

Grapevine

Spring/Summer 2023



What's your top
priority?

We'll be asking you what you think
so we can measure your
satisfaction (& our performance)

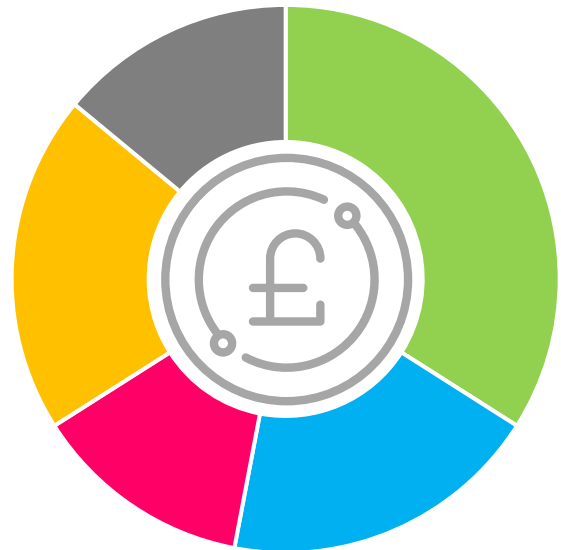
2023/24 budget

What will we be spending the money on this year?

	£000s
Cash in	
Rent	4,340
Grant funding	258
	<u>4,598</u>
Cash out	
Repairs & safety checks	(699)
Staff costs	(972)
Insurance ¹ & overheads	(663)
New homes	(1,024)
Planned investment	(531)
Energy efficiency	(553)
Interest on loans	(736)
	<u>(5,178)</u>
Spend in excess of income²	(580)

¹ we insure all our homes (the building) but you need to insure the contents

² we have existing funds in place to meet the additional spend



- Repairs, planned investment & energy efficiency (34%)
- Staffing (19%)
- Overheads (13%)
- Development (20%)
- Interest (14%)

We'll be continuing with our planned investment and energy efficiency programmes:



35



80



23



43

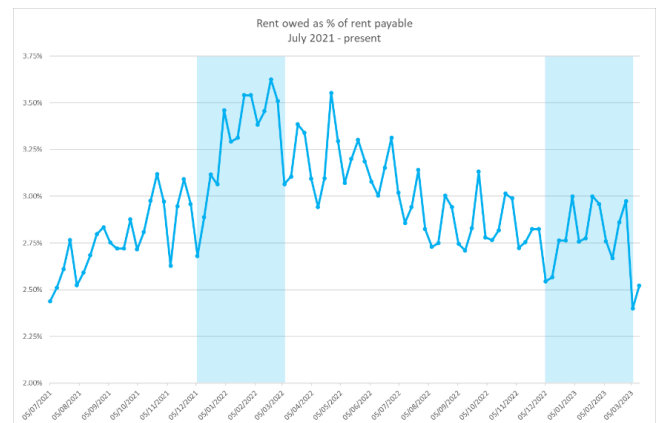


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Paying the rent

Rent arrears have improved on this time last year. Over Christmas 2021 and into 2022 rent arrears peaked at 3.6%. Over Christmas 2022 and into 2023 rent arrears didn't go above 3.0%.

What does the percentage mean?



We add up all rent arrears (ignoring the pre paid balances) and divide that by all the weekly rents (multiplied by 52). For example, if your rent is £100 per week and you're £250 in arrears your individual arrears would be 4.8% ((£250/£5200) x 100).

House & home

We've made some small changes to our day to day repairs

We're continuing to change the way we work to be more effective. It's a bumpy ride ahead but we'll get through it. Things may be delayed or changed but they won't be cancelled or forgotten.

We've made some minor changes to our day to day repairs and planned investment services. For example, we install wall panels in bathrooms rather than tiles. These are quicker to install and easier to clean and maintain. We no longer tile or decorate kitchens after installing a new one. We now use chain link instead of fence panels, concrete posts and gravel board. This change brings us in line with other housing associations and Local Authorities.

Do you use alternative fuels?

You may be eligible for a £200 Alternative Fuels Payment (AFP) if both the following are true:

- your household is not connected to the mains gas grid
- you use alternative fuels as your main form of heating

This is on top of the £400 from your electricity supplier. You're eligible for this payment if the main way you heat your home uses:

- tank or bottled gas
- liquid petroleum gas (LPG)
- oil
- wood
- solid fuel

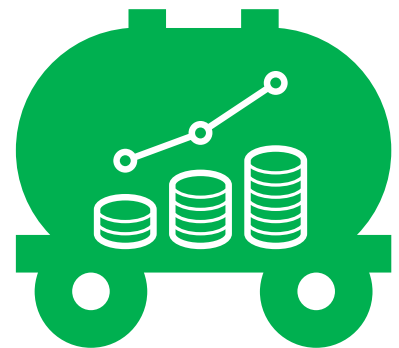
Most homes that are eligible for this payment will get it automatically as a credit on their electricity bills from February 2023. You can [apply online](#) if you don't get it automatically.



Somerset Council

The new unitary Somerset Council will launch on 1 April 2023.

On 22 February 2023 the [Council Plan](#), outlining the ambitions of the new council, was formally approved by the outgoing Somerset County Council. On the same day the [first budget](#) for the new authority was approved by the Council.



www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills/alternative-fuels



“If you’re unhappy with the service from your landlord you should make a complaint to them first.”

Social tenants empowered to make complaints

The ‘Make Things Right’ campaign encourages residents to complain to their landlord before escalating to the Housing Ombudsman.

Residents are being encouraged to make their voices heard by making a complaint to their landlord in the first instance and then escalating to the Housing Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the landlord’s final response.

This follows decisive action to protect tenants in social housing, including time limits for landlords to investigate and fix damp and mould under Awaab’s Law and mandatory qualifications for social housing managers to make sure residents receive a quality service.

Findings from the government’s social housing resident panel – bringing together over 200 residents across the country – found 65% of members said their experiences of raising complaints with their landlord had been unsatisfactory.

“Please get in touch if you’re unhappy. We’ll work with you and come to a resolution.”

Lee

www.socialhousingcomplaints.campaign.gov.uk

Making sure you’re safe at home

We’ve started annual visits to tenants who live in a home with a shared communal area (we have 89 in total). During the visit we check for general health and safety as well as fire safety.

Once we’ve visited all these homes we’ll start visiting everyone in all homes regularly.

Surveying our homes

We’ll also start visiting all our homes so we can update the stock condition survey we completed a few years ago. This informs our planned investment programme and means we can be more proactive in highlighting repairs and maintenance in our homes. It’s also a recommendation of the Better Social Housing Review. You can find out more on page 8 ►

We’ll start in the new year and we’ll contact you to make an appointment.

Together with Tenants

What are your priorities?

Back in 2019 we asked you what your priorities were and you said:



1. Invest in improving the **energy efficiency** of our homes and reduce energy bills
2. Invest in maintaining and improving the **standard of our homes**
3. Do more to help people with **disabilities** get the support they need
4. Support people who want to maintain and **improve their homes themselves**
5. Help people improve their **mental health and wellbeing**
6. Help people get onto the **property ladder**
7. More help dealing with **conflict and anti-social behaviour** in our communities
8. Build **more homes**
9. Help encourage people to **maintain their gardens** better
10. Provide access to independent advice and **support when things go wrong**
11. Improve the **information** available about the services SHAL provides
12. Help people improve their **physical health and wellbeing**
13. Help people **manage their money**
14. Provide better ways for people to **share their views** and have their say

Our Community Chat in February discussed how the last few years may have changed what you think and how you feel? Have your priorities changed? Have some moved up the list while others have moved down? **Are there any missing? Are there new ones we need to consider?**

Community Chats

Our Community Chats continue to grow and we often welcome new faces to them. So far in 2023 this year we've chatted about the rent increase and how we measure our performance and your satisfaction.

We've had 25 Community Chats since January 2021.

"It's a great opportunity for tenants to come together and have their say, especially if their opportunities to meet and chat with people elsewhere are limited."



www.shal.org/category/community-chat

How do you think we'll do this time?

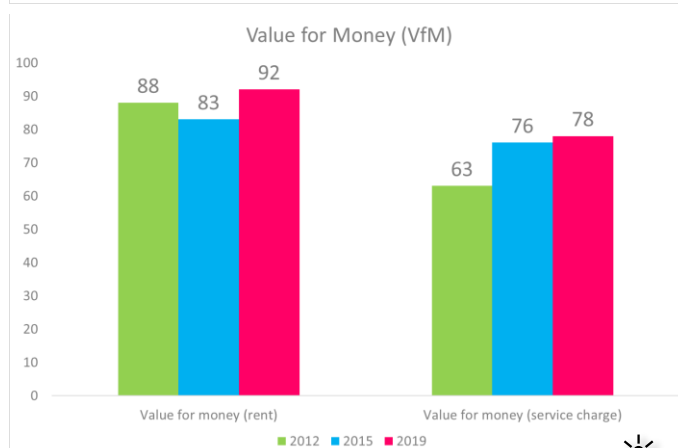
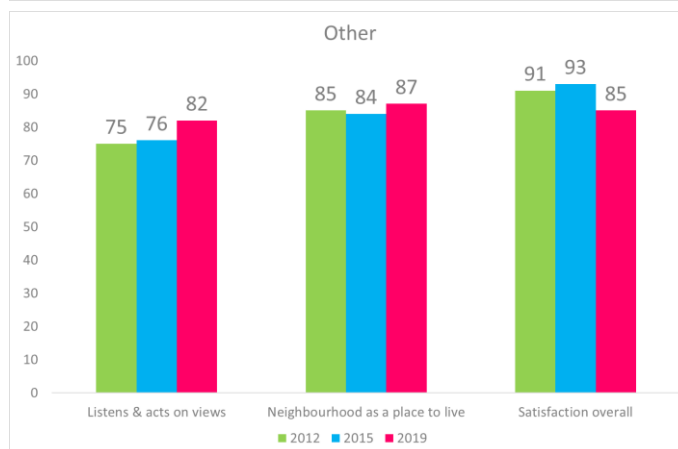
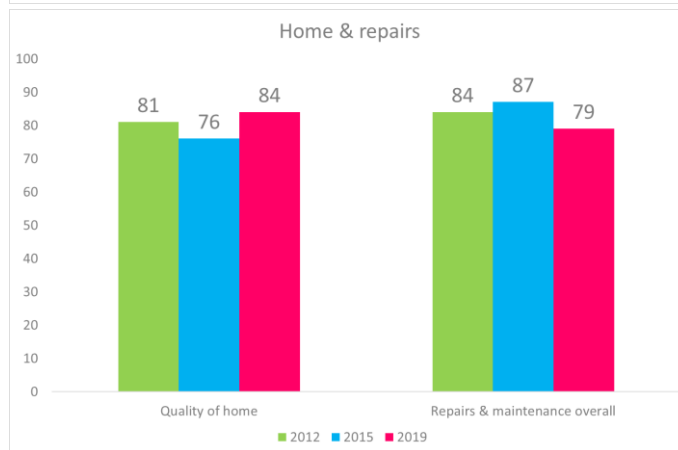
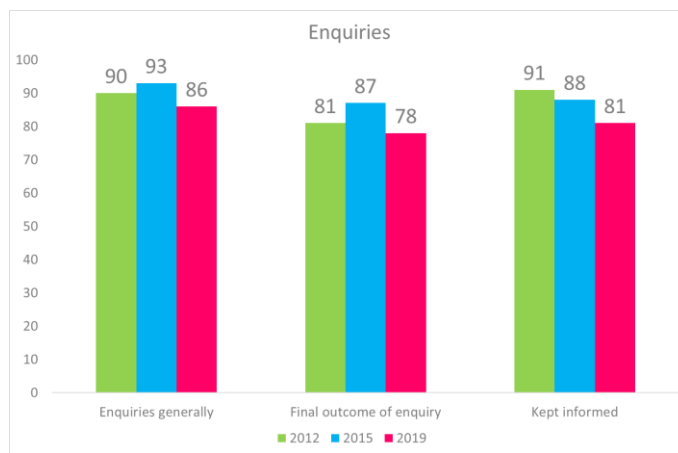
These are the headline figures from our most recent surveys. **A lot has happened since our last survey in 2019 (almost too much) and it's taken its toll on people, organisations and services.** The cost of living crisis has also had a devastating impact on lots of people. It's been a real struggle.

We're aware we've not always been able to deliver our services in the way we'd hoped during the pandemic. The cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine and leaving the European Union are still having an impact in terms of supplies and costs.

It's so important you have your say

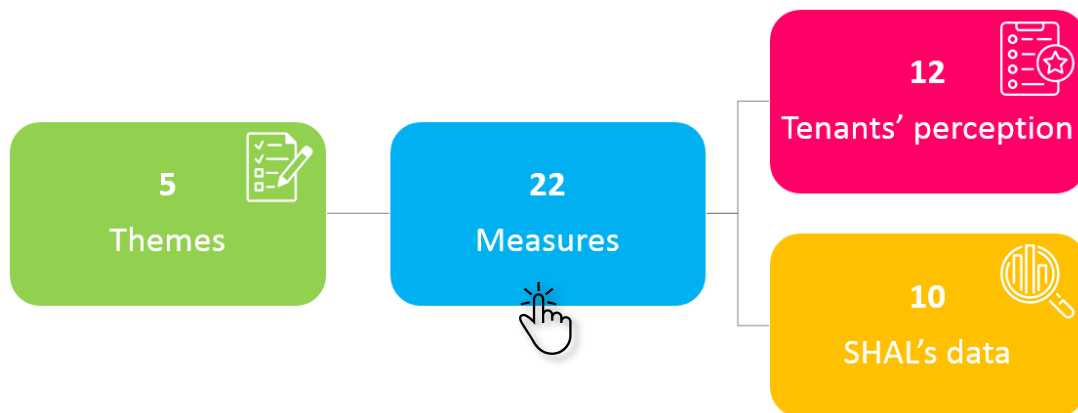
We had a great response rate to our survey in 2019 (40%) and we had lots of feedback from tenants across our community. We want as many people as possible to complete the survey and the more feedback we get the better.

It means we know what's really going on and what people are really thinking and feeling about their home and community – and our services.



Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

We've talked previously about the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). They come into force from April. There are 22 measures across 5 themes. 12 will be based on what you think and 10 will be based on our data. Landlords with less than 1,000 homes will not be required to report them to the Regulator of Social Housing but will need to produce them every 1 or 2 years. **We'll need to ensure they're published for everyone to see and we'll share them with you regularly.**



Tenants' perception

1. Overall satisfaction **(85%)**
2. Satisfaction with repairs **(95%)**
3. Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair **(new)**
4. Satisfaction that the home is well maintained **(90%)**
5. Satisfaction that the home is safe **(90%)**
6. Satisfaction that SHAL listens to tenant views and acts on them **(82%)**
7. Satisfaction that SHAL keeps tenants informed about the things that matter to them **(81%)**
8. Agreement that SHAL treats tenants fairly **(85%)** and with respect **(94%)**
9. Satisfaction with SHAL's approach to handling complaints **(new)**
10. Satisfaction that SHAL keeps communal areas cleans and well maintained **(new)**
11. Satisfaction that SHAL makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods **(new)**
12. Satisfaction with SHAL's approach to handling anti-social behaviour **(65%)**

SHAL's data

1. Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard
2. Repairs completed within target timescales **(66% & 84%)**
3. Gas safety checks **(100%)**
4. Fire safety checks **(100%)**
5. Asbestos safety checks **(100% & 86%)**
6. Water safety checks **(N/A)**
7. Lift safety checks **(100%)**
8. Complaints relative to the size of the landlord **(47)**
9. Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales **(71%)**
10. Anti-social behaviour cases relative to the size of the landlord **(49)**



“All social housing should feel like a home for those who live there, a place for people to feel comfortable and safe, to live well and thrive.”

Better Social Housing Review

The Better Social Housing Review was set up in June 2022, consisting of an expert panel and chair. Between August and October 2022 the panel gathered views and insights on social housing from people and organisations across England. The panel reported its findings and recommendations for change in December 2022.

This review gathered insights and testimonies on how to change social housing for the better by reaching out to people with direct experience of social housing, as well as organisations with a role in providing and managing it.

Recommendations

1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should **refocus on their core purpose** and deliver against it.
2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a **thorough audit of all social housing** in England.
3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards **defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks** like.
4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should **promote the traditional housing officer role** as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.
5. Housing associations should **work with all tenants to ensure that they have a voice and influence** at every level of decision making across the organisation, through both voluntary and paid roles.
6. Housing associations should **develop a proactive local community presence** through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working.
7. Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to **undertake an annual review** of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review's recommendations.

Our community is growing

Since April 2022 we've welcomed 47 new people to the SHAL Community. **We've re-let 31 homes (including 5 mutual exchanges), let 15 brand new homes and sold 1 new home for shared ownership.**

Charges & costs

14% of our tenants who pay *social rent* pay a service charge in addition to their rent. This could be for communal areas or services specific to their property or estate. If you pay an *affordable rent* any services we provide are included in the rent.

There are no other costs or charges associated with your tenancy – apart from:

Repairs & maintenance

Missed appointments	£48
Repairs that are your responsibility (including after you've moved out)	Quote (see handbook)

Legal costs

Referring you to court (e.g. rent arrears)	£325
Legal costs (e.g. if we can't gain access to complete a safety check)	£600 plus

Mutual exchange (MX)

Application fee	£25*
Electric safety check	£75
Gas safety check	£75
Lock change	£65
Oil safety check	£75
Solid fuel safety check	£50

* non-refundable



Unpaid costs & debts

Leaving costs and debts unpaid could impact your credit score and your prospects of being offered accommodation in the future (including moving to another SHAL home or exchanging tenancies). We may also decide to postpone investment in your home until the debt has been paid.

Unpaid debts are referred to a credit management and debt collection service.

As at 17 March 2023, 109 current tenants owe £19,998 in unpaid costs and re-charges. 31 former tenants owe £117,019.

We've seen an increase in re-charges for missed appointments. This is a cost we don't want to pass on.

If you're not able to keep an appointment please let us know the day before to avoid being re-charged.

Rent increase

In our Christmas 2022 newsletter we talked about what may happen to rents in April 2023. The government regulates how your rent changes each year. Because of the current financial climate, they consulted with the housing sector on the different options about the rent will change in April 2023.

As part of the Autumn Statement in November, the government announced they'll cap rent increases at 7%. This means we cannot increase your rent by more than 7% in April 2023. **Without this cap, your rent could have increased by as much as 11.1%.**

Is SHAL charging more but doing less to save money?

No. The 7% increase in rent doesn't match the increase in the cost of materials and other overheads we're facing as an organisation. We've seen increases between 13% and 33%. However, SHAL is strong financially and people's homes are safe. We've had to find new ways of working and it's not always been easy. **We're continuing to change the way we work to be more effective. It's a bumpy ride ahead but we'll get through it. Things may be delayed or changed but they won't be cancelled or forgotten.**

Cost of living payments for 2023/24

You may be able to get up to 5 payments to [help with the cost of living](#) if you're getting certain benefits or tax credits. **You do not need to apply.** If you're eligible, you'll be paid automatically in the same way you usually get your benefit or tax credits. This includes if you're found to be eligible at a later date.

If you have had a message asking you to apply or contact someone about the payment, this [might be a scam](#). These payments are not taxable and will not affect the benefits or tax credits you get.

"We've worked with 22 tenants to claim **over £31,166** in backdated benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments since April 2022. We haven't evicted anyone for rent arrears since 2016."

Lee

We remain committed to **providing safe, warm and affordable homes in our community** and:

- creating a strong community
- building strong relationships
- providing quality homes and services
- including, listening and understanding
- being transparent and accountable



Health & wellbeing

Condensation, damp & mould

A coroner said the death of Awaab Ishak should be a **“defining moment”** for the UK’s housing sector. Greg Fell, the vice-president of the Association of Directors of Public Health, said the verdict “tragically underscored” the “hidden risk” to public health posed by mould. “It’s a significant threat,” he said. “We are going into a winter where people will be turning the heating down in a way that encourages more damp in our homes.” Richard Blakeway, England’s Housing Ombudsman, said **“Landlords must make plans to tackle the real risk of worsening damp and mould issues as energy bills soar.”**

Responding to damp, mould & condensation

In 2022, we completed over 100 day to day repairs relating to damp, condensation and mould costing around £14,505. We’ve also made significant investment in another home and installed internal wall insulation.

Damp	£266
Draughts	£1,744
Insulation	£1,910
Internal wall insulation	£13,657
Mould	£3,397
Overhaul windows	£6,471
Ventilation	£717
Total	£28,162



What does SHAL do?

We monitor all cases at our monthly health and safety meetings until they’re resolved. **We continue to review what we do and how we do it.** We’ll work with you, our colleagues across the sector and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities to create specific commitments so people know what to expect and standards are improved – and continue to be improved for everyone.

Working proactively

We’ve identified significant improvements to our least energy efficient homes. We have a plan to invest in around 30 homes a year between now and 2030. This will mean all our homes have an energy efficiency rating of at least C. **We’re also working to proactively identify homes that are at risk.**



It’s easy to report

You can **send the word MOULD to 07984355553** and you’ll receive information and advice by text.

You can also ask for further information and a call back if you prefer.



www.shal.org/resident-area/damp-condensation-mould

Competition time! You can win £50 vouchers!



1. HM The King will be crowned in Westminster Abbey on which date?

- A: 1 May
- B: 6 May
- C: 8 May

2. Rents will increase by how much on 3 April 2023?

- A: 3%
- B: 5%
- C: 7%



3. How many Community Chats have we had since January 2021?

- A: 15
- B: 25
- C: 35



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: lee@shal.org

Post: Crypton House, Bristol Road, Bridgwater, TA6 4SY

Text: 07984 355553

Deadline: 30 April 2023

The lucky winner of the competition in our last issue was Leanna from Bridgwater. The answers were: 1A (Jubilation), 2C (47), 3B (35).

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.