



HOMES FIRST



Tenants Handbook

Lewes District
and Eastbourne
Borough Councils

Welcome to your new home

We hope that this handbook helps you to understand the services provided to you and your rights and responsibilities as a tenant of Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Council.

This document is given out to new tenants at the start of their tenancy and the latest version of the handbook is published on our website:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/council-tenants-handbook

where you can also find more information about our housing services.















**If you would like to speak to someone
about this information, please contact us.**

Lewes District
and Eastbourne
Borough Councils



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Important Contact Details

Main Council Contact Details

Lewes District Council

6 High Street, Lewes, BN7 2AD T: 01273 471600

Eastbourne Borough Council

Town Hall, 1 Grove Road, Eastbourne BN21 4UG T: 01323 410000

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Text Relay: 1800101323410000

Repairs Contacts

Email: homesfirstcsas@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes District Council T: 01273 471600 – Option 2

Eastbourne Borough Council T: 01323 410000 – Option 2

Out of hours emergency repairs:

Main council number, then the emergency repairs option.

Gas Heating problems:

Call BSW Building Services Ltd on 01444 836036

Rents Contacts

Lewes District Council T: 0800 023 7080

You will need your 12 digit reference number

Eastbourne Borough Council T: 0800 288 8097

You will need your 7 digit reference number

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

Section 1 – Important Contact Details

Contacting your housing officer

Housing officers cover a geographical 'patch'. We have email addresses for each patch, which are monitored by a group of housing officers so that messages always get through in a timely fashion even if someone is on leave, sick or having to focus on something very urgent. Please see below for details of each patch.

Lewes District Council

Eastern Rural

Barcombe, Cooksbridge, Firle, Glynde & Ringmer
easternrural.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

South West Rural

Piddinghoe, Kingston, Rodmell
southwestrural.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

North West Rural

North Chailey, Ditchling, Plumpton, Newick, Wivelsfield Green
northwestrural.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Newhaven

newhaven.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Peacehaven

peacehaven.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Seaford

seaford.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Telscombe to Falmer

telscombetofalmer.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes Landport

leweslandport.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes De Montford and town centre

lewesdemontfordandtowncentre.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes West Malling

leweswestmallington.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes East Malling

leweseastmallington.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes St. Pancras

lewesstpancrason.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Lewes Neville

lewesneville.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Eastbourne Borough Council**Archery**

archery.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Central

central.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Upperton

upperton.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Hampden Park East

hampdenparkeast.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Hampden Park West

hampdenparkwest.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Martello

martello.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Shinewater

shinewater.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Old Town Central

oldtowncentral.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Old Town Downside

oldtowndownside.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Section 1 – Important Contact Details

Langney Village and Rise

langneyvillageandrise.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Tower Dene

towerdene.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Other

Tenancy Resolution Team

resolution.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Communal block issues/surrounding estates concerns

Estates.housingteam@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

We're here to help



Council Department Email Addresses

Customer First / Homes First

customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Tenant Involvement

tenantinvolvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Other Useful Contacts

Age UK

Tel: 0800 055 6112 www.ageuk.org.uk

Child Benefit

Tel: 0300 200 3100 www.gov.uk/child-benefit

Citizens Advice Bureau

Tel: 03444 111 444 www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Disability Benefits (DLA/ PIP/ AA)

Tel: See website www.gov.uk/disability-benefits-helpline

DVLA

Tel: 0300 790 6801

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency

East Sussex County Council

Tel: 0345 60 80 191 www.eastsussex.gov.uk

East Sussex Fire & Rescue (non-emergency)

Tel: 0303 999 1000 www.esfrs.org

Emergencies

Tel: 999

Environment Agency

Tel: 03708 506 506

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency

Section 1 – Important Contact Details

ESCC Blue Badge Team

Tel: 01323 464 244

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/blue-badges/contact-the-blue-badge-team

Tax credits

Tel: 0345 300 3900

www.gov.uk/topic/benefits-credits/tax-credits

Jobcentre Plus

Tel: 0800 055 6688

www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus/new-benefit-claims

National Grid (to report gas leaks)

Tel: Gas 0800 111 999 – Electricity 0800 404 090

www.nationalgrid.com/uk

NHS 111 Service

Tel: 111

www.111.nhs.uk

Pension Service (State Pension/Pension Credits)

Tel: 0800 731 7898 www.gov.uk/contact-pension-service

Police (non-emergency)

Tel: 101

Social Care Direct

Tel: 0345 60 80 191

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/getting-help-from-us/contact-adult-social-care

South East Water (Drinking Supply Emergencies)

Tel: 0333 000 0001 www.southeastwater.co.uk

Southern Water (Waste Water Emergencies)

Tel: 0330 303 0368 www.southernwater.co.uk

TV Licensing

Tel: 0300 555 0286 www.tvlicensing.co.uk

Moving in

Moving into your new home is an exciting time and we want to help your move go as smoothly as possible. This section provides some basic information about what to expect when you move into a Lewes District or Eastbourne Borough Council property, but if you have other questions, please look on our website or speak to the Neighbourhood Housing Team.

Keys

After you have signed your new tenancy agreement you will be provided with a set of keys, including communal front door keys if necessary. We do not have spare keys to your property. If you require additional keys it is your responsibility to get more cut. If you lose your key(s) to your individual property it is your responsibility to arrange a locksmith. We do hold copies of some communal front door keys to blocks as these are security keys and cannot be copied. If you lose your common way key, you will have to request a replacement from the Property Services team and there is a charge for this. For Retirement Housing accommodation, please refer to the Retirement Housing Team for guidance as these are all security keys and any lost or replacement keys or electronic

fobs will need to be requested via the team.

Housing related benefits

If you are already claiming Housing Benefit, please be aware that your claim is related to your current accommodation and will not move with you when you move homes. In advance of the sign up for your new property, it is your responsibility to complete a new Housing Benefit application form or report your changes by signing in to your Universal Credit account. Any delay with applying for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit can result in rent arrears building up which you will be responsible for. You will also need to make arrangements to pay your Council Tax at your new address. There are more details on Housing Benefit in Section 3 of this handbook.

Section 2 – Moving in

Gas, electricity, water and TV

It is your responsibility to advise utility companies (such as gas, electric and water) of the date that you moved into your home. It is very important to make a note of meter readings when you first move into the property as most utility companies will need to know these. To find out who your gas supplier is, call 0870 608 1524 and to find out who your electricity supplier is call 0333 202 2023.

You will also need to inform TV licensing of the date you moved in and pay for a new license for your new property or move your existing license. If you live in Retirement Housing, please refer to the Retirement Housing Team for advice on concessionary license criteria and payment methods.

Post and Electoral Register

Please make sure you notify as many companies as possible of your new address before you move, otherwise you may lose important post. You can also arrange to have your mail redirected to your new home. To arrange this, please go to www.royalmail.com/personal/receiving-mail/redirection

Note that there is a cost for this service.

You will also need to register at your new address on the Electoral Register. This ensures you will be able to vote in any upcoming elections. Please visit

www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Or call the electoral department of your Authority on their main numbers detailed on page 1.

Contents insurance

As a Landlord or Freeholder we insure the structure of your home, but you are responsible for insuring your personal property and the decoration of your home. We are only responsible for repairing elements such as walls, plastering, boilers, windows and the roof. The Council will not be liable and will not pay for the contents of your home such as furniture, carpets, personal items or appliances if they are damaged in an accident such as a fire or flood or if you have things stolen in a burglary.

The cost of contents insurance is usually a very small proportion of what it would cost you to replace lost household items. When taking out contents insurance, shop around for the best policy, making sure that it is with a reputable

company. It is important to include third party cover in case anyone claims against you – for example, if you accidentally leave a tap running and flood your neighbour's home.

TV aerials and satellite dishes

All of our flats already have communal digital aerials, for which there is a small charge that forms part of your total rental charges. The aerial will receive terrestrial channels; if you wish to access extra channels you will need to use a set top box from one of the satellite TV companies or use a TV with inbuilt Freeview. If there is no communal aerial and you wish to install a satellite dish, you must apply for permission in writing as well as planning permission. Please complete the online form available on our website or speak to the Property Services Team.

Pets

Some properties are subject to local pet agreements. You need approval if you would like to keep a dog or a cat and you live in a self-contained flat or maisonette or you want to run a pet-related business from home. If you live

in Retirement accommodation, you need approval if you would like to keep any pet. In all cases approval to keep a dog will require the signing of a Responsible Dog Agreement.

Lettable Standard

As part of the sign up process you will be provided with a copy of the Lettable Standard document. This outlines the condition that properties should be in when they are let and is based on the principles of safety, security, cleanliness and all services being in working order.

The purpose of the Lettable Standard is to ensure that a consistent standard of work is carried out by the Council and its Contractors to all empty properties before they are re-let. Likewise, when a property is handed back to us following the tenant moving out, the Council expects the property to be in a similar condition.

If you are not happy with the standard of your new home, please contact the Property Services Team.

Paying your Rent

One of the most important responsibilities of being a Council tenant is to make sure your full rent is paid on time. Rent becomes due on the 1st of each month. This section gives an overview of the ways you can pay your rent. If you have any problems making your rent payments, it is best to contact your landlord to discuss your situation. Ignoring the problem will only make it worse.

Telephone

Paying by telephone is convenient with our 24 hour automated payment line. Lewes tenants need to call 0800 023 7080 and Eastbourne tenants need to call 0800 288 8097. You need your full payment reference number handy to process your payment. Calls to these numbers are free from a UK landline, but charges may apply from mobiles.

Direct Debit

A Direct Debit is simple and easy to set up and saves you time. There are a selection of dates available to choose from, details are available on the direct debit form. You can download a Direct Debit form from our website: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/payments/pay-your-rent

Online banking or standing order

You can pay via online banking or by setting up a standing order. A standing order can be set up by you with your bank for a fixed date in the month but cannot be amended by us. Please ensure you set up your arrangement to debit your bank account five banking days before your instalment is due to us. You must quote your full payment reference number against the payment or standing order. Our bank details:

Lewes District Council
Lloyds Bank
Sort Code: 30-80-12
Account: 10298260

Eastbourne Borough Council
Lloyds Bank
Sort code: 30-80-12
Account: 10712168

Online

You will need your full payment reference number which can be found on any correspondence you have been sent or your rent payment card.

You can pay on-line by visiting:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/payments/pay-your-rent

This is a quick, secure and convenient way to pay.

Post

You can pay your rent by cheque and send it to us. Please make cheques payable to either Lewes District Council or Eastbourne Borough Council and put your full payment reference number on the back of the cheque. Please note we do not take cash and post-dated cheques are not accepted. Please send your cheques to the relevant address below:

Customer First
6 High Street
Lewes BN7 2AD

Customer First
Town Hall, Grove Road
Eastbourne BN21 4UG

Pay rent at your local shop or Post Office by PayPoint

You can pay your rent using cash by going to any Post Office or shop displaying the PayPoint logo. In order to do this, you must take your payment card that you should have received shortly after moving in to your home. If you have lost your payment card, contact the Income Maximisation and Welfare team for a replacement.

Housing Benefit and Universal Credit

These benefits help people on low income pay their rent. You may be able to claim one of these benefits if you have a low household income. Please contact the Council for advice on which of these benefits you may be eligible to claim.

If you receive Universal Credit, you need to ensure that any top ups or supplements that you are responsible for are made on time. If the Council is not receiving your rent directly you need to pay the housing element to us as soon as you receive it.

The authority is unable to accept any new applications for Housing Benefits, in most cases you will

Section 3 – Paying your Rent

need to apply for Universal Credit to get help with your housing costs. The exceptions to this rule are where you and, if applicable, your partner have both reached state retirement pension age or you are living in supported accommodation, that meets the authority's specified accommodation criteria.

Moving into the authority or between Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils will require a new application and may mean you need to apply for Universal Credit. If you are moving within the same authority and already receive Housing Benefit you will normally be able to make a new application for Housing Benefit in respect of your new address.

Service Charges

Some tenants will have a service charge element in addition to their rent, which partly depends on the type of property you rent. A detailed explanation of these charges can be found on our website: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/article/1217/Charges-to-your-council-rent or can be sent to you on request.

General Service Charge

This is paid by some tenants to cover items on housing land such as grass cutting, upkeep of play areas, estate lighting, fencing and management costs.

Communal Service Charge

This applies to tenants living in flats and is an extra charge on top of rent that covers items such as communal lighting, estate inspections and door entry systems.

Retirement Housing Communal Charge

This covers Retirement Housing communal facilities.

Retirement Housing Personal Charge

This covers personal heating and lighting costs and other personal facilities.

Personal Support Charge

This pays for services that help you live independently, such as lifeline facilities.

If you are having trouble paying your rent

If you are having difficulty paying your rent or are falling behind, you should contact the Income Maximisation and Welfare team straight away so that we can advise you on what you can do.

Please ring 01273 471600 (Lewes) or 01323 410000 (Eastbourne) and chose options 6 then 3 to discuss your rent account.

More information and advice on what to do are available on our website

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/payments/pay-your-rent under the 'Problems with paying your rent' heading.

We can give you advice on different payment methods, which benefits you may be entitled to, and agencies you could contact to get independent advice and help with your debts. If you are unable to pay all that you owe in one payment, we can reach a reasonable agreement that will enable you to pay by regular instalments.

There are serious consequences if you fail to pay your rent:

- You risk legal action being taken which may result in Court Costs, a County Court Judgement against you and the possibility of losing your home
- You will not be allowed to transfer to alternative accommodation
- You may not be allowed to carry out a mutual exchange
- You will not be able to rent a garage from us
- You will not be eligible for our Internal Redecoration Scheme
- You will not get a good reference from us, such as for another landlord, bank or building society

Types of Tenancies

This section gives an overview of the different types of tenancies which may be offered by the Council. You can find more information on the website.

Introductory tenancy

An introductory tenancy will be offered to all new tenants who have not had a Council or Housing Association tenancy before. An introductory tenancy runs for a 12-month probationary period where you need to demonstrate you are able to keep to the terms of the tenancy agreement. You will need to allow the Council to visit you during this time. If you fail to keep to the terms of the agreement, for example not paying your rent on time or causing a nuisance to your neighbours, then we are able to evict you more quickly than 'secure tenants'. For introductory tenancies we are required to prove to the court that the problem has occurred and that it has been dealt with properly. The court can then give an order to end the tenancy.

At the end of your introductory tenancy (usually after 12 months) and as long as you have kept to the terms of the tenancy agreement, your tenancy will automatically convert to a secure tenancy which gives you more security in your home and more rights.

During your introductory tenancy you cannot apply for a transfer, exchange or assignment, sublet part of your property or carry out any alterations to the property.

The most common reasons that introductory tenancies fail are the non-payment of rent and anti-social behaviour. If breaches such as these occur, we can extend the introductory tenancy period by a further six months. In this case, we must send you a Notice of Extension explaining our reasons. You also have a right to ask that the decision to extend your introductory tenancy be reviewed.

Secure tenancy

If you have been a tenant with us for more than a year you will normally hold a secure tenancy, which gives you more rights such as being able to move properties. It also gives you more security and usually means that you can remain in your home for as long as you like provided that you do not break the terms of your tenancy agreement. There are some circumstances, for example redevelopments, where the Council can make you move to another property. If this is likely to happen to you we will give you plenty of notice.

Joint tenancy

You may have signed one of the tenancies described above with someone else – this makes you both joint tenants. Holding a joint tenancy means that you are both responsible for keeping to the terms of the tenancy agreement, including paying the rent, until the joint tenancy comes to an end.

For more information about changing a joint tenancy to a sole tenancy, please see the Making Changes to your Tenancy section of the handbook.

Non-secure tenancy

If the Council has placed you in Temporary Accommodation you will be given a non-secure tenancy or a license, depending on your personal circumstances. If you are later offered a Council tenancy you would be issued with an introductory tenancy at this point.

Non-secure tenancies do not have all the rights that secure tenants have, including no right to buy, right to exchange, right to succession or right to take in lodgers or sublet. If the Council wishes to end the tenancy, it can serve a notice to quit, bringing it to an end.



Section 4 – Types of Tenancies

Breaking the terms of your tenancy

Whatever type of tenancy you hold, it is important that you keep to the terms of the agreement which are explained in more detail in your tenancy agreement. The main responsibilities are:

- To pay your rent on time and not get into arrears
- Not to cause, or allow any family or friends to cause, anti-social behaviour in your home or neighbourhood
- To live in the property as your only and main home and not to sublet the whole property to someone else
- To keep your home in good condition and allow us or our contractors access to inspect or carry out repairs when necessary

If you break the terms of your agreement, for example you do not pay your rent on time or you do not look after your home properly, we can take action against you. We can apply to the court to end the tenancy and we can also apply to the court for an order saying that you must or must not do something. This can involve other agencies such as the Police.

If you are worried about not being able to keep to the terms of your agreement or if you break the terms of your agreement because you are unwell or in other difficulties, please speak to the Neighbourhood Housing team as soon as possible and they will try and help you.



Making Changes to your Tenancy

There may be times over the course of your tenancy where you would like to make some changes, such as moving to a different property, adding someone to the tenancy or buying your home. This section provides more information on some of these common changes.

Transferring or leaving your property

If you are a Council tenant and you wish to end your tenancy and move into the private rented sector or other alternative accommodation, you must give us 28 days' notice in writing. The easiest way to do this is to complete a termination form – please contact the Neighbourhood Housing team.

If you are transferring to another Council property, you will not need to give us 28 days in writing as we have helped facilitate the move, but you will be required to sign a surrender on your old property when you sign the paperwork for your new property. This will be explained to you by the Neighbourhood Housing team. The length of overlap time you have between properties can vary and you will need to discuss this

with the Neighbourhood Housing team.

The Neighbourhood Housing team and a member of the Property Services team will arrange to conduct a Moving out Inspection before you leave your old property. This is to identify anything you may need to repair, change or clear before you hand the keys back. If you do not follow the advice given to you during the moving process, recharges will be applied in the following circumstances:

- If there is damage to the property, such as damage to doors, sanitary ware or kitchen fixtures
- If you leave any fixtures and fittings installed by you such as flooring, cupboards, fire surrounds or shelving

Section 5 – Making Changes to your Tenancy

- If you have installed any non-standard items such as glass doors or light fittings and these are not removed and replaced with our standard items
- If the property is not left clean, clear of rubbish and in good condition
- If the garden is not left tidy with grass cut, and any structures, sheds or greenhouses erected by you removed

Mutual Exchange

If you want to move you could think about moving by Mutual Exchange. This means you will need to find another local authority or housing association tenant to swap with and seek permission from both landlords involved in the exchange.

As a tenant of the Council, you can join Homeswapper free of charge to assist you to find a suitable exchange.

www.homeswapper.co.uk

You can also use Facebook groups or adverts in local shops. Once you think you have found a suitable exchange, please apply online or contact your Council to obtain an application form.

Once you have found someone who would like to swap properties with you then you need to complete a Mutual Exchange Application form and both parties need to return this to the Neighbourhood Housing team so that we can assess the application and seek references from the other parties landlord. You cannot swap homes without getting our agreement and we will advise you of our decision within 42 days from both applications being received.

We can only refuse a Mutual Exchange Application on certain specified grounds:

- There is a court order for possession or a suspended possession order
- The landlord has started possession proceedings
- The property is too large or not reasonably suited to the incoming tenant's needs
- The property is a service tenancy – this means the tenant occupies it for the better performance of their duties
- The property is designed for a disabled person and the incoming tenant is not disabled

- The property is a Retirement Housing property and the prospective tenant does not require this service

Reasons for refusal will always be given. The only appeal is by way of Judicial Review through the courts on a point of law.

Please note that introductory tenants are not entitled to mutually exchange.

A full moving out inspection is completed prior to exchange, and incoming tenants will accept responsibility for any non-standard fixtures and fittings and for the condition of the property when they move in. Outgoing tenants will be told at the inspections if there are any changes or repairs they need to make before the exchange goes ahead. Mutual exchanges must be at no cost to the Council, so you are strongly advised to ensure you are happy with the condition of your new home before agreeing to exchange.

It is illegal to offer money to another tenant to induce them to move.

Downsizing

The Council has a limited supply of family-sized accommodation and disability-adapted properties. We recognise that a number of our homes are under-occupied, whilst at the same time we have families living in Temporary Accommodation, (including bed and breakfast), and others living in properties which are overcrowded. We have therefore adopted an under-occupation incentive scheme in order to free up some of these properties and maximise the use of our housing stock.

Under this scheme council tenants who give up larger accommodation, and some tenants who mutually exchange to smaller properties in the same Council area may be eligible for cash incentives. More information can be found on the website.

Succession

When a tenant dies, there may be a right for the tenancy to be passed on which is known as succession. A tenancy can only be passed on once. The rules governing the rights of succession depend on when the tenancy started, the type of tenancy held

Section 5 – Making Changes to your Tenancy

and the relationship between the tenant and the person wishing to succeed. Please contact the Neighbourhood Housing team to discuss your succession rights.

Assignments (Including joint to sole and sole to joint tenancy)

It is not usually possible to assign a secure tenancy from a joint tenant to a sole tenant, unless a court order has been obtained. A joint tenant's name cannot just be taken off the tenancy as it is no longer possible for the Council to allow an assignment between two joint tenants.

If you are a joint tenant and your circumstances change, please contact the Neighbourhood Housing team or seek independent legal advice.

There are some specific circumstances where it is possible to assign a sole tenancy to a person who would be entitled to succeed to the tenancy. For more information, please contact the Neighbourhood Housing team.

Changing your tenancy from a sole to joint tenancy

If you hold a sole secure tenancy and you wish to have your partner added to the tenancy, you can request that the tenancy is changed to a joint tenancy. In order for this to happen, we would need to see proof that you are married or in a civil partnership or your partner has been living with you at the property for the last 12 months.

The Council will not consider joint tenancies between parents and children or siblings. If the sole tenant is in breach of any of the conditions of their sole tenancy then the application will be refused. Please contact the Neighbourhood Housing team for more details.

Right to Buy

If you have held a public sector tenancy for more than 3 years you may be able to apply to buy your Council property at a discounted price. You could apply if:

- the property is your only or principal home
- you are a secure tenant
- you have been a public sector tenant for a minimum of three years – it does not have to be three years in a row.

- you do not have any legal problems with debt
- you do not have a Possession Order or Anti-Social Behaviour Order
- your home is not due to be demolished

Retirement Housing or properties that are particularly suited for elderly or disabled people do not fall within the Right to Buy scheme.

For more details on the Right to Buy scheme, please visit www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/housing/right-to-buy.



Extra Help for Older People

Adaptations

There may be ways we can adapt your home to suit your changing needs. For more information on this process, please see section 11 of this handbook.

Homes First retirement properties

As people get older, they may wish to downsize and/or move to ground floor accommodation. Many people like the reassurance of being around neighbours of the same age group and having the ability to call on someone easily 24 hours a day if they have an issue with their housing. Lewes and Eastbourne Councils have retirement flats and bungalows across their areas which are available to residents over 60 years. These properties have lifeline systems and Retirement Housing Officers attached to them to provide an enhanced housing service.

The Retirement Housing Service

The Retirement Housing Service is provided Monday to Friday (not including bank holidays) 8.30am to 5pm and delivered by a dedicated team of staff called Retirement Housing Officers. Each Retirement Court has two team members who work across 4 to 6 different sites. Your dedicated staff member will base themselves at courts where we have a staff office and will be there several times a week. When they are on annual leave you will see their buddy officer. If you live at a court or bungalow scheme with no staff office, you may not see your Retirement Housing Officer as often, but they will be visiting your scheme each week to undertake necessary estate inspections and carry out resident visits. You may contact your Retirement Housing Officer at any time during the working hours as above and they will be happy to assist you with your tenancy questions.

Your home will be fitted with an emergency lifeline system, and you will be provided with a mobile pendant, this means that, should you require help, you can summon it wherever you are in your property at the push of a button 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Each tenant presses their "I'm OK" button Monday to Friday to ensure their wellbeing. If staff do not hear from tenants, they will check on their well-being by lunchtime.

Tenancies in Retirement Housing are independent living tenancies.

There are no care services or support provided. You must be able to manage and make decisions about your tenancy and maintain your home to a good standard. The Retirement Housing Officer role is there to ensure our buildings are safe and well maintained, our properties are let, and all tenants have well-being checks. They can advise you on tenancy matters relating to your home and signpost you to other agencies should you need help or support.



Supporting you in your Tenancy

There may be times when you or a member of your household need extra support to help with day to day problems.

We are trained to refer you to an appropriate service if you need support to help you maintain your tenancy. This may be an internal service provided by us, or an external service provided by another organisation.

If you have a medical need you are always advised to contact your GP service in the first instance. If you feel threatened you are always advised to call the Police on 101, or in an emergency on 999.

Domestic abuse

For many people, home isn't a safe place. But we know it isn't always easy for people to recognise domestic abuse in their relationships, and it can be hard to reach out for help.

Domestic abuse is recognised as: Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive behaviour or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexual orientation. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to: psychological, physical, sexual, economic and emotional forms of abuse.

If you're worried that you or someone you care about is

experiencing domestic abuse, you might not know what to say or do. You might be concerned about making the situation worse. Or if it is happening to someone you know, you might find it difficult to understand why someone doesn't leave. People who have experienced domestic abuse say that the opportunities to talk, along with practical and emotional support, is important – particularly from someone they trust. By being there, and listening, you can help someone break the silence about their situation.

If you, or someone else, is in immediate danger call 999 and ask for the police.

Please contact Lewes District Council on **01273 471600** or Eastbourne Borough Council on **01323 410000** (Option 9) and ask to speak to your Housing Officer. An officer can talk to you about your housing needs and can assist you and discuss options, such as alternative accommodation, with the assistance of our Housing Options and Wellbeing team if appropriate.

At Eastbourne and Lewes District Councils we have a 'Sanctuary Scheme' that is available and aims to make it possible for victims/survivors to remain in their homes and feel safe and provides an alternative to relocation away from support networks. This is done through the installation of enhanced security measures in a victim's property.

More support can be found at www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/DASupport



Living in a Council Property

During your time as a Council tenant, there may be issues and questions that come up. There is plenty of information on our website www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk and in your tenancy agreement, and you can always ask the Neighbourhood Housing team, but this section gives the answers to some common queries.

Alterations

For more information on making alterations to your home, please see section 11 'Repairs and Maintenance' in this handbook.

provided varies according to the need of individual blocks and we talk to the residents regularly to make sure it suits their need. The service charge pays for this service.

Compliments

If you are pleased about something we have done, the service provided or the actions of a particular member of staff, please let us know. By doing this, we can see if we can change other services to get the same result as well as making our staff members feel valued.

All communal gardens are for the enjoyment of all residents. Please be respectful of your neighbours when using the shared garden. All shared space will remain shared, we will not approve any requests to divide the garden up, and the installation of garden furniture or play equipment is not permitted.

Communal areas in flats

Tenants and leaseholders share the responsibility of keeping all the public areas clean and tidy. Additionally, all our blocks have a regular cleaning and estate monitoring services which ensures that a reasonable standard of cleanliness is maintained at all times. The level of service

Flats make great homes, but to reduce nuisance and noise and to maintain health and safety you must not:

- Store any items in any communal areas including under the staircase and landings. Where these have to be removed you will be recharged.

- Smoke in entrances, staircases or landings
- Prop open any fire safety doors or entrance doors
- Let any unknown people into the block to ensure safety for all residents

Equal opportunities

We believe that all residents, our staff and people that visit Lewes District and Eastbourne should feel welcome, safe, valued, included and respected. We believe all people should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and be free from discrimination. We are committed to challenging unfair discrimination in all forms, including any incidents of harassment against residents or our staff. Our full Equality Policy can be found on our website at www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

Flooring in flats and maisonettes

When living in flats or maisonettes, Lewes and Eastbourne Councils ask that you keep all the floors in the property substantially covered with material suitable for reducing the transmission of noise, such as carpets or rugs. You must obtain the Council's prior written

permission before you install floor tiles, laminate, wooden flooring or flooring of a similar nature. This permission will only be given to tenants living in flats and maisonettes in exceptional circumstances.

If you install any such flooring without the Council's prior written permission, the Council may require you to remove it at your own expense and replace it with floor coverings as set out above.

Garages

Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils have garages available to rent. You can apply to rent a garage online or by telephoning Customer First. We will not be responsible for any damage to items stored in the garage. You should have appropriate insurance. Flammable liquids must not be stored due to the risk of fire.

You must have a clear rent account for your residential property and payment will be required in advance. You will need to sign a rental agreement when you collect the keys as well as providing ID.

Section 8 – Living in a Council Property

To end your agreement you will be required to provide 7 days written notice. You will be liable for the rent during the notice period and will continue to be liable once the notice period has expired if we have not received the keys.

Gardens

If your home has a garden, it is a condition of your tenancy that you take care of it. This includes keeping the garden free from rubbish, the grass and hedges trimmed and not removing large trees or shrubs without our consent. Bonfires are not permitted. If you are struggling with your garden maintenance, please speak to the Neighbourhood Housing Team.

Gas and electricity meters and cards

Some of our properties have pay as you go gas and electricity meters installed. Some people prefer these types of meters as they can make it easier to monitor energy usage. However, if you would like to change your meter to a standard one and receive bills, you are free to do so and will need to contact your energy supplier to have this done. If you do have a pay as you go

meter in your property, there should have been gas and electricity cards or keys left in the property for you when you moved in. If not, you will need to request these from the energy supplier.

Gifts and hospitality

All council employees are aware that it is a serious criminal offence for them to corruptly receive or give any gifts, loans, fees, reward or advantage for doing or not doing anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity. Any gifts, including those given in wills, will be politely declined. An employee should, therefore, tactfully refuse any personal gift that is offered to them or a close relative.

Staff Code of Conduct

The Council is committed to providing the highest standard of service to its customers. In order to maintain these and ensure a professional service is delivered, all members of staff must adhere to the Council's Code of Conduct. If you have any concern regarding the conduct of any of our staff you can report them in confidence to a Team Leader or Senior Officer of Homes First: Eastbourne 01323 410000 Lewes 01273 471600

Lodgers

While you are not allowed to sublet the whole of your property to someone else, you can apply for permission to take in a lodger. You cannot take in a lodger if this would mean you would exceed the maximum number of people permitted to live in your property, which is specified in your tenancy agreement. You also cannot take in a lodger if you are an introductory tenant. If you are granted permission for a lodger, you must notify the Neighbourhood Housing team in writing of the names and dates of birth of your lodgers within fourteen days of them moving in. If you are in receipt of benefits you will also need to ensure they are aware of any changes.

Unlawful subletting

It is illegal for tenants of either Council to sublet the whole of their home to someone else; you must use your home as your main and principle residence. If we think that you are subletting your property, we will investigate and take action. If you suspect that a property is being sublet, you can report it to us in confidence by telephoning us. Photographs will be taken of tenants when you

receive your keys to help us prevent and tackle tenancy fraud.

Making a complaint

At Homes First, we're committed to providing the best services we can. We know we don't always get everything right, and when that happens, we want to hear about it and be given an opportunity to resolve matters for you.

When you think we've failed our service standards or want to make a complaint, we'll aim to put matters right quickly by being open and accountable. We treat all customers fairly and take prompt action to carry out an investigation to understand where we may have gone wrong.

You can send us details of your complaint in a variety of ways:

- Online complaints form: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/complaints
- Email: customerfirst@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk
- Letter: Complaints, 6 High Street, Lewes BN7 2AD or Complaints, Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne BN21 4UG

Section 8 – Living in a Council Property

If you are unable to make your complaint by any of these means, you can telephone us to raise your complaint. If you live in Lewes District, please call 01273 471600; if you live in Eastbourne Borough, please call 01323 41000.

You can also contact the Housing Ombudsman at any time. The HO website www.housing-ombudsman.org explains how they can help you to resolve a complaint you have not previously been able to.

Alternatively, you may contact the Housing Ombudsman on Tel: 0300 1113000 for advice. Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org or write to: Housing Ombudsman Service, Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, London E14 9GE.

Mobility vehicles

If you would like to keep a mobility scooter at your property you will need to ask your Neighbourhood Management team for permission. You will also need to ensure you have adequate insurance as you will be liable for any accidental damage caused to your property. All mobility scooters will require an annual PAT

(Portable Appliance Test) to ensure the charging equipment is in a fit state to be used. The PAT will need to be carried out by a certified professional and you will be required to provide a copy of the certificate for your file. If the charger fails the PAT test then it will be the owner's responsibility to repair/replace the damaged item. If you live in a flat, we may refuse permission if there is no capacity at the block where you live as no scooters can be stored in communal hallways, or other areas not designated as a scooter storage area. For more details please seek clarity from our policy or a member of the team.

Parking

We provide parking areas on most of our housing estates, however, vehicle use has increased since a lot of our estates were built and in some places this has caused problems. Where we have parking spaces or car parks these are not allocated.

In Lewes, parking permits are required in the De Montfort estate, the St Pancras estate and Wellington Street / North Street areas. New tenants for these areas will be supplied with one

permit per household by the Neighbourhood Housing team.

In Eastbourne, there are a limited number of parking spaces available to rent at Solly Court and Rush Court on Bourne Street. These spaces are only available to rent from residents in these blocks and are rented by way of a license. Please contact the Neighbourhood Housing team for more information.

Parking vehicles that are untaxed or not roadworthy in all parking areas is forbidden, as is parking on grass verges or pavements. We will remove and dispose of such vehicles. Likewise, caravans, trailers, boats and other items will be removed after a suitable notice period.

If you wish to park a vehicle, caravan or trailer in your garden, you will need to apply for permission to install a hardstanding and carriageway crossing. Lewes and Eastbourne Councils will not fund a hardstanding unless there is a confirmed medical need for convenient access to a vehicle supported by an Occupational Therapist. Disabled parking

spaces can be marked out on the road to assist disabled residents on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist but they will be available for use by any tenant or visitor with the appropriate Blue Badge. To discuss this further, please contact your Neighbourhood Housing team.

Refuse and recycling

As a tenant, you are expected to dispose of your rubbish responsibly. If you live in a flat, you need to place the rubbish in the provided bin areas, and if you live in a house, please ensure the rubbish is put out for collection on the day. To reduce odours, maintain street cleanliness and to protect your rubbish from animals, we strongly recommend residents put their bagged rubbish in a wheelie bin.

****** Please contact the Council Customer First team or visit the website for details and costs of new or replacement waste or recycling bins.

If you live in a block of flats, please do not place any discarded household or garden objects, for example, washing machines and

Section 8 – Living in a Council Property

garden waste, in the bin areas or drying areas. This will be treated as fly tipping and you could receive a fine.

Lewes and Eastbourne Councils strongly encourage all tenants to reduce as much waste as possible by recycling. Both Councils run recycling schemes where boxes and bins are provided to tenants wishing to recycle. For more information, please contact the Customer First team or look on our website.

Tenants of Lewes Council can sign up to have their food waste collected. To register for this scheme or for more information, please go to our website or telephone us.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

All members of the community can help to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. If you tell us that you think you or someone you know is being abused, harmed or neglected, or we have concerns that this may be happening, we will respond in accordance with our Safeguarding Policy.

For more information on safeguarding, go to www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk and search for 'Safeguarding'.

To report a concern over the safety or welfare of a child or young person (aged under 18) or a vulnerable adult, please contact East Sussex County Council: 0345 608 0191 (Adult Social Care, Children and Family Services). In an emergency, if there is imminent danger or a crime may have been committed, contact the Police.

Smoking

You or any member of your household or any visitors must not smoke in any common areas within a block of flats. Smoke-free legislation was introduced in 2007 and applies to all communal areas if they are wholly or substantially enclosed. Any person smoking within these areas is committing a criminal offence and could be fined up to £200. We have a legal responsibility to ensure that these communal areas remain smoke free and ask that if you witness anyone smoking in them you report this to us to enable the Neighbourhood Housing team to investigate.



Section 8

Looking after your garden and helping our wildlife

With climate change being a 'hot' topic and British wildlife being in trouble, the Council has adopted a Pollinator Strategy which aims to help nature across the District and the Borough. We are hoping that you will join us by encouraging wildlife wherever you can.



Some Council properties come with gardens or outdoor space in various shapes and forms, which, when cared for well, are great for people and wildlife enjoyment.

Here are some top tips for enjoying your outdoor space, helping attract wildlife and keeping it looking loved:

- **Grow more native flowers, shrubs and trees** – nectar, pollen, leaves and woody debris are important food sources for wildlife including butterflies and bees, as well as providing seeds, berries, fruits and cover for birds and mammals.

If you are limited on space, plant up pots and window boxes with wildflowers and herbs on patios or hardstanding areas, not only providing for nature but offering colourful displays for us too.

- **Mow less, later and a little higher** – mowing less or later in the growing season allows grasses and common-lawn plants to flower such as clovers, daisies, buttercups, dandelion, and selfheal, which are important food sources for insects including butterflies, not to mention a picnic-ground for the hungry birds which feed on them.



Did you know?

Flowering grasses often form an important part of the lifecycle for the caterpillars of butterflies and moths.

- **Create woodpiles, leaf piles, compost and trimmings** – the decomposing and discarded off-cuts from your garden can be incredible places for animals to thrive, feed and hibernate. Keep in a corner, out of the way so as to maintain a well looked after plot.



- **Keep an area of your garden 'wild'** – at the back or along the sides, including welcoming ivy, nettles and brambles which are all important food sources for wildlife. Nature loves informal and natural edges.
- **Keep connected** – small gaps allow for hedgehogs and other creatures such as toads to roam and make use of gardens to feed.



- **Hold some water** either in bird baths or shallow saucers to provide the life source for wildlife, from frogs, newts and small creatures to thirsty garden birds.

Gardens, when all added up, form a substantial area of our landscape. If managed with nature in mind, they can really help provide vital food and shelter, and link up movement-corridors for our beloved local wildlife.



Estate Services

Neighbourhood and Estates Team

Homes First Neighbourhood and Estate Officers undertake monthly block inspections. The team check the condition of the communal areas including the shared drying areas and gardens. As part of this inspection they will report repairs, address fly tipping and remove items left in the communal ways. Details of their checks and findings can be found on the noticeboards.

Neighbourhood First Team

The Neighbourhood First Team undertake quarterly inspections of our wider estates. As part of those inspections they check our garages, play areas and the green spaces on our housing land. They respond to fly tipping, report repairs and ensure areas are clear of graffiti and litter. The team is also responsible for managing our grounds maintenance contract and ensuring the estate's grounds are well maintained. They ensure trees on housing estates and around street properties are kept

HOMES FIRST ESTATE SERVICES

working in partnership with
Neighbourhood Housing · Property Services
Retirement Housing · Environment First



in a safe and attractive condition and do not damage or interfere with neighbouring buildings. Tree pruning is carried out as required in cases of health and safety or urgent need.

Cleaning

We are responsible for making sure that the internal common parts of buildings and external common areas of estates are kept clean and tidy to residents' satisfaction and that cleaning is carried out in a safe and efficient manner. The service provided by our contractor comprises:

- Regular cleaning of internal areas
- Various other tasks such as stripping, polishing and buffing of floors and the cleaning of the bin chute rooms where present.
- Cleaning of windows in common parts



Getting on with your Neighbours

Neighbourhoods are made up of households all with different lifestyles. We should all try to be understanding of each other's differences to enable us to enjoy living in our homes. In consultation with tenants, the following definition of "acceptable behaviour" was agreed. "Acceptable behaviour is behaviour that is considerate, responsible, and reasonable and has regard for our neighbours and how our behaviour may affect them. It requires respect for our neighbours, our environment and our community."

Anti-social behaviour and hate crime can include:

- Harassment or intimidation
- Verbal abuse
- Criminal damage and graffiti
- Noise nuisance
- Drug dealing
- Vehicle related nuisance
- Violence

Anti-social behaviour is not:

- Ball games; children playing in public communal areas
- Youths gathering socially (unless they are causing a nuisance)
- Being unable to park outside your own home or in a communal parking area
- DIY and car repairs – unless these are taking place at night
- Civil disputes between neighbours, such as shared access and driveway boundaries
- Lifestyle differences
- Domestic noise, such as from washing machines, toilet flushing, vacuum cleaners, lawn mowing, babies crying, BBQs, cooking smells

Who am I responsible for?

As a tenant you have a responsibility to respect your neighbours and the local environment and to act in a considerate manner. You are responsible for your own behaviour, the behaviour of anyone who lives with you or visits you, and your pet's behaviour. Any anti-social behaviour that comes from your property and is related to you is considered a breach of your tenancy.

What to do if you are experiencing anti-social behaviour and/or hate crime?

There a variety of ways we can work with you to help resolve the situation:

- If you feel safe and comfortable doing so, talk informally to the person causing the problem. This often solves it at an early stage as it may be that they are unaware that their behaviour is causing a problem. Involving us straight away can make your neighbour feel threatened which may make the situation worse.



Section 10 – Getting on with your Neighbours

- Listen to the person, they may tell you about things that cause them annoyance.
- If the problem continues, please contact us. You can make an online report or call Customer First.
- If there is immediate risk of harm, or if a crime has been committed, please contact the Police by calling 999 (in an emergency) or 101 (for Police non-emergencies). You should be prepared to work with us to help try and resolve issues. This may include keeping an Incident Diary. An Incident Diary is very important as it may be used as evidence later on if required.
- We can also refer both parties to an independent mediation service who may be able to help you resolve the differences.

A full copy of Homes First Antisocial Behaviour and Hate Crime Policy is available on our website or you can request it.

ASB Case Review Process

The ASB Case Review Process is a process you can use to ask agencies to review their response to anti-social behaviour or hate incidents you have reported. You can use the ASB Case Review Process if you have reported three separate incidents within the past six months to the Police or Council. You can activate the ASB Case Review Process on behalf of someone else if you have their written consent. The ASB Case Review Process can only be activated in writing.

The ASB Case Review Process is designed to ensure that there is a review where cases have been reported and no action has been taken. It is not a complaints procedure. For further information on dealing with anti-social behaviour, please visit our website or telephone us.

Repairs and Maintenance

We aim to provide a home for you which is safe, in good condition and with any necessary repairs done well and within standard timeframes. While we can repair some things, there are some items that are your responsibility. This section details more about how repairs issues are dealt with.

How to Report a Repair

If you have a repair you need to report, please contact our housing repairs helpdesk on the numbers or email addresses below, or use the online forms at www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

For emergencies out of hours, please call the main number and select the relevant option. Please be careful to ensure this is a real emergency incident otherwise you may be charged.

An emergency does not include minor issues that can wait until the next working day, such as

- lights not working unless electrics are sparking
- leaking gutters or overflows
- a minor leak from a radiator that could be contained in a bowl

Email: **homesfirstcsas@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk**

Lewes District Council T: 01273 471600 – Option 2

Eastbourne Borough Council T: 01323 410000 – Option 2

Out of hours emergency repairs:

Main council number, then the emergency repairs option.

Gas heating problems:

Call BSW Building Services Ltd on 01444 836036

Section 11 – Repairs and Maintenance

Processing requests

Once you have contacted us, we can tell you if it is our responsibility or yours to fix and whether it is an emergency or a routine repair. We may need to visit to assess the work beforehand. If so we will contact you to make an appointment. Please note that the Council reserves the right to restrict the type and extent of repairs undertaken from time to time, due to financial constraints.

If a repair is needed, we ask if you want an appointment to be made with the contractor before calling. If the repair is an emergency an appointment will not be made. However, we try to find the best time to call. Appointments will be scheduled between 8am to 5pm. This is when the contractor will arrive to start the work. For a longer job, they may arrive in the morning and finish in the afternoon.

If an emergency repair (a repair that is needed to solve an issue that is placing residents at harm, or risks causing serious damage to your home) is needed outside of office hours, please call the usual number (see page 1 for details). You will be redirected to our emergency contractor service.

What am I responsible for?

There are certain repairs that are the responsibility of the tenant to maintain and fix, and there are others which are the responsibility of the Council. On the next page is a quick guide setting out who is responsible for some of the most common repairs. If you are not sure whose responsibility it is, please call and discuss the issue with the repairs team.



Section 11 – What am I Responsible for?

Council

Car hard standings/drives
if built by the council

Gates

Garden walls – if the boundary
is owned by the council and
originally erected by the Council

Matters of health and safety
relating to garages, outbuildings
and stores if built by the Council

Paths/steps/ramps

Front and back doors

Locks – front and back door only

Stolen Keys – crime ref number
must be provided

Door entry systems
and letterboxes

Communal areas

Canopies and porches over doors
and windows

Fascias/soffits and roofs

Windows and glazing

Walls and wall tiling if originally
done by the Council

Tenant

Dustbin

Washing lines
(except communal lines/rotaries)

Sheds and greenhouses

Garden maintenance
except communal gardens

Internal doors and ironmongery

Replacement keys unless stolen
and crime reference number
is provided

Lost keys

Doorbells

TV aerials
except communal systems

Telephone points

Painting/decorating inside walls

Continues on next page...

Section 11 – What am I Responsible for?

Council

Ceilings

Floors

Kitchens and extractor fans

Painting and rendering outside

Carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms – except replacing batteries

Gas pipes

Fire grates and surrounds

Plastering

Switches, sockets, light fittings and wiring

Taps/stopcocks; water pipes/leaks

Basins, sinks, baths and showers installed by the Council

Toilets

Guttering/rainwater, drains and waste pipes

Heating and hot water issues including hot water cylinders and immersion heaters

Tenant

Small cracks and painting of ceilings

Floor coverings

Appliances, such as cookers

Small cracks and repairs to paint outside

Replacing any batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors (where not a fixed unit)

Gas meters, electric meters

Fixtures and fittings

Small cracks/repairs to plaster

Lightbulbs, fuses, fluorescent tubes and starters. Extra sockets including electric car charging points where tenant requires.

Plugs and chains

Toilet seats

How long will it take to complete a repair?

Here are examples of some types of repairs and the time in which we aim to complete the work.

Please note that these timeframes are guides and discretion will be used in determining the priority of the work.

Priority 1 Emergency – within 24 hours

- Total or partial loss of gas supply (if not the supplier's responsibility)
- Total loss of heating or hot water
(November to April only or for sheltered housing)
- Total or partial loss of electrics
- Total or partial loss of water
- Leaking pipes or drains
Leaking pipe likely to cause extensive damage
- Blocked drain, toilet, sink, basin or bath
- Unsafe electrics
- Re-securing / making safe items if they are dangerous,
such as timber floors, stairs, temporary repair to leaking roof etc.
- Security risks, such as being unable to lock your front/back door
or close ground floor windows
- Kitchen unit repair where health and safety is an issue

Continues on next page...

Section 11 – How long will it take to complete a repair?

Priority 2 – urgent within 7 days

- Repairs to toilets, sinks, baths, basins or taps (other than those considered an emergency through escape of water which should be a priority 1 as above)
- New toilet or basin
- Roof repairs (possibly following an emergency temporary repair as a priority 1 above)
- Clearing gutters and/or downpipes where likely to cause more damage
- Door entry phone not working
- Mechanical extractor fan in internal kitchen or bathroom not working

Priority 3 – Routine within 28 days

- Repairs to kitchen units (other than the emergency repair in priority 1 as above)
- New kitchen units/worktops
- Repairs to floor boards (unless dangerous and covered under priority 1 as above)
- New cold water tank
- Repairs to walls and chimneys
- Outside door and window repairs
- New sinks and baths

Section 11 – How long will it take to complete a repair?

Planned within 85 days

- Replacement fencing
- Replacement doors and windows
- Non urgent external brick works
- Replacement porches



Section 11 – What am I responsible for?

Malicious damage or neglect

As a tenant it is your responsibility to look after your home and keep it decorated, clean and free from rubbish. You must not deliberately break windows, doors or any fixtures or fittings.

If we have to carry out a repair or remove rubbish for which you are responsible, you will be charged for the work. In extreme cases such damage or neglect may be grounds for eviction.

Making alterations to your home

You must ask permission from the Council in your area before making any adaptations to your property. You can do this online at www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk. If you make alterations to your home without obtaining prior permission from your landlord, you may be asked to reverse any changes you have made at your own cost.

Some items in your home have been fitted for safety reasons and therefore cannot be changed, including door closers fitted for fire safety, special locks on fire escape doors, window restrictors, vents, smoke detectors and safety signs.

Some items have specific safety standards that any change you make must conform to, such as doors and glass which must meet current safety regulations.

We will not refuse you permission without reason. You may be refused if you are an introductory tenant, if you have outstanding rent or Council Tax arrears, or if the alteration substantially changes the composition of your home – for example, if it means a reduction in the number of rooms.

You do not need permission for things like repainting or wallpapering the inside of your home or putting up small shelving units, but most other changes will need permission. If you are not sure about whether or not you need permission, please call the Council to discuss your alteration.

Disabled adaptations

We can sometimes help if you or a family member are struggling in your home and need equipment or adaptations to help manage a disability and maintain independence. Alterations can range from minor adaptations such as fitting lever taps or fixing grab rails, through to larger works

such as replacing outside steps with a ramp, or fitting a level access shower. What works we do will depend on your circumstances, the feasibility of making the adaptations in your current property, and whether the property is suitable for your long term needs.

For major adaptations above £1000 we will need recommendations from an Occupational Therapist. This is because the Occupational Therapy team will specify not only what needs doing but also the exact measurements of adaptations. We can then, subject to financial provision, carry out the work. You can self-refer via the Adult Social Care website. For child adaption needs, go to East Sussex School Health and Childrens Integrated Therapy Services website.

Mould and condensation

Every winter we get a number of calls from tenants reporting black mould growth on walls and ceilings. The last few years have been particularly bad due to increasing heating costs and particularly cold winters. It is important to be aware that there is a difference between mould caused because of a defect in the property and mould caused by condensation.

There is always moisture in the air, but as it cools down it can't hold as much moisture and tiny drops of water appear – this is condensation. It mainly happens during cold weather and appears on cold surfaces and places where there is little air movement such as in corners of rooms, near windows or behind cupboards and wardrobes.

We will help you to identify what is causing mould in your property. This may involve recommendations to you to change how you use the property to reduce and better manage air moisture. Simple things can make a big difference, such as:

- Put lids on saucepans
- When the kitchen or bathroom is being used, close the doors and open the windows
- Dry clothes outside
- If using a tumble dryer make sure it is a condensing type or vented to the outside
- If you have to dry clothes indoors, put them in the bathroom, shut the door and keep the window open
- Mop up any condensation everyday

Section 11 – What am I Responsible for?

- Keep furniture away from walls, particularly external walls
- Heat your home more evenly – such as low level heating all day rather than short blasts – this should also reduce your heating bill
- Most windows have small trickle vents in the top of the window frame – keep these open to increase ventilation
- Use a hand held fungicidal wash to treat and wash down small localised areas of mould.

These measures should prevent or greatly reduce the condensation and mould growth you experience. The repairs team will ask you to try all these steps to help manage condensation and mould. Our surveyors and contractors will identify any issues to the structure and services that are contributing to damp and mould issues, and schedule the required works.



Safety

Apart from regular repairs and maintenance, there are various safety issues that all tenants should be aware of. This section explores: fire safety, block safety, gas safety, carbon monoxide safety, electrical safety, Legionnaires' disease, frost precautions, water safety and asbestos safety.

Fire

Fire is one of the most serious hazards in any home. As a landlord, fire safety is a top priority for us and something we continue to invest in.

New fire safety laws came into force in 2022. Part of these laws means we must check your front door once a year if it leads into an area shared with other residents within blocks which exceed a height of 11 meters from the lowest ground level floor. We will make an appointment with you for these checks. Please help us to ensure the fire safety of your building by keeping to these appointments.

Our blocks have been assessed for fire risk with relevant improvements completed on a risk based approach.

Please consider the following points to help prevent fires:

- Do not leave candles unattended and keep them away from children, pets and combustible materials
- Never smoke in bed
- Always ensure cigarettes and candles are extinguished completely and disposed of
- Keep matches, candles and lighters away from children
- Do not cook if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Maintain all electrical appliances
- Keep furniture and clothing away from heat sources
- Do not block the stairway – it may be your means of escape
- Have a family action plan. Raise the alarm and get everyone out as quickly as possible – **GET OUT, STAY OUT and CALL 999**
- If you live in a Retirement Housing block of flats ensure you are familiar with the fire procedure

Section 12 – Safety

- Do not store flammable liquids in your home
- Test smoke detectors regularly

Contact the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service on 0800 177 7069 if you would like a free information pack containing fire safety advice and guidance. They can also check to see if you are eligible for a personal fire safety visit.

E-bikes/Scooters (EPPV's)

The use of Electric Powered Personnel Vehicles (EPPV) including E-bikes and Scooters has increased. These products come with serious associated risk. The lithium batteries in EPPV's hold a significant amount of energy and can expel in the form of very hot localised fire, or in some cases an explosion, which can be difficult to control and/or extinguish.

London Fire Brigade has recorded 155 E-bike fires and 28 E-scooter fires in 2023, leading to three deaths and about 60 injuries. In the past 12 months, we have recorded one fire due to an E-bike lithium battery.

Please consider the following points if you own and keep an EPPV in your home:

- Do not leave EPPV's in escape routes or bedrooms.
- If possible, store near any fire detection system e.g. smoke alarm
- Do not leave EPPVs charging overnight unattended
- If possible, purchase a fireproof bag to charge EPPV batteries

Following these steps will lower the risk.



Section 12 – Safety

Block safety

Good housekeeping is fundamental to reducing risk in blocks of flats. Controlling the presence of combustible materials and ignition sources not only reduces the potential for accidental fires to start and develop in the communal areas, it also significantly reduces the scope for deliberate fires.

Sometimes we find things left in the communal hallways such as bikes, pushchairs, shoes, plants, or mobility scooters. Whilst we understand that this may be for a good reason, they do create a hazard. Should there be a fire, the corridors could fill with smoke, reducing visibility. In these circumstances they severely restrict the time taken to evacuate a building, or hinder access for fire-fighters.

To keep everyone safe, we have a policy of 'zero tolerance' for anything left in communal corridors and hallways and we will remove items left without prior notice and will charge those responsible for the cost of the removal.

Let us know if there is anything left in your communal areas. You can do this by contacting the Neighbourhood Housing Team. Remember – fire safety is everyone's responsibility.

Plan a safe escape

Fitting smoke alarms is the first crucial step to protecting yourself from fire. But what would you do if one is set off?

You can carry out these simple checks in your home:

- Close inside doors to stop fires from spreading
- Turn off and unplug electrical appliances unless they are designed to be left on such as a fridge
- Check your cooker is turned off
- Do not leave the washing machine or tumble dryer on when unattended
- Turn heaters off and set up fireguards around open fires
- Put candles and cigarettes out properly
- Make sure exits are kept clear
- Keep door and window keys where everyone can find them

Section 12 – Safety

Gas safety

Gas appliances that are not working correctly can produce poisonous fumes and lead to explosions. If you smell gas you should immediately:

- Turn off the gas supply tap
- Put out cigarettes and naked flames
- Turn off gas cookers, fires and anything else with a naked flame
- Open all doors and windows.
- Leave the property as soon as possible
- Call the National Grid Gas Distribution immediately on 0800 111 999
- Stop using electrical equipment and do not touch any light switches

By law, we must check your gas appliances each year. We will contact you when your annual gas service is due and you must let our nominated contractors into your home to carry out this inspection. Failure to do so will result in legal action being taken against you. We may recharge any costs we incur while trying to gain access to the property, which can result in considerable costs to you as the tenant.

Carbon Monoxide Safety

Carbon monoxide poisoning is rare, but becomes a problem when appliances do not work properly or where the room is not well ventilated. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include tiredness, drowsiness, headaches and pains in the chest and stomach.

We safeguard tenants by carrying out annual safety checks. We also fit carbon monoxide detectors to properties where required.

DIY gas work is against the law – never try to alter or repair a gas appliance yourself. All work to the gas appliances in your home must be carried out by a Gas Safe registered installer.

Electrical Safety

Your electrical equipment can be dangerous in terms of safety. Follow these guidelines to help prevent your electrical goods causing a problem:

- Make sure an electrical appliance has a British or European safety mark when you buy it
- Certain appliances, such as washing machines, should have a single plug to themselves, as they are high power rated

Section 12 – Safety

- Have second hand electrical equipment safety checked before you use it
- Try to only use one plug per socket
- An extension lead or adaptor will have a limit to how many amps it can take, so be careful not to overload them to reduce the risk of a fire
- All electrical work must be carried out by an approved electrician. Do not ignore any electrical faults you notice – deal with them straight away – hot plugs and sockets can electrocute you or start a fire
- Switch off and unplug appliances when not in use
- Never run flexes under carpets
- Never touch electrical appliances with wet hands
- Make sure flexes are in good condition and that appliances are correctly fused
- Only use electrical appliances in the bathroom that are designed to be used there

We are legally obliged to check your electrical wiring and any fixed electrical appliances, such as storage heaters. Failure to allow access will result in legal action being taken against you.

Legionnaires' disease

Legionnaires' disease is a form of pneumonia caused by the Legionella bacteria. It is contracted through inhaling droplets of water containing the bacteria and can be fatal. Legionella bacteria can be common in hot and cold water systems, storage tanks, pipework, taps and showers. The risk of Legionella in individual houses or flats is very small. Taking the following advice however, will reduce this even further.

- Clean all taps and shower heads regularly. Unscrew the shower head if it comes apart and clean inside as well
- Make sure that lids are kept fitted to water tanks in the loft, and that the tank insulation is not disturbed
- If you have a washing machine or dishwasher that is not used or is broken, turn off the water at the valves where the flexible hoses connect to the fixed pipework
- When you move into a new home or if your home is left unoccupied for more than one week, be sure to run all showers, baths, wash basin or sinks continuously for a period of five minutes to flush through

Section 12 – Safety

any form of bacteria. Showers or taps should be opened very slowly to avoid the production of a spray or splashing which could be breathed in

- Switch your water heater 'on' if one is fitted and leave for a period of at least one hour prior to use
- Those most at risk include elderly people, smokers and those suffering from long-term illness. It can be contracted through drinking contaminated water and cannot be passed from person to person. In Retirement Housing accommodation, Homes First operates a Legionella Prevention Management Plan.

Frost precautions

During cold weather it is advisable to keep homes reasonably warm at all times. If you are going away, even for just a few days, turning off the stopcock and draining all water from the taps and toilet will help prevent frozen and burst pipes.

Water Safety

Make sure you know where your stop tap is. If your water supply is cut off, make sure your taps are closed to prevent flooding and wastage of water when reconnected.

Asbestos Safety

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral and has been very widely used in a range of products to improve their strength and durability. It is perfectly safe if it is not disturbed or damaged. If asbestos is to be removed, it will have to be disposed of properly. This may mean using a licensed contractor. Please contact us if you need any further information about asbestos.



Getting Involved

We want you as a tenant of Lewes District or Eastbourne Borough Council to have a real say in how your home is managed. If you have some spare time there are many ways that you can get involved and tell us what you think. We can provide training and cover your costs, such as childcare and travel. Here is our menu for getting involved:

Informal ways to get involved from your home

Virtual 300 – a group of tenants who have agreed to comment on changes to plans, policies and services, via email or online. You can also receive surveys by post, text, email or telephone.

Communications Panel / Armchair Advisors – ensure that communications are easy to understand by reading and commenting on documents such as our newsletter from the comfort of your own home.

Informal ways to get involved, every now and then

Focus Groups – one-off, informal but structured discussion with other tenants to give your views on key services, such as our allocations service.

Chat Café – occasional informal ‘drop ins’, often at a local café, to


chat with other tenants and housing staff, on the issues that matter most to you.

Annual Tenants Day – an opportunity to keep up to date about our services, meet our staff and network with other tenants.

Mystery Shoppers – trained tenants who test our services to make sure they are delivered in line with agreed standards and whether those standards are appropriate.

Quality Checkers – volunteers who accompany staff on estate walkabouts to point out any maintenance etc. which needs addressing or who quality check services such as grounds maintenance.

Equality and Diversity Voice* – Specific consultations and events where services may have a different impact because of a



person's age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.

Youth Voice* – Specific consultations and events for tenants aged 16-25 and young people aged 16-25 living in our households

Formal ways to get involved

Tenants Organisation of Lewes District (TOLD) or Listening to Eastbourne Tenants (LET) – TOLD represents the views of tenants of Lewes District Council. LET represents the views of tenants of Eastbourne Borough Council. Meetings discuss topical housing issues and monitor housing performance. Both organisations manage/oversee a 'Community Improvement budget', which tenants can apply to for their community.

We support involvement groups in both Lewes and Eastbourne who meet regularly to discuss local issues, and to make improvements to benefit those living in their area. They also get involved in local events and activities. All tenants living in the areas can attend.

Tenant Scrutiny Team –

Tenant-led scrutiny reviews are overseen by TOLD and LET, who commission trained tenants to carry out in-depth service reviews on a service area, such as repairs. The scrutiny team makes evidence-based recommendations, to officers in the Senior Leadership Team and agree an improvement plan, which is monitored by the TIE group

Retirement Housing Forum –

for those in retirement housing courts you may be able to represent your court at a Retirement Forum to discuss the views and specific needs of tenants living within the courts.

Procurement focus groups* –

Trained tenants will be involved in Homes First tender processes, looking at contract requirements, selecting contractors and monitoring contract delivery

*These are possible new involvement methods that we may try if there is enough interest.

Section 13 – Getting Involved

Benefits of getting involved

You will learn more about how the council and the housing teams work and how your input can make a real difference.

You will meet a wide range of people with a wide range of experience and learn from each other.

Tenants involved in scrutiny have suggested lots of ways to improve our services – such as informing a damp and mould policy and procedure/rent arrears recovery.

Involved tenants are often best placed to make improvements in their community.

Some successes include:

Campaigning to save a local library, working in partnership to develop a new play area, running a foodbank, organising litter picks, planting trees, organising a community barbecue or other community events and planting a community allotment.

For more information, please contact the Tenant Involvement Service by email:

tenant.involvement@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

or call 01273 487249

(answerphone message).



Section 13 – Climate Change

What we are doing?

You may know that the Council has declared a climate emergency. We are looking at how we can address this and find the best ways to reduce the carbon footprint of our housing stock. Housing produces a large amount of carbon, so this is a big and complex challenge.

As well as reaching a low carbon footprint we need solutions that are affordable for tenants and do not increase household energy costs. This might mean there is a change to the way our homes are heated, powered, and insulated.

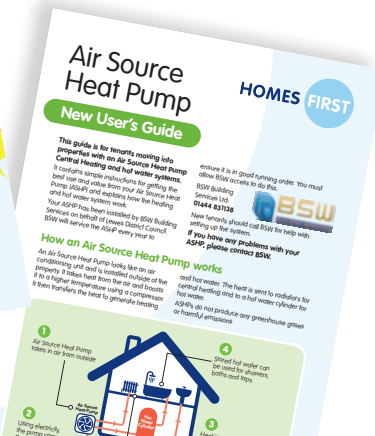
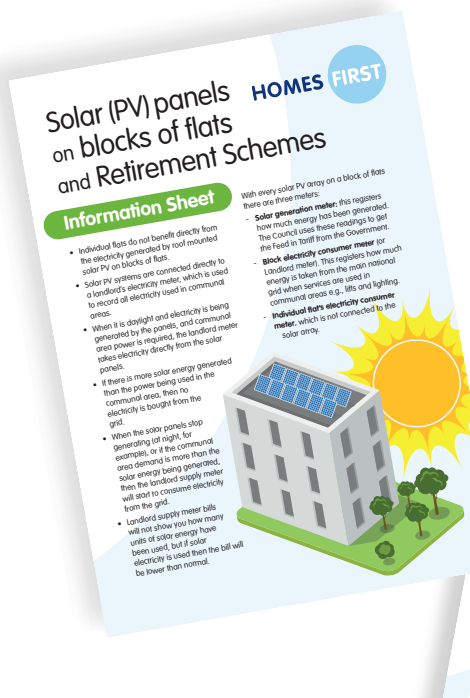
Renewable technologies

Some of our homes already have sustainable carbon reducing technologies such as Solar PV panels or Air Source Heat Pumps. Some of our flats have roof mounted Solar PV panels, which provide electricity to the communal area of the block.

We are looking at ways that we can increase the numbers of properties with Solar PV panels. We will share any new information or initiatives about this with you.

We have produced user guides for tenants in houses with Air Source Heat Pumps and Solar PV. to tell you how they work, what to expect if your home is fitted with one, how to get the best value from them and what the benefits are for you.

The guides are available on the website.



Privacy and Data

Privacy Notice for Neighbourhood Housing

Why we are collecting your data

Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council are data controllers and collect your personal data in order to provide the housing and support services you have requested from us. We will only collect the personal data from you to deliver the following:

- Assess housing and re-housing needs
- Delivering our housing and support services in the community
- Meeting our regulator requirement by consulting with you on any major changes to our service.
- Managing your tenancy/lease
- Monitoring services to ensure they are delivered in a fair and equitable way
- Monitoring services to support future service development and delivery

- Monitoring services to provide statistical data for governance and compliance purposes.

What is the legal basis for processing this data?

We do this either as a task carried out in the public interest, for the performance of a contract with you or to protect your vital interests in line with relevant legislation.

Who will your information be shared with?

Homes First may need to pass the personal information that we collect from you on to other agencies and partners, such as Social Services, NHS, Police and Approved Contractors. This will not be done unless it will contribute to us being able to meet your accommodation and support needs, or unless we feel there is a threat to your own safety or the safety of others.

We may also need to contact these agencies to check information provided by you, or information about you provided by a third party, with other information we hold. We may also get information from third parties, or give information to them to check the accuracy of information, to prevent or detect crime, or to protect public funds, if the law allows it. These third parties include the NHS, local authorities and government departments such as; the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Where we need to disclose sensitive information such as medical details to a third party, we will only do so once we have obtained your explicit consent, or where we are legally required to. We may disclose information when necessary to prevent risk of harm to an individual.

We may also share your information with approved contractors such as our repairs contractors or contractors providing a service on our behalf, such as Acuity. As a council we work with Acuity Research to gather feedback on

- specific housing services provided, such as following the completion of a repair,
- what our tenants think more generally about our housing services.

We use this feedback to improve services and some information – for example, the percentage of our customers satisfied with our overall housing service we are required to provide to the Regulator of Social Housing.

You may be asked to take part in surveys. If you do not wish for your personal data to be shared with Acuity Research, you can contact us as below and we will ensure your personal data is not shared with them.

Councils are required by law to protect the public funds they administer. We may use any of the information you provided for the prevention and detection of fraud. We may also share information with other bodies that are responsible for auditing or administering public funds, including the Cabinet Office to assist in the prevention and detection of fraud.

Section 14 – Privacy and Data

Providing accurate information

It is important that we hold accurate and up to date information about you in order to assess your needs and deliver appropriate services. If any of your details change, please tell us as soon as possible so that we can update your records.

We will not:

- Use your information for marketing or sales purposes without your prior explicit consent.
- Send or store your data abroad.
- Make decisions about you based on automated processing.

How long will we hold your data for?

We will keep your data as long as you are a tenant or leaseholder with us plus six years.

Your rights regarding your information

You are entitled to request a copy of any information about you that we hold.

If the information we hold about you is inaccurate, you have a right to have this corrected and you have the right to request completion of incomplete data. You have the right to request that we stop, or restrict the processing of your personal data, in certain circumstances. Where possible we will seek to comply with your request, but we may be required to hold or process information to comply with a legal requirement.

You have the right to object to the processing of your personal data in certain circumstances. We may still be required to hold or process information if there are legitimate grounds for doing so.

If you are dissatisfied with how the councils have used your personal information, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office at casework@ico.org.uk

Section 14 – Privacy and Data

Identity of

Data Protection Officer

Michele Wilkinson

Governance Lawyer and

Data Protection Officer

Contact details

Lewes District Council and **Eastbourne Borough Council**

Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne BN21 4UG

Tel: 01323 410000

Email: accesstoinformation@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

If you would like more information, please visit our website:

www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/access-to-information/data-protection



**This Tenant Handbook is available in large print,
audio tape, disc or in another language upon request.**



HOMES FIRST

Tenants Handbook

Lewes District and
Eastbourne Borough Councils

