



## SHAC 2022 Annual Report

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### Our Purpose

SHAC is a network of tenants, residents, workers and activists in housing associations and cooperatives. It is aligned to the Unite Housing Workers Branch which represents staff in these organisations.

We campaign to improve the lives of those who live in housing association properties and to reduce the commercialisation of the sector. Our demands include genuine tenant and resident democracy, improved repairs and maintenance services, reduced rents and service charges, better health and safety provisions for all, and an end to the exploitation of housing workers.

SHAC's purpose is essentially to fill a gap in the empowerment of tenants and residents in this sector. It is needed now more than ever. As one member said:

*"I have just stumbled upon your organisation and may I just take a second to appreciate what you are doing. I have been fighting clarion for over a year with a damp and mould issue. I have on several occasions felt helpless alone and completely disregarded. I have cried many nights due to getting absolutely nowhere with them.*

*I have been feeling like there is no end to the unlivable situation I am forced to live in. However knowing organisations like yourselves exist gives me hope there is an end and there is support from at least one person who understands I'm not going crazy, clarion are driving me that way and fast.*

*Thank you for being that flickering light at the end of a dark tunnel."*

SHAC@Clarion Member



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### Introduction

The last twelve months represent a period of significant growth in SHAC's profile and range of activities, brought about through the efforts of countless tenants and residents who have engaged in the branch meetings, petitions, surveys, protests, and other campaigning.

Within this group, members of the SHAC Committee deserve special thanks. Alongside their own particular battles, they have worked throughout the year to prioritise and focus SHAC's work; not an easy task given the huge range of problems within this tenure.

### SHAC Branches and Landlord Executive Meetings

Landlord specific branches remain central to our work. Currently functioning are those for Hyde, Hexagon, Clarion, OHG-Riverside, Peabody-Catalyst, MTVH, Optivo, NHG, and L&Q, which meet quarterly.

These meetings provide insight on the range of landlord problems, allow attendees to receive peer support, and drive the priorities and direction of any campaigning related to that landlord.

As a result of the pressure applied by some of these branches, we have met with their executives to press for changes to the way they operate. In each case, a prior branch meeting has elected the delegates and mandated them on issues and demands. The delegates subsequently met to agree a basic script for presenting the issues and to make sure that everyone remains focussed. This has proved to be an effective template.

So far, meetings have been held with the executives of Hyde, L&Q, OHG-Riverside, and MTVH. One is planned soon with Optivo. They have led to dialogue and are important, but do not replace the campaigning approach taken by SHAC.

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### Some other highlights from our SHAC branches include:

Members of the **Clarion** branch are working with FindOthers to collectivise, campaign, and possibly take legal action over data breaches following its cyber attack. They were also involved in producing a dossier on the organisation for a high-profile columnist which should be published by the end of 2022.

As well as meeting with the executive, members of the **L&Q** branch formed a sub-group and produced a survey on new build homes quality which was published and presented to the executive. This is being discussed with the landlord.

**MTVH** branch members have met twice with their executive, and are providing mutual support for estates involved in collective non-payment action.



We have held a protest on a **Shepherds Bush Housing** estate over disrepairs and poor service. The group is continuing to organise with SHAC's help. We also protested outside the **Clarion** headquarters.

One of our newer groups, **SHAC@NHG**, recently agreed to hold a protest and are consulting with the wider membership to identify dates.

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### All Member Freeze Rents & Service Charges Campaign

Our all-member group is an opportunity for every member to get involved in campaigning.



This group has led the **Freeze Rents & Service Charges Campaign**. Alongside campaign partners, we have held two protests outside the Department for Levelling Up, presented an oversized letter for the Housing Minister.

For the next phase of the campaign, we are building a group of members who have said that they will withhold rents and service charge increases in April 2022.

Unite the Union supported the campaign with leaflets and three professionally produced films for sharing on social media.

The lobbying has so far helped ensure that the social rent cap formula was abandoned by government, and set at the sub-inflationary level of 7%. Housing associations have also agreed to apply the same cap to shared ownership rent levels.

The campaign continues and in the new year, will focus on increasing the group of those pledging to withhold payment.

The government announcement of the cap, and other campaigning activities, led to wide reporting and helping to increase SHAC's profile.

A national protest is planned in the new year, with this campaign at the forefront, but also incorporating other issues such as ending service charge abuse, and disrepairs.

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### FindOthers and Service Charge Abuse

SHAC has run a long campaign to end service charge abuse by housing associations. As part of this, SHAC and FindOthers teamed up to create a dedicated site bringing together people affected by this issue. This will combine legal action if applicable with campaigning and lobbying to put an end to extortionate and inaccurate service charges by housing associations.



Included within the site is a unique online tool to request and chase service charge packs. The platform removes a lot of drudgery from the process with pre-set letters to which users can add their contact details and landlord name. The service is pre-programmed with the contact email addresses of most housing associations.

### SHAC Disability Visibility Group

The Dis Vis group has worked on getting the member-developed Charter Scheme adopted by housing associations. It has been presented it to all the executives we have met. We have also sent more than 100 introductory emails to the smaller housing associations asking to meet any tenant-led disability forums. We have spoken about it to the press and have received some useful feedback to refine the Scheme.

SHAC supported the Bureau of Investigative Journalism with its article on the misuse of anti-social behaviour injunctions against disabled tenants and residents, and will be adding this as

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a key campaign priority in the future. The latest Dis Vis meeting also highlighted anti-social behaviour targeting disabled tenants and residents, and we will add this to our priorities.

### Defeating the UK Housing Awards Extravaganza

When Inside Housing and the Chartered Institute of Housing announced that they were holding their annual UK Housing Awards event, it was notable that the event was moved from London to Manchester, from evening to lunchtime, and that the formal dress code was dropped. We believe that these changes were directly in response to the event picket and protest organised by SHAC in 2021.

SHAC led public opposition to the event organising a petition which garnered a staggering 54,001 signatures.

Despite correspondence with the organisers, the ceremony was still set to go ahead, so SHAC organised a picket and protest, getting public declarations of support from the Greater Manchester Tenants Union, Kwajo Tweneboa, and Acorn.

The final straw for organisers came in the form of the increased media focus on the failings of the social housing sector triggered by a coroner confirming that a two year-old boy had died from toxic mould and damp conditions in his home. This combined with SHAC's announcement that ITV would be covering the event proved to be too much, and the event was cancelled with just days to go.



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While there was widespread celebration of the cancellation, and it certainly boosted everyone's morale, members also called on SHAC to organise an alternative protest which is being planned for the new year.

### Press Coverage

We are increasingly approached by the press for help with interviewees or for comments on articles. This work is helping provide SHAC with a higher profile, and helps get our messages out to the public.

Highlights from the last twelve months include commentary and interviews on LBC, BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Radio Norfolk, BBC London, and Times Radio. In print publications include numerous articles in Inside Housing and The Big Issue. We achieved national coverage through The Guardian, The Financial Times, plus a number of local and specialist publications.

### Fundraising

SHAC's finances are growing in health although we do not have grant funding. We have received major donations from **Unite the Union** nationally, the **Unite Housing Workers Branch**, and the **Radical Housing Network**. We also have an increasing number of regular donors through PayPal, plus *ad hoc* donations from members.



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We never cease to be humbled by the generosity and sometimes sacrifice by those donating to help us continue our vital work. SHAC does not have premises or paid staff. All funds are directed towards campaign activity and a small number of administration costs.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has donated or helped secure a donation for SHAC. Without you, our work would not continue.

### Our Website



Our website remains the primary platform for amplifying our messages, communicating our activities, and providing support to members.

This year, SHAC has added new resources for members campaigning on disability, plus guidance and templates on a range of different subjects.

We continue to innovate on the site, adding the Service Charge Survey 2022, plus a Press Disrepairs Report function to help us match journalists' interview requests to members willing to speak to the press. We now issue a monthly press release summarising disrepairs cases.

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More than 28,000 people visited our website over the last twelve months, and it had over 53,000 views and. We published 61 of our own or guest written articles, and the number of subscribers doubled to 81.

### Social Media

Our **Twitter** feed has reached more than 3,000 followers, up from 1,388 in December 2021. Top Tweets of the year were the announcement of cancellation of the UK Housing Awards which received 41,000 impressions, and the launch of the Service Charge Survey with 37,000.

Our **Facebook** page is now a regular forum for discussion, and is public. It has 1884 followers, up from 827 in December 2021. The highlights included announcement of the social rent cap which received 2,330 views, the LBC interview with 3,300 views, and the call to picket the UK Housing Awards which received more than 3,500.



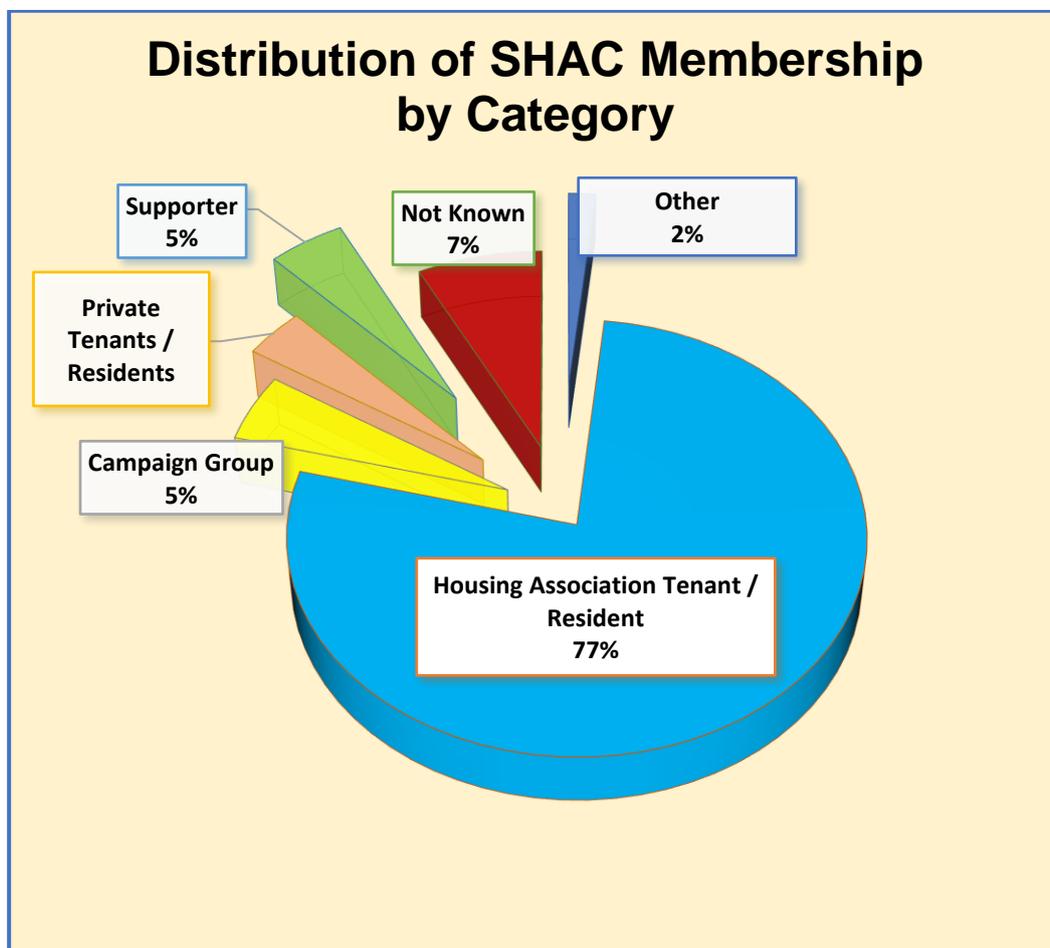
SHAC's **YouTube** channel has 93 followers, with popular videos including SHAC's evidence to the Social Housing Regulation Inquiry, the Shepherds Bush HA protest, and films featuring rent and service charge strikers.

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### Membership Growth and Distribution

Our membership is growing steadily and increasing our reach and power, with numbers doubling over the last year. More than 75% are housing association tenants and residents.





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### In Summary

The year has been turbulent for social housing tenants and residents, with appalling disrepairs, abuse through the service charge system, discrimination on grounds of race and disability, and landlords who generally fail to provide the standard of housing needed for a decent quality of life.

The news of Awaab Ishak's death due to damp and mould, the ongoing battle for justice by Grenfell survivors, and friction over the rent cap, have all led to greater coverage in the media, but crucially also a greater level of coalition building between housing activists.

Over the coming year, SHAC will continue to demand better for all, whether through supporting member-led campaigns, collaborating with other groups, joining housing workers on their picket lines, or holding government and executives to account.

We hope that if you are not already a member, you will join us.

**Email**      [shac.action@gmail.com](mailto:shac.action@gmail.com)

**Website**    [www.shaction.org](http://www.shaction.org)

**Facebook**   [www.facebook.com/groups/145158149342578/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/145158149342578/)

**Twitter**     [@HAWRNet](https://twitter.com/HAWRNet)

**Join SHAC**   [Registration Form](#)

December 2022