

# Decaying Homes, Forgotten Lives:

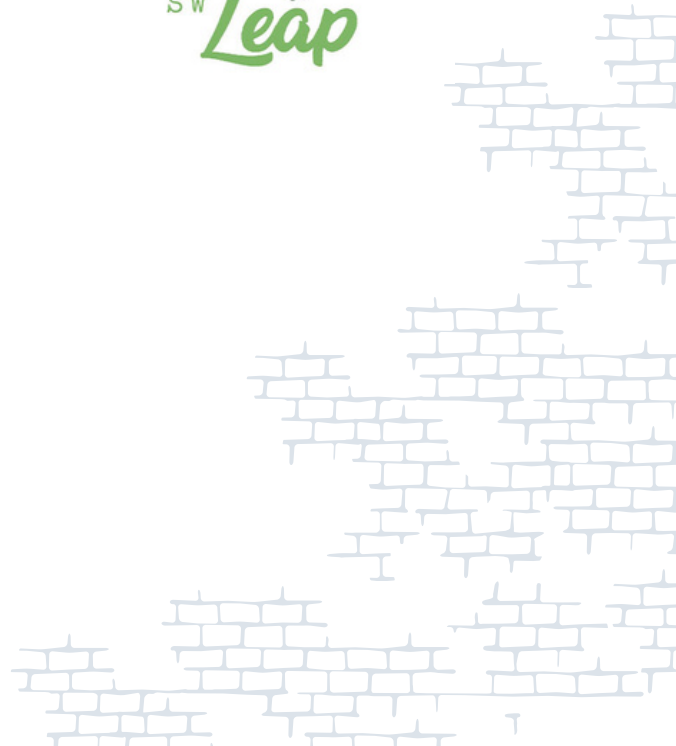
**A Call for Urgent Action in Richmond's  
Social Housing Disrepairs Crisis**



**Ruils Independent Living, Multicultural Richmond,  
Citizen's Advice Richmond, Richmond AID, Age UK Richmond,  
South West London Energy Advice Partnership (SWLEAP)**

May 2024

This report was created in partnership by the following organisations who have a vested interest in the needs of social housing tenants in Richmond Borough.



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# Executive Summary

**We all want a home that is safe, free of disrepairs and in liveable condition.**

For many social housing tenants in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, this basic human right is not being met. Our survey has found that many residents are living in appalling conditions with their homes having significant disrepairs that have not been rectified by housing providers. Moreover, disabled residents and those experiencing intersectional exclusion, face even greater barriers to getting their disrepairs resolved and their voices heard.

Jenny and her family have had an ongoing penetrating damp issue since moving into their social housing property in Richmond Borough 15 years ago. All bedrooms are affected, leading to white and black mould, watermarks on the walls, water in electrical plug sockets, and furniture and clothing ruined. Every member of Jenny's family has experienced physical symptoms of long-term mould exposure including allergies and fatigue and their situation has significantly exacerbated their disabled family member's condition.

Jenny has consistently been told that watermarks and blown plaster were caused by condensation even though the walls worsen with rain. An appointment with an external surveyor confirmed that it was penetrating damp and that the housing provider needed to do an inspection to find the cause. The provider continues to blame this on condensation, and even with a formal complaint in place, the case has not been moved forward.



This situation has affected the family's physical and mental health, their family life, has caused damage to personal belongings and affected their personal hygiene. The family are on a low income and can't afford to replace furniture and clothes. Additionally, a disabled member of their household has experienced immense stress because of the disrepairs. No one should be forced to live in these conditions.

Jenny and her family are 1 of 101 households who responded to our survey seeking views and experience on the state of social housing disrepairs in Richmond. Overwhelmingly, tenants are experiencing trouble with communication with providers and timeliness of getting their disrepairs fixed.

Additionally disabled people and those experiencing intersectional barriers (like having a long-term health condition and English as an additional language) have cited inaccessible communication channels and a lack of reasonable adjustments.

This research and subsequent report highlight key areas of improvement needed in dealing with disrepairs and supporting the additional needs of tenants. It also highlights the significant volume of work undertaken by the voluntary sector to fill the gaps that exist in the social housing sector.

Our organisations want to see real and meaningful systemic change so that tenants like Jenny and the many others can live in homes free from disrepair.

**We want housing providers to ensure that:**

- 1 Residents with protected characteristics are flagged properly in their internal systems and access needs are met in all communications.**
- 2 Accessible communication channels between tenants and housing provider are available and easy to use.**
- 3 Providers are transparent on internal issues and communicate these to tenants and organisations in an accessible way.**
- 4 Isolated and disillusioned tenants are able share their feedback in an accessible and inclusive environment.**
- 5 Repairs get done, properly and completely, and in a timely manner.**

We want to be actively involved in this change and we hope that through working together with housing providers and the council, we can achieve better outcomes for tenants across the Borough.

To this end, we want a quarterly meeting between our organisations and the housing providers to highlight key issues, detail what actions need to be taken and hold all parties accountable. We also want real coproduction with disenfranchised and intersectionally excluded people to be put in place.

# Background

A chronic issue for social housing tenants in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is disrepairs and the way that they are handled by social housing providers.

**In 2022/23 69% of complaints raised to the Richmond Tenant's Champion were about repairs, which is an increase from 65% in the previous year<sup>1</sup>.**

This overwhelming majority is also reflected in our work.

Voluntary sector organisations across Richmond Borough have provided support to many social housing clients dealing with disrepairs in their properties through 1-2-1 case work, advice, drop-in sessions, complaint escalation, mediation and advocacy. We have worked with countless clients who have waited years for repairs to their homes, lived in squalid conditions and have struggled to engage meaningfully with their housing providers. Over the last few years, we have seen a sharp increase in need and unacceptable living conditions due to disrepairs not being addressed by the housing associations.

For the last few years, housing associations in Richmond have blamed unacceptably long delays for repairs/responses on Covid, supply issues and outside contractors. When asked for clarity on timescales and what tenants should expect, case workers are being told that they can't give timescales and that people will just have to wait. This attitude has had a detrimental impact on clients' wellbeing and increased the amount of time and work our case workers have had to put in to get issues properly dealt with. This has included escalating complaints to the providers and housing ombudsman.

Ruils and Multicultural Richmond applied and were successful in receiving funding from Inclusion London to create a campaign aimed at both understanding and addressing the problems around social housing disrepairs in the borough, with a specific focus on reaching those who are often intersectionally excluded from sharing their views and experience. In this case people who are disabled and whose first language is not English.

A collective of organisations actively working with social housing tenants was created to feed into this campaign, comprising of Ruils, Multicultural Richmond, Citizen's Advice Richmond, SWLEAP, Age UK Richmond and Richmond AID.

<sup>1</sup> [The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Tenant's Champion Report 2022/23](#)

## The main goals of this campaign were to:

- 1 Give social housing tenants the space/time to share their experiences fully, share what they think is working and give feedback on how they think systems for repairs/complaint escalation can be improved,**
- 2 Increase reach and engagement with disabled social housing tenants who we may not already be connected with, specifically those who experience intersectional exclusion, through partnership working with Multicultural Richmond and other local organisations,**
- 3 Produce a report detailing the data gathered from tenants to highlight what is important to them and**
- 4 Create an action plan for future engagement with housing providers, the collective and tenants.**

All of our organisations have tried many tactics in the past to engage with housing associations. On a one-to-one basis, we have had some success escalating cases on behalf of clients who haven't felt listened to or had their disrepairs resolved. However, working on individual cases is extremely time consuming and most of the time does not resolve the wider issue.

Systemic change is required and we hope that this work, that we have completed as a collective, will be heard and taken seriously by housing associations and change the way they engage with tenants on repairs/reasonable accommodation. We want transparency, honesty and openness and for housing associations to listen to their disabled tenants.

We are campaigning for change and want to see the housing associations co-producing new systems with disabled people that are accessible going forward.



# What We Did

The first phase of this campaign has focused on giving tenants\* safe spaces to share their experiences with disrepairs in social housing.

We held 5 events across the borough, both in person and online, that provided inclusive and accessible spaces for disabled people and those with English as an additional language to share their views:

- Wednesday March 15 2023 at Whitton Social Centre, Whitton
- Thursday March 30 2023 at York House, Twickenham
- Tuesday April 18 2023 on Zoom
- Thursday April 27 2023 at Mortlake Community Centre, Mortlake
- Friday April 28 2023 at Whitton Community Centre, Whitton

**York House event on March 30th 2023** – we had a combination of Councillors, the community engagement team, professionals and local residents in attendance.



**Mortlake Community Centre event on April 27th 2023** – we had all of our collective partners in attendance and the support for several local Councillors, some of whom are social housing tenants themselves. Pictured are Kiran and Ravi (Multicultural Richmond), Hallie (Ruils) and Timi (Mortlake Community Association).



**Housing Community Event at Whitton Community Centre on April 28th 2023** – 15 organisations from across the borough present and we held a panel discussion featuring Ruils, Richmond AID, Richmond and Wandsworth Housing Team from the Council and the Procurement team from the Council.





Attendance at these events varied, but even where there was limited attendance, those individuals were grateful for the space to share their experience without fear of the housing associations being present. For all who attended and shared their experiences, we made sure to connect them with local organisations who could support them with ongoing issues.

In addition to filling out the survey, event attendees came up with a lot of ideas and possible solutions, which we have included in our recommendations.

The campaign has had the support of Richmond Council, its Councillors and both local MPs, who have helped us share the survey and have invited us along to their monthly surgeries to support people who come with social housing issues. The MPs have also emailed their constituents who have previously come to them with disrepairs issues.

We have been publicising the campaign through the collective's [social media](#), blogs, newsletters and websites. To promote the events, we had over 2500 leaflets delivered in key areas across the borough and we have called clients to invite them along to the events and to fill in the survey.

In total we received 101 responses to the survey which was closed at the end of September (7 months of data collection).

Because we only collected responses from tenants who engaged with us, it is important to note that the data collected is not necessarily representative of the whole of Richmond Borough or the whole tenancy group from a specific housing provider. Data collected does, however, indicate trends in certain areas where many residents have shared experiences and views.

Tenants were not offered incentives for completing the survey.

\*Please note that for ease of reporting we have referred to the people who completed our survey as tenants. We are not inferring that this is representative of all the social housing tenants in Richmond Borough, it is merely shorthand for reporting purposes.

# What We Found

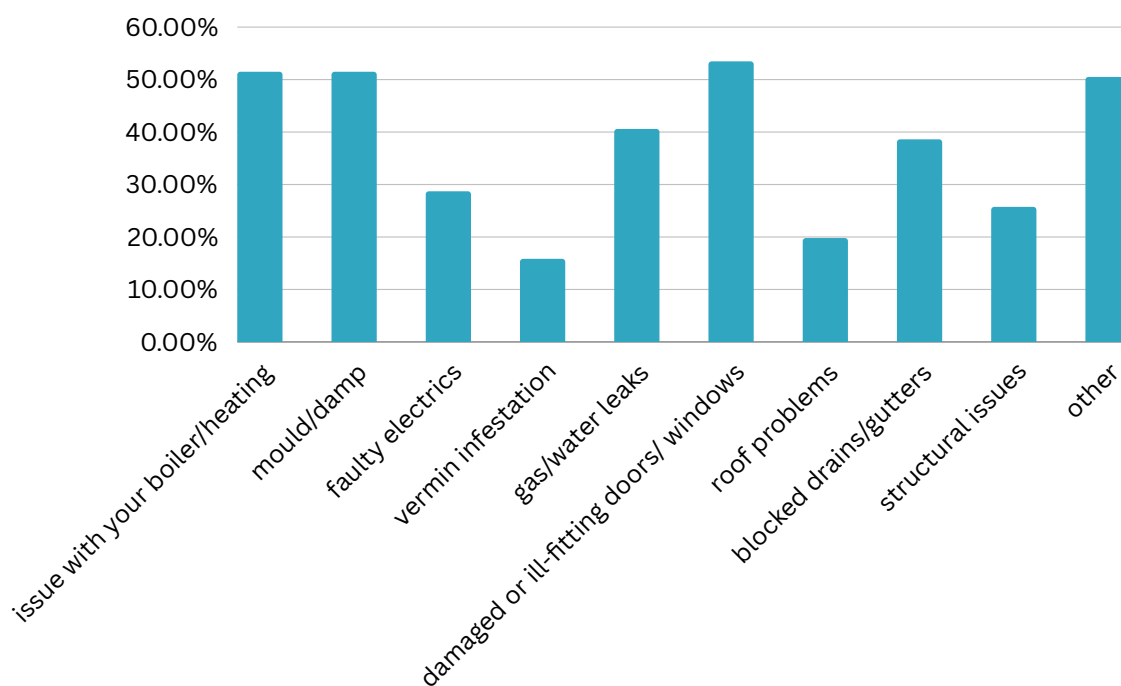
## Overview Data

We collected feedback from 101 social housing tenants living in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

50% of respondents reported that they have had 5+ disrepair issues in their current social housing property.

When asked which disrepairs tenants had experienced, the most common issues were: “damaged or ill-fitting doors/ windows” (53%), “issue with your boiler/heating” (51%) and “mould/damp” (51%).

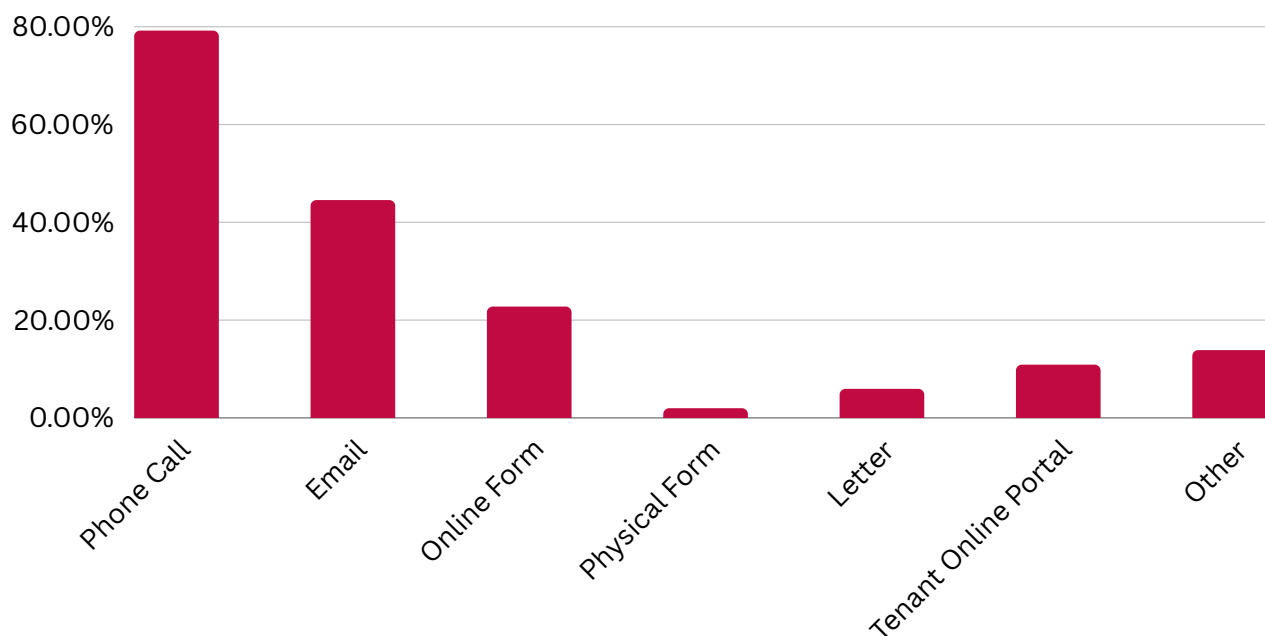
**Figure 1. What disrepair(s) have you had in your property?**



When asked when their most recent disrepair issue occurred, there was an even split between ‘less than one month ago’ and ‘more than one year ago’ – both 30%. Regardless of when the most recent issue occurred, the majority of people (67%) said that they had reported the problem within one month.

A strong majority of people (79%) said that they reported their disrepair over the phone with ‘email’ being the second most used method (45%).

**Figure 2. How did you report your most recent disrepair issue?**



When asked what efforts tenants made to report their issue, most people said they needed to contact the provider via multiple avenues, on multiple occasions to get a response.

**Table 1. What efforts did you make to report your disrepair?**

<b>Actions taken by tenant</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>
Need to contact provider by multiple methods on multiple occasions to get a response	51
Online booking system doesn't always work	8
Unable to get through on the phone/phone line disconnects/wait time for phone call very long	6
Need to re-explain the problem many times to different people every time you make contact - they do not keep a record and files are not up to date	5
I've had to chase for a long period to get a response	4
I've had to get external support to help me get through to provider about my disrepair	3
Reporting channels are not accessible (language barrier, elderly who doesn't use internet)	2
The result you get depends on the person you speak to	1
Issues with having an advocate support a client because of GDPR	1

“Damaging.  
Completely took over my life.  
All my energy went into  
chasing [X]\* for health and  
safety information and repairs.  
Emails went unanswered.  
Phone calls were time  
consuming and nothing ever  
happened from  
these calls.”

“Have reported a range  
of problems in the past - over  
the phone mainly because of  
language barrier. Lots of calls  
made and voicemails left, but  
they never call back or the  
phone cuts off when you  
do get through.”

“I was unable to raise  
the repairs on the tenant online  
portal so was left with no choice  
but to ring the office. I waited 30  
minutes for the call to be  
answered. I sent an email for a  
different repair and I am still 6  
months later waiting for a  
response from my housing  
provider.”

**Only 44%** of people had received a response to their initial contact from their housing provider within 1 month.

30% of people said that they are still waiting for their report of disrepair to be acknowledged.

In the situations where the housing provider did respond, tenants said that they either did so by phone (45%) and/or by email (40%). 26% of tenants selected 'other' with the top response saying that they had not received a response.

\* Housing provider name retracted

**Table 2. Describe your housing provider’s response to your report**

Response from housing provider	Number of responses
Provider ignores or doesn’t return contact	34
Get a promise to fix the issue with no follow through	13
Provider tries to make the issue seem less serious than it is when you report it	11
Confirmation that disrepair report has been received and someone will be in touch but never get a response	9
Met with “there is nothing we can do”	6
Agreed the repair but it keeps getting postponed	6
Said they were “looking into it” but no agreed action	3
Tenant told to fix the disrepair themselves	3
They respond in an inaccessible way (i.e. sending emails to someone who doesn’t have internet access, elderly)	2
Agreed the repair but the people in charge haven’t given green light	2
Day to day staff polite	2
Tenant “blacklisted” for raising complaints	2
Agree to fix some issues but ignore others reported	2
Responded to the complaint made and won’t respond about the disrepair	1



“I am working with a lady at [X]\* on the case and I have issues getting through to her. They keep sending emails instead of calling back. They know I don’t have internet and that I can’t check it frequently.”

“In general, the day-to-day staff were far more sympathetic and engaged with solving the problem than the original housing officer or her manager were. We were lied to multiple times by both and eventually completely black-listed so emails went unanswered, phone calls unreturned and booked repairs were actively cancelled.”



\* Housing provider name retracted



“Dismissive. Harmful. Not taking me seriously or questioning my credibility. Using my mental health disclosure as a reason to explain no communication or action, because apparently, it’s my mental health management which is the issue.”

“Sewage flood was treated as just another leak. They were dismissive, ignorant, unprofessional and disrespectful, dehumanising and have a bullying culture. We are treated as only as 9-5 job, not as human beings. They seem to forget the fact that they are dealing with human lives, their health and well-being.”



When asked if their issue had been fixed, **60% of tenants said ‘no’**, with a further 22% saying that the repair is ‘in progress’.

When asked about the actions taken to resolve the disrepair, tenants said:

**Table 3. What action has your housing provider taken to resolve your disrepair?**

Action taken by housing provider	Number of responses
No action taken	38
Send out the wrong people to fix the issue (i.e. sent a window company for a brick issue) or unqualified people	20
Temporary fix employed rather than fixing it properly	14
Repair completed	10
Provider says repairs are completed when they are not	9
Engineers/contractors were sent but didn’t show up	7
Response to fix emergency situation but they never sent someone to fix issue properly	6
Tenant dealt with issue themselves	5
Completed the repair but because of quality issue has come back	4
Appointment was scheduled for the repair to be fixed without communicating with the tenant	3
Started the repair but didn’t complete	3
Given compensation for inconvenience	1



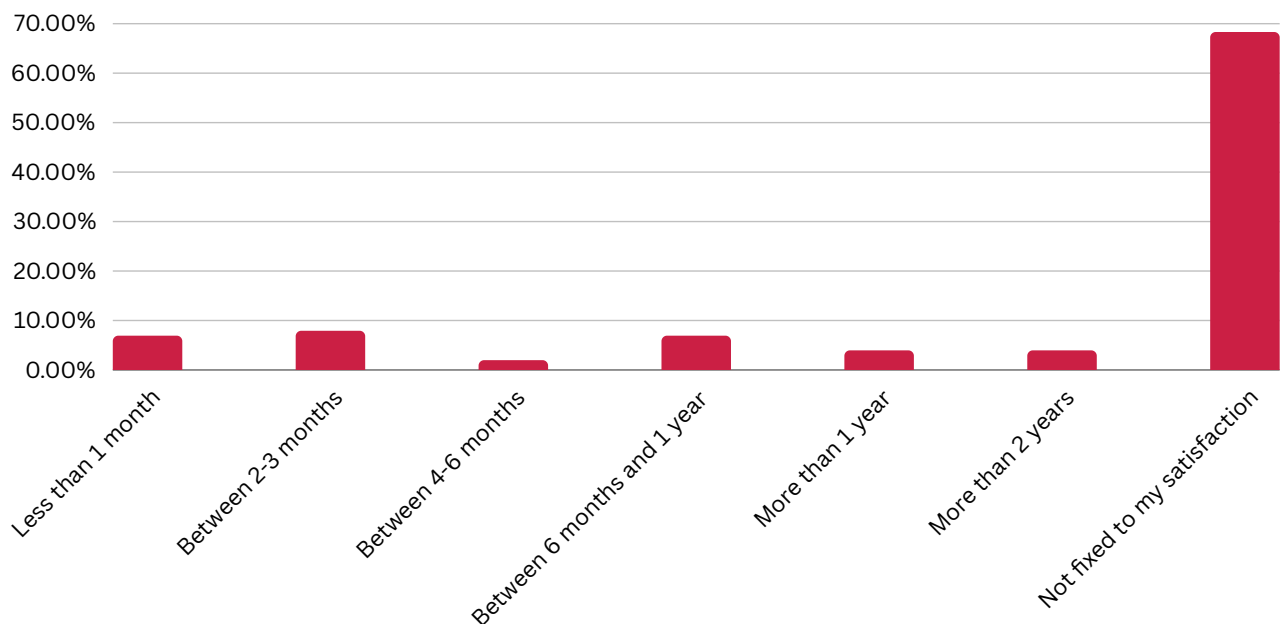
“It took the involvement of local MP to get landlord to consider the seriousness of the situation and treat it with due urgency. With MP’s involvement they agreed to replace carpets/ flooring and disinfect the flat. Process was long battle.”

“I phoned the out of hours team when I got back from work yesterday as I was very distressed about the poor condition of the main communal front door. They logged the details and said they would pass these on to the relevant people who deal with repairs, but that it was down to me to chase them up which is difficult for me as I work full time in a customer facing environment.”

“Very good with emergency repairs. Had a bad leak and they came out within 4 hours. They stopped the leak but it took time for the wall to dry out etc. I have had to put in formal complaints twice to get the repairs done.”

Overwhelming, tenants said that their most recent disrepair issue had not been fixed to their satisfaction (68%), with 8% of people waiting more than 1 year to have their issue addressed.

**Figure 3. How long did it take for your social housing provider to fix the problem to your satisfaction?**



# 47%

**of tenants surveyed said that they had submitted a formal complaint through the housing provider's process.**

A further 6% are in the process of making a complaint. 47% of people said they had not submitted a complaint.

When asked if they had escalated their issue to the Ombudsman, only 11% said 'yes' with a further 6% saying they were in the process of escalating.

Interestingly, 64% of tenants surveyed said that they had not accessed any outside support from organisations or advocates to help them resolve their disrepair issue. This was surprising given the amount of support available from the voluntary sector in Richmond.

Ruils (33%), Richmond AID (12%), Citizen's Advice Richmond (10%) and SWLEAP (4%) were all cited as organisations people had received support for. People also said that they received support from other sources as well:

**Table 4. Other sources of external support access by tenants**

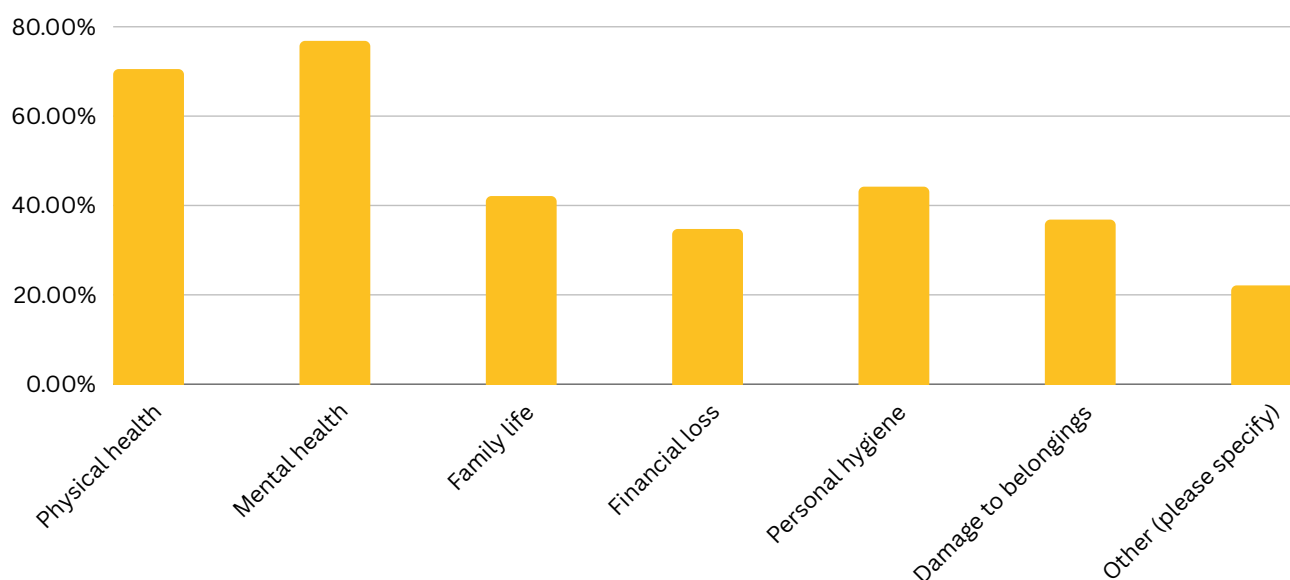
Source of support	Number of Responses
Local MP	7
Local Councillors	5
GP Surgery	4
Social Prescribing	3
Tenant's Champion	3
Castelnau Community Centre	2
Occupational Therapist	2
Family	2
Neighbours/ Friends	2
Social Services	2
Carers	2

Source of support	Number of Responses
Citizen's Advice Richmond	1
Environmental Health	1
Guide Dogs for the Blind	1
Mental Health Team	1
Ombudsman	1
Royal British Legion	1
Crosslight Advice	1
Solicitors	1
Grace Advocacy	1
RB Mind	1
Richmond Carers Centre	1

A large number of people reported that their physical (71%) and mental (77%) health had been impacted by their experience with disrepairs in their property.

Personal hygiene (44%), family life (42%) and damage to belongings (37%) were also cited as ways that people had been impacted. Only 6 people said that their life had not been detrimentally impacted by their disrepair.

**Figure 4. If any, what parts of your life have been impacted by the disrepair? Select all that apply.**



**Table 5. ‘Other’ ways your life has been impacted by disrepair in your home**

Other ways life has been impacted	Number of responses
Affecting disabled members of household	7
Risk of loss of life (suicide) or threat to life (injury)	3
Worry/stress	3
Feel unsafe/unsecure in the home	2
Time lost chasing and trying to get issue resolve	1
Anti-social behaviour	1
One issue has caused other disrepairs	1
Affected neighbours and relationships	1
Lack of accessibility	1
Inconvenience	1
Affects care given by carers	1
Aesthetics	1



“This is affecting our children who have ADHD.”



“This has impacted my disability management so much. I now experiencing not being able to talk when anxious. Regular meltdowns which impact my ability to go places I would usually go.”



“We have had ongoing hospitalization and medication for our child with asthma.”

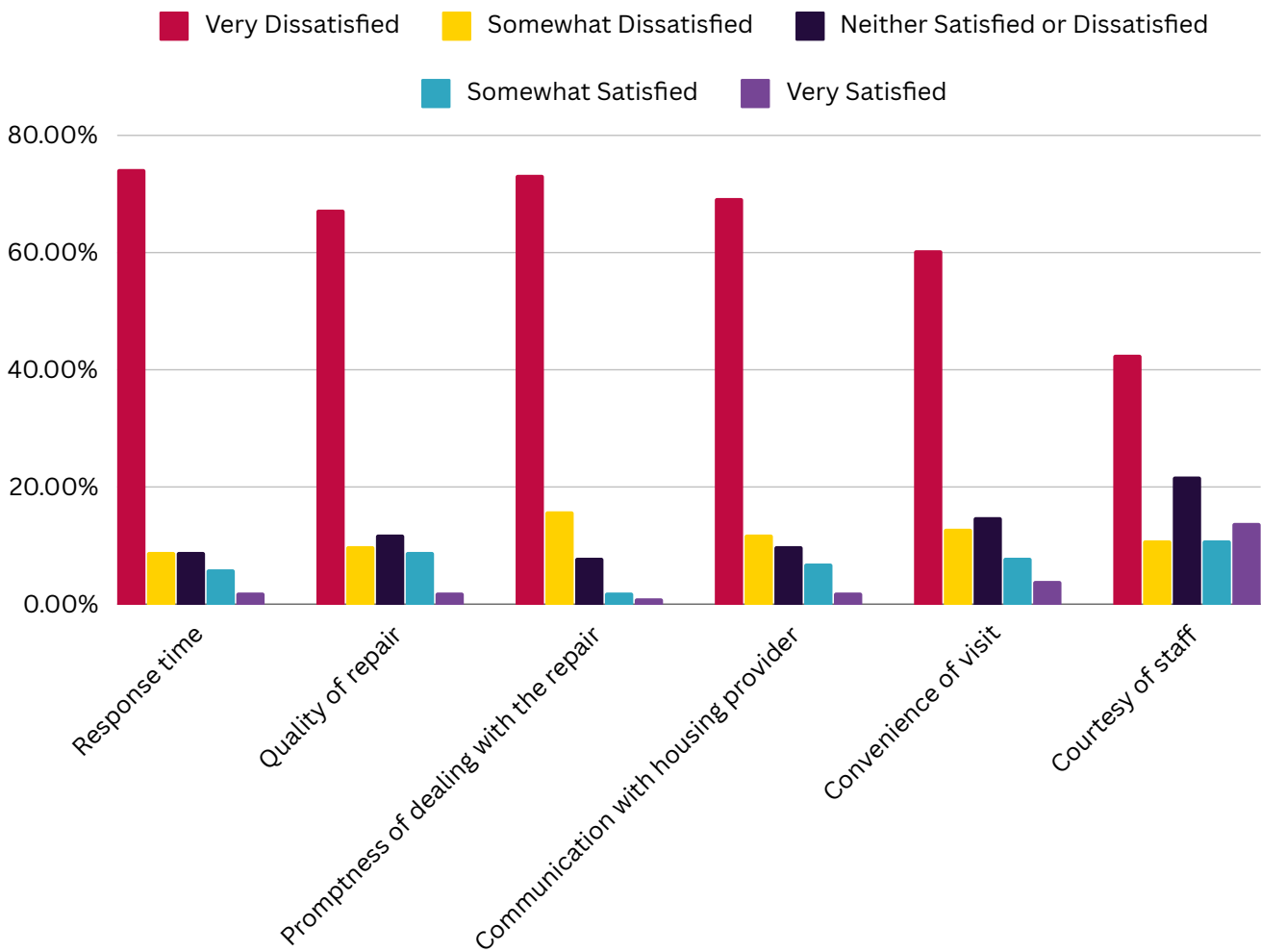
We also asked tenants what their overall experience was like in the following areas:

- Response time
- Quality of repair
- Promptness of dealing with the repair
- Communication with the housing provider
- Convenience of the visit
- Courtesy of staff

In all of the categories except for ‘courtesy of staff’ over 73% said that they were ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ with their experience. People were most dissatisfied with the ‘response time’ (74% very dissatisfied) and ‘promptness of dealing with the repair’ (73% very dissatisfied).

The highest rating was in the ‘courtesy of staff’ category, with 25% of people saying they were ‘somewhat satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the service.

**Figure 5. How would you rate your level of satisfaction with your disrepair experience from very dissatisfied to very satisfied?**



We asked people ‘If you could change one thing about the way your disrepair was handled, what would it be?’ and they had a lot to say.

The top response was to repair the issue, but the other responses highlighted the desire for better communication, taking the issue seriously and more accountability/transparency from providers.

A major theme in responses throughout the survey was around respect and treating tenants with empathy.

**Table 6. If you could change one thing about the way your disrepair was handled, what would it be?**

<b>What Would you Change?</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<b>Repair Process Improvement</b>	
Repair the problem	23
Quicker response time	10
Send qualified people to complete the repairs	10
Fix the disrepair quicker	8
Improve the quality of the repairs	5
Work to understand the issue so you can send the right person out to fix it	4
Nothing to fix, happy with service	3
More efficient methods to deal with repair (i.e. ordering the right parts)	1
<b>Communication</b>	
Better communication with the tenant (callbacks, follow through, consistency)	19
More accountability and transparency for reasons behind repairs not getting done - honesty	13
More empathetic communication from customer service	9
Listen to what the tenant has to say	9
Adjust the communication to the needs of the tenant, making sure it is accessible for all people (i.e. disabled, people who don't speak English, digitally excluded)	9
Informing tenant of what is happening throughout the process	4
Better communication between customer service staff and their managers	4
Keeping their word – do what they say they are going to do	3
Better communication between contractors and housing provider	3
<b>Tenant Relationship and Respect</b>	
Taking the issues reported seriously from the start	13
Believing and respecting the tenant	9
Taking responsibility for their property	7
Understanding the long-term impacts on tenants when things aren't dealt with (i.e. health problems from mould)	7
Complaints system needs to be taken seriously	3
Adjustments for disabled people (i.e. being flexible with timings)	2
<b>Administrative and Operational Efficiency</b>	
Keep accurate records of people's access needs in their system so all staff can see	7
Keep accurate records - what has been reported, what has been agreed, what has actually been completed	5
People turning up when they say they will	3
Clarity on who is responsible for fixing the repair when it is reported	2
Give options for appointment times rather than telling	2



“To be taken seriously. Mould and damp is horrible - ruins clothes and household items including furniture. Food goes off. It never ends trying to tackle it. Smells so bad. Breathing difficulties, etc.”

“That [X]\* and their contractors had better communication with each other as every time I've called, I made it very clear what I needed doing. Also they need to rethink the complaints and compensation system as they can't compensate me for using electric heaters for the last two years which has cost me thousands in electric bills as I still have the heaters and no heating.”

“More communication - they know I can't read or write. Living there for 10-11 years so they should know. I can answer them verbally, but can't read emails. I need to be phoned. They need to act and respond faster - shouldn't take years.”

“They need to adjust their communication to meet the needs of individuals - I have trouble reading and writing in English and they know this. They still send me emails even though they know this isn't accessible for me. They also know I don't have internet in temp accommodation and still don't call. I wish they would listen. I wish they would take my situation into consideration.”

“I live in fear that something will break so I am so careful all of the time. It has been so good to talk to someone and have this space to say something. It has really happened to me and it is helpful to be able to share.”

\* Housing provider name retracted

## **Demographic Data**

101 people completed our survey, which consisted of 30 questions. It took people, on average, 14 minutes to complete online, and surveys completed over the phone took closer to 30 minutes.

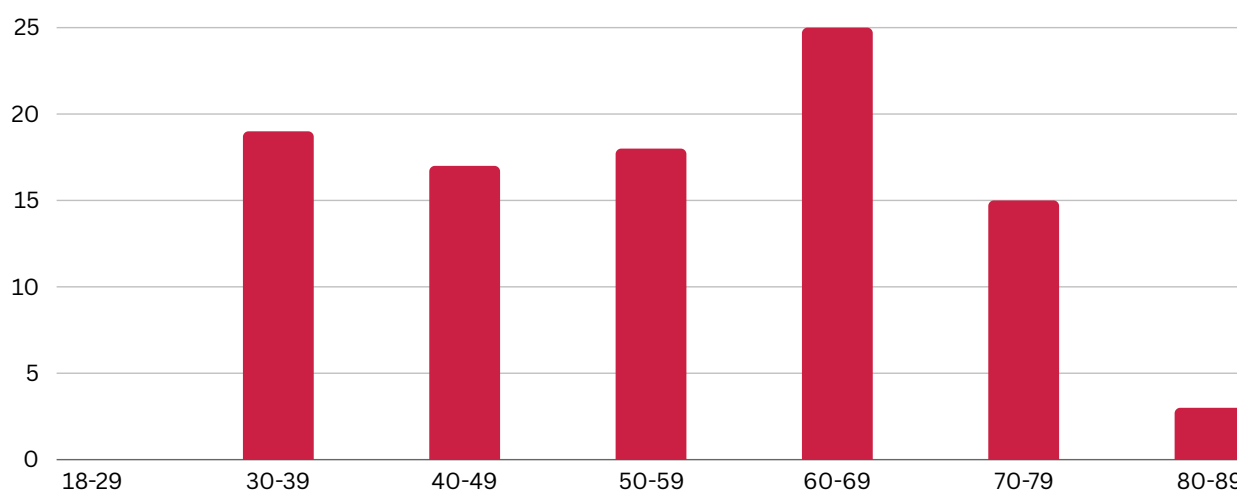
36 people completed paper surveys and a further 13 people completed the survey over the phone.

The majority of respondents were Richmond Housing Partnership tenants, with PA Housing tenants having the second highest response rate.

**Table 7. Breakdown of respondents by Housing Association**

<b>Housing Association</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
The Guinness Partnership	2
London & Quadrant Housing Trust	1
Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Association	6
Notting Hill Housing Group	2
PA Housing	12
Richmond Housing Partnership	78

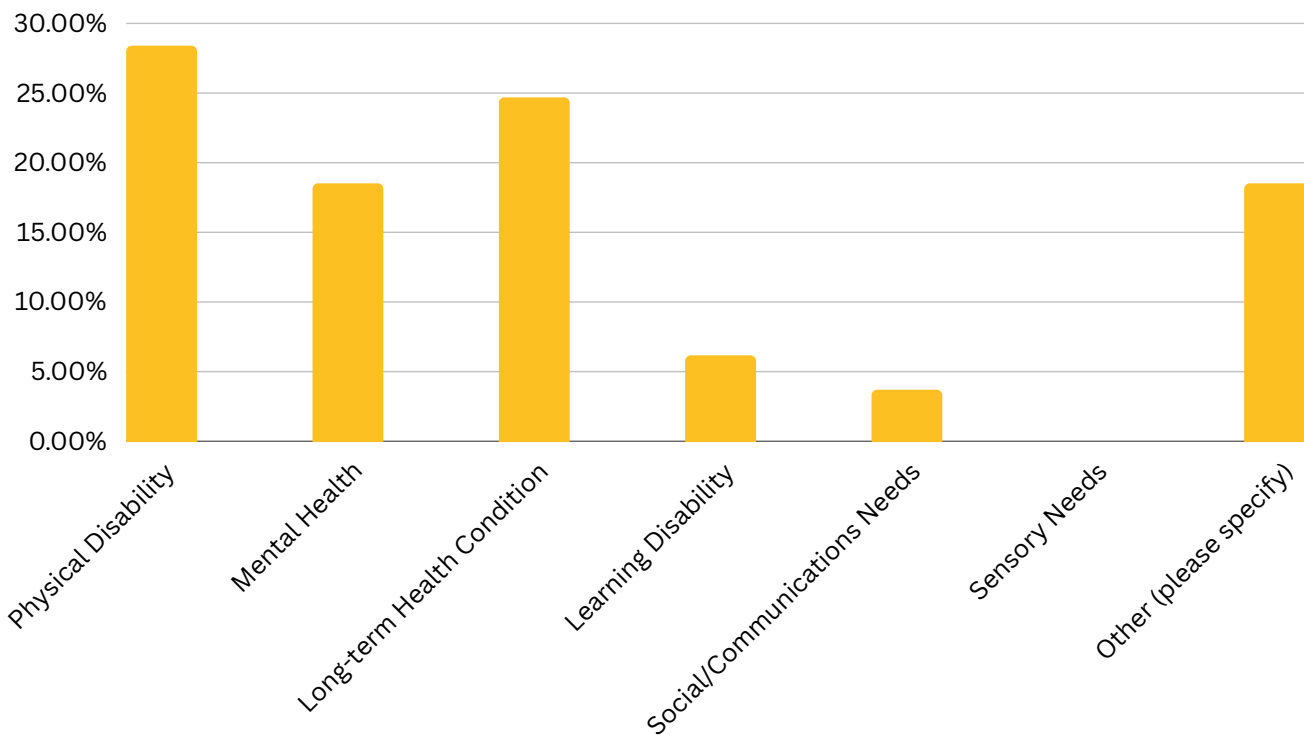
**Figure 6. Age Range of Residents**



One of the main goals of this campaign was to reach those who are intersectionally excluded from sharing their views, due to disability/impairment, racial background, language barriers and/or digital exclusion.

81% of tenants reported that they or someone in their household is disabled and/or has a long-term health condition, physical or mental health needs or additional support needs.

**Figure 7. What category most accurately reflects the needs in your household?**



30% of people were from a minority ethnic background with 15% having English as a second language.

13% of respondents were disabled **and** had English as an additional language.

# Voluntary Sector Work

**For the period January to September 2023, in which this research was carried out, Ruils, Richmond AID, Citizen's Advice Richmond and SWLEAP have supported 290 people on social housing disrepair cases.**

By 'support', we mean providing advice, doing home visits, sending e-mails, making formal complaints, escalating cases to the Tenant's Champion and Ombudsman and getting people rehoused. Multicultural Richmond and Age UK Richmond do not provide direct housing support, but signpost clients to other support services.

The vast majority of cases taken on by our organisations involve intensive, ongoing casework – which requires a lot of time and resources from our organisations and the individual case workers supporting clients. Even when we do not take on cases, our case workers spend a significant amount of time fielding calls, understanding the situation and directing people to the right support. The sheer volume of work that we do for and on behalf of clients bridges the gap in capacity that housing associations have in dealing with complex issues and understanding the needs of their tenants.



Amongst our organisations, the most common disrepair issue that we see in our casework is overwhelmingly damp and mould. We also see properties with leaks caused by outdated plumbing and poor infrastructure. Boiler and heating issues are frequent in non-energy efficient homes, leading to increased utility bills. We also support many clients who have long periods without heat and water, which is especially troubling when there are freezing temperatures. Additionally, we are seeing more and more properties that are unfit for human habitation.

In supporting clients to get their disrepairs sorted, our teams often need to work closely with housing providers and their staff. In our experience, we are not always afforded the same treatment as the council or other professionals. We would like open, and more importantly, clear communication from housing providers when we ask specific questions about cases we are working on.

We would like to see greater transparency and for our requests to be taken seriously and actioned. We know that everyone is under immense pressure and time poor, but mutual respect and a willingness to work collaboratively will achieve better outcomes for tenants and will help us all to make best use of our limited resources.

# Next Steps

The primary goal of this campaign was to identify what is working and what needs to be improved. Overwhelmingly, the tenants who responded to our survey felt unheard and have experienced long outstanding disrepairs. The long-term implications and impact to tenants are worrying and issues need to be addressed to prevent further distress and future tenants from experiencing the same problems.

We are calling on the housing associations to work with us on the following recommendations and coproduce solutions to the following areas:



## **Residents with protected characteristics are flagged properly in their internal systems and access needs are met in all communications.**

This was one of the strongest themes that came out of our survey. Many felt that their needs were not taken into consideration throughout the process – from initially reporting the repair all the way through to getting it resolved.

It is crucial that needs and reasonable adjustments are accurately recorded and that customer service agents and contractors have access to this information at every point of contact. Tenants may have physical, mental, social or other needs that might impact their ability to communicate or engage with social housing employees. If this information is available up front, residents can get the support they need, reducing the number of contacts and time it takes to get their issue resolved.



## **Accessible communication channels between tenants and housing provider are available and easy to use.**

We want to work with providers to examine existing communication channels and look at additional options that would help those who cannot effectively use the current systems. All tenants should be able to access information shared by their provider. Posts on social media and emails are not enough to update residents. Accessible formats, printed correspondence and translated documents should be made available, where required. These reasonable adjustments should be recorded in the tenant's records.

We recommend creating a working group to review the current communication methods used and who can help to develop new ways of communicating to ensure that information is available to all.

For example, the group could look at providing Braille vs audio description for visually impaired or blind people. Work also needs to be done to ensure that emergency/urgent repairs can be reported via a number of methods so that no one is excluded. At the moment you can only do this via the phone for some providers. The working group could coproduce solutions and provide feedback on what will work better.

Additionally, once accessible channels are created, there is work to be done to inform residents of the different ways that they can get in touch with providers. An access guide is one option, but others could include creating a dedicated mail out to all tenants or having an in-person session going through the options.



### **Providers are transparent on internal issues and communicate these to tenants and organisations in an accessible way.**

We know that housing associations are under a lot of pressure and have challenges that aren't communicated externally to support organisations and tenants. When speaking with tenants many said that they would be more understanding of delays if they had been communicated with properly from the beginning of their problem. For many, this does not happen and leaves them frustrated.

We want to support housing providers to look at ways to speed up the response to emails or repair requests via online portals. Currently it can take weeks or months to get a reply. When residents don't hear from the providers they then send in another email or phone in creating an even bigger back log. Getting an acknowledgement of their request and a follow up would make a big difference and help residents to feel heard.



### **Isolated and disillusioned tenants are able share their feedback in an accessible and inclusive environment.**

Many tenants feel isolated and afraid to share their experiences with providers. We spoke with some tenants through translators, completed many surveys over the phone and had 1-2-1 in person appointments with people to help them share their views. We want providers to examine the feedback mechanisms (including the complaints process) to make sure they are accessible and inclusive for all tenants.





## **Repairs get done, properly and completely, and in a timely manner.**

One of the biggest requests made by tenants was that disrepairs are taken seriously and fixed the right way from the first report. Long wait times and patch-up repairs mean that properties deteriorate, people start experiencing health and social issues and cases are escalated to voluntary sector organisations and MPs.

### **Quarterly Meetings**

We want to work with housing providers to create solutions. Our collective wants to set up a quarterly meeting with individual providers to:

- Track the progress of the coproduced solutions
- Feedback on current issues/trends case workers are seeing in their work
- Discuss how the collective can support the provider to implement and embed change

Our sector provides a huge amount of support to social housing tenants. We work with them very closely on their individual cases, but this amasses to a huge volume of work - over 290 clients supported between January-September 2023 alone between our organisations. This means that we are well placed to help come up with ideas and also implement them. We also have key insight into what will work for our clients, who need reasonable adjustments put in place for them to get the best outcomes.

# Going Forward

We hope this report is enlightening and highlights the issues that your tenants are facing. We want to help and we hope that through working together, we can achieve better outcomes for tenants across the Borough.

A confidential version of this report has been shared with our partners, supporters in the Council and the local people who shared their experiences with us. We are accountable to our clients and community, and want them to know that we are serious about coproducing change.

We welcome your thoughts on this report and look forward to working with you to achieve real and measurable change.

Signed,



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We would like to thank all of the tenants across Richmond Borough who shared their views, came to an event and fed into our research. Thank you for trusting us to amplify your voices and use what we've learned to push for change.

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