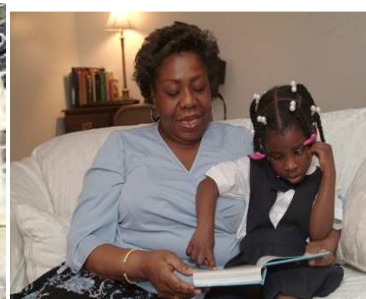


Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018



**Improving homes,
Transforming lives.**

Improving the quality of homes across Eastbourne is an important part of the Council's housing strategy 'At Home in Eastbourne'. Eastbourne's Housing Renewal Policy is part of how the Council will make its vision for housing a reality. It is designed to help people be at home in Eastbourne by...

Providing more homes

- Increase the number of homes available in Eastbourne by bringing empty properties – both residential and non-residential - back into use as new places to live

Helping people to find and keep a home

- Help reduce homelessness by increasing the choice and range of homes available in Eastbourne

Encouraging people to look after and maintain homes

- Improve the quality of privately rented accommodation by encouraging private landlords to have high standards of management and maintenance

Making it easier for people to enjoy a home

- Reduce fuel poverty by improving the energy efficiency of private housing and at the same time reduce Eastbourne's carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions
- Help older people and those who have disabilities be able to live safely and independently in their own home

Eastbourne's Housing Renewal Policy reflects and complements the

- Eastbourne Corporate Plan
- At Home in Eastbourne Housing Strategy
- EHL Housing and Economic Development Board
- Eastbourne Private Housing Enforcement Policy
- Eastbourne Core Strategy (Local Plan)
- Eastbourne Environment Strategy
- Pride of Place: The East Sussex Integrated Sustainable Community Strategy

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Introduction

Poor quality housing has a significant impact on the health of the occupants. That is why it is important that those who own or manage properties do all they can to keep their houses and flats in good condition. It is of course primarily the responsibility of owners to maintain their property, whether they live in it or rent it to someone else. However some households, particularly some older people and other vulnerable residents, do not have resources needed to keep their homes in good repair. Tenants sometimes need help to work with landlords to improve the quality of their homes. In all these cases the Council has an important role, providing help, assistance and where necessary taking enforcement action to bring homes up to a decent standard.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 sets out powers for the Council to provide a broad range of assistance for people who need help to repair and adapt their homes. It allows the Council to provide a range of grants, loans and practical advice to help repair, improve or adapt homes to meet the needs of local residents.

Eastbourne Borough Council's successes, which have been secured by working together with many other organisations, include:

- A comprehensive energy programme across East Sussex as a lead authority in the East Sussex Energy Partnership
- Vulnerable households assisted with Small Works Grants have essential repairs done
- More homes for families have been provided by bringing back into use empty houses, with more than 100 empty properties brought back into use every year
- An Emergency Heating and Hot Water Repair Scheme
- The safety of residents at risk of domestic violence has been substantially improved through the Sanctuary Assistance Scheme
- A Housing Solutions Service to help people find and move to a home more suitable for their needs

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Who do we work with to deliver the Housing Renewal Policy?

Eastbourne Borough Council works with a wide range of partners to deliver the Housing Renewal Policy. They include:

- Local authorities across East and West Sussex
- Eastbourne Homes Limited Housing and Economic Development Programme
- The Public Health Service
- Financial services providers
- Housing associations
- Private landlords
- Letting and managing agents
- Energy companies
- Building contractors
- Age Concern
- Brighton Housing Trust

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What do we know about housing in Eastbourne?

Owner occupied property accounts for around 75% of the homes in Eastbourne. It remains the most popular tenure and responsibility for looking after an owner occupied home rests with the owner. Most of these are well maintained and suitable for the needs of their residents but a significant number are believed to be in an unhealthy condition and lack adequate heating or insulation. The Council is able to provide advice to help people work out the best way to get decent repairs done that will make their homes safer and more secure and last longer. There are times when people may have problems finding the money to cover the cost of essential repairs. The Council can also offer help and advice here on the options owner occupiers may have to raise the resources needed to make repairs.

Social housing, provided by the Council itself or housing associations accounts for around 15% of the homes in Eastbourne. The landlord is responsible for repairs and maintenance. Moreover, social housing must meet the Decent Homes Standard which sets out minimum requirements for the quality of social housing.

High house prices and a shortage of social housing can mean that **renting from a private landlord** can be the only option for many local people. This sector of the housing market ranges from bedsits and rooms in shared houses to executive -style lets of large detached homes.

There are approximately 2,300 university students studying at Eastbourne's university campus, 7,600 students study at Sussex Downs College and an additional 30,000 language students visit the town each year. A significant number of these students rent homes from private landlords.

The most recent **Eastbourne House Condition and Energy Efficiency Survey** indicates that the estimated proportion of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)¹ is 1,300, which is 3.3% of the stock compared with 2% across England. Eastbourne has approximately 150 mandatory licensable HMOs. This is an HMO with three or more storeys, shared amenities and five or more residents.

Failure to meet minimum standards defined as having a Category 1 Hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System is a problem in 13.1% of dwellings or 5,180 homes.

Grants, charges and loans

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The two types of assistance are:

- A 'grant' which is funding given for a specific purpose and is not repayable unless specific conditions are not met
- A 'loan' is an arrangement to repay the assistance normally through our partner organisation the Parity Trust.

For assistance, such as a grant, which totals more than £999 a charge will be placed against the property. Other, smaller grants are not repayable and no charge will be placed against the property.

- A 'charge' is a charge on a property made by the council for a specific amount, repayable when the property is sold or exchanged.

Money secured when charges are repaid is reinvested in the Housing Renewal Policy programme. This means that we can continue to help more people in the future. The charges are discretionary and repayment demands will be determined on a case by case basis reflecting the individual circumstances of each applicant.

We always make sure that applicants for grants or loans are given clear information and are fully aware of any obligations once assistance has been provided.

5 What assistance can the Council provide?

The council's website includes comprehensive advice and information about private housing at www.eastbourne.gov.uk/privatehousing

All assistance is subject to sufficient funding being available

There are five groups of assistance:

1. Repairs and Improvements

- ***Healthy Homes Assistance***

Healthy Homes Assistance is available to provide resources to enable the over 60s, families with a child under 16 and disabled people receiving a means tested benefit to stay in their own home by making it 'healthy' and safe. The assistance will however only be given to improve living conditions to alleviate serious risks to health and safety by dealing with Category 1 hazards or serious disrepair that will lead to a Category 1 hazard if not addressed. The assistance is up to a maximum of £10,000 to deal with these hazards and will be provided by means of a loan through our partner organisation Parity Trust. Owner occupiers or leaseholders with five years to expiry of their lease who have owned and occupied the property as their only or main residence for a year are eligible.

- ***Small Works Grant***

This grant is available to help vulnerable households over 60 or who are disabled, with savings of less than £10,000, to maintain their homes. Works can include adaptations, repairs or other works such as improved security to help people to remain living in their own home. The maximum grant is £500.

2. Adaptations

- ***Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)***

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants are available, as prescribed in the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. People with disabilities can obtain a mandatory DFG for a range of work including:

- making it easier to get in and out of their homes or to get around in their bedroom, bathroom, living room and kitchen or to help them care for another person
- making it easier to use the toilet, bath and shower
- to provide safe access to the garden
- making it easier to prepare and cook food
- improving or installing a suitable heating system
- helping to control lighting, power and heating

The maximum grant payable for eligible works is £30,000

3. Safer Homes

- ***Sanctuary Grant***

This scheme is one of a range of options available to prevent homelessness to help people considered to be at risk of domestic violence to remain in their own homes should they so wish. It can provide additional locks, window security, outward opening external doors and in certain cases a safe room within the home that will provide a refuge at times of danger. The grant is up to a maximum of £1000.

4. Warm and energy efficient homes

- ***Warm homes delivered by working with the Green Deal² and ECO³***

We plan to build on the success of the East Sussex Energy Partnership with a wider pan Sussex grouping called Your Energy Sussex to work with Carillion Energy Services to help promote insulation and renewable technologies. This initiative will help reduce CO₂ emissions and this will be funded by the Energy Company Obligation. Our work as part of Your Energy Sussex will continue to offer incentives to householders to take advantage of the Green Deal and other offers at increasingly subsidised rates. Energy Efficiency works can be funded by a variety of funding sources such as Green Deal, ECO feed in tariffs for solar PV, Renewable Heat Incentive, up to £7600 DECC grants and £66m borrowing facility from the LEPE which the authority will be able to access under current arrangements.

²

³

- **Emergency Heating and Hot Water Repair Grant**

This is a grant for boiler repairs to assist older and disabled people. To assist with this match funding from benevolence funds and other sources may be sought on a case-by-case basis. The grant is for the over 60s or disabled with less than £10,000 of savings and is up to a maximum of £1000.

5. Empty Property Assistance

This is available to help bring empty properties back into use, aiming to increase the supply of housing for those in need, particularly homeless households seeking the Council's assistance. To be eligible for this assistance a property must have been empty for more than six months and be in need of renovation, improvement or conversion works. The assistance is normally limited to a maximum of £10,000 per dwelling, provided by means of a loan through Parity Trust and wherever possible the Council will seek to secure nomination rights for an agreed period, usually five years.

6 Fees and Charges

Fees of up to 15% of the eligible works may be charged by surveyors and other support agencies for assisting a client through the process of obtaining assistance. Other charges can include those for Land Registry, Planning or Building Control and surveyor or architect fees. The Council will consider whether fees are reasonable in assessing and determining any application. Obtaining Planning and Building Control approval are the responsibility of the applicant. If a preliminary structural or electrical survey is required to determine the extent of work necessary then the applicant will be liable for these fees. The application must include satisfactory invoices so that, if assistance is approved, the applicant may be reimbursed for some or all of these costs.

7 What isn't included in the Housing Renewal Policy?

- Separate funding is available for work to **social housing** which is the responsibility of the landlord. The Housing Renewal Policy therefore does not apply to social housing.
- Funding will not normally be available for works to **boats, caravans or tents**.
- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants are available for caravans and mobile homes provided that the eligibility criteria are met.
- The Council does not normally use its powers to **acquire, demolish or replace homes** as this rarely provides best value for money.

8 Encouraging Housing Renewal

- **Contractor Call**

Contractor Call's Register lists approved contractors for various building works. This is a scheme that protects vulnerable people from rogue traders and bogus builders by putting them in touch with approved local contractors. The service is available to all residents of Eastbourne. Advice on obtaining a contractor is available on 01323 724433 between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm Monday to Friday. The service is based at Age Concern, Venton Centre, Junction Road, Eastbourne, BN21 3QY.

- **Community maintenance and building skills training**

This is delivered by Sussex Downs College via a range of DIY courses: visit the college at sussexdowns.ac.uk/ or telephone **01323 637637**.

- **Voluntary organisations**

Eastbourne Borough Council provides advice and advocacy services through its links with Brighton Housing Trust's Eastbourne Advice Service, on 01323 642615 based at 28 St Leonards Road, Eastbourne, BN21 3UT and www.bht.org.uk We will help to promote these services through visits, leaflets and our website.

- **Enforcement Action**

Landlords have a responsibility to make sure that all accommodation they let is in good repair. The Council will use the enforcement powers available (set out primarily under the Housing Act 2004) to tackle landlords who offer substandard accommodation. Further details on how we do this can be found in the Private Council's Housing Enforcement Policy.

- **Working with Private Housing Landlords and Letting Agents**

We will continue to engage with private sector landlords, including The Council provides advice, education and training to landlords and agents via the Landlords' Forum and associated landlords' events. Any landlord is welcome to attend the forum.. The Council also works with the National Landlords Association to make sure it is up to date with all the latest news, views and developments from the sector.

- **Working together in Sussex**

The Council works in partnership with Wealden District Council work on returning long term empty properties back into use and is an active member of the Sussex Energy Saving Partnership. It is a member of the Supporting People Commissioning Group. Sussex Empty Homes Forum which promotes and encourages good practice across the county.

- **Empty Properties**

The Council looks to bring empty properties back into use by working with owners of properties to find the most effective means of returning their properties into homes. Our emphasis is on liaising with owners and jointly understanding why a property is empty and what needs to be done to return it to use. We offer information and advice about a range of options and encourage

them to return the property to use within a reasonable timescale. The Council is also able to offer help finding suitable tenants and may be able to help in sourcing financial assistance, such as loans, towards renovation costs.

Where this type of work fails, the Council will consider taking enforcement action. A range of legislative powers can be used to address immediate risks posed to the community by a problematic empty property and to help to improve its appearance, pending its return to use. There are additional powers available to secure refurbishment and re-occupation, such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders, Compulsory Purchase Orders and Enforced Sale Procedures.

9 Service Standards and Monitoring

- Once all the required forms and supporting information have been received the application will normally be assessed for eligibility within 28 working days or a letter will be sent stating what is missing from the application.
- The Council reserves the right to take up to 6 months to approve an application to make sure the efficient use of resources.
- An approval notice, where appropriate, will include the address of the property for which grant or assistance is being approved, the cost of the eligible works and the value of any services and charges being included with the application.
- A refusal notice will set out the reasons for the refusal of assistance.
- Payment will normally be made within 28 days of the receipt of invoices that are acceptable to the Council.

The Housing renewal Policy remains valid until updated. The impact and outputs of the policy are continually monitored throughout the year and measured against targets which are reported quarterly.

10 Further information and advice

Advice may be obtained from the Housing Standards Team, 1 Grove Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 4TW. Tel: +44 (0)1323 415373 Fax: +44 (0)1323 415997

Further information is available from our web site and enquiries may also be made electronically at: www.eastbourne.gov.uk

Appendix 1: The Application Process for Assistance

Preliminary enquiry forms can be obtained from the Private Housing Team at 1 Grove Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 4TW or downloaded from the Council's website www.eastbourne.gov.uk/privatehousing

Assistance will only be available from the Council whilst there are sufficient funds to deliver the Policy. Applications must be made on the appropriate form provided by the Council and accompanied by all the information required. In making an application for assistance the applicant will be giving their permission for the Council to verify the information in the application, for example, by comparing with other records held by the Council or other statutory authorities. If it appears that the potential applicant may be eligible for assistance then an officer will inspect the property by appointment and assess the works required if appropriate. Following a successful assessment the householder will be invited to submit a formal application, together with all the required information including at least two competitive estimates where necessary.

All Assistance given where the total value is more than £1000, will be repayable on the sale of the dwelling / change of title or sooner if the applicant so decides as set out on the assistance documentation. Grants up to £1000 are not repayable. All assistance that has been registered as a land charge must be repaid, while conditions apply, when there is a change of ownership or tenure or sale. This condition is binding on the applicant and any subsequent owner until the assistance is repaid. Should assistance be offered through the Parity Trust then those terms and conditions shall apply. Before requiring the repayment of assistance the Council will have regard to the person's ability to make a payment. If it is considered that the repayable amount will place the person in undue hardship and there are exceptional circumstances then a waiver request can be considered by the Portfolio Holder for Community Services.

Owner-occupiers are required to have owned and lived in the dwelling for at least one year on the date of application to ensure that resources are targeted to long term residents. There are insufficient resources for the Council to assist with the improvement of properties that have been purchased in poor condition with existing defects. **Tenants with a repairing obligation** may make an application so long as the owner of the property has given their consent to the works.

Before giving assistance the Council will be satisfied that the applicant has received appropriate advice or information about the extent and nature of any financial or other obligation that they will be taking on and that they are capable of meeting the repayment conditions. Should assistance be offered through the Parity Trust then those terms and conditions shall apply. The Council will provide a written statement of the conditions to which assistance is subject and ensure that all persons to whom assistance is given receive advice or information about any obligations to which they would be subject once assistance has been provided. The grant will normally be calculated using the cheaper of two estimates. Works are to be carried out in accordance with any schedule provided by the Council.

The amount of assistance may be re-determined in exceptional circumstances if the Council is satisfied that circumstances beyond the control of the applicant mean that the approved works could not have been carried out within the originally approved amount. The assistance may also be re-determined if the eligible works cannot be carried out without undertaking additional works that could not have been reasonably foreseen at the time the application was made. Once approval is given the works may be commenced. Works must not commence before approval is made by the Council. Payment can either be made in instalments at agreed stages during the period of the work or in full at the completion of the works subject to the submission of satisfactory receipt of all relevant invoices.

The payment of assistance is conditional upon:

- the eligible works being completed to the satisfaction of the Council
- acceptable invoices or receipts for payment being provided for the works and the fees, services and charges in respect of which the assistance or part of the assistance is to be paid.

We will normally inspect works undertaken and expect works to take place within six months of approval. We will ask the applicant to sign that the work has been satisfactorily completed. Whilst the contract will be between the applicant and the contractor, the Council will normally make payment direct to the applicant's contractor. Payment may be made to the applicant, in the form of a cheque payable to the contractor, in certain exceptional circumstances. A direct payment may be made to the applicant if the Council has received a receipted invoice that has been paid by the applicant. The Council will only pay for the cost of materials where the works have been carried out by a member of the applicant's family.

Assistance is limited to a maximum of £30,000 over any 10-year period and will normally only be available for the main structure of the dwelling. In certain circumstances we may consider an application within these time periods, when risks to health and safety arise that were not in evidence when the previous application was made. The only exception to this is the mandatory DFG where successive applications may be made subject to an occupational therapist's assessment.

Outhouses, conservatories, porches and 'lean-to's will normally be excluded in order to target limited resources most effectively. Assistance will not normally be available to undertake work outside the curtilage of the dwelling except where essential to ensure the provision or repair of services such as gas, water, and drainage or electricity supplies. Where appropriate such assistance is also subject to the provision by the applicant of the written permission of the landowner. Work covered by an insurance claim or which should have been so covered will not normally be eligible for assistance.

A completed certificate of owner occupation or proof of title must be submitted with the application. This certificate will state that the applicant has or proposes to acquire a qualifying owner's interest in the dwelling, intends that the dwelling will be the only or main residence of, and will be occupied by, the applicant or a person who is a member of the applicant's family. Having an owner's interest means owning the freehold of the property, or having it on a tenancy, with a repairing obligation, of which not less than five years remain unexpired at the time of the application. This condition applies whether the property is owned alone or jointly with others. Section 113 of the Housing Act 1985 applies in determining whether a person is a member of another's family. Where an application for assistance is accompanied by an owner occupation certificate it is a condition of the assistance that the dwelling is occupied in accordance with the intention stated in the certificate until the assistance is repaid. The applicant shall notify the Council of any breach of the owner's certificate.

Assistance conditions will be enforced in all cases. Where any condition is in force, the Council may require the person responsible to provide any information to satisfy the Council that the condition is being complied with. The Council can require this information in writing or other form within the reasonable time period specified by the Council. Failure to comply with this requirement is a breach of assistance conditions and the assistance must then be repaid to the Council. The Council does not have the burden of having to prove that the condition is not being complied with.

All eligible works must be carried out by a contractor whose estimate accompanied the application unless an alternative estimate is submitted and approved by the Council subsequent to the original approval of the application. Maintenance of a property is the owner's responsibility and we will take any lack of maintenance into account when considering eligible works. Where a warranty is available the contractor should provide this. Eligible works are to be started within 6 months of the approval of assistance and

completed within a further 6 months unless an extension is requested and agreed by the Council in writing. Completion of the works will be the responsibility of the applicant and agent if applicable.

Assistance conditions come into force from the date the assistance is approved. The Council may recover any interim payments or other costs incurred if the agreed work is not fully completed. Assistance conditions outside the SCML scheme are registered as a local land charge. This charge will not be removed until the assistance has been repaid. A local land charge is binding on any person who is for the time being an owner of the premises concerned. When a condition is broken, the Council has all the usual powers and remedies in law to enforce the local land charge and secure payment of any amount due.

The Council will obtain the consent of the person to whom the assistance was provided before varying the specification of any assisted work, and before varying or revoking any condition to which assistance is subject. Applicants are advised that they must have adequate buildings insurance until the property is sold, unless the applicant does not have an insurable interest in the property.

Appendix 2:

Applications outside policy

There is scope within the policy to consider supporting one off scheme developments or work that falls outside the provisions of this policy should it fall into the overall spirit of the Private Housing Renewal Policy. This would be subject to approval from the Portfolio holder for Community Services following a special consideration report. All enquiries will be assessed on the merits of the individual circumstances presented.

Appendix 3:

Complaints and appeals

Appeals against refusal of any grant application or refusal to waive grant conditions should be made in writing to the Housing Operations Team Leader, 1 Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4TW. The letter should plainly state the grounds on which the appeal is made e.g. that the policy has not been applied correctly or that an exception should be made to policy due to unique circumstances. A written response will be made within 21 days of receipt of the appeal letter. If an appellant is unable to make a written representation then appeals in other formats will be accepted and the determination will be communicated in a manner that is appropriate to ensure that the appellant readily and fully understands its content and meaning.

The Council's corporate complaints procedure may also be used in the event that applicants are dissatisfied with the service they have received. However complaints should be directed to the Housing Operations Team Leader in the first instance so that an opportunity is given to resolve any complaint direct, at the address above.

Eastbourne Borough Council – Grant assistance Summary (for details see Housing Renewal Policy)

Initiative	Eligibility	£ Assistance maximum
Repair		
1. Healthy Homes Assistance To alleviate serious risks to health and safety by dealing with Category 1 hazards or serious disrepair that will lead to a Category 1 hazard if not addressed	Over 60 or Disabled or family with a child under 16 On means tested benefit Owner occupiers or leaseholders with 5 years to expiry of their lease who have owned and occupied the property as their only or main residence for a year are eligible	10,000 provided by means of a loan through Parity Trust
2. Small Works Grant Works can include adaptations, repairs or other works to enable people to remain living in their own home.	Over 60 or disabled with savings of less than £10000	500
Adaptations		
3. Disabled Facilities Grant A mandatory grant in certain circumstances for a range of work	Disabled and subject to test of resources which does not apply to disabled children	30,000
Safer Homes		
4. Sanctuary Grant Provides additional locks, window security, outward opening external doors and in certain cases a safe room within the home that will provide a refuge at times of danger	Those considered to be at risk of domestic violence enabling them to remain in their own homes should they so wish.	1000
Warm and Energy Efficient Homes		
5. ECO funding to be delivered via Carillion and other partners 6. Energy Efficiency improvements to be delivered via a number other funding sources	a. ECO funding available for those on certain benefits b. All residents eligible for Green Deal subject to conditions	Varies
7. Emergency Heating & Hot Water Repair Grant Match funding from benevolence funds and other sources may be sought on a case-by-case basis.	Over 60 or disabled with savings of less than £10,000 Needing emergency boiler repairs	1000
Empty Properties		
8. Empty Properties Assistance	Empty for more than 6 months and nomination rights Required	10,000 50% of cost