



**Anti-Social
behaviour**



**Need financial
support?**



**Consultation on
Council Housing
Services** in Eastbourne

December 2023
Issue 9

Tenants' Open Voice

for tenants of Lewes District and Eastbourne



Debbie Twitchen Investiture

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**Sharing
and repairing**



**Minestrone
Soup Recipe**

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Words from the Chairs...

Tenants Open Voice Issue 9

You'll see some changes to this edition of Tenants' Open Voice, which has been edited with the help of Andy Evans (Chair of Residents Voice) and Debbie Twitchen (Chair of the Tenants of Lewes District).

reminded about looking after ourselves. I also did a great workshop on engaging with the community – a real passion of mine. The conference also had a



Andy Evans

In July I attended the TPAS conference in Coventry. It was a great networking event and I met people from all over the country who share the same issues as we do - things like mould, repair problems, and anti-social behaviour. I attended a 'Meaningful Social Value,' workshop which looked at how to make the most of our contractors - something which I would like Residents Voice and the Panels to push for. I also enjoyed a session on 'Looking after you' which looked at ways to avoid burn out. Having been involved myself for many years now, it was helpful to be

memory board to remember those who are no longer with us, and I was pleased to see Gerald Shepherd (Retirement Housing) remembered.

At the last Residents Voice meeting, we changed our approach and used the first half hour to discuss individual resident concerns. Committee member Jacqui recorded everything to make sure matters were followed up. Thanks also to Lee Michael (Neighbourhood First Operational Manager) who answered questions about how communal areas inside and outside our schemes are managed. He was also able to take a number of queries away to look at.

Finally, I wanted to make you aware of something which will place the tenant voice at the forefront of housing



management in Eastbourne. The Council Cabinet have just approved a consultation which will ask tenants for their views on returning management of housing services back to Eastbourne Borough Council and away from Eastbourne Homes - the Arms-length Management Organisation (ALMO). Residents Voice will be part of the team coordinating the consultation, and Eastbourne Homes tenants will find a letter about the proposal inside this magazine. If you'd like to know more about getting involved, please feel free to email me at:

61andyevans@gmail.com

Best wishes and happy holidays – Andy.

Debbie Twitchen MBE Investiture

On Wednesday 27 September, Debbie Twitchen (TOLD Chair) received an MBE at the Windsor Castle Investiture ceremony for her outstanding activism and community work on behalf of residents.

Debbie said: "I firmly believe this award is for everyone who works in any voluntary capacity across the entire Lewes district. Anyone who knows me will be aware that establishment medals are not my thing, but I am truly grateful for the work of the many community groups and organisations in the district to be recognised in this way. Their work is needed more than ever, and I thank each and every person who offers-up their time in support of others."

An MBE is a Member of the Order of the British Empire which is awarded for an outstanding achievement or service to the community which has had a long-term, significant impact.



Debbie Twitchen MBE

It's been a difficult period for everyone, including the Council. In particular, the day-to-day repairs service has experienced

great financial difficulties and TOLD have worked with Property Services to find solutions to make sure that money is spent on improvements to our homes. In October we met with senior officers to discuss the Major Repairs Reserve and were promised that an additional £1.5 million a year will be made available for planned maintenance in 2024 which was a great result. The findings of a tenant survey commissioned by TOLD will be used to make sure this money is spent on your priorities. We also had concerns that some empty homes in poor repair might be sold without consultation with tenants, but it's also been agreed that TOLD will be consulted whenever a sale is proposed in future.

I was pleased to see that the September Estate Services pop-up events attracted many tenants who don't usually come

to meetings, which I think is a good thing. The TOLD Committee encourages everyone to get involved because we believe the tenant voice has to be heard and considered in all aspects of decision making.

The cost-of-living crisis continues to affect everyone, and you'll find lots of useful information on the support available in this magazine. I would like to make residents of Lewes aware of the free impartial advice offered by Ovesco which you'll find outlined on page 6.

Lastly, at the TOLD AGM on the 26 October I was re-elected as Chair of TOLD alongside a new committee. Rest assured, we'll continue to keep a close eye on any decision making that affects tenants and make our views known. You can find out more about TOLD's work on our Facebook page, the website www.told.org.uk or by emailing me directly;

debbietwitchen@gmail.com

Happy Christmas and New Year! Let's hope it's a better one – Debbie.



Everyone has the right to feel safe

Tackling anti-social behaviour

According to research commissioned by Resolve (a community safety and antisocial behaviour advocacy agency), anti-social behaviour (ASB) is widespread, often unreported and has a massive impact on victims and communities. There are over five million incidents of ASB in the UK each year, and approximately one in seven people experience ASB at least once a week (13.8%), with an estimated 1.7 million people experiencing ASB every single day. In terms of impact, one in four UK adults say ASB has made them feel unsafe in their local area and 58% of people say more needs to be done to tackle the issue. The Homes First Tenancy Resolution Team are there to help tenants and manage high-level ASB reports or complex cases. Last year the resolution team had an average open case load of 110 cases across the team; they completed 63 Hate and ASB Risk Assessments



(HARAs) and made 125 safeguarding referrals. There were also 151 formal tenancy actions taken to combat ASB, including the service of Notices of Seeking Possession and 42 mediation referrals were made.

Don't suffer in silence

It's easy to report ASB and the best way to do so is on www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk - available 24/7. Simply type 'report anti-social behaviour' in the 'search our website' box and press return to complete an online report form. Or if you prefer to call, you can contact us on: 01273 471600 (Lewes tenants) or 01323 410000 (Eastbourne tenants).

Estate Services

Community pop-ups

HOMES FIRST ESTATE SERVICES

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



Karen Stewart (Eastbourne Area Panel) visits the Leslie Street pop-up.

Estate Services are different teams from within the Council and their contractors who work together to provide a range of services to an area. This might include teams managing window cleaning, fly tipping or compliance checks.

In Eastbourne on September 21 and in the Lewes District on 28 September, Estate Services ran community pop-up events in three locations in each area. Around 80 tenants came along to the events across the two days to talk about a range of issues including repairs, anti-social behaviour, and waste management. A review of the sessions took place in October and due to their success, Estate Services are already planning sessions for next year so watch this space.



Chailey pop-up, 28 September.

Last year, households were sent a newsletter specific to the zone they live in with contact details for each team and an outline of who to contact in which circumstances. If you did not receive your newsletter or if you'd like another copy, please contact: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk.



Housing Consumer Standards



On 21 July 2023, the Social Housing Regulation Bill became the law. This legislation requires housing providers like Eastbourne Homes and Lewes District Council to be regularly inspected to ensure the health and safety of residents and their homes.

The Government's Regulator of Social Housing oversees the social housing sector across England and requires the Councils to provide homes and services that comply with a regulatory framework and a set of regulatory standards. These are called the consumer standards:

- **home standard** – the quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance.

- **tenancy standard** – how properties are allocated and exchanged and terms around tenure (type of occupation).
- **neighbourhood and community standard** – issues around neighbourhood and communal areas and anti-social behaviour
- **tenant involvement and empowerment standard** – customer service and complaints, tenant rights and involvement.
- **tenant satisfaction measures standard** – reporting against the tenant satisfaction measures, which cover information on areas such as repairs, safety checks and complaints.

There are twenty-two Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) in total, which help tenants understand how well we are doing. Ten of these, including gas and electrical safety checks and anti-social behaviour, are measured by us, but the remaining

twelve use tenant perception surveys to capture and measure tenant views of us in relation to:

- Overall satisfaction
- Satisfaction with repairs
- Satisfaction with the time taken to complete a recent repair.
- Satisfaction with the home being well maintained.
- Satisfaction with home safety.
- Satisfaction that the landlord listens and acts on tenant views.
- Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them.
- Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect.
- Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints
- Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained.
- Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods.
- Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect.

The government requires Councils to report their TSM and perception survey results to the Regulator of Social Housing so our overall performance can be monitored.



An update from Housing Repairs and Maintenance



Like all other services and industries, the Councils are facing unprecedented pressures on their repairs budgets due to high inflation and increasing material and labour costs.

In the past, there has been some flexibility with repairs. For example, if the item being repaired was assessed as being at the end of its economic life, usually it was renewed. Unfortunately, to manage expenditure and ongoing cost pressures we now face, we have now limited our service to essential repairs only.

What will this mean for you?

If we take your call, and do not consider the repair essential, we will make a record, review the situation, and prioritise when, and if the work can be done. This also applies when a repair is completed, and a contractor

recommends further works be considered in the future.

We will also prioritise works inside homes and to the building structure rather than fencing, gates, sheds, and garages, although we will endeavour to keep these in a safe condition.

Please tell us if works 'on-hold' start to deteriorate and we will do our best to help.

A reminder...

Our Repairs team work hard to provide the best service in difficult circumstances. We recognise that offering a limited service can be disappointing, but our staff should always be treated courteously and with respect. It's important that staff are not subjected to abusive behaviour in any form, which includes but is not limited to:

- Rude, disrespectful, or offensive behaviour, derogatory remarks, disruptive conduct, and verbal/emotional abuse.
- Sexually inappropriate comments or behaviour.
- Racist or prejudiced abuse.
- Threats of physical violence.
- Intimidating or violent behaviour.

Our call centre is remarkably busy, and we take many repairs calls each day. Sadly, the level of abuse has increased recently and where language and/or behaviour is deemed unacceptable by the Customer Services Advisor, you will be asked to stop, or the call will be terminated, and an official warning letter issued.

Thank you for your cooperation.



Make things right

Make Things Right

The government launched the 'Make Things Right' campaign in March 2023 to raise tenant awareness about making complaints.

The campaign is based on the idea that everyone deserves a home that's safe, secure, and well-maintained, and that in cases where a tenant has reported an issue that hasn't been fixed, it should be easy to make things right.

The campaign explains the steps you can take if you're unhappy with a service and there's a toolkit which provides materials you can use. More information can be found on www.gov.uk, simply search using the words 'make things right.'

Four Million Homes was launched shortly after Make Things Right in April 2023 to help tenants in the 4.4 million social housing sector homes across England to engage more effectively with their landlord. Through training and the availability of information, it is hoped that tenants will feel more confident about their legal rights and a landlord's responsibilities. To support the campaign, certificated training modules are taking place across the country alongside free live webinars, and there is also a 'resident sounding board' where tenants can share their ideas and influence the campaign as it progresses. You can find out more, book free training and use the sounding board at: www.fourmillionhomes.org

Four Million Homes

Knowledge and action for change in social housing



Please help Property Services keep your homes safe

As a landlord, we have a legal duty to conduct gas and electrical safety inspections to keep your homes safe. Surprisingly, some tenants make it difficult for us to visit their homes for these inspections, which can be time consuming and cause delays. Remember, if safety checks are not completed, it isn't just a few people in one property at risk, but potentially neighbours as well. This makes it very important that every tenant does the right thing and lets us in to complete this essential work. It's also important to remember that if a tenant refuses access for a safety check without a valid reason, they are in breach of their tenancy agreement and legal action can be taken.

The Homes First Compliance Team recently secured 3 injunctions in Court against tenants who refused access for essential gas and electric safety checks. In each case, the Court awarded Homes First costs, and as a result £3,165 plus VAT has been charged to the tenants concerned.

Please help Property Services keep your homes safe by acting responsibly and allowing access for important safety checks.



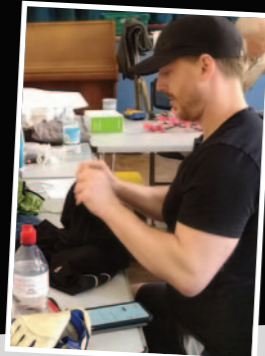
Saving money and the planet...

by **Sharing** and **Repairing**

Skilled volunteers at **Repair Cafes** fix people's household items, ranging from kettles to lawnmowers, clocks to clothes and much more – for free, and with tea and cake available!

- **Lewes Repair Cafe** operates on the first Saturday of each month at Landport Community Hub, Landport Road, BN7 2SU from 2pm to 5pm (last orders 4.30pm). Visit: www.lewesrepaircafe.org.uk
- **Seaford Repair Cafe**, run by Sharing Skills Community Interest Company (CIC), is held on the fourth Saturday of each month at the Mercread Youth Centre, Seaford, from 1pm to 3.30pm. There's also a 'pay as you feel' lunch available from noon. Visit: www.sharingskills.co.uk/seaford-repair-cafe
- **Newhaven Repair Cafe**, run by Newhaven Green Centre, usually takes place on the second Sunday of the month from 2.30pm - 4.30pm at Meeching Hall, 2A Fort Road. For dates, visit: www.newhavengreencentre.com/repaircafe

While all repairs are free, there are also donation boxes, and card payments are accepted too.



Library of Things are sharing libraries where people can borrow household items and things that are used only occasionally.

- To browse the stock of **Newhaven Library of Things**, simply visit www.newhavengreencentre.myturn.com/library/inventory/browse
- You can reserve items online and collect on a Thursday morning at Newhaven Library or from Riverside Hall on a Tuesday evening by arrangement.
- **Lewes Library of Things** is currently open on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10.30am to 12.30pm at Landport Community Room, 2a Horsfield Road, BN7 2TA. For more information, visit: www.leweslibraryofthings.org.uk

- **Sharing Skills CIC** also runs a pre-loved school uniform exchange in Seaford, Incredible edible – a community gardening group, and practical skill-sharing workshops. Visit: www.sharingskills.co.uk

TOP TIPS from OVESCO to save money & energy

As we approach the colder months, here are a few tips to help you save money and energy:

- Tackle draughts and cold spots around doors and window frames. Draught excluder cushions can be placed at the bottom of doors to help maintain heat. They are particularly helpful when used on doors that lead to rooms you don't heat (such as a spare room or utility room for example). You can even 'DIY' your own cushion with old material rolled-up!
- Drawing your curtains earlier is another simple measure to keep more heat in. If you have radiators under windows, make sure your curtains don't drape over them as they will absorb and waste heat!
- 10% of homes lose heat through their letterbox. This can be cheaply and easily remedied by ensuring you have a letterbox brush draught excluder. They cost around £4 and

attach behind the inside opening of the door using four screws.

- Radiator reflector foil can be cut to size and fixed behind radiators with some tape. It can reflect up to 95% heat back into the room, helping to reduce the energy wasted onto cold walls. For that reason, it's more effective for radiators on external walls (but not suitable for night storage heaters.)
- Whilst we want to keep the warmth in, remember to keep your home ventilated and the air circulating by using window vents if you have them, this will help to keep your home mould and damp free.
- If you have gas central heating, don't be tempted to use plug-in heaters instead of turning your heating on. They are less effective, use more energy and cost more money to run! Turn down radiators in rooms that are not used so often.



There's lots of free help and advice available on grants, to help you understand bills and approach new suppliers, insulate your home, and deal with debt. Organisations working in your area who can help include Citizens Advice, Warm Home Service, the Emergency Food Network, your GP, Care for Carers, Health & Social Care, the NHS, and the Energy Saving Trust. OVESCO have local community energy champions who can offer free, impartial energy bill help and advice. To find out more and speak to us, freephone **0800 458 9045** or email: energyadvice@ovesco.co.uk



Wave Community Bank

Wave Community Bank is a local organisation that provides ethical, affordable loans and savings accounts to people living or working in East Sussex in a way that benefits the local community.

Wave Community Bank are not-for-profit and promote savings and sensible borrowing among their members, 38% of whom live in social housing. 90% of their customers say they would recommend the bank to family, friends, or colleagues. Wave can also provide budgeting and debt advice, signposting to those who cannot access our loans, and they offer face-to-face appointments at their head office in Hove, by telephone or via Zoom.

To find out more look for Wave Community Bank on social media or call **0300 303 3188** or email info@wavecb.org.uk.

Money Advice Plus help

If you have money worries, the Councils can refer you for free debt and benefits advice.

If this something you'd like us to help with, simply speak with your Housing Senior Caseworker or email tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk with your permission to refer, your full name, address and contact number, and a brief description of the difficulties you're experiencing.

Does your household need extra financial support?

If you're finding it difficult to keep warm, buy enough food or pay essential bills, you may be able to get extra help. Residents in Lewes district and Eastbourne can now apply for help from the government's Household Support Fund, which local councils are now helping to pay out.

Residents who received an award from the first round of the Household Support Fund 4 scheme do not need to apply and will receive an automatic award from the second round if they are still eligible.

You must live within the council's area, be over the age of 18 and be liable for the Council Tax, rent or a mortgage, have a legal right to public funds, and be finding it difficult to pay for heating, lighting, water bills or food. You must also be in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction but not receiving one of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credits
- Income Support
- Income Based Job-Seeker's Allowance
- Income Based Employment & Support Allowance

The best way to apply is online as you will receive notification of any decision and you'll be able to track the application. For the full eligibility criteria, and to make an application search for 'Household Support Fund' on www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk Residents who are unable to apply online can call **01323 415047** and a member of the team will make the application on your behalf.

During the online application or telephone call you will be asked to supply your National Insurance Number, as well as the sort code and account number for your bank account. Please have these to hand when you call as your application cannot be made without this information. Please note, if you are not in receipt of Housing Benefit or a Council Tax reduction, you may need to supply evidence of your income and capital.

Some good news!

Universal Credit and other benefits are set to increase from next April 2024 by 6.7%. According to the government, this will mean an average increase of £470 for 5.5 million households in the UK next year.



Consultation on the future of Council Housing Services

Eastbourne Borough Council launched a consultation with tenants and leaseholders over future options for its housing services on the 4 December. Cabinet Councillors approved the consultation following an internal review of alternative management models for housing currently managed by Eastbourne Homes Limited (EHL). The consultation will take place over the coming months, and you can have your say by completing a short survey on the website - www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk – simply use the word 'consultations' in the search our website box. Eastbourne Homes tenants will also find a letter about the proposal included with this magazine.



Council's stop £3.8 million of social housing fraud

Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils have prevented more than £3.8 million of social housing fraud in the past two years including abandonment of properties and fraudulent Right to Buy applications. Figures released by the Counter-Fraud team in July 2023 revealed that 51 cases of social housing fraud had been stopped between April 2022 and March 2023 alone.

The team's work included the successful prosecution of two separate cases of Right to Buy fraud heard at Chichester and Lewes Crown Courts, where suspended sentences were handed down to the former tenants. In total, 38 Right to Buy applications

were stopped and 11 properties were recovered after investigations found that the tenant no longer resided in the property.

Work was also undertaken in this period to prevent Housing Application fraud and highlight undeclared changes in circumstances. This work by the Housing Options and Wellbeing team involved reviewing all existing applications so only those families in genuine need were able to access the limited housing stock available. The review resulted in the removal of 1,302 applications in Lewes and Eastbourne.



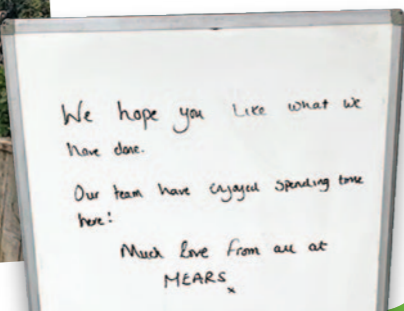
To report housing fraud anonymously online, visit: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk Simply type 'report fraud' in the 'search our website' box and complete an online report form, or you can use the hotline number **0800 7317039**.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are becoming more common across the UK and the good news is that they're something no-one is priced out of, as anyone can come along, pick up a watering can and get involved. It's clear that plants and people have the power to make lasting change by creating new social connections that can transform our wellbeing and environment for the better. Whether it's growing herbs with a neighbour, or developing spaces for wildlife, everything can make a difference.

Landport Community Garden is a great example of this growing trend, and it has gone from strength to strength in the last 12 months. A recent boost to the project was the hands-on help delivered by repair contractor Mears through their social value project. Over the course of a few days a team of Mears operatives helped to clear, re-pave and transform the garden to the delight of residents. A big thank you to Lisa Balsdon

(Mears Customer Success Co-ordinator) who helped make this happen!



Are you Insured?

Personal items like furniture, household appliances, carpets, and clothes or anything stolen are not covered by Council Buildings Insurance, so tenants need their own contents Insurance 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.

You can find out more about this affordable 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, the size of your home, its location, and the type of cover you choose.



Eastbourne Area Panel

Blackberry Buzzards

A great day was spent visiting the Gorrington Road site to see the community allotment in action, including a plot being readied to welcome children this winter. The project is offering 2-3 allotment growing sessions per week, has provided more than a ton of sustainably grown cost-free produce for the community, and is developing a children's toolkit new food projects.



Spun Glass Theatre

A morning was spent with parents and little ones at a new children's creative workshop using theatre making to connect parents and children to one another with a story or dance. The children were fully engaged with songs and stories that brought ideas to life.

EAP negotiated free places on both these projects to Homes First tenants wishing to take part.



Eastbourne Area Panel also funded...



The Family Fun Gathers summer picnic had to be held indoors this year due to the strong sunshine, but as you can see, despite being inside, 40 residents and children from Langney had a great time!



Neighbourhood Leaf Hall volunteers, including Eastbourne Area Panel member Karen; produced and delivered wholesome meals to 70 families who had been referred for support by various agencies. The soup and dhal were strong favourites on the day!

Lastly, a shout out to Alison from Old Town who decorated her home for Halloween and raised £125.00 for the St Wilfred's Hospice. Well-done Alison!



For more information on any of these wonderful projects, please contact: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes Food Partnership

In October, across the Lewes District, community groups took part in Good Food East Sussex month. Lewes Food Partnership (LFP) were pleased to fund several Harvest Celebrations which included apple pressing events using up lots of windfall apples. The events made use of a new Apple Press, which is available to borrow – just ask! The Landport Residents Association have also recently purchased an apple press with the help of the TOLD community improvement budget so watch out for more apple pressing events next year. Thank you to the Peverells Community Garden (Seaford), Hospitable Environment (Newhaven), Wallands School Community Allotment (Lewes), and Fitzjohns Food bank (Lewes) and Lewes Open Door for their help with the events!



LFP also supported Lewes Climate Hub in Food Focus month, where several free talks and demonstrations around food were organised. Coordinator Ruby

Makepeace-Somerville also gave a talk at the Feeling the Pinch project exhibition which aims to amplify the voices of residents in the cost-of-living crisis. Lastly, LFP hosted its second annual food summit at Plumpton College on 18 October which attracted over 80 people who heard from a number of community groups and brilliant speakers on issues of food sustainability and food security. The million-dollar question was - how to balance food equality and food sustainability?



We encourage you to sign up to our newsletter and food charter to add your voice to the movement: www.lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org/get-involved/join-the-partnership/ There are lots of ways to get involved with community food groups in Lewes District, whether you like growing, cooking or eating, simply get in touch by emailing: info@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org or check out the website www.lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org or social media: [@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership](https://twitter.com/lewesdistrictfoodpartnership) for updates and opportunities. If you need help with food this winter you can find out about local projects in the Emergency Food Network: www.lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org/resources/emergency-food/

Tenant Scrutiny

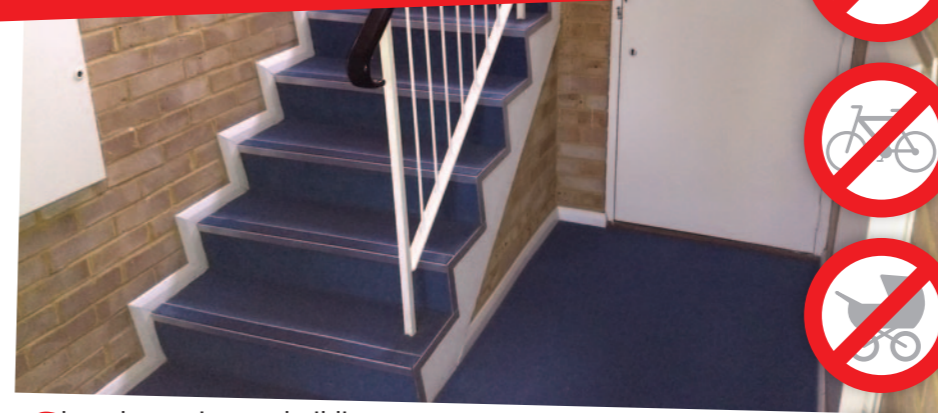
Having completed three successful reviews, which looked at communal repairs, the complaints process and our approach to rent arrears, the Tenant Scrutiny Team are currently in the midst of a review of the voids process. This time their focus will be to improve void turnaround times and the tenant experience. At the end of the review, a report and recommendations will be produced for the consideration of the Senior Leadership Team. If you would like to know more about tenant scrutiny, or want to be involved in this rewarding work, please email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

TOLD repair priorities survey results

In September, the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) sent out a survey to all Lewes tenants. The survey asked residents to pick their top three major maintenance choices from a list of ten options which ranged from internal work such as kitchen replacement, to external work like roof renewal. 281 completed surveys were returned, and the results will now be used by Property Services in their planning of future improvement work in the Lewes District.

PRIORITY

Fire safety in blocks



Shared areas in your building such as corridors, stairways and fire escapes are everyone's way out, and we have rules about what you can keep in these areas to keep you and your neighbours safe in the event of a fire.

We want you to be able to enjoy your home and personalise your space. But we also need everyone to do their bit to keep your building safe.

The two main hazards that could stop people getting out of your building safely are:

- shared areas filling with smoke, making it harder for people to get out.
- things tripping people over or getting in their way as they try to leave.

To make sure everyone can always get out of the building, you must keep shared areas clear at all times of anything that could catch fire or get in someone's way.

To help prevent fires, you must not use shared areas or corridors to store:

- electric bikes, scooters, and wheelchairs
- bikes or motorbikes
- prams or buggies
- bin bags

And in an emergency, always call **999**

- tools or DIY equipment
- chairs or furniture
- plastic plant pots
- mobility scooters
- shoes or shoe racks

If you're keeping these or anything else that could catch fire outside your flat, in corridors or any other communal area, please find somewhere else to keep them.

Please follow our guidance and work with your Housing Senior Caseworker and Neighbourhood Advisors to help keep everyone safe. We regularly check shared areas and may remove things that could be dangerous for you and your neighbours without notice.

Please contact your Housing Senior Caseworker if you:

- spot anything in your communal areas that could be dangerous.
- need help with storage.
- have a question about fire safety or what you can keep in shared areas.



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

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. Or you can call us on: 01273 471600 (Lewes tenants) or 01323 410000 (Eastbourne tenants).

Retirement housing

We're all getting older, and Homes First Retirement Housing offers good quality independent living for the over 60s, alongside the reassurance of emergency alarms and the option of some personalised support. Our schemes also have social clubs, lots of activities and a strong sense of community.

If you're thinking of your next move and would like to know more, go to www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk and search using the words 'retirement housing' or email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



The Virtual

300

The Virtual 300 now has 200 members. It's popular because it's an easy way for tenants to get involved from the comfort of their own home. In the past tenants have commented on new policies, helped to brand our services, and been involved in competitions. Our last prize winner was Steven from Eastbourne who won £50 worth of vouchers in November! If joining this influential group appeals, just email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk to get the ball rolling.



Tenants Of Lewes District



The Tenants Organisation of Lewes District (TOLD) committee oversees an annual budget of £20,000 which Lewes tenants can apply to for funding community improvements that benefit local residents. Since April this year, TOLD has approved funding for garden improvements, a community library, solar lighting, benches and has supported local charities working in the area.

If you have a community project in mind and would like to know more or how to apply, simply email: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Recipe

Whole, hearty and flexible Minestrone soup

This tasty, nutritious minestrone soup is brilliant at using up what you've got in your fridge, and it's super-easy to tweak using whatever you have in the house.

Ingredients for 8 portions

- 1 clove of garlic
- 2 small onions
- Olive oil
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 2 carrots
- 2 sticks of celery
- 2 large handfuls of seasonal greens.
- 1 vegetable stock cube
- 1 x 400g tin of tomatoes
- 2 x 400g tins of beans, such as cannellini.
- 100g dried pasta
- Parmesan cheese or vegetarian alternative and extra virgin olive oil to serve.

Method

Peel and finely chop the garlic and onion. Put a large shallow casserole pan on a medium-high heat with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add the garlic and the bay leaves, followed by the onions. Trim and chop the carrots and celery into rough 1cm dice, adding to the pan as you go. Remove and finely chop any tough stalks from your

greens and add to the pan. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring regularly, or until softened and caramelised.

Crumble in the stock cube, pour in the tinned tomatoes, breaking them up with your spoon, then add 1 tin's worth of water. Pour in the beans and their juice, then add a pinch of salt and black pepper. Shred your greens and

sprinkle into the pan, top up with 600ml of boiling kettle water, then add the pasta. Cover and leave to simmer for 10 to 15 minutes, or until the pasta is just cooked and the soup has thickened to your liking. Season the soup to taste, then serve with a grating of Parmesan cheese and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.



Find us on Facebook and X for news and information about all our services and housing-related news.

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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