

"We couldn't have coped without it..."

Let's get talking

Gwent Court and Churchill House

Autumn 2020
Issue 1

Tenants' Open Voice

for tenants of Lewes District and Eastbourne

New magazine name

Competition Winner!

See page 2



Virtual 300

Eastbourne and Lewes News

Highlights inside...

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HOMES FIRST



lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Welcome to the new Tenants Open Voice



Gary Hall

Welcome to **Tenants' Open Voice**, our new joint newsletter for Eastbourne Homes and Lewes District tenants.

Since the joint transformation and the creation of Homes First, we have worked hard to refine the service we offer tenants and looked at how best to communicate with you. With the help of our involved tenants, we have created this exciting new joint newsletter which combines the strengths of Open House and Tenants Voice and covers all areas of Homes First – I hope you find it both interesting and informative.

This has been a challenging year for everyone, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic and changing government guidelines and requirements we have had to change our services quite radically during 2020.

I would like to take this opportunity to not only praise our staff response to this, but also to thank you – our tenants – for your patience in what has been an unprecedented situation.

I hope that there are better times around the corner for all of us. Please stay safe.

Kind Regards

Gary Hall BA(Hons), FCIH, MinstLM

Head of Homes First
Lewes District Council
and Eastbourne Borough Council



Find us on Facebook:
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Eastbourne Homes Ltd**



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CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRES

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1 Grove Road, Eastbourne. Tel: (01323) 410000

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Joint Newsletter Name Competition

In the past, Eastbourne and Lewes had their own local newsletters – *Open House* in Eastbourne and *Tenants' Voice* in Lewes.

However, last January tenants' representatives decided that a joint newsletter should be established to reflect the close working relationships that now exist between the two authorities since the establishment of Homes First. The original plan was to produce final editions of *Open House* and *Tenants' Voice* alongside a competition to choose a name for the new joint

newsletter, but the onset of the pandemic made it necessary for

us to produce a series of Covid-19 newsletters to support and inform our tenants instead.

As the first lockdown eased, the competition idea was re-born when members of the Virtual 300 tenant group were invited to help choose a new name. Twenty two entries were received from tenants, which were judged anonymously by the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment panel (TIE) in September.

The winning entry *Tenants' Open Voice* was submitted by Angela from Eastbourne, who received a £20 shopping voucher.



Virtual 300 - VITAL

(Virtual Involvement of Tenants & Leaseholders)



As part of an ongoing recruitment drive to involve more tenants, we are building a virtual community that will provide an accessible forum and allow us to consult more widely on more topics and involve more of you from the comfort of your own home.

As part of this drive, we are asking tenants to join an online community we have called the Virtual 300. Tenants can choose to complete short surveys, participate in discussion groups or join information sharing workshops. Those who become actively involved will be rewarded for their efforts through regular prize draws and incentives.

Our goal is to recruit 300 tenants and so far 100 of you have enrolled – **will you be next?**



If you are interested or would like to find out more, please email:
tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Do you live in the following areas?

Shinewater Park • Hampden Park East
• Willingdon Trees (Eastbourne)
• Newhaven • Peacehaven (Lewes District)

Do you have a great idea and need help to make it happen? Local people are coming together to take positive action, share their stories and work together to improve their local environment and create healthy communities. The ABCs of making it happen are:

Acting on what matters
Believing in the benefit
Celebrating success

Making it Happen is funded by East Sussex County Council and can offer small Sparks grants and advice and guidance on moving from idea to action.

You can find out more by checking the website:

www.making-it-happen.org.uk

or by emailing:

makingithappen@sussexcommunity.org.uk

Homes First Tenants' Conference

HOMES FIRST

As you know, we had to postpone our 2020 conference due to Covid-19.

Whilst we still have a provisional booking for March 2021, we are unable to confirm details due to the changing situation. We hope we will be able to have an event next year and will continue to look at alternative options to engage with you all as a group of involved tenants.



Estate Walkabouts

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions we have not been able to carry out the planned estate walkabouts this year, but we hope to start them again as soon as we can. We propose to target areas

where there are local issues, such as planned maintenance or anti-social behaviour. Tenants living in the areas identified will be notified and invited to join our staff to give us their views.

If you think your area needs a walkabout planned, please contact us by email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



STAR Survey

We have sent out a 'STAR' (Survey of Tenants and Residents)

satisfaction survey to a number of our tenants. If you do receive one, we would be very grateful if you could complete and return it to us, so we can use the results to measure how we are doing and use your ideas to improve our services.

The results of the survey will appear in the next newsletter and the 2020/2021 annual report.

If you have any queries or comments, please email:

tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



Stock Condition Survey

Earlier this year, Faithorn Farrell Timms (FFT) were appointed to undertake a programme of stock condition surveys on the whole of Lewes District and Eastbourne Homes housing stock.

The stock condition surveys involve looking at the main building components such as the roof coverings, windows, doors, kitchen, bathroom and heating system and collecting information about their type, age and condition.

The aim of the stock condition surveys is to help us prepare our planned maintenance programme and assess the funds required to deliver the planned maintenance each year. Planned maintenance is the name we give to the replacement or repair of certain building components, which includes the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms, electrical rewiring and decoration. Our annual planned maintenance programme makes sure that the homes most in need of works receive them first.

The surveys are well underway, but if your home hasn't been surveyed yet, please don't worry, as some homes will be seen before others. FFT will continue to write to residents over the coming months advising when they will be in each area in order that an appointment can be arranged.

With over 6,000 properties to inspect, this is a large project, and the current aim is to have all surveys complete by the end of March 2021. This will, of course, depend on residents allowing access for the surveys to be undertaken and we would appreciate everyone's co-operation in this regard.

How will I know if my property has been selected for planned maintenance works after the stock condition survey?

The information collected during the stock condition survey on each individual home will not be shared with residents. However,

each year the budget for our planned maintenance programme will be set and the homes identified as most in need of works will be included in the year's planned maintenance programme.

If your home has been included, we will write to you nearer the time to tell you the works we will carry out, the name of the council staff member who will support you through the process and the appointed contractor, if known. If you have not received a letter then you will not receive any works that year, but you may receive them in the future.

In time, all of our homes will have planned maintenance works carried out, as the different components that make up a home require replacement. Therefore, if we have not contacted you or carried out any planned maintenance works so far, it is because we have assessed your home as not requiring any works at the moment.



Tenant Scrutiny SUCCESS



Earlier this year, our tenant scrutiny team completed a detailed review of the service provided when tenants report a communal repair. The team made recommendations to Homes First who responded with a timetable to implement a number of the recommendations.

Tenant scrutiny member John Langley said: "During our investigations we realised there was a big discrepancy in the response tenants receive from Homes First when they report a repair in their home or for a shared communal area."

Homes First Leadership team have agreed to align the service so that tenants reporting communal repairs will now be given a job number and an appointment time.

Other promised improvements include drafting new procedures to incorporate any recommendations and a new online portal enabling tenants to feedback on service. Two Neighbourhood First workers will also be assigned to carry out regular inspections of blocks of flats, and there will be improved co-ordination to ensure resources such as scaffolding are used more effectively.

The scrutiny team were impressed by staff and thankful for the honest contributions that drove recommendations to improve the communal repairs service for the benefit of everyone. The team also recognised that all concerned were working hard to help maintain tenants' homes under challenging conditions.

The next scrutiny review will look at how Homes First deals with complaints. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact the Tenant Involvement team. Tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk or call us on 07800 689302.



Right to Buy fraud prosecution

A Lewes housing tenant received a 20 month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months, for fraudulently attempting to purchase a three bedroom house with a £80,900 discount on 10 January 2020 at Brighton Crown Court.

Debbie Mclean, 54, was prosecuted after claiming to live in a three bedroom house, when she applied to buy the property in June 2018. Although she was the registered tenant, she had in fact moved out of the property, residing at various other addresses in Sussex since 2014.

Had Mclean still been a tenant at that address, she would have been entitled to the maximum discount on the purchase price under Right to Buy rules, getting a £80,900 discount from the public purse on the property.

The false declaration and abandonment of the property was discovered by the council's counter fraud team.

The Judge in the Crown Court, in passing sentence, referred to the offence as 'thoroughly dishonest'. She stated that Mclean had deprived others more in need of accommodation for the sake of her own self-interests since the property could have been used to the advantage of a family with children. The Judge stated that Mclean's actions had been 'despicable'.

To report housing fraud anonymously online visit:
lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housingfraud

Direct Debits are an easy, simple and convenient way to pay your rent and Council Tax.



- You no longer have to worry about paying on time.
- It costs nothing to set up and can be cancelled by you at any time.
- It costs the Council less to collect and any money we save means there is more money available to help improve the service you receive.

We offer:

- Monthly Direct Debits, taken on the first of every month.
- Fortnightly Direct Debits, taken on the Monday of every rent paying fortnight.
- Weekly Direct Debits, taken on the Monday of every rent paying week.

Contact us on (01323) 410000 or (01273 471600) to set up a Direct Debit, or to download a form, go to:
lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/payments/pay-your-rent/





Residents of Gwent Court in Eastbourne.

As lockdown took hold, many communal lounges in retirement housing schemes were closed to keep everyone safe, which made access to communal gardens more important than ever before. As Jan observed when asked about the garden at Gwent Court in Eastbourne “we couldn’t have coped without it.”

Residents of Gwent Court were able to take full advantage of a gazebo funded by the Central and Archery Area Panel community improvement budget (see page 10) to create a socially distanced space where they could meet for a chat or join in garden activities such as maintaining a thriving wildlife area or growing flowers, fruit and vegetables.

As well as the social aspect, gardening offered a great low-impact way for the residents

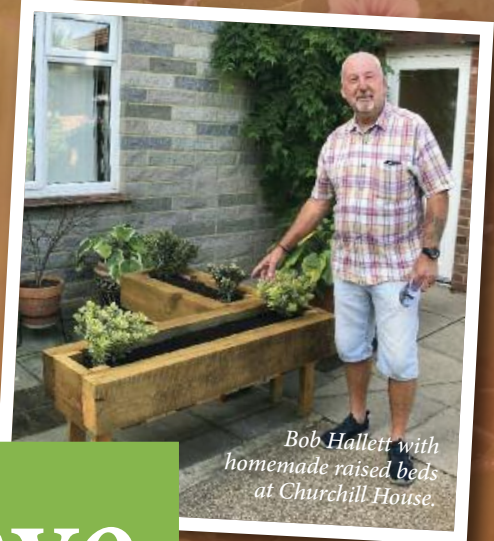
to improve muscle tone and heart health as the activity required bending, twisting and walking providing much needed exercise.

Bob, who lives at Churchill House in Seaford, described the garden there as an oasis without which residents would have ‘gone insane.’ During lockdown ground maintenance stopped so residents also had to step in to try to keep the garden areas clear of weeds and in good order. Creating various spaces outside alongside gardening activities and other projects helped many overcome the anxiety and

isolation that the pandemic brought with it. As Linda observed “I’d have gone off my rocker without this garden.”

Both schemes have also been able to supply their residents with home grown vegetables and fruit ‘there for everybody’ at times when supermarket shelves were running low.

Studies across the UK have shown that even a five-minute exposure to a natural scene can reduce issues such as raised blood pressure, muscle tension and increased sensitivity of the skin. Residents who can see nature and greenery, even if it’s just a window view, have lower stress, better stimulation of the mind, and less of a focus on pain and discomfort so let’s get gardening!



Bob Hallett with homemade raised beds at Churchill House.

“We couldn’t have coped without it...”



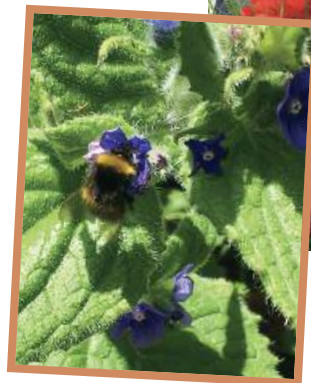
Looking after your garden and helping out wildlife

British wildlife is in trouble, so the Councils have adopted a Pollinator Strategy which aims to help nature across the District and the Borough. We are hoping that you will join us by encouraging wildlife wherever you can.

Some Council properties come with gardens or outdoor space and are great for people and wildlife to enjoy. Here are some tips to enjoy your outdoor space and help attract wildlife:

- Grow more native flowers, shrubs and trees – these are important food sources for wildlife such as butterflies and bees. They also provide seeds, berries, fruits and cover for birds and mammals.

- If you are limited on space, plant up pots and window boxes with wildflowers and herbs on patios or hardstanding areas.
- Mow less, later and a little higher – mowing less or later in the growing season allows grasses and common-lawn plants like clovers, daisies, buttercups, dandelion, and selfheal to flower. These are important food sources for insects including butterflies.
- Create woodpiles, leaf piles, compost and trimmings – these can be incredible places for animals to thrive, feed and hibernate.
- Hold some water either in bird baths or shallow saucers for wildlife like frogs, newts and birds.

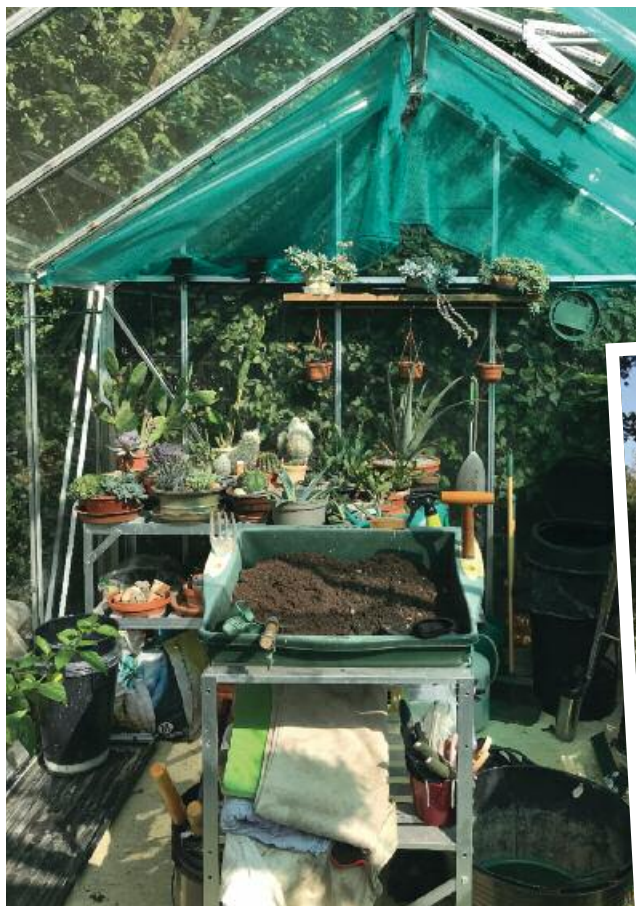


Photos taken by Jacqui Astridge of Stirling Court, Eastbourne.

- Keep an area of your garden 'wild' at the back or along the side for ivy, nettles and brambles to provide food sources for wildlife.
- Keep connected – small gaps allow for hedgehogs and other creatures such as toads to roam and make use of gardens to feed.

For more advice see the Tenants' Handbook at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/council-tenants-handbook

Summer House at Churchill House.



Potting shed at Churchill House.

Gas Contract Renewal



Following the retendering of the gas servicing and maintenance contract for Homes First, we are pleased to announce that the winning contractor for the gas appliance servicing and maintenance contract, including our sheltered housing blocks is BSW Building Services Ltd.

BSW Building Services Ltd. are based in Scaynes Hill, Haywards Heath. they have been carrying out our day-to-day

maintenance and annual gas service programme for Homes First, as well as our boiler replacements since the 14th of September 2020.

To contact BSW Building Services Ltd. for your gas fuelled central heating and hot water repairs, or to arrange an appointment for your gas service, you can call **01444 836 036** between 8.30am and 5.30pm and choose the relevant option.

For emergency breakdown calls outside of these hours, Eastbourne tenants should call **(01323) 410000** and Lewes tenants should call **(01273) 471600** before following the guidance for the correct option.

All BSW Building Services Ltd. engineers will carry and produce ID on every visit...

Don't forget to check it!

Ask to see Contractor's ID

Before allowing access to your home to Mears operatives, or any of their subcontractors, please make sure they show you an ID badge. If they do not have ID, you can refuse entry, or ask for their name and then contact repairs service in your area to make sure they are a legitimate worker. To check with Mears, Eastbourne tenants should call **(01323) 410000** and Lewes tenants **(01273) 471600**.



Homes First recently launched SwapTracker to support the mutual exchange process.

SwapTracker is linked directly to HomeSwapper which is a popular way our customers already use to find a suitable exchange.

SwapTracker has an easy to use, mobile friendly form that can be submitted to Homes First online. This helps to improve transparency to all concerned and allows the system to give updates and notifications throughout the process. It also allows for document sharing reducing the need to post or deliver paperwork.

We hope that SwapTracker will help Homes First provide an improved service and reduce the need for face to face contact keeping people safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

You can access SwapTracker via the HomeSwapper website: www.homeswapper.co.uk

Let's get talking (resolving neighbour disputes)



Last year, Homes First dealt with 369 reports of Anti-social Behaviour from tenants and leaseholders, and during lockdown we've seen an increase in reports as tensions and frustrations increased between neighbours during this worrying time.

We encourage residents to speak to each other when an incident or dispute occurs because this is often the quickest way to resolve an issue or misunderstanding. Our officers work with mediation services who can help you to speak with your neighbours in a calm and structured way. In Eastbourne we offer referrals to Mediation Plus, and for those living in the Lewes District we make referrals to Brighton and Hove Independent Mediation Services.

Here are some top tips to try and resolve disputes with your neighbours:

- **The more understanding the better** – it can make a big difference if you understand the other person's situation and what their experience is – and for them to understand yours.
- **Take a moment** – we usually complain when we are struggling to cope with a difficult situation. It's always worth taking time to calm down and reflect before saying anything.
- **Explain your concerns** – communicate when you are as calm as you can be and explain why you are finding things difficult – avoid personal remarks or exaggeration.

- **Offer to listen to the other person's point of view** - this is not easy to do when you are annoyed, but it can make a huge difference if you can do it. Listening to someone doesn't mean you agree with them.
- **See if it's possible to agree a plan that would work for you both** - remember you don't have to be friends, just people who can live peacefully next to each other. You will probably need to make compromises and agree how you will communicate in the future.

We are currently running a consultation with tenants to help us complete our new Homes First anti-social behaviour policy and we'd love to hear your views. You can find the consultation online here:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/consultations/homes-first-asb-policy-consultation/

The closing date for responses is Monday 23rd November 2020 at 5pm.

Don't suffer in silence!

No resident should have to tolerate Anti-social behaviour, and our friendly Customer Advisors are here to help. Please call us if you are experiencing problems in your area and let us know what is happening so that we can give you the best advice and support.

Eastbourne tenants should call:
01323 410000

Lewes tenants should call:
01273 471600



Don't forget - you have to be registered to vote in future elections.

Eastbourne and Lewes councils have launched campaigns encouraging residents to register to vote.

The annual canvass helps to identify any residents who are not registered, and makes sure the register is up to date. People who have moved recently are particularly encouraged to look out for the voter registration messages from the councils and check the details.

Research by the Electoral Commission shows that recent home movers are far less likely to be registered than those who have lived at the same address for a long time. Across the UK 92% of people who have been at their property for more than 16 years are registered, compared to just 36% of people who have lived at an address for less than one year.

Melanie Davidson, Head of Support and Improvement at the Electoral

Commission, said: "It's really important that everyone who is entitled to vote is able to do so. Making sure you provide the necessary information to your local authority when it is needed will ensure the process runs smoothly."

For more information visit:
www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/elections-and-voting/annual-canvass
or www.electoralcommission.org.uk

POLLING STATION



A thank you to... Someone you could rely on

Always immaculately dressed with matching clothes, shoes and make-up, Cecile Slater was a hardworking Area Panel Chair who showed a real interest in the Old Town community. With her local connections and superb work ethic, Cecile was a champion for Eastbourne Homes and worked tirelessly for all residents whilst being incredibly supportive of local officers. She could often be found scouring charity shops looking for teddy bears to cellophane wrap and sell, or collecting wine and chocolate to raise money for charity. Cecile could

always be relied on to help at the Sunday Funday or Old Town fete and you could always ensure a fun time would be had in her company.

Over the years Cecile was careful to spend Area Panel funding wisely by reaching out to local groups she felt needed support. Search and Rescue, cheerleaders, the JPK project, the Old Town Film Club and St. Elizabeth's Church all benefited thanks to her commitment and interest in the local community.

She later became Chair of Residents Voice where she was a driving force bringing all the area panels together to work as a group.



We would like to thank Cecile, as she stands down from her involvement work, for the hard work, support and friendship she has provided over the years and wish her health and happiness for many years to come.

And lastly, thank you also to Hubert Benjamin, Si Teague, Alison Adams and Monica Marchant for their Area Panel involvement.

Area Panels...

Despite being unable to meet face-to-face, the panels still managed to keep in touch with members and approve funding applications in Hampden Park & Willingdon Trees, Central and Archery, Old Town and Langney.

Nikki Wickham (Specialist Advisor) has evolved the funding criteria to meet the challenges of Covid-19 and support communities. Programmes to combat loneliness and mental health, employment training, IT support and training initiatives to help people get online have all been aided by the panels, as you can see listed below.



Hampden Park & Willingdon Trees

Defiant sports (pictured top right with HPAP chair Andy Evans). Funding tennis for adults with physical, mental and learning disabilities.

Willingdon Trees Community Centre. Maximising the outside space to enable better community access.



Parkland Federation.

Promoting outside learning and creating spaces such as the duck pond pictured right.

Working in partnership.

Meetings with Morrisons and 3VA to work together to benefit the community (Andy Evans, pictured bottom left, with Kim Hatcher-Davies and Georgie Hoogerwerf).



Langney

Seaside Rangers. Making football affordable for all families.

Natural Dye garden at The Priory - art workshops for people vulnerable to social isolation.



Central & Archery

Gazebo at Gwent Court. Enabling residents to sit outside and socialise during the hot weather (see page 6).

Patio chairs - New Derby House Enabling residents to socialise together.

Duck pond - before and after!



Together we can make a real difference to the communities we live in.

If you are interested in being part of one of the panels or have a funding idea please contact: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

TOLD Tenants of Lewes District

A word from the Chair

The Covid-19 pandemic, alongside a range of personal struggles, has made it a tough year for the committee and all our fellow tenants and leaseholders.

Despite the changes in the way we now have to work online, rather than being all together as we would have liked, we have still managed to achieve a great deal.



It is vitally important that we continue to question and be involved in decisions that affect tenants and leaseholders, and that is what we strive to do in the year ahead.

Working Virtually

We haven't been able to hold meetings since March, but we've met this challenge head on with the support of the Tenant Involvement team and embraced online engagement platforms and supported initiatives like the Virtual 300 (see page 3).

Alongside the Area Panels in Eastbourne, TOLD have funded a number of laptops which are being used by tenants who would otherwise be unable to participate.



The Lewes School Uniform Bank (LSUB)

This year, The Lewes School Uniform Bank dealt with

more referrals than ever as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold.

TOLD were glad to be able to help with a **£250 donation** that contributed to the delivery of 76 uniform jumpers, polo shirts and blazers, 138 trousers and skirts, and 150 good quality second hand items to children across the Lewes District.



TOLD AGM



TOLD held their first virtual AGM on Thursday 22nd October and it was well attended and a great success considering the present circumstances. Seven tenants without access to personal computers were accommodated safely at the Tenant Resource Centre (pictured above) so that everyone who wanted to participate could be made welcome.

A new twelve strong committee was unanimously elected by those present:

- Debbie Twitchen (Chair)
- John Langley (Vice Chair)
- David Nicholson (Secretary)
- Sue Wells (Treasurer)
- Reny Pulling
- Bob Hallett
- David Pickbourne
- Sylvia Gibbs
- Richard Jeneway
- Colin Lockyer
- Anthony Howard
- Jenny Dindial



The next TOLD session will be a virtual Christmas Quiz to be held on Thursday 17th December. For details of the arrangements, please email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Community Improvement budget

Due to the impact of the pandemic, applications for community improvements have been fewer than in normal years.

Don't forget that the TOLD committee has access to an **annual budget of £20,000** that can be spent on community projects and spaces. This year we have funded garden equipment, folding tables and inclusive picnic tables amongst many other things. (See page 12.)

If you would like to make an application to fund a community project or improve your communal area, email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk for more information.



Community Improvement and Capital Funding budgets



Roxburgh Court Tenants with their new garden furniture. (Taken Summer 2019, before social distancing.)

tenants in the area.

In Eastbourne, tenants can apply through their local

Area Panel (see page 10), made up of local residents.

In Lewes, tenants can make an application to the Community Improvement budget in the same way.

In these cases, the

Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) committee (see page 11) consider the applications using the same community benefit criteria and agree funding



where appropriate.

Pictured left are tenants from Roxburgh Court who made an application to the Langney Area Panel for garden furniture which has proved very popular and helped morale during the recent lockdown.

Pictured above is a raised bed built in a communal garden in Raymond Close, Seaford. Bill, who is blind and lives there, said smelling the flowers and herbs 'kept him sane' during lockdown.

The Tenant Involvement team manage two pots of money which tenants can access to fund small improvements to communal areas or to support local community initiatives. To be considered for this funding, the idea must demonstrate a clear benefit to the community and be supported by

If you would like your idea to be considered by an Area Panel or TOLD, please contact us for more information.

Email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Prize Wordsearch



- Windy
- Stormy
- Chestnuts
- Conkers
- Crab Apples
- Pumpkins
- Autumn Colours
- Misty Mornings
- Harvest Moon
- Halloween
- Gloves
- Daddy Longlegs
- Guy Fawkes
- Falling Leaves
- Fireworks
- Coats
- Hats
- Rugby
- Football
- Umbrellas

To enter the prize draw for a **£10 shopping voucher**, please send your completed word searches to:

The Tenant Involvement Team
2A Horsfield Road, Lewes,
East Sussex BN2 4TA

Or why not take a photo with your phone and email your entry to us at: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk.

H	A	R	V	E	S	T	M	O	O	N	A	R	V	B	D	C	E	F	G
A	S	U	K	L	M	J	N	P	Q	X	Z	Y	B	A	C	E	H	M	I
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G	I	H	J	K	L	M	S	E	V	A	E	L	G	N	I	L	L	A	F

Wordsearch created by Pauline, New Derby House, Eastbourne.