



Message from Gary Hall, Head of Homes First

During this unprecedented time, please be reassured that Homes First are working hard to deliver vital services and to support our most vulnerable residents.

Lewes District Council, Eastbourne Borough Councils and Eastbourne Homes have been working closely with community and voluntary groups to establish a "community hub". This aims to help signpost vulnerable and isolated people to help in the community.

The service is for those who DO NOT fall within the government's criteria of 'Extremely Vulnerable' – who will have received a letter from the NHS, and for whom a central government support network is in place.

If you need support, please use the online request form on the Lewes and Eastbourne council website:

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

We've also created a dedicated helpline for those who

are vulnerable. If you are a vulnerable tenant and can't access the request form online, **please call 01323 679722 (Eastbourne) or 01273 099956 (Lewes). Lines are open daily between 8.30am – 5pm.**

Please use our online services and webchat via our website whenever possible as this frees up staff to assist those most in need. Always consider whether your call is absolutely necessary and understand there may be a delay in us answering your call.

Following the latest government advice and for the welfare of our residents and staff, we have now closed our reception areas at 1 Grove Road in Eastbourne and Southover House in Lewes. Resident enquiries continue to be answered online or by phone.

To contact the council, residents should email: **customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk**

Our customer advisers will be calling over 3,600 vulnerable residents in the coming days to undertake welfare checks, so it's really important to keep our telephone lines open and allow this critical work to take priority. **Thank you all for your cooperation.**

Gary Hall

People who received a letter from the NHS because they are at high risk if they catch the Coronavirus and don't have a support network of friends and family around them, are reminded to visit: www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable or call **0800 0288327**, the government's dedicated helpline.

The Government defines 'extremely vulnerable people' as:

1. People with solid organ transplants.
2. People with specific cancers and who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy.
3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD.

4. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

If you or a member of your household fall within the above "extremely vulnerable" definition, you should have received a letter from the NHS or been contacted by your GP or hospital clinician.

If you've not had any contact, you can register centrally at:

www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable

5 things you can do to make a positive difference in your community



Think of others,
consider your actions
and be kind



Connect and
reach out to your
neighbours



Make the most
of online groups



Support vulnerable
or isolated people



Share accurate
information
and advice

Benefits Update

Changes to jobcentre appointments

If you're receiving benefits, you do not have to attend jobcentre appointments for three months, starting from Thursday 19 March 2020. You will continue to receive your benefits as normal, but all requirements to attend the jobcentre in person are suspended.

New Claims for Universal Credit

If you apply for Universal Credit you will need to make an appointment for your "new claim interview". The interview will take place by phone with a work coach. You will be given the number to call to book this appointment when you've submitted your new claim online.

Changes to health assessments

The Department for Work and Pensions has taken the decision to temporarily suspend all face-to-face assessments for health and disability-related benefits.

This is aimed at reducing the risk of exposure to coronavirus and safeguarding the health of individuals claiming health and disability benefits, many of whom are likely to be at greater risk due to pre-existing health conditions.

If you already have an assessment appointment booked, you do not need to attend. Your assessment provider will contact you to discuss your appointment and explain the next steps.

If you have made a claim for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Universal Credit (UC) or Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) but do not have a date for



an assessment appointment, you do not need to do anything.

You will be contacted shortly by phone or letter to let you know what will happen next.

If you are already receiving PIP, ESA, UC or IIDB, you will continue to receive your current payments as normal.

Changes to how much money you'll get

From 6 April 2020 the government is increasing the standard allowance in Universal Credit and the basic element in Working Tax Credit for one year. Both will increase by £20 per week on top of planned annual uprating. This will apply to all new and existing Universal Credit claimants and to existing Working Tax Credit claimants.

This means that for a single Universal Credit claimant (aged 25 or over), the standard allowance will increase from £317.82 to £409.89 per month.

If you're self-employed

The Self-employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) will support self-employed individuals (including members of partnerships) whose income has been negatively impacted by coronavirus. The scheme will provide a grant to self-employed individuals or partnerships, worth 80% of their profits up to a cap of £2,500 per month. You should not contact HMRC about accessing SEISS now. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will use existing information to check who is eligible and invite applications once the scheme is up and running.

Difficulty paying rent

If you're having trouble paying your rent please email: customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

You can also chat live with an adviser via our "Live Chat", available on all pages of our website.

If you are unable to contact us through the above methods please call **01273 471600** (Lewes) or **01323 410000** (Eastbourne). We're currently experiencing high call volumes, so you might experience a longer wait than usual. Please be patient; we aim to answer all calls as quickly as possible.

If you usually pay your rent at the Post Office or Pay Point you can switch to other payment methods, which in these times, we would encourage.

Online: Pay online at:
www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/payments/pay-your-rent/

Automated payment line:

Eastbourne Customers: 0800 2888 097

Lewes Customers: 0800 023 7080

By bank transfer:

Eastbourne Customers: Sort Code 30-80-20
Account Number 10712168

Lewes Customers: Sort Code 30-80-12
Account Number 10298260

For the reference please use your payment reference number.

Important: However you pay your rent, please ensure you quote your payment reference number. This can be found on any correspondence sent to you by Account Management.



Emergency Repairs Update

As tenants, you have the right to a decent, warm and safe place to live. Homes First wants to make sure that your homes are being kept in good repair and free from hazards. We're now prioritising emergency repairs – those repairs which ensure the health and safety of residents. 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.

We will continue to carry out servicing and repairs to gas appliances to ensure they are safe and efficient and we're still carrying out annual 'Landlords Gas Safety Records'. 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.

Advice for pet owners

The latest World Health Organisation advice is that there's **no evidence of coronavirus circulating in pets or other animals in the UK**, and there's nothing to suggest animals may transmit the disease to humans.

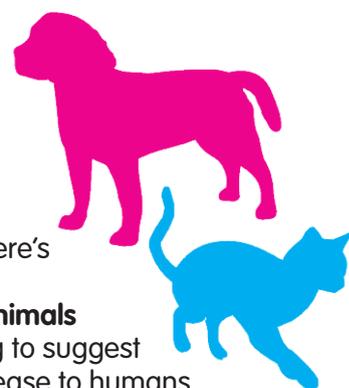
In line with the general advice on fighting coronavirus, you should wash your hands regularly, including before and after contact with animals.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus and must remain at home for 14 days as a household and your dog cannot get exercised at home, or if you need hospital treatment, you should ask someone outside of your household to care for your pets including walking your dog.

All non-essential trips to vets should be avoided. If your pet needs urgent treatment, you must phone the vet to arrange the best approach to meet your pet's needs.

You may leave your house to exercise once a day and you should combine this with walking your dog. In doing so, it is important that you minimise the time spent outside of the home and remain two metres away from anyone outside of your household.

You may also leave your house to provide care or help a vulnerable person. This includes walking a dog for someone who is unable to leave their house because they are self isolating or being shielded. You should remember to wash your hands before and after handling the dog and keep two metres away from other people and animals, including when handing over the dog to the owner.



Beware of fraud and scams

Please be aware that criminals are using the Covid-19 pandemic to scam the public; don't become victims.

Criminals are experts at impersonating people, organisations and the police. They spend hours researching you for their scams, hoping you'll let your guard down for just a moment.

Stop: Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe.

Challenge: Could it be fake? It's ok to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.

Protect: Contact your bank immediately if you think you've fallen for a scam and report it online to Action Fraud: www.actionfraud.police.uk or call **0300 123 2040**

Your bank or the police will NEVER ask you to transfer money or move it to a safe account.

Online Shopping and Auction Fraud

Seek advice: If you're purchasing goods and services from a company or person you don't know and trust, carry out some research first and ask friends or family for advice before completing a purchase.

Scam messages: Be wary of unsolicited emails and texts offering questionably good deals, and never respond to messages that ask for your personal or financial details.

Payment method: Avoid paying for goods and services by bank transfer as that offers you little protection if you become a victim of fraud. Instead, use a credit card or payment services such as PayPal.

If you have made a payment: Inform your bank as soon as possible, they can help you prevent any further losses. Monitor your bank statements regularly for any unusual activity.

Retirement Housing Schemes

Homes First are taking the following steps to help keep tenants in our retirement housing schemes safe and well:

- Restricting the number of people accessing the schemes and suspended the use of guest and communal rooms until further notice.
- Only permitting entry to the scheme for residents and those providing essential services such as personal care, health care, maintenance, food and prescription medicine deliveries.
- Ensuring our contractors are working in safe ways.
- Cleaning our schemes more frequently, including careful and frequent cleaning 'touch points' such as door handles.
- Sharing the latest NHS and government information posters and advice with tenants in our schemes.
- Only undertaking essential visits and offering additional telephone call checks.

- Updating contact and next of kin information we have for all our retirement housing tenants.
- Postponing our refurbishments at Reed Court and Riverbourne House.
- Postponing the stock condition surveys.

Some of our staff will now be working from home due to personal health concerns so we will be asking the remaining team to help support the essential elements of our service. This will impact our visible presence on site, but please be assured the team will be available over the phone. We'll be asking other colleagues to support the service to undertake health and safety checks.

Please let the team know if you have been asked to self-isolate, have been diagnosed with or have any symptoms relating to Coronavirus. The team will then cease all visits and undertake contact via the lifeline system or over the phone.



Domestic and sexual abuse support during the restrictions in response to Coronavirus (Covid-19)

Change Grow Live's Portal Service is an East Sussex domestic abuse charity. Domestic abuse can affect both women and men in heterosexual, gay or lesbian relationships. If you are experiencing domestic violence, you can get help to make it stop.

With the UK in a lockdown due to the spread of Covid-19, lots of adults and children are staying home much more than usual. If you or someone you know needs help with domestic or sexual abuse, you can contact The Portal via the Helpline numbers; **0300 3239985**. In an emergency, always call **999**

if you are in danger. The service is working with social care services, the police, and local councils to make sure people get the protection and safety they need.

It can also be helpful to ask friends and family members to check up on you regularly, either online or over the phone. This is also a good way to take your mind off self-isolation. You can also call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on **0808 2000 247** or contact the Helpline via Refuge's contact form at:

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Useful Contact Numbers

- **NHS 111** – only call **111** if you cannot get help online
- Education queries, phone the Department for Education – **0800 046 8687**
- Emergency Repairs Lewes District Council – **01273 471600**
- Emergency Repairs Eastbourne Borough Council – **01323 410000**
- BSW Heating (Eastbourne) – **0800 1422761**
- BSW Building Services (Lewes) – **01444 836036**
- Lewes District Citizens Advice – **01273 007556 x 100**
- Citizens Advice Eastbourne – **03444 111 444**



Lewes District Council



Working in partnership with **Eastbourne Homes**