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# SHAC 2024 Annual Report

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## Our Purpose and Structure

SHAC is a grassroots campaign group building tenant and resident power across the UK. We campaign to oppose high rents, service charge abuse, disrepairs, poor antisocial behaviour handling, and disability discrimination. SHAC is run democratically, and we try to ensure that decision-making is grounded in the interests of members through their involvement.

## Giving Thanks

As an entirely voluntary campaign group, and in the absence of paid staff, we rely entirely on the contributions of volunteers to carry out our work. The sheer numbers involved make it impossible to properly thank all those who have approached SHAC not just with problems, but a determination to actively help others and stem injustice at source. But while not being able to list individual names, we are no less grateful for, and appreciate, every single contribution.

We place on record our thanks in particular to the SHAC Committee who have generously helped direct and develop the work of the organisation throughout 2024.

## Website Resources

- [Unfair and Uncapped: Freeze Rents, Cap Service Charges](#)
- [End Service Charge Abuse](#)
- [Disability Visibility](#)
- [Antisocial Behaviour \(ASB\)](#)
- [Disrepairs, Damp and Mould](#)
- [A National Tenants' and Residents' Union](#)
- [Events](#)
- [News Blog](#)
- [Press Articles](#)
- [SHAC Action Newsletters](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Donations](#)



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## Introduction

The last twelve months have been very busy for SHAC, and our collective efforts have made an impact. We have exposed many different aspects of housing injustice, influenced the direction of government housing policy, and challenged landlords who transgress. That said, achieving genuine landlord accountability remains a difficult task and it is one that we will continue to aim for over the coming year.

The housing crisis has many aspects, including disrepairs, homelessness, insecure housing, the lack of landlord accountability, the inaccessibility of the legal system, weak regulation, high rents, rip off service charges, dysfunctional complaints procedures, social stigma, social cleansing, and neighbourhood decline.

It is no surprise therefore that when engaging with MPs and councillors, they have told us that the many different aspects of the housing crisis need to be given a much greater priority. Yet during the General Election in July, none of the main political parties offered transformative solutions to this crisis.

It has been left to SHAC and other campaign groups, whether formally constituted or through *ad hoc* grass-roots self-organisation, to beat the drum and expose the suffering that is caused by a lack of access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

In line with these aims, SHAC has used its strengthening public profile and archive of resources to facilitate more activist communities than ever before. We will continue to build on our successes and the outlook for the year ahead is positive.

## With Thanks

It is impossible to do full justice to all the campaigning that has been done over the last twelve months, but we hope that this report offers an interesting flavour.

Suzanne Muna

**SHAC Secretary**





## SHAC @ Landlord Communities

The number of landlords with an active group of members within SHAC has grown, and the locus of organising has expanded into WhatsApp communities.

Examples of organising through WhatsApp include our Peabody and Notting Hill Genesis members who have organised protests, A2 Dominion members who have met three times with the landlord's Chief Executive, council housing members who have developed a template for comparing service charge costs, and Clarion members who are engaging collectively with MPs.

Alongside the alliance-building opportunities offered by WhatsApp, the forums offer hubs through which people have exchanged peer support and advice on how best to resolve individual or estate level problems.

From January 2025, we will be holding regular monthly meetings to discuss progress across all campaigns plus any organising focussed on specific landlords. We will continue holding separate themed meetings as needed, but these are likely to be fewer in number. The schedule of meetings is accessible on our website [Events](#) page.

## End Service Charge Abuse (ESCA)

ESCA has been the most intensive of our campaigns, and it received a considerable boost with extensive BBC coverage in March and then again in October.

Members decided to focus on engaging with politicians to demand a series of changes to the law. We have met a significant number of Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs throughout this period and further meetings are planned.

George Howarth MP suggested that we draft a letter on his behalf to then Secretary of State for Housing, Michael Gove. This was done and eventually published as an open letter, co-signed by a total of 35 MPs.





Baroness Scott who oversaw the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, invited George to meet with her to discuss the issues. The sector took note, and the Chair of the G15 large landlords, L&Q's Fiona Fletcher-Smith, was pressured to write an open letter on behalf of landlords in an attempt to rebut our evidence.

Running alongside the early political work, we have continued to feed service charge case studies to the press. This reached a high point in March 2024 when the BBC's Tarah Welsh reported on service charge issues, with the broadcast and print versions both referencing SHAC. The social media shares attracted significant interest, including 2.2 million views for the BBC's Twitter post.

On the back of the public interest, we launched a Parliamentary Petition calling for the creation of a service charge regulator. It was signed by more than 18,500 people within six weeks. At this point, however, a General Election was called, putting a halt to the engagement by MPs and bringing the petition to a stop. Nonetheless, the MPs were made powerfully aware of the considerable support it had attracted so our efforts were not lost.

After the election, we resumed our MP engagement and at the time of writing, had met more than 25 of the current cohort, with more being added all the time. Through these meetings we were advised to propose amendments to the Renters Reform and Leasehold Reform bills, both of which are progressing through Parliament, and to draft Parliamentary Questions that could be tabled by MPs. Two documents were prepared with significant input from members. Multiple MPs have now tabled versions of our questions, propelling this issue to the fore politically.

All this action changed the discourse on service charges from one in which abuse was dismissed and downplayed as occasional errors, to an acknowledgement that overcharging is widespread and systemic. This is a necessary first step to getting it addressed.

During the year, we also explored further the question of strategic legal action. We teamed up with the Public Interest Law Centre who explored possible legal angles, and one has emerged as viable. Further work is now being undertaken to gather the relevant evidence.



## **Antisocial Behaviour and Disability Visibility**

Our work on Disability Visibility and antisocial behaviour has been driven by SHAC Committee member Jacqueline Parkes, with significant input from Carl Davis.

Following our publication of the Disability Visibility Charter in 2023, we produced a toolkit which added detail to the steps we advised landlords to take. The Charter was distributed to all the main landlords and some smaller associations, both by SHAC centrally and by our members when engaging with their landlords.

We acknowledged the close interrelationship between disability and antisocial behaviour (ASB). Our disabled members are disproportionately the victims of ASB, are more likely to be falsely accused of engaging in antisocial behaviour, and are often at a considerable disadvantage when trying to get the landlord and other authorities to address it.

SHAC launched a survey and produced two excellent reports that achieved national exposure on the BBC and elsewhere. The reports offered a unique perspective on ASB, not just on the experiences of those exposed to this type of behaviour, but the role of landlords as perpetrators. We are now in discussion with the Victim Support Service on ways that this situation can be reversed.



## Unfair & Uncapped: Rents & Service Charges

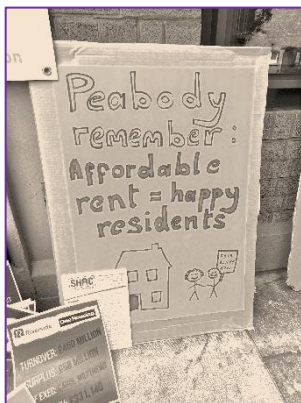
After rises of 7.7% in April 2024 for social rents and many other rent categories, SHAC continued promoting the Unfair and Uncapped: Freeze Rents. Cap Service Charges campaign. We made it clear that unaffordable rent levels are contributing both to homelessness and a growing debt burden for our members.

Our main campaign action is to support those withholding the annual rent uplift. So far, more than 600 people have signed up. Updated resources such as template letters and guidance were produced to help.

Labour's offer on social rents is the same as the previous government, with a proposal to raise the rent cap by Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation plus 1% for the next decade. It is now consulting on this. SHAC has responded and shared a template response for our members to submit. This campaign will continue.

## Lost Social Purpose

We always aim to hold in-person protests to help bring our activists together and highlight current demands. This year, we held a series of demonstrations outside the head offices of Peabody, MTVH, L&Q, Clarion, Southern and Notting Hill Genesis to show how far these housing associations have strayed from their original social purpose. The action underscored their transformation from local housing associations into corporate commercial landlords and developers. Our messages were amplified on social media.



## Disrepairs

The physical disrepairs blighting lives across the UK has once again assumed a level of prominence in the post-election period. Daniel Hewitt has launched a new podcast – Trapped – which revisits many of the themes on the deplorable state of UK housing



from 2021. One of the episodes ('Speaking Truth to Power') features SHAC giving evidence on disrepairs.

Much of our work on this issue has been media focussed, exposing the conditions that members are having to endure, as well as providing resources for members to use when attempting to get landlords to make repairs. It is often only public naming and shaming that finally prompts repairs, but we also lobby government on this issue, and to emphasise the inadequacies of existing system of complaints.

SHAC has also been working with Shelter on the development of 'Awaab's law' which the charity drafted. Our intervention followed research by the group of Public Interest Lawyers who exposed just how big the enforcement gap is, and which the new legislation does not fill. SHAC's committee member Gerald Kennedy has led on this and we will continue to include updates in SHAC Action.

### **A National Tenants and Residents Union**

As our members are all too aware, acting individually means that we are often outflanked when trying to challenge large, powerful corporate landlords with seemingly endless resources and superior access to decision-makers in local and national government, and in the press.

We know (and pay tribute to) the many community and campaign groups carrying out excellent work to help tenants and residents self-organise. However, we believe that the lack of a national housing movement has hindered fundamental change and allowed landlord dominance to continue.

The establishment of a tenants' voice has been attempted several times previously, but were generally top-down and policy driven, funded and controlled by government or charities. They did not seek to create tenant and resident self-organisation.

This does not however mean that a tenants and residents union will inevitably fail. We believe that it can be successful if it gains the support of the labour movement.



To be sustainable, it must also be grounded in the principles of self-organisation and committed to developing a layer of activists able to empower member self-advocacy.

Like a trade union, such a body would support tenants and residents with individual casework, resource them to campaign collectively on estates, and advocate for legal and governmental policy changes that favour tenants and residents, not landlords. It must also unite people regardless of tenancy or landlord type.

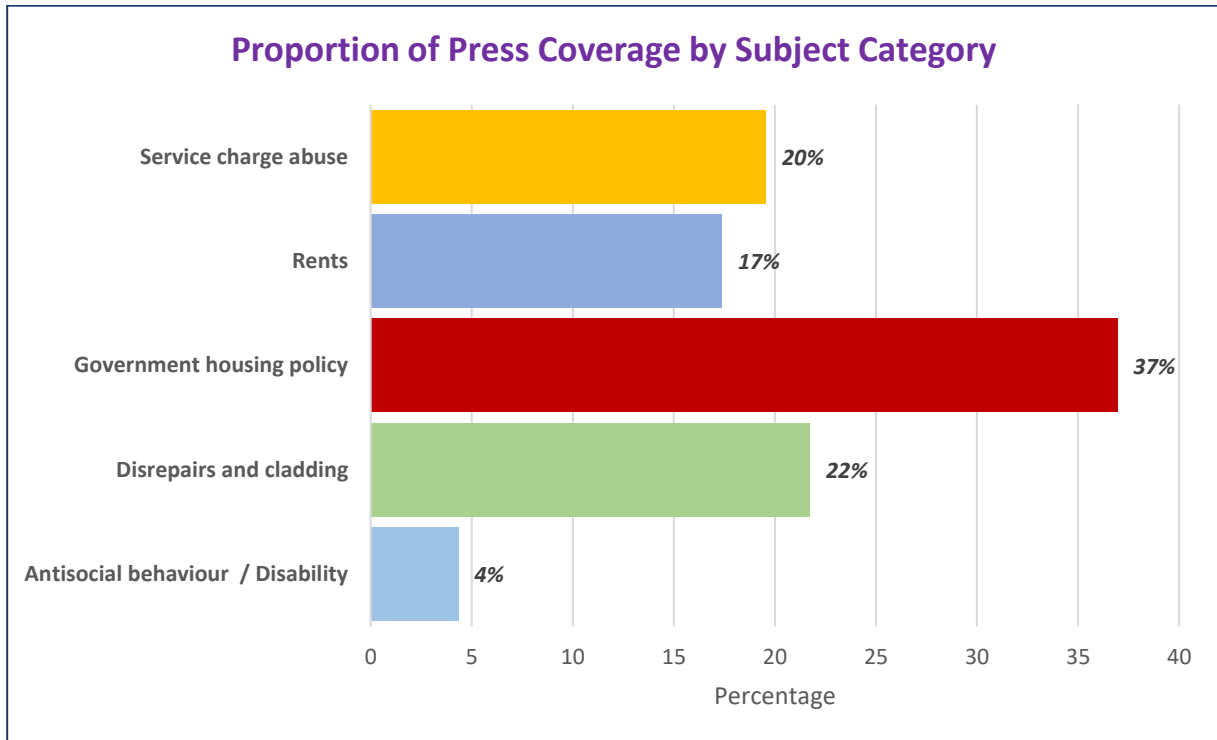
SHAC is now attempting to initiate such a union through engagement with members, campaign partners, and the trade unions. Its aims are to supplement rather than replace existing groups with a specialist focus and remit.

Despite only launching in September, the initiative is supported by nine campaign groups or alliances and more than 30 tenants' and residents' associations (TRAs). The number of TRAs has declined considerably over the last decade as landlords have withdrawn support for them in favour of more easily controlled resident panels, but they nonetheless represent a crucial test of grassroots interest. Their endorsement of our project has therefore been of particular importance.

### Press Coverage

SHAC has had an exceptional year in terms of broadcast and printed press coverage. We have featured in more than 40 articles by media companies including multiple BBC channels, Sky News, The Guardian, The Independent, The iPaper, The Times, The Big Issue, LBC radio, and Inside Housing among others.

The main topic that SHAC was invited to comment on has been Government housing policy, followed closely by disrepairs (including cladding) and service charges. Our members have also featured extensively in journals reporting on disrepairs.



## Our Articles and Newsletters

We have published almost forty articles on our website this year, including an increased number of posts guest-written by members. This helps develop our website as a platform for tenants and residents. The range of issues covered by our articles has varied widely, reflecting the diverse problems our members face.

Lindsay Bush wrote about leasehold reform proposals and the enforcement gap. Carl Davis reviewed a book on housing law. Brian Madican described how building council housing could save millions of pounds in benefits. From Wales, Jon Wilson and Padi Phillips both reported on the deplorable behaviour of Welsh landlords and the loss of social housing stock.

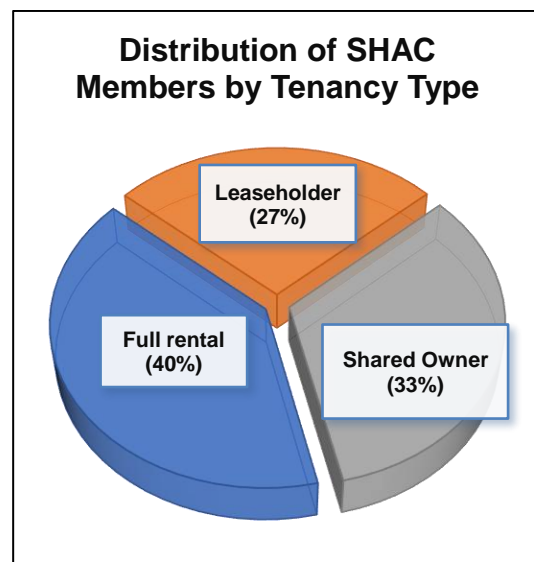
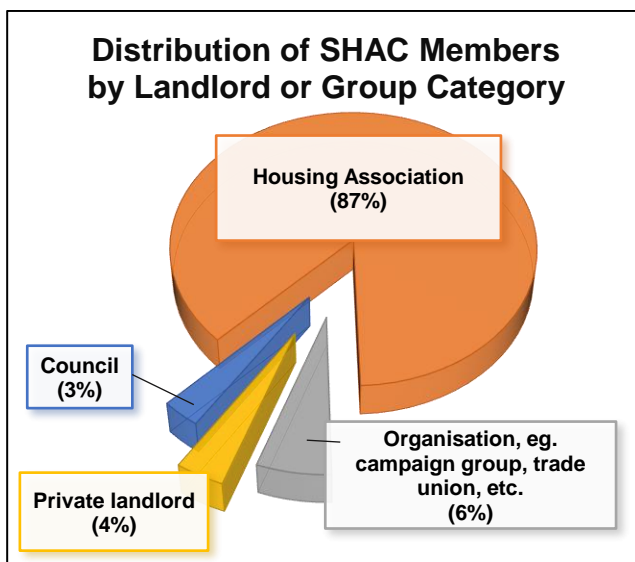
Harold May exposed the scandalous vulnerability of almshouse tenants. Michael Savell named and shamed Greenwich Council for its betrayal over council housing. Mary Pimm highlighted resistance by Peabody tenants to unaffordable rent rises, and Michael Harrison described Onward’s journey from managed decline to gold mine.

Partner groups also sent articles. Grace Lally of Housing Rebellion reported on the pop-up rogue’s gallery targeting Southern Housing, and Paul Kershaw of the Unite Housing Workers Branch covered strike action by Sanctuary workers.

Editions of our newsletter, SHAC Action News, has provided a regular roundup of activity and often contains interviewee requests from journalists. It is produced most weeks and distributed via our mass mailer, Constant Contact. If you are a member of SHAC but don’t receive it, please check your junk folder and restore an old copy to your main inbox. You can also find back copies on our [SHAC Action News](#) web page.

## Our Members

Our membership numbers have increased, and our community profile is now more diverse. Although we remain primarily focused on housing association landlords, many campaigns and resources are relevant to those in council and private sector housing, driving up members from these landlords.

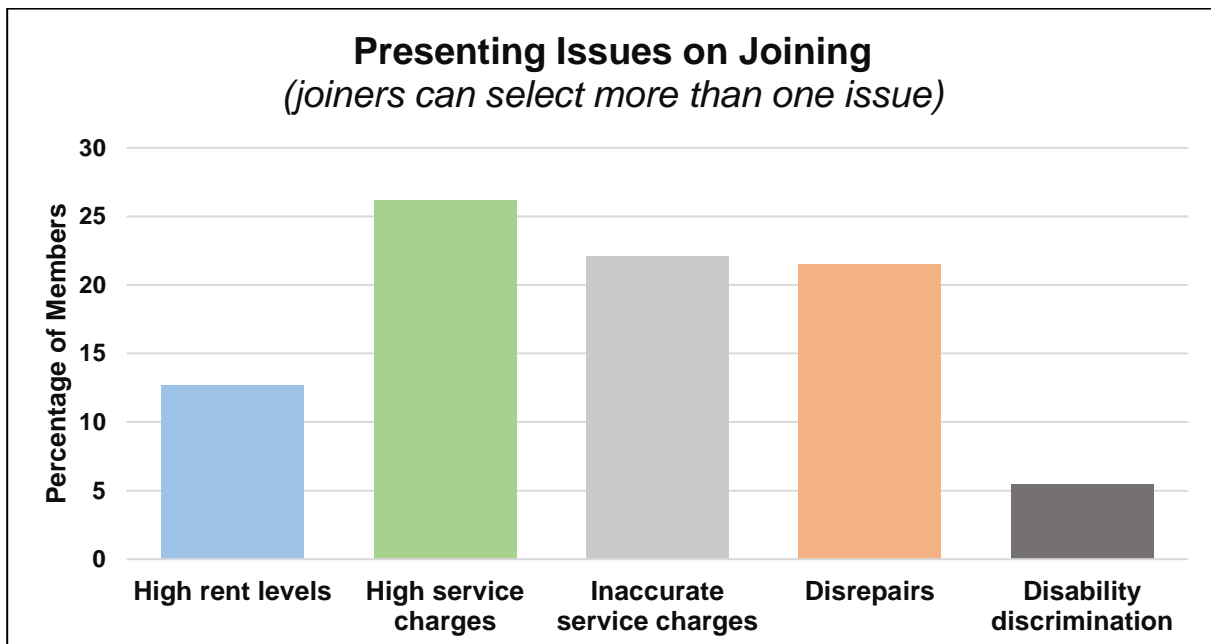




Service charge abuse remains the main issue prompting members to join SHAC. Disrepairs are the second most common concern, with high rent levels also affecting a significant number.

Disability discrimination remains far too high, and around 5% of our members are compelled to join because they believe they have been discriminated against on the basis of a disability.

We will continue to campaign on all of these issues over the coming year.



### Social Media

Our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Bluesky accounts help us amplify our messages and reach new audiences. The number of subscribers has increased across all platforms, and the two new accounts (Instagram and Bluesky) are performing well.

Alongside social media, we posted over 20 videos on our YouTube channel, one of which achieved over 1,000 views. The number of subscribers rose from 154 to 282. The videos include films of our protests as well as television and radio interviews.

### Help SHAC Fight

SHAC relies on donations to fund its activities. All funds are used for campaigning and basic admin. We have no office base and do not employ staff. Donations keep us afloat, and can come from individuals or labour movement organisations like trade unions or other campaign groups. If you are able to help, please go to

<https://shaction.org/donations/>

### Fighting Forward

The last year has been one of exceptional growth and impact for SHAC, but we are keenly aware that the housing crisis continues to ruin lives despite the vast profits and surpluses being accumulated by private and housing association landlords.

Landlords of all types are complacent because government agencies and authorities are not sufficiently holding them to account when they fail. This in turn leaves landlords content to ignore problems, and the lack of collective organisation contributes to a deficit of urgency when issues occur. It remains our mission to make sure this changes, hold landlords to account, and make sure regulatory agencies perform better. We look forward to working with all our members as we move closer to this goal over the coming year.

## SHAC Income and Expenditure

Year to Date 2023-2024

as at 30th September 2024

**Income**

Donations - Funders	£	4,956.89
Donations - SHAC Members	£	2,010.41
Donations - Paypal	£	698.43
<b>Total Income</b>	£	<b>7,665.73</b>

**Expenditure**

Bank Charges inc. Pockit	£	93.89
Secretary Expenses	£	400.00
Travel Costs	£	1,333.74
Printing	£	1,610.10
Zoom	£	2,040.45
Constant Contact	£	536.40
Twitter Ad.	£	158.08
Postage	£	16.58
<b>Deposit Building Centre</b>	£	<b>280.50</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	£	<b>6,189.24</b>

<b>Total Surplus Y. T. D</b>	£	<b>1,476.49</b>
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