

## SHAL's Community Chat 2024-02

### Tenants' priorities

Lee Barrett led the Community Chat about the tenants' priorities from last year's survey:

- 1** invest in maintaining and improving the standard of our homes
- 2** invest in improving the energy efficiency of our homes
- 3** support people who are struggling financially

It was agreed there was a lot to take in! SHAL will find different ways to communicate this effectively to get as much from tenants and the survey as possible. There was surprise at number 1 because there was a feeling the standard of our homes is generally very good and we've invested in and improved a lot of homes over the last few years.

There was no surprise at 2 and 3 because of the way things are at the moment. Angela Gascoigne said she's working with the National Housing Federation to get the government to understand the need for a long-term plan for housing, especially in rural areas.

**One tenant shared their experience of living in the private rented sector and how his landlord gave him 2 months' notice to leave rather than invest in energy improvements.**

We're working harder than ever to improve the energy efficiency of our homes, bringing them all up to "C" by 2030, focusing on our least efficient homes first.

Someone asked if it's money or manpower that's making it harder to do what's needed sooner. It was agreed it's both. SHAL has a finite amount of money and while there's grant available it's not always easy to get and it's not always worth it.

SHAL's been able to secure grant meaning every £1 we spend can go further and we can make more improvements in more homes. We'd still be making these improvements if we didn't

have the grant; it just means we'd have to reduce investment elsewhere (e.g. doors, bathrooms and kitchens) and it would take us longer to do what's needed.

One tenant said they can't afford to heat their home and only use an electric blanket to heat themselves rather than the room/home.

We want to be in a place where everyone is able to heat their home to a comfortable temperature. However, some factors (i.e. energy prices) are out of our control.

One tenant asked if SHAL spends more money building new homes than it does in investing in existing ones because that's what it looks like. Neil Allan explained SHAL can borrow money to build new homes but not invest in existing ones and Angela Gascoigne confirmed investment in existing homes will not be at the expense of building new homes (i.e. if SHAL needs to cut back it can stop building new homes rather than stop investing in existing ones).

There was a chat about how SHAL can help people who are struggling financially, especially those "in the middle" who fall just short of the thresholds for benefits and recent cost of living payments. 45% of you said you were "just about getting by" financially and 21% of you are finding it difficult.

There is a clear link between those struggling financially and mental health and wellbeing.

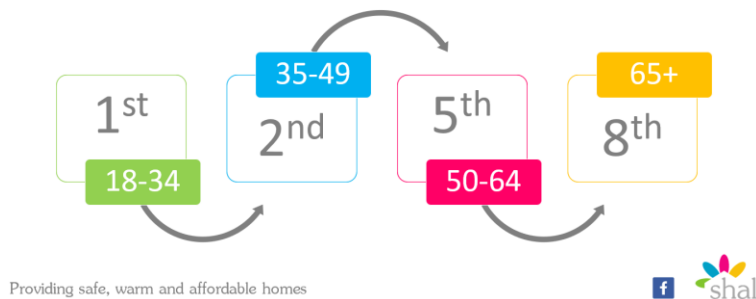
It was acknowledged it doesn't take a lot (or very long) for financial shocks to push you to the limit and those "just about getting by" can easily find themselves finding it difficult in no time at all.

**There was a chat about the recent rent increase letters. One tenant said her rent is increasing by about £40 per month and she doesn't know what to do. Angela Gascoigne said SHAL needs to "get out there" and enable its Housing Officers to "access all areas" in terms of help and support available.**

SHAL has a support fund available to help tenants who are struggling financially which has been increased for 2024/25. The next Community Chat will focus on the 2024/25 financial year and the budgets SHAL has set for the year.



“Support people who are struggling financially”



It was agreed SHAL (staff and tenants) will try and meet with representatives from different organisations (including councillors and candidates for this year’s general election) to help tenants see they’re not on their own and share their experiences with those responsible for making decisions that affect all of us.

**We need to come together and be creative and try and solve these problems together. Together we can explore (and try and understand) the who, what, where, why, when and how.**

There was also a chat about how SHAL can help and support to maintain and improve their homes themselves. It was number 4 in 2019 and number 5 in 2023. It’s number 2 for those who’ve lived in their home between 11 and 20 years (home for life).

Tenants said SHAL needs to communicate what support it offers to tenants and ask them what support they might need as it’s different for everyone. Sometimes it’s just a few words of advice or showing someone how to prepare for/start a project (a “handyman” service).

Watch this space!

The information and involvement priorities are more important for older tenants and those who aren’t digitally active

