



HOMES FIRST



Message from Gary Hall, Head of Homes First

In this, our fourth newsletter update since the beginning of lockdown, I again want to thank you all for continuing to follow Government advice and helping to stop the spread of the virus. I also want to thank staff at Homes First and from around the Councils for their hard work and continued commitment to deliver the vital services we all rely on.

On Monday 18 May 2020 the Housing Minister issued a letter to social housing tenants setting out the steps being taken to support them during the plan to reopen society. In-line with this letter (which can be read in full at: [www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-adaptations-for-council-properties/housing-repairs-and-maintenance/)

[adaptations-for-council-properties/housing-repairs-and-maintenance/](http://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-adaptations-for-council-properties/housing-repairs-and-maintenance/)), we are working hard to restart services most affected during lockdown.

It remains important that we are able to keep our phone lines open for critical work supporting the most vulnerable residents, so if you are able to contact us by email or through online chat, please do so:

Email: customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Online Chat: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

If you are unable to contact us through these methods, please call **01323 410000** (Eastbourne) or **01273 471600** (Lewes). Lines are open daily between 8.30am–5pm.

Thank you for your ongoing support and cooperation.

Gary Hall

Financial Wellbeing Help & Advice



During these worrying times, your financial well-being is important. With so much 'advice' available, it can be overwhelming to work out what is best for you.

East Sussex Credit Union has put together an extensive overview of help and guidance which may be available to help members through these difficult times.

If you're struggling, take time to get the help that is available to you, reduce your bills and help look after your financial wellbeing now. The guidance can be accessed online at: www.eastsussexcu.org.uk/COVID19financialwellbeing

Like many organisations currently, East Sussex Credit Union has followed Public Health England and Government Advice in closing their head office.

Enquiries can still be emailed to:

General enquiries - info@eastsussexcu.org.uk

Loan enquiries - loans@eastsussexcu.org.uk

They are still able to take a limited number of telephone calls during office hours but please only call if you are unable to access the website or email your queries.

Useful Contact Numbers

- **NHS 111** – only call 111 if you cannot get help online
- **Education queries** – Call the Department for Education – **0800 046 8687**
- **Emergency Repairs**
Lewes District Council – **01273 471600**
Eastbourne Borough Council – **01323 410000**
- **BSW Heating** (Eastbourne) – **0800 1422761**
- **BSW Building Services** (Lewes) – **01444 836036**
- **Lewes District Citizens Advice** – **01273 007556** x100
- **Citizens Advice Eastbourne** – **03444 111 444**
- **East Sussex Credit Union** – **0300 303 3188**
- **East Sussex Community Hub**

If you're struggling to cope with coronavirus because you're alone, worried, unwell, short of money or can't get medicine, food or other essentials AND there is no one living near you who you know and can trust to help, you can request support at:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/community/covid-19/request-support-for-vulnerable-residents/

If you are unable to access the Community Hub online, please call:

01323 679722 (Eastbourne) or **01273 099956** (Lewes)

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Update

Property Services

Throughout the pandemic, we have worked hard to maintain your homes and ensure that they are kept in good repair. We have been completing emergency only repairs to ensure your health and safety during a period of significantly reduced staffing levels for both ourselves and our contractors.

As the Government starts to ease its lockdown measures, we will work to undertake a wider range of repairs. We are currently working through a backlog of existing requests and facing a shortage of key materials such as plasterboard, plaster and kitchen units. This means that we will need to prioritise requests in a different way for a while and only accept non-emergency repair requests where we have the capacity to complete the repair.

Examples of the types of non-emergency repairs requests which we will be able to undertake include:

- Plumbing
- Brickwork and masonry
- Groundwork, fencing and gates

We will continue to update you as things develop.

If we need to visit your home for these services, we'll outline the safety precautions that we'll take and conduct our visits in line with the latest guidance. Where our staff or contractors are carrying out works and inspections please continue to allow them access along with the required social distancing (two metres or six feet).

Thank you all for your patience and understanding.

Neighbourhood Housing

The Neighbourhood Housing team have worked together demonstrating great commitment to ensure we are able to provide essential services to our most vulnerable tenants. We have changed the way we are working to provide many of our services over the phone, keeping site visits to a minimum to protect staff and tenants.

The Tenancy Resolution and Sustainment team are contacting over 90 vulnerable residents in our general needs homes on a weekly basis. We have been working closely with the Police and Adult Social Care to ensure the welfare and safety of these residents, and keep them healthy in their homes. Only one resident was found to need hospitalisation and thanks to our intervention they are now making

a good recovery with the help of our wonderful NHS. We have also been supporting those residents who are concerned about their neighbours breaching COVID-19 regulations and working with the Police to provide guidance to our tenants about the COVID-19 rules. Where breaches continue, we've requested the Police take action. This work is vital to ensure we all stay safe in our communities.

Retirement Housing

The team have been doing a great job working together to cover all our onsite essential compliance checks and deliver our regular service update letters, explaining the changes we have made to our service and providing vital advice throughout the pandemic. We have spoken to all tenants to encourage them to accept more frequent call checks and have a pool of volunteers who call our Lewes based tenants over the weekends, with our Eastbourne tenants receiving their call from our lifeline providers, Welbeing.

Tenant Involvement

In February, we took the difficult decision to postpone the 2020 Tenants Conference which was due to take place at Plumpton Racecourse, 25 March. As difficult as the decision was at the time, it was shown to be correct when the Prime Minister announced lockdown on 23 March. Having consulted the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Panel, we have now decided to reschedule the conference to 2021. We know that this news will disappoint some of our most involved tenants and leaseholders. We'll work with you over the coming months to bring the conference back bigger and better in 2021 and we look forward to hearing your ideas.

Contact the Tenant Involvement Team by emailing: tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Housing Needs & Standards

Our teams continue to support those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Over the last 4 weeks we have helped 89 households to either prevent or relieve homelessness. Additionally, we have allocated properties to 18 households and supported 30 households to move on from emergency accommodation.

If you are worried about becoming homeless, please contact Eastbourne and Lewes council's Housing Needs team as soon as possible so we can discuss your realistic housing options and help prevent you from losing your home.

You can use the contact us form at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/contact-us or call **01323 410000**.

More information is available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/



NHS Help us to help you

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a decrease in people accessing NHS services for a range of conditions that are not related to coronavirus.

This is particularly impacting adults and children attending A&E departments for urgent and emergency medical issues, including serious conditions such as stroke and heart attacks; cancer patients attending their ongoing treatments; and expectant mothers attending for regular scans.

If you need medical help, the NHS is still there for you and is ready to provide the care you need.

- If you need medical help from your GP practice, contact them either online, by an app or by phone to be assessed.
- If you need urgent medical help, use the NHS 111 online service. If you cannot get help online, call 111.
- If it's a serious or life-threatening emergency, call 999
- If you are told to go to hospital it is important that you go to hospital.
- You should continue to attend your appointments, unless you have been told not to attend.



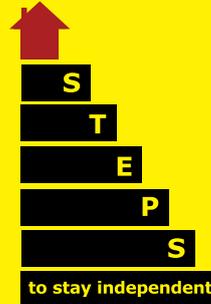
Beware of Scams

Unscrupulous criminals are exploiting fears about COVID-19 to prey on members of the public, particularly older and vulnerable people who are isolated from family and friends.

Members of the public should ignore scams on the doorstep, through social media and contact centres advertising products such as supplements and anti-virus kits that falsely claim to cure or prevent COVID-19. Communities are also being urged to look out for signs of neighbours being targeted by doorstep criminals preying on residents by cold-calling at their homes and offering to go to the shops for them. The criminals often claim to represent charities to help them appear legitimate before taking the victim's money. There are genuine charities providing support, so consumers should be vigilant and ask for ID from anyone claiming to represent a charity.

You can protect your neighbours by joining **Friends Against Scams**, which provides free online training to empower people to take a stand against scams. To complete the online modules, visit:

www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk



Free housing support for residents 60 years+

If you are experiencing issues which impact on your housing, either to;

- Stay safe living in your home
- Consider moving to somewhere more suitable for your needs

One call to STEPS will give you access to information, advice and potentially support from one of our dedicated team of Floating Support Workers. We are here to help whether you're a home owner, social housing tenant or those who find themselves without a home.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we are able to support our clients via the telephone or email, directly or through a family member or friend.

The STEPS team have been able to support during this time with areas such as;

- Welfare Benefit claims
- Linking into local community support
- Keeping warm and reducing energy costs along with housing advice.

If you are unsure whether STEPS can help you, please contact us on **01323 436414**. You can text us on **07970 668106** or email us at: referrals@stepswest.co.uk



Peter Vockins (pictured above with his dog Skye) recently accessed STEPS service to help with finding appropriate accommodation and to ensure he was receiving the correct benefits.

Lewes and Eastbourne Community Hub Update

Since the beginning of April, the councils have been running a Community Hub for Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough.

The hub is for people who are vulnerable, isolated and without friends, family or neighbours nearby to support them, and for those experiencing financial hardship. The purpose of the hub is to connect to local voluntary and community organisations that can provide the basics needed. This could include doing shopping, collecting medicines, keeping in touch to avoid feelings of loneliness, or providing food parcels for those vulnerable and isolated residents who are experiencing financial difficulties.

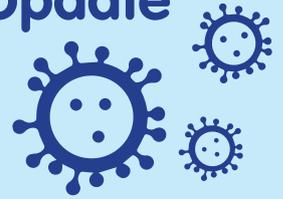
How does it work?

We have a team of staff who can deal with requests coming in through our website via an online form, or via our dedicated phone line (details on the front page). This team will speak to the person requesting help and find out what they need. They will then use a directory of community contacts to choose the best local service for them to be in touch with – and give them details about when that group operates and how to get in touch.

Who are these community groups?

We have built up a directory of around 85 different groups across Eastbourne and the Lewes District who have agreed to help with this work. Some of these groups have been established for many years, and others have formed recently, specifically to help people through this crisis. Some cover an individual neighbourhood or village whilst others

work across wider areas. Most are run entirely with volunteers, although a few of the larger groups have some paid staff as well. In all cases, their enthusiasm and commitment have been extraordinary.



How are the community groups being supported?

We are working in partnership with 3VA, a local 'umbrella' organisation which supports charities and other voluntary groups. They have signed up over 300 new volunteers. Three council staff have worked with 3VA to contact volunteers and match them to appropriate voluntary work. Staff are also talking regularly to the 85 community and voluntary groups to ensure they have all the help, advice, guidance and volunteers they need.

How's it going?

At the time of writing, the Community Hub helpline has received nearly 2,800 calls and online requests. The community and voluntary organisations have done an amazing job responding to all these requests for help. On top of the usual fantastic work undertaken by our local foodbanks, an additional 1600 food boxes have been distributed to those in need from Council stocks.

Contact your community hub:

Lewes – **01273 099956**

Eastbourne – **01323 679722**

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/requestsupport

Homes First – Home Contents Insurance Scheme

Tenants and leaseholders can now apply for home contents insurance from as little as £5 per month thanks to a new scheme. Lewes District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council and Eastbourne Homes have teamed up with Aviva, the UK's biggest insurer, to launch Homes First Insurance following a request from tenants.

While the council insures the structure of council homes, it does not include what is inside such as furniture and belongings. Homes First Insurance offers a policy with exclusive rates and a range of optional extras including cover for accidental damage. There is no excess to pay if a claim is needed and the cost can be paid monthly by direct debit.

It is suggested that council tenants and leaseholders consider insuring their personal items against events including accidental damage, fire, theft and flooding/escape of water.

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The policy is underwritten by Aviva Insurance Limited and administered by Wessex Administration Services Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

For more information or to apply for Homes First Insurance, visit: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/tenants-contents-insurance/ or call **01962 892086**.



Lewes District Council



Working in partnership with Eastbourne Homes