

**Your safety is our highest priority**

**Can you afford not to be insured?**

**What's happening with repairs?**

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March 2024  
Issue 10

# Tenants' Open Voice

for tenants of Lewes District and Eastbourne

**Did you know about our retirement housing?** See page 9

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# Words from the Chairs...

# Tenants Open Voice Issue 10



## Andy Evans

Chair of the Eastbourne Area Panel and Residents Voice

You'll be pleased to hear that the Eastbourne Area panel continues to support local community groups, and the group recently approved funding for an exciting free five week 'cooking for life' course for tenants in Eastbourne.



The cookery sessions will be run by [communitychef.org.uk](http://communitychef.org.uk) and they'll be taking place at Riverbourne House on Belmont Road in May and June this year. Places are very limited, so if this course is of interest, please call **07766 526217** or email: [office@communitychef.org.uk](mailto:office@communitychef.org.uk) for more information.

January's Residents Voice saw the biggest turnout ever which was really great, and particular thanks must go to Marie Cooper (Interim Property Services Lead), Peter Bowley (Repairs Manager) and Angela Morgan (Asset Manager) for answering all the questions about major works and repairs. Going forward, our members will be involved in revising the communications being published for tenants regarding repair priorities. You can find out about more about repair priorities on pages



The panel also approved funding to repair mobility scooters used by residents in *The Beacon*.

The highlight of the Christmas Eastbourne Area Panel meeting as always was the annual quiz – a big thank you to Pauline for being Quiz Master! Congratulations to Tony, Peter, and Graham (below) who were the



Quizmaster Pauline.

runaway winners, and to the local Foodbank, which benefited from many generous donations which were gratefully received.



six and seven of this edition.

An interesting presentation was also given by Katie Dawkins on the Allocation Policy which is currently under review. Watch this space for more news.

Lastly, if you want to know more about getting involved in Eastbourne, feel free to email me:

[61andyevans@gmail.com](mailto:61andyevans@gmail.com)

**Best wishes – Andy**

## Debbie Twitchen MBE



Chair of the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)

It continues to be a challenging time for all of us due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis which affects the poorest and most vulnerable in our society most acutely. In light of this, the TOLD committee are obviously not happy with a proposed rent increase of 7.7% in April this year, but due to continuing inflation and cost pressures, we reluctantly recognise that some increase is inevitable.

We've been working hard to have the tenant voice heard loud and clear by influencing budget setting for the coming year and have done this by challenging and questioning where appropriate. How the Housing Revenue Account is spent has been a key focus because this comes directly from our rent and it is particularly important tenant priorities are heard and understood.

In other news, over the last year TOLD have successfully allocated £20,000 of community budget funding to a range of projects across the district and recently made donations to six foodbanks who've all been hit hard by increased demand.

TOLD have also influenced a consultation coming soon on the Allocation Policy. TOLD's view is that using a direct let model would reduce re-let times, rent loss, and remove any confusion to tenants. Look out for a consultation coming soon and make sure to make your views known.

You can find out more about TOLD's work on our Facebook page, on our website:

[www.told.org.uk](http://www.told.org.uk)

or by emailing me directly: [debbie.twitchen@gmail.com](mailto:debbie.twitchen@gmail.com)

**Best wishes**

**Debbie**

# Your safety is our highest priority

## Fire Safety Regulations 2022

**H**omes First makes your safety its highest priority, and one vital aspect is conducting regular inspections of fire doors in flats and communal areas.

Fire doors act as a barrier to contain fires and prevent the rapid spread of smoke in corridors. It's now a legal requirement in buildings over 11 metres in height (typically a building of five storeys or more) for us to inspect these doors every year to ensure they are properly maintained and in good working condition. Completing these annual inspections, enables us to promptly identify and deal with any issues with self-closing mechanisms for example. This ensures that fire doors work properly as emergency exits when they're needed the most.

We have employed a contractor called Summit Environmental to help with these inspections and would ask that you give your full cooperation if they contact you to assess a fire door. We acknowledge this might be inconvenient at times, but these inspections are vital for everyone's safety.

All communal areas will have information signs advising you what to do in the event of a fire (see illustration), and we request that everyone reads these to be familiar with the fire evacuation rules for your building.



Please also be aware of the location of your nearest emergency exit, and the designated meeting points outside of the building. Also remember to close all doors behind you as you leave and always use the stairwells and never the lifts. Only return

to the building if the emergency services have given you the all-clear signal to re-enter. If you have limited mobility and require assistance in an evacuation, please let your Senior Caseworker (Housing) know as a priority so a personal evacuation plan can be developed for you.

By making sure that proper maintenance of fire doors is completed and by making residents aware of evacuation requirements, collectively we will achieve the highest level of fire safety in our buildings. We take the Fire Safety Regulations 2022 very seriously because they are essential for your protection, so let's work together to create a safe community for everyone.



## Eden's Mission

**E**den's Mission is a community-based project which aims to promote a healthy and active lifestyle, and the Eastbourne Area Panel recently helped the group continue their good work

with a donation from their community improvement budget. Their free events include a fitness bootcamp every Monday and Wednesday evening at Defiant Sports (The Crumbles) between 6.30 and 7.30pm ; a group for dads affected by baby loss every fortnight on a Thursday from 7.30pm at Morrisons, Hampden Park, and they're also planning a women's well-being group.

You can find Eden's Mission on Facebook and Instagram, or you can email: [edensmissioneastbourne@gmail.com](mailto:edensmissioneastbourne@gmail.com) or call **07496 867022** for more information.



## Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms



The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022 require:

1. **At least one smoke alarm on each storey of your home where there is a room used as living accommodation.**
2. **Carbon monoxide alarms to be installed in any room containing a fixed combustion appliance, except gas cookers. Typically, appliances which are powered by gas, oil, coal, wood, etc., like gas or oil boilers, or log-burning stoves.**

We are required to ensure smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are repaired or replaced once we are made aware and they are found to be faulty. If your alarms are not in working order, please arrange to have the batteries replaced, and if the alarm still doesn't work, or you are unable to replace the batteries yourself or you have concerns about your smoke detectors or carbon monoxide alarms, please contact us by telephoning **01273 471600 (Lewes)** or **01323 410000 (Eastbourne)** where you can speak to an advisor and arrange for a repair or replacement.

# Can you afford not to be insured?

Council tenants don't need to worry about buildings insurance as this is the Council's responsibility and the cost of it is covered by your rent. This means that in the event of a fire, water leak or storm damage the Council will repair any damage to the structure of the property and any fittings such as damaged kitchen units or bathroom fittings.

**Contents Insurance is different** and is needed to protect your personal belongings – items like furniture, household appliances, carpets, and clothes or anything stolen.

## Home contents insurance is important

If something bad happens, the Council is not responsible for the loss or damage of any personal property (whether they belong to you or someone else) no matter how they become damaged. To help our residents, Homes First have teamed up with AVIVA to provide an affordable home contents insurance scheme. 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 annual cost with a monthly Direct Debit for as little as £5 per month.

You can find out more about this affordable home contents insurance package on the website [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://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.



## The Fire

Mr Jones lives with his family in a 3-bedroom house. There was a fire at the property caused by an unattended chip pan. The damage was limited to the kitchen, but it needed a full replacement and all the appliances, and other items in the kitchen were damaged. The Council replaced the damaged kitchen units and cleaned up the affected areas, but Mr Jones was responsible for replacing all the household appliances and other belongings that were damaged at a great personal cost because the family had no Contents Insurance.

## Burst Pipe

Mrs Smith lives on the ground floor, and the water tank in the flat above burst, and her lounge was flooded. The ceiling also came down and her furniture, carpet, TV, and other appliances were all damaged. The Council repaired the leak and reinstated the ceiling because they were responsible for these, but Mrs Smith had to make a claim on her Contents Insurance for all her damaged belongings, including the carpets.

## Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation (DAHA) update

A big thank you to everyone who gave their views on the Homes First Domestic Abuse Policy in our consultation which ended in July 2023. The positive messages we received were much appreciated and the fantastic responses helped us to shape and review our approach.

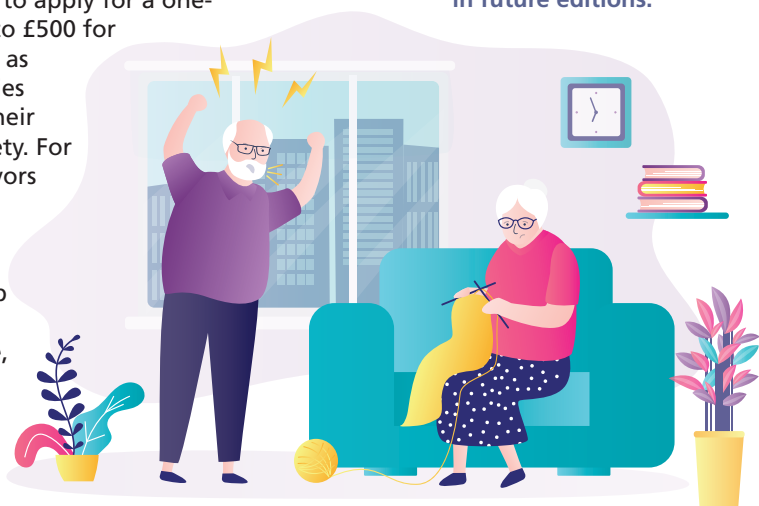
Our Domestic Abuse Policies which were officially launched in October 2023 have created a support framework which helps us work towards the best possible outcomes for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. And alongside, our ongoing work aims to make domestic abuse part of the conversation year-round to ensure our communities are aware of the support that's available to them. Our commitment to helping victims/survivors of domestic abuse is further underlined by our corporate statement to domestic abuse, which can be viewed on the website: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) – search for Domestic Abuse Support.

**£2 million government funding for Women's Aid to help survivors of domestic abuse flee and stay away from abusers.**

This welcome Women's Aid funding will allow domestic abuse survivors, who don't have the financial means to leave their abusers, to apply for a one-off payment of up to £500 for essential items such as groceries and nappies to help them and their children flee to safety. For the first time, survivors will also be able to apply for a further one-off payment of up to £2,500 to help them secure an independent future, by putting down a deposit for rental accommodation for example.

This funding will be delivered through referrals via services that have a specialist understanding of domestic abuse. For more information on referrals for Women's Aid funding visit [www.changegrowlive.org/domestic-abuse-service-east-sussex/info](http://www.changegrowlive.org/domestic-abuse-service-east-sussex/info)

**Please stay tuned for more information on our Domestic Abuse Accreditation in future editions.**





## Don't let DEBT build up until it is too much to cope with...

Many years ago, when I left home and became a Council tenant, my nan gave me some sound advice I've always tried to follow. "Deborah," she said, "whatever you do, always pay your rent and Community Charge (now known as Council Tax) and try not to get into debt by buying things you can't afford." And she was right of course, because keeping a roof over your head is one of the most important things alongside other 'priority debts' that must be paid like the aforementioned Council Tax, gas, electricity, TV licence and many others.

Sometimes people get frightened when letters arrive from credit card providers, catalogues they owe money to, or for unpaid parking tickets to name but a few. However, these should be seen as 'non-priority debts,' and whilst they should never be ignored, the priority debts are the ones that need to be focused on. The others can usually be dealt with by mutual agreement to offer a small sum until you can afford more.

If you have access to the internet, there is a huge amount of advice out there, but Citizens Advice is a good start. Just type 'work out which debts to deal with first' into the search engine on [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) or check out [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org) to get great advice from a trusted source. All the advice agencies are under pressure as demand is high with the cost of living the way it is, but there is help out there.

Don't let debt build up until it's all too much to cope with. If you're in Council rent arrears, try and talk to someone as soon as possible, because ignoring your priority debts won't make them go away. Although financially things have been hard for me at different times of my life, I've never forgotten nan's wise words and they've helped me a lot.

**Debbie Twitchen MBE** TOLD Chair



part 1

The Councils have put together lots of information on help and support on the website – [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) – and this is updated regularly. Simply type 'help with the rising costs of living' into the 'enter search text' field and press return to see the full range of support that's available. There are also pages on benefits and grants you can find by searching 'benefits and grants,' and a Benefits Calculator which gives you an idea of what you might be entitled to.

### Pension Credit

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

### Emergency fuel vouchers

Emergency fuel vouchers are available for qualifying households in Sussex. Vouchers are available with a referral from Citizens Advice in Lewes or Eastbourne.

The vouchers (£28 for a single person and £49 for a family) are for vulnerable residents on limited incomes or means-tested benefits who are facing difficult financial circumstances or have a pre-payment meter.

You can find out more by calling **03444 111 444**.

### Help if you're at risk of being cut off.

Citizens Advice have set up an *Extra Help Unit* – [ehu.org.uk](http://ehu.org.uk) – for people who are vulnerable or at risk of being disconnected by their energy provider. They can help you by raising a complaint with your energy provider for you.

Citizens Advice also have information about other grants and benefits to help pay your energy bill. This includes Winter fuel payment, Warm Home Discount, Grants to help pay off your energy debts and Cold Weather Payments.

### 'Safety net' payments to Lewes District Council residents

Lewes District Council is offering funds to residents on a low income who will miss out on the government's £900 cost-of-living payments. The one-off 'safety net' payment of £400 is available to eligible residents who are struggling to keep warm, buy enough food or pay essential bills. To qualify, you must be in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax reduction but not in receipt of any other means-tested benefit, unless you are also receiving a qualifying disability or carer's benefit. The funding is limited and will be paid out on a first come, first served basis. You can apply through [grantapproval.co.uk](http://grantapproval.co.uk) or call the Lewes District freephone cost of living crisis number: **08081 753990**.

# What's happening with repairs?



Like all services, the Councils are facing unprecedented pressures on budgets due to inflation, which has affected materials and labour costs. In the past, there has been some flexibility when attending to repairs, but unfortunately due to the ongoing pressures we face, we've had to limit our service to essential repairs only.

## What are essential repairs?

We are assessing repairs against our minimum responsibility as a landlord which is defined in legislation as -

- a) Keeping in repair the structure and exterior of the dwelling-house (including drains, gutters, and external pipes).
- (b) Keeping in repair and proper working order the installations in the dwelling-house for the supply of water, gas, and electricity and for sanitation (including basins, sinks, baths, and sanitary conveniences).
- (c) To keep in repair and proper working order the installations in the dwelling-house for space heating and heating water.
- (d) Any repair that contributes to a hazard, as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- (e) Any issues that would be defined as prejudicial to health under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. This includes repairs to resolve issues that are injurious or likely to cause injury to health.

## Priority 1 Emergency – within 24 Hours

### Examples of emergencies include:

- Total or partial loss of gas supply (if not the supplier's responsibility)
- Total loss of heating or hot water
- Total or partial loss of electrics
- Total or partial loss of water
- Water coming from outside the building which can't be contained - from leaking pipes or from a fault in the fabric of the building for example.
- A blocked or unusable drain, toilet, sink, basin, or bath where no other is available.
- Unsafe electrics where there is a risk of shock (e.g., exposed wiring)
- Re-securing/making safe items if they are dangerous, e.g., timber floors, stairs, handrails, kitchen units or temporary repair to a leaking roof etc.
- Security risks, such as being unable to lock your front/back door, or close ground floor windows.
- Lack of smoke alarms (NB battery alarms can be provided as a short-term measure)

***There may be other works considered an emergency, and discretion will always need to be used.***

## Priority 2 Urgent – within 7 Days

### Examples of urgent repairs include:

- Containable water coming from outside - from a plumbing leak or from a fault with the fabric of the building for example.
- Clearing gutters and/or downpipes where they likely to cause more damage.
- A door entry phone not working.
- A mechanical extractor fan in the kitchen or bathroom not working.
- A Replacement shower (when there is no other means of washing, such as a bath).

## What are our repair priorities?

We have four levels of repair priority which you can see here. As a general rule, Priority 1 & Priority 2 repairs will be viewed as essential repairs.

Priority 3 repairs will need to be considered using the essential repair criteria. Those deemed not essential are being put on a non-urgent list for next year.

Priority 4 repairs will be put on non-urgent list to be progressed when budgets permit. Note: tenants with these repair priorities are asked to

advise the repairs service if the issues worsen.

Rest assured, due consideration is always given to tenants with medical conditions or circumstances that mean that they would be at a higher risk of harm should a repair not be undertaken, and a flexible approach is taken when prioritising these issues. For example, if there was damp and mould, and a tenant has pre-existing medical conditions that might be worsened by the presence of mould, an urgent mould wash might be arranged.

## Priority 3 Routine – within 28 days

### Examples of routine repairs include:

- Repairs to kitchen units (other than the emergency repair in Priority 1)
- Repairs to floorboards (unless dangerous and covered under Priority 1)
- Electrical remedial works (other than those causing an immediate risk, which is Priority 1)
- Fencing repairs
- A new cold water storage tank
- Repairs to walls and chimneys
- Outside door and window repairs (other than emergency repairs – Priority 1)
- Repair or replacement, sinks, baths, basins, or taps (other than those considered an emergency)
- New kitchen units/worktops
- New paths (unless reported as dangerous and requiring more urgent attention)
- New gutters and downpipes

## Priority 4 Planned – within 85 days

### Examples of planned repairs include:

- Complete replacement of fencing
- Replacement doors & Windows
- Non-urgent external brick works.
- Replacement Porches



## 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](http://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

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.

## Changes to the distribution of Tenants' Open Voice



From the summer, we'll be sending out Tenants' Open Voice to most tenants by using their email address. This change in approach will help us to save money and allow us to increase the frequency of the magazine. Plus, many of you have made us aware through tenant surveys that we need to do more for the environment by saving paper for example.

However, we also recognise that some tenants prefer a posted copy for many valid reasons. If this is you, simply let us know you want Tenants' Open Voice posted to you by emailing us at: [tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) or by calling: 07595 460334 and leaving a message with your details.



# Help with the rising costs of living

part 2



## flexibus

### Flexibus

Flexibus is a flexible, on-demand rideshare service, for areas with limited or no bus service. Residents can book a Flexibus journey to their nearest town, train station, hospital, and other key destinations. Flexibus operates exclusively for places not served by a regular bus service, and services run 7am to 7pm, Monday to Saturday (not Sundays or Bank holidays). Please note, you can't book a Flexibus journey to travel along an existing public transport route.

To find out more, visit [www.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk) and search for 'flexibus.'



### Warm home check service

East Sussex County Council also provide a warm home check service which is available all year round. It offers advice and support to anyone who struggles to keep warm at home.

Their service includes:

- advice on getting help to pay for heating.
- an assessment of your home to identify how to keep warm.
- small works such as improving insulation or repairing a boiler.
- emergency temporary heating.

For more information about the service and to check eligibility, visit [www.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk) and search for 'keep warm and well'.

### Help with water bills

Southern Water has set up a Financial Hardship Fund to help their customers reduce their water bills or write-off debt. There are three different types of support available:

- Up to 50% one-year bill reduction for customers hit by hard times.
- Debt write-off of up to £2,000 for customers who are back on track with bills, but will never be able to repay their debt
- A grant of up to £1,000 to make improvements to a customer's home.

To find out more, please visit: [www.southernwater.co.uk](http://www.southernwater.co.uk) or call Southern Water on 0330 303 0368.



South East Water have a Helping Hand scheme which offers financial help to clear outstanding balances on water and sewerage bills.

To find out more, please visit [www.southeastwater.co.uk](http://www.southeastwater.co.uk) or call 0800 952 4000



**Water Sure** is for households with three or more children aged 18 and under or who have a person with a medical condition that means they use a lot of water. Residents can find out more about **Water Sure** by calling 0800 952 4000.

### The exceptional hardship payment fund

The exceptional hardship payment fund has been set up to support our most vulnerable customers who have seen a reduction in the Government support which helped to pay their Council Tax liability or are suffering financial hardship due to unforeseen circumstances. You can apply for exceptional hardship payments on the website: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) Search using the words 'exceptional hardship payments.'

### Reducing energy use at home



The Energy Saving Trust offer help to save money on bills at the same time as reducing your carbon footprint. You can find out more on their website: [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)

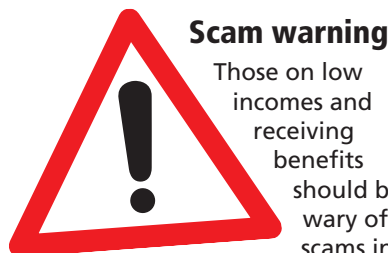
### The British Gas Energy Trust

is an independent charity set up to support families and individuals facing financial hardship and energy debt. You do not need to be a British Gas customer to access help.

You can find out more on their website: [www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk](http://www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk)

### NHS Healthy Start Scheme

If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk. Visit: [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk) to find out more.



### Scam warning

Those on low incomes and receiving benefits should be wary of scams in which fraudsters use the opportunity to try and access personal details. They often pretend to be government bodies, and some are designed to capture your financial details.

On legitimate payments, there will be a reference on a recipient's bank account of their National Insurance number, followed by DWP COL, or the reference HMRC COLS for those eligible through tax credits.



# Did you know about our retirement housing?

## 'Independent living with a sense of community'

Both Eastbourne and Lewes District Council offer retirement housing accommodation for people aged over 60 years in unfurnished flats, studio apartments, or bungalows especially designed for older people. The accommodation is comfortable, convenient, safe, and enables residents to enjoy what Trevor who lives in an Eastbourne scheme calls 'independent

living with a sense of community.'

All the homes have an intercom alarm system with emergency assistance available 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and a Retirement Housing Advisor available to provide well-being checks and signpost to any appropriate support services. Many retirement courts also have optional social activities organised by residents that help to build a strong sense of community and foster lasting friendships.



If you're interested in finding out more about our properties or would like to look at one of our show flats, please contact our friendly and professional team by emailing: [RetirementHousing@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:RetirementHousing@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk), or view our website page: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) and search for Retirement Housing.

## Cash incentives for downsizing your home



The Councils have a very limited supply of family sized accommodation and disability-adapted properties, and we know some of our homes are under-occupied, while at the same time families live in temporary accommodation or in properties which are overcrowded. As a result, we have developed an under-occupation incentive scheme to try and free up properties and make the best use of our housing stock.

The scheme offers Eastbourne Homes Limited and Lewes District Council tenants who give up larger accommodation the chance of cash incentives and in some cases a higher priority for re-housing. Payments are available if you move via the housing waiting list or by mutual exchange (as long as all parties within the exchange move to suitable sized accommodation).

To be eligible for the scheme, tenants must:

- have a clear rent account (or one that would be cleared by the incentive payment available)
- agree to a property inspection to identify any repairs that need to be addressed and / or paid for by the incentive payment if they are a tenant responsibility.

Homes First recognises that the cost of moving has increased over recent years, so we have also reviewed the contribution to removal costs available. Details of the revised policy and the application form can be found on the website – [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) – simply search for cash incentives for downsizing.

If you have any queries or wish to discuss your options, please contact your Senior Caseworker (Housing) who will be happy to provide you with further guidance.

## News about the Hampden Park and Willingdon Trees Area Panel

Unfortunately, the Hampden Park and Willingdon Trees group have decided not to operate as an Area Panel in the future as they are unable to meet the terms of reference relating to Area Panels. However, the good news is that they're looking into ways to continue providing activities like the popular Christmas Fayre in Hampden Park, so watch this space.

A big thank you to all the members, especially Pat Hearn, Angela Kirby, Val Thornton, Carol Carpenter, Margaret Salisbury, The Spencer family, Carol Whale, Hampden Park Shed and the Willingdon Trees Community Centre.

At the final meeting in February, the panel were able to end on a high by donating £300 of the Christmas Fayre proceeds to Warming Up the Homeless and Eastbourne Food Bank.



Hampden Park and Willingdon Trees Area Panel warming up the homeless.

## What are Tenant Satisfaction Measures?

In July last year, the Social Housing Regulation Bill became the law. This requires housing providers like Homes First to be regularly inspected to ensure the health and safety of our residents and their homes. To make this happen, the Government's Regulator of Social Housing has introduced a new system of assessment which uses Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) which we can report to tenants so they can understand how well we are doing. There are 22 TSMs, which cover five main themes. Ten of these, including gas and electrical safety checks and anti-social behaviour, are measured by us, but the others will use tenant perception surveys - a questionnaire used to measure and understand your opinions, experiences, and perceptions regarding our services. If you're contacted to complete a survey, please help us by being honest, as your feedback really helps us to improve all aspects of our service delivery.

The TSM surveys will seek your views of Homes First in relation to your satisfaction:

- with Homes First
- with repairs
- with the time it took to complete a recent repair.
- with your home being well maintained.
- with home safety.
- on how we listen and act on your views.
- that we treat tenants fairly and with respect.
- on how well we keep you informed about things that matter to you.
- with our approach to handling complaints
- with how well we keep communal areas clean and well maintained.
- that Homes First's makes a positive contribution to your neighbourhood.
- with our approach to managing anti-social behaviour.

The information we collate must be reported to the Regulator of Social Housing. We will also be providing the survey results in future Tenants' Open Voice newsletters, which will increase to four editions a year to tie in with the reporting cycle.

## Fraud case shown on the **BBC**

One of the Fraud Team's investigations was shown on the BBC's 'Fraud Squad' series which highlights Local Authority efforts to prevent, pursue and prosecute fraud offences. The case featured involved a man who was charged with two counts of fraud by false representation because he pretended to live in a 3-bedroom Council property and claimed a Right to Buy discount twice for £78,600 and £80,900. The property was returned to the Council, and the man received two 24-month prison sentences (suspended for 24 months).

The Fraud Squad show, which aired on 25 September 2023, can still be seen on BBC iPlayer: [www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer) Just look for Fraud Squad, Series 5, Episode 6.

The case was of particular interest to the BBC because of the level of detail obtained through the use of covert surveillance - an investigative tool strictly regulated by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. The use of covert surveillance by Local Authorities is limited to the prevention or detection of serious criminal offences.

## FRAUD SQUAD

More information on covert surveillance can be found on: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) - simply search for Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

You can report housing fraud anonymously on the website by searching for 'Report Fraud' or call the Fraud Hotline number: **0800 7317039**.

## Four Million Homes

Knowledge and action for change in social housing



Four Million Homes was launched last year to help tenants in the 4.4 million social housing sector homes across England to work better with their landlords with the help of training and access to information. It's hoped that this will empower tenants, so they feel more confident about their legal rights and their landlord's responsibilities.

Training modules are taking place all over the country, and there are free live webinars, and a 'resident sounding board' where tenants can share ideas and influence the campaign as it progresses.

You can find out more about Four Million Homes, book free training and use the sounding board on their website:

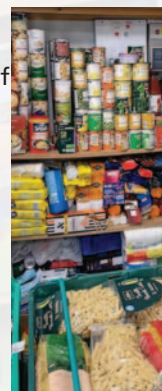
[www.fourmillionhomes.org](http://www.fourmillionhomes.org)

## The importance of Foodbanks

Foodbanks have reported an enormous surge in demand in recent years, as many people living in Sussex are faced with the ravages of the cost-of-living crisis. This means the numbers of those living in acute poverty have been steadily increasing.

Foodbanks can really help if you can't afford the food you need, but to access one you'll usually need a referral from Citizens Advice, a Children's Centre, a Health Visitor, or your Housing Senior Caseworker. The foodbank will provide the essentials you need and sometimes they can also signpost you to support on your income and spending.

You can find out where your nearest foodbank is on [www.1space.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://www.1space.eastsussex.gov.uk) by typing the word 'foodbank' in the keyword search.



# Eastbourne and Lewes District Food Partnerships win national awards!

Sustainable Food Places awards recognise places where individuals, communities and local organisations are coming together to build better food systems. The bronze awards given to Eastbourne and Lewes District reflect the vibrant Good Food Movements that have taken hold across the two areas. Applications for the two areas were put together by the respective food partnership coordinators, featuring a range of different local initiatives across six key action areas: good food governance, good food movement, healthy food for all, sustainable food economy, good food procurement and food for the planet.

"I'm delighted for the Partnership and looking forward to building on this awesome achievement for such a new organisation' - Johnny Denis, Eastbourne Food Partnership Coordinator

'The team at LDFP are so proud to be part of such a creative and committed Good Food movement. This award belongs to all of the brilliant individuals, communities and individuals working across the movement and we're delighted at the opportunity to celebrate each and every one of them."

Lewes District Food Partnership Coordinator **Nancy Wilson**

## Rooted Community Food

Rooted Community Food are a volunteer-centred growing project in Eastbourne that specialise in growing community connections as well as growing delicious sustainably produced fruit and veg. They are committed to sharing their produce with communities in Eastbourne through donations to the network of community fridges. In 2023, alongside donations from other 'allotmenters' at the Gorrington Road 'crop drop', the Rooted team donated 1670kg of food in 2023! They are a great example of Eastbourne's Good Food Movement, bringing together sustainability, inclusivity, and justice in their commitment to better food systems.

*Below: The team at Rooted celebrate the bronze award with Eastbourne Food Partnership director Karen.*



"They're so lovely there and it's always a surprise, you never know what you're going to get so yeah, they are so sweet and so helpful."

*Newhaven Community Supermarket member*

## Seahaven Community Food

Seahaven Community Food run community supermarkets in Newhaven and Peacehaven on a pay-as-you-feel basis. Alongside fruit, veg, bakery, store cupboard and hygiene goods, the supermarkets stock ready-meals prepared with love by volunteers at Denton Island Community Kitchen. The supermarket's friendly team of staff and over 50 volunteers are committed to creating a warm social environment with a community café serving warm drinks, cakes, and soups. This award reflects their commitment to building fairer, more inclusive, and more joyful food systems in Lewes District.

*Above: Lewes District Food Partnership coordinator Nancy celebrates the bronze award with the team at Peacehaven Community Supermarket.*

## You can join in the Good Food Movement too!

To find out more and get involved with groups passionate about growing, visit:

[www.eastbournefoodpartnership.org.uk](http://www.eastbournefoodpartnership.org.uk)

[www.lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org.uk](http://www.lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org.uk)

## The Tenants of Lewes District supporting communities

The Tenants of Lewes District committee oversees a £20,000 fund which is used to support tenant communities across the district. In the last year alone, the committee have approved applications for garden improvements, a community library, solar lighting, benches, and they have also supported local charities. Most recently, £6,845 was given to six Foodbanks operating in the Lewes District on a pro-rata basis to help them manage rising demand due to the continuing cost of living crisis.

If you'd like to know more about the community improvement budget and how to apply, email: [tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)



## Tenant training courses held in Eastbourne

Eastbourne recently hosted two training courses for Eastbourne Homes and Lewes District Council tenants.

The sessions, coordinated by the Tenant Involvement, were designed to enable tenants to better understand Homes First performance information and the workings of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). They were well received by attendees, and it's hoped that tenants will now feel more confident to challenge and question performance and spending so that service delivery improves.



*Performance information training – Nov 23*

## Tenant Scrutiny

It's taken nearly a year, but the Tenant Scrutiny Team have now completed their review of the voids and allocation process. The team have worked hard to produce a detailed report containing 26 recommendations aimed at improving the service to tenants. This will be presented to the Council's senior leadership team in the very near future, after which, progress on improvements will be closely monitored.

The team will be exploring a boot camp style approach for future reviews over two separate days starting in June. If you'd like to really make a difference and join the Scrutiny boot camp, please get in touch by emailing: [tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

*We'd love to hear from you!*

## Eastbourne Consultations news

In November last year, Eastbourne Borough Council's Cabinet agreed to a tenant consultation being undertaken which looked at how housing services would be delivered in the future. The question centred around whether tenants wanted to see services remain under the governance of Eastbourne Homes Ltd or return to being governed by Eastbourne Borough Council. The consultation ended on 16 February, and the results were as follows:

**71% agreed** with a proposal to bring governance of housing services back to Eastbourne Borough Council.

**23% neither agreed nor disagreed** with the proposal.

**5% disagreed** with the proposal to bring governance of housing services back to Eastbourne Borough Council.

Cabinet agreement will now be sought to terminate all existing arrangements with Eastbourne Homes Limited and take back in-house responsibility for the governance of the Council's housing service. Subject to Cabinet agreement, officers will then work with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, existing Eastbourne Homes Board members and tenants to develop new governance arrangements. This would involve a transitional arrangement whilst the dissolution of Eastbourne Homes Ltd is finalised.

## Lewes District tree planting

With help and support from the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) and Lewes District Council officers, Brighton Permaculture Trust\* successfully secured funding from the government's £10 million Urban Tree Challenge Fund to plant trees across the district. Planting more trees is crucial to improve health and wellbeing, connect people with the outdoors, absorb noise, reduce flood risk, lower temperatures through shading, and create green spaces for communities to come together.

After a great deal of work identifying suitable areas, and

consultation with local residents, in February and March around 100 trees were planted in Lewes, Peacehaven and Seaford which is fantastic news for residents and wildlife.

*\*Brighton Permaculture Trust is a charity that promotes greener lifestyles and sustainable development through design, run by experienced volunteers and permaculturalists.*



## HOMES FIRST wants to find and help tenants who might be affected by Digital Inclusion...

Digital inclusion means:

- Being able to use computers, smart phones, and the internet.
- Having access to the internet via a broadband connection, wi-fi or mobile.
- Having services available that meet everyone's needs.

Our work on digital inclusion began with technology upgrades to provide Wi-Fi access in communal lounges at retirement schemes. However, pilot projects in Eastbourne and Lewes had mixed success, so we started working closely with TechResort – a company who provide a digital inclusion service. We began by commissioning a report which showed that over 10% of our retirement housing residents are digitally excluded by having no email, IT, or mobile phone. As a result, we plan to purchase laptops and printers for our residents to use and organise training to make sure residents are not digitally excluded. We hope this will help residents access essential services, arrange medical appointments, order prescriptions or food online and apply for benefits. TechResort have already run two training sessions with college students to support tenants, and we hope to secure funding for monthly drop-in sessions across our schemes where tenants can get help with any issues.

There are a range of resources available to those facing digital

tech  
resort

inclusion challenges, and we've put together a toolkit to help our staff signpost residents to any free training and support services that are out there. If you'd like more information on digital inclusion, ask your Retirement Housing Advisor or contact: [tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)



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



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Eastbourne Homes Ltd



Follow us on X:  
@LewesDC  
@ebnhomes

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.