



Lewes District Council



Stowe Place, a new affordable housing development in Newhaven

Tenants' Annual Report

2022-23

Vision and Values

Our vision

To maintain, develop and set pioneering standards for the provision of homes and housing services across the Borough.

Our values

- **Excellence as standard** – we will have clear measures to demonstrate our commitment to every resident based on genuinely caring about their homes and how their tenancies help support positive life chances.
- **Transparency** – we will operate in an open, honest way and be accountable to residents and stakeholders.
- **Inclusivity** – we will make sure that our services and homes enable all members of our communities to be included and to benefit from our services.
- **Innovation led** – we will work with our stakeholders to continuously improve and adapt our homes and services to meet changing demands and expectations.

We are proud of our staff and the services we provide, and work hard to deliver what we promise by setting clear targets to achieve great outcomes. We also recognise the important role tenants play in ensuring that we deliver value for money with effective, efficient, and accessible services. Tenant involvement is central to delivering great outcomes to ensure communities thrive, and we offer a range of ways to get involved:

- Chat cafes
- Communications Panel
- Community pop-ups
- Focus Groups
- Mystery Shopping
- Quality Checkers
- Retirement Housing Forum
- Spends and Saves
- Tenant Days
- Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)
- Tenant and Resident Associations
- Tenant Scrutiny Team
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel (TIE)
- Virtual 300

For more information on how to get involved, see pages 8 & 9.



Introduction by Gary Hall

Head of Homes First



Welcome to this year's Tenants' Annual Report.

We have had another busy and challenging year in Homes First. Much of this year has been centred around improving services that support our tenants and residents through the cost-of-living crisis that we touched upon in the report last year. This has undoubtedly challenged many people and in Homes First we increasingly see the knock-on effects of national and local economic difficulties. Officers remain fully committed to assisting you where we can.

We continue to try to get the best value from the budgets we work with and ensure that your homes and environments are safe and secure. Despite the difficulties faced, we will not compromise on safety and compliance and as always, we ask for your help to alert us to any issues you feel are compromising this.

It is recognised that tenant rents increased at a rate not seen for many years and I am personally keen that we continue to address value for money in all our services. We are grateful for tenant input into this agenda and as always, I will make the plea for you to get involved in the shaping the services we run in whatever way you can and in whatever way suits your personal circumstances.

We welcome your feedback on any issues you wish to discuss around your home and Council Services.

Thank you.

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Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

On 21 July 2023, the Social Housing Regulation Bill became the law. This legislation requires that housing providers like Homes First are regularly inspected to ensure the health and safety of residents and their homes. The Government's Regulator of Social Housing has developed a new system to assess how well landlords are providing excellent quality homes and services. Among other things, the system uses a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) which Homes First must report on to help tenants understand how well we are doing.

There are twenty two TSMs, covering five main themes. Ten of these, including gas and electrical safety checks and anti-social behaviour, will be measured by Homes First, but the remaining twelve will use tenant perception surveys to capture and measure our tenants' general 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.
- Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to managing anti-social behaviour.

Protecting privacy

Any information tenants provide is covered by privacy and data protection laws. This is important because tenants need to feel comfortable about giving honest answers, and protecting tenant confidentiality helps with this. Homes First has commissioned Acuity Benchmarking and the Housemark STAR framework, both widely used in the UK housing sector, to run surveys and enable us to compare ourselves with other housing providers. Homes First will make sure perception survey results are meaningful by getting enough responses and involving all our tenants. We will also make sure that the mix of people responding reflects the mix of people living in our homes to ensure accuracy.

In future annual reports, we will publish our TSM results, and report on how we conducted tenant perception surveys, including the number of responses we received. This information will also have to be reported to the Regulator of Social Housing.

Complaints Handling

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Homes First, our staff, or those acting on our behalf. We try very hard to resolve any complaints informally, but sometimes this is not possible. Anyone who uses or receives a service or is affected by a service from any part of Homes First can complain, and when a formal complaint is made, this is allocated to a Specialist Advisor in the Customer Experience Team. A Stage 1 complaint investigation then takes place, hopefully with a resolution. In situations where a customer is dissatisfied with a Stage 1 outcome, they can escalate their complaint to a Stage 2 for further investigation. This usually requires the customer to provide more information to help explain the reason for their dissatisfaction with the Stage 1 review. In cases where the customer is unhappy with the Stage 2 outcome, they have the option to further escalate the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

In the 2022/ 2023 period, we received 257 complaints including 43 which were escalated to Stage 2.

Of the complaints received, the vast majority related to the repairs service which received 189 complaints. Overall, 61.7% of our complaints were closed within our target times of 10 working days at Stage 1, and twenty working days at Stage 2. One complaint was escalated for investigation by the Housing Ombudsman.

Complaints Success

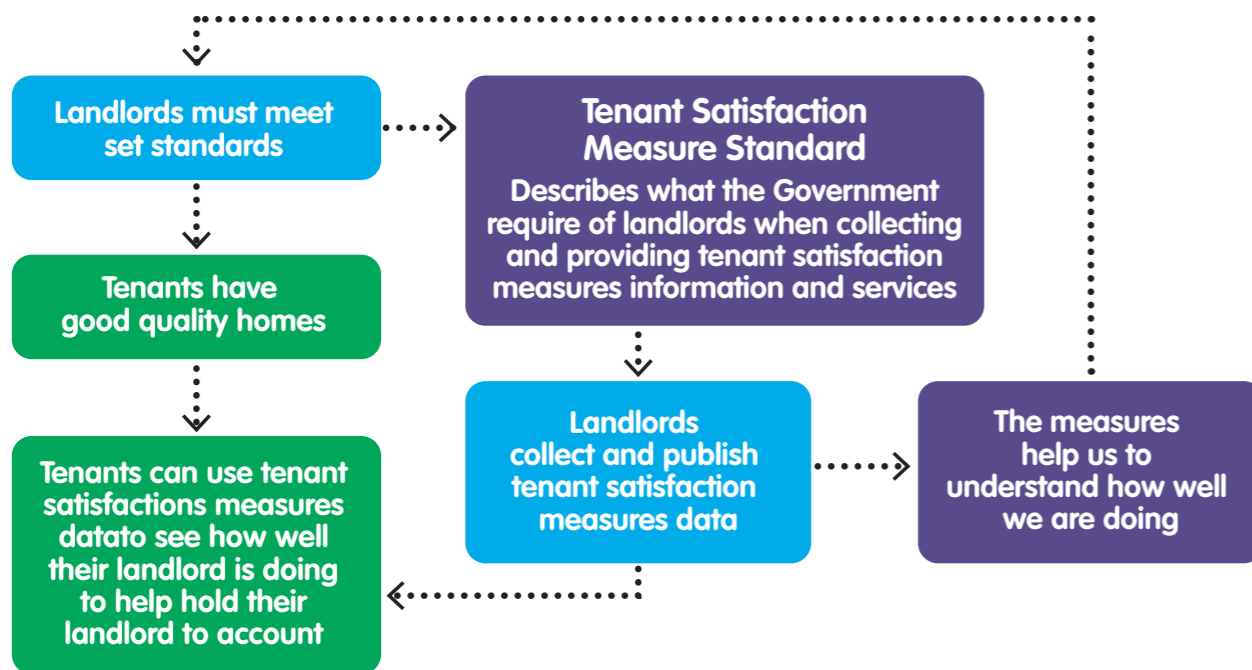
Homes First are committed to providing high quality services and we do our best to make sure any contact with us is professional, courteous and goes beyond expectations. However, sometimes things do go wrong and when they do, we recognise the need to listen and put things back on the right track. The Customer Experience Team work hard to try and make sure that complaints are dealt with professionally, though the number of complaints continues to increase significantly, and the increased workload creates significant pressures on this small but dedicated team.

During 2022-23, we have worked to identify trends and collaborate with Service Leads and Managers to implement changes and

improvements where resources allow. These have included:

- Further streamlining of the repair complaints process, to keep on top of onward case management.
- The implementation of joint visits with surveyors where this is likely to support resolution.
- The immediate implementation of a damp and mould protocol when tenant's express concerns in customer surveys.
- The delivery of awareness-raising sessions for Councillors and MPs to support them in their tenant and constituent advocacy role.
- The delivery of complaints management training to Retirement Housing Advisors and Customer Advisors.
- The introduction of a triage approach to increase the number and percentage of informal resolutions to complaints.
- The introduction and increased monitoring of pro-active customer contact when repairs are cancelled or not able to be completed.
- The introduction of an Homes First Complaints Resolution Policy and Procedure to meet full compliance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.

How will Tenant Satisfaction measures work?



Did you know..?



The government launched the 'Make Things Right' campaign in March 2023 to ensure more social housing residents know how to make a complaint. The campaign was based on the idea that everyone deserves a home that's safe, secure, and well-maintained, and if a resident has reported an issue that hasn't been fixed, it should be easy to 'make things right'.

The campaign explains the steps that tenants can take if they are unhappy with the service from their social housing provider..

The **Make Things Right** toolkit provides materials which residents can use to spread the word about how to make complaints, including by signposting to: [gov.uk/socialhousing-complaints](https://www.gov.uk/socialhousing-complaints) for advice. More information can be found on www.gov.uk – search using the words 'make things right'.

On the 19 April 2023, **Four Million Homes** was launched by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities to empower residents 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 their 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. To support the campaign, Homes First will promote and share information on the campaign at every opportunity.



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

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

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

How do we know?

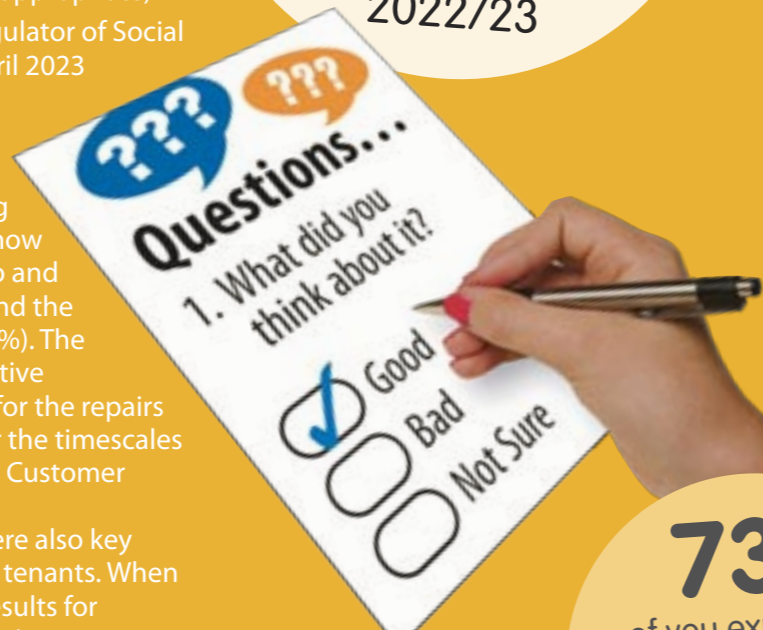
Each quarter tenants were telephoned and invited to take part in a telephone interview conducted by a company called Acuity. Homes First commissioned Acuity to create a survey using the Regulator of Social Housing Tenant Satisfaction Measures outlined on page 4 of this report. The telephone surveys were confidential, and the results anonymised unless permission was given to be identified. The views of approximately 125 tenants per quarter were proportionately sampled by tenure, area, and age, to allow Homes First to:

- Collect information on tenants' perceptions of current services.
- Compare the results with previous surveys, where possible.

- Compare the results with other landlords (where appropriate)
- Report to the Regulator of Social Housing from April 2023 onwards.

Annual satisfaction was lowest for complaints handling (21%), followed by how views are listened to and acted upon (55%) and the handling of ASB (61%). The most frequent negative comment area was for the repairs service, in particular the timescales to complete repairs. Customer service, contact and communications were also key areas of concern for tenants. When combining all the results for 2022/2023, the most important driver for tenants' satisfaction with overall services, was that Home First is easy to deal with, followed by the provision of a safe home, the repairs and maintenance service, and the quality of the home. The implication is that if improvements around the most influential measures can be

67% of you expressed overall satisfaction with the service provided by Homes First in 2022/23



73% of you expressed overall satisfaction with the service provided by Homes First in 2022/23

achieved, it is more likely to lead to increased satisfaction with the overall services provided, so Homes First will strive to make these improvements with the help of tenants in 2023 / 2024.



The Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)

TOLD holds three open events per year which all tenants are invited to. These sessions have guest speakers on topical housing issues or operate as social networking events. TOLD has a working committee, which is made up of 12 tenants elected at an AGM. The committee meets quarterly with Service Leads to discuss on-going housing service issues and agrees any required consultation with other tenants. It also monitors Lewes District Council performance and works closely with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel on Homes First policies.

TOLD influenced service delivery and improved tenant understanding in 2022/2023 by:

- Raising concerns about the Housing Revenue budget with the Council Cabinet and the Council's finance team, which resulted in a commitment to only use the Major Repairs Reserve to fund major

housing stock improvements, and not new homes.

- Providing input on plans to help tenants affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
- Agreeing social value projects funded by Mears to benefit tenants.
- Being involved in workshops and presentations at the Tenant Conference and reviewing new policies.
- Contributing to Tenants' Open Voice magazine.
- Giving their views on repair priorities for a new day to day repairs contract.

The committee also oversees an annual Community Improvements budget, which is open to bids from tenants and officers. During 2022/2023, spending of £20,000 was approved on a range of projects which included donations to foodbanks, supporting community garden projects, bin area improvements, communal benches, and youth project funding.



The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel (TIE)

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel (TIE) is made up of tenant representatives who will help Homes First drive tenant satisfaction improvements in 2023 / 2024 by:

- Working with senior managers to ensure good governance, best practice, high levels of performance and value for money.
- Making sure tenant priorities and views are at the heart of everything Homes First does, and fully considered in all aspects of strategic decision making.

Making sure that the services Homes First provide meet tenant needs.

- Representing, and being representative of, all aspects of the tenant community.
- Ensuring effective engagement and consultation with tenants.

Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA's)

There are a small number of Tenant and Resident Associations in the Lewes District, but in 2022/2023 only the Landport Residents Association (LRA) which serves around 800 households was active. The LRA works with their community to make improvements in the area and liaises with Homes First on housing issues which affect people living locally. Tenants are not required to establish a formal TRA to improve their communities. For example, residents in the Brickly and Cinque Foil in Peacehaven regularly hold community events, such as barbecues, garden competitions and a Christmas light up, which have been locally organised with the support of TOLD and their Community Improvement Budget. We are happy to support any tenants who want to do things in their neighbourhood, even if they do not want to set up a TRA.

The Landport Residents Association supported their local community by:

- Delivered a weekly foodbank collection service supporting on average 45 families and 43 single clients per week.
- Organised monthly litter picks and a book club group.
- Organised a children's Easter event and a summer barbecue attended by around 250 tenants.
- Supported a Library of Things, School Uniform bank, Community Café, and a Community Fridge.
- Liaised with the police and the community to deal with antisocial behaviour issues.
- Liaised with East Sussex County Council and the community on improvements to road safety.
- Made Community Improvements Budget applications to help set up a community garden shed and a memorial bench.
- Organised cost-of-living crisis meetings to help the local community.
- Produced local newsletters, delivered four times a year.



Did you know..?

In 2022/2023 we launched an Estate Services Improvement Project, to make it easier for our tenants to contact the right team. Essentially, Estate Services are different teams in the Council and their contractors who work together to provide services to the estate.

With the help of tenants, we also developed branding for Estate Services and produced and delivered estate zone newsletters to all our tenants.



There are lots of opportunities to get involved and make a difference!



Formal ways to get involved:

Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)

TOLD represents the views of tenants of the Lewes District. The TOLD committee meets quarterly to discuss topical housing issues, and Homes First performance is also discussed. The committee also oversees a community improvement budget of £20,000 which tenants and others can apply to for project funding that benefits their community.

Open meetings are held twice a year and the second of these in the autumn is an Annual General Meeting where the committee is elected.

Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs)

There are a small number of Tenant and Resident Associations in the Lewes District, but in 2022/2023, only the Landport Residents Association was active. Tenants are not required to set up a formal TRA

to improve their communities. For example, residents of the Brickly and Cinque Foil in Peacehaven held regular community events, such as garden competitions in 2022/2023. If you'd like to run a community event or set up a TRA, the Tenant Involvement Team can help.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (TIE) Panel

We worked closely with members of the TIE panel to refocus their involvement and avoid duplication of time and effort. Members have aligned themselves to service improvement projects working closely with Service Leads to ensure that tenant consultation and communication is embedded in the projects, and we will report back on the approach next year.



Tenant Scrutiny Team

The Tenant Scrutiny team is made up of Lewes District and Eastbourne Homes tenants. The team conducts in-depth reviews of service areas identified by the TIE panel. Each review produces a report with recommendations aimed at making improvements to the service. In 2022 – 2023, the team completed a review of rents arrears management which made 18 recommendations for improvements.

The Retirement Housing Forum

This is a joint forum that works across the Lewes District and Eastbourne which is made up of representatives from retirement housing schemes in both areas. New members are elected every year to represent residents from their scheme at the forum. The group also assists with the allocation of community improvement funding for projects in retirement housing schemes.

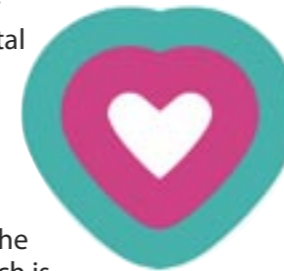
Spends & Saves

This group is made up of tenants who have been trained to be involved in the selection of contractors, contract requirements, and contract delivery.

Less Formal ways to get involved:

Love Clean Streets

The "Love Clean Streets" mobile app can be used to make us aware of any environmental problems when you are out and about. You can send a photo with the location which is directed straight to the right member of Neighbourhood First staff to deal with.



Focus Groups

We sometimes run informal one-off discussion groups online or face to face to help us to look deeper into the customer experience in relation to key areas, such as our repairs service.

The Virtual 300

The Virtual 300 are a group of tenants who share their views on our services from the comfort of their own homes. We email members for their views on new policies, service improvement ideas and sometimes to judge competition entries. It is easy to be involved as much or as little as you like with the bonus of regular prize draws and incentives for taking part.

Communications Panel / Armchair Advisors

These tenant armchair advisors make sure that communications are as easy to understand as possible, and we use their feedback to help us review drafts before they are published.

Community Pop-ups

Periodically we join other Council teams and their contractors who work together to provide services to an estate at community pop-up events to discuss local issues.

Mystery Shopping

Tenants sometimes help us to evaluate our services to make sure

they are delivering in line with agreed standards, and that the standards are appropriate.

Chat café

Sometimes we ask residents to join us at a local community café or online with a cuppa to talk about local issues that matter to them.

Tenant Days

We sometimes arrange tenant days such as a conference, community event or door-step consultation so people can discuss issues that matter to them.



Surveys & questionnaires

Sometimes we use surveys and questionnaires to ask you what you think. Surveys can be sent by post, by telephone, text, or email.

Tenant Involvement Strategy

We published a new Tenant Involvement Strategy in 2023, which will enable our tenants and staff to respond positively to the new Social Housing Regulatory Framework and make sure we are prepared for initiative-taking regulation and in-depth assessment.



The benefits of getting involved...

We believe that tenants possess the skills and the knowledge they need to be involved, because tenants are social housing experts. It is also true that tenants who participate in their communities are best placed to make improvements in their local areas.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, TOLD helped improve local communities by approving spending of £20,000 on a range of community improvement budget projects in general needs and retirement housing. These included

making pro-rata donations to six foodbanks across the Lewes District, supporting a range of community garden projects, improving bin areas, installing benches in communal spaces, youth project funding and many other projects.

TOLD also influenced Housing Revenue Budget spending and plans to help tenants affected by the cost-of-living crisis, as well agreeing social value projects funded by Mears to benefit tenants.

Tenant Group Meetings

We will continue to offer hybrid meetings giving tenants the opportunity to meet in person or join online using Microsoft Teams. For more information on meeting and dates, contact:

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



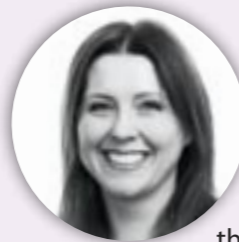
The **Homes Standard** looks at how we provide homes that are **safe**, good quality and well maintained

92.23% of our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard

Did you know..?



The Property Services team lead Simon Watts 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 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.



Peter Bowley is the Repair Services Manager. He is a chartered surveyor and heads up everything repairs related. Peter is supported by a team of experienced Lewes District area surveyors.



Akin Fadairo is the Estates & Facilities Manager. He is a leading leasehold management specialist and leads our new managing agent service which includes the leasehold and health and safety compliance teams.

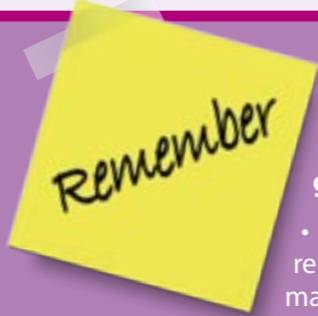
How are we doing?

Between April 2022 and March 2023, we completed **8632 responsive repairs**, of which **2333 were emergency**, **2304 urgent**, **3782 routine** and **213 planned**.

We also completed 12 replacement kitchens and 17 bathrooms.

Overall, Homes First spent £2,216,767 on 3226 properties, giving an average amount spent on responsive repairs per property of £687.

We also spent £4,525,845 on planned improvements giving an average spend of £1,403 for each property.



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

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

65% of tenants were satisfied with the overall quality of their home

71% of you were satisfied with the standard of repairs conducted in the last year



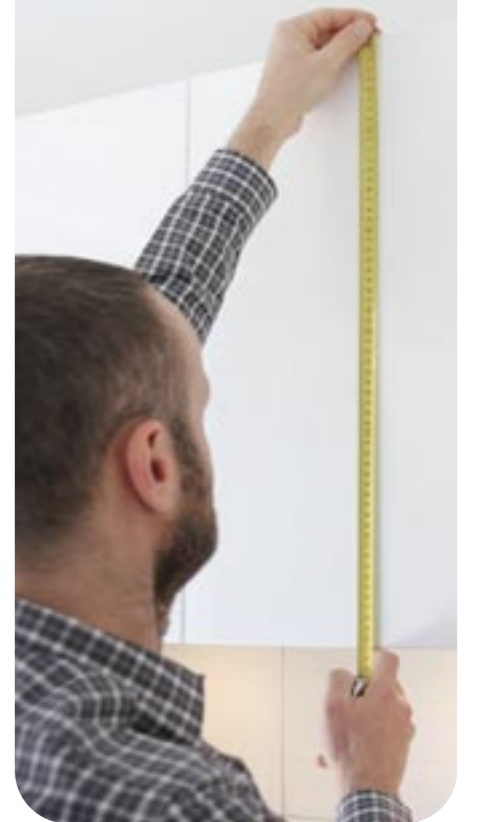
The Decent Homes Standard

Whilst 93.23% of our homes meeting the Decent Homes Standard is a significant decrease from the figures reported last year, it should be noted that each year properties will become 'non-decent' because a building component will be due for replacement, for example, a boiler, kitchen, or roof. Our target is to reduce the number of non-Decent Homes within the investment programmes. During 2022-2023 ad hoc projects such as Fire Risk Works at Reed Court came up that had to be funded from the existing budgets which had an impact on the number of decent homes works that could be completed. We have already increased the number of decent homes from 93.23% to 94.35% in

Quarter 1 of 2023-2024 and there are plans in place for these all to be rectified to return to full decency by the end of this financial year - 31st March 2024.

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 formula applies, but this is based on a 40-year-old rule.

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.



Did you know..?

Dealing with damp and mould is a particular priority for us and we have taken a number of steps to improve our response:

- In May 2022, we took call-handling back in-house, so that 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 attends most properties annually to conduct gas safety checks and reports back if they see any damp or mould issues.
- It is often assumed that the cause of mould growth is condensation, and although this is more often the case, we have revised our procedures to ensure a surveyor inspection takes place at an early stage. These visits are followed up at 3 monthly intervals and closely monitored.
- Our surveyors have access to specialist suppliers and consultants if necessary.
- An additional surveyor has been 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 also delivered presentations to teams across the Council about damp and mould to promote awareness and accountability.



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

Between April 2022 and March 2023, we let:

- **107 general needs homes** • **4 Studio properties**
- **31 one-bedroom flats, bungalows, and maisonettes**
- **51 two-bedroom flats, houses, and maisonettes**
- **17 three-bedroom houses** • **4 four-bedroom houses**

We also let **45 retirement housing flats**, which included **26 one-bedroom flats, 6 two-bedroom flats** and **13 studios**.

The average number of days taken to re-let our empty properties was **45.1 days**.

Homes First recognises that mutual exchanges encourage tenant mobility and support sustainable communities by making the best use of our housing stock. Being able to Mutual Exchange gives our tenants a broader range of choice on home size, type, and location. It also provides the opportunity to find a home that's suitable for household needs and the chance to move to other parts of the country.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, we helped 28 tenant households to mutually exchange using HomeSwapper (the UK's leading exchange service for tenants) and SwapTracker which provides an online portal for information sharing, that helps tenants to track the progress of their mutual exchange application easily.

65% of you said you were happy with the overall quality of your home

Between April 2022 and March 2023 we let **107** general-needs homes...

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4 Studio properties...

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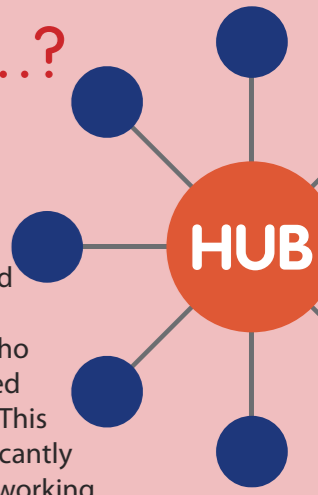
The Housing Solutions service adopted a new IT system in October 2022, so data is not available for the first two quarters of 2022/2023. Between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023, we assisted 248 households who were homeless or at risk of homelessness by providing advice and assistance, producing personal housing plans, signposting to services and financial help to secure accommodation.

We successfully enabled 24 households to remain in existing accommodation or find a new property, and another 14 households were relieved from homelessness by the local authority taking reasonable steps to help the

applicant secure suitable accommodation for at least six months. 42 households were considered for a Main Housing Duty decision (i.e., they were provided temporary accommodation until this duty ended) and 23 were accepted. The others were found to have not been in priority need, not eligible or intentionally homeless. To demonstrate its commitment to Value for Money, Homes First collects key performance data on how much we spend on emergency accommodation every month.

Did you know..?

The Housing Options & Wellbeing team are working to create a 'hub and spoke model' with partners who will be co-located under one roof. This will allow significantly improved joint-working relationships and interventions and help to deliver a one stop shop, which the community can use to access the support they need from multiple agencies, both statutory and non-statutory. The goal is to offer a seamless joined-up approach, which links in with other buildings in the local area (the 'spokes') when necessary to provide easier access for clients. It's hoped that this will allow housing related issues and other needs to be identified and resolved at the earliest opportunity, improving outcomes for our shared clients, avoid repeat access to frontline services, and reduce the need for high-cost interventions at crisis point. We hope to move our dedicated Triage Team into the Hub by October 2023 to provide face to face appointments for those customers who are unable to access our on-line services.



Did you know..?

Last year the Housing Needs Team renamed their service to Housing Options & Wellbeing to better reflect what the team offers. Their aim is to provide an effective housing needs service with strong partnerships that foster a range of sustainable options, long-term solutions for an individual's housing and wellbeing needs, and prevent homelessness wherever possible by:

- Preventing people from becoming homeless through the provision of timely and personalised holistic interventions.
- Intervening to relieve homelessness with a range of high quality and affordable housing solutions, and providing expert advice, guidance, and decisions on homeless and housing applications.

- Sustaining independent living through the provision and enablement of strong wellbeing and employment interventions with our partner agencies

A new in-house Triage Team has been established to take calls and improve the customer journey by offering advice, support and/or appointment at the first point of contact. Ongoing plans for the coming year include:

- The completion of a Housing Register Review
- A review of the Allocations Policy
- A review of the Voids Process
- The introduction of a new performance management framework
- The implementation of a Homelessness Partnership Hub

73% of you said you were satisfied with the safety of your home

The Neighbourhood and Community Standard

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

We work hard to be visible in our communities and provide tenants the opportunity to engage positively, including, where possible, in preventative measures relating to antisocial behaviour (ASB). Last year the tenancy management team resolved an average of 38 ASB cases every month. The team also completed 21 Hate and ASB Risk Assessments (HARA) with the Police, Adult Social Care, Mental Health, Children's Social Care, Victim Support and Drugs and Alcohol services. 52 'formal tenancy actions' were taken to combat ASB, including Notices of Seeking Possession. There were also 52 referrals for safeguarding made, and 14 referrals for mediation delivered by www.bhims.org.uk

Being in conflict with your neighbours can be really difficult

Homes First works with the Brighton & Hove Mediation Service to offer a comprehensive range of mediation, dispute, and conflict resolution services.

Brighton & Hove Mediation Service are the recognised independent mediation organisation in the Lewes District and have helped hundreds of people resolve many distinct kinds of disputes, and helped neighbours and families from all kinds of backgrounds improve communication and relationships.

What is mediation?

Mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution where two or more people involved in a dispute are helped to understand each other and recognise that they can find their own resolutions to conflict. Mediation can help with disputes between neighbours, within families, or between any people doing business with each other.

Mediation is recognised as an effective way of problem solving that can help avoid costly and lengthy legal proceedings or formal procedures. The Brighton & Hove Mediation Service use accredited mediators to help our tenants identify their needs, clarify issues, explore solutions, and negotiate agreements. The mediators function as facilitators, helping people to

work out a solution that is realistic, practical, and workable. The decision-making rests with the parties involved and the mediation process is entirely voluntary.

Benefits of Mediation

- Mediators can meet at a neutral venue or connect via phone, to listen to the issues from your point of view.
- They can arrange meetings at a time to suit you.
- Mediators will make as many return visits, as necessary.
- You are in control and can disengage from the process at any time.
- Mediation is confidential, and all meetings are conducted in private. Information will not be shared with others unless you say so (subject to child protection and other safeguarding requirements).
- Mediators are impartial and do not take sides.

62% of tenants are satisfied that Homes First makes a positive contribution to their neighbourhood.



What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined as a pattern of behaviour in a relationship used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats that influence another. This includes behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone and knowing what abuse is helps us all to recognise it when it happens. Whatever form abuse takes, it is never justified, and any behaviour that demeans, frightens or distresses has to stop. We can all do something to keep people in our communities safe.

On average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partner every week in England and Wales and 75% of deaths take place inside the person's home. Housing providers like Homes First can help in the prevention of further deaths by spotting the signs of domestic abuse and making earlier interventions.

Homes First is working towards gaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation (DAHA) for their handling of cases relating to Domestic Abuse.

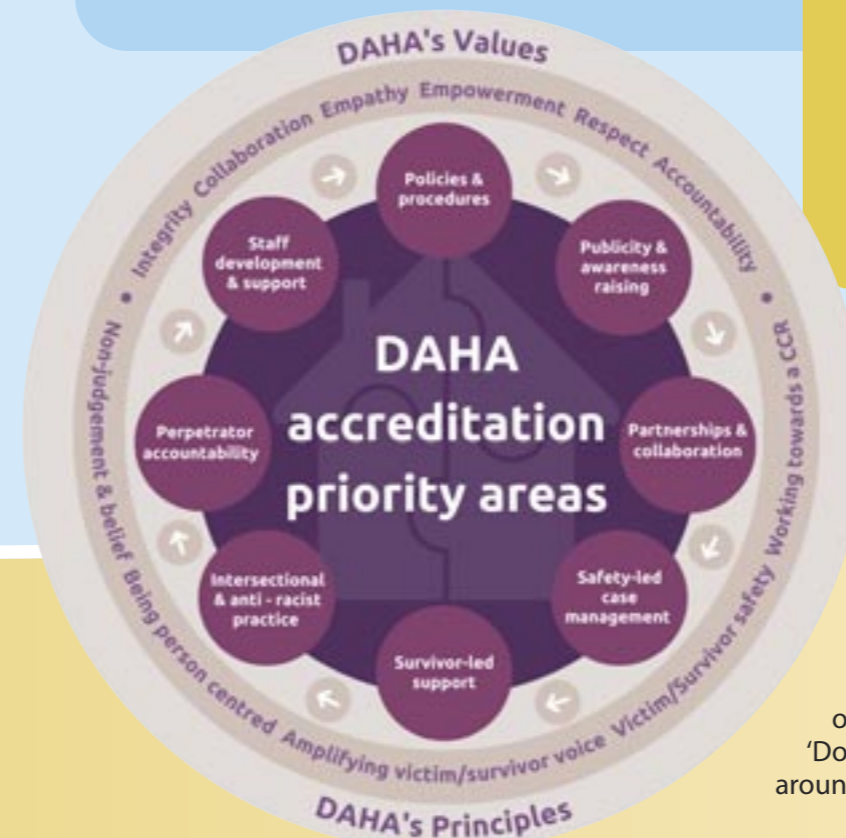
In September 2022, we began the journey towards achieving the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation which is a UK benchmark that sets out how housing providers should

respond to domestic abuse. We intend to use the DAHA best practice framework to improve services for those who have suffered domestic abuse. The framework sets out eight priority areas that are needed to deliver safe and effective interventions in domestic abuse cases and builds in processes that guide staff to address the needs of survivors and hold perpetrators to account.



Ray Brickley, who was recruited as project lead for the DAHA Accreditation process, said:

"I am extremely proud to help lead the organisation towards achieving the DAHA Accreditation and with it help to ensure that survivors and their families feel empowered and supported by Lewes District Council in their journey. We will continue to strive for the best possible outcomes for them and their families."



As part of the accreditation process, we have developed a Domestic Abuse Policy which explains our responsibility as a social landlord and our offer of support to those who may be presenting to our Housing Options and Wellbeing team. We have also developed a Domestic Abuse Policy for our staff which sets out the support that is available for our colleagues who are victims/survivors.

The next step on the journey will be to improve our data, develop our domestic abuse training offer for staff and create a volunteer network of 'Domestic Abuse Champions' to help embed the work around domestic abuse across our organisation.

The Value for Money Standard

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

Homes First is subject to a range of regulations and standards it needs to meet which are set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This includes an assessment on

whether the auditor is satisfied that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources, including consideration of financial

sustainability and governance arrangements and that services are of value for taxpayers.

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

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

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

Therefore, value for money is high when there is an optimum balance between low costs, high productivity, and successful outcomes. We have a Value for Money Strategy to help us understand the costs, work to reduce them, improve performance and service delivery, and increase customer satisfaction. The initiative

seeks to embed value for money in every aspect of our work and make it 'everyone's business' and at the heart of everything we do. To support this, a network of Value for Money 'champions' was established across Homes First to promote value for money so our teams can identify where we can:

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

One of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel (TIE) regularly meets with the Value for Money champions to provide input and review the progress made. Homes First's goal is to ensure that the rent our tenants pay is used in the most cost-effective and efficient way, and we work hard to make sure that our estate work and contracts are providing not only value for money, but assurance around compliance.

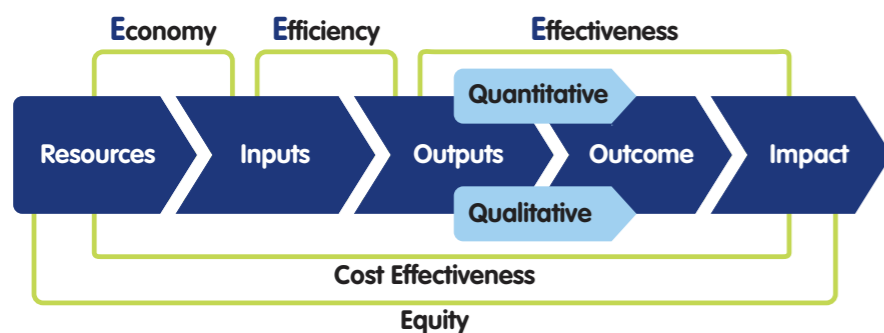
Did you know..?

The VFM Estates Project has established new ways of working on our estates by using best practice to review our services. We started by using a place-based approach to map out what services were already on offer and the partnerships that existed so any gaps in service could be identified. The project has helped to make teams more visible to tenants, review processes, bring about improvements and create a stronger culture of shared responsibility and personal ownership across our estates.

Successes in 2022 / 2023 include:

- Reviewing the lettable standard to make savings.
- Reviewing the voids and allocation process, and void property clearance
- The introduction of guest rooms and hybrid technology in Retirement Housing Schemes
- An ongoing review of repairs processes
- Reviewing our list of local contractors
- The Housing Options & Wellbeing hub

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



On the 01 April 2023, Sara Cosham (above) was recruited as a Project Manager to develop a data strategy for the organisation, refine IT processes, find new ways of managing information across our services, and give staff greater control over the planning and management of maintenance contracts.

It is hoped that a new review of our allocations policy will also deliver significant efficiencies in 2023/2024.

How are we doing?

In 2022 / 2023 we collected **95.78%** of our rent.

73% of our tenants said they were treated fairly and with respect.

The average weekly rent for a property including service charges was **£94.26** (this is the average for all Homes First properties from bedsits to five bed houses). The average weekly rent for all properties in the district was **£253.85** per week (Office of National Statistics).

Did you know..?

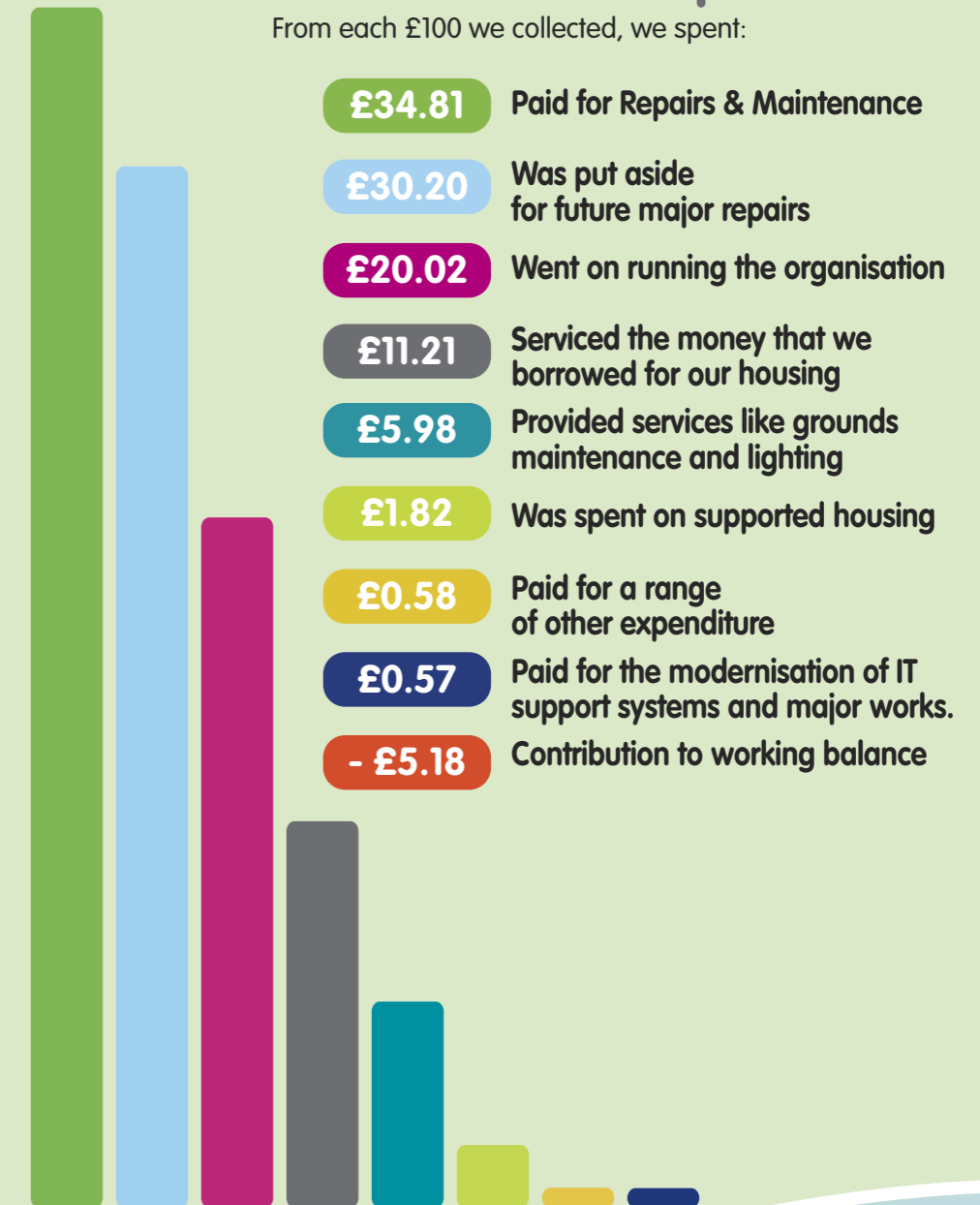
We sustain tenancies by working collaboratively with external partners to maximise tenant income and by focusing on prevention and early intervention. The use of eviction proceedings is a last resort action - there were no evictions carried out between April 2022 and March 2023.

This is how we raised our income...

We spent **£18,566,549** (110%) due to double digit inflationary pressure, energy costs tripling and increased wages. These exceptional circumstances required the council to pay a higher management fee from rent as well as supplement the income with reserves.

How income is spent...

From each £100 we collected, we spent:



Governance and Risk Management

Robust governance is essential to achieving Value for Money, so we have arrangements in place to monitor performance, and challenge risk through Homes First formal governance frameworks. In addition to this, residents can influence decisions, identify areas for improvement and review services through the Tenants of Lewes District, Tenant Involvement & Empowerment (TIE), the Virtual 300 and a range of surveys. Gary Hall – Head of Homes First – oversees the Value for Money risk register in line with government's Code of Practice.

Help and Support available

The Councils have put together information on the support which is updated regularly on our website:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

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

There are also pages on **Benefits and grants:**

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/benefits-and-grants/

And a **Benefits Calculator** giving you an idea of what you might be entitled to:

<https://lewes-eastbourne.entitledto.co.uk/home/start>

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

Telephone: **01273 471600**

Postal Address:

Income Maximization and Welfare,
Lewes District Council, Southover House,
Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB .

The Household Support Grants

If you're finding it difficult to keep warm, buy enough food or pay essential bills, you may be able to get extra help.

Lewes District residents can apply for help from the government's Household Support Fund, which the Council is helping to pay out. You must live within the council's area, be over the age of 18 and be liable for the council tax, rent or mortgage, and be finding it difficult to pay for heating, lighting, water bills or food.

You can check your eligibility on our website: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Type 'housing support grants' into the 'enter search text' field and press return.

Please note, if you have received an award from the Household Support Fund 3 scheme you do not need to apply and will receive an award based on your previous application.

Free school meals

Your child may be able to get free school meals if you get any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if your household income is less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Children who get paid these benefits directly, instead of through a parent or guardian, can also get free school meals.

To find out more about free school meals in East Sussex visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk and type 'free school meals' into the 'search our site' box.



Healthy Start

If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four, the Healthy Start scheme can help you:

- buy healthy foods like milk or fruit.
- get free vitamins.



You need to be claiming certain benefits to qualify unless you're pregnant and under 18.

You can find out more here: www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme (DESSS)

The Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme (DESSS) provides emergency help in certain situations. It does not provide cash or loans but may provide the food or utilities that you need. Your household will usually only be able to receive support from the scheme once in 12 months.

For more information and to apply visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk and type 'Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme' into the 'search our site' box.



Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice have up to date advice pages with information on what help is available:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

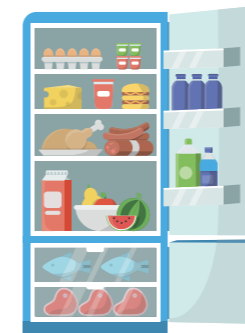
Type 'Get help with the cost of living' into the search box and press return. They also have online chat available, or if you prefer, you can call using: **0800 1448848**.

citizens advice

Help if you are struggling to afford food

You can find information on Foodbanks by looking on the East Sussex 1Space website: <https://1space.eastsussex.gov.uk>

Simply type the word 'foodbank' in the search for box. For more information on Foodbanks see page 20.



Community fridges and pantries

Community Supermarkets, pantries, and larders redistribute surplus or donated food, providing an important function in reducing food waste and improving access to food in the community.

In the Lewes District they are located as follows:

Denton – Havens Food Cooperative's Community Pantry,

2a Thompson Road, Denton, BN9 0RS.

Surplus food, available for anyone to collect.

Telephone: 01273 918226

Email: havensfoodcoop@gmail.com

Newhaven - Community Supermarket (SCDA),

Denton Island Community Centre, Newhaven, BN9 9BA.

Telephone: 01273 517250

Email: enquiries.info@sussexcommunity.org.uk

Peacehaven - Community Supermarket (SCDA),

Community House, Meridian Way, Peacehaven, BN10 8BB.

Telephone: 01273 517250

Email: enquiries.info@sussexcommunity.org.uk

Seaford - SEA Community Larder,

Old Natwest Bank, Clinton Place, Seaford, BN25 1NP.

Email: hello@seafuture.org

The Transfer Incentive Scheme

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

More information and an application form can be found on www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk by using the search term 'cash incentives for downsizing'.

Did you know..?

The Customer Service Team answered **167,000** calls from tenants this year

The team also:

Answered **2900** webchats

Received **79,000** emails

Scanned **15,000** documents and letters



Other useful Information



Ask ELLIS
Your intelligent Chatbot

Our intelligent chatbot ELLIS is available 24hrs a day, 7 days a week and can answer many types of different questions. ELLIS was launched in March 2021 and has answered 87,000 queries, almost a third of which have been out of office hours. ELLIS has achieved a 95% accuracy rate, and when a question can't be answered, customer service staff are still free to chat online between 8.30am and 5pm (weekdays). If you're not able to find what you're looking for on www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk or you don't want to use chat services, there's also a **Contact Us** form available, or you can call: **01273 471600**.

Option 2 – For repairs, including communal repairs.

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

Option 4 – Planning.

Option 5 – Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction

Option 6 – Licensing, including taxis and Licensing Acts

Option 7 – Homelessness Queries

Option 8 – Everything else, including Waste and recycling, street and open spaces, and Council Tenant Rent accounts.

Office opening times.

Reception services are open 6 High Street Lewers between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. A limited service is available for dropping off documents, answering basic enquiries, and signposting to relevant organisations and services.

There is also a phone inside the reception areas you can use to contact the council if you don't have a mobile device available.

If you have no money for food...

Food banks can help if you can't afford the food you need, but you will need a referral from Citizens Advice, a children's centre, a health visitor, or your Housing Senior Caseworker before you can use one. The food bank will provide the essentials you need and sometimes they can also signpost you to support on your income and spending.

There are six Foodbanks operating in the Lewes District:

Fitzjohns Foodbank (Lewes)

Christ Church, Prince Edward's Rd,
(corner of Fitzjohns Road), BN7 1BL.
Opening hours: Monday 1pm - 2.30pm
T: 07395 156873
E: fitzjohnsfoodbank@gmail.com



Landport Foodbank (Lewes)

Tenants Resource Centre, 2a Horsfield Road, Lewes, BN7 2TA.
Opening hours: Mondays 2pm – 2.30pm (except bank holidays)
T: 07793 953446
E: debbietwitchen@gmail.com

Malling Foodbank (Lewes)

Kings Church, Unit 3, Brooks Road, Lewes BN7 2BY.
Opening hours: Mondays 12pm - 1.30pm
T: 07539306585
E: admin@mallingsfoodbank.org

Newhaven Baptist Church Foodbank

Newhaven Baptist Church, Church Hill, Newhaven, BN9 9NA.
Opening hours: Wednesday and Friday 9.30am - 1pm
T: 07825446711
E: jac.parson@newhavenbaptistchurch.co.uk

Ringmer Foodbank

Ringmer Village Hall, Ringmer Library, Ringmer, Lewes, BN8 5QH.
Opening hours: Mondays 11am - 12pm
T: 07782905847
E: foodbank@ringmerbaptist.org.uk

Seahaven Storehouse

Seaford Community Church, 115-117 Vale Road, Seaford, BN25 3HB.
Opening hours: Thursdays 10am – 1pm
T: 07921 844930
E: seahavenstorehouse@gmail.com

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



- For general emergency repairs you can use the main contact number which is **01273 471600** – listen for the out-of-hours message.
- For all gas heating repairs contact BSW Building Services free on: **0800 865 4428**, or by using their landline number: **01444 836036**.
- For heating and hot water breakdowns only, you can call BSW Building Services on: **01444 836036**
- If there is a gas leak you can contact the National Gas Emergency Service on: **0800 111 999**

Other emergency numbers:

Electricity power cut: **0800 31 63 105**

Mains water leaks: **0333 000 0365**

Homelessness – After 5pm or at weekends: **01273 471600**

Other useful numbers:

Non-emergency police: **101**

NHS Non-emergency: **111**

East Sussex County Council: **0345 608 0193** for highways issues such as road maintenance, pavements and street lighting, adult social care, mental health services, schools and education services, grass verge cutting.

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

Samaritans: **116 123**