

Stowe Place,
Newhaven

New laptops help
digital inclusion

June 2024
Issue 11

Tenants' Open Voice

for tenants of Lewes District and Eastbourne

Fire Safety
at Home

Community
Payback
Scheme

In memoriam
Terry Smart

Don't forget
to contact us by
1st September

if you would like a copy
of Tenants' Open Voice
by post!

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Don't forget to subscribe

by 1st September for a posted newsletter if you'd like one.

See page 2 for more information

Words from the Chairs...

Tenants Open Voice Issue 11



Andy Evans

Chair of the Eastbourne Area Panel and Residents Voice

The Eastbourne Area Panel has been very busy lately and we've been able to support a broad range of community initiatives and projects. One I have a personal connection to, are the free cooking classes we helped fund at Riverbourne House. This is because during lockdown I completed an online cookery class that really helped my mental health, and my cooking skills! The panel have also done great work supporting Community Wise – www.communitywise.org.uk - by helping to fund a Heating Control Management System that has significantly reduced their energy bills and enabled them to spend more of their money on the work they do. We also helped the Old Town Community Library by purchasing some laptops for their 'digital inclusion' work – something you might have read about in the last edition of Tenants' Open Voice.

Free cooking classes at Riverbourne House

Reducing energy bills with Community Wise



New laptops at Old Town Community Library



I'm very excited to hear that community pop-ups have been taking place again this year with more resources to make a bigger impact. I wholeheartedly approve of the pop-ups because it's really important that Council officers are out and about and seen on our streets. It's also critical that more tenants get involved in the Eastbourne Area Panel and Residents Voice, because as you can see, we can make a difference. Lastly, I'd like to encourage everyone to take a look at the Four Million Homes website - www.fourmillionhomes.org It's packed full of information and

there's lots of free training available. It's a great resource with guidance and training on our rights as tenants and how to stand up for them.

If you want to know more about getting involved, contact Tenant Involvement – tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk or feel free to email me - 61andyevans@gmail.com.

**All the best
Andy**



Debbie Twitchen MBE

Chair of the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD)

I'd like to begin by drawing everyone's attention to the Universal Credit migration that's taking place. If you're receiving benefits keep a look out for your Universal Credit Migration letter as ignoring it could stop your payments. There's more information on the next page, so if you are on any benefits, please take to look to avoid any problems down the line. TOLD has been remarkably busy lately and with some good outcomes. We successfully lobbied the Council to provide more funding to local foodbanks which have been struggling with increased

demand brought about by the cost-of-living crisis, and we were pleased to hear that some help has been agreed and is on the way – details to follow. TOLD remains firmly against the sale of Council homes, and we recently became aware of 4 homes sitting empty due to the extremely high cost of bringing them back into a lettable state for tenants. The Council have decided to sell the 4 homes and TOLD have agreed to this on the understanding that the money from the sales is used to replace

them with homes offering the same number of bedrooms, and that any left-over money be used for new council homes, and not for those already in the pipeline.

I hope the replacement homes that are developed meet the high standards demonstrated by the new Stowe Place flats which I was really impressed by when I saw them recently. The 21 new homes have been built on the site of a former police station, and all of them were spacious and of a high standard. With almost 1.3 million households in England currently on housing waiting lists, we desperately need more, and TOLD will continue to push for every opportunity to be taken to build more Council homes with realistic rents in the Lewes District. You can find out more about TOLD's work on our Facebook page, on our website: www.told.org.uk or by emailing me directly: debbietwitchen@gmail.com

**Best wishes
Debbie**



Stowe Place, Newhaven

Some benefits and tax credits are ending

and being replaced by



Managed migration

Universal Credit is a single monthly payment to help with your living costs and provides support if you are working and on a low income or are looking for work.

The following benefits and tax credits are ending and being replaced by Universal Credit:

- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Look out for a letter called a **Universal Credit Migration Notice** from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) explaining what you'll need to do and when.

It is important that you do not do anything until you receive your Universal Credit Migration Notice letter, because this tells you when you need to move to Universal Credit. You will not be moved automatically, and you must claim Universal Credit by the deadline date given in the letter. The deadline date for applying is 3 months from the date the letter is sent out.

Look out for your letter, as ignoring it could stop your payments.

If you have a question about claiming Universal Credit or have a problem getting online, call the number in your Universal Credit Migration Notice letter.

If you currently receive tax credits, you'll still need to claim by the date in your letter even if you've just renewed your tax credits.

Many people will be eligible for at least the same amount on Universal Credit as their previous benefit, but if your Universal Credit entitlement is less than your previous tax credits or benefits, then you may be eligible for financial protection when you move to Universal Credit. This additional amount is known as 'transitional protection'.

Your current benefits will end as soon as you submit your claim for Universal Credit. You will not be able to go back to your existing benefit once you have claimed.

YOUR VOTE MATTERS



The General Election – Thursday 4 July

For the UK Parliamentary Election on 4 July, you will need to take Photo ID.

Which forms of ID can I use to vote?

You can use any of the following forms of ID to vote:

- Passport
- Driving licence (including provisional license)
- Blue badge
- Certain concessionary travel cards
- Identity card with PASS mark (Proof of Age Standards Scheme)
- Biometric Immigration document
- Defence Identity Card
- Certain National Identity Cards

For more information on the forms of photo ID which will be accepted, you can visit the Electoral Commission website: electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID.



Changes to the way Tenants' Open Voice is delivered to you

This month we delivered Tenants' Open Voice by email to those tenants with an email address and posted out the remainder as usual. The change, which was approved after tenant feedback and after consulting the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) and Residents Voice, will help us to save money, support the environment and mean we can produce the magazine more frequently.

From September this year, we'll only be sending Tenants' Open Voice by email unless you have requested to be added to postal mailing list.

If you'd like to continue to receive a posted copy of Tenants' Open Voice, that's fine, but you must let us know by emailing:

tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk by 1st September.



Four Million Homes

Four Million Homes was launched by the government to support the 4.4 million tenants in social housing sector homes across England to work better with their landlords. It is hoped that empowered by training and information, tenants will feel more confident about their legal rights and what their landlord is responsible for. Training modules are being delivered all over the country, and there are also free online training and webinars.

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

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

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

What are Tenant Satisfaction Measures?

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) cover five main themes aimed at helping to improve standards for people living in social housing. They form part of a new system which allows you to see how well we are performing so you can hold us to account. There are 22 TSMs, and ten of these, including gas and electrical safety checks and anti-social behaviour, are measured by us, while the others use surveys to measure performance.

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures capture your views on:

- Homes First.
- Repairs.
- The time it took to complete a recent repair.
- Your home being well maintained.
- Home safety.
- How we listen and act on your views.
- How we treat our tenants with fairness and respect.
- How well we keep you informed about things that matter to you.
- Our approach to handling complaints
- How well we keep communal areas clean and well maintained.
- Homes First's making a positive contribution to your neighbourhood.
- Our approach to managing anti-social behaviour.

A company called Acuity has been commissioned to conduct the surveys, to help us understand how you think we are performing. The surveys take about 10 minutes to complete and if

acuity
making sense of housing

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.

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.

In future, Tenants' Open Voice will be published four times a year at the end of each quarter in March, June, September, and December so we can report the TSM results to you shortly after we receive them. The Regulator of Social Housing also requires us to report all the TSM results for the whole year to them annually, and Homes First submitted these to The Regulator in June.

The 'good news story' for this edition of Tenants' Open Voice is that most of the TSMs in the last Quarter 4 (January to March 2024) have improved with an average overall satisfaction score of 68% (Lewes) and 73% (Eastbourne) given by our tenants. Complaints handling provided the poorest result with a 4% satisfaction score in Eastbourne and 19% in Lewes.

The Customer Experience Team works hard to try to resolve complaints within a reasonable time, but this is not always possible as we rely on information from other teams. We are working with Service Leads to deal with complaints more efficiently by agreeing any actions that we need to do and by when with the customer before closing cases.

In recognition of the satisfaction scores and issues around closing complaints in the required time, we have:

- Carried out systematic review of repair complaints management with the Property Services Lead and Assistant Director.
- Delivered a training session to key staff in Property Services.
- Reviewed the internal process for managing repair complaints with a focus on closing complaints with a promise that action will be undertaken.

Service Improvements arising from Quarter 4 results:

- a review of complaints has led to a pop-up event on a Newhaven estate around repair and anti-social behaviour issues.
- a revised approach to Tenant Scrutiny has been piloted to address complaints about the management of damp and mould.
- Clarification of our guidance around complaints has started.
- a review of essential repair guidance on the website has taken place.
- we have reviewed our approach to data management in line with Housing Ombudsman's feedback.

If you have any questions about the TSM results for quarter 4 in Eastbourne or Lewes, or about the surveys, please get in touch by emailing: tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk.





Lewes District Council

Overall Satisfaction 68%

In Q4 23/24, almost seven out of ten tenants (68%) are satisfied with the overall service provided by Lewes District Council.

The highest levels of satisfaction are for tenants being treated fairly and with respect (76%), the quality of the home (75%) and the provision of a safe home (70%).

However, some measures have satisfaction levels below 60%: Lewes District Council's positive contribution to neighbourhood (58%) and listening to and acting on views (51%). The lowest satisfaction is for complaints handling at just 19%.



75%

Quality of home



70%

Well maintained home



75%

Safe home



69%

Repairs - Last 12 months



63%

Time taken - last repair



60%

Repairs & Maintenance



61%

Communal area clean and well maintained



58%

positive contribution to neighbourhood



60%

Handling of anti-social behaviour



65%

Easy to deal with



51%

Listen and acts



71%

Kept informed



76%

Treated fairly and with respect



19%

Complaints handling



Overall Satisfaction 73%

Just over seven out of ten tenants (73%) are satisfied with the overall services provided by Eastbourne Homes in Q4 23/24. Even more are satisfied with the quality of the home Eastbourne Homes provides (77%), safe home and kept informed (both 76%) and upkeep of communal areas (74%). A similar number of tenants are satisfied with the repairs service (72%) and the time taken to complete repairs (71%), but slightly less are satisfied with the general repairs and maintenance service (71%). However, just 59% are satisfied that Eastbourne Homes listens to tenant's views and acts upon them. The lowest satisfaction is for complaints handling at just 4%.



77%

Quality of home



71%

Well maintained home



76%

Safe home



72%

Repairs - Last 12 months



71%

Time taken - last repair



69%

Repairs & Maintenance



74%

Communal area clean and well maintained



73%

positive contribution to neighbourhood



63%

Handling of anti-social behaviour



69%

Easy to deal with



59%

Listen and acts



76%

Kept informed



72%

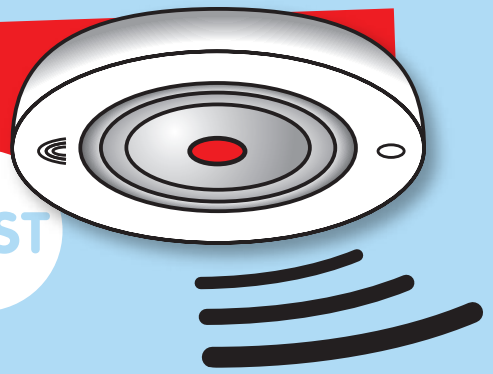
Treated fairly and with respect



4%

Complaints handling

HOMES FIRST



Homes First believes that the best way to keep tenants safe from fire is to help you understand common risks and reduce them in your home. Here are some firefighters' top tips to keep you safe...

Do you know how you would escape in an emergency?



An escape plan could save your life. In a smoky, scary atmosphere, it's easy to freeze, panic and become disorientated. By planning and practising how you will escape with the whole family, you can be more confident about a safe escape.

Cooking and fire safety



Around 60% of fires in the home start in the kitchen. With bubbling pans, open flames and maybe a little one or pet underfoot, kitchens are potentially dangerous places:

- Don't leave cooking unattended on the hob or grill – if you have to leave the kitchen, turn off the heat.
- If you're very tired, have been drinking alcohol or are taking medication that might make you drowsy, it's safer not to risk cooking.
- Loose clothing can easily catch fire, so take care not to lean over a hot hob, and always keep tea towels and cloths away from the cooker and hob.
- Try to keep the oven, hob, cooker hood, extractor fan and grill clean – built-up fat and grease can ignite and cause a fire.
- Double check the cooker and hob are turned off when you've finished cooking.
- Check toasters are clean and not placed under kitchen cabinets or close to anything that can catch fire.

- Never put anything metal in the microwave.
- Always keep an eye on children and pets in the kitchen: don't leave them unsupervised; put matches and lighters away; and keep saucepan handles out of reach.

What to do if clothes catch fire?

If clothes have caught fire, don't run. Try and remember 'Stop, Drop, Roll' – which means:

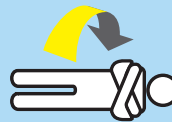
Stop – don't run, you'll make the flames worse.



Drop – lie down on the ground at once.



Roll – in heavy fabric or a fire blanket to smother the flames, though just on the ground will help.



Smoking and fire safety



Smoking is a major cause of fire fatalities, and we all know the health risks.

- It's safer to smoke outside, but make sure cigarettes are put out.
- Never smoke in bed, and never throw cigarette butts from a balcony as you can cause a fire elsewhere.
- Use deep, heavy ashtrays, and never leave cigarettes unattended.
- Empty ashtrays with care and make sure everything is put out.

- Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- Never smoke if you use healthcare equipment or an air flow pressure relief mattress. If you use skin creams consider using fire retardant nightwear.

Vapes may cost less than cigarettes but they're still a fire risk. E-cigarettes or vapes need to be used safely.

- Always buy e-cigarette devices from reputable retailers, follow the instructions, and only use the charger that came with the device.
- Always make sure that e-liquids are out of reach of children, and never leave e-cigarettes charging unattended or on overnight.
- Never use vapes or e-cigarettes close to medical oxygen or where emollient creams or airflow mattresses are being used.
- Don't leave items continuously on charge.
- Avoid storing, using, or charging batteries in extremes temperatures and protect them from damage.
- Never let your battery come into contact with metal items such as coins as this can cause a short circuit and explosion.

FREE Home Safety visits

Even little things can make your home much safer for you and your family. By booking a Home Safety Visit you can have your home checked



East Sussex
Fire & Rescue Service

over by a fire safety specialist who will also talk to you about your individual needs and safety concerns.

To book a FREE Home Safety visit, contact:
East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

Telephone: **0303 999 1000**

Email: **enquiries@esfrs.org**

**HOME
SAFETY
VISIT**



Being in conflict with your neighbours can be really difficult

Homes First works with Mediation Services to offer a comprehensive range of mediation, and conflict resolution services. We use recognised independent organisations in the Lewes District and Eastbourne who have helped hundreds of people resolve many distinct kinds of disputes, and helped neighbours and families from all kinds of backgrounds improve communication and relationships.

What is mediation?

Mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution where two or more people involved in a dispute are helped to understand each other and recognise that they can find their own resolutions to conflict. Mediation can help with disputes between neighbours, within families, or between any people doing business with each other. Mediation is recognised as an effective way of problem solving that can help avoid costly and lengthy legal proceedings or formal procedures. Accredited mediators help our tenants identify their needs, clarify issues, explore solutions, and negotiate agreements. The mediators function as facilitators, helping people to work out a solution that is realistic, practical, and

workable. The decision-making rests with the parties involved and the mediation process is entirely voluntary.

Benefits of Mediation

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

If you'd like to talk about mediation, speak with your Housing Senior Caseworker.

Tenant Scrutiny Team 'Bootcamp'

The Scrutiny team is an important group comprising Lewes and Eastbourne tenants that's had a real impact on policies and procedures across the Councils. Most recently the group reviewed the service we offer around damp and mould by painstakingly reviewing information drawn together from policies and procedures, complaints, performance information, and real customer experiences. Then questions were devised for a series of interviews with key Council officers on day two. The next stage of the process will involve a review of the results so that the team can arrive at a range of tangible recommendations which Property Services can commit to.

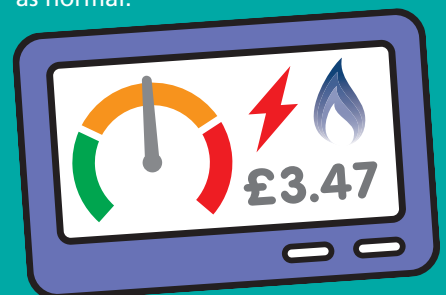
If you'd like to be involved in the next Tenant Scrutiny review, please get in touch by emailing: tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Economy 7 Meters

Preparing for the shut-down of the Radio-Teleswitch service.

Some tenants have electricity meters which are controlled by a radio signal sent from a radio mast. These Radio Teleswitch (RTS) meters are generally fitted in houses where the electricity is used for heating and hot water, and the radio signal controls the times when cheaper electricity is supplied for heating. Houses with RTS meters usually pay for electricity through a dual-rate tariff (such as THTC or Economy 7), which means they pay one cost for standard energy (such as sockets, lights etc.) and another cost for heating (storage heaters, hot water tank etc.).

The technology that supports RTS meters will end on 30 June 2025. Without the technology to tell RTS meters when to switch between peak and off-peak rates, they may no longer work properly, and it may mean that a consumer's heating and hot water supply stops functioning as normal.



Energy suppliers are planning to replace these RTS controlled meters with smart meters able to manage dual-rate tariffs, before the RTS service shutdown. Smart meters measure how much gas and electricity you're using and send those readings automatically to your energy supplier. They come with an in-home display screen to help you monitor and reduce your energy use. At the end of 2023, over 60% of all meters in Great Britain were smart and the government has targets for smart meters to be installed in 74.5% of homes in the UK by the end of 2025.

Although we expect your energy supplier to contact you with information about installing a smart meter in your home, we suggest that you contact them to confirm their plans for your home and your meter replacement before June 2025.

Community Payback Scheme

Homes First will be working in partnership with the **Community Payback scheme** in the future on projects to benefit our local communities. Examples of work that could be undertaken include removing graffiti, clearing wasteland, painting, litter picking and making paths more accessible.

To comply with the scheme, work must:

- benefit the local community
- not take paid work away from others
- not make a profit for anyone



If you have any suggestions for work in your community, please email: tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation



Our ongoing work aims to make sure that domestic abuse is part of the conversation year-round and ensure that our communities are

fully aware of the support that's available to them. Enhanced training has also been developed for staff with the help of local partners, and we have

recruited 'Domestic Abuse Champions' across the Councils to provide support internally and share best practice and advice for cases that might come up in a service area.

It's hoped that the accreditation process, which will involve Interviews with tenants, will be complete by the end of the year, so watch this space for more news!

In memoriam Terry Smart

Terry Smart was a dear friend for over 38 years, and although we led very different lives and didn't see each other as much as we'd have liked, when we did meet up it was like our friendship had never changed.

Terry was a man who didn't suffer fools gladly, but he would fight your corner if you asked him for help because family and friends were a very important part of his life. He also always made everyone laugh which was a real gift.

Terry and I worked together voluntarily on Residents Voice and the Eastbourne Area panel trying to improve our community. He was an intelligent and interesting individual who helped bring about a lot of changes for the residents of Eastbourne.

Terry will be missed by so many, and I shall always remember the laughter and camaraderie. It was a real pleasure to have known him for so long.

Fly high my dear friend – *Jacqui Astridge*



Eastbourne Homes Ltd.

In our last edition we reported that Eastbourne Home Ltd. (EHL) would be dissolved following our consultation with EHL tenants. Since then, we have been working with our lead Councillors (Cllr Diplock and Cllr Slater), the existing tenant Board, and members of Residents Voice and TOLD to develop a new governance structure for Eastbourne alongside a review of the Governance arrangements in Lewes.

We plan to have a new approach to governance in place by the Autumn which we hope will address some of the issues residents have raised with us.

- Better agenda planning and written reports provided well in advance – this will allow tenants more time to review information and allow us to work with them to improve housing services.
- A clear split between strategic work (finance, policy, new developments, and performance information) and operational service improvement (working with staff to improve repairs, cleaning services, garden maintenance etc.)
- Using our survey information explained on pages 4 and 5, complaints and involved residents' feedback to help us review services and make improvements.

We will also begin rebranding our activities as Eastbourne Borough Council to align governance with Lewes District Council, so you'll see the Eastbourne Homes Ltd. brand gradually disappear from our website, our policies and all our publications.

If you have any questions about governance, please feel free to email us at:

tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk



Lewes District Council



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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