



**Property Services
Who's Who?**

Energy Advice



Food Partnerships

June 2023
Issue 8

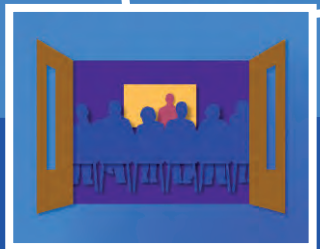
Tenants' Open Voice

for tenants of Lewes District and Eastbourne

Four Million Homes



Conflict with Neighbours



Right to Repair Scheme

Knowledge and action

for change in social housing

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Tenants Open Voice Issue 8



Gary Hall



Welcome to 'Tenants' Open Voice', the joint newsletter for the tenants of Eastbourne Borough and the Lewes District. I hope you enjoy this edition. We would love to hear your thoughts (good or bad), so please feel free to share your views by emailing: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

As usual, we have packed the newsletter with help, tips, and news as we seek to assist all our tenants to navigate challenging times.

We concentrate much of the content around repairs and what the decent homes standard still means after all these years in operation, whilst also giving some information around the renewed approach we are taking in managing our estates and ensuring your local area is safe. As always, we want to build

partnerships with you to make sure this is proactive and successful.

We continue to offer opportunities to encourage you to get involved in the way we run services and we have several ways you can have your say and be influential in the work we do. Over the last six years especially, since the Grenfell tragedy there has been an emphasis on not only the very obvious need to ensure homes are safe but also to make sure that housing organisations and Local Authorities listen to the expert voice of tenants and act upon the things you tell us that need to improve. Government legislation has followed, and this requires that we do even more to capture the voice of the tenant, and we encourage as many of you as possible to be part of that picture.

As always, we want to hear your views. Until next time, stay safe and take care.

Kind Regards

Gary Hall BA(Hons), FCIH, MinstLM
Head of Homes First, Lewes District Council
and Eastbourne Borough Council



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Tenants Open Voice is compiled and edited by Harry Hillery (Tenant Involvement) and is designed in-house by Printing Services for Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils.

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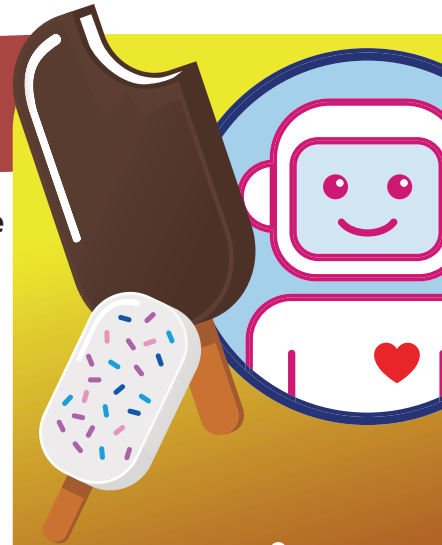
Chat with ELLIS

Our intelligent chatbot ELLIS is available 24-hours-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 garden waste or Council Tax.

ELLIS was launched in late March 2022, and to date 71,000 queries (25% out of hours) have been answered. ELLIS has delivered a 95% accuracy rate in answers when compared to a customer advisor, and when a query is too specific for ELLIS, customer service staff are still free to chat with online as before between 8.30am and 5pm on weekdays. If you are not able to find what you're looking for on the website or can't use our chat services, you can use the Contact Us form on the website or call us.

In addition to ELLIS assisting residents online, ELLIS will also be appearing on our phones later in the year to assist with some basic queries. This will prevent residents having to wait on the phone to speak with someone where their question can easily be answered and will in turn allow our staff to focus their time and attention on those with more complex cases and needs.



Ask
ELLIS
Your
intelligent
Chatbot

Four Million Homes

The **Four Million Homes** campaign is a government funded project, which aims to empower residents in the 4.4 million social housing sector homes across England to engage more effectively with their landlords.

It is hoped that through training and the availability of information, tenants will feel more confident of their legal rights and the responsibilities of their landlords. To support the campaign, certificated training modules will be taking place across the country alongside free live webinars. There will also be a 'resident sounding board' on the Four Million Homes website where tenants can share their ideas and influence the campaign as it progresses.

The clear message to landlords is that they must support their tenants by:

- Considering the tenant voice in every decision
- Asking tenants what they want and listening
- Judging success by outcomes and seeing a difference
- Being accessible and easy to talk to

With this in mind, Homes First will promote Four Million Homes and share information on the campaign at every opportunity.

You can find out more, book free training and use the sounding board on www.fourmillionhomes.org

Four Million Homes

Knowledge and action for change in social housing



New Tenant Involvement Strategy 2023-2027

We recently reviewed our Tenant Involvement Strategy which was last updated back in 2018. As part of the process, we were pleased to see that the aims we agreed with tenants five years ago have stood the test of time and are still meaningful to the tenants who helped us refresh the strategy.

We believe that this strategy provides the principles and flexibility to respond well to the expectations of proactive consumer regulation that is being developed as part of future Social Housing Regulation. This strategy enables us to respond to the changes which will place an emphasis on the importance of tenants being listened to and being able to hold their landlord to account.

We would like to recognise the work of all tenants who have been part of delivering our initial strategy for their commitment and time given to supporting Homes First develop and improve the services we deliver. We also thank them for helping to shape the future direction of our tenant engagement opportunities and look forward to working to ensure that this strategy remains fit for purpose in a changing and challenging environment. This Strategy formally reinforces our commitment to involving tenants in shaping the services that Homes First provides.

If you would like to find out more about getting involved, just email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk so that we can talk through the options.

The Tenant Scrutiny Team

After three well received reviews of communal repairs, the complaints process, and the approach to rent recovery, this year the Tenant Scrutiny Team have decided to take a look at a new empty property (void) and allocations procedure which is being introduced. The team had the opportunity to meet with staff involved in implementing the new procedure in April and have started to scope out the review process. With the 28-day turnaround target and the tenant experience in mind, the focus of the review will be to:

- Look at the new procedures being implemented
- Complete reality checks with staff and tenants to check the new process works
- Determine if void turnaround times have improved
- Make any recommendations thought to improve the process even further

Updates on the progress of the empty property (void) and allocations review will appear in future editions of Tenants' Open Voice so watch this space.

If you would like to know more about scrutiny, or become involved in this rewarding work, please email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Property Services **who's who?**

The Property Services team lead is **Simon Watts** who has over 40 years' experience in housing and property services, the last 15 at leadership or director level. Simon is supported by three senior managers:



Marie Cooper (right) is the Asset Investment Manager. She is also a chartered surveyor who heads-up teams of planned maintenance surveyors and those managing the stock investment programmes looking after replacement kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, doors, and windows.



Damp and Mould

We recognise that the increased cost of utility bills is a challenge for those on low incomes, especially when it is colder, and people try to keep heat in. It is very important that everyone tries to ventilate their homes especially when clothes are dried indoors. Ideally drying clothes should be restricted to kitchens and bathrooms with open windows and trickle vents or low-cost fans (if you have one) with the doors closed. This helps to reduce condensation elsewhere and prevents the growth of mould in many cases. Dealing with damp and mould is a big priority for us and we have taken a number of steps to improve our response:

- In May last year, we took call-handling back in-house, so we are no longer solely reliant on Mears for assessment and action.
- Our surveyors and call handling team have undertaken refresher training on damp and mould reporting and diagnosis.
- Our gas servicing contractor reports back to us if they see any damp or mould issues.
- Where damp and mould are reported, we have been revised our procedures to ensure a surveyor inspection takes place at an early stage. These visits are followed up at three-monthly intervals and closely monitored.
- Our surveyors have access to specialist suppliers and consultants when necessary
- An additional surveyor is being recruited to focus on damp and mould issues, inspections, and advice.
- We install electric or over-bath showers, with mechanical ventilation to reduce condensation and energy costs.
- The Property Services Team have delivered presentations to other teams across the Council about damp and mould to promote awareness and accountability.



Peter Bowley (left) is the Repair Services Manager. He is a chartered surveyor and heads up everything repairs related.

Peter is supported by a Senior Surveyor called **Jess Kelsey** who leads a team of area surveyors:

- **Adediran Kujore** – looks after Newhaven, Seaford & Peacehaven
- **Kevin Donovan** – looks after Lewes Town
- **James Wood** – looks after Lewes Rural Villages
- **Ron Grimmer** – looks after Hampden Park, Central, Archery and Martello
- **Oliver Rafferty** – looks after Langney, Shinewater, Old Town and Upperton

Peter is also aided by a Repairs Customer Services Manager called **Katrina Gray** and her team of Repairs Officers who answer your calls.



Akin Fadairo is a leasehold management specialist, and leads our new managing agent service which includes the leasehold and health and safety compliance teams.

The Repairs Service

Due to the increasing cost of building materials and the Councils' need to keep rent increases as low as possible, providing an effective property maintenance service is proving very challenging not only in the Lewes District and Eastbourne, but across the country. For the responsive repairs team this means only undertaking works that are absolutely necessary and repairing things rather than replacing them. We will also be restricting the external decorations programme and fencing works so that we can work with tenants to provide the best service possible within their homes.

Some works will have to be put 'on hold' and others will be added to a programme to make sure we deliver the best value for money.

Our in-house repairs team will do the best they can for you, but please be patient with them if they cannot always provide what you want.



The Stock Condition Survey

Throughout 2020 we undertook a survey of all our blocks of properties and attempted to gain access to review the condition of kitchens and bathrooms. Outside, the inspections covered roofs, guttering and windows. The information we collected has been used to create business plans for each Council which set out the cost of maintaining your homes for the next 30 years. We have used this plan to produce programmes of work, but each individual home will be checked again before a contractor is instructed. We gained access to 75% of properties, which was a reasonable success bearing in mind the work was carried out during the pandemic. We continue to update our records as properties become void and where we find gaps in the data.

Decent Homes Standard

Our planned works programme, which was put together using information from the stock condition survey, will continue to ensure all properties meet the Decent Homes standard.

The Decent Homes Standard was introduced in 2006, and requires that homes:

- Are in a reasonable state of repair
- Have reasonably modern facilities and services
- Have a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The Decent Homes Standard recommends the life span of 'key building components.'

For kitchens this is 30 years, which means that kitchens over 30 years old should be replaced. For bathrooms, a similar rule applies, but they need to be either 30 years old and in poor condition or over 40 years old. In the past we have tried to replace kitchens and bathrooms before they get too old, but due to budget constraints we are having to stick to the Decent Homes Standard recommendations.



daha

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation

Since my last article in Tenant's Open Voice there have been many positive developments on our journey towards DAHA accreditation. I was very proud to be able to present the work I am planning to members of the EHL Board and the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD). And plan to present to Resident's Voice in Eastbourne in the next few months.



The feedback for the work has been overwhelmingly positive and there have been numerous offers of help and assistance which has been great to see. The subject of domestic abuse is, of course, an incredibly important one and the desire to help victims and survivors in our areas is shared as a priority at every level of Eastbourne Borough and Lewes District Councils.

We have developed policies relating to Domestic Abuse which covers our responsibility as a social landlord and helps to outline support that can be offered to those who may have fled their homes due to domestic abuse and may be presenting to the local authorities as homeless. Our next steps are to get you involved.

If you are interested in being part of the consultation around our policies and our work on domestic abuse, please get in touch with me via email at ray.brickley@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk.

How do I contact...

HOMES FIRST

There are many ways you can report issues or find information on our services. Many things can be reported online using the website: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk. Simply type in 'report a problem' in the enter search text field and press return to see a range of options. Another way to find what you are looking for is to type in a key word. For example, if the grass verges need cutting, type in the word 'overgrown' or 'grass' and press return. Some of the online reporting forms need you to register a 'My Account' first, but you only need to do that once. The online forms are a quick and easy way to report many issues including:

- Repairs to your home and, for blocks of flats, repairs to communal areas
- Missed bins and waste and recycling issues

- Dog and animal problems
- Litter and fly tipping
- Graffiti and vandalism
- Noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour

To make a complaint, simply type 'make a complaint' in the enter text field on the website to be directed to online options. You can also appeal decisions on Housing Benefit, Council Tax, Homelessness and Housing Register banding on this way.

Chat with ELLIS and online chat are available during office hours on the website. Look for the icon on the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. If ELLIS is unable to answer your query, customer advisors are on-hand to help.

Lewes Energy Advice



Ovesco is a not-for-profit community interest company that develops community-owned renewable energy across the Lewes District and East Sussex to reduce carbon footprint and lower the dependence on imported

energy. They offer free, impartial energy advice to residents, and have helped hundreds of households over the last year with their energy bills. Trained Energy Champions are on-hand to provide:

- Energy Bill Health-Checks
- Help with reducing energy usage in the home
- Free energy reducing kits and insulation materials for the home
- Checking eligibility for the warm home discount and energy related financial support
- Help with approaching suppliers regarding arrears, direct debits, and payment plans
- Advice on eco heating upgrades, renewables, and retrofitting

Ovesco also has a dedicated Energy Room at the Climate Hub situated in Lewes House on the Lewes high street. There are weekly drop-in advice surgeries on Wednesdays, between 10.30am – 1pm, or you can contact their hotline and speak with an energy champion or arrange a one-to-one meeting.

Email: energyadvice@ovesco.co.uk
or freephone: 0800 4589045



Eastbourne Energy Advice



ENERGISE SUSSEX COAST helps residents in East Sussex to bring down the cost of electricity, gas, and water bills and also to save energy and carbon. They believe everyone can save money on their bills, and they offer a free friendly service to everyone via the Eastbourne Foodbanks or by calling 01424 390 062.

They can help with:

- Giving advice on saving energy and bringing bills down
- Support to access grants and the Warm Home Discount
- Help with energy and water debts
- Applying for grants for white goods and household items
- Freebies such like LED lightbulbs, draught-proofing kits, mould monitors and energy monitors

- Problem bills and talking to your supplier
- Advice on how to access free or part-funded energy efficiency measures
- Advice on the cheapest energy tariffs available
- Information about easy DIY home energy saving and keeping your home affordably warm for people working from home
- Home visits from the green handyman to install energy saving like draught proofing

And if you are looking for rewarding volunteer opportunity that helps address the cost-of-living crisis, you can become an energy champion.

To find out more, contact:
kate@energisesussexcoast.co.uk
or call 01424 390062



ENERGY CHAMPIONS!

BECOME AN ENERGY CHAMPION

Summer Savings



Everyone can save money by reducing the amount of water they use, so here are some quick wins for the home:

- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth – a family of four could save up to £100 from their annual water bill.
- If your home has a hot water cylinder, you can save up to £68 a year if you have this insulated.
- Put a large bottle of tap water in the fridge to save waiting for the tap to run cold, which can waste 10 litres of water!
- Using an eco-shower head can typically save £100 per year on your fuel bill, and costs just £20 to buy. Reducing showering time to a speedy four minutes can also save up to £176 a year.
- Fitting a £5 aerator to your tap can save around £25 per year
- Use lids on saucepans – this is more efficient and reduces the amount of water lost as steam.
- Run your washing machine and dishwasher with full loads and use an eco-setting if available..
- Use a washing-up bowl in your sink to reduce the amount of water you use – you can even use the dirty water afterwards in your garden.



Food Partnerships

The Food Partnerships in Lewes and Eastbourne work with local communities to bring together individuals and organisations who are committed to creating a more equal, sustainable, and diverse food system in their areas.

Grow a row

What if you could grow food on your own plot, in your garden or even on your windowsill that feeds back into the community and improves access to food?

The Eastbourne Food Partnership has launched a campaign called 'grow a row' which aims to get Eastbourne growing, cooking, and eating local.

How does it work?

- You can go along to a growers' event and pick up some seeds, handy growing tips, or even a growing kit.
- You can plant an extra row (or pot) or more, using handy growing guides and nurture your seeds or seedlings into vegetable heroes.
- When harvest time comes, you

can leave the produce you have grown at the nearest drop off point, where it will contribute to increasing access to nutritious and affordable food to local residents.

You can find out more about 'grow a row' by visiting <https://eastbournefoodpartnership.org>

[.uk/grow-a-row](https://eastbournefoodpartnership.org) or by scanning the QR code.

You can also contact the Eastbourne Food Partnership by emailing info@eastbournefoodpartnership.org or through the website [eastbournefoodpartnership.org.uk](https://eastbournefoodpartnership.org)



Feeling the pinch

In Lewes, the Food Partnership has been campaigning for change with a project called 'feeling the pinch: have your say!' The project involves participants from across the whole

Lewes District, including the coastal strip towns of Peacehaven, Newhaven, and Seaford, who share their stories and experiences of living through the Cost-of-Living Crisis. The work aims to challenge misconceptions and raise awareness about the realities of everyday life for many who live in the area. One participant said: "To be treated so badly – then when you get a little bit of help, you're told to be grateful. It's awful and I don't have a voice."

We know that the issues residents face date back much further than the Cost-of-Living Crisis, but it has affected everyone, and the Lewes Food Partnership believes the time is right to reflect on the impact, from homelessness and food poverty to the lack of access to services. As part of the project, a panel of 'experts by lived experience' will take part in a series of workshops, to help build confidence and make sure real people's experiences are being heard. The project will climax with a 'hearing' in June which will bring together the panel of experts with local policy makers including councillors, business leaders and decision makers. Although it is difficult to influence policy, the Lewes Food Partnership believes with a shared voice we can at least make sure the issues that matter the most to people are being heard.

If you would like to know more about the project or are interested in issues of food justice, security and sustainability please email info@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org or follow us on social media [@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership](https://twitter.com/lewesdistrictfoodpartnership)

Contact
info@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org
 for more info. Or follow us on social media
[@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership](https://twitter.com/lewesdistrictfoodpartnership)

Lunch Positive



Lunch Positive is a local charity which delivers a wide range of support around health and wellbeing, financial disadvantage, combatting loneliness and social isolation for people living with HIV in Sussex. A strong person-centred focus on reaching out and engaging with people is used so that

people who might otherwise not be supported benefit from social connection, peer-support, and empowerment.

Lunch Positive provides the only regular group support gatherings in the Lewes District, Eastbourne Borough and Hastings for people living with HIV in Sussex and these are open to anyone living with HIV in the area. The gatherings provide a safe community space where people can make friends, access food, receive benefits and cost-of-living advice and other specialist help when needed. In between the monthly sessions,



additional telephone and face-to-face support is provided by the Project Coordinator, including home visits.

People can find out more about Lunch Positive services on the website: www.lunchpositive.org or by telephoning 07312 862 768.



Right to repair scheme

Secure and introductory local authority tenants who need repairs to their homes can seek compensation through the right to repair scheme in some cases when certain repairs are not done within a defined timescale.

There are twenty types of repair that qualify for the scheme, including insecure doors, broken door entry-phone systems, some issues with water and electricity supplies, blocked sinks, and leaking roofs. A repair will not qualify for the scheme if –

- it exceeds an estimated cost of £250
- the local authority is not responsible for the repair or
- after inspection, the landlord decides that the repair is not a qualifying repair and notifies the tenant of this in writing.

When repair work is not completed within the specified time, you need to tell the Council, and ask them for another contractor to do the work. If the second contractor does not complete the repair work within the time limit, you can ask for £10 in compensation, and for every extra day you wait, you can get another £2. The most compensation you can get for any one job is £50. However, if you have any rent arrears, the Council can use the compensation to reduce the arrears rather than paying you the money.



Estate Services

As we mentioned in the last edition of Tenants' Open Voice, we recently launched a combined Estates Services approach to working with you and your local community.

Various different teams from within the Council and their contractors all work together to provide a range of services to the estate. This might include different teams managing window cleaning, fly tipping or compliance checks, but they come together as Estates Services. To launch the idea, we developed a dedicated logo with the help of our tenants which identifies this partnership working.

Late last year, households were sent a newsletter specifically for the zone they live in with contact details for

HOMES FIRST ESTATE SERVICES

working in partnership with
Neighbourhood Housing · Property Services
Neighbourhood First · Environment First



each team and an outline of who to contact in which circumstances. We also placed posters in all our blocks with the same information. If you have any queries or concerns, please do report these to the relevant service so we can follow up and respond to any issues.

If you did not receive your newsletter for any reason or you live in a block and the poster has gone, please contact the Neighbourhood Housing Team on **01323 410000** (Eastbourne) or **01273 471600** (Lewes) and we will arrange for another one to be sent to you.



Fraudsters sentenced following investigation



A father and daughter who attempted to buy a council house dishonestly and benefit from an £84,000 discount have been sentenced at Lewes Crown Court. After pleading guilty to two counts of false misrepresentation, Graham and Hayley Bradford both received 10 months imprisonment (suspended for 20 months), and both were ordered to pay £3,000 in costs to Lewes District Council and carry out 200 hours of unpaid work.

The pair who claimed to live together in a property on Valence Road in Lewes, made two right-to-buy applications for the house, but

investigation revealed that Graham Bradford was living elsewhere. If the council had sold the three bedroomed home to them, they were in line to receive an £84,200 discount on the purchase price, paid for by the public purse.

In his sentencing remarks, His Honour Judge van der Zwart recognised the diligence of Council officers in their work to expose this fraud and said 'these were thoroughly dishonest attempts to profit from local government housing. These are crimes against not only the local authority, but local authority taxpayers. It's a testament to the diligence of the local authority enquiry team that they uncovered this dishonesty.'

Conflict with your neighbours

Being in conflict with a neighbour can be really difficult, but there is support available to help.

Homes First work with Mediation Plus for Eastbourne cases and the Brighton & Hove Mediation Service for Lewes District cases, to support tenants who are experiencing neighbour conflict. Your Senior Caseworker (Housing) can help by passing on your details to the appropriate service who will get in touch to explain the support they can offer. You can then take some time to think about your options and decide whether you would like to take part in mediation with your neighbour or receive some 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 is not thought to be suitable, there is a one-to-one service that can also help.
- There are lots of different ways that you can access support, including by telephone, video conferencing and face to face.
- The mediation services always respect privacy and your choices, and they support everyone equally.



Case study

A referral was made by a Senior Caseworker (Housing) for Anne (not her real name), an older woman who was experiencing ongoing noise from her neighbour who lived in the flat above her with a young child. Anne had made a complaint about 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 Anne was asked if she had spoken to her neighbour, she said that she had tried speaking to her neighbour, but they had just made negative

comments and allowed their son to continue making a noise. It was decided that mediation was not possible in this case, so instead Anne was offered one to one support through conflict coaching and engaged in three conflict coaching sessions with mediators. Anne found the sessions helpful and felt she was experiencing less conflict. She had also decided how she would talk with her neighbour in future and said, 'it was good to get things off my chest.' Anne appreciated the help provided from the mediation service caseworker and mediators as this helped her feel more able to manage the situation with her neighbour.

Are you Insured?

Buildings insurance is the Council's responsibility and the cost of it is covered by your rent. This means that tenants don't have to worry if there's fire, water or storm damage to the structure of the property and fittings like damaged kitchen units or bathroom fittings as the Council will repair any damage. However personal items like furniture, household appliances, carpets, and clothes or anything stolen are not covered, and contents Insurance is needed to protect and replace these belongings.

Homes First have teamed up with Aviva, the UK's largest insurer, to provide an affordable home contents insurance scheme for our tenants and leaseholders. The package offers exclusive rates and a range of optional extras, including cover for accidental damage. There is

also no excess to pay if you need to make a claim, and you can spread the cost of the insurance with a monthly Direct Debit from as little as £5 per month. Home contents insurance is important because if something bad happens, the Council is not responsible for the loss or damage of any personal property (whether they belong to you or someone else) no matter how they become damaged. You can find out more about this affordable home contents insurance package on the website: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk by using the keyword 'insurance' in the search box. Alternatively, you can look on comparison sites to find the best value deal. How much you pay will depend on how much your possessions are worth, size of your home, location, and the type of cover you choose.



TOLD Tenants of Lewes District

A word from the Chair...

In this edition of the magazine, you will find lots of helpful information relating to repairs and the cost of living, but I would like to draw particular attention to the Universal Credit migration guidance on page 12, which it is very important that those readers claiming benefits are aware of.

I would like to offer my congratulations to returning and new Councillors across the Lewes District after the recent local elections. The Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) look forward to continuing to work with them on repairs, the cost of living, and environmental issues.

Collectively the TOLD committee encourages everyone to get involved in the ways available because as the Four Million Homes campaign stresses, the tenant voice is important and should be considered in all aspects of decision making. To find out more about TOLD's work, you can email me directly - debbietwitchen@gmail.com, or take a look at our website - www.told.org.uk or our Facebook page. You can also email TOLD at: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



Tenants of Lewes District



Tenants Of Lewes District

TOLD continue to work with the senior leadership team to discuss finance, repairs, and other important matters. Everyone is very welcome to come to our Open Meetings which take place three times a year at the Tenant Resource Centre (2a Horsfield Road, Lewes, BN7 2TA). The TOLD committee also manages an annual budget of £20,000 which residents can apply to for community improvements and initiatives. Last year the budget was used to fund community garden projects, bike sheds and garden furniture, benches, a memorial plaque and provided plants for communal gardens amongst many other things. If you would like to know more or make an application email tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk or call 07595 460334 and leave a message.

The TOLD Committee are there to help, so if there are any issues you would like to raise, please do not hesitate. Simply email debbietwitchen@gmail.com or toldsec@gmail.com

Community Gardens UPDATE



The Landport Community Garden has recruited a part-time worker funded by Landport Community Hub grants to oversee the garden's progress. This has already made a huge difference to the space - the summer house has been reinstated, vegetables have been planted out, and health and wellbeing groups like dementia support and Pippa's Nursery have been able to come in and make use of the garden.

Volunteer days continue to take place alongside regular drop-ins on the 1st Saturday of every month. Everyone is welcome - experienced gardeners to those with no growing experience looking to learn and meet like-minded people.

To find out more, email Mary Hill at: mary.hill999@hotmail.co.uk or check out the Landport Community Hub Facebook page.



David Pickbourne memorial plaque.

The Landport Community Garden shed



Thank you from Fitzjohn's Foodbank



Saxon House drop-in

Cost of Living themed drop-ins have been taking place at Saxon House in Newhaven, and on the Landport Estate in Lewes recently. It's likely that more will be programmed in the future, so look out for updates on the Lewes

District Housing Facebook page or, for up-to-date news, email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



Thank you from the Seahaven Foodbank

Residents Voice

The January meeting focussed on the management of anti-social behaviour and abandoned properties at the request of residents attending the October session who wanted an understanding of the processes involved. Property Services also gave a presentation on how mould and damp are dealt with at the session.

At the April session, the focus was on planned maintenance work and queries relating to the decent homes standard, gas boilers specifications and communications. The estates services project was also discussed, and feedback from the Regulator for Social Housing's pilot inspection of Eastbourne Homes was presented. The pilot inspection was requested to inform the regulator's approach to inspections in the future, and it was pleasing to see that the feedback was 'assurance on every area reviewed', meaning the regulator was happy with our existing approach or was happy that plans were in place to address any shortfalls identified.

The next meeting takes place on the 25th July between 10.30 – 12.30 in Meeting Room 1 of the Town Hall. At this session, the Council's work on Domestic Abuse national accreditation will be presented, and the new Tenant Involvement Strategy (2023-2027) will be launched.

If you have any questions or would like to attend, please contact Nikki by emailing tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



Eastbourne Area Panel

EAP meeting February

The Eastbourne Area Panel received interesting presentations from The Warm Hub and Compass Community Arts at the February meeting, and followed the May session with a short litter pick around the area before having tea and cake at Archery Court as a reward.

Several panel members have joined the walking cricket club at Shinewater Sports centre, which was supported by the panel and Sussex Cricket. All ages and abilities are welcome at the sessions, which cost £3 and take place on Mondays between 9am and 11am.



The next Eastbourne Area Panel meeting will be a community picnic on the Gorrington Road allotment on the 9 August from 12pm. You'll be able to see what Rooted Community Food are doing and there'll be activities for younger gardeners too. Bring your own picnic, join the fun and RSVP to tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

The Hampden Park Area Panel celebrated Easter with a Hampden Park Community Centre Easter Fayre which they supported with a £600 contribution. The event was well received and raised £725 which was be donated to a local foodbank.



Eastbourne Area Panel

Recently the panel helped to fund outward bound activities for pupils of Tollgate Community Junior School at Blacklands Farm. A spokesperson for the school said: "the children get to go on

an amazing adventure for two days in East Grinstead. Because they go for two days, this means they can take part in more of the exciting activities and outdoor adventures that the farm provides. Without the funding we received, it may not have

been possible for the children to go for two days. The children absolutely loved it, and it is a wonderful experience for them, particularly for some of our children who may not otherwise get an opportunity to take part in this sort of outdoor activity."



Moving to Universal Credit from other benefits



Universal Credit is replacing six benefits known as 'legacy benefits.' These are:

- Housing Benefit
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Child Tax Credits (CTC)
- Working Tax Credits (WTC)
- Income Support

If you already get one of these legacy benefits, you will have to move onto Universal Credit by 2029, and can stay on them for now unless:

- you get a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) telling you to claim Universal Credit by a certain date

- your situation changes in certain ways - for example, you might need to claim Universal Credit if you have separated from a partner or moved to a different area.

You can still move to Universal Credit if neither of these things happen, but it is very important to check if you will be better off because if you apply for Universal Credit any other legacy benefits you are getting will end, and you will not be able to go back to any of them in the future - even if you are appealing a benefit decision.

If you do have a choice between staying on your legacy benefits and claiming Universal Credit, talk to an advisor at Citizens Advice (0800 144 8 444) or another agency so they can help you work out how much you will

get on Universal Credit. You will need the following information handy:

- your income - including any earnings or benefits
- your rent and living costs
- your savings and investments

If you receive a letter that gives a deadline to claim Universal Credit, it is a 'migration notice.' If your letter does not have a deadline, you do not have to claim Universal Credit unless you want to.

Claiming Universal Credit

If you do claim Universal Credit, usually you will get one payment a month and you will have to manage your claim online. It usually takes 5 weeks to get your first Universal Credit payment, but it can take longer.

The Virtual

300

The Virtual 300 group continues to grow, and we're keen to get to 300 members as soon as we can. We ask members for their thoughts on new policies, to judge competitions and even help with the branding for our services. It's a really easy way that tenants can get involved and have their voice heard from the comfort of their own home. If you're interested in participating in this growing group, why not email tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk to get the ball rolling.

Anyone who joins the group by Monday 17 July will have their name placed in a prize draw to win £25 worth of shopping vouchers.

Gas Safety

As a landlord, we have to check all your gas appliances each year to make sure you and those living around you safe. Please help us to keep everyone safe by

allowing our nominated contractors - BSW Building Services - into your home to carry out an inspection. If you do not allow us to complete these essential checks, we may start legal action against you and repay the costs.

Being a Good Neighbour

Paul is known locally as 'the caretaker' by people living on The Brickly, because he is happy to help anyone. His motto is 'if there's something you can do to help, it doesn't hurt to try and help' and he certainly has - by trimming grass verges, repairing fences, levelling paving, installing Christmas lights across the estate and numerous other odd jobs. Paul is a jack of all trades who'll gladly turn his hand to anything and expects nothing in return. He believes that being a good neighbour starts with a chat and an awareness of what's going on. It's all about keeping an eye out for each other, keeping busy and building a strong community.

We'd love to hear more good neighbour stories so we can share them in this magazine and award a prize for the one judged to be the best by the Virtual 300 tenant group.

You can send them to tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk or, during office hours, you can call: 07595 460334.

