

# Grapevine

Spring/Summer 2019

## House & Home

- What are people saying?
- The consequences of recreational drug use
- Investing in our homes
- Being open and transparent
- Reducing our use of plastics

## Health & Wellbeing

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- Serious organized crime
- Building better relationships
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## SHAL

- How we deal with complaints
- New homes for Bridgwater
- The role of the Housing Ombudsman

# New homes for Bridgwater

We're building 28 new homes and  
continuing to invest in our current homes

Note to self: my  
rent will start to  
increase from  
April 2020

## What's it got to do with you?

It may sometimes feel like we're being nosy and asking for lots of personal information about who lives in our homes. It's quite natural to feel protective of your personal information. It's not only natural, it's sensible.

However, the more we know about the people living in our homes the better landlords we can be. Strict laws are in place to make sure your personal information is protected.

## The Homes Act 2018

On 20 March 2019 a new law came into force to make sure that rented houses and flats are 'fit for human habitation', which means that they are safe, healthy and free from things that could cause serious harm.

This includes those who rent privately as well as from a council or housing association.

It will apply if you sign your tenancy agreement on or after 20 March 2019. If you signed your tenancy agreement before 20 March 2019 it will apply from 20 March 2020.

Visit our [www.shal.org](http://www.shal.org) for more information.

## I'll text you

Our text service is more popular than ever – and we've even got our contractor's using it. You can send the following texts 24/7:

<b>BAL</b>	To get your balance
<b>CARD</b>	To get a new PayPoint card
<b>DD</b>	To set up or amend a direct debit
<b>PAY</b>	To find out how to pay your rent
<b>REF</b>	To get your Payment Reference Number for allpay
<b>ASB (plus a message)</b>	To report anti-social behaviour
<b>RENTS (plus a message)</b>	To contact your Housing Officer
<b>REPAIR (plus a message)</b>	To report a repair

## We give you a home for life

Our purpose is to provide safe, warm and affordable homes to a decent standard for people who are homeless or in housing need.

We're not out to make a profit. Any surplus we have at the end of the year is put back into what we do. Our homes are provided to tenants for life (after an initial 12 month starter tenancy) as long as they:

1. Pay their rent
2. Look after their home
3. Are a good neighbour

Sadly, we've had to evict 4 tenants between April 2018 and February 2019 (2 for arrears and 2 for serious anti-social behavior). This is always a last resort.

Overall, we have re-let 26 homes and completed 13 mutual exchanges between April 2018 and February 2019.

## We're here to help



01278 444344



07984 355553  
(text only)



07889 537164  
(out of hours)



2 King Square  
Bridgwater, TA6 3DG



[information@shal.org](mailto:information@shal.org)



[www.shal.org](http://www.shal.org)  
[www.mytenancy.co.uk](http://www.mytenancy.co.uk)



## Cannabis

Occasionally we receive complaints about people smoking cannabis. Despite what people may think about cannabis and recent changes in the law cannabis is still a Class B drug. That means it's illegal to have for yourself, give away or sell.

- Possession can get you up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both
- Supplying someone else, even your friends, can get you up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both

## Cuckoo

'Cuckooing' is when dealers from larger cities use violence, exploitation and intimidation to take over the home of a vulnerable person to use as a base for drug dealing.

'County lines' are gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into smaller towns across the country.

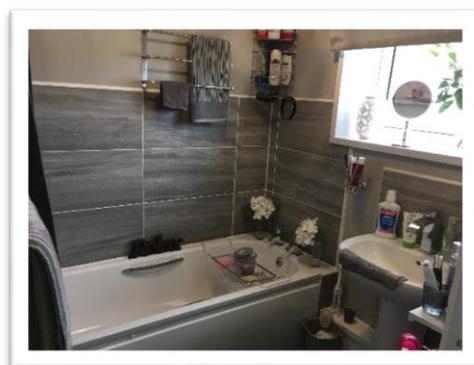
## You're breaking the law – and breaching your tenancy

If the police catch people supplying illegal drugs (including cannabis) in a home, club, bar or hostel, they can prosecute the landlord or any other person concerned in the management of the premises.

## Eviction

If either a tenant, person living in or visiting one of our homes has, gives away, cultivates or sells cannabis we will issue a Notice of Seeking Possession. This is the first legal step towards evicting you from your home.

If you'd like some information, help and advice about cannabis and what to do about drug use see our **Health & Wellbeing** section



## Investing in our homes

We're really proud of the work we've done over the last few years and we're planning to do more and more. In the 4 years to the end of March 2019 we've replaced:

Bathrooms	Central heating	Doors	Kitchens
145	108	418	140

We've had some fantastic feedback from tenants. However, with the best will in the world our planned maintenance programme doesn't always go according to plan. Sometimes we need to re-schedule or unforeseen problems come our way. Other times tenants simply aren't happy with what we've done or how we've done it and choose to make a complaint.

## What are people saying?

Here is some of the feedback we've received back from tenants about our planned programme:

*"I'm a very nervous lady and he made me feel extremely relaxed and did a lovely job... everything was just perfect!"*

*"He found a pound in my bathroom and gave it back to me which made my day."*

*"A wonderful man... trustworthy, polite and excellent at his job."*

*"All the work they have done in my house is fantastic... very nice lads and ladies."*

*"She's such a lovely girl she really is and she knows her job... very professional."*

*"Dear lovely SHAL lady... please help yourself to tea, coffee and biscuits... thank you for all your fab work and being so tidy."*

*"I do have several concerns about SHAL. Over the past few years I have noticed that they no longer care about the tenant anymore! As landlords I think they are awful I have had a lot of dealings with SHAL as I have said and I have been a tenant for over 20 years."*

*"They agree to do something and then they change their minds! This has happened on many occasions and I have been left in tears on several occasions."*

*"I still have outstanding jobs three going back as far as April 2018, and no sign of these jobs being done any time soon, so I have to live with their mistakes as do any one who visits me and it is embarrassing."*

*"I hope that you will print my input on SHAL. I look forward to the newsletter."*

**"We have published your complaint about our service because we want to be transparent. Everyone at SHAL cares about the individuals and families who rent homes from us. I am sorry that you have been distressed. I have visited you at home to discuss your concerns and I have written to you to clarify where we are and why. Please use the next stage of our complaints process if you are still not happy with our service."**

**"Ultimately you can get your complaint reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman – details of how to contact them are on our website or you can ring, email or text us for them and we will be happy to send them to you. For issues where you think SHAL has caused you 'serious detriment' you can contact our regulator – again details are on the website or phone, text or email us and we will be happy to send you the information."**

## Being open and transparent

We're committed to being open and transparent. This is a key part in the government's green paper on social housing:

- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
- Ensuring homes are safe and decent

We can achieve this by involving tenants, being clear about what we do and being open about complaints made against us and how we resolve them.

Angela

95%

are satisfied with their most recent repair

[www.shal.org/resident-area/complaints](http://www.shal.org/resident-area/complaints)

## How to reduce your use of plastics

The extent of plastic pollution is overwhelming. Plastics have crept into every part of our lives. How can we possibly make a difference? Here are a few ideas:

1. Don't be overwhelmed – take it one step at a time.
2. Always remember your bag for life.
3. Work out what plastics you really need – go through your waste and look at the plastics you throw away the most. What alternatives are there?
4. Avoid excessive food packaging – save money and food waste too by buying what you need rather than the amount prepacked in plastic.
5. Try plastic-free cleaning – white vinegar diluted in 3 parts warm water makes a cheap and effective natural surface cleaner and cuts down on plastic cleaning bottles.
6. Say no to plastic straws
7. Avoid microbeads – check the packaging. Avoid products that contain PE, PP, PET, PMMA, PTFE and nylon.
8. Try 'naked' toiletries – in 2015 sales of shampoo bars meant that almost 16 million plastic bottles weren't made. Likewise, use traditional bars of soap rather than pump action plastic bottles.
9. Leave plastic at the supermarket – take some of the plastic packaging you don't want off the products you do want and leave it at the checkout. It's a bit scary, but you're well within your rights to do it, and you're helping the supermarket to understand what their customers want (Alice, Greenpeace).
10. Find your nearest re-fill stations and package free supermarkets like "Lesser Litter" in Taunton. You can reduce the amount of plastic in your weekly shop by re-filling containers.

## Brownie cookies

### Brownie half

- Dark chocolate chips (100 g)
- Unsalted butter (65 g, diced)
- Caster sugar (75 g)
- Light brown sugar (50 g)
- Egg (1, large)
- Plain flour (65 g)
- Cocoa powder (1 ½ tbsp)
- Baking powder (½ tsp)

### Cookie half

- Unsalted butter (100 g, softened)
- Golden caster sugar (125 g)
- Egg (1)
- Vanilla essence (½ tsp)
- Plain flour (200 g)
- Baking powder (1 tsp)
- Dark chocolate chips (100 g)

1. To make the brownie batter, melt chocolate and butter in a bowl over simmering water. Beat together sugars and egg, then stir in chocolate mixture and stir to combine
2. Mix together the dry ingredients with a pinch of salt, then add to the chocolate mixture and mix well
3. To make the cookie dough, beat the butter and sugar together until pale and creamy, then beat in the egg and vanilla. Fold in the flour and baking powder with a pinch of salt. Add the chocolate chips and stir
4. Take ½ tbsp of each mixture, roll into balls, and press together into a single ball. Repeat with the rest of the mixture, place on a lined baking sheet and chill for 15 minutes. Heat oven to 180 C/gas mark 4
5. Bake for 7 minutes, until crisp at the edges but slightly soft in the middle. Leave to cool on the tray for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely



Sheila

## Cannabis: know the risks

As well as being illegal, cannabis can have a devastating effect on people's health. It can:

- affect your motivation
- impair your memory
- give you mood swings
- disturb your sleep and make you depressed
- make you anxious, panicky and aggressive
- cause hours (or days) of anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations
- cause a serious relapse for people with psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia
- increase your chances of developing illnesses like schizophrenia, especially if you have a family background of mental illness and you start smoking in your teenage years

Heavy cannabis users often get cravings and find it hard not to take the drug – even when they know it's causing them physical, mental or social problems.

## Worried about drug use?

Drugs can be a hard subject to discuss, especially if you think your friend or relative has a problem.

Try to stay open-minded and remember that, with the right help and support, most people overcome their use before any serious harm is caused. Also, even if you do offer support, they might not change their behaviour.

You or your friend can call FRANK anytime on 0300 123 6600 for confidential advice.



## Are you feeling pressured into taking drugs?

1. Remember that you're not alone. It's easy to think you're the only one who's not tried drugs but, actually, most young people don't take drugs.
2. Work out where you stand on issues like sex, drugs and alcohol. Knowing your own mind makes it easier to stay true to yourself.
3. Prepare yourself. Think about how you'd like to respond when someone offers you drugs so you know what to say.
4. Try to understand who's offering you the drugs and why. Friends should understand if you say no, people you don't know you very well may expect something in return.
5. Say no firmly but clearly and without making a big deal about it. If they try to persuade you, don't feel like you have to change your mind.
6. Remember that, although they may not show it, your mates will respect you more if you're assertive and clear about what you do and don't want to do.
7. Take a look around. You'll soon see that you're not the only one worrying about what other people think of you. Try to focus on your own opinion of yourself - in the end, that's all that matters.
8. Worried about your mates being pressured? Don't keep it to yourself, talk to them, or someone you trust.
9. If you're finding it hard to be yourself within your group, take a step back, and think about whether it's time to find a new crowd to hang out with.
10. Before trying anything new it makes sense to know what's what. You can find out more about different drugs online or call FRANK on 0300 123 6600 at any time, day or night.

## Worried about your child? Here's some advice on how to start up a conversation about drugs

It's important to stay calm and open-minded when you talk to your child about drugs.

Remember to look online to make sure your knowledge is up-to-date and accurate, and think about how you'll react if your child says he/she has tried drugs. You don't want to react in a way that shuts down the conversation.

Once you're ready to chat, make sure you:

1. Keep the subject broad to begin with, ask open-ended questions about your child's friends and school. An open-ended question is one where the person can't answer with a 'yes' or a 'no'. For example, "What was today like at school?" or "Why do you think people take drugs?"
2. Allow plenty of time, don't rush the conversation.
3. Listen carefully and keep the chat as two-way as possible.
4. Be understanding – not judgmental or critical.
5. Respect what they have to say – don't lose your temper if you disagree with your child's opinions, it might make them rebel more.
6. Don't make assumptions about what they know or do, and don't accuse your child of taking drugs (even if you think they have).
7. Let them know you're there for them – that they can talk to you about drugs.
8. Set boundaries, make it clear what your house rules are so they know what you will and won't accept.
9. Be realistic: while there are some serious risks involved in drug use, most people who try drugs don't suffer any long-term harm to their health.
10. And if they are using, don't confront them when they're high.

**If your child refuses to talk to you, try not to panic. Remember that people who try drugs often don't carry on using them. Support them to talk to another adult such as a school nurse, GP, youth worker or a specialist service.**

### Do you need a bit of help sometimes?

The word 'vulnerable' can be offensive and patronising. However, we regard 'vulnerable' as:

*"A person who may need either occasional, temporary or full-time help and support to carry out normal day-to-day activities."*

This could be because for any number of reasons including: poor mental or physical health; age; sensory impairment; progressive illness; financial exclusion and debt; social exclusion and loneliness; lack of support networks.

Knowing about any care or support you may need, or any disabilities you may have, will help us be a better landlord and means we may be able to help you.



## Disability

The Equality Act says a disability is: **“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”**

What does it mean by substantial adverse effect? This means that your condition doesn't have to stop you doing certain things completely but it must make it more difficult. It may also mean that you avoid doing certain things.

What does it mean by long-term? This means your condition has lasted, or is likely to last, for more than 12 months. Your condition may develop into another condition related to the first. You might be treated as having a disability if, together, these conditions have an adverse effect for more than 12 months. Some conditions come and go (“recurring”). You may be treated as having a disability even if the adverse effects last less than 12 months at a time. Other conditions get worse over time (“progressive”). You might be treated as having a disability even if it has a minor effect now. You may no longer be treated as having a disability if you receive treatment and you get better.



## Stress busting

Are things getting on top of you? Here are some great stress busting tips from one of our tenants:

1. Gardening – not only do you get fresh air and exercise you get a good boost of vitamin D from the sun and a great looking garden too.
2. Bath time – treat yourself to a nice relaxing bath with essential oils and relaxing music.
3. Music – put your favourite music on and dance like no-one's watching. You'll get a bit of exercise, release endorphins and feel more positive.
4. Walk your dog – or volunteer to walk someone else's. Get away from it all, get some fresh air – and it'll keep the dog happy too!
5. Have a chat with a cuppa and a cake – just 10 minutes can make all the difference and get you motivated.
6. Avoid alcohol – and drink water. It's the ultimate detox plus it's free! Add some ice and a slice to cool down or boil the water and add a slice of lemon to warm you up. It helps cleanse your system.
7. Eat raw fruit and veg for a day – not boiling the goodness out of them will give you an energy boost.
8. Look forward – think about all the things you have to be thankful for. Give yourself something to look forward to even if it's just a meal with your friends, walk in the park with friends or shopping trip with your mum.
9. Sleep on it – clean your sheets, tidy your bedroom, let some fresh air in and get a good night's sleep. You could even use some lavender room spray.
10. Meditate – get yourself a meditation CD and choose a time when you're not going to be disturbed. Turn off your phone, lie down and imagine you're floating on a cloud or in a warm pool of water. Wiggle your toes and then relax them. Then do the same with your legs and work your way up your body and finish with your face and head. Relax for as long as you can. Open your eyes and get back up slowly.

## 28 new homes for Bridgwater

We're proud to announce an exciting new development of 28 new homes in Bridgwater. We've been supported by funding from both Homes England, Sedgemoor District Council and EDF Energy. We've worked hard with our partners to re-develop a brownfield site on Monmouth Street in the heart of Bridgwater.

They will be built by Summerfield Developments (SW) Limited. It's a high quality and sustainable development that will both reflect and improve the local character.



## How to apply for them

To apply for one of these homes you'll need to register with Homefinder Somerset and 'bid' for the homes when they're advertised as part of the Choice-Based Lettings process.

This 'bid' doesn't involve money, it's just an expression of interest.

If you'd like to know more about Choice-Based Lettings, how to register or how to 'bid' you can visit Homefinder Somerset online or call the Housing Advice Team at Sedgemoor District Council on 0300 303 7800.

If you'd like more information about the development or SHAL you can visit us online, email [information@shal.org](mailto:information@shal.org) or call 01278 444344.

[www.homefindersomerset.co.uk](http://www.homefindersomerset.co.uk)

## Making a complaint about SHAL

Like all Housing Associations SHAL has a formal complaints procedure. We embrace complaints as a way of learning.

Sometimes we make mistakes or things go wrong. Other times tenants simply aren't happy with what we've done or the way we've done it.

All complaints are recorded and investigated before we provide a formal response.

## Involving tenants

We recently had a complaint about the information we provide on our rent letters.

We asked the tenant if they'd like to be involved in designing a new letter.

We went through several drafts before inviting the tenant in and asking for their feedback. They were happy with what we'd done and we thanked them with a £25 One4all voucher.

Stage 1: a response from **any member of staff** within 3 weeks

Stage 2: a response from a **Director** within 3 weeks

Stage 3: a response from a panel of **Board** members within 4 weeks

**Housing Ombudsman** (only 8 weeks after we have completed our formal process)

## The Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman will investigate complaints referred to them but they will only if 8 weeks have passed since we completed our complaints process (stage 3). They will make a finding of either: No maladministration, Service failure, Maladministration or Severe maladministration

Maladministration is a formal decision by the Ombudsman that a landlord has failed to do something, done something it shouldn't have or, in the Ombudsman's opinion has delayed unreasonably. Investigations can be long and complex but **they aim to complete 98% of cases within 12 months**. Once their investigations are complete they will send a determination letter to both the complainant and the landlord.

In December 2017 our Board heard a complaint at Stage 3 and wrote to our tenant with the findings. The tenant decided to refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman in April 2018 after waiting 8 weeks. The Housing Ombudsman concluded their investigation in December 2018 and found no maladministration.

## Money

Did you know you're better off paying with a direct debit?

Back in February 2019 **74%** of those who pay by direct debit were up-to-date or in advance with their rent.

That compared to **42%** who don't pay by direct debit.



### Money, money, money

Each year it feels like we get less and less for our money. Here are some great tips from one of our tenants:

1. De-clutter – start with one room. You can sell clothes you no longer wear on online or take yourself off to a car boot sale and sell all those kitchen appliances you've never used.
2. Sell your gold – if you have old or broken jewellery that's not of sentimental value you can get some money for it.
3. Grow your own herbs – it's easy to grow herbs at home including mint, rosemary, chives and parsley. Just remember to grow mint in a pot as it's fast growing and will take over your garden.
4. Grow your own food – it's easy to grow your own vegetables like tomatoes and potatoes. Put your old sprouting potatoes in a pot with a hole in the bottom for drainage and cover with soil. The plants will grow and you can dig up the potatoes when the plants die off.

### Paying the rent

Everyone's rent will go down by 1% on 1 April 2019. If you pay a service charge this may have increased. This is the last of the rent decreases that were ordered by George Osborne back in 2015.

**Rents will start to increase again from April 2020. We're always reminding tenants they need to pay "in advance" with their rent and this is more important now than ever.**

Paying an additional amount each week/month will reduce any arrears you have and start to put you in advance with your rent.

If you'd like to talk to someone about agreeing a payment plan or if you'd like to let us know how much you're going to pay text **RENTS (plus your message)** to 07984 355553 and your Housing Officer will contact you.

# Neighbourhood & Community

## Tenants Together

We re-launched Tenants Together back in February with a meeting at The Engine Room in Bridgwater. It was a small turn out but we had a great discussion. Quite a few tenants let us know they couldn't make it because they were working or had prior commitments. We're already looking forward to the next meeting.

We talked about what tenants think of SHAL, how we can get more tenants involved and how we can bring the community together with gardening. We appreciate everyone has busy lives and we all need to be in lots of places at once so it's not easy to find the time to come along to meetings like these. We're looking into other ways of getting tenants involved in what we do.

Rather than have a meeting at a set time we thought we might have a **coffee morning** where people can pop in if they're passing or as and when they can during the morning.

We also thought future meetings could have a **theme** where we share information on that theme and you can ask questions, tell us what you think and give feedback about your experience(s).

## Creating a stronger, more balanced relationship with tenants and residents

The National Housing Federation is launching an ambitious new programme of work to build a stronger relationship between housing associations and their tenants.

The project, called Together With Tenants, sets out a plan of action to ensure boards are always properly connected and accountable to the people they house, whilst also giving tenants and residents a strong role in scrutiny.

**SHAL has chosen to become an early adopter and work with the National Housing Federation in developing the new "Together with Tenants" Charter.**

## Police tackling organized crime

Back in January 2019, Avon and Somerset Police announced they had raided more than 100 homes across Avon and Somerset suspected of being cuckooed by county lines drug dealers. In total, 114 vulnerable adults were spoken to following welfare checks at 126 addresses in the Bath, Bridgwater, Mendip, Taunton, Weston-super-Mare, Yate and Yeovil areas. Two children were also safeguarded following the visits.

Detective Chief Inspector Kerry Paterson, force lead for county lines, said: "We all know drugs have a detrimental impact on our communities, with anti-social behaviour and other crimes such as theft and burglary committed by users looking to fund their habits. But county lines gangs also pose a significant threat to users who are especially susceptible to exploitation.

**"Many do not view themselves as victims and are often manipulated into carrying out crimes or subjected to violence."**



# Competition time! You can win £50 vouchers!

1. How many new homes is SHAL building in Bridgwater?

- A: 28
- B: 38
- C: 18



2. How many bathrooms has SHAL replaced in the 4 years to the end of March 2019?

- A: 145
- B: 108
- C: 140



3. Who should you talk to if you're worried about drugs?

- A: Dave
- B: Frank
- C: Barry



You can answer as many questions as you like – you only need to get one right!



Just send the question number and your answer (for example 1A or 1A 2C 3A) along with your name and address to:

Email: [information@shal.org](mailto:information@shal.org)  
Post: 2 King Square, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 3DG  
Text: 07984 355553

**Deadline: 31 May 2019**

The lucky winner of the competition in our last issue was Lisa from Highbridge. The answers were: Cairngorms (1A), 12 days (2B), Hoglet (3A).

Competitions in this newsletter are not open to members of staff, shareholders of SHAL or their relatives. By entering this competition you agree that the collection of any prize will be photographed and SHAL Housing Limited is given the competitor's consent to publication of such photographs in any form. Where entries are made by children their parents/legal guardians must give such consent.