



Homes First Retirement Housing Tenant's Guide



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The Homes First Retirement Housing Service

The Retirement Housing Service is provided Monday to Friday (not including bank holidays) 8.30am to 5.00pm, and is delivered by a dedicated team of staff called Retirement Housing Advisors. Each Retirement Court has two team members who work across 4 – 6 different sites. Your dedicated staff member will work based at courts with a staff office several times a week and when they are on annual leave you will see their buddy officer. If you live at a court or bungalow scheme with no staff office, you may not see your Retirement Housing Advisor as often, but they will be visiting your scheme each week to undertake necessary estate inspections and undertake resident visits. You may contact your Retirement Housing Advisor at any time during the working hours above, and they will be happy to assist you with your tenancy questions. Your home will be fitted with an emergency lifeline system, and you will be provided with a mobile pendant. This means should you require help you can summon it wherever you are in your property at the push of a button.

Tenancies in retirement housing are independent living tenancies, meaning there are no care services or support provided. You must be able to manage and make decisions about your tenancy and maintain your home to a good standard. The Retirement Housing Advisor role is to ensure our buildings are safe and well maintained, our properties are let, and all tenants have well-being checks. They can advise you on tenancy matters relating to your home and signpost you to other agencies should you need help or support.



Moving to retirement housing has allowed me to remain living independently and helped me gain a new sense of community.

Retirement Housing Advisor Role

Your Retirement Housing Advisor will undertake the following duties in relation to your tenancy, your property, and the court your home is based on.

- Assess all housing applicants to ensure retirement housing is right for them before they are offered an empty property.
- Conduct viewings of empty properties, and the retirement court with prospective tenants and family/support workers.
- Undertake signing your tenancy meeting with new tenants.
- Undertake Tenancy Sustainment Assessment Meetings. These will happen in the early weeks of your new tenancy and then every 12 months thereafter. These are a regular obligation, and we may need to undertake meetings more frequently if there has been a change in your circumstances - i.e. relating to requiring care/support in the home. These meetings will discuss whether you have the independent skills to maintain your tenancy and home alone, or if you require assistance with aspects of this. If this means retirement housing is no longer right for you, your Retirement Housing Advisor will signpost you to more appropriate housing solutions.
- Monitor 'I'm Ok' button pressing between 8.30am and 10.00am Monday – Friday (excluding bank holidays). This is an obligation of all tenancies to press your 'I'm Ok' button so your Retirement Housing Advisor knows you are well. You can be contacted in an alternative way for your well-being checks if you prefer.
- Maintain an open-door policy when working from offices except when dealing with confidential meetings or telephone calls.
- Conduct testing of the lifeline alarm system and fire/smoke alarm testing in your home and on the court every 3 months.
- Undertake weekly building checks, fire safety inspections, and report any communal repairs and health and safety issues as and when necessary.



- Undertake weekly inspections of the cleanliness of communal areas such as the laundry and lounges.
- Keep only relevant information regarding residents in-line with GDPR, and ensure this is updated on all systems as soon as possible following any change to information. We do share appropriate information with other agencies such as the police or fire service when necessary.
- Ensure court noticeboards are kept up to date with relevant and timely information relating to the council, staff, the retirement housing service, and court detailed information.
- Take guest room bookings and monitor the cleanliness and general upkeep of the guest rooms.
- Make referrals and signpost to appropriate agencies such as Adult Social Care, Occupational Therapy, mental health services etc, when you need support or assistance.
- Make referrals to housing/tenancy related support if you need assistance reading, writing, or completing forms.
- Assist in medical emergencies by contacting your GP, ambulance and next of kin. In an emergency your Retirement Housing Advisor can arrange food deliveries, prescription collection and other services for a short period of time until a support service/relatives can provide this.
- Encourage, advise, and signpost to social clubs to organise activities or events to enable interested residents to take part.
- Undertake investigations into low level Anti-social behaviour reports on the courts and make appropriate referrals to other agencies or Homes First tenancy resolution team where appropriate.



- Review and monitor CCTV, where located on courts.
- Make safeguarding referrals to Adult Social Care, GPs, or mental health services where there is a concern about the safety or well-being of a resident.
- Undertake an annual property inspection of your home. This will usually occur at the same time as your Tenancy sustainment assessment and advance notice will be given.

Lifeline Alarm System

All retirement housing properties have an alarm system and pendant operating from them. The alarm system is linked to a Lifeline call provider and is answered 24 hours a day, every day of the year. You will be provided with a pendant which you can wear around your neck or a wrist. This means you always have a push button in your home on your person in case of an emergency or a fall. All new tenants are provided with a pendant. Where a pendant is lost or damaged, there is a recharge cost for replacement.

“Knowing the Lifeline team are available in an emergency at the push of a button gives me and my family peace of mind.”

When you push your lifeline alarm button - either on the speaker unit in your home or on your pendant - a call goes through to our Lifeline call provider. They aim to answer as quickly as possible, and most calls are answered in under a minute. The call operators will quickly establish with you what the problem is and then send the appropriate help, such as emergency services or your next of kin if you just need reassurance. In normal office hours they may contact your Retirement Housing Advisor as they are locally based to respond to you if the issues are not a medical emergency.

The friendly Lifeline team are there to help you, they will always follow up with a



message to your Retirement Housing Advisor so they can contact you to check on your well-being. If you are locked out of your flat, please pull the cord or push the button on any speech unit in any of the communal areas or ask a neighbour to do so. The Lifeline team can call your key holder such as a family member, and during working hours they can call your Retirement Housing Advisor. Out of normal office hours, they will call a Homes First representative who will attend and let you into your property.

Please do not try to contact your Retirement Housing Advisor by telephone or email out of hours as they will not receive these messages, if you need assistance out of normal office hours always pull your cord or push your button on the lifeline unit or pendant.

Use of communal rooms

Communal rooms at the courts can be used for a variety of activities such as:

- Coffee mornings
- Exercise classes
- Darts
- Bingo
- Meals
- Meetings
- Community events
- Private functions such as a birthday party or a wake



Any activity or event must be approved by the Retirement Housing Team so please speak with your Retirement Housing Advisor before organising anything.

As these are communal spaces which all residents pay a service charge for, any resident is allowed to use the space at any time regardless of an organised event. However, it is hoped residents will respect others and use discretion if it has been agreed the room can be used by a family for a funeral etc. for a brief time. Rules around health and safety apply at all times, there is no smoking and no pets allowed in communal rooms. On occasion, Homes First as the landlord will use the communal rooms for staff meetings and training purposes, residents will be notified in advance of when the room is out of use for these purposes. On occasion, other organisations may wish to use our facilities - this will only be granted if residents are in agreement, for example, Citizen's Advice may wish to run a surgery drop-in or Age Concern may wish to run some occasional sessions.

It's great to know I'm surrounded by friendly neighbours, but I can close my door and enjoy my own space whenever I want to.

Communal laundry

Some courts have a communal laundry room with several washing machines and tumble dryers available for residents' use. Homes First **does not** provide laundry powder or liquid, and residents must ensure they leave the machines in a clean and tidy state. Heavily soiled items and pet bedding should not be cleaned in communal machines.

Getting involved with Homes First decision making

There are several ways you can become involved in decisions that affect your home, the area you live in, and Homes First policies and procedures for housing and retirement housing services:

- **Weekly drop-in meetings** – Your Retirement Housing Advisor will hold a weekly surgery for one hour every week in the communal lounge of every court. If you do not have a communal lounge at your property, you are welcome to join the meeting at your nearest court with a lounge, just speak to your Retirement Housing Advisor about the time and date. These meetings allow the Retirement Housing team the ability to share essential information about your court or the service, and allows residents to raise any areas of concern they may have regarding the service or the court.



The meetings help build a sense of community, we feel involved in the decisions and it's good to know your neighbours have everyone's best interests at heart.

- **6 Monthly meetings** – These meetings are arranged twice a year at every court with a communal lounge. For bungalow schemes with no communal lounge a meeting will be arranged at your nearest site. A range of officers from across Homes First attend, and additionally, our contractor partners responsible for cleaning, grounds maintenance, fire alarms etc aim to make themselves available also. This is an opportunity for residents to let us know where the service is performing well - or not - so that we can respond to your feedback and make improvements where necessary. If there are health and safety concerns raised at the meeting, the Retirement Housing Advisor and Surveyor will conduct a walkabout on the site after the meeting and residents are welcome to join to point out any issues for discussion/action.

- **Social clubs** – Some courts have their own social club committee, they are a formally constituted group of residents living on your court, who organise events and activities at the site. They are an inclusive group with a Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary, with audited accounts looking to boost social activities for you and your neighbours. If you are interested in setting up a social club, please speak to your Retirement Housing Advisor; there are a set of guidelines any social club must abide by to have the support of Homes First.



- **Repairs feedback** – You will be contacted after every repair you report to ask for feedback on how well it has been completed, how professional the operatives were, and if you were satisfied. It is important to us to get this essential service right first time, so, please give us your feedback as we use this to improve our repairs.
- **Consultation on refurbishment and court improvements** – If your site is due to have any major works or a refurbishment programme, Homes First will consult all residents and support you through the period of works with progress updates. There will be choices for residents to make on paint colours, carpet colours, curtain styles etc.

- **Retirement Housing Forum** – Each court can elect a representative from their site who works with the Retirement Housing Team staff to consider how we can improve the Retirement Housing Service, and review overall satisfaction with how Homes First function as a landlord. The representative is expected to attend 4 meetings per year and speak to their neighbours at their court about any matters that affect them around their tenancies which they feel need resolving with Homes First for consideration. They also act as a point of contact to review notices and communications before they go to the wider tenant base, they review policies and procedures, and help us to procure new contractors for contracts which are due for tender.
- **Community Improvement Bids** – There is money available each year in the form of a budget the Retirement Housing Forum process. Different courts can put forward ideas to their Retirement Housing Advisor who can discuss with all residents whether they approve of the request. If all agree a proposal, an application can be made by residents to the Retirement Housing Forum for funding for any items they may need for their site - such as garden benches, extra plants or for a special club or event to hold an activity that helps residents.



- **Formal residents' groups** – We also have a number of formal residents' groups across Homes First for all tenants to participate in. Details can be found on our website, or you can contact our helpful Tenant Involvement Team. These include Eastbourne Residents' voice and area panels, Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD), Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Panel, Tenant Scrutiny Team, the Virtual 300, and we also have informal focus groups and surveys to understand residents' views.

Service charges

You will be charged weekly rent for your tenancy, and in addition to the rent charge there is a service charge for services to your property and court. You will receive a full breakdown of the rent and service charge elements when you sign your tenancy and then every March thereafter. You may request a rent statement at any time from our Account Management team. Please ask for advice about this from your Retirement Housing Advisor.

If you have a low income and need help and support to cover the costs of your rent and service charge, you may be entitled to Housing Benefit or Universal credit. Some elements of service charge can be covered by benefits, these are called **Eligible service charges** and some elements are not covered by benefits, these are called **non-eligible service charges**.

Eligible service charges – these charges can be covered by benefits.

- Retirement Housing Advisor service
- Door entry system maintenance
- Communal areas cleaning and communal window cleaning
- Laundry facilities
- Lifts
- Communal heating, water, and electricity
- Grounds maintenance
- Caretaking service only Eastbourne areas

Non-Eligible service charges – these charges will **not** be covered by benefits; you will need to arrange to pay these charges even if you do receive benefits.

- Gas, water, and electricity in your own property
- Lifeline service

I love living in retirement housing because it gives me the best of both worlds. I can be as independent as I want, or join in the activities. Best of all I feel safe and secure.

Communal garden maintenance

Some courts have communal gardens or areas of grass and shrubs surrounding them which do not form individual gardens, these areas need to be maintained. The council employs contractors to undertake this work. The contractors cut the grass at different frequencies throughout the year dependant on grass length and weather.

Shrubs and hedges are pruned a few times a year. If you have any concerns about the grounds maintenance, these should be reported to our Customer Contact Centre on Tel. 01323 410000, on our Report It App, or via the Council's website. Please also speak to your Retirement Housing Advisor.



Many bungalows come with their own gardens; these are the responsibility of the tenant to maintain to a good standard. If you are struggling to manage your garden, you should speak to your Retirement Housing Advisor.

Cleaning of communal areas

Those courts which have communal areas such as hallways, lounges, and laundries need to be cleaned, the size of your court will depend how frequently this is completed. All courts will have at least a weekly clean, some more often. Your Retirement Housing Advisor can explain the individual service at your court. The cleaning is provided by a contractor of the Council.

The areas cleaned include:

- Entrances and hallways
- Corridors and staircases
- Lifts
- Communal lounge/kitchen
- Communal WC/bathroom
- Guest room
- Laundry
- Bin store
- Office

If you have any concerns about the cleaning standards or cleaning contractors, please speak to your Retirement Housing Advisor.

Repairs and maintenance

It is the tenant's responsibility to ensure their property is kept in a good state of repair, this includes reporting repairs to Homes First in a timely manner. Repairs are classed as 'emergency' or 'non-emergency', which means they are responded to by different timescales. Emergency repairs are attended to as quickly as possible, and non-emergency repairs may take some time to be completed. Most repairs will be dealt with directly by contractors the Council employs to undertake repairs to your home. In some circumstances, a



Maintenance Surveyor from the Homes First Property Services team may need to visit your home to inspect the issue, and decide the best course of action before instructing a contractor about the exact works to be completed. If you are unsure of the definitions of emergency and non-emergency repairs, please speak to your Retirement Housing Advisor. Our repair contractors will provide you with an appointment for when they will visit your home to undertake the necessary repair.

To report a repair, please call our Customer Contact Centre on Tel. 01323 410000, you may also use the reporting a repair form on the councils' website for non-emergency repairs. You can use this telephone number 24 hours a day to report a repair. If you require a heating repair, there is a different number for our heating engineer BSW freephone Tel. 01444 836036. You can also speak to our lifeline call provider by pulling your cord or pressing your lifeline button to report a repair out of normal working hours.

If you see a repair is required in a communal area such as a leak on the corridors, please speak to the Retirement Housing Advisor, who will ensure this is reported and attended to. If you see a communal repair out of normal office hours, please report this yourself in the usual way listed above.

After every repair you will be contacted to give us your views about how it was completed and how satisfied you are. It's important to us to hear when we've done well - and not so well - so we can improve our services.

Dealing with anti-social behaviour

If you are in immediate danger from anti-social behaviour or crime, please get to safety and call 999 and ask for the police. If you witness a crime being committed, please call 999 and ask for the police or pull your lifeline cord/press button and explain what you have witnessed. Never get involved in an incident, you should not put yourself at risk - if you are able to safely observe, please do so; it may be helpful to write this down to share accurately with the police later. Please contact your Retirement Housing Advisor to let them know about any incident you have witnessed at your court or property.

If you wish to report crime anonymously you can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

If you are involved in anti-social behaviour at your court or with your neighbours, in the first instance you should report this to your Retirement Housing Advisor. They will investigate your report, speak to the other parties involved, and work with you to resolve the issue. Most anti-social behaviour in retirement housing is low level and generally involves disagreements between neighbours over gardens or pets etc. We have a helpful mediation service which works with residents to resolve such problems. If a nuisance persists, or there is serious anti-social behaviour, your case will be escalated to a Senior Retirement Housing Advisor or our Tenancy Resolution team. This team deals with more serious or long standing anti-social behaviour, which may result in enforcement action against a resident's tenancy. You will be expected to keep a log of all incidents, and may be involved with working with other agencies such as noise pollution officers and the police.

Complaints or compliments about Homes First Retirement Housing

If you have a complaint about any of the Council's services which cannot be dealt with by your Retirement Housing Advisor, please report it directly to our Customer Contact team. Complaints must be submitted in writing, this can be done via a simple form on our website www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk, by post to Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG or by email at customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk. We have a specialist Customer Experience team who will deal with your complaint and will aim to investigate and respond within 10 working days however this may take longer depending on the nature of the complaint. Any positive comments you have about our services are very gratefully received and shared with our staff team. You may contact any of the Retirement Housing Management team - their pictures and contact details are on your communal noticeboard.