

Housing Update: 20 April 2020

COVID-19

HOMES FIRST

Lewes and Eastbourne
Councils
working together for you

Housing Update at 20 April 2020

The government has acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to affect the ability of many tenants, owner occupiers and buy-to-rent landlords to pay their housing costs, and has said that no tenant affected by the pandemic should be evicted as a result of these circumstances.

Changes to Eviction Procedure

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the law regarding the eviction of tenants has changed. Up to 30 September 2020, for the majority of tenancies a landlord must give a tenant a minimum of 3 months' notice to evict.

From 27 March 2020 any possession orders will be suspended for 90 days. This means that in any case where a court order is required to evict, the tenant cannot be evicted during this national emergency.

It is a criminal offence for a landlord to evict a tenant without a court order.

Help with Rent Arrears

If you are currently experiencing difficulties with managing to make rent payments, it is essential that you speak to us as soon as possible.

Tenants are still liable to pay rent during this period, and any arrears accrued during this period will need to be paid back in the future.

If your income has recently reduced or you have lost your job, you may be entitled to claim Universal Credit to help pay for rent and other living costs.

If you are already claiming Universal Credit and your income has reduced, notify the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). If you are receiving Housing Benefit, notify the Council if your income is reduced.

If you are currently receiving either Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit and are having trouble paying your rent, you can apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).

You can find more information about DHPs and can apply [here](#).

You can access more information about Universal Credit [here](#).

Mortgage Arrears

If, as a result of COVID-19, you are having problems paying your mortgage, contact your lender as soon as possible and request a mortgage payment holiday.

Advice & Assistance

If you would like further advice or assistance on any housing issue, please contact:

Housing Solutions Team, Lewes & Eastbourne Councils

T: 01323 410000 Or 01273 471600

E: CustomerFirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Brighton Housing Trust

Provides free and confidential specialist housing advice for residents in the Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough.

See their website www.bht.org.uk or call:

Eastbourne Advice Centre

T: 01323 642615

E: eastbourneadvice@bht.org.uk

Brighton Advice Centre

T: 01273 645455

E: enquiries@bht.org.uk

Retirement Housing

To help protect the health and safety of our residents and in line with government guidance, we have restricted visits to schemes to essential only. Essential visitors include:

- Carers (including family and friends if they are providing essential care for you)
- Local managers
- Health professionals
- Scheme cleaners
- Contractors undertaking emergency repairs
- Contractors/Homes First staff undertaking essential Health & Safety checks or servicing
- Food delivery operatives

Retirement Housing Advisors are now working off site to help reduce the number of visitors and can be contacted by email or by office number (which will then be diverted to their mobile phone).

We're continuing with frequent 'check calls' and are contacting residents who have previously opted out to encourage them to receive this service during these difficult times. We also have a team of volunteers making weekend calls across our retirement housing schemes in Lewes District, and WEL carrying out similar calls across Eastbourne schemes. If any residents would like an increase in the frequency of these calls, please contact your retirement housing advisor to arrange this.

Repairs and Servicing

Many of our staff and contractors are still working, though some are experiencing reduced staffing levels. Homes First wants to make sure that your homes are being kept in good repair and free from hazards, so we are continuing to prioritise emergency repairs and gas servicing. We are also continuing to service our lifts and communal water tank systems. If your repair doesn't fall into this emergency category, please make a note of your request and submit it to us at a later date.

If we need to visit your home for these services, we will outline the safety precautions that we will take and conduct our visits in line with the latest guidance. Where our staff or contractors are carrying out works and inspections, please allow them the required social distancing (two metres or six feet), without which we will find it difficult to maintain services.