

**HOMES FIRST**



# Getting Involved

## Induction Guide



## Welcome

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.

This guide aims to give tenants who are new to Homes First or to being involved all the information they might need to participate in decision making alongside

a good understanding of how Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Homes Limited operate. Tenant groups are best placed to make local improvements and wherever possible we offer training and support to enable residents to participate.

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# HOMES FIRST

The Homes First Team delivers services to residents across Eastbourne and Lewes. This includes the services on behalf of Eastbourne Housing Investment Company Limited, the Lewes Housing Investment Company Limited and the Aspiration Homes Limited Liability Partnership, via a Service Level Agreement with each company.

- **Neighbourhood Housing**

This team looks after day-to-day tenancy and estate management and provides housing support to local residents.

- **Housing needs**

This team deals with homelessness management, choice-based lettings, and private housing support.

- **Property services**

This team manages repairs, programmed works, and health and safety compliance.

- **Customer Experience**

This team responds to complaints and enquiries, reviews policies and procedures and encourages and enables tenant involvement.

## The Customer Experience team includes four officers who look after tenant involvement

The Tenant Involvement team sit within Customer Experience. They help tenants have their say on how Homes First delivers its services and improves neighbourhoods. The team also provides information about how services are delivered alongside opportunities for involvement in decision making and shaping services.



**Richard Tomkinson**

(Customer Experience and Performance Improvement Lead)

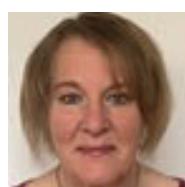
Richard leads the Customer Experience team and the tenant involvement service. He oversees the tenant strategy and approach and helps steer the development of new involvement activity.



**Ruth Tahsin**

(Specialist Advisor)

Ruth co-ordinates the Tenant Scrutiny Team, supports the Tenants of Lewes District and Tenant Resident Associations. She also arranges community events, tenant training, the STAR Survey and the annual Impact Assessment.



**Nikki Wickham**

(Specialist Advisor)

Nikki supports Residents Voice, Eastbourne Area Panels, the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Panel (TIE), and co-ordinates community improvement spending in Eastbourne. She also manages transactional surveys and works on policy revisions.



**Harry Hillery**

(Senior Caseworker)

Harry produces publications like Tenants' Open Voice, the annual reports, tenant involvement updates and information guides. He also handles social media and the website, coordinates community improvement spending in the Lewes District and manages recruitment to the Virtual 300.





## Lewes District Council

Lewes District Council is made up of 41 councillors who are elected by residents living within the district. Nine of these councillors lead on one of the designated portfolios listed below:

- Finance and assets
- Regeneration and prosperity
- Sustainability
- Recycling, waste, and open spaces
- Performance and people
- Communities and customers
- Planning and infrastructure
- Housing
- Tourism and devolution

One of the nine portfolio leads acts as the Leader of the Council and together they meet as the Council Cabinet eight times a year. The Cabinet works

closely with senior Council staff and other councillor sub-committees to manage the needs of the business, make key decisions, and agree recommendations which are tabled at full council meetings for approval. The Council has overall responsibility for the management of 3237 homes in the Lewes District and for the building of new Council homes. The Cabinet also approves and reviews a 20-year Business Plan which includes detailed proposals on maintaining existing homes and building new homes. Lastly, the Council also manages the annual Housing Revenue Account budget which sets out details of yearly housing income derived from tenant rents, alongside housing expenditure, such as day to day repairs.

Two Lewes District Council tenants are elected from the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) to represent tenant views at Council Cabinet meetings. These tenant representatives receive papers in advance of meetings and report back to TOLD on any relevant issues. The lead councillor with the housing portfolio is also invited to TOLD meetings.



Working in partnership with **Eastbourne Homes**

Eastbourne Borough Council has 27 councillors representing the nine wards which make up the Eastbourne Borough. Councillors are elected by those registered to vote in their wards.

The Cabinet has seven members and is chaired by one elected as Leader of the Council. Like the Lewes District, each member of the Cabinet has

a portfolio which they are responsible for. The Cabinet member portfolio roles are:

- Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet
- Responsibilities aligned with the Chief Executive
- Financial Services
- Tourism and Culture services
- Direct Assistance services
- Climate change, place services and special projects
- Disabilities and community safety

Councillors change, but you can see who currently leads on a portfolio in both areas and find out more about committees and

meeting dates on the website by using the search word 'councillor':

[www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)



Eastbourne Homes Limited (EHL) is an Arms-length Management Organisation (ALMO), wholly owned by Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC). The Board consists of nine Non-Executive Directors. Three of the Board Directors are EBC residents, two are nominated by the Council and the remaining four are independent.

The role of the Board is strategic management of the Company, ensuring the Company is in a strong position to continue to deliver excellent services to its customers. To achieve this, the Board is supported by the Homes First Management Team (EBC),

which in turn manages the day-to-day operation of the business.

The Board meet quarterly, supported by two Committees, which also meet on a quarterly cycle:

- Service and Performance Committee – which focuses on performance, financial management, housing management, and property management
- Audit and Risk Committee – continually reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of systems, focussing on internal controls and internal and external audit results. In addition, it reviews and considers risks to the organisation via the risk log

For more information on Arms-Length Management Organisations, see: [www.almos.org.uk/almos](http://www.almos.org.uk/almos)

## CUSTOMER FIRST



**Customer First** are the main point of contact for customers on the telephone, online chat, or via ELLIS the Chatbot. The team deals with all casework across the Councils except housing related work which is managed by Homes First. The team are also responsible for income recovery including Council rents, Housing Benefit and Council Tax.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST

**Neighbourhood First** are a team of officers who work with our communities to improve their neighbourhoods. They act as the link between the Councils and the community, and work with volunteers, groups, and other Council staff to maintain the quality of the environment. Neighbourhood First advisors can help and assist with a range of issues, which include:

- Dog fouling
- Fly-tipping
- Littering and street cleaning
- Abandoned vehicles
- Fallen trees

Neighbourhood First advisors attend community meetings and neighbourhood resident meetings to find out what matters most to our communities. They also carry out a range of street and open spaces inspections to make sure the environment is well maintained, give advice on access issues to local businesses, and conduct inspections of the communal areas in blocks of flats. During inspections they report any communal repairs they see, take steps to remove items stored in communal landings/stairwells that pose a fire risk, and make sure the area is clean and tidy.

Issues can be reported on the website by searching for '**Neighbourhood First**' and then using the 'Report a problem' button. The **Report It app** is also available to download by clicking the 'Report It' smartphone app button.

## REPORT IT



Garden Waste

Recycling

Refuse



## ENVIRONMENT FIRST

**Environment First** manage all the waste and recycling services across the Councils. If issues arise with bin collections, street cleansing or anything else waste related (fly tipping, graffiti removal etc) this team can help.

You can report any problems online:

**[www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)** by asking ELLIS or by calling the main Council telephone numbers: (01273) 471600 – Lewes District or (01323) 410000 – Eastbourne

## Green Consultancy Team

The **Green Consultancy Team** look after communal gardens and green areas such as recreation grounds and play parks. They are responsible for grass cutting, shrub maintenance and tree safety, and employ contractors to maintain these areas to prescribed standards. Any problems can be reported online: **[www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)**

This team also oversees projects like wildflower planting to encourage bees and other wildlife to flourish in communities.



# The benefits of getting involved

There are many benefits to getting involved and we believe residents who join our tenant groups are best placed to make local improvements in their community.

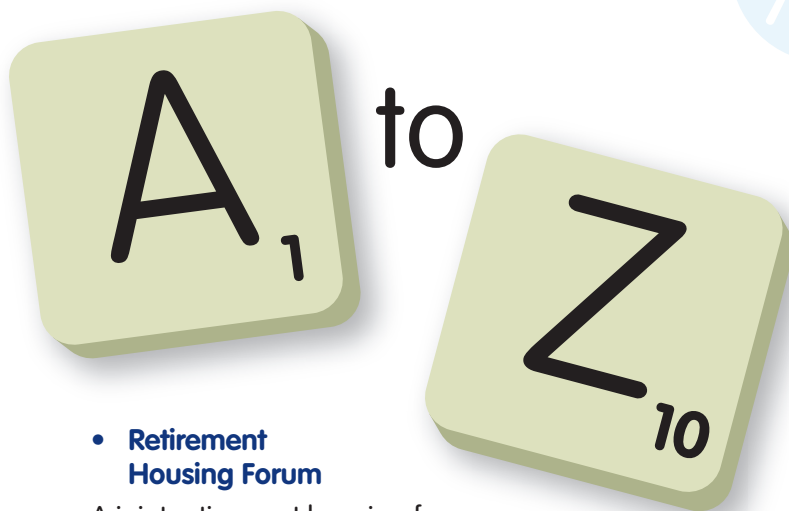
Recent successes across Eastbourne Homes and Lewes District include:

- Supporting and setting up local foodbanks
- Organising litter picks
- Planting trees and wildflowers
- Providing laptops and tablet computers to retirement housing schemes and primary school children
- Landscaping communal spaces and gardens
- Supporting local art walks to benefit mental health and social networking
- Organising community events like BBQs and afternoon teas
- Supporting the purchase of new equipment for local charities
- Establishing community gardens and growing areas
- Providing outside furniture and raised planting beds for general needs and retirement housing schemes
- Supporting those with learning disabilities to access sport



# The A – Z of involvement

There are many ways to get involved and make a difference...



- **Annual Tenants Day**

Every year we aim to hold an event which all tenants are welcome to attend, like our Annual Conference for example. This is a great way to keep up to date with our services, meet the teams, and network with other tenants.

- **Area Panels**

Area Panels provide residents with the opportunity to get involved in local events and learn about Homes First services. The Eastbourne Area Panel is made up of residents from the Old Town, Langney, and Central and Archery areas working together and there's also a panel for the Hampden Park & Willingdon Trees area. Both panels work on behalf of residents in the area, and new members are always welcome.

- **Communications Panel**

This forum helps us make sure that our newsletters and guides like this one make sense and are free from mistakes.

- **Community Pop Ups**

Look out for our Homes First gazebo at community events and local consultations. Our staff will be on hand to chat to you about issues in your local community.

- **Focus Groups**

These are informal, but structured discussion groups with other tenants, which allow residents to share their views and shape key services, such as our allocations process.

- **Quality Checkers**

We have been piloting involving residents in quality checking the communal cleaning service in retirement housing. Once the pilot is complete, we will explore how to extend the approach to other schemes, so watch this space.

- **Residents Voice**

Residents Voice represents the views of residents in Eastbourne and is open to all tenants and leaseholders. The meetings which take place quarterly, look at policies, services, and performance. The group also manages a Community Improvements Budget, which tenants can access to fund projects which benefit their community.

- **Retirement Housing Forum**

A joint retirement housing forum operates across Eastbourne and Lewes, made up of representatives from all the retirement housing schemes. Members are elected at each scheme to represent the views and specific needs of their schemes.

- **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (TIE) Panel**

Panel Members are elected tenants who meet four times a year. They work with senior managers to discuss issues affecting residents across Eastbourne and the Lewes District, and make sure that tenant interests are fully considered in all aspects of strategic decision making.

- **The Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)**

TOLD represents the views of tenants living in the Lewes District. The TOLD committee meets quarterly to discuss topical housing issues, and Homes First performance. Open meetings are also held twice a year to which guest speakers are invited. Like Residents Voice, TOLD also manages a Community Improvements Budget which tenants can apply to for project funding which benefits their community.

- **Tenant and Resident Associations**

There are several tenant resident associations operating in the Lewes District that you can join, or we can help you set up your own.

- **Transactional surveys**

We have developed a 'moment in time' approach to capture feedback on services received. Asking for feedback in this way gives us great insight and helps to improve and develop our services - look out for our emails and text messages.

- **Virtual 300**

The Virtual 300 is a great way to be involved and have a say without leaving home. We regularly email members to ask what they think about new policies, service improvement ideas and even competition entries. You can get involved as much or as little as you like, and there are incentives available including a £50 prize to the most active member every year.

# How tenant groups work



Most of our tenant organisations, are set up as constituted groups which means they work to an agreed set of rules called a constitution. This includes key information such as how the group is set up, how often it meets, who it represents, and what it aims to achieve. Tenants groups usually elect a Chair, a Secretary and sometimes a Treasurer to oversee the running of their organisation, but the success of the group is dependent on everyone who attends meetings, and their willingness to listen to others and collectively reach decisions which further group aims.

Everyone has a part to play, but it helps to understand the roles of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer and how all members can contribute to the group's success. Summarised below are the key responsibilities for officer roles and for everyone else taking part in meetings. There is also a 'code of conduct for meetings', which sets out ground rules for behaviour during meetings which we ask all tenant groups to follow.

## Officer roles and responsibilities

### The Chair

The Chair is the person that makes sure things get done, but not the person who does everything.

#### In meetings, the Chair:

- Welcomes and introduce newcomers
- Ensures the group has agreed common aims and knows what they are
- Keeps the group on track with the meeting agenda and to time
- Ensures meetings are orderly and observe the group's own rules (constitution)
- Helps find common ground in any discussions
- Makes sure that everyone gets the chance to take part in discussion
- Ensures that when decisions or actions are agreed, they are noted and carried out
- Reports back to the group on progress on agreed decisions and actions

#### Outside of meetings, the Chair:

- Prepares the meeting agendas with the help of the secretary, in line with the constitution
- Ensures other committee members are carrying out their tasks, offering support where necessary
- Remains informed of all activities being carried out on behalf of the group
- Checks the minutes of the meeting for accuracy before they are distributed



- Makes any necessary decisions between meetings after consulting with other committee members

### The Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for the administration tasks of the group. **In meetings, the Secretary:**

- Keeps a record of who attends meetings
- Takes meeting notes (called minutes), and ensures that actions and decisions are recorded, noting who is doing what and by when
- Asks the Chair for clarification on any points/actions that are unclear
- Makes sure that any correspondence received by the group is reported at meetings
- Records the date and time of future meetings

#### Outside of meetings, the Secretary:

- Checks the accuracy of the minutes before they are sent out
- Circulates the agreed minutes to members as soon after the meeting as possible.
- Makes sure that people are invited to meetings
- Books meeting venues and invites guest speakers where necessary
- Prepares the agenda for meetings, adding timings if needed
- Assists the Chair with any follow-up work
- Ensures that the frequency of sessions meet the group's constitution.
- Writes and receives letters on behalf of the group.
- Makes sure all information relevant to the group is kept safe and meets data protection guidelines

### Other committee members and attendees

- Support the Chair and Secretary at meetings
- Share the responsibility for any new actions and roles – e.g. publicising successes
- Help out at meetings and make new members feel welcome
- Prepare for meetings by reading any information given in advance and by carrying out any actions they have agreed to do
- Understand the rules and aims of the committee and its constitution



# Code of Conduct

All residents, staff and guests at meetings are expected to adhere to a code of conduct which is there to make sure:

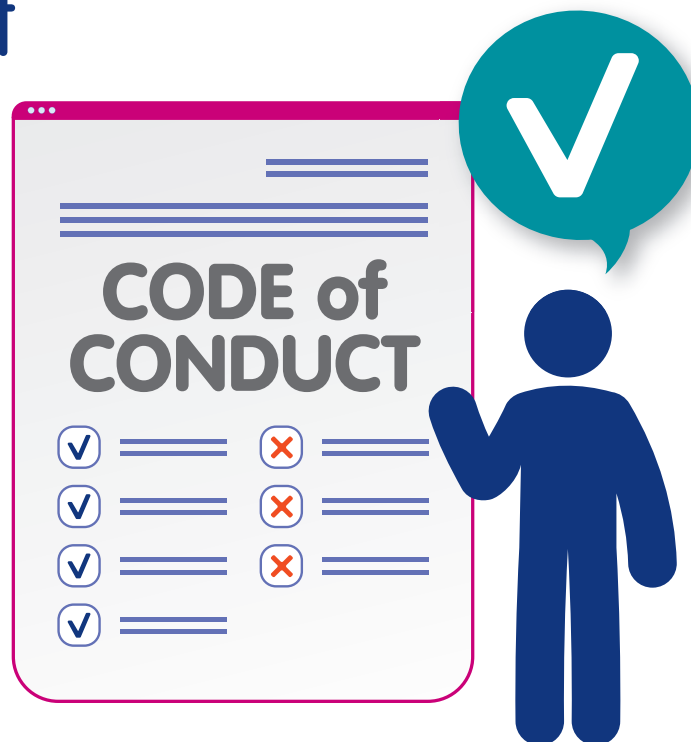
- People feel welcome and able to contribute
- That meetings are run in an inclusive and business-like manner
- The highest standards of behaviour are maintained

## Anyone attending meetings must:

- Conduct themselves in a reasonable manner
- Welcome new members and make them feel comfortable
- Before attending, read any papers relevant to the agenda
- Do their best to arrive on time
- Not attempt to disrupt the meeting or attend meetings under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Keep mobile phones switched off except when an emergency situation is anticipated
- Keep to the subject under discussion and contribute accordingly
- Treat everyone fairly, and respect equality and diversity by not discriminating unlawfully or unfairly against any person
- Not use discriminatory language or make derogatory, inflammatory, or personal remarks about other people
- Not harass, bully, threaten, intimidate, or assault others
- Respect the right of other people to speak without interruption and allow everyone the opportunity to speak
- Respect the views and opinions of others and accept that these may not always be the same as their own
- Adhere to the Chair's instructions and decisions
- Not discuss issues described as 'confidential' with any person or body outside the meeting
- Not seek to raise individual issues or complaints, unless time is set aside specifically for this purpose

Where a resident has a personal interest in a matter to be discussed, they should declare it so that other people at the meeting can decide if the resident should leave the session while it's discussed. NB this does not apply to interests held by residents generally, such as the quality of Homes First services.

Where there is potential or an actual cause to stop someone from attending meetings because of their behaviour, or if an individual treats a member of a group between meetings in a way that is likely to



cause them to feel uncomfortable about attending future meetings, the Head of Homes First can consider suspending the individual from attending one or more meetings pending an investigation.

## Once an investigation has taken place, the outcome could be to:

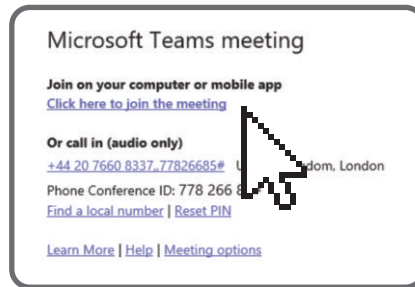
- Take no action
- Give a warning to the individual
- Place conditions on further attendance at meetings
- Exclude the individual for a period of time from attending any or all meetings
- Have the behaviour investigated by the police or other agency, and/or take action for breach of tenancy or lease, and/or (for members of staff) instigate disciplinary or capability proceedings
- Take other appropriate action where necessary

The Head of Homes First might also exclude an individual from attending meetings if there is reason to believe they might be a risk to the safety or wellbeing of others at the meeting. If an individual breaches the code repeatedly and/or seriously, the other members of the tenant group can vote to exclude the individual. The Head of Homes First also has the right to exclude a person who has breached the code in a very serious or persistent way from all meetings for a period of time. If the Chair is in breach of the code, the lead Council officer for that meeting can enforce the code of conduct as if they were the Chair, and if demanded by a majority of those present, a vote of no confidence in the Chair will be held at the start of the next meeting, with due notification being given of this to all members of that group.

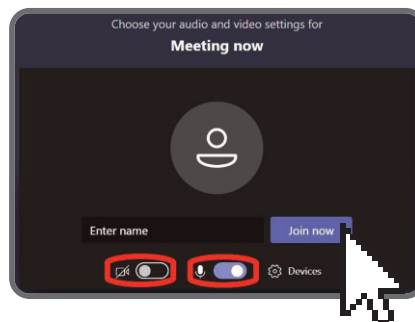
# Using Microsoft Teams

These days, many of our meetings use Microsoft Teams to give people the option of joining in the session from home if they prefer. You can join in the meetings by accessing Microsoft Teams on a laptop, tablet device or even a smart phone. You don't have to download the application, but you will need to use Google Chrome or Google Edge as your internet browser.

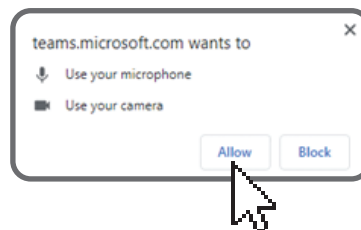
If you've asked to attend a tenant group meeting using Microsoft Teams, you'll receive an email, usually from the tenant involvement team, with information on how to join. Look out for a message link in the email in blue writing with 'Click here to join the meeting'.



When you click on the link, a page will open on your browser and you'll see a **Join Now** button. Simply enter your first name and then click the **Join Now** button.



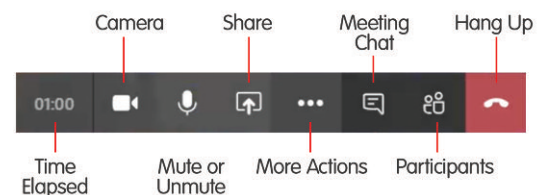
The **camera** and **microphone icon** at the bottom should both be on, but you might see a message like the one here. If you do, select 'Allow'.



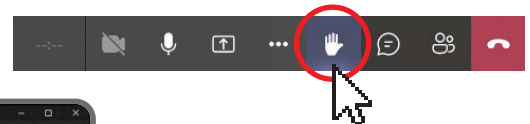
You will now be in the meeting and be able to see the other participants...



Whilst you are in the meeting a Microsoft Teams toolbar will display – if it disappears, simply move your cursor (mouse) on the screen and it will re-appear. There are several different functions served by the toolbar, which are –

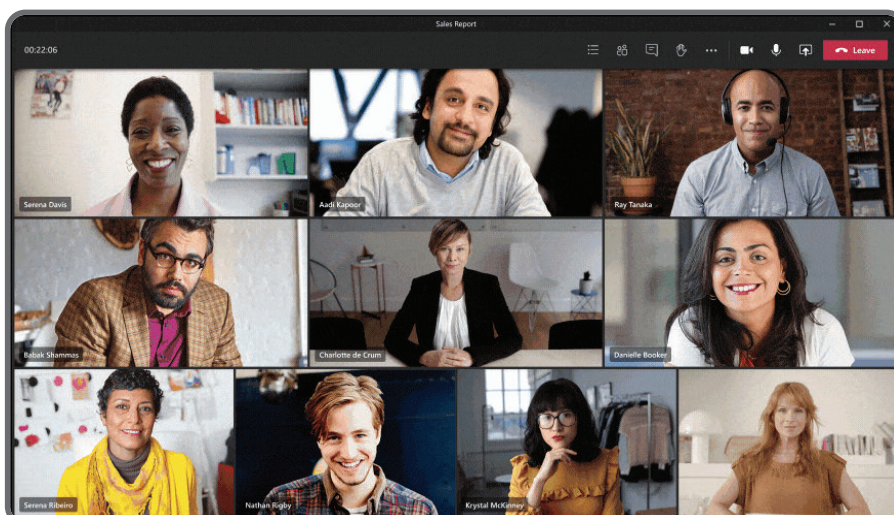


When the meeting starts you may be asked to turn off your microphone whilst you're not speaking. To do this just click on the turn audio/on off microphone as shown on the toolbar. When the microphone symbol has a line through it, it is muted so others in the group cannot hear you. To unmute, simply click on the icon again.



In most cases there will also be a hand icon on the tool bar.

If you want to make a comment during the meeting, just click on the hand icon and everyone at the meeting will see that you have raised your hand. The Chair will then invite you to speak. You can press the hand icon again to lower your hand once you have finished speaking.



# How we keep information safe

## Data Protection

In the UK, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) from the Data Protection Act 2018, applies to the processing of UK residents' personal data.



It is important that any personal data that can be used to identify a person is kept securely. As an involved resident, you might have access to personal data / information, so it is important that you have an understanding of GDPR and are familiar with our 'Privacy Notice' on the joint website: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

## What is personal data?

This is any information that could be used to identify someone such as –

- Identity data – name, title, date of birth, marital status, gender, or unique identifiers (such as your National Insurance number).
- Contact data – home or business address, email address and contact telephone numbers.
- Financial data – financial and payment information such as your bank account details.
- Communications data – this includes preferences in how someone likes to receive information and communications, for example, whether they wish to receive information about other services we provide.

We collect personal information to:

- Help us deliver the service requested.
- Enable us to meet legal obligations and statutory functions.
- Confirm an identity so we can provide a service.
- Contact you by post, email or by telephone.
- Understand your needs so we can provide a requested service.
- Update your customer record.
- Prevent and detect fraud and corruption.
- Consult, inform, and gauge your opinion on our services when agreed in advance.
- Protect individuals from harm or injury.

## Equality and Diversity

The communities we serve are made up of different people who have individual needs, requirements, and expectations. It's therefore the Council's responsibility to ensure that services are delivered in ways that promote equality of opportunity and meet the needs of all communities. Homes First are committed to meeting the legal duties of the Equality Act 2010 and supporting and celebrating the different communities which make up our vibrant villages and towns. You can find out more about the Council's Equality and Diversity objectives on the website - [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

Equality is not about treating people the same, it's actually about changing things to allow everyone to be able to access the same goods, services, and opportunities that everyone else enjoys.

To achieve this, tenant representatives need to understand the needs of different people and work to make sure the services provided are accessible to everyone.

Diversity is about celebrating and recognising the contribution of everyone.

Think about making a cake...

- \* **No eggs** - the cake won't bind together
- \* **No flour** – the cake won't rise
- \* **No sugar** – it'll taste bad
- \* **No butter** – the cake will be dry and hard



You need all the different ingredients to make a good cake and it takes different people to make a good community. If you take anything away, you'll have something that's not very nice. A community that doesn't use all its resources and talent, a community that people don't want to live in, a community that starts to build barriers. Diversity helps to build a community that people will hopefully enjoy and want to be part of.



# Glossary

**glossary** / noun / 1. An alphabetical list of words relating to a specific subject with explanations.

- **Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO)**

An ALMO is a not-for-profit company that provides housing services on behalf of a local authority.

- **Aspiration Homes Limited Liability Partnership (AALLP)**

Aspiration Homes acts as the asset holding vehicle for affordable housing properties developed through the EHICL and LHICL commercial development programmes.

- **Chair**

The person in charge of a meeting (used as a neutral alternative to chairman or chairwoman).

- **Constitution**

A set rules and ideals which dictate how a group is organised and governed.

- **Council Cabinet**

The Council Cabinet is the main decision-making body of the local council. Each Cabinet member is responsible for particular areas of council business - this is known as their portfolio.

- **Senior Caseworker**

A Senior Caseworker is the lead officer on complex cases. Senior Caseworkers usually have a specialism such as housing for example.

- **Councillor**

Councillors are elected to the local council to represent their own local community, and must either live or work in the area.

- **Eastbourne Homes Limited Board**

The Eastbourne Homes Limited Board provides housing management and property services to Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC) tenants and leaseholders. The Board has clearly set out constitutional and legal duties under the Articles of Association (Companies Act 2006) which ensure the Board exercises duties well and effectively.

- **Eastbourne Housing Investment Company Limited (EHICL)**

EHICL was set up to enable the Council to undertake non-Housing Revenue Account (HRA) development and provide a financial subsidy to support the delivery of affordable homes.

- **Housing Revenue Account**

The Housing Revenue Account is a record of revenue expenditure and income derived from rents from the local authority's own housing stock.

- **Internet Browser**

An internet browser, also known as a web browser or simply a browser, is a software program that lets you view web pages on your computer. You can think of your browser as your gateway to the internet.

- **Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council is the elected Chair of the Cabinet and appoints other councillors as Cabinet members.

- **Lewes Housing Investment Company Limited (LHICL)**

LHICL was set up to enable the Council to undertake non-Housing Revenue Account (HRA) development and provide a financial subsidy to support the delivery of affordable homes.

- **Minutes**

Meeting minutes are notes that are recorded during a session. They highlight key issues that have been discussed, actions proposed or voted on, and activities to be undertaken.

- **Microsoft Teams**

Microsoft Teams is a communication platform developed by the company Microsoft to provide a chat and video conferencing application.

- **Officer**

An officer is a member of the Council staff such as a Senior Caseworker, Retirement Housing Advisor or Specialist Advisor.

- **Portfolio**

Cabinet members are councillors with special responsibilities over an area of the council's activities, such as tourism or climate change. Their area of responsibility is known as their portfolio.

- **Retirement Housing Advisor**

A Retirement Housing Advisor deals with the day-to-day administration at Retirement Housing Schemes.

- **Secretary**

The Secretary supports the Chair to ensure the smooth functioning of a tenant committee.

- **Service Level Agreement**

A service-level agreement (SLA) is a commitment between the provider of a service and a client. Aspects such as quality, availability and responsibilities are agreed between the service provider and the service user.

- **Specialist Advisor**

A Specialist Advisor provides customer-focused specialist advice on a range of services such as Tenant Involvement for example.

- **Tenant**

A tenant is a person who occupies land or property rented from a landlord like the Council.

- **Treasurer**

The Treasurer watches over all aspects of financial management and works closely with other members of the tenant committee.

You can reach the **Tenant Involvement Team** by emailing us at:

[tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

or by contacting us individually if you prefer:

**Ruth Tahsin** (Specialist Advisor)

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Working days are Wednesday and Thursday.

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Working days are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

**Harry Hillery** (Senior Caseworker)

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Working days are Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.