

SHAL's Community Chat 2023-08

Accessing our homes

Shell Dubens led the chat about how we access our homes to complete important safety checks. We're legally required to complete several important safety checks regularly including:

We check...	every	& it takes around
Asbestos	5 years	1 hour
Electric	5 years	4 hours
Gas, oil & solid fuel	1 year	1 hour
Lifts	6/12 months	1 hour

Completing these checks means you, your home and your tenancy are safe. The safety checks need to be completed well ahead of when they're due so we can complete any necessary remedial repairs too.

We (Shell) always contact you to make a convenient appointment – and we schedule all the safety checks apart from gas, oil and solid fuel. Our colleagues in Somerset Gas contact you about those. We use calls, text and email to make, confirm and remind you about the appointments.

We work closely with a small number of trusted local companies to complete these safety checks in your home. Working closely with them and making the appointments directly with you and them reduces potential for things to go wrong – hopefully! It also means it's a familiar company name/face for you. One tenant commented they wouldn't be so trusting of a larger "faceless" contactor.

Louise shared her experiences of working in larger housing associations where information is lost between them and the contactor and they don't always have a good relationship with the housing association or knowledge of the people who live in their homes. We always challenge our contractors if they do something we're not happy with or aren't performing satisfactorily.

We recently started to pass on the cost of missed appointments. Our contractors were reporting missed appointments cost them in the region of £30,000 per year.

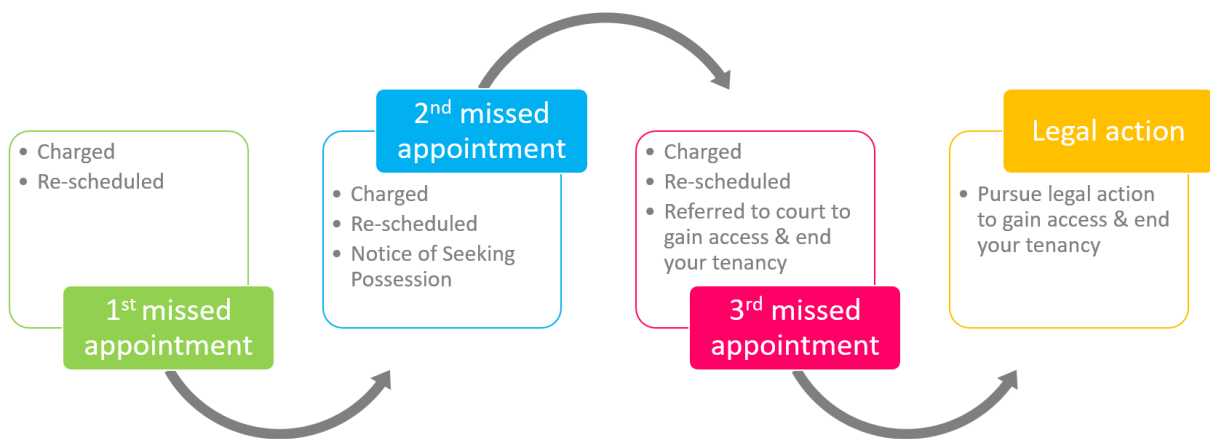
Since April 2023 we've charged 60 tenants a total of 74 times (approximately £3,500). One tenant has been charged 4 times. The amount we charge is based on the administrative work involved in re-scheduling the appointment and finding the engineer work at the last minute.

Often this is unsuccessful and the engineer ends up having to wait until the next appointment in their diary.

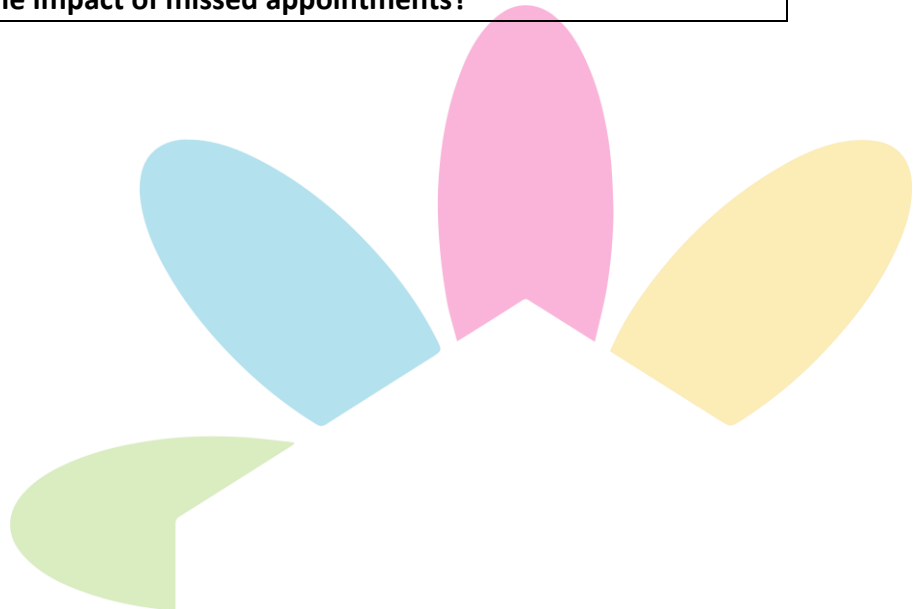
Ultimately if we're not able to gain access we'll take legal action. Several missed appointments and legal action could mean you're required to pay around £1000 in legal costs. We'll always gain access as our priority is to complete the safety check and make sure you, your home and your tenancy are safe.

Not gaining access is a cause for concern and your Housing Officer will visit you as part of the process and serve a Notice of Seeking Possession. However, the Housing Officer will have a conversation with you and explore ways in which we may be able to help.

We're always learning and have made several changes to how we administer the process over the last few years. For example, our phones are open from 7:30 am Monday to Friday to give people an extra hour in the morning to cancel a same day appointment if they need to in the event of an emergency.



What do you think about this process? How are we able to make the process easier for you (and for all our tenants) to reduce the impact of missed appointments?



Re-charges

In addition to the missed appointments we also talked about the re-charges owed by tenants. In total, 198 tenants owe around £146,438:

Tenants	£
Current (159)	26,918
Former (39)	119,520
Total	146,438

This includes repairs completed to properties that have been returned to SHAL in a poor condition, legal costs relating to evictions and repairs completed that were the responsibility of the tenant. There was genuine surprise at the amount involved.

Unpaid debts and charges could impact your credit score and your prospects of being offered accommodation. Unpaid charges are pursued during (and after) your tenancy. They can be referred to either the County Court or a credit management/debt collection service.



Boiler project

Simon White provided more information about the boiler efficiency project we chatted about back in June.

We're now looking at ways in which we can roll this out to lots of homes, the learning we can share with everyone and how it will make maintaining and repairing the boilers in our homes more effective and efficient – and minimize the disruption to you.

We'll keep you posted.

