



TENANTS' VOICE

Newsletter of the Tenants Organisation of Lewes District (TOLD)

Putting tenants first

A fresh way of delivering housing services has been introduced across the district, under the umbrella of the Homes First team.

This combines staff from Lewes District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council and Eastbourne Homes Ltd. They now work as a single group that aims to deliver more efficient ways of working and providing a better service for you.

The new team continues to offer a full range of housing advice, homelessness services, tenancy management, repairs and maintenance and private sector housing.

The new initiative is part of a wider programme of sharing between the two councils, intended to maintain and improve frontline services.

You remain a tenant of Lewes District Council, while your counterparts in Eastbourne continue as tenants of Eastbourne Homes Ltd, which delivers housing management on behalf of Eastbourne Borough Council.

Councillor Ron Maskell, Lewes Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, says: "I am delighted that we have launched Homes First. This enables us to run stronger and more efficient services, whilst continuing to put our residents first."

For more information visit

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing

Picture: *The teams convene*



A word from the Chair



*Debbie Twitchen,
Chair of Tenants
of Lewes District*

Welcome to Tenants' Voice.

The winds of change are blowing across the land these days, not least for Lewes district tenants.

The all-important business of day-to-day repairs sees a new contractor Mears. It tendered successfully to take over from SMG,

Ringmer Electrics and the Housing Maintenance Unit. See page 3.

A new cleaning contract has been awarded to "Just Ask". You can read more about this on page 7.

You will be hearing a lot about "Homes First", and we take an initial look at this new-look housing service operated jointly by Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Homes. See story opposite.

Latest in our series of interviews is Councillor Ruth O'Keeffe, who sits as an independent on the town, district and county councils. See page 4.

We are pleased to report that TOLD now oversees money spent on community improvements, empowering tenants with direct responsibility for this budget. See page 5.

We on the TOLD committee are committed to improving life for all tenants. We welcome your views about Tenants' Voice and your suggestions as to topics we might cover. Contact our secretary Dawn Tideswell at told.secretary@gmail.com

Or call 01273 487 249 to leave a message.

Universal Credit means changes that may affect you

A new way to receive working age benefits in a single monthly payment for your household, Universal Credit is now being introduced in Eastbourne and is due to be rolled out in Lewes later this year. It replaces a number of benefits:

- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income related Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income related Employment Support Allowance

If you currently receive Housing Benefit, you don't need to claim Universal Credit immediately. You only need to claim if your circumstances change.

You will not be moved onto Universal Credit automatically. However there are things you must do to make sure you are ready as and when this does happen. If you are not ready, your benefits will be delayed, and will only be back-dated in exceptional circumstances.

If you and your partner are eligible for Universal Credit, you will receive one payment, not two.

How to make sure you are ready

- Find somewhere to access the Internet regularly. Universal Credit claims can only be made online - there are no paper applications.
- Set up your own email address – this is essential, and you can't use a friend's or relative's email.
- Set up a bank account – payments are monthly and direct to your account.
- Verify your identity on:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introducing-govuk-verify>

Check list: your detailed information for Universal Credit application

- Postcode and proof of current address.
- Photo ID – ie: driving licence or passport.
- National Insurance number – on a payslip, a letter from HMRC or call 0300 200 3500
- Proof of how much your rent is, whether you pay or it's paid by housing benefit?
- Bank account details.
- Accommodation – ie: private rent or council tenant.
- Tenancy start date.
- Full names and birth dates of everyone living in the house.
- Landlord's address.

- Savings and other capital such as share, or property that you don't live in.
- Earnings from work – ie: recent pay slips.
- Income not from work - ie: a pension or insurance plan.
- Any other benefits.
- What you pay for childcare.
- Child benefit reference numbers for any children you have.
- Disabilities – claimant and household.

Important things to know

To apply online when the time comes visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit>

It takes at least five to six weeks for a new claim to be assessed and for your first payment to arrive. So it's important to complete your application as soon as possible. If you are unable to wait for this long, ask your DWP advisor for an advance payment.

You must book an appointment at a Jobcentre Plus within five working days of making your initial UC application. If not your application for UC will be cancelled, and you will have to start the process over.

It's really important to pay your rent on time to avoid arrears as per your tenancy agreement.

If you claim Housing Benefit make sure you click 'YES' when applying.

A common mistake made by claimants is clicking the 'NO I don't pay rent' box. This can impact the results of your application.

Help getting online

You can use computers at your local Jobcentre, and get online free of charge at most libraries.

Ask your local library for help with using the Internet and setting up an email address.

Tel: 0345 608 0196 to book a session with a Computer Buddy with East Sussex libraries.

Tel: 01273 290 800 for tuition with a volunteer at Jubilee Library, Jubilee Street, Brighton, BN1 1GE.

DWP help with making a claim

Tel: 0800 169 0190 If you are eligible for Universal Credit and you need help. You will be asked for your reference number, your NI number and other personal details.

DWP's Universal Credit help lines

Tel: 0800 328 9344 (for UC customers who do not yet have an online account)

Tel: 0800 328 5644 (to book a first appointment if you are registered online)

Proud supporter

TOLD is pleased to report that Lewes DC continues to support people in most need as the most generous supporter of the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), among district and borough authorities in East Sussex. The award to Lewes District CAB is £175,340 for 2018/19, up from £167,205 in 2017/18.

In addition, the Council for Voluntary Service will receive £28,000, Homelink £11,800, Sompriti £10,000 and the Rural Community Council for Sussex £3,500. Lewes DC has also earmarked £30,000 that voluntary organisations can bid for in their work to support people through the rollout of Universal Credit.

Councillor Tony Nicholson, Cabinet member for Customers and Partners, said: "It gives me immense pride to know that Lewes District Council leads the way in financial support for the voluntary sector. The pressures on local government funding are well known. Yet our determination to fund groups that support people in most need remains steadfast."

New repairs and maintenance provider

Delivery of repairs and maintenance services for council homes has been transferred to the Mears construction firm under a consolidated contract.

The result of a re-tendering process begun by Lewes DC in 2017, the contract runs for an initial term of five years. Lewes DC has an option to extend the contract by up to a further five years, subject to satisfactory performance reviews.

The contract covers responsive repairs, repairs to vacant properties, out of hours and emergency repairs, aids and adaptations and provision of a dedicated repairs call handling facility. The Mears team is co-located with Lewes DC's Property Services staff at Southover House, Lewes.

The transfer of repair services to Mears does not affect the way you report repairs. As before you should do this by telephone on 01273 471 600 option 3 option 1. Or e-mail:

lewes.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk

Lewes DC thanks all the tenants and leaseholders who gave up so much of their time to help develop the specification and evaluate the tenders.

Citizens Advice Bureau has Lewes district under its wing

Lewes District Citizens Advice gives advice to clients living or working in Lewes District. It offers specialist debt and benefits advice in Newhaven.

Tel: 03444 111 444 for all of Lewes District CAB.

<http://www.lewesdistrictcab.org.uk/>

Lewes Citizens Advice Bureau

Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes BN7 1AB
Drop in and appointments: Monday, Tuesday, Friday 09.30-15.00.

Telephone advice: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 09.30-15.00

Wheelchair access. Wheelchair toilet.

Newhaven Citizens Advice Bureau

15-19 Chapel Street, Newhaven BN9 9PN
Specialist debt and benefits advice by referral only, in addition to general advice.

Specialist debt/benefit appointments: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10.00-15.00:

Telephone advice: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 09.30-16.30

Wheelchair access. Wheelchair toilet. Internet advice access.

Seaford Citizens Advice Bureau

37 Church Street, Seaford BN25 1HG
Drop in and appointments: Monday & Wednesday 09.30-15.00.

Telephone advice: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 09.30-16.00.

Wheelchair access. Wheelchair toilet. Internet advice.

Peacehaven Library Citizens Advice

5a Meridian Centre, Peacehaven BN10 8BB
Drop in every Tuesday 10.00-12.45 & 13.15-15.45:
(5 per day. First come first served).

Wheelchair inaccessible - please contact for further details.

Peacehaven Town Council Office

The Meridian Centre, Peacehaven BN10 8JH
Pre-booked appointments only, every Thursday 09.30-15.45.

Wheelchair access. Wheelchair toilet.

Telscombe Cliffs Citizens Advice

Telscombe Civic Centre, 360 South Coast Road, Telscombe BN10 7ES
Drop in last Tuesday of every month 10.00-12.30
(Over 60's tea club).

Wheelchair access. Wheelchair toilet.

OTHER SUPPORT

Money Works

Budgeting, debt or benefits advice.

Tel: 01273 809 288

www.moneyworksbh.org.uk

East Sussex Support Scheme

Non-monetary support if you are in financial crisis.

Tel: 0300 330 9494

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/DESSS

East Sussex Credit Union

Help getting a bank account.

Tel: 0300 303 3188.

Get involved Have your say Win £50!

Homes First are in the process of developing a new Tenant Involvement Strategy and you can help shape our approach by completing a short questionnaire which will be arriving on your door mat or in-box in the next couple of weeks.

You won't even need a stamp, and you could win £50.

What do we mean by Tenant Involvement?

When we talk about Tenant Involvement, we mean:

- How we find out what tenants and communities want and need.
- All the ways that tenants can get involved if they want to.
- The ways in which we support and empower tenants to influence and improve our services.

By working together, tenants and staff can:

- Create an environment where tenants can shape our services. We want to be truly resident-led.
- Develop meaningful involvement opportunities which produce useful feedback that we can act on.
- Make sure our approach to involvement leads to improvement and positive change for tenants, communities and Homes First.

Lewes has a strong tradition of tenant involvement, with TOLD, Sheltered Housing Forum and a range of other groups and approaches being used to facili-



tate a two-way conversation between the Council and Tenants and Leaseholders.

The new strategy will introduce some exciting ways for you to get involved, whilst strengthening some of our existing approaches and creating ways for more of you to contribute.

We've made a start by establishing a tenant and staff steering group, which has designed the consultation and will oversee the development and implementation of the new strategy, based on the answers that you give us as part of the consultation.

Through the consultation, we're hoping to find out if you want to be involved, what you want to be involved in and how best to involve you. The steering group will consider the consultation responses and work to design ways for you to be involved to the degree and level that you choose.

If you would like more information about any aspect of this article or need help to complete the questionnaire when you receive it, please contact Ruth Tahsin or Nikki Wickham on 01273 487249

This article was written by the Tenant Participation Team

Garden waste collections increased

Previously offered for 10 months of the year with a collection break in December and January, Lewes DC's garden waste service is now available all year round, with the exception of the Christmas fortnight, and at no extra cost.

Now in its third year, the fortnightly service has been adopted by more than 3,500 green-fingered residents across the entire district. The cost is £70 a year, payable in one go or by monthly direct debit.

You can sign up for the service at any time during the year. It provides a 240-litre brown wheelie bin for grass cuttings, leaves, hedge trimmings, shrubs, plants, flowers, house plants and brush wood up to 20 cm / 8 inches diameter. All suitable garden waste is processed locally into compost.

"Due to popular demand, we're delighted to offer this service to residents all year round," says Councillor Paul Franklin, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste & Recycling. "If you feel you don't have enough waste to fill a bin, you could share one with a neighbour."

Neighbourhood First in Lewes.



A new service was launched by Lewes DC in early April to boost communications between the council and the community. Dubbed Neighbourhood First, the team comprises nine advisers who cover the Lewes District by zones, arranged so that four of them have responsibility for the coastal strip, two operate in Lewes, and three look after the rest of the district.

Working in partnership with East Sussex County Council, local Police, volunteers and community

group, the advisers' concerns include matters such as:

- Dog fouling.
- Fly-tipping.
- Littering
- Street cleaning.
- Graffiti.
- Abandoned vehicles.
- Fallen trees.

Their remit also embraces involvement in local events and maintaining links with tenant participation groups across the district. The advisers are available to talk with residents, and also to attend community, town and parish council meetings.

They make a range of inspections of streets and open spaces to ensure the environment is well maintained, and they are available to advise local businesses on matters such as access.

To contact the advisers dial 01273 471 600 and ask for Neighbourhood First

Or go to

<https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/report-a-problem/>

Apply to improve your neighbourhood

Improvements to council-owned communal gardens and green spaces are funded from a £20,000 annual budget, now directly in the gift of TOLD.

You can apply on behalf of your local community for an improvement from the list below, which will benefit you and your neighbours. All you have to do is complete an application form, and send it to TOLD, which considers projects for funding at its quarterly meetings. Eligible projects include:

- Fixed bench, garden seat or table. Shed, storage, water butt, bird table, gardening equipment.
- Minor solar external lighting. Portable table and chairs, parasol, pergola.
- New planted hanging basket or pot. Plants for existing hanging basket or pot.
- New flower bed. Supply, plant and maintain trees / bushes.

It's really easy to participate. The rules stipulate: 1) that the project is in an area such as a communal garden or green area on housing land; 2) neighbours living nearby are in agreement.

To make a proposal to improve your area, we suggest you:

- Check with your neighbours to be sure they support your idea. Then submit your application. For a form, contact ruth.tahsin@lewes.gov.uk
- or 'phone 01273 483 249. Or...
- Discuss your idea with your local tenants' and residents' association who, if they agree, will submit an online application. Or...

- Talk to your Neighbourhood First team, local Senior Caseworker (Area Housing Officer) or Caseworker (Scheme Manager), and ask them to submit a bid.

Tenants' repair responsibilities revised

Since joining forces, Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council have addressed differences between their tenant repair policies so that services are aligned across both councils.

With input from a tenant working group, it has been agreed that you are now responsible for the repair of the following items in your home:

- Telephone points.
- TV aerials (except communal systems).
- Fixtures and fittings.
- WC seats.
- Shower handsets.
- Plugs and chains.
- Garden maintenance (except paths).
- Timber garden sheds.
- Green houses.
- Washing lines (except communal lines and rotary dryers).
- Lost keys.
- Letter box interior plates.
- Door bells (except disabled adaptations/hardwired).
- Internal doors.

A novel route to health and happiness?



Television has been investigating the merits of bringing together the young and the old – from the extreme boundaries of life as it were.

The timeless broad question is whether there is mutual benefit to be enjoyed from combining the wisdom of senior people with the energy of junior people.

Such notions have struck a chord at Burleys, grounds maintenance contractor to Lewes District. Karen Rigby-Faux is Burleys community liaison officer.

Her role ultimately is to improve open spaces, co-ordinating between Burleys, the council and tenants. And she is keen to support people who want to be actively involved in their environment.

Karen poses the question – or is it a challenge? – to tenants: Do you have a project that you would love to share with your neighbourhood's younger generation as partners? If so, you can count on Burleys.

Such ideas have found expression in Channel 4's recent series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*, which shed some light on how inspiring and reassuring these relationships can be.

The broad premise of the series: Pre-schoolers share their classroom with pensioners for six weeks. What impact does this experiment have on the health and happiness of the older group?

The BBC is also in the field with *Old School with the Hairy Bikers*. So there are two TV series to get the creative juices flowing. And now here's a real-life example...

Jo Wunsch works for 3VA, supporting voluntary action across Eastbourne, Lewes District and Wealden.

3VA delivers Chances4Change Eastbourne which supports community-led initiatives and activities to enhance wellbeing and improve connections within communities.

At a recent sheltered housing forum, Jo Wunsch gave a presentation on a highly successful intergenerational collaboration between Eastbrook Extra Care Home and The Causeway School in Eastbourne.

This embraced gardening and memory book projects, both inspiring examples of how durable links can be forged between the young and the elderly.

Eastbrook residents said of the project: "The garden games and painting messages onto pebbles with the children brought me so much joy." "It was so much fun." "I enjoyed the children being here very much."

3VA's report *Supporting an Intergenerational Project* can be downloaded at

<https://www.3va.org.uk/about/our-projects>

The scope of such projects is as broad or as long as you care to make it, for example:

- Arts and crafts
- Histories and memoirs.
- Singing and performance.
- Gardening and growing.
- New games or technology.
- Sharing skills: knitting, sewing, growing flowers or vegetables.
- Outdoor games: badminton, skittles, hula hoops, boules.
- Seasonal activities: Easter, Halloween, Christmas, New Year.
- Combinations with scope to engage more people with a variety of interests, health issues and abilities. For instance, some people are unable to garden, but would like to knit or talk about their childhoods.

Experience shows that such projects are most successful when staged towards the end of the summer term when schools have more time to spare. To get to work on a project now would be a perfect timing.

A good start might be to invite representatives of your local school for a coffee-and-cakes meeting to discuss the idea.

For further guidance contact Karen Rigby-Faux at Burleys: 01273 510 906, or krigby-faux@gburley.co.uk

Fancy a change of scene? Here maybe is your answer

Committed to helping tenants find the right property, Lewes DC has subscribed to HomeSwapper, the UK's biggest and best direct home swap-service for social housing. A quick and easy way to find both local and national exchanges, it facilitated more than 40,000 swaps in 2017, and currently has 500,000 tenants signed up.

Free to join for Lewes DC tenants, HomeSwapper avoids over-reliance on the Housing Register, a cumbersome way to find alternative accommodation. Tenants in Eastbourne have already benefited from successful exchanges via HomeSwapper.

Council officers are trained in to use the system, and it is ready for tenants to seek their ideal swaps locally or anywhere in the UK. Register quickly online or via the HomeSwapper app on a smart phone or tablet.

Keep an eye on the Council's web site and social media for updates, or contact your Neighbourhood Housing Officer.

Get the best out of HomeSwapper

- Draw up a list of "must haves" and "would likes" for your new home. This will help you remain focused throughout your search.
- To speed things up, use the "additional text" box in your advert to show what you seek and what you offer. You could be the missing link in a chain.
- No matches? Try widening the radius on the maps tool. You may find your dream home in an area you hadn't thought of searching.
- Check your account regularly, signing in as you would on Facebook.
- Download the free mobile app.
- "Happy to help" are Swappers offering advice to anyone wanting it.
- Respond to *all* messages left by others, at least with a polite "No thank you". HomeSwapper provides template responses to save you time.
- Treat others as you wish to be treated yourself. Remain polite even when a home is not what you seek. Don't keep people waiting for a response, or otherwise waste their time.
- Keep your rent account up to date. Arrears could prompt your current landlord to refuse or delay your move.
- You – and not your landlord - might be responsible for repairs to your home. Best to check this sort of detail and be clear about such responsibilities before you swap.
- To avoid receiving further alerts and messages from HomeSwapper and other users, close your account once you have swapped.

For more information:

<https://www.homeswapper.co.uk/>

Clean sweep for Lewes and Eastbourne residents

A contractor called Just Ask has begun a new contract, providing a cleaning service to the communal areas of the housing blocks that are owned or managed by Homes First.

In 2017 Lewes and Eastbourne Councils put their respective cleaning services out to tender as a single joint-contract to gain efficiencies and save money. Tender winner Just Ask had already provided cleaning services to Eastbourne Homes Ltd for more than seven years, and the same levels of service now extend to residents in Lewes.

The contract is for an initial five-year period. The councils have an option to extend it further by up to five years, subject to satisfactory performance.

Many thanks to the tenants and leaseholders who volunteered to help develop the specification and to evaluate tenders received from bidders.

Home Works funding in jeopardy

In its draft 2018/19 budget East Sussex County Council proposes halving funding to the Home Works service, which has provided short-term homelessness prevention for vulnerable people since 2009.

In 2017 the service supported more than 3,200 households, benefiting 6,723 local people with an invaluable community resource that helps them build resilience and resolve complex housing, health, safety and financial issues.

"Home Works saved my life," says one grateful client. "I was by myself in my camper, cold, lonely, in pain, and with no hope for the future. I tried to hang myself twice. Something had to change. After support from Home Works, I have a nice home, help for my health problems and purpose in life. It's as if I have been given a new start after being in such a dark place."

"We do appreciate the overall funding crisis that East Sussex County Council faces," says Home Works' Sarah Bray "But we have asked it to reconsider the consequences of such a drastic cut now await the outcome of the public consultation which closed on 25 April."

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/ascsavings.

and

<https://www.southdown.org/>

Contact Sarah Bray at

sarah.bray@southdown.org



Free training opportunities tailored to improve your mind

Would you like to meet tenants from other parts of Sussex and take part in training which can help you in your community?

The council works with other local housing providers to provide free training for tenants throughout the year.

SETUP (South East Training Uniting People) offers training places to tenants from Lewes District. Transport costs can be reimbursed, and refreshments are also provided.



Spaces are limited, so first come first served. Ring 01273 487 249 to book your place.

Or email contacting.setup@gmail.com with your name, contact details and a list of courses that you would like to attend.

Here are three courses SETUP has scheduled during the coming months:

Level 2 Food Safety: 15 May, Uckfield or 19 September, Lewes: This course helps you to develop knowledge of food hygiene principles and trains you to the nationally-required safety level.

Networking event: 20 June, Brighton: These networking events are a fantastic opportunity to meet and network with tenants from across the South East. You can pick up new ideas for projects and activities and share knowledge and experience. Topics include “growing in containers”, “dementia awareness” and “avoiding being scammed”.

Fundraising for community projects: 14 November, Uckfield: Do you have an idea for a community project, scheme or activity? But you need funding to help make it happen? This session assists you identifying different types of fundraising, target potential funders, and plan and complete an application form.

Have more say in how things are run

Are you happy with the opportunities that Lewes District Council offers you to get involved?

Do you want to influence how the council provides housing services such as repairs or allocating tenancies.

Would you like more say?

There are many ways to participate, among them:

- Join delegates at the annual tenants’ conference: take an over-view of housing issues and enjoy fun workshops.
- Attend TOLD (Tenants’ Organisation of Lewes District) meetings every three months: keep up to date with local housing issues.
- Join Lewes DC’s scrutiny team: meet service managers and carry out regular audits of the overall housing service – approximately once a month.
- Play a part in task and finish working groups: for instance alongside staff and other tenants in an in-depth review of a particular housing service.
- Engage in surveys via email, web site, letter or telephone email – if Lewes DC wants your opinions on a possible change of service, it will contact you.
- Lend a hand in your local residents’ association meetings to help improve your community

You’ll receive a warm welcome, whichever of these options you choose. For more information, call 012732 487 249 or email ruth.tahsin@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

To get this newsletter in a large print document or other format please contact 01273 487249 or email told@hotmail.co.uk

About Tenants’ Voice

Tenants’ Voice is a newsletter for tenants. The views expressed and materials presented are those of the authors, and do not represent the views or endorsement of Lewes District Council (with exception to pages 6 and 7) or the Editor.

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