us who may be supporting residents at times of vulnerability.

Another key partner at the meeting is representation from the Council's Community Safety team. We heard about how a local task group, had targeted drugs and related ASB, how the team plans for potential problems, such as water safety and crowds of young people. We also learnt about new powers that will come in through the Crime and Policing Bill such as Respect Orders. The Council also works hard to prevent domestic abuse and sexual violence, and resources were highlighted on how to support people. The Council also shared how it was working on accreditation to the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).

Finally, information was shared on how the Community Ambassadors were making a difference in the Borough.

'Cllr Vassileva's collaborative approach as Tenants' Champion has strengthened partnership working between local policing teams, housing providers, and key agencies across Richmond Adult Social Services and Health. Her consistent engagement in CMARAC, alongside her ability to bring partners together and contribute informed perspectives, has enhanced coordinated responses and improved outcomes for residents. Her leadership in promoting joint working and effective information adds significant value to our local community safety arrangements. I would also like to extend my thanks to Cllr Vassileva for all her hard work as the Tenant's Champion over the last year.'

Inspector Jon McLoughlin, Richmond and Twickenham Safer Neighbourhood Team, Metropolitan Police.



Cllr Vassileva with Cllr Millard, Cllr Varley and colleagues from the Community Engagement team and TPAS

How the Tenants' Champion works in partnership to improve resident services.

Because the Tenants' Champion service started in 2011 it has developed a wealth of experience in helping both individual residents and housing associations resolve complaints. It has also taken a leading role in developing themes and projects for improving the life for social housing residents. Two initiatives that have developed in recent years have been the SHIP and Community Ambassadors project.

The Social Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP) which is designed to improve standards and drive investment for residents living in existing social housing, was developed with the main housing associations (RHP, PA Housing, L&Q and MTVH). These associations now report each year to the Adult Social Services, Health and Housing services Committee on the following themes:

- Putting the resident voice at the heart of decision making

- An improved repairs experience
- Investing in sustainable homes
- Tackling defects and disrepair
- Investing in safe and strong communities

The Community Ambassadors Project (CAP), set up in 2022, was also created in collaboration with the main housing associations working in the borough. A recent TPAS review of the project concluded that the programme 'shows a strong commitment to resident involvement demonstrated through an innovative

approach that has truly been led and shaped by residents.' Twenty-five social housing residents have been recruited and trained to support their local area and have more influence in decision-making. A particular strength of the scheme is that residents with different social housing landlords come together, mix and share ideas. The aim is to improve quality of life and develop community initiatives which could be smaller-scale repairs or bigger projects. Community Ambassadors have now carried out more than 10 estate inspections and have raised over 150 communal repairs. Please see Appendix 1 for some examples of what the Community Ambassadors have been involved in.

'MTVH welcomes the Richmond Tenants' Champion relationship with MTVH and values the role it plays in reflecting residents' experiences and driving improvement.'

We remain committed to delivering safe, well-maintained homes and responsive, transparent services. Resident feedback in Richmond is an important source of insight, and we are using this to strengthen local delivery.

Over the past year, we have focused on improving communication, increasing the visibility of Local Housing Managers, and enhancing our approach to repairs, anti-social behaviour, and estate services. We recognise that consistency and timeliness remain areas for improvement and are addressing these through clearer standards and stronger local accountability. We are also reinforcing our approach to health and safety, including damp and mould, fire safety, and vulnerability, in line with Awaab's Law requirements.

Strong partnerships such as this are integral to the success of our MTVH 2030 strategy and we will continue to work with residents and the Tenants' Champion to ensure feedback leads to meaningful and measurable improvements.'

Maxine Gordon, Director of Housing MTVH

Whilst the Tenants' Champion service is designed to assist existing social housing residents, it is very aware of the demand for social housing for those waiting for it and often gets contacted by existing tenants who are desperate for a transfer, often

because of overcrowding or medical needs. While we spend a lot of time explaining how transfer processes and mutual exchange works and highlighting the Council's downsizing scheme, a greater supply of new social housing is essential and is a priority for Richmond Council.

There are multiple challenges in delivering additional affordable housing in Richmond Borough including high land values, scarcity of available land and protected green space. However, the Council is committed to increasing the availability of affordable housing through various means. We are developing genuinely affordable housing on council-owned land, working with private developers to ensure that new developments incorporate affordable homes, acquiring private properties for use as temporary accommodation to provide urgent support, encouraging down-sizing, with an incentive scheme and ensuring new homes are accessible and inclusive for residents with a range of needs. Over the past 2 years over 250 affordable homes have started on site with a further 250 planned across the next 2 years, contributing to a pipeline of more than 1,000 genuinely affordable homes across the borough.

I am also very supportive of partner's projects where they align with my priorities, and I have made space on my Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum agenda's for Ruils to publicize and promote the project undertaken by a partnership of Richmond Borough Voluntary organisations, which highlighted the experience of disabled residents and those experiencing intersectional exclusion, who appeared to face great barriers in getting repairs completed. The report was called 'Decaying Homes, Forgotten lives: A Call for Urgent Action in Richmond's Social Housing Disrepairs crisis'. [Decaying Homes, Forgotten Lives](#) Although the campaign phase of this project has finished, the Tenants' Champion service will continue to support follow up actions and will take part in a forthcoming summit on the issues.

The Tenants' Champion service also notes the recent report developed by Richmond Aid, 'Locked Out: The Housing Crisis Facing Disabled People in Richmond' and will aim to follow up issues raised in this too. [Locked Out: The Housing Crisis Facing Disabled People in Richmond](#)

Aims for the year ahead:

- Continue to offer a Tenants' Champion service for Richmond Borough's housing association tenants and leaseholders.
- Continue to analyse themes, trends and volumes in casework to see how housing associations' policies and practices are affecting residents, and to promote good practice.
- Host the twice yearly 'Tenants' Champion Interagency Forum' to continue to encourage excellent multi-agency working, sharing good practice, and promoting and monitoring other initiatives that benefit the Borough's social housing residents.
- Work with colleagues managing SHIP and Community Ambassador project to make sure the Council's offer to support social housing residents is as comprehensive as possible, and that the collaboration with housing association partners is supportive and efficient so that everyone's resources are used productively.
- Maintain focus on complex cases, by participating in the Borough's CMARAC for high-risk anti-social behaviour cases and joining or leading professionals' meetings where a multi-agency approach is necessary.
- Continue to support and promote initiatives that align with Tenants' Champion priorities, and which benefit social housing residents in the Richmond Borough.

Thanks from Residents:

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued patience and relentless persistence while working on our behalf. Thank you for all the hard work you put into getting the flat repaired." (VH)

"Many thanks to you for all the hard work that you have done on behalf of JR and me in our dealings with our housing association. Your invaluable advice and assistance over the past year have helped us greatly in negotiating with them" (GW)

"Thank you so much. Again, I really appreciate your help. It's such a relief to feel someone is finally listening to me and helping me." (RJ)

"Thank you very much for your help. Before you got in contact with them, I was constantly leaving messages and emails with no response. They did call me last week, and repair men finally arrived to fix the leak after six long months! I do not think I would have got this resolved without your input, so I am very grateful to you." (AM)

"Thank you again for your time - it's clear that you do have everyone's best interests at heart." (JW)

Appendix 1: Achievements of the Community Ambassadors Project (CAP) 2025/26

L&Q Ambassador Kate has developed a newsletter for the Queen's Road Estate sharing local news, information, and opportunities. Two editions have now gone out to every household on the estate.



Community Ambassadors event at Mill Farm Road with colleagues from PA Housing, RHP and MTVH

Ten estate inspections have taken place, with around 150 communal repairs identified by ambassadors and raised with their Housing Associations.

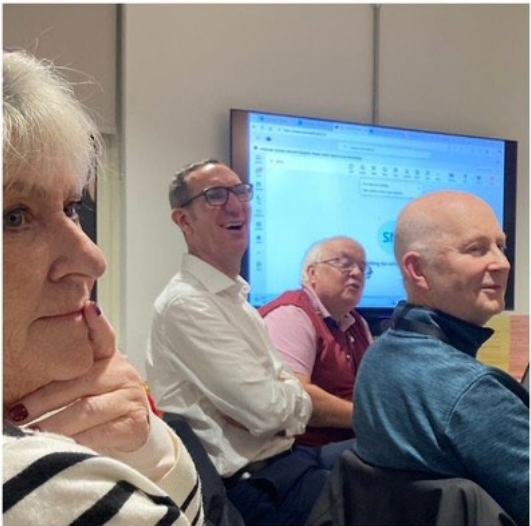
Six events organised and ran on estates, led by ambassadors and supported by the CAP project officer, housing associations and other partners such as the Richmond health bus. An estimated total of 450 people attended events.

Ambassadors have held quarterly forums, sharing ideas and challenges, and speaking with housing professionals. In December, ambassadors spoke with Jonathan Walters (then Deputy Chief Executive and now Chief Executive Officer of the Housing Regulator).

Ambassadors input into a bid to central government's Social Housing Innovation Fund to support further growth and development of the programme, securing funding for the next year and gaining national recognition for their work.



Community Ambassadors event in Hampton Wick



Community Ambassadors meeting with the Housing Regulator in December 2025

Appendix 2: Richmond upon Thames Private Registered Provider Stock 2025

Housing Associations	General Needs - self contained units	Supported Housing / housing for older people units	Total:
A2 Dominion	99	27	126
Anchor Hanover	0	39	39
Central and Cecil Housing Trust	0	20	20
Golden Lane Housing Ltd	0	7	7
Guinness Partnership	150	34	184
Hastoe Housing Association Ltd	30	0	30
Home Group	0	11	11
Karibu Community Homes Ltd	27	0	27
L&Q	452	109	561
Look Ahead care and support	0	12	12
Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing	347	25	372
Notting Hill Genesis	79	0	79
Origin - Places for People	145	0	145
PA Housing	1421	301	1722
Reside Housing Association Ltd	0	11	11
Richmond Housing Partnership	5829	414	6343
Sovereign Network Group	107	0	107
Stonewater Limited	5	0	5
The Barnes Fund	0	33	33
The Hampton Parochial Charities	0	12	12
The Sons of the Divine Providence	21	0	21
Total	8812	1055	9867