

**Community  
Payback**

**What is Mediation?**

September 2024  
Issue 12

# Tenants' Open Voice

for tenants of Lewes District and Eastbourne

**What is  
Pension Credit?**



**'Skyvac'  
unblocks  
gutters**

## Community Pop-Ups

**Making a difference!**

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HOMES FIRST



# Words from the Chairs...

# Tenants Open Voice Issue 12



## Debbie Twitchen MBE

*Chair of the  
Tenants of Lewes  
District (TOLD)*

I'd like to start by reminding everyone about the Universal Credit migration that's still taking place. If you're receiving benefits, please look out for your Universal Credit Migration letter to avoid problems later on, because ignoring it could stop your payments!

The TOLD committee continue to be very busy representing tenant interests. We successfully lobbied the Council to provide more help to tenants struggling in the cost-of-living crisis, and as a result in September £24,000 will be distributed to local foodbanks in the Lewes District. This is important because most of the people needing food live on our estates. Recently we've also been meeting with Councillor Mark Slater (Cabinet member for tenants and those in housing need) to influence the Council's business planning and make sure that tenants get their fair share of any available resources.

We will be holding our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 7 November, and

everyone is welcome. At this meeting, a new committee of twelve tenants will be elected for the next 12 months, so if you'd like to stand for one of these important voluntary roles, and make a difference, I'd love to hear from you. I'll be honest, it's a commitment and not everything we try to do goes to plan, but I can look back with pride and say that we've achieved a great deal over the years.

Tenant Involvement are also recruiting for a new Tenant Service Improvement Panel (TSIP) which will comprise Lewes and Eastbourne tenants. This group will look at a range of topics and report their findings back to TOLD (Lewes) and LET (Listening to Eastbourne Tenants). Having the two groups working together will hopefully help us share the work and be even more effective in the long run.

If you'd like to know more about these voluntary roles, email : [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) for an informal chat and more information.

You can also find out more about TOLD's work on our Facebook page or by emailing me directly: [debbietwitchen@gmail.com](mailto:debbietwitchen@gmail.com)

*Best wishes*

**Debbie**



## Andy Evans

*Member of LET  
(Listening to  
Eastbourne Tenants)*

I'd like to start by saying goodbye to Eastbourne Homes Ltd, and hello to our new governance structure headed up by Eastbourne Borough Council. These are exciting times, and I'm really looking forward to being involved in LET which will represent all Eastbourne Borough Council tenants. LET will initially oversee the community improvement budget and review the criteria for funding so we can focus on making a difference to the areas where you live. So come and talk to us and keep those applications coming!

I'd love as many tenants as possible to be involved in the new governance arrangements in Eastbourne, because in

these money stretched times, it's more important than ever that tenant voices are heard. The new housing regulations and tenant satisfaction measures can only help with this, and I'm happy that we'll be working alongside Lewes tenants as part of the new Tenant Service and Improvement Panel (TSIP) to keep an eye on performance, share ideas and improve services to tenants.

It was great to see so many officers out at the Community Pop-up held in Etchingam Road in June. I was really impressed with how everyone pulled together and worked so hard to clear weeds, clean bin areas and fill three skips with rubbish! I believe it's important for Council staff to be seen out and about on the estates, as it gives tenants the opportunity to talk about the issues that matter to them, so I'll be pushing for more of these pop-ups to take place in the future.



If you think your area needs one, please get in touch. If you'd like to know more about getting involved in LET or TSIP, please email: [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk). They'll happily have an informal chat with you so you can find out more, but if you prefer, email me: [61andyevans@gmail.com](mailto:61andyevans@gmail.com)

*All the best*

**Andy**

# Community

# Pop-Ups

The new Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (TIAS) came into force on 1 April 2024, replacing the old Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. It contains the biggest changes under the new consumer standards and requires Homes First to foster good relationships with tenants and commit to being open about accessing services, raising complaints, influencing decision making, and being held to account.

To support our work on the new consumer standards we completed a review of the complaints we've received and used this important tenant feedback to help us programme community pop-up events to address the issues raised.

Several areas were considered for community pop-ups, but the final locations were chosen after speaking with tenants and neighbourhood teams, looking at

survey results, and several site visits. Over two days in June, around thirty Estate Services officers and Mears workers came together to run community pop-ups in Etchingam Road, Eastbourne (11 June) and in Hanson Road, Newhaven (13 June). The teams worked tirelessly on both days to make a real difference to the areas by clearing rubbish, tidying, and washing bin stores, erecting signage, litter picking, and weeding. There was also a rubbish amnesty in both areas which filled five skips!



It was also great to see many tenants visiting our gazebos to discuss a range of issues and thank us for the work - some even rolled up their sleeves and helped us which was marvellous! The two events were viewed to be a great success by all concerned and made a visible difference to the areas as you can see from the photos. Later in June we ran a much smaller pop-up at Lee Court in Newhaven which was co-ordinated by the local housing officer. This event was arranged in direct response to tenant complaints about anti-social behaviour and repairs. A gazebo was erected in the car park and many tenants came out in the sunshine to talk first hand to officers and the local police about the problems they'd been experiencing. More community pop-ups will be organised in the future, and once again we'll use tenant feedback and tenant satisfaction measure results as a guide to make sure resources are targeted effectively and reach the places they're most needed. If you think your area warrants a community pop-up, please let us know by emailing: [tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)



## What is Community Payback?

Homes First will be working in partnership with the Community Payback scheme in the future on projects to benefit our local communities. In the Lewes District and Eastbourne, the scheme is delivered by the Probation Service who supervise the unpaid work that offenders do to 'pay back' to the community for their crimes. The main priority is the protection of the public, so each offender is carefully assessed before they are assigned to any project. This assessment looks at an offender's criminal and personal history, the crimes they committed and the risk they pose to the public. Offenders would never be allowed to carry out the work if they are considered a risk to

the public. Whilst they work, offenders wear orange jackets marked 'Community Payback' so that local people can see they are paying back for their crimes.

Magistrates and Judges can order someone to do between 40 hours and 300 hours of Community Payback at a minimum of six hours per week.

Work that can be done includes:

- Graffiti removal
- Street clean-ups
- Ground clearance
- Recycling projects
- Building maintenance



- Landscaping and gardening projects
- Improvements to park and community facilities
- Environmental preservation programmes

If you have any suggestions for payback work in your community, please email: [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

# Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Social Housing Regulation Bill requires Councils to be regularly inspected to maintain the health and safety of residents and their homes. To make this happen, the Government's Regulator of Social Housing introduced a system of assessment in April 2023 which uses Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) that can be reported to tenants in a way that makes it easier to understand how we are doing.



ES FIRST

There are two types of survey:

- **Perception survey**

Acuity calls a random sample of tenants each quarter to ask 12 questions to measure and understand your opinions, and perceptions regarding our services.

- **Transactional surveys**

Acuity calls a random sample to ask about your actual experience of a service transaction for repairs, major works, complaints, or anti-social behaviour

The surveys take about 10 minutes to complete and if you're selected at random you will receive a call from **01273 093 939** (a Brighton Area code) between 9am and 8pm from Monday to Friday. Don't worry if you miss the call because they'll leave a recorded message.

If you have any questions or concerns about the surveys, or you would prefer not to receive a survey call, simply email: [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) and we'll do our best to help.

Homes First has commissioned a company called Acuity to complete TSM surveys with tenants in the Lewes District and Eastbourne so we have data on your opinions of, and attitudes towards, us (your landlord) and the services we provide.

## Consent to share personal information

Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council are data controllers who collect and process personal information about you in order to provide services, and in order to do this we collect and share certain

information with 'third parties' such as Mears, our repairs contractor, or in this case Acuity Research and Practice.

The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires that data controllers provide certain information to people whose information (personal data) they hold and use, and a privacy notice is one way of providing this information. You can

see our privacy notice on the website by searching using the key words 'privacy notice' in the search our website box. Alternatively, it can also be found on pages 56 – 58 of the Tenants Handbook.

## The Complaints and Feedback Team

### What we do it and why we do it

The Complaints and Feedback team manage complaints coming to Homes First. They also look after data gathering for Disrepairs claims, Freedom of Information requests, Housing Ombudsman complaints and housing related MP enquiries. The team works hard to improve all aspects of complaints management across all our services, but we are mindful that staffing vacancies over the last quarter has affected our complaint handling performance.

### What's new

The new Housing Ombudsman's code of practice for complaint handling requires all landlords to appoint a Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) on their Governing Body. In Eastbourne, Cllr Peter Diplock (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness) will take on this role, and in Lewes, Cllr Mark Slater (Cabinet Member for Tenants and those in Housing Need). You can find out more about the Housing Ombudsman's work on their website: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

In the future we will meet the Councillors and Service leads on a quarterly basis to review complaint numbers and performance, but most importantly to look at what we can do better and agree how to go about it. We will also give tenants the opportunity to comment on the process where possible so if this is of interest to you, don't hesitate to get in touch with us by emailing: [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)





Lewes District Council

In Q1 24/25, just over six out of ten tenants (62%) were satisfied with the overall service provided by Lewes District Council. This is a drop from 68% in the quarter before. Despite overall satisfaction with repairs and maintenance increasing slightly this quarter, other repairs satisfaction areas saw a fall in satisfaction.

NOTE: Green arrows are an improvement, red arrows are a deterioration.

### Overall Satisfaction

Last Quarter **68%** ↓ **62%**



Quality of home  
Last Quarter 75%  
**71%** ↓



Well maintained home  
Last Quarter 70%  
**63%** ↓



Safe home  
Last Quarter 75%  
**74%** ↓



Repairs - Last 12 months  
Last Quarter 69%  
**66%** ↓



Time taken - last repair  
Last Quarter 63%  
**62%** ↓



Repairs & Maintenance  
Last Quarter 60%  
**61%** ↑



Communal area clean  
and well maintained  
Last Quarter 61%  
**57%** ↓



Positive contribution  
to neighbourhood  
Last Quarter 58%  
**58%**



Handling of  
anti-social behaviour  
Last Quarter 60%  
**50%** ↓



Easy to deal with  
Last Quarter 65%  
**62%** ↓



Listen and acts  
Last Quarter 51%  
**58%** ↑



Kept informed  
Last Quarter 71%  
**75%** ↑



Treated fairly and  
with respect  
Last Quarter 76%  
**74%** ↓



Complaints handling  
Last Quarter 19%  
**29%** ↑



In Q1 24/25 overall satisfaction in Eastbourne fell to 68% from the 73% recorded in Q4 23/24 which reflects the trend in Lewes. Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance in Eastbourne fell from 69% in Q4 23/24 to 58% this quarter, but other feedback showed improvements.

### Overall Satisfaction

Last Quarter **73%** ↓ **68%**



Quality of home  
Last Quarter 77%  
**70%** ↓



Well maintained home  
Last Quarter 71%  
**60%** ↓



Safe home  
Last Quarter 76%  
**67%** ↓



Repairs - Last 12 months  
Last Quarter 72%  
**76%** ↑



Time taken - last repair  
Last Quarter 71%  
**76%** ↓



Repairs & Maintenance  
Last Quarter 69%  
**58%** ↓



Communal area clean  
and well maintained  
Last Quarter 74%  
**71%** ↓



Positive contribution  
to neighbourhood  
Last Quarter 73%  
**67%** ↓



Handling of  
anti-social behaviour  
Last Quarter 63%  
**68%** ↑



Easy to deal with  
Last Quarter 69%  
**66%** ↓



Listen and acts  
Last Quarter 59%  
**59%**



Kept informed  
Last Quarter 76%  
**75%** ↓



Treated fairly and  
with respect  
Last Quarter 72%  
**67%** ↓



Complaints handling  
Last Quarter 4%  
**15%** ↑

Last year the Tenant Scrutiny team which is made up of Eastbourne and Lewes tenants reviewed the Void and Allocation process in Homes First. In meetings that took place over four months, the team examined tenant feedback, procedures and processes and other information before producing a detailed 23-page report containing many recommendations. This was presented to senior managers and in January this year a service improvement plan was put together to drive improvement. Since then, all 20 recommendations are in the process of being actioned and nine have been completed! These include improvements to communications between staff and to tenants, changes to the void checklist, better information for tenants moving into an empty home, a smoother and more transparent candidate selection process, and an understanding that some flexibility and sensitivity to tenant circumstances is needed in the moving process.

This year, the Tenant Scrutiny team decided to try a new approach to their



reviews using a bootcamp style. **Bootcamps** are designed to provide a fast-paced, immersive experience alongside a strong sense of community and collaboration. And so it was in June that the Tenant Scrutiny team met at a central location in Seaford for two full days to look in detail at the damp and mould procedures delivered by Property Services.

The subject was chosen by the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) and Residents Voice (Eastbourne) in response to tenant feedback and the rise in complaints being received by Property Services about damp.

Day one of the bootcamp involved a complete immersion in survey results, tenant feedback, complaint letters, existing procedures, and processes. Then key staff were selected for interviews and questions drawn up to dig deeper. On day two the interviews took place after which the findings and themes that had emerged in the review were collated.

Although the experience was certainly intense and fast paced the boot camp approach was deemed a great success. Everyone involved, including the staff who facilitated the sessions, and those interviewed, welcomed the change as it proved easier to keep abreast of matters and retain information, 'stay in the zone' and enjoy the camaraderie that the days also offered.

A service improvement plan has already been produced which will be implemented over the coming months. This will include an annual gutter clearance programme for blocks of flats after the Scrutiny Team noted that many cases of damp and damage to property can be caused when overflowing gutters are not cleared.

To supplement this work, Mears (Maintenance Contractor) will be using a 'SkyVac' machine (pictured left), which can easily unblock gutters up to a height of three storeys.

If you think your gutters need clearing, please call the **Repairs Service** on **01273 471600** (Lewes) or **01323 410000** (Eastbourne).

Tenant Scrutiny highlights tenant power in action and shows what a difference involving tenants can have.

If you'd like to be involved in the next Tenant Scrutiny bootcamp review, please get in touch by emailing: [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) so we can arrange an informal chat.



# Is your home too **BIG** for you now?



**We're here when you're ready to downsize and we'll offer you a cash incentive.**

**Homes First** also help with removal costs or replacement floor coverings up to £1,250. In some circumstances we can even provide up to £400 for a packing service!

On top of the cash incentives being offered to Lewes District Council or Eastbourne Borough Council tenants you could also take the opportunity to:

- move to a location you prefer
- reduce your household bills
- avoid the 'bedroom tax', if you are of working age
- move into accommodation with easier access to support services
- help a family move out of overcrowded or temporary accommodation.

Under the scheme you may also be given higher priority for re-housing, giving you a wider choice of alternative properties to choose from.

To find out more about the updated scheme, visit our website:

[www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/cash-incentives](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/cash-incentives)

Call 01273 471600 (Lewes) or 01323 410000 (Eastbourne)

Email: [customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)



## You said, we did...

Many of you have told us that using the term 'Senior Caseworker' to describe front line workers in the housing team doesn't really fit the bill. We've listened, and we'll be using the term **housing officer** to describe this key role in the future.

**Housing officers** are there to provide support and advice to residents on a broad range of tenancy related matters. They can also link you up with other agencies in cases where more specialised help is needed and make referrals to local foodbanks. Housing officers are very busy and hardworking and often out and about on the estates so if you don't get an immediate response to a query, please be patient. Housing Officers manage geographical 'patches' and look after all tenancy related matters and more in their given area.

### • Your Lewes District housing officers

<b>Caroline Sharp</b>	working Wednesday to Friday	in Newhaven area
<b>Louisa Tucker</b>	working Monday to Wednesday	in Seaford area
<b>Curtis Bell</b>	working Full time	in Landport Estate and Peacehaven area
<b>Gina Hadfield</b>	(on maternity leave until January 2025) but work being covered by other team members Tuesday to Thursday	Rural areas
<b>Rebecca Long</b>	working Full time	Lewes town area
<b>Team leader: Richard Said</b>		

### • Your Eastbourne Homes housing officers

<b>Vacancy</b>	– being covered by other team members Tuesday to Friday	in Central Eastbourne area
<b>Lisa Cole</b>	working Full time	in Langney area
<b>Ade Akerejola</b>	working Full time	in Hampden Park East area
<b>Nikkee Houghton</b>	working Full time	in Old Town area
<b>Team leader: Joanne Smith</b>		

You can reach your housing officer by calling **01323 410000 (Eastbourne)** or **01273 471000 (Lewes)**.

Alternatively, you can email: [customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)



## Tenancy audits

**H**omes First are developing a programme of tenancy audit inspections which involve a member of the housing team visiting you to complete a short questionnaire and check your photo ID and proof of residency. Housing officers will always show their photographic identification before asking to enter your home, but if you have any concerns, just get in touch.

These visits are important because we want to make sure we're delivering the right services and support that's based on an accurate assessment of the needs of the tenants living in our properties.

The visits will also give you the chance to speak about any issues you might want to discuss and help us to identify any property related concerns. Officers will also want to see all the rooms in your home and the garden areas and maybe take photographs. Sometimes we might 'cold call' if we are in the area, but usually we'll arrange appointments in advance which can be rearranged if they're not convenient. Please note, that if we're visiting you already for another reason, we might ask to carry out an audit to avoid inconveniencing you at another time.

### Please help us by allowing access.

It's very important that you give us access for these inspections for the reasons explained. Denying access is a breach of your tenancy conditions, and refusing access could give us no option but to take enforcement action.

# Keeping your Home Safe



As your landlord, we have a legal responsibility to make sure your home complies with health and safety regulations and is safe for you to live in. This means that sometimes we have to visit and carry out important checks.

## Gas Safety Check/Service (LGSR)

A Gas Safety Check / Service is needed every year, and Property Services will send you a letter with an appointment for this check to be carried out. If the appointment isn't convenient, simply call using the number on the letter to rearrange the appointment.

## Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICR)

The Council is also required to carry out electrical inspections of homes and communal areas every five years. If this is due, you will receive a letter with an appointment, which you can change if it's not convenient just like the gas check.

To complete the inspection, access is needed to every room so all electrical sockets, switches and any appliances that we have installed can be checked. The electrician will also need to see the

consumer unit (fuse box) so make sure this is clear and accessible.

These inspections are vital for your safety, and make sure that the electricians in your home are safe to use and working correctly and efficiently.

## Fire Doors

Another vital aspect of ensuring safety is the regular inspection of fire doors, which in some instances are individual flat entrance doors. Fire doors act as barriers to confine fires and prevent the rapid spread of smoke through corridors. If a building is over 11 metres high, it is now a legal requirement that fire doors are inspected every year. This allows us to quickly deal with any damage or issues with self-closing mechanisms, so the fire doors remain fully functional as emergency exits when they are needed the most.

We have employed a company called Summit Environmental, to carry out the fire door inspections, so if your building qualifies you will be contacted via letter with an appointment for your block. If you cannot keep the

appointment, as before you can easily change it.

## What happens if you refuse access?

If you do not allow us reasonable access to carry out safety checks, we will apply to the courts for an injunction to gain access. This action is costly, and the £1,600 fees incurred would be re-charged to the tenant concerned.

Refusing to give access to carry out a gas safety or electrical safety checks is also a breach of the tenancy agreement, and puts you, your family and your neighbours at risk.

## Electrical Safety

- Always keep a torch handy for electrical emergencies.
- Before you call your supplier, check that you have credit on the meter and that your bill has been paid. If there's a power cut the streetlights and your neighbour's lights will also be off.
- If there's a water leak in your home or from another property and it affects your electrics, do not use the affected electrical points, and if possible, switch off the electric circuit at the fuse box. If you are unsure about the circuit, switch everything off.
- If you smell burning or there are damaged or exposed cables and connections, do not use the appliance, and if possible, switch it off.

Contact the Council repair contact centre as soon as you can:  
Eastbourne – **01323 410000**  
Lewes – **01273 471600**



## If you smell gas at home

### If you smell gas at home, you should:

- Turn off your gas supply at the meter.
- Don't turn any electrical switches on or off because this can cause a spark, and an explosion if there is a lot of gas present.
- Do not use your mobile phone indoors as this could also cause a spark.
- Do not smoke or use a naked flame.
- Open all your doors and windows.
- Go outside and call the National Grid's 24-hour helpline on: **0800 111 999**





# Mediation

Homes First is supporting tenants to resolve neighbourhood issues through mediation.



## What is mediation?

Mediation is a form of dispute resolution where two or more people involved in a disagreement are helped to understand each other and find a solution. Trained mediators can help tenants clarify issues, explore solutions, and negotiate agreements. The mediators function as facilitators, helping people to work out a way forward that is realistic, practical, and workable. The decision-making rests with the parties involved and the mediation process is entirely voluntary.

## What are the benefits of Mediation?

- Mediation is confidential, and all meetings are conducted in private.
- Mediators are impartial and do not take sides.

- Mediation empowers people to deal with their own problems.
- You are in control and can end the process at any time.
- Mediation avoids long lasting hostility.
- Mediators can meet at a neutral venue or speak on the telephone.
- Mediators can arrange meetings at a times that suit you, and make as many return visits, as necessary.

**If you'd like to talk about mediation, speak to your housing officer.**

## Conflict Coaching One-to-One support

If mediation is not possible, you can ask for one to one support to help you deal with neighbourhood issues, without involving your neighbour. You can find out more by calling: **Mediation Plus (Eastbourne) 01424 446808** or: **BHIMS (Lewes) 01273 700812.**

# Leaseholder News

We have around 280 leaseholders in the Lewes District and 650 leaseholders in Eastbourne. In Eastbourne there's a Leaseholder Panel which meets quarterly, and we're trying to create something similar for Lewes leaseholders if there's interest to do so. The panels are voluntary groups who we consult with on leaseholder matters with the joint aim of driving continuous improvement.

For example, the Eastbourne Leaseholder Panel recently reviewed the paperwork we send out with reconciliation accounts and suggested some simple but effective changes to improve and simplify the paperwork.

We are currently working on the 2023/24 accounts reconciliation which should be with leaseholders very soon. The reconciliation compares the estimated or interim charges invoiced against the actual costs incurred. We then issue an invoice or a credit note depending on the outcomes.

Please remember, when making service charge payments, make sure you use the details on the reverse of the invoice you receive. For Lewes leaseholders, these details changed from 1st April 2024.

The easiest way to contact the Leasehold Team is by email to: [leasehold@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:leasehold@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk).

For telephone queries, call: **01323 410000** (Eastbourne) or **01273 471600** (Lewes)

Last of all, if you're interested in joining a Panel please get in touch!

## Councillors to consider first round of 'unavoidable savings'

Cabinet councillors at Eastbourne Borough Council will be considering immediate spending cuts and operational changes to achieve extensive budget savings. The authority has repeatedly warned that the costs of homelessness and temporary accommodation placements are causing an unprecedented strain on Council finances, and this has led to a national campaign calling for government support. Despite including over £3m of savings in the 2024/2025 budget,

additional savings of over £2.7m are needed. The focus of the savings is on discretionary services, the areas of work the Council isn't required to provide, as opposed to statutory services that the Council must provide by law.

A consultation on the savings is taking place so please make your views known. You can find the consultation on the website – [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) – by using the keywords 'savings consultation' in the search our website box.



# What is Pension Credit?



## Pension Credit

is a benefit that 2.58 million older people are entitled to, but only around 4 in every 10 of those who qualify actually make a claim.

The amount of Pension Credit you could get will depend on your circumstances, but it's always worth checking if you qualify. As well as a useful pension top up, Pension Credit can also be a gateway to other benefits, so even if you are only entitled to a small amount it's worth claiming, because other benefits could be unlocked. You have nothing to lose by applying, and potentially a lot to gain, and if you've previously been turned

down, you can still make a new claim each year.

### Making a claim is really easy.

You can call for free on **0800 99 1234** or visit [gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim](https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim). If you would like to apply by post, you can download the application from the website, or ask a local voluntary organisation like Citizens Advice to call and ask the Pension Service to request a paper form for you.

It can be helpful to have the following details to hand before you get started:

- your National Insurance number
- your bank account details

- information about your income, savings and investments
- information about your pension (if you have one)
- details of any housing costs you have (such as a mortgage, interest payments or service charges)
- your partner's details, if you have a partner.

With average energy bills likely to go up by £150 per household due to the energy price cap increasing by 10% in October, it makes sense to try and make a claim before the winter.

## PINCH POINTS: Have your say

### Get involved in a project to improve local support systems!

Are you passionate about making sure local people get the support they need? Do you sometimes struggle to make ends meet?

Lewes District Food Partnership is looking for local people to use their experiences to build fairer, more compassionate support systems.

The Pinch Points project builds on the success of last year's Feeling the Pinch project, where community members shared their experiences of the cost-of-living crisis.

Pinch Points workshops will start in the Autumn, held in four easy-to-access locations across Lewes District.

#### Participants will:

- Share a meal together
- Discuss their experiences and ideas for improvement
- Receive £20 for each workshop they attend

A previous project participant said: "I feel more connected, more hopeful, in touch with other people and the community."

Do you want to get involved? Email Nancy at: [info@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org](mailto:info@lewesdistrictfoodpartnership.org)



## Update on grounds maintenance

Right across the UK, grounds maintenance teams are under huge pressure. The main reason for this is the particularly wet spring. During this time, the high levels of rainfall made it too damp to mow the grass and with the warmer weather that followed, there has been very rapid growth in grasses and other vegetation. This is something that local authorities are struggling to keep pace with.

It is also true that many grounds maintenance contractors, including Idverde, are trying to bring in more resource to manage the situation. However, recruiting to these roles is proving challenging.

Council officers have been meeting Idverde regularly and have left their senior team in no doubt about the seriousness of our concerns. Idverde has acknowledged that levels of service provided have fallen below the high standards we expect and assured us that it is doing everything within its power to address the current under-performance.

We are monitoring the progress made and will not hesitate to take further action if the promised improvements are not achieved.



# Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation (DAHA) – UPDATE

Since my last update, work has continued to develop on our journey towards accreditation from DAHA. The policy which tenants helped us to develop went live in October 2023 and all our residents now have clear information about the support they can expect from the Councils if they are experiencing domestic abuse.

In January this year, the Councils published a corporate statement which set out their position on all domestic abuse risks and put steps in place to ensure that we are improving our knowledge and response to domestic abuse to give the best possible outcomes to victims/survivors. Our website has also been updated with detailed information for victims/survivors, and now includes a section for those who have identified themselves as perpetrators of domestic abuse either in their current or previous relationships.

In the future, I'll be organising awareness sessions for our involved tenants to promote the work and

embed knowledge, and I have created a promotional campaign with a QR code linked to our website.

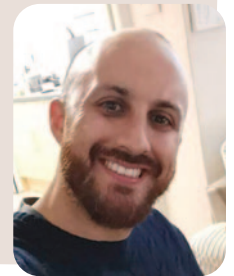


daha

We continue to prepare for the DAHA assessment later this year, which has involved collating case reviews, the submission of evidence and our continued development of Domestic Abuse procedures. DAHA put a successful outcome down to a combination of good policies, procedures, training, and promotion, as well as evidence that the approach to Domestic Abuse is found embedded in the practice of all staff. We hope that the areas highlighted, and our continued work will put us in a strong position for success in achieving the goal that began nearly three years ago.

Should you wish to know any more please do get in touch:  
[ray.brickley@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:ray.brickley@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

Best wishes  
**Ray Brickley,**  
 Housing Manager – Domestic Abuse



EXPERIENCING ABUSE  
 IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

SCAN ME



HELP IS AVAILABLE

## Four Million Homes

Knowledge and action for change in social housing



The Four Million Homes campaign was launched by the government in April 2023 with the aim of empowering tenants living in the 4.4 million social housing sector across England to engage more effectively with their landlords. Since then, by providing free training and the information, the project has helped many tenants have a better understanding of their legal rights and the responsibilities of their landlord. There have also been certificated training modules taking place across the country alongside free live webinars.

The Four Million Homes website: [www.fourmillionhomes.org](http://www.fourmillionhomes.org) – is a great place to look for:

- Guidance on issues including repairs and maintenance, anti-social behaviour, dealing with your landlord, and much more.
- Free training events across the country (Note: book places now for sessions running until February 2025).
- Free monthly webinar sessions where issues relevant to social housing are tackled.
- Training sessions as videos, which you can watch at any time and in any place.

The Four Million Homes campaign has been running in support of the Social Housing Regulation Bill, and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) which are discussed on page 5. Going forward, Homes First will continue to take every opportunity to promote and share information on the campaign and :

- Consider the tenant voice in every decision
- Ask tenants what they want and listen
- Judge success by outcomes and by seeing a difference
- Be accessible and easy to talk to

If you'd like to know more, simply email:  
[tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

You can also find Four Million Homes across social media:

**Instagram** – [www.instagram.com/fourmillionhomes](http://www.instagram.com/fourmillionhomes)

**X** – [www.x.com/4millionhomes](http://www.x.com/4millionhomes)

**Facebook** – [www.facebook.com/fourmillionhomes](http://www.facebook.com/fourmillionhomes)

**Vimeo** – [www.vimeo.com/fourmillionhomes](http://www.vimeo.com/fourmillionhomes)

**LinkedIn** – [www.linkedin.com/company/fourmillionhomes](http://www.linkedin.com/company/fourmillionhomes)

**Youtube** – [www.youtube.com/@fourmillionhomes](http://www.youtube.com/@fourmillionhomes)



# A new approach to governance



Work has been done with members of Residents Voice and the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) to develop a new governance structure. It's hoped the new approach will provide a clear split between strategic work (service improvement planning, finance, policy, new developments, and performance information) and operational service improvement (working with staff to improve repairs, cleaning services, garden maintenance etc.). We'll also be using our survey information explained on page 5, complaints, and tenant feedback to help us review services and make improvements as demonstrated by the Tenant Scrutiny successes.

In Eastbourne, a new tenant group has been created to replace Residents Voice and the EHL Board. The name for the group, which was chosen by tenants, is LET (*Listening to Eastbourne*

*Tenants*). In the future, LET will work with TOLD on strategic work, and be supported by another new group called the Tenant Service and Improvement Panel (TSIP), who will look at the operational work. It's believed the new governance structure will help share the work more effectively between involved tenants and allow more time to dig deeper and drive performance improvements that benefit everyone. If you'd like to have your say, make a difference, and help make sure the tenant voice is heard in decision making at every level, please feel free to email: [tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](mailto:tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) for an informal chat about the options available.

## HOMES FIRST

### How do I contact Homes First?

There are many ways you can report issues. One way is to report online using the website:

[www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk)

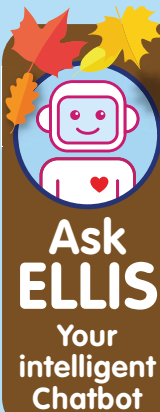
You simply need to type 'report a problem' in the enter search text field and press return to see many options. The online forms are a quick and easy way to report many things:



- 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.

If you prefer, you can type in a key word. For example, for maintenance issues, type in the word 'repair' and press return.

Chat with ELLIS and online chat are available on the website during office hours. 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.



If you prefer to call us, you can use:

**01273 471600** (Lewes tenants)

or **01323 410000** (Eastbourne tenants).



Lewes District Council



## Are you insured?

Personal items such as furniture, household appliances, carpets, and clothes or anything stolen are not covered by Council Buildings Insurance,

so tenants need their own insurance to protect and replace these belongings if something bad happens.

To help make this more affordable, Homes First have teamed up with Aviva (the UK's largest insurer) to provide a home contents insurance scheme for our tenants and leaseholders which offers exclusive rates and a range of optional extras, including cover for accidental damage. There's no excess to pay if you need to make a claim, and you can spread the cost of the insurance with a monthly Direct Debit from as little as £5 per month.

You can find out more about the scheme on the website: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk) by using the keyword 'insurance' in the search box or look on comparison sites to find a 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.



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

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



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