

Grapevine

Autumn/Winter 2023



New year, new challenges,
new opportunities

Where has the time gone?

Community chats

Hybrid community chats

Since the end of July we've started to have hybrid Community Chats (i.e. online using Zoom and in person at Crypton House).

We know online isn't for everyone so we'll be making more of an effort to include people who prefer to meet in person. You can find out more about our planned "roadshow" in the [SHAL](#) section ▶

Free parking and refreshments are available at Crypton House and the meeting room is on the ground floor.



We're here to help



01278 444344
(including out of hours)



07984 355553
(text only)



Crypton House, Bristol
Road, Bridgwater, TA6 4SY



information@shal.org



www.shal.org



[@shalhousing](https://www.facebook.com/shalhousing)



[Messenger](#)

Do you text?

Information and services are available 24/7 by text message.

Providing we have your up-to-date number stored you can send TEXT to 07984355553 to get a full list of options available.



What are they all about?

They take place monthly, online and in person.

We always have a theme for each chat, but we end up chatting about all manner of different things, which is great. We always learn a lot from these chats! [We always share the notes from the chats online.](#) These are Community Chats we've had since the last issue of Grapevine (left).

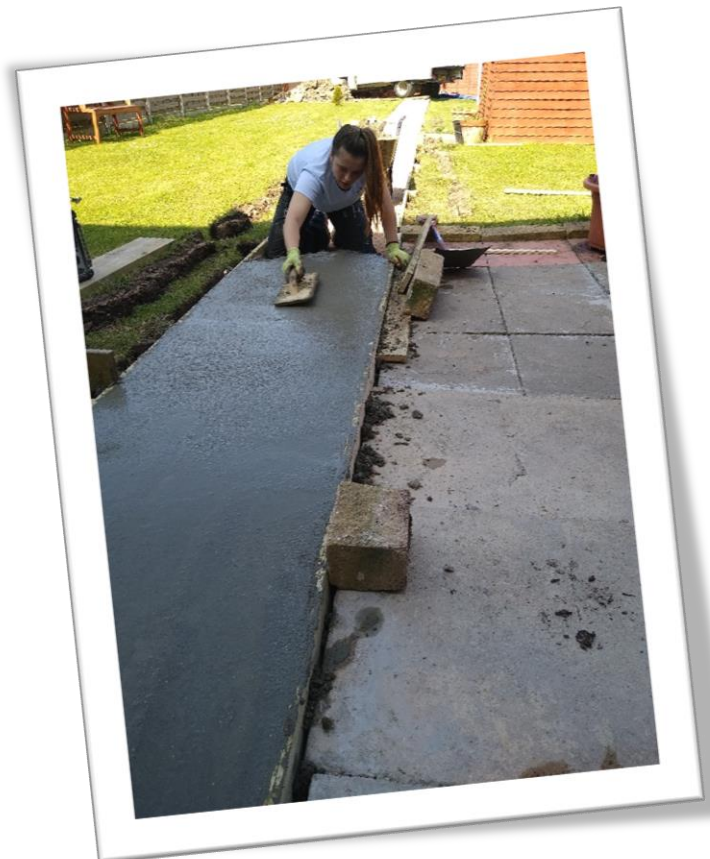
Around 70% of you have heard of SHAL's Community Chats. **How can we encourage people to come along or get involved in them?**

You can also find out more about our plans for a Roadshow in the [SHAL](#) section ►



“Got to applaud Carrisse on this one!

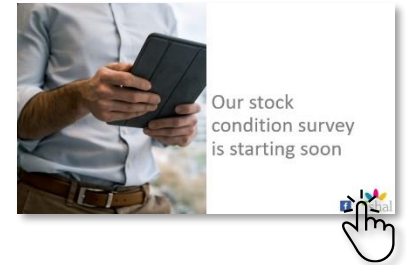
“She laid her first concrete path yesterday (13.5m) after digging up the old one the day before.”



Surveying our homes

Back in April we chatted about our plans to complete a stock condition survey. The Better Social Housing Review has recommended all housing associations **publish a thorough audit of all social housing** in England.

We want to up-date the information we have following the extensive planned investment programme since the previous stock condition survey in 2015/16. **We're then aiming to re-inspect all our homes once every 5 years.**



What's the plan?



We've prioritized a number of homes to survey between now and the end of March 2024 but we'll survey every home eventually. Members of our Maintenance team will be completing the surveys so you'll recognize familiar faces. Becki will contact you to make an appointment and answer any questions you may have about what's involved.

You can also find out more online or text SURVEY to 07984 355553.

www.shal.org/resident-area/stock-condition-surveys

Do a bedtime check to keep you safer at night

When you are asleep, it takes longer to notice the signs of a fire. If you don't have a working smoke alarm, there will be nothing to wake you. To help prevent fires occurring through the night, it's important to check your home for fire hazards before you go to bed. Make sure you:

- Check the cooker, washing machine, tumble dryer and dishwasher are turned off
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances (unless they are meant to be left on, like your fridge and freezer)
- Properly extinguish candles and cigarettes
- Turn heaters off and put up fire guards
- Close inside doors at night to stop a fire from spreading
- Make sure exits and escape routes such as stairs are clear

You might want to have a phone and a torch in your bedroom, in case there is a fire.

You can find out more about fire safety in the [Health & Wellbeing](#) section ►

Access

Despite our best efforts we're still seeing a high number of re-charges being made because we're not able to gain access for pre-arranged appointments. We chatted about this in the Community Chat back in August.

We've re-charged 82 tenants 98 times since April 2023.

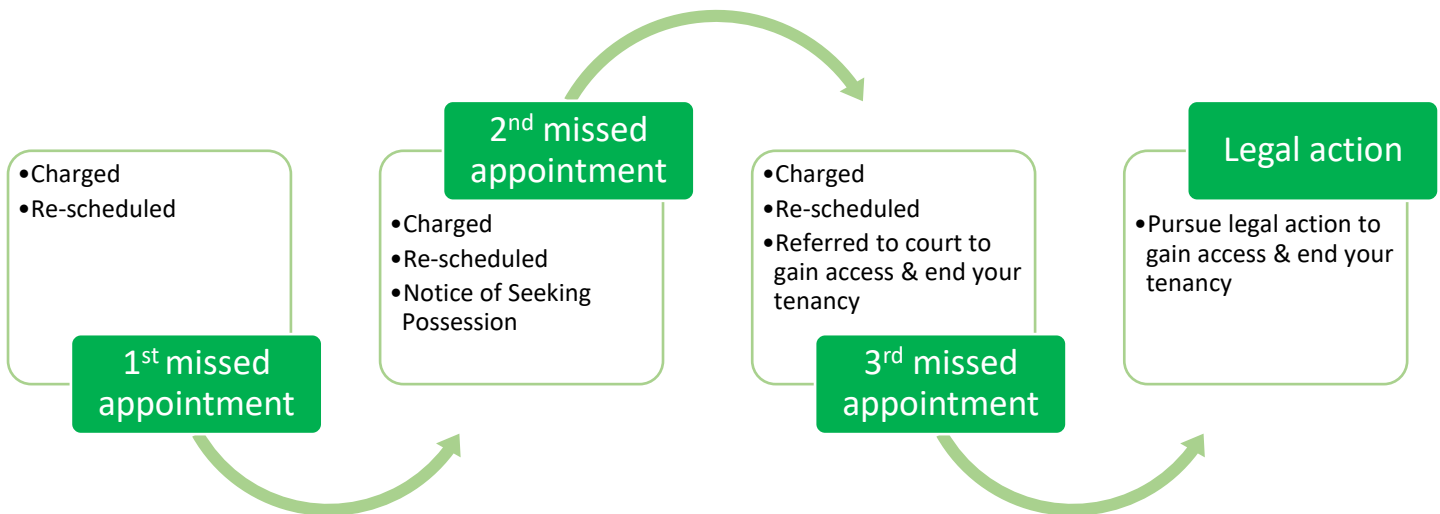
We're not trying to inconvenience you. We're a responsible landlord and we want to ensure the safety of you, your home and your tenancy. We're required to comply with all the latest legislation, regulations and policies.

"I would like to say how lovely and helpful my housing officer Louise is.

"I am in a very embarrassing and emotional situation, and she does not seem to judge and has offered me all the advice and help I need.

"Thank you."

Shell



Age limit

If we need to work in your home, there needs to be someone aged 16 or older at home. However, Somerset Gas work slightly differently. If they need to work in your home, including servicing a boiler, there needs to be someone aged 18 or older at home. **We'll confirm this with you when we make an appointment.**



"Ruby was very charming and professional and did a cracking job."



Don't suffer in silence

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

ASB in your neighbourhood can make life miserable. It is unacceptable behaviour that comes in many forms – such as noise, abusive behaviour, littering, or illegal drug taking – and we always want it to stop.

But sometimes it isn't easy to know who can help. That's because many local organisations – including the police, local authorities, and social housing landlords – have different powers, roles and responsibilities to help and support victims.

SHAL's ASB cases

We've received 35 reports of ASB since April 2023. That means we're likely to have received 60 reports by the end of March 2024. We've received 15 reports relating to alcohol, 6 relating to assault/violence and 14 relating to damage/graffiti.

Dealing with ASB

If you are made to feel uncomfortable or inconvenienced by other people's behaviour around your home, you should first try to approach the other party involved (**where it is safe to do so**) to explain to them how their actions are affecting you and ask them to change their behaviour.

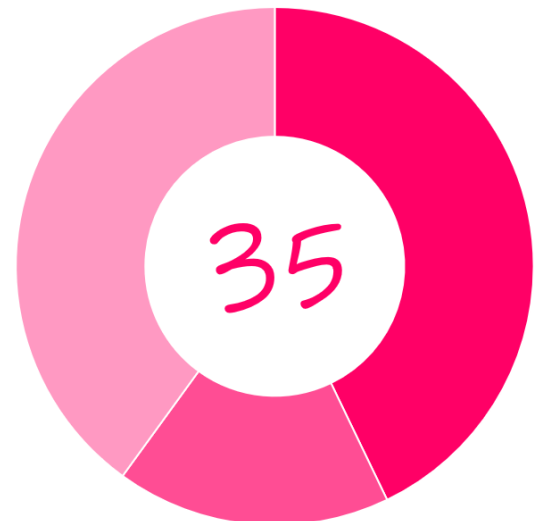
Sometimes, other people may not be aware that their behaviour is causing distress or nuisance and letting them know may help.

What is ASB?

ASB includes a range of nuisance and criminal behaviours which are causing distress to others. Whether someone's actions can be classed as ASB relies heavily on the impact it has on other people.

Behaviour that is more frequent or persistent is more likely to be considered as ASB. The type and intensity of the behaviour also matters.

Landlords, the police, and local authorities consider all these factors when deciding how best to deal with reports of ASB. Each report is looked at individually by considering the suffering of the victims and the impact on the wider community.



www.asbhelp.co.uk/tackling-the-problem

Examples of what is (and isn't) ASB

Examples of ASB can include:	Examples of behaviour that may not be ASB can include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noisy and/or abusive behaviour• Vandalism• Graffiti• Intimidation• Public drunkenness• Littering• Fly tipping• Illegal drug use• Excessively barking dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-off parties and barbecues• Infrequent and occasional noise or disturbances• Children's play• Occasional dog barking• Excessive noise from domestic appliances (e.g. washing machines, vacuum cleaners)• Minor vehicle repairs• Gossip• Escalated disputes

If a crime is being committed or you're being threatened or intimidated, call 999 (emergency) or 101 (non-emergency).

We take all reports of ASB seriously. We work with both the accused and the accuser to resolve ASB when it's reported.

The path towards a resolution isn't always easy or quick. We often have to work with other organisations and agencies to support those involved or take further action. This could be the police, other landlords or the Council.

One of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) requires us to report on how many ASB reports we receive (per 1000 homes) and how satisfied you are with our approach to handling ASB.

Protecting children & vulnerable adults

We all have a role to play in protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults in our community. Somerset Council is committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

If you are worried about a child, a young person under the age of 18, or a vulnerable adult you should contact Somerset Council on 0300 123 2224.

If you or the person you are concerned about is in danger and immediate action is required, you should ring the emergency services on 999.



**Somerset
Council** 

www.somerset.gov.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing/safeguarding



Project to help with recycling

Funding from [Somerset Community Foundation](#) (HPC) is enabling the great Bridgwater organisation [Somerset Levels and Moor Shed](#) (SLaMS) to make 41 wooden recycle bin storage units for SHAL's tenants.

It will help make recycling easier for the homes that receive them and help keep the surrounding area tidy (see left). This project will take up to a year to complete. As this is a pilot project it's hoped we may be able to gain more funding at a later date to make more.

SLaMS is based at The Canal Workshop, Old Taunton Road, Bridgwater. They are part of the [UK Men's Sheds Association](#) – although not just men attend.

It's a great place to meet up and take part with other people interested in various woodworking projects. There are skilled carpenters on site if you don't have any experience and it's a great opportunity to socialise and make something worthwhile out of wood.

If you have woodworking skills, would like to learn, or would just like to find out more please get in touch.

Email: info.slamshed@gmail.com

Call: Simon on 07872508181

Tom on 07788508746

Online: www.slamshed.org

Lori Lee

Project Manager

What's on @ the Hub?

The Hub at Bridgwater is a community resource centre which networks with many different voluntary organisations, businesses and statutory services across the community.

Their aim is to ensure that no person slips through the net when they are in need.

The Hub is what happens when a group of charities and organisations all work together with one goal in mind

Supporting Bridgwater People

What's an internal audit?

You may or may not be aware that SHAL has internal auditors who check what we do and how we do it. Although they're called "internal" auditors they don't work for SHAL.

This year, the internal auditors have looked at how we:

- Respond to reports of damp, condensation and mould
- Invest in our homes and complete day to day repairs
- Prepare empty homes to be re-let and set up new tenancies
- Collect rent payments and deal with rent arrears
- Manage data and IT and the quality of the data we use to produce the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

These audits are in addition to our regular audits of health and safety information and processes including asbestos, electric and gas checks. They provide a level of assurance to the Board that we're complying with all the rules, regulations and laws that apply to us.

They also make recommendations and share best practice so we can continually improve what we do and how we do it.

Our survey said...

We're working through the data and the draft report from the company who completed the survey on our behalf. There's quite a lot to go through!

We'll be sharing the results with everyone (online and in Grapevine) as well as in a series of Community Chats across Somerset (we're calling it a roadshow). We'll be meeting in **Hamp, Newtown and Sydenham** in Bridgwater as well as **Nether Stowey, Taunton and Woolavington**.

Around 70% of you have heard of SHAL's Community Chats. **How can we encourage people to come along or get involved in the roadshows?**



39%

of you responded to the tenant satisfaction survey



Social housing

New homes for Wedmore

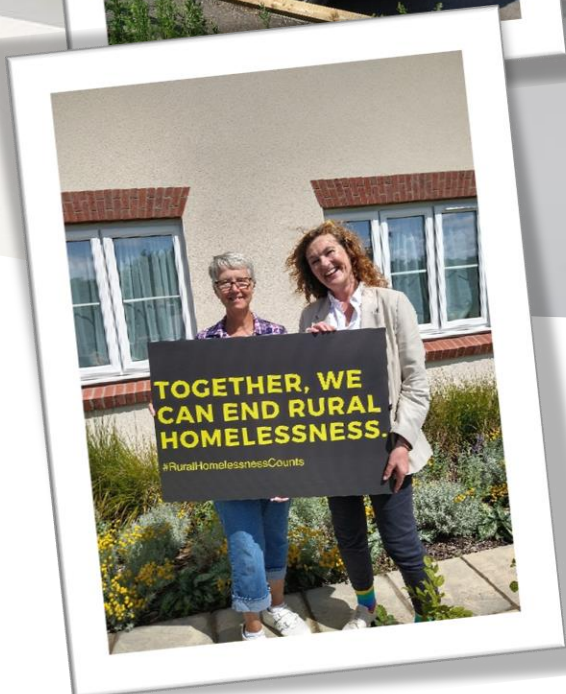
We've created another SHAL Community in Wedmore, creating 15 new homes for life. Back in July we celebrated Rural Housing Week in Wedmore. It was great meeting people from across the development including our tenants, owner occupiers and tenants from the private rented sector.

Jennifer and Steven provided tea and cake and we were able to organize for an ice cream van to swing by. It proved popular with the builders who were finishing off the development! Rural Housing Week 2023 was a national celebration of rural housing focusing on:

- Hidden homelessness
- Investing in rural communities
- Improving the planning system
- Unlocking growth in rural areas



“Living in this house in Wedmore and the fact it's affordable has been life changing in every single possible way.”



New homes for Watchet

We're in the process of developing and letting 16 new homes for life in Watchet. We've let 6 so far and the remaining homes will be let as and when they're built.

This doubles the size of the SHAL Community in Watchet taking the total number of homes there to 32! Once completed, SHAL will have 780 homes for rent and 4 homes for shared ownership.

39%

of our homes are in smaller towns and villages across Somerset (i.e. not in Bridgwater, Burnham on Sea, Highbridge, Minehead & Taunton)



Rural communities

English rural local authorities are home to one fifth of the population including 4.8 million workers & half a million businesses.

"Fuel poor" rural homes

"Fuel poor" rural homes have been hit hard by the cost-of-living crisis. Electricity costs more per unit than gas so those "off gas" pay more to get warm.

Domestic heating oil is around £0.81 per litre at the moment, compared to £0.43 in March 2021. It reached £1.60 per litre in March 2022!

Source: www.boilerjuice.com/uk



Housing crisis

England has moved from having 31% of households in social rented accommodation in 1979 to 17% in 2018/19. **Also, around 40% of homes sold under the Right to Buy scheme are now in the private rented sector.**

In short, housing associations have a really difficult job on their hands. You can find out more in the [Better Social Housing Review](#) that we discussed at our Community Chat back in July.

"To have this house to make into a home means more than the world."

New consumer standards for social housing

The Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) has completed their [consultation](#) on the draft consumer standards. This has included speaking to landlords as well as thousands of tenants. **The 4 new consumer standards will replace the 5 existing standards:**

- Home (quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance)
- Tenancy (how properties are allocated/exchanged and terms around tenure)
- Neighbourhood & Community (issues around neighbourhood and communal areas and anti-social behaviour)
- Tenant Involvement & Empowerment (customer service and complaints, tenant rights and involvement)
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (reporting against the TSMs, which cover information on areas such as repairs, safety checks and complaints)

The RoSH has been guided by 3 tests for developing their approach to consumer regulation:

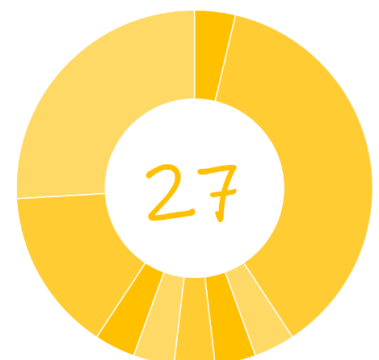
1. It must make a meaningful difference to tenants
2. Landlords must be able to deliver its expectations
3. They must be able to regulate against it

The new consumer standards

Standard	Requirement
Safety & Quality	Requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.
Transparency, Influence & Accountability	Requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account. This includes the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).
Neighbourhood & Community	Requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.
Tenancy	Sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.

Making a complaint

We've received 27 complaints since April 2023. That means we're likely to have received 46 complaints by the end of March 2024. We've received 10 complaints relating to decisions we've made and 7 relating to the standard/quality of work. Other complaints include incorrect information/advice, delays, impolite treatment and our application/allocations process.



Are you struggling to see an NHS doctor?

Tell [Healthwatch Somerset](#) about your experiences by 31 January 2024 to help make access to health care in Somerset easier.



The Somerset Emotional Wellbeing Podcast

Did you know Somerset Emotional Wellbeing have a series of weekly [podcasts](#) you can listen to online (for free)? They cover a wide range of subjects including: reversing prediabetes; long COVID; living well with respiratory disease' making complex decisions.

If you would like to suggest guests and topics for them to cover, please get in touch with them by emailing: somicb.sewpodcast@nhs.net

Damp, condensation & mould

As we move into the colder months we'll be approaching everyone to reassure them they can (and encourage them to) report problems with damp, condensation and mould.

There's lots of information on our website and on our Facebook page. You can also text MOULD to 07984 355553 at any point during the year to find out more.



Do you live with COPD?

Respiratory diseases continue to be a significant cause of health-related issues and mortality in Somerset. Among these, COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) has a higher prevalence in Bridgwater compared to many other regions in England and the county.

However, less than 50% of people in Bridgwater have had an annual review with their GP, meaning many are not receiving support or have not been diagnosed with COPD.

Warmer & healthier homes

We're continuing to invest in our least energy efficient homes to make them warmer and healthier. Work includes innovative insulation solutions as well as new heating systems.

"I'm so happy I can't thank you all enough for your patience and persistence.

"I don't know myself it's lovely and warm. THANK YOU!"

Surprising fire risks in your home

There are many commonly used household items that can cause a fire. Some may not be that obvious.



DEVON &
SOMERSET
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE



Mobile phones & laptops

Devices can heat up when they're being charged. Sometimes they can overheat if there's a fault. Leaving a device charging on carpets, bedding or furniture can start a fire.

Only charge devices on a hard surface, and when you're home – and awake!

Dishwashers, washing machines & tumble dryers

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service attend around 115 fires each caused by domestic appliances.

Never leave an appliance on when you're out or asleep. If it starts to smoke or a small fire breaks out, you have more chance of noticing if you're at home. This will reduce the risk of the fire causing more serious damage.

Wheat bags

Wheat bags are packs that you warm up in the microwave (used to relieve pain). Use them with care. Follow the instructions and don't overheat them.

Only use wheat bags on the body. Don't use them as bed warmers as they can continue to heat and start a fire on bedding.

Moisturisers or emollient creams

Many [emollients](#) products designed for dry skin conditions contain flammable materials. The products alone are not flammable, but **a build-up of emollient/skin cream residue on fabrics can increase flammability.**

If anyone in your home uses emollients, you should wash their clothes and bedding separately from everything else. You must also take extra care around heat, flames and cigarettes.

Vaping & e-cigarettes

Every 6 days, someone in the UK dies from a fire started by a cigarette. **The best way to reduce the risk is to quit or smoke outside.**

Although dropping an e-cigarette or vape won't cause a fire, electrical elements like chargers can cause fires. [You can find out more about smoking safety online.](#)

Glass ornaments on window sills

Glass ornaments, vases, reading glasses and mirrors on window sills will **magnify the sun's rays.**

This can cause surfaces to heat up and sometimes catch fire.

www.dsfire.gov.uk/safety

Bedbugs

Bedbugs are small insects that often live on furniture or bedding. Their bites can be itchy, but do not usually cause other health problems.

Bedbugs can hide in many places, including on bed frames, mattresses, clothing, furniture, behind pictures and under loose wallpaper.

Signs of bedbugs include:

- Bites – often on skin exposed while sleeping, like the face, neck and arms
- Spots of blood on your bedding – from the bites or from squashing a bedbug
- Small brown spots on bedding or furniture (bedbug poo)

On white skin, bedbug bites usually look red (right). On black or brown skin, they may look purple and may be harder to see.

How to get rid of bedbugs

It's very difficult to get rid of bedbugs yourself because they can be hard to find and may be resistant to some insecticides. There are some things you can try yourself, but these are unlikely to get rid of bedbugs completely.

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wash affected bedding and clothing on a hot wash (60C) and tumble dry on a hot setting for at least 30 minutes• Put affected clothing and bedding in a plastic bag and put it in the freezer for 3 or 4 days• Clean and vacuum regularly – bedbugs are found in both clean and dirty places, but regular cleaning will help you spot them early	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep clutter around your home, especially around your bed• Bring secondhand furniture indoors without carefully checking it first• Take luggage or clothing indoors without checking it carefully if you have come from somewhere where you know there were bedbugs

How do they get around?

Bed bugs don't have wings, so they have to crawl to move around on their own. They can move within walls, through floor and ceiling openings, and on pipes. But most bed bugs spread from place to place when they get onto people's clothes, linens, or furniture and into luggage.

Bed bugs, unlike lice, don't travel directly on people and spread from person to person. But they can travel on people's clothes. In this way, people can spread bed bugs to others, without even knowing it.



Household Support Fund

You can get help regardless of your work situation, provided you show that you are struggling to pay for essentials. A Household Support Fund will not affect your benefits.

It can cover supermarket food vouchers and Energy Top Up Vouchers (for use with pre-payment meters).

It can't cover debt repayments, cash payments, rent or housing costs, phone bills or non-urgent items such as televisions and some furniture.

www.somerset.gov.uk/care-and-support-for-adults/somerset-household-support-fund

Back-billing explained

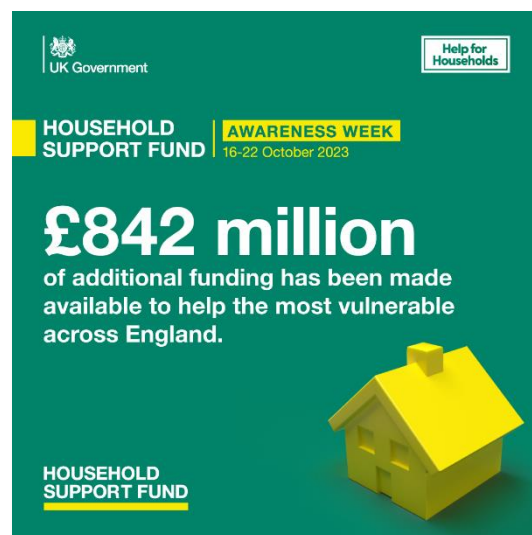
Back bills are sent to you by your gas or electricity supplier when you've not been accurately charged.

You can't be charged for gas or electricity used more than 12 months ago if you have not been correctly billed for it, or informed about it via a statement of account, before. This includes situations where a supplier increases your Direct Debit because it was set too low.

Suppliers cannot use this to recover any shortfall for a period longer than 12 months ago. Suppliers must make these terms clear in their contract terms and conditions. The rules apply to household and small business energy customers.

They may not apply if you have behaved obstructively or unreasonably, preventing accurate billing.

www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households

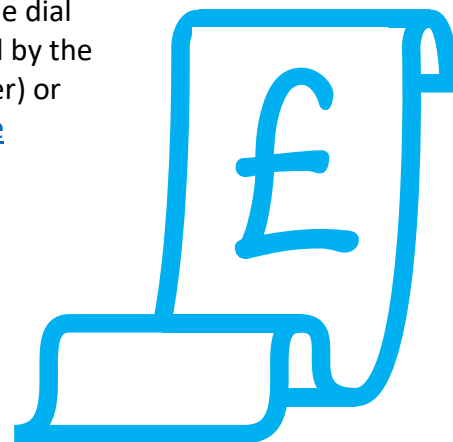


I can't pay the back-bill

If you think you can't afford to pay, ask your supplier about repayment plan options. **They must take into account how much you can afford.** They will explain your options.

Citizens Advice can also help if you can't agree on a payment plan or if you're not happy with the options the supplier has given to you.

You can call 0808 223 1133 (textphone dial 18001 followed by the helpline number) or use their [online webchat](#).



Are you in receipt of tax credits?

Tax credits are coming to an end, and most people will need to apply for Universal Credit instead.

Look out for a letter called a Universal Credit Migration Notice from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) explaining what you'll need to do, and by when.



If you are claiming tax credits and are aged 65 or over, DWP will write to you to ask you to apply for Universal Credit or Pension Credit, depending on your circumstances. You won't be moved automatically, so it's important to act quickly and follow the instructions in the letter, otherwise your benefits will stop.

If the amount you are entitled to on Universal Credit is less than your existing benefits, a top up amount is available. This is called Transitional Protection. You can get the Transitional Protection if you have received a Migration Notice letter from DWP and make a claim by the deadline date on your letter.



Do not apply for Universal Credit until you've received your Migration Notice from the DWP.

If you apply before you're asked to you won't receive the Transitional Protection (if applicable).

Have you heard of Advicelocal?



Find help with benefits, work, money, housing problems and more. To get started, enter a postcode and choose an advice topic to find links to tailored information for your area. You'll also find [details of independent advice organisations across the UK](#) that can help you get the advice and support that you need. They will usually be able to offer free advice and support, and help to answer any questions you have. Advicelocal can help you find information relating to:

- Welfare benefits and tax credits
- Council tax, including exemptions and discounts
- Debt and money advice
- Housing and homelessness
- Employment and work issues
- Disability and social care

www.advicelocal.uk

Competition time! You can win £50 vouchers!



1. What percentage of you responded to the Tenant Satisfaction Survey?

- A: 29%
- B: 39%
- C: 49%



2. The Regulator of Social Housing is introducing how many revised consumer standards in April 2024?

- A: 4
- B: 6
- C: 8



3. The Better Social Housing Review has how many recommendations?

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

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 November 2023

The lucky winner of the competition in our last issue was Anthony from Bridgwater. The answers were: 1B (6 May), 2C (7%), 3B (25).

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.