



HOMELINK

LEWES DISTRICT CHURCHES

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



HOMELINK CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF PUTTING ROOFS OVER HEADS

By Ros Kellaway, Chair of Trustees

I am very proud to be the Chair on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Lewes District Churches HOMELINK. Despite very challenging conditions in the private rental sector, we continue to provide an invaluable service to those at risk of homelessness, both through our interest-free loans for those needing a deposit and first month's rent, and through our small grants service.

We helped 99 local people get a permanent roof over their heads in 2023, of whom 41 were children.

Our small grants service continues to provide essential support to those who have managed to find a permanent home but find themselves without basic items such as beds, curtains, cooking equipment and floor coverings. Our Winter Appeal was aimed particularly at raising money for this aspect of our activities, and we were delighted to have raised over £10,000. A special thank you goes to the Enjoolata Foundation for their match funding, which is included in this.

We would be unable to help so many people without the support of our local community, patrons and funders. We are particularly pleased to have grown our working relationship with Lewes District Council this year, and to have increased the number of referrals from them, enabling us to help even more people. We are also very pleased to be in the process of recruiting additional co-opted trustees from the local community, and to be holding and participating in a number of community events, such as the Brighton Marathon, Lewes Artwave festival and our popular annual Christmas concert.

A great strength of our charity is the fantastic people who work for it, and the kindness and respect with which they treat our clients. Thank you to all our trustees, staff and volunteers for everything they do.



DEMAND FOR LOANS UP BY A THIRD

By Gary Brettle & Shaun Gilbert, Client Managers

The year 2023 will be remembered as a tough one for our local community, with the cost of living crisis disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable and those on the lowest incomes.

Many difficult stories were shared with the HOMELINK team. People spoke of the considerable challenges involved in finding and securing affordable rental accommodation in the area, while those who did manage to secure a suitable home struggled to afford basic household items.

There was a significant increase in demand for our core interest-free loans service, which provides people with rent in advance and security deposits. We received 221 referrals, compared with 166 the year before – a rise of 33 per cent.

Despite this, the number of loans actually issued was lower, with 47 loans made at a total value of £67,989, benefiting 58 adults and 41 children. This compares to 55 loans made at a total value of £79,797 last year.

Loan repayments from clients stood up very well, despite the unfavourable economic conditions, with a repayment rate of 77 per cent. This reflected a team effort, spearheaded by staff member Frances Hymas. The total value of loans repaid over the year exceeded that of loans made, maintaining the charity's sustainable operating model.

Meanwhile, the number of non-repayable small grants issued to help people buy essential household goods hit a record high. Through our standard budget allocations, plus increased funding from the very supportive Enjoolata Foundation, we were able to issue 264 grants at a total value of £48,627. As recently as 2021, this service was issuing just 99 grants a year at a total value of £25,103, and much of the credit for this achievement goes to our small grants volunteer administrator Gill Short, for whose efforts we are truly grateful.

Changes to the welfare system in 2024 offer some hope to HOMELINK applicants and clients with housing and related needs. Local housing allowances are being significantly increased, while Universal Credit and certain other benefits are also rising, effective from April 1. We wish to acknowledge and offer thanks for all the support given by trustees, volunteers and staff colleagues alike to assist us in the demanding client manager role.



'The loan you facilitated has meant we can now spend Christmas together as a family in our new home'

FROM 2023 CLIENT

'A massive thank you for helping with the flooring in our new home. I actually cried when I walked in and saw it'

FROM 2023 CLIENT

HIGH DEMAND FOR SMALL GRANTS

By Gabrielle Hill, Finance Manager

We had another busy year in 2023, thanks in particular to high demand for our small grants service. Altogether, 264 one-off grants were issued to help people purchase essential household goods, provide emergency support with start-up costs involved with renting a new property, and fund energy-saving items such as carpets and curtains. We also finished disbursing the Enjoolata grant in September.



Meanwhile, our core interest-free loans service gave out 47 new loans for rent in advance and deposits, and 68 loans were repaid in full. At the end of 2023, we had 346 active loans, for a total value of £264,507. Due to the shortage of private rented accommodation in the area, it has become increasingly difficult for our clients to find affordable housing. We hope that this situation will improve soon.

Our fundraising events brought in over £7,000 this year and included a garden party in Bishopstone, an art exhibition as part of the Lewes Artwave festival, and our annual Christmas concert in Seaford. We would like to give our heartfelt thanks to all our generous donors and the many churches and organisations who support us. We really appreciate your generosity.

INCOME

Voluntary donations	£41,240
Charitable grants	£46,619
Local authority grants	£39,200
Fundraising events	£ 7,308
Tax refund	£ 6,891
Investment income	£ 1,859
Total income	£143,117

264
GRANTS

EXPENDITURE

Non-repayable grants	£48,627
Employee expenses	£82,588
Office expenses	£10,317
Tenant expenses	£6,309
Comms & events	£2,170
Audit	£1,260
Total payments	£151,271

99

people helped
into homes

47

LOANS

LOOKING BACK: HOMELINK'S 25 YEARS OF FIGHTING HOMELESSNESS

By Nuala Calvi

This year marks a quarter of a century since HOMELINK housed its first ever client. Over that time the housing landscape and the way the charity operates has changed considerably, but the pressing need for our services has remained.

That wasn't the expectation when the charity was first founded. 'We thought we'd only be needed for ten years, max,' says Chris Tutt, former Honorary Secretary and a member of the Action Group that helped set up HOMELINK. 'That's how long we thought it would take for the government to understand the homelessness situation and do something about it.'

At the time, the impact of council house sell-offs, the recession and a chronic lack of housebuilding had led to large numbers of people sleeping rough on the streets for the first time since the 1930s.

HOMELINK offered an innovative model – a rent and deposit guarantee scheme, backed by pledges from local supporters, that enabled people to get past the first hurdles into rental accommodation. By February 1999, it had guarantees of £26,000 from 93 guarantors, and donations totalling £15,000 from churches and individuals.

But thanks to a lack of available accommodation in the district, the reluctance of local estate agents to get on board with the scheme, and a low number of applicants, it was a slow start.

'There was a year when we only housed one person and we thought about giving up,' admits Terry Howell, Trustee and former Chair. 'One problem was we didn't have that many applicants because we were reliant on Lewes District Council to make referrals.'



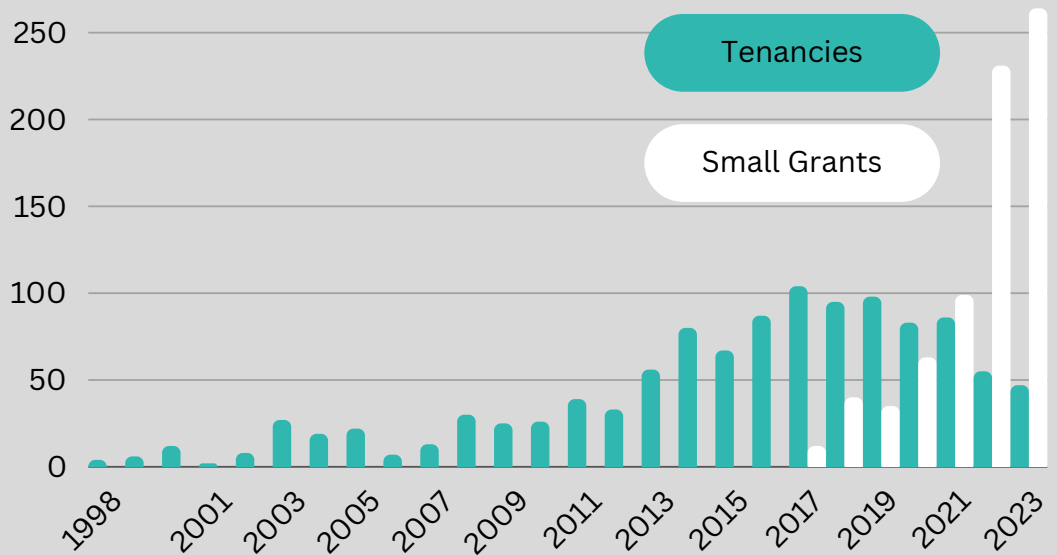
Over time, the charity began taking referrals from other agencies including job centres, rough sleeper projects, local women's refuges and young people's services, and eventually introduced self-referrals. The number of tenancies achieved rose steadily, reaching more than 100 by 2017.

HOMELINK's rent and deposit guarantee scheme was later replaced with an interest-free loan scheme, with loans repaid at an affordable rate and repayments 'recycled' to help the next person in need.

'Landlords on buy-to-let mortgages couldn't rely on guarantees – they wanted money up front,' explains Chris. 'It meant our supporters had to change from guarantors to donors and be encouraged to give annually, monthly or quarterly. Luckily there was absolutely no difficulty and they all understood, but it was a lot of work contacting everyone and explaining it to them.'



Equally challenging was the move from being a Trust to becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This put the organization on a more official footing, but involved calling every single donor and asking them to switch their direct debit to a different bank account.



Volunteers have always been HOMELINK’s lifeblood. For many years the charity had just one paid employee, a ‘coordinator’ (client manager), and although it now has five part-time members of staff, hours volunteered still outnumber paid hours by a ratio of three to two.

A dedicated team of volunteers continues to raise money through garden parties, raffles, choir performances and teas, and in recent years the charity has organised more high-profile fundraisers, such as its hugely successful 20th anniversary concert at Glyndebourne opera house. It has also been successful in securing grant funding from major organisations ranging from Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust to the Enjoolata Foundation.

Over time, the reasons that people become homeless have shifted – from relationship breakdowns being a leading cause, to Section 21 evictions becoming a big issue – while soaring rents in the south east have made finding affordable accommodation extremely difficult.

The pandemic and the cost of living crisis that followed brought new challenges – and new innovations. During lockdown, client managers began conducting interviews with applicants by telephone for the first time. After seeing escalating numbers of new tenants unable to afford basic household items such as fridges, cookers, beds, carpets and curtains, the charity introduced a small grants scheme, and has seen demand for this continue to soar. It also started offering emergency energy and food vouchers.

‘Our offering has changed, in that loans for rent and deposits are in decline because of a lack of affordable rental accommodation, and small grants for essential household goods, which we didn’t do at the outset, are now a considerable part of our offering,’ says Client Manager Gary Brettle. ‘That puts further pressure on us, because with loans we get most of the money back, but with grants the money is essentially gifted to the people concerned.’

Gary has seen an increase in clients coming to HOMELINK with complex needs, and a large part of the charity’s work is now around signposting people to other services. ‘People very rarely come to us with just a housing need these days,’ he says. They may have mental health issues, or be vulnerable in other ways. We have to look at cases holistically.’

Although the ways in which HOMELINK offers help have changed over the years, the charity’s services continue to be a lifeline for those in need.

‘If we get to the point where we’re not needed, then we’ll have done our job,’ Gary says. ‘But I think that’s a long way off at the moment.’

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISERS A SUCCESS

By Jane Lee, Trustee

HOMELINK's ability to help the most vulnerable in our community relies on the dedication of its many volunteers and excellent staff, the support and generosity of local groups, businesses and community, and several charitable funding organisations.



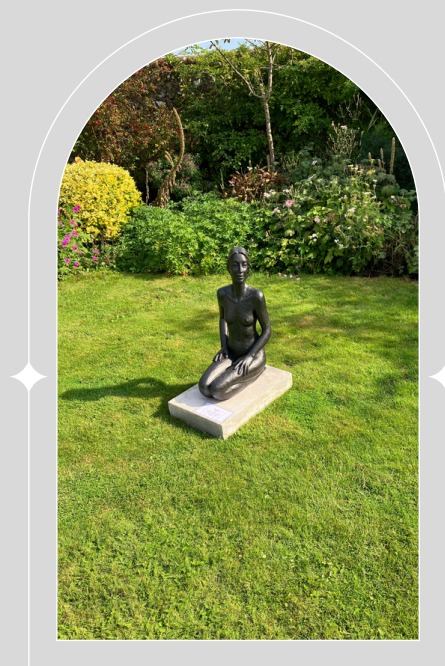
Our community fundraising events are an important part of our fundraising plans. We were fortunate to be offered the beautiful Barrack Cottage garden by David and Karen Allam for a hugely successful Garden Party. As in 2019, this was very popular. Chair Ros Kellaway and her husband Steve opened their beautiful gardens with displays of sculptures and paintings as part of Lewes Artwave festival. The year was rounded off with the ever-popular Christmas concert with the Ashdown Singers.

We were overwhelmed by the response to our Winter Appeal, which was so generously match-funded by the Enjoolata Foundation. Special thanks go to the volunteers who pounded the streets of Lewes district in less than perfect weather to deliver 4,000 flyers.

Finally, a note about our website, which suffered a catastrophic failure at the start of the year. Matt Skeggs, of EMSL, generously rebuilt the website for us in his own time and followed this up with improvements to make it easier to donate. It is now also possible to donate via bank transfer, easyfundraising, CAF and Stewardship.

If you would like more information, Gabrielle will be very pleased to help you. Please email finance@leweshomelink.org.uk.

Thank you to everyone who supported us in 2023, whether it was by baking, delivering leaflets, serving refreshments, regular or one-off donations, hosting, contributing to or attending an event, supporting our Winter Appeal or making us your Charity of the Year. Everything you do helps someone who is experiencing homelessness.



THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS

Funding partnerships in 2023 provided us with the much-needed funds to run our service and also help clients struggling to cope with the rise in the cost of living. Our heartfelt thanks go to the following trusts and foundations for their support:



East Sussex County Council
Lewes District Council
Enjoolata Foundation
Garfield Weston Foundation
Henry Smith Charitable Trust
Ian Askew Charitable Trust
Lewes Citizen Advice Bureau
Lewes District Food Partnership
Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Catholic Housing Aid Society
Michael Bell Communications
Golders Green Foundation
Littlestone Charitable Trust
Cliffe Feoffees
Diocese of Arundel and Brighton
Churches in Lewes District
The Silver Lady Trust

HOMELINK ANNUAL MEETING INVITATION

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE OUR 25TH YEAR

The Chair and Trustees of Lewes District Churches HOMELINK would like to invite all supporters and partner organisations to join us at our annual meeting, as we celebrate 25 years of helping people into housing. This year's meeting will be held at King's Church, Brooks Road, Lewes, BN7 2BY on May 18 at 5.15pm. Complimentary refreshments will be provided. We look forward to seeing you there!

ABOUT US

HOMELINK is a Sussex-based homelessness prevention charity. We help the homeless or people at risk of becoming homeless within the Lewes District area into housing. Our interest-free loans cover the cost of a landlord's deposit and advance rent. The loans are then repaid at an affordable rate agreed with our clients, and repayments 'recycled' as soon as they are made to help the next person in need. We also provide emergency grants for essential household items.

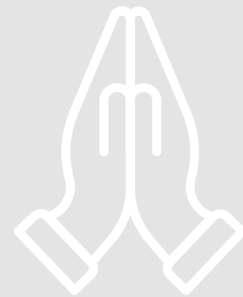
FOR YOUR PRAYERS

Please ask that HOMELINK may continue to be effective and efficient in helping people into housing with both loans and grants.

Pray for all in our district who are homeless or losing their home.

For improved financial support.

For our Chair, trustees, staff, volunteers and new trustees.



OUR PATRONS

HM Lord-Lieutenant of East Sussex, Mr Andrew Blackman

The Rt Revd William Hazlewood, Bishop of Lewes

The Rt Revd Richard Moth, Bishop of Arundel and Brighton

The Revd Barbara Evans-Routley, Methodist Superintendent for Central Sussex United Area

The Revd Bridget Banks, Moderator of URC Southern Synod

Maria Caulfield MP



CONTACT US

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Follow us on X, Facebook & Instagram - @HomelinkSussex | **Charity No: 1174895**

HOMELINK Trustees: Linda Fisher, Terry Howell, Jane Lee, Hugh Jones, Rev. Jac Parson (until December 2023), Malcolm Mazey, Joanna Slaughter, Rosalind Kellaway, Chris Tutt, Joan Wignall

HOMELINK trustees have given consideration to the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have satisfied themselves that systems and procedures are in place to manage those risks.