

SHAL's Community Chat (rural housing)

Thursday 30 June 2022

Angela Gascoigne led a discussion about rural housing.

Background

Did you know SHAL has over 750 homes in 47 towns and villages across Somerset? We've built 72 homes in rural areas in the last 10 years. 32% of our homes are in "Designated Rural Areas" and exempt from the current Right to Acquire legislation.

The theme for Rural Housing Week is 'levelling up rural communities'. But that mission is impossible without good quality homes in places where people want to live.

Levelling up must mean:

- Reducing regional inequality
- Investing in skills and education
- Modernising our infrastructure

People living in rural areas can face a "triple whammy" of costs.

Older (and harder to heat) homes

Many homes in rural areas can't be connected to the gas grid. They also tend to be older and harder to heat. SHAL has worked hard in up-dating the Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) for all its homes and identified 47 that have an EPC rating of E or below. SHAL is investing in improving the energy efficiency of these homes.

[Domestic heating oil prices](#) have increased after a spike earlier this year. On 10 March 2022 the average cost was £160 per litre, compared £43 on 10 March 2021. The average cost is currently £104.

We're really proud that our Finance Director, Neil Allan, has worked very hard to secure funding for SHAL to help towards the cost of getting this work done. His work has also helped secure funding for other landlords across the South West.

He's working closely with our Maintenance Manager, Simon White, to make these much needed improvements in an efficient and effective way. Ensuring value for money and being cost effective means we can continue to do the day to day repairs and planned maintenance.

The process isn't straightforward and government regulations can make the process very time consuming.

Dependency on frequent travel to urban centres

One tenant shared her frustration at using public transport and how it took 3.5 hours to travel from Bridgwater to Yeovil (and then 3.5 hours back home) with her young child!

Fuel costs are also putting pressure on people (and services that rely on that fuel).

The [average cost](#) to fill a Ford Focus with a 55 litre (12 gallon) tank has increased from £63 (2020) to £109 (2022), according to the RAC.

Financial pressures on various services that may compound poverty and isolation

Providing services to rural areas can be more expensive as they have to cover a wide area. Services are often cut to save money. In addition to travel costs there can be additional financial pressures. For example, affordable rents in rural areas can be higher than social rents elsewhere.

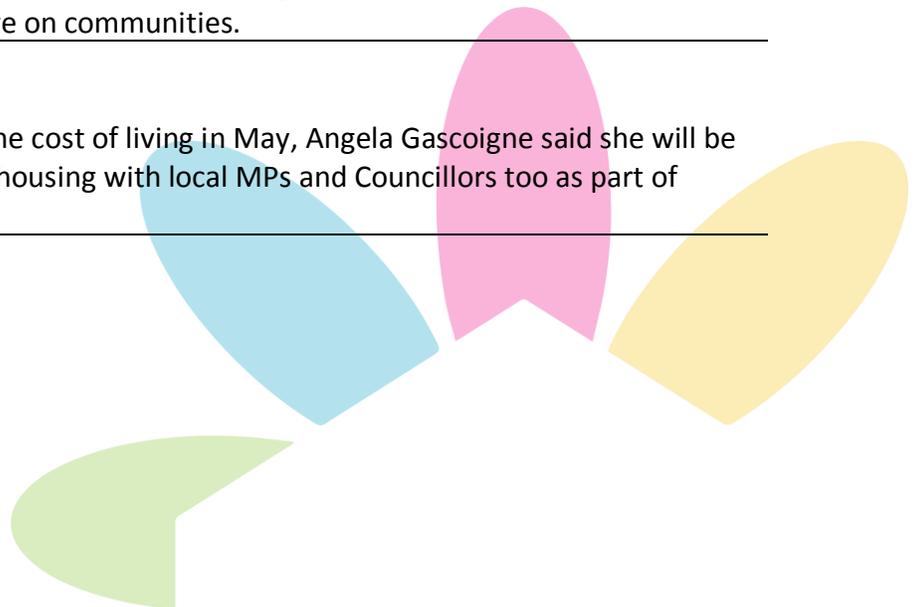
New homes are more likely to be let on an affordable rent which is 80% of the market value for the area. The average weekly rent for a 3 bed home is £99 (social rent) compared to £143 (affordable rent).

Building new homes in rural areas isn't always straightforward – and it's harder for housing associations to replace homes sold under the right to acquire.

Did you know: it's estimated 40% of homes purchased under the right to buy have ended up in the private rented sector and just 5% of those homes have been replaced. There was a discussion about the government's plans to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants and the impact this will have on communities.

What now?

Following on from our chat about the cost of living in May, Angela Gascoigne said she will be highlighting the challenges of rural housing with local MPs and Councillors too as part of Rural Housing Week.



What do you love
about living in
Somerset?

What challenges are
you facing?

What could make life
easier right now?

