

## SHAL's Community Chat 2023-01

### Rent increase

Neil Allan led the chat about the rent increase that will take place in April.

When we met back in September 2022 we talked about “balancing the books” and the impact rising prices is having on organisations like SHAL. It was something we began to talk about in January 2022 ahead of last year's increase.

The rent increase for April 2022 was 4.1% (fixed at the CPI for September 2021 plus an additional 1%). However, by that time the overall CPI was already at 9%. We were seeing other indexes hit 14% and 16.8% by that time too. Making ends meet and balancing the books has been a challenge to say the least and those challenges have continued into this year.

The rent agreement that Housing Associations had with the Government was based on CPI at September plus 1%. At that time CPI was at 10.1% so under the agreement Housing Associations could have increased the rent up to 11.1%. However, the government consulted the housing sector on a change to the agreement and proposed rent increases of 3%, 5% or 7% for 2023/24 only.

**Following the consultation, the Government has fixed the increased at up to 7% and SHAL's Board has decided to increase rents by 7% on 3 April 2023.**

The increase of 7% doesn't match the increases we're continuing to see. For example, one contractor has increased its costs by 13% this year and another supplier has increased their costs by 6% on three occasions last year. Doors have increased from around £750 to £1200 alone. These increases are having an impact on both the day to day and planned maintenance budgets.

However, we're not paying more simply because we're being charged more. We always negotiate and “shop around” and re-tender contracts if necessary. We're members of 3 different procurement groups who help us get the best market rates available. We're always mindful of getting value for money, good quality products and services and making sure every £1 we spend goes as far as it can and accessing funds and grants that may be available to us.

Recruitment was a struggle last year for many organisations, including SHAL. We now have a team of 8 Multi Traders and 1 Apprentice. This means we can manage the cost, quantity and

quality of the work we do more effectively. It will also help us respond effectively to reports of damp, condensation and mould.

Our housing team increased to 3 Housing Officers last year and they each now manage all aspects of your tenancy from moving in to moving out and everything in between. If you're not sure how to contact your Housing Officer you can text WHO to 07984355553. Over 2022/23 they've worked with tenants to claim over £24,000 in backdated benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments and referred over 40 tenants to other organisations for support and advice. SHAL hasn't evicted someone for rent arrears since 2016 although we have evicted people involved in drug dealing (who may have had rent arrears) as well as causing significant Anti-Social Behaviour.

The response from the group was that an increase is inevitable and it's always best to know so you can plan ahead.

One commented it's important to know what goes on "behind the scenes" and the costs involved in what SHAL does. What we also heard was that we need to make sure that upfront people know that they can come to us if they are worried about rent payments and we need to make sure that this is spelled out really clearly.

*"People need to know SHAL is approachable."*

We'll be putting together an information pack of frequently asked questions (FAQs). If you have any questions or feedback you'd like to see included please email [Lee@shal.org](mailto:Lee@shal.org) or call 01278 444344 and we'll respond to them.

We share as much as much information as possible online, by text and email as well as in Grapevine and on Facebook.

- What are your thoughts?
- What's happening in and around your community? What can we share?
- Who do you think we may need to support?
- What do you think are the key messages?

Lisa shared information about Warm Banks that are available around Bridgwater, including the Town Hall and the Sydenham Pantry. Also, the Community Champion at Morrisons in Bridgwater is holding an insulated cooking "Wonder Bag" at the cafe in Morrisons on 31 January 2023 at 2:00 pm.

