

Tenants' Annual Report

2021-2022



Lewes District Council



The official opening of homes at Oakfield,
Plumpton Green on 19 January 2022.

There are many ways that tenants can get involved...

- V300
- Scrutiny
- TIE
- TOLD
- Quality checkers
- Tenant resident associations

For more information on how to get involved, see pages 16 and 17.



Introduction by Gary Hall The Chair of the Board of Directors



Welcome to this year's Tenants' Annual Report.

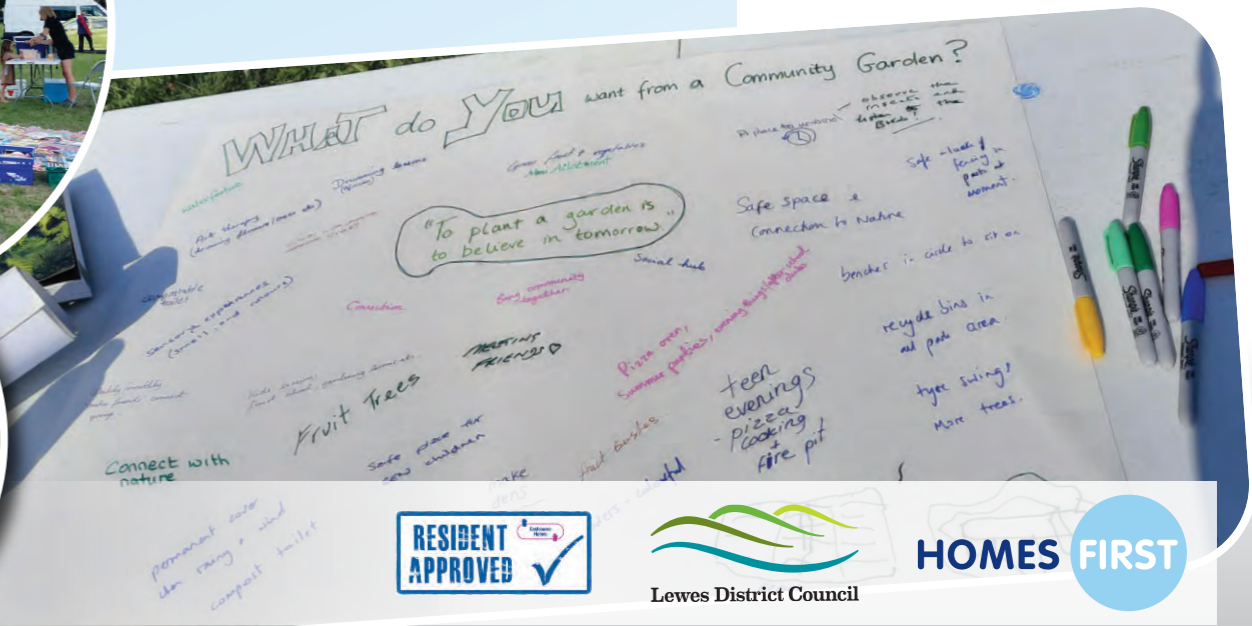
We have had another busy and challenging year in Homes First. Much of this year has been about the recovery and resetting of services after the end of the lockdowns and once again I can reflect on your patience and understanding through much of this and thank you for your support. You will be aware of the inflationary issues that we are all experiencing and unfortunately Homes First is not immune from this challenge with industry costs greatly increasing. A further knock-on impact of the pandemic and other external factors is around a shortage of materials which is providing a challenge for our repair and maintenance services. Please be assured that we continue to seek improvements in performance whilst pursuing a Value for Money agenda across all services. Much of our focus continues to be around sustainability work and connecting Housing with a healthy environment on our estates as well as getting officers back onto estates to tackle the issues you want us to, on the ground. There will also be greater emphasis on responding to emerging legislation both around capturing the voice of tenants and the critical areas of building safety and compliance. It remains critical that we hear and act upon your voice in developing and shaping what we do. I would again encourage as many of you as possible to get involved through the range of options available to you. We continue to face several 'cost of living' challenges over the next few months, but please be assured that we will do all we can, with partners, to support you and your families through this difficult period.

As always, we welcome your feedback on this and any other issues you wish to discuss around your home and Council Services.

Thank you.

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The **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard**

looks at how we **involve you** and **respond** to your needs

How do we know?

Our annual tenant satisfaction survey went out at the end of October to around 25% of our tenants, and we received responses from 470 Eastbourne tenants. The results showed a decline on 2020 results in all aspects other than 'neighbourhood as a place to live,' but this mirrored a national trend. The biggest drops in the Lewes District (5%+) were in relation to responses on 'listens to views and acts upon them,' 'easy to deal with,' and 'overall satisfaction.' Analysis of the comments provided through the STAR survey show that over 66% of negative comments related to Repairs and



Communications, and these two themes were predominantly responsible for a significant majority of complaints. In response, the Customer Experience Team delivered a series of focus groups (one online and two face to face) to delve deeper into



73% of you were satisfied with the overall service provided by Homes First in 2021-22

the customer experience in relation to these two themes. The focus groups were facilitated by Richard Tomkinson (Customer Experience & Performance Improvement Lead) with discussion themes and topics developed and agreed with Service Leads for each area. The outputs of the focus groups will inform a detailed improvement plan developed using focus group feedback and recommended service actions, which will then be communicated back to residents. Whilst satisfaction levels have declined, this is in line with sector trends and service actions are being taken to address dissatisfaction.

Did you know..?

We engaged with tenants and leaseholders over plans to improve fire safety, health and safety and recycling rates in our blocks of flats in Eastbourne with bin chutes. The decommissioned bin chutes will be replaced by attractive, easy to use bin stores with green roofs in convenient locations away from buildings. Reusable recycling bags will also be provided to make recycling easy.

Not Costing the Earth



HOMES FIRST

Working together to reduce our carbon footprint

The Future

A new approach is being implemented for 2022-23 to ensure Service Leads have the scope for more responsive and timely interventions when service issues are identified. Homes First have commissioned an independent market research agency to carry out tenant satisfaction surveys. Perception surveys should provide us with insight into how satisfied tenants are with their homes and the services provided by us. In addition, a complimentary series of transactional surveys looking at responsive repairs, complaints, and new lettings for example, will provide live feedback from tenants who have recently used our services. The findings from the surveys will show us the drivers behind satisfaction levels, the issues tenants are most concerned about, and inform Homes First's future strategic and operational planning. The surveys will comply with Acuity Benchmarking and HouseMark's STAR framework, widely used in the UK housing sector, Ireland, and



Wales, and give us the flexibility to run surveys tailored to specific interests which we can compare with other providers through Acuity Benchmarking and HouseMark. We believe that resident satisfaction research is an important business intelligence tool which can help us drive improvement and demonstrate Value for Money as well as giving us insight into how satisfied residents are with their homes and the services they receive.

The Tenants of Lewes District

The Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) is made up of tenant representatives from across the Lewes District area. TOLD has a working committee made

up of 12 tenants who were elected at the Annual General Meeting in October 2021. The committee met quarterly with senior housing leads to discuss housing issues and agree on how tenants were consulted on these issues. The group also monitored Lewes District Council housing performance and worked closely with TIE on Homes First policy.

Service delivery in 2021/2022 was influenced in the following ways:

- After identifying areas of concern in the 2022 Housing Revenue Account budget, TOLD raised these with the Council cabinet.
- TOLD investigated the STAR survey results and agreed to hold tenant focus group meetings on repairs and communications to help develop service improvement plans.
- TOLD agreed the priorities of the 'Not Costing the Earth' project.
- As a result of TOLD performance monitoring, improvement actions were agreed by the by the Senior Leadership Team. Performance reporting from the repair contractor Mears was brought back 'in house' and TOLD's feedback was used to design a new approach for the future.
- TOLD were able to consider tenant feedback on services and improve resident understanding via meetings and their website.
- TOLD liaised with tenants to inform Homes First policies on keeping pets and allocations.
- TOLD helped to agree discussion and consultation topics for the Virtual 300 group
- TOLD contributed to articles appearing in the Tenants' Open Voice magazine
- TOLD held two open meetings for tenants, with presentations on new builds, repairs, and energy saving initiatives.

Community improvement projects

Throughout 2021/2022 TOLD Approved spending of £20,000 on a range of community improvement projects which included -

- New garden furniture and improvements in Churchill House, Coldstream House, Haven Brow, and Hythe Crescent (Seaford), and Meridian Court (Peacehaven)
- A new shed and greenhouse at Reed Court (Lewes)
- A water butt in Raymond Close to support communal growing (Seaford)
- A new bench in Ashington Gardens (Peacehaven)
- A 'living wall' installation on the De Montfort estate (Lewes)
- Funding for a new community garden start up at 'The Cabin' (Seaford)
- Litter picking equipment and new litter bins on the De Montfort estate



Tenant and Resident Groups

The Landport Residents Association (LRA) is an active community group which met six times in 2021/2022. The group coordinated community events which ranged from a Book Club and drop-ins to a summer BBQ attracting over 300 local residents. The LRA also hosts a foodbank which helped over 50 households last year and a Community Café.



68% of you said you were satisfied with the opportunities we offer to enable you to get involved and have a say on how we provide housing services.

The **Homes Standard** looks at how we provide **homes** that are **safe**, good quality and well maintained



Did you know..?

Property Services Lead **Simon Watts** manages a team of 40 staff who work hard to keep your homes safe and well maintained.

Simon has a wealth of experience and expertise in property management obtained through a varied career working for a variety of organisations including The London Borough of Hackney, Circle Housing, East Kent Housing, Town & Country Housing and Moat Homes.

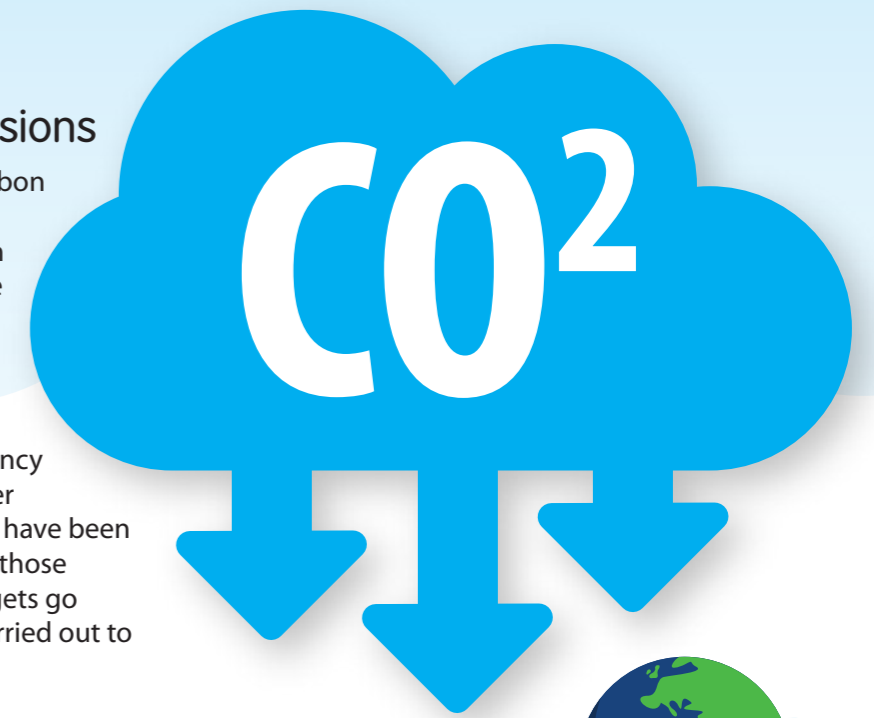
98.98% of our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard

73% of tenants were satisfied with the overall quality of their home

73% of you were satisfied with the standard of the last repair you had carried out

Reduction of carbon emissions

One of our key objectives is to reduce the carbon emissions generated by our housing stock, although this work will need to be met within our current resources. We also need to ensure it's affordable for our residents, so we don't increase existing levels of fuel poverty. It's unlikely we'll be able to afford the combination of measures needed to achieve Energy Performance Certificate energy efficiency target 'C' unless money is provided from other sources. Four different grant funding streams have been identified and we are working hard to access those considered suitable to help our existing budgets go further so that cost-effective works can be carried out to minimise our carbon emissions.



Did you know..?

Homes First is working towards meeting the 2030 zero carbon target for our housing stock. Case studies have been undertaken to find the best retrofit solutions for our architecturally different houses and flats. One of the key drivers of this work is that any changes proposed will not result in higher energy bills for our tenants.

Not Costing the Earth



HOMES FIRST

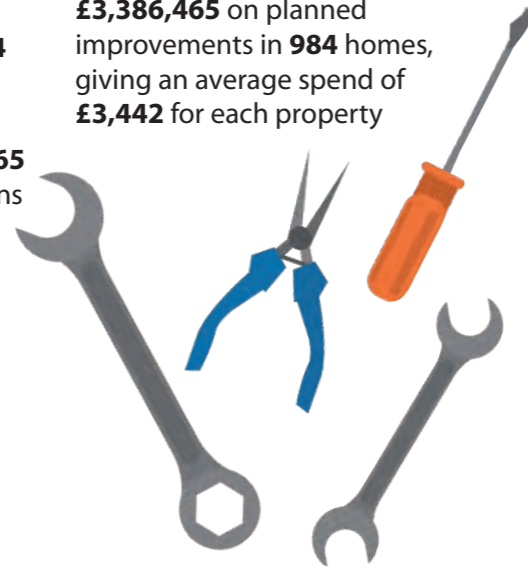
Working together to reduce our carbon footprint

How are we doing?

Between April 2021 and March 2022, we completed **8093** responsive repairs, of which **2103** were emergency, **1204** urgent, **4549** routine and **237** planned.

We also completed **65** replacement kitchens

and **67** bathrooms, and **7** separate WCs. Overall Lewes District Council spent **£2,121,487** on **3220** properties, giving an average amount spent on responsive repairs per property of **£659**. We also spent **£3,386,465** on planned improvements in **984** homes, giving an average spend of **£3,442** for each property



Remember

If you have an emergency repair out of office hours you can still get the help you need:

- For general emergency repairs you can use the main contact number which is **01273 471600** – Option 2. This also directs you to the Mears out of hours service.
- For heating and hot water breakdowns only, you can call BSW Building Services on **01444 836036**.
- If there is a gas leak you can contact the National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**.

Value for money

As part of our Value for Money strategy, we continue to review our maintenance contracts to explore any opportunities

for savings and efficiency gains to make sure our contract management is fit for purpose and delivering to our tenants. In the past year, the Customer Experience Team and Property Services have supported this initiative by working closely with Mears by holding weekly meetings to improve service and the customer experience. Homes First is committed to continuous improvement and to deliver this aim we collect key performance data monthly on the:

- Percentage of homes with a valid gas safety certificate
- Percentage of domestic properties with Energy Safe Certificates (EICR) up to five years old
- Number of emergency repairs completed in month
- Number of non-emergency repairs completed in month
- Percentage of repairs completed right first time
- Overall satisfaction with repairs



Did you know..?

Lewes District Council has **1224** flats in **248** blocks, **1324** houses, **280** bungalows, **398** Retirement housing properties, **273** leasehold properties, **5** shared ownership homes and **60** garage blocks managed by the Homes First team.

A disused Fire Station site in Newhaven was purchased from the Fire Service, and a design for **6** homes has been approved by the planning committee.

This will provide affordable homes for local families.



The Tenancy Standard

looks at how we **end tenancies**, manage **empty properties**, and **allocate** homes



The average time taken to re-let our empty properties was **33.3 days**.

Homes First recognises that mutual exchanges encourage tenant mobility and support sustainable communities through best use of housing stock. Mutual Exchange

provides a broader range of choices on size, type, and location of homes, and gives tenants the opportunity to find a home which is suitable for their needs and the opportunity to move to other parts of the country. Between April 2021 and March 2022, we helped 19 tenants to mutually exchange their home using HomeSwapper (the UK's leading exchange service for tenants) and SwapTracker which provides an online portal for information sharing, helping tenants to track the progress of their mutual exchange application easily.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, we let **74** general needs homes:

- 1** Studio property
- 48** One-bedroom flats, bungalows, and maisonettes
- 69** Two-bedroom flats, houses, and maisonettes
- 36** Three-bedroom houses
- 4** Four-bedroom houses

We also let **38** retirement properties which included **8** studio flats and **16** one-bedroom flats, **10** one-bedroom bungalows and **4** two-bedroom bungalows

Did you know..?

The Housing Needs team restructured in October 2021 and brought in a team of Specialist Advisors to lead on cases from start to end to improve efficiency. We have also recruited three new Customer Advisors who joined the team in September to establish our initial duties, provide information, manage expectations, and signpost clients to other services as needed. To support this work, a new internal IT system will also come

on stream to help the Housing Needs team manage caseloads more effectively and accurately report on outcomes. These changes will allow us to review how we are work with our customers and partners and improve how we deliver our service to prevent and relieve homelessness. A hub which enables key partners to work together in a person-centred approach is also being implemented.



Between April 2021 and March 2022 we let **156**

general-needs homes...

48

One-bedroom flats, bungalows, and maisonettes...

1

Studio property...

69

Two-bedroom flats, houses, and maisonettes...

36

Three-bedroom houses and...

4

Four-bedroom houses

Value for money

To demonstrate its commitment to Value for Money, Homes First collects key performance data on how much we spend on emergency accommodation every month.

Did you know..?

The East Sussex Wellbeing and Employment team works on bridging the gap between homelessness, health, and employability by supporting customers to access the appropriate services to improve their overall wellbeing and reduce the demand on emergency and temporary accommodation.

Between April 2021 and March 2022, the team received 196 referrals. Including 43 from Eastbourne. Clients ranged from 19 to 69 years old and were supported in obtaining employment, in sustaining stable accommodation, and received help with benefit applications, managing debt, applying for grants and other support.

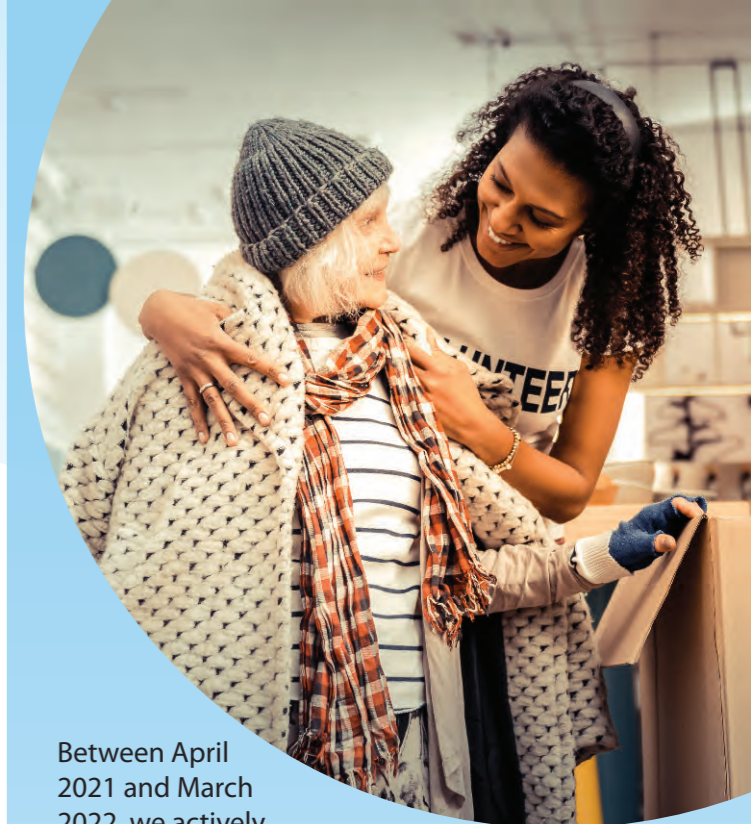
After receiving help from the team, one client wrote - "I am writing this, to just express how thankful I am with the way you have helped me out these past few months. It's just been nice to have someone there that says they're going to do something and actually go through with it and make sure whatever's needed to be done, is done. I appreciate it a lot, thank you."

77% of you said you were happy with the safety and security of your home



Did you know..?

Properties are being identified for purchase across the Lewes District to help meet the housing demand. A block of flats in Newhaven currently let as temporary accommodation by the Council has been identified for purchase within the acquisitions programme ensuring long term stability for residents of Newhaven.'



Between April 2021 and March 2022, we actively assisted 673 households homeless or at risk of homelessness by providing advice and assistance, producing personal housing plans, signposting to services and in some instances offering loans. The outcome of every application is different depending on what the need is, but we successfully enabled 145 households to remain in existing accommodation or find a new property, and another 96 households were relieved from homelessness by the local authority taking reasonable steps to help the applicant secure suitable accommodation for at least six months. 94 households were considered for a Main Housing Duty decision (i.e., they were provided temporary accommodation until this duty ended) and 47 were accepted. The others were found to have No Local Connection, Not in Priority Need, Not Eligible or Intentionally Homeless

To demonstrate its commitment to Value for Money, Homes First collect key performance data on how much we spend on emergency accommodation every month.



The Neighbourhood and Community Standard

looks at how we **manage** and **improve** your neighbourhood and **deal with** anti-social behaviour

of tenants were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

We are active in our communities and provide opportunities for our tenants to engage positively, including, where possible, preventative measures relating to antisocial behaviour (ASB). Last year the tenancy management team worked on resolving an average of

69 ASB cases every month. The team also completed 34 Hate and ASB Risk Assessments (HARA) with the Police, Adult Social Care, Mental Health, Children's Social Care, Victim Support and Drugs and Alcohol services. 88 'formal tenancy actions' were taken to combat ASB,

including Notices of Seeking Possession. There were also 24 referrals for safeguarding made, and 6 referrals for mediation delivered by the Brighton & Hove Mediation Service: www.bhims.org.uk

Being in conflict with your neighbours can be really difficult

Homes First work with Mediation Plus to support tenants who are experiencing conflict. If you would like to speak to someone about your situation, your Senior Caseworker (Housing) can pass your details to Mediation Plus. They will call you to explain the support they offer, and then give you time to think about whether you would like to take part in mediation or conflict coaching. Some things to consider:



- People often find it very helpful to talk things through with the mediation service and find out how mediation works.
- If mediation isn't suitable there is

a one-to-one service that can help.

- There are lots of different ways that you can access support, including telephone, video conference and face to face.

- We respect your privacy and your choices.
- We support everyone equally.



Case study provided by Brighton & Hove Independent Mediation Service

A referral was made from Homes First for a tenant called Anne (not her real name), an older lady who was experiencing ongoing noise from a neighbour who lived in the flat above her with a young child. Anne had made a complaint, saying that there was constant banging from the flat above during the day, and early evening. Anne believed the noise was caused by the child throwing things around and being allowed to roller skate about in the flat. When Homes First asked if Anne had spoken to her neighbour, she said that when she tried speaking to her, her neighbour just made negative comments and allowed her son to continue making a noise.

Mediation was not possible in this case, because only one person wanted to take part, so instead, Anne was offered one-to-one



support through conflict coaching. Anne agreed to this option and completed three conflict coaching sessions with trained mediators, after which the session notes were sent to her by post.

Anne found the sessions helpful and said that it was 'good to get things off my chest.'

After the sessions she felt that she

was experiencing less conflict and was able to decide how she would communicate with her neighbour in future.

Anne appreciated support from the mediation service caseworker and the mediators who helped her feel more able to manage the situation with her neighbour.

Did you know..?

In March 2022 Homes First staff co-ordinated a 'day of action' on the De Montfort estate which saw fly-tipping cleared, broken bins removed and replaced, bin areas cleaned, new community bins installed, and a recycling area relocated. Our Value for Money strategy has helped us explore new ways of working and increased visibility on estates. Our aim is to re-invigorate areas, understand challenges, and offer the best possible support to the tenants who need it the most.



The Value for Money Standard

looks at how we collect rent and other charges and how we provide value for money

Homes First is subject to a range of regulations and standards it has to achieve, set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

This includes an assessment on whether the auditor is satisfied that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources, including consideration of financial sustainability and governance arrangements and that services are of value for taxpayers.

The three 'E's are the components of value for money:

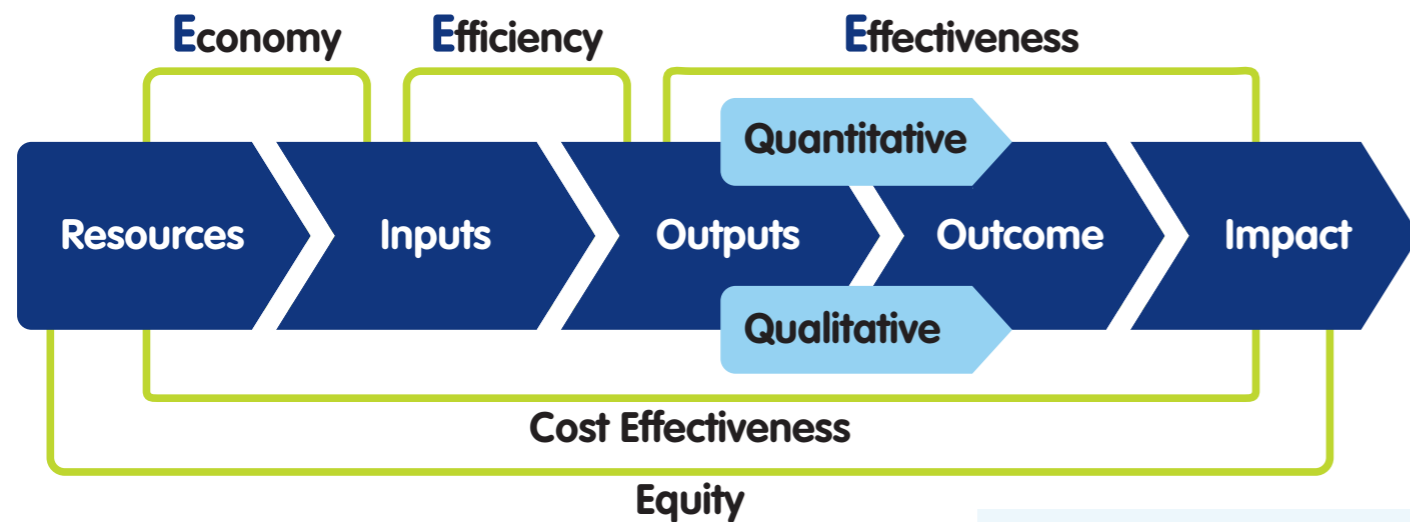
Economy (Less) – the price paid for what goes into providing a service. (for example, salary of staff, material costs of a repair).

Efficiency (Well) – a measure of productivity, i.e., how much you get out in relation to what is put in. (for example, the efficiency of services such as rent, and arrears collection may be measured by the cost of the service compared to the total rent collected).

Effectiveness (Wisely) – the outcome for customers. (for example, satisfaction levels among residents with tenant participation arrangements).

Therefore, value for money is high when there is an optimum balance between all three – relatively low costs, high productivity, and successful outcomes.

This diagram shows how the three 'E's link together to help services to demonstrate Value for Money...



Value for money strategy

In November 2021 Homes First launched its first Value for Money Strategy to help us understand the costs of services (and reduce them where possible), improve our performance and service delivery, and increase customer satisfaction. The idea behind the initiative was to make sure value for money is 'everyone's business' and at the heart of everything we do. The strategy recognises the value of ideas and the need to support and share them, and to this end a network of Value for Money 'champions' was established across Homes First to promote VFM in

teams and identify where we can:

- Make savings
- Streamline processes
- Improve our overall performance
- Increase customer satisfaction

Did you know..?

We work collaboratively to sustain tenancies with partners to maximise tenant income by focusing on early intervention. The use of eviction proceedings is seen as a last resort, and none took place between April 2021 and March 2022.

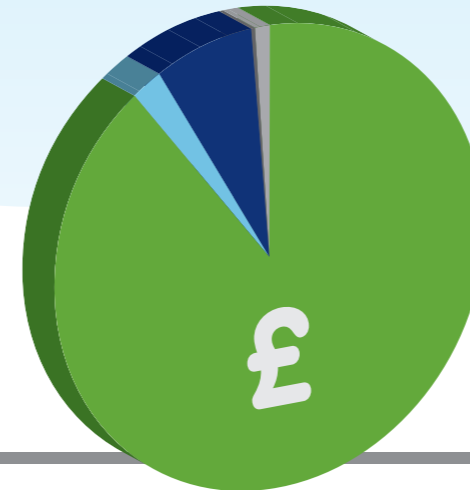
How are we doing?

We collected **96.12%** of our rent. **83%** of tenants said they were satisfied that their rent provided value for money.

The average weekly rent for a Lewes District Council property, including service charges, was **£98.62** (this is the average for all properties from bedsits to five bed houses).

The average weekly rent for all properties in the Lewes District was **£213.46** per week (Office for National Statistics).

This is how we raised our income...



£15,107,405	Dwelling Rents
£336,218	Non-Dwelling Rents
£1,379,694	Charges for Services
£144,324	Contributions towards Expenditure
£158,300	Community Amenities Contribution
£17,125,941	TOTAL INCOME

How income is spent...



From each £100 we collected, we spent:

£30.04	Repairs and Maintenance
£24.86	Depreciation
£21.45	Supervision & Management
£10.93	Non-debt Management Costs
£5.39	Special Services
£4.89	Contribution to Working Balance
£1.49	Retirement Housing
£0.85	Other Expenditure
£0.09	Revenue Contribution to Capital Expenditure

Governance and Risk Management

Robust governance is essential to achieving Value for Money, so Homes First has arrangements in place to monitor performance, and challenge risk, through Eastbourne formal governance frameworks. In addition to this, residents can influence decisions, identify areas for improvement and review services through Residents Voice, the Area Panels, the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment, the Virtual 300 and a range of surveys. Homes First has recruited a Quality & Value for Money Lead to report progress directly to the Head of Homes First and develop a Value for Money risk register in line with governments Code of Practice.

Did you know..?

The VFM Estates Project set out to establish 'new ways of working' on our estates by using best practice to review the impact and challenges brought about by Covid-19. A 'place based' approach was used to map out what services were already on offer and what partnerships existed so that any gaps in service could be identified. The project has also tried to make teams more visible to tenants, review processes, bring about improvements and create a stronger culture of shared responsibility and personal ownership across our estates.



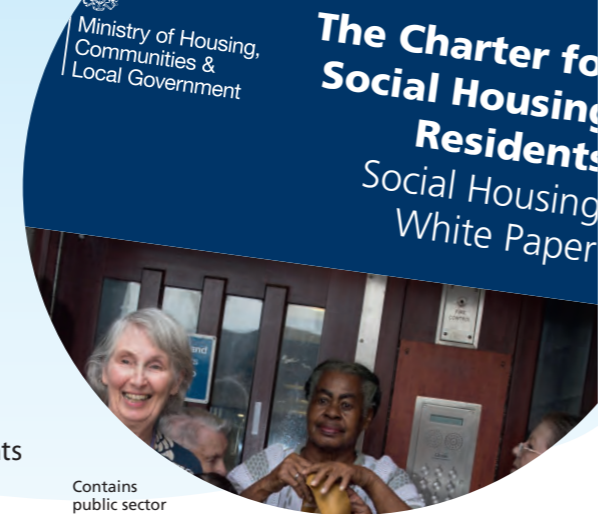
The Charter for Social Housing Residents

In last year's Annual Report, we wrote about the Charter for Social Housing Residents and the range of measures which the Government plans to introduce to improve the experience of people living in social housing. In June 2022, the Government published the Social Housing Regulation Bill, which will bring into law many of the measures contained in the Charter once it has passed through Parliament. The key changes being introduced by the Social Housing Regulation Bill mean that Lewes District Council will be regularly inspected in the future to ensure the health and safety of both residents and their homes are being protected from risk of serious harm and standards maintained.

Homes First has been working over the past 2 years to prepare for the anticipated changes to come, and thus far we have:

1. Undertaken a full stock condition survey to plan for future maintenance requirements

2. Established the Customer Experience Team to improve complaints handling and management, listen to residents and ensure that tenant views influence service decisions
3. Published our Tenant Involvement Strategy
4. Undertaken a resident-led scrutiny review of complaints handling and acted on the 20 recommendations made
5. Completed a self-assessment of compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's complaints handling code
6. Revised our Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy and reviewed internal procedures to improve the way we manage ASB
7. Published articles in Tenants' Open Voice relating to coming changes and provided regular updates to staff and residents groups



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8. Implemented the Regulator's new Tenant Satisfaction Measures in our regular STAR surveys and strengthened our approach to listening to your views and acting on them
9. Commenced work to improve how we use data to improve service performance
10. Established a Safety Group for both Authorities to coordinate communication and response to emerging legislation and guidance in relation to building safety

We're working continuously to improve and embed change in advance of any legal requirement to do so.

Complaints Success



Homes First are committed to providing high quality services and we do our best to make sure any contact with us is professional, courteous and goes beyond expectations. However, sometimes things do go wrong and when they do, we recognise the need to listen and put things back on the right track. The Customer Experience Team work hard to try and make sure that Homes First complaints are dealt with professionally, and thanks to Tenant Scrutiny team recommendations made in 2021 and improvements in ways of working, the completion of complaints closed on time

improved to 64% in March 2022 – the best on record at the time. To improve our service, we have:

- Continued working with the Property Services team and contractors to improve service delivery and customer experience and reviewed all active complaints with the Repairs team every week.
- Continued working closely with Mears to improve performance and ways of working and assigned a Customer Experience team officer to work with Mears to manage complaints more effectively.
- Delivered training on customer service skills, Autism awareness and complaint management to officers across the organisation.

- Helped with the restructure of the Housing Needs and Standards Team to help reduce the backlog of work which has led to complaints.
- Introduced new customer satisfaction surveys to gather feedback from customers on their experience when raising a complaint, which will be used to help improve service delivery

We recognise the importance of complaints and see them as valuable feedback we can use to learn from and improve services. If you need to make a formal complaint, you can use an online form on the website:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/about-the-councils/make-a-complaint/

Complaints handling

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Homes First, our staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents. Anyone who uses or receives a service or is affected by a service from any part of Homes First can complain. We do our best to resolve any complaints we receive informally, but sometimes this is simply not possible.

When a formal complaint is made, this is allocated to a Specialist Advisor in the Customer Experience Team. A Stage 1 complaint investigation then takes place, and hopefully a resolution found. In situations where a customer is dissatisfied with a Stage 1 complaint outcome, they can escalate their complaint to a Stage 2 for further investigation. This usually requires the customer to provide more information to help explain the reason for their dissatisfaction with the Stage 1 review. In cases where the customer is unhappy with the Stage 2 review or feel that matters are still not resolved, they

have the option to further escalate the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

In the 2021 / 2022 period, we received 220 complaints, and 31 of these escalated to Stage 2 of our complaints process. Of the complaints that were closed, 134 related to poor service, 39 were about our staff or contractors, and 26 referenced repeated service failures. Overall, 33% of our complaints were closed within our target times of 10 working days at Stage 1, and twenty working days at Stage 2.

In the 2021 / 2022 period, we received **196** complaints

37 were about staff or contractors

Of the complaints that were closed **95** related to poor service

21 referenced repeated service failures

Did you know..?

In April 2013, the Housing Ombudsman took over responsibility for all new complaints about social housing. This includes complaints about a local authority's (or arms-length management organisation's) relationship as landlord to its tenants or leaseholders. Since the publication of the Social Housing White Paper in November 2020, the Housing Ombudsman has experienced a surge in casework unprecedented in its 25-year history due to increased resident awareness of their right to complain and a faster resolution of complaints by landlords in line with the Housing Ombudsman code. The increase reinforces the changing role and importance

Housing Ombudsman Service

of complaint handling itself, which Homes First believes should be an integral part of a healthy resident-landlord relationship and service development. The Housing Ombudsman works with the government to inform and develop their policy and believes social housing to be a unique sector deserving an independent, proactive, and visible Ombudsman to support it.

There are many ways to get involved and make a difference



The Virtual 300

The Virtual 300 is a group of involved tenants who share their views on the work we do from the comfort of their own homes. We regularly email members for their views on new policies, service improvement ideas and sometimes to judge competition entries. The great thing is you can be involved as much or as little as you like with the added bonus of incentives for taking part. Every year we give a £50 prize to the most active participant and there are prize draws throughout the year.



The 'Report It' mobile app can be used to make us aware of issues when you're out and about. You can send a photo of the problem and the location, which is then directed straight to the right member of Neighbourhood First staff to deal with.

Transactional surveys

We ran a number of 'moment in time' transactional surveys last year and used the information we collected to feedback to the Complaint Resolution team and inform Tenant Scrutiny review

recommendations. Asking about a service when the experience is fresh gives us great insight and helps us to improve and develop our services. Next year we plan to use a dedicated satisfaction survey software company called Acuity to help us continue to improve the services we offer.

Communications Panel

This group of tenants helps us by reading our newsletters and reports before they are distributed to make sure they are easy to understand and free from jargon and mistakes.

Focus Groups

We sometimes run informal, but structured discussion groups online or face to face to enable us to delve deeper into the customer experience in relation to key areas of work, such as our repairs service.

Tenant Day

Every year we aim to programme events which tenants can attend, like the Tenant Conference for example. These events are a great way to keep up to date with our services, meet our teams, and network with other tenants.



Community Pop Ups

We organise and support community events and consultations ranging from fun days to litter picks. Look out for our Homes First gazebo where staff will be on hand to chat to you about issues in your local community.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (TIE) Panel

The TIE Panel is made up of a group of tenants who meet with senior managers to discuss issues that affect tenants across Eastbourne and the Lewes District. Their job is to make sure resident interests are heard and fully considered in all aspects of strategic decision making. Tenants are elected to the panel which currently meets four times a year.

Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)

TOLD represents the views of tenants of the Lewes District. The TOLD committee meets quarterly to discuss topical housing issues, and Homes First performance is also discussed. The committee also oversees a Community Improvements Budget of £20,000 which tenants can apply to for project funding which benefits their community. Open meetings are held twice a year and the second of these in October

is the Annual General Meeting where the committee is elected.

Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs)



There are several tenant resident associations operating in the Lewes District which you can join, or the Tenant Involvement Team can help you set up your own.

Tenant Scrutiny Team



The Tenant Scrutiny team is a strategic group made up of tenants of Eastbourne Homes Limited and the Lewes District. The team carries out in depth reviews of service areas chosen by the TIE panel. Each review produces a report outlining strengths and weaknesses alongside recommendations aimed at making improvements. In the 2021 – 2022 period, completed a review on complaints management and began a review of rents arrears management.

Retirement Housing Forum

This is a joint forum working across Eastbourne and Lewes, made up of representatives from retirement housing schemes in both areas. Every April members are elected to represent and discuss the views and specific needs of their scheme at the forum. In the last the group also led on the allocation of community improvement budget funding for projects in retirement housing schemes.

Benefits of getting involved...

The Tenant Scrutiny team made several recommendations to improve complaints management last year and as a result:

- Two additional Customer Experience team members were recruited to manage housing complaints
- Weekly meetings were established with managers to ensure repairs related complaints were dealt with correctly. This led to a reduced backlog of complaints and a reduction in the number of complaints being received.
- Tenants who were previously unable to use the online form to make a complaint, can now do so over the telephone
- The complaints handling team are now able to devote time to learning from complaints, spotting trends and as a result improving services.

We believe that tenants already possess many of the skills and the knowledge needed to be involved, because tenants are experts at living in social housing. It's also true that involved tenants are best placed to make local improvements in their communities. Eastbourne successes for the period April 2021 and March 2022 include:

- Funding storage for the Hampden Park and Willingdon Trees community centre
- Supporting fitness classes
- Pathway & step repairs
- Funding tennis equipment for a local club
- Arranging wheelchair access in a local park
- Supporting community growing projects

- Tree and shrub planting
- Redesign of bin areas
- Providing computer equipment for a local charity
- Restoration of the Princess Diana Memorial Gardens
- Funding an allotment shed to support disabled users
- Funding of picnic benches

Tenant Group Meetings

We continue to offer hybrid meetings, giving tenants the opportunity to meet face-to-face or join meetings online using Microsoft Teams.

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel (TIE) meets

three times a year, and we are actively seeking to find Eastbourne representatives for this this strategic group.

Provisional meeting dates for next year are:

- 01 March 2023
- 01 July 2023
- 01 September 2023

The Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) committee

meets on a quarterly basis and Open Meetings are also programmed three times a year. 2023 dates to be confirmed

The Landport Residents Association

meets around eight times a year on a Wednesday evening – 2023 dates to be confirmed.

The Retirement Housing Forum

meets regularly – 2023 dates to be confirmed

For more information on these sessions, please contact:

tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



Help and Support available



For information on the support the Councils currently have available, go to:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

and use the keywords 'help with the rising costs of living' in the search box.

There's also a **Benefits Calculator** you can use at:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

To find it, use the keywords 'how much am I entitled to' in the search box.

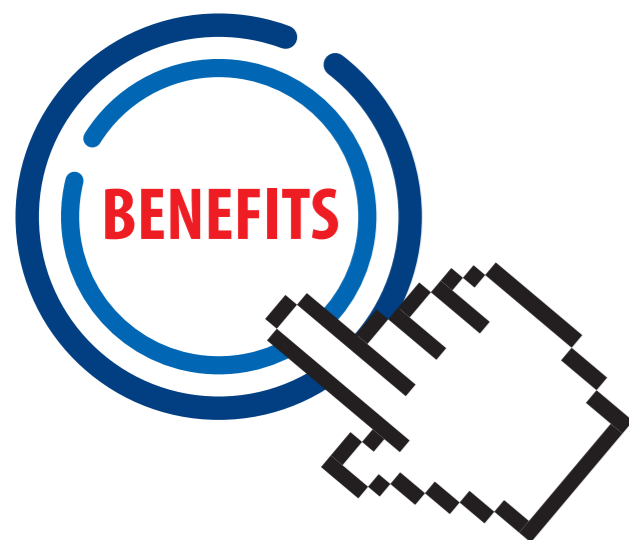
If you don't have access to the internet, you can also call or write to us:

Lewes residents

Telephone: **01273 471600**

Postal Address:

Income Maximisation and Welfare
Lewes District Council, Southover House,
Southover Road BN21 4UG



Disabled Facilities Grants

For information on how to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant, you can call Adult Social Care Direct on **0345 6080 191** or call the East Sussex County Council switchboard on **0345 608 0190** to request an Assessment.

Discretionary Housing Payment

A Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is there to help people who receive the housing element of universal credit and are struggling to pay rent. You can apply for DHP on the website: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Simply use the keywords 'discretionary housing payments' in the search box

Pension Credit

Pensioners are the age group least likely to be claiming all the financial help available to them, including Pension Credit. This can provide thousands of pounds in extra help each year. Check if you can claim at gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim



Warm Home Check Service

You can apply for a Warm Home Check:

- if you are on low income, or living with a long-term condition or disability
- if you are in receipt of Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Universal Credit, Pension Guarantee Credit or Pension Savings Credit, Income Support, Income based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Income Related Support Allowance (ESA)

Text **WARM** to **80011** or call **0800 464 7307** or apply online at: www.warmeastsussex.org.uk

Warm Spaces

We are working with voluntary sector partners to support a network of 'Warm Spaces' across Lewes District over the winter. These must be safe, warm, non-judgemental spaces where local people can: sit and be warm, study or work on their laptops (with access to Wi-fi), have a hot drink, be with company, access advice or information / signposting to advice on debt, bills, benefits, and food. Find out more by using the keywords 'warm spaces' in the search box on www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Energy Saving Advice Service

The Energy Saving Trust is an independent organisation working to address the climate emergency and to empower millions of householders every year to make better energy choices. They can help make your home more energy efficient, reduce your carbon emissions and lower your energy bills. You can find out more on their website: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk or by calling **Freephone 0800 444 202**.

Citizens Advice

If you don't have enough to live on, Citizens Advice might be able to signpost you to help that's available to afford essentials like food and any grants or benefits available to help you pay your energy bills.

Lewes residents can call Citizens Advice by calling freephone: **XXXX XXXXXXXX**.



Brighton Housing Trust (BHT)

BHT Sussex are offering a free debt advice service for anyone living in East Sussex. They can help you understand your debts, look at your income and expenditure, liaise with creditors and look at the best way to deal with and manage your debts.

To access the service, email **EastbourneAdvice@bht.org.uk**, or call mobile: **07385 491271** or tel: **01323 642615**.

HomeWorks

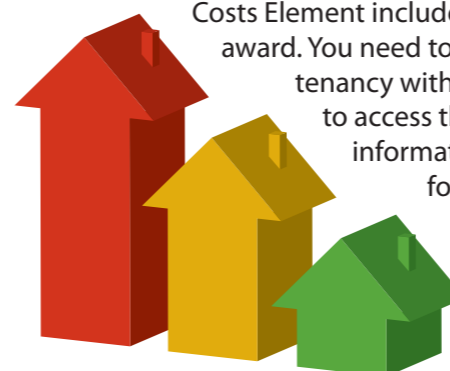
BHT Sussex also delivers the East Sussex Floating Support Service for vulnerable people, aged 16+ who need help to live independently.

You can call Home Works on **01273 929394** or find out more about what support they offer here: www.bht.org.uk

The Transfer Incentive Scheme

The Transfer Incentive Scheme (TIS) is for Council tenants who have one or more bedrooms they don't need who and are interested in downsizing. It can also help tenants who have a reduction in the Housing Costs Element included in a Universal Credit award. You need to have held a secure tenancy with us for at least one year to access this scheme. More information and an application form can be found on

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk by using the search term 'cash incentives for downsizing'



Energy Bill Support Scheme

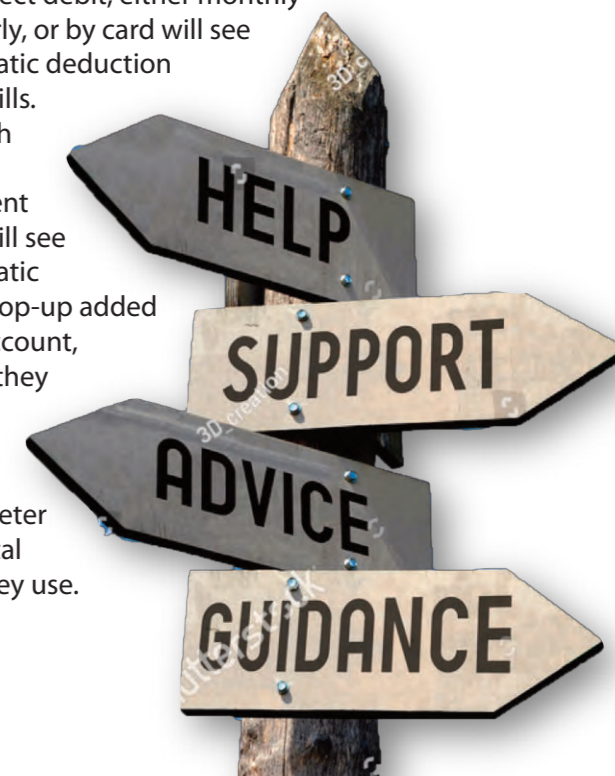
The government announced that all households will receive £400 to help with rising fuel bills this autumn paid in six instalments.

Households will see a discount of £66 applied to their energy bills in October and November, and £67 a month from December to March 2023.

How do I get the money?

All customers with a domestic electricity meter who pay by direct debit, either monthly or quarterly, or by card will see an automatic deduction off their bills.

Those with 'smart' prepayment devices will see an automatic monthly top-up added to their account, meaning they will have to add less credit to their meter for the total energy they use.



Did you know..?

The Customer Service Team answered

97,293 calls

from Lewes tenants this year.

The team also:

- answered **25,963** webchats,
- received **78,667** emails,
- scanned **20,395** documents and letters.



Other useful Information



**Ask
ELLIS**

Your
intelligent
Chatbot

Chat with ELLIS

Our intelligent chatbot ELLIS is available 24hrs-a-day, 7 days-a-week.

ELLIS can assist and answer many of the questions you might have, whether that's information on your area, who your local Councillor is, or even how to make payments online for services such as Council Tax. ELLIS was launched in late March 2021 and to date they have answered

28,000 queries, almost a third of which have been out of office hours. ELLIS has managed a 93% accuracy rate when answering queries compared to a customer advisor, and when a question can't be answered by ELLIS, customer service staff are still free to chat online instead between 8.30am and 5pm (weekdays). If you're not able to find what you're looking for on the website (www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) or you can't use our chat services, there's the Contact Us form on the website or you can call us by telephone.

Option 1 – Lewes District Council main number:
01273 471600

Option 2 – For repairs, including communal repairs. Please note that for emergency repairs after 5pm or at weekends (including heating) you will then need to also select Option 1.

Option 3 – Council tax queries and paying council tax – except council tax reduction.

Option 4 – Benefit enquiries and council tax reduction.

Option 5 – Planning.

Option 6 – for anything else

Office opening times

Reception services are open at Southover House in Lewes and in the Town Hall in Eastbourne between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, but in a reduced capacity.

A limited service is available for dropping off documents, answering basic enquiries, and signposting to relevant organisations and services. There is also a telephone inside and outside the reception areas that you can use to contact the council if you don't have a mobile device available.

Please note: our reception at Saxon House in Newhaven is now closed.

Do you need help with food?

Food banks are community organisations that can help if you can't afford the food you need. You'll need to get a referral from Citizens Advice, children's centres, health visitors or your Senior Caseworker (Housing) to use one. The food bank will provide you with essentials and sometimes signpost you to other support.

Landport Foodbank, Lewes
Tenants Resource Centre, 2a Horsfield Road,
Lewes BN7 2TA. E: debbietwitchen@gmail.com

Malling Foodbank, Lewes
Kings Church, Unit 3, Brooks Road, Lewes BN7 2BY
E: briankcfrench@gmail.com

Fitzjohns Foodbank, Lewes
Christ Church, Prince Edward's Road, Lewes BN7 1BL
E: fitzjohnsfoodbank@gmail.com

Seahaven Storehouse
Seaford Community Church, 115-117 Vale Road
Seaford BN25 3HB. E: seahavenstorehouse@gmail.com

Ringmer Foodbank
Ringmer Village Hall, Ringmer Library, Ringmer
Lewes BN8 5QH. E: gilliansal1947@gmail.com

Newhaven Baptist Church Foodbank
Newhaven Baptist Church, Church Hill, Newhaven
BN9 9NA. E: jac.parson@newhavenbaptistchurch.co.uk

If you have an emergency repair out of office hours you can still get help

- General emergency repairs – call **01273 471600** and listen for the out-of-hours message.
- Heating and hot water breakdowns - call BSW Building Services on **01444 836036**.
- Gas leaks – call the National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**.

Other emergency numbers:

Electricity power cuts: **0800 63 105**

Mains water leaks: **0333 000 0365**

Homelessness (After 5pm or at weekends): **01323 410000**

Other useful numbers:

Non-emergency police: **101**

NHS Non-emergency **111**

East Sussex County Council: **0345 608 0190** for highways issues such as road maintenance, pavements and street lighting, adult social care, mental health services, schools and education services, grass verge cutting.

Shelter – Housing advice: **0808 800 4444**

Samaritans – **116 123**