

Introduction by Ros Toomey, Chair of Trustees

As the Chair of Lewes District Churches HOMELINK, and despite very challenging conditions in the private rental sector, I am very proud that we continue to provide an invaluable service to those at risk of homelessness in the Lewes District. We do this both through our interest free loans for those needing a deposit and the first month's rent and through our Home Essential Goods Service (formerly known as our Small Grants Service - see page 3).

In 2024, we helped 146 local people get a permanent roof over their heads, of whom 71 were children, a significant increase on the previous year.

Our Home Essential Goods Service continues to provide essential support to those who have managed to find a permanent home but find themselves without essential items. This could include beds, curtains, cooking equipment and floor coverings.

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 the Enjoolata Foundation this year, also Cliffe Feoffees and Trinity Church in Lewes, enabling us to help even more people.

Our relationship with Lewes District Council continues to be of great importance for the number of referrals we receive from them, enabling us to help even more people. We are also very pleased to have recruited additional volunteers and trustees from the local community and are grateful for the continuing support from local churches.

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.



Introducing our New Trustee: Richard Jayawant. Richard says:

'I am an engineer by training and have been part of the team running a medium sized specialist engineering business which I am slowly trying to retire from. The free time I have recently acquired will be well spent on supporting HOMELINK, with homelessness being an area which my wife and I have supported via several charities for many years.'

My previous charity experience has been as a trustee, secretary and chair of the finance committee and I hope to use this experience together with my general business experience in support of HOMELINK.'

We are delighted to welcome Richard to the Board of Trustees and are delighted that he has chosen to share his expertise, experience and heart for this cause with us.

Client Managers' Report - Gary Brettle and Shaun Gilbert



DEMAND FOR OUR CORE (INTEREST FREE) LOANS SERVICE REMAINED HIGH IN 2024

2024 was a busy year for us in dealing with the multitude of frontline housing and homelessness enquiries from the general public whilst also supporting the charity in other important areas such as planning, fundraising and partnership building/maintenance.

Referrals for loans at 237 showed a 7% increase over the previous year. Resultant interview assessments (at 145) showed a similar percentage increase. The total number of loans made in 2024 to meet 'upfront' housing costs was 61, up from 47 in 2023, an increase of 47.5%. This assisted 146 people into better housing situations whilst addressing matters such as domestic violence, no fault evictions, overcrowding, sofa surfing, moving on from emergency, temporary or supported accommodation and many other challenging situations.

The total value of loans made in the year was £98,119 giving an average loan value of £1,608. Loan repayments from clients held up well in the tough economic conditions with a repayment rate of 76.6%. That said, together with our Repayments Officer, Frances Hymas, we worked closely with an increasing number of clients in financial difficulty in order to find a mutually agreeable solution to manage their loan going forwards.

The difference between referrals received for loans and loans made seems stark (at 176) but highlights a major, and sometimes underestimated, issue of the significant 'log-jam' in the housing market where need for rental homes far exceeds their supply. HOMELINK provides plenty of advice, support and signposting to families in this situation – being those who are in genuine housing need but ultimately are unsuccessful in finding private rental sector housing. In most of these cases, sadly, the applicants concerned will be forced to maintain the unsatisfactory housing situations or homelessness for longer than is advisable or desirable. The few lucky ones will be allocated social housing.

We are proud to advise that we were able to continue to offer hardship vouchers for registered current applicants and clients struggling and presenting with an immediate emergency. We usually offer a supermarket voucher for £25 or £30 (69 vouchers issued in 2024, total £1435).

Finally, a BIG thank you to all those who assisted us in our role throughout the year and helped us deliver such important solutions to those in housing need.

Small Grants activity and outcomes is reported separately this year and we offer our appreciation for the considerable time given/sterling work done by volunteer Gill Short in this regard.

237 Referrals for Loans

**61 loans provided
benefitting
75 Adults and 71 Children**

Gary and Shaun will be saying a few words at our Annual Meeting - do come along and meet them, ask questions, get to know them. Full details about the Annual Meeting are on the back page.



Small Grants Report - Gill Short, Small Grants Volunteer



Our small grants service provides non repayable, HOMELINK supplied (and where necessary fitted), essential household goods that a referred applicant needs but cannot afford to buy from their own resources.

This year we had a total of 128 referrals, 104 of which we were able to accept. We have worked with 118 adults and 76 children spending a total of £29,139.10

We decided at the beginning of the year to spread the indicative budget over 12 months – allocating £2,000 a month if required, with a further £1,000 available. During the year we were able to obtain £1,500 a quarter from Cliffe Feoffees resulting in a possible budget of £31,000. This was only an indicative budget so we have been as prudent as we could to ensure that there was sufficient budget to pay for core costs.

The cost-of-living crisis continues, hence the demand for the small grants service. It is clear that there is just as much, if not more, need than in 2023 and this is likely to continue into 2025. The demand for small grants remains the same – individuals and families who have been homeless or in emergency accommodation often have few possessions, no beds or bedding, nothing to cook with or to keep food cold, no carpets or curtains or blinds to keep the new home warm in the winter months. They have faced considerable hardship - relationship breakdowns, disability, physical and mental illness and domestic abuse.

We are making a real difference to people as they start their lives afresh. One client told me that it felt like Christmas had come early; another who had been sleeping rough was delighted with a kettle and microwave, cutlery and crockery and requested a broom, dustpan and brush set to keep his new room clean and tidy. This year I have noticed the increase in approaches from victims of domestic abuse from 6 in 2023 to 17 in 2024.

I am very grateful for the support of the Client Managers and other paid staff. They act as advisors and supporters to me when we have clients with complex needs. I know I couldn't do the job without them.

**128 Referrals for
Small Grants**

**98 Small Grants provided
benefitting
118 Adults and
76 Children**



Announcement about our Small Grants Service:

In order to more clearly convey the purpose of our Small Grants Service, we are renaming it! From the date of our Annual Meeting, it will be called 'HOMELINK's Essential Goods Service' or 'HEGS'. This more accurately reflects the nature of what we do: we provide essential goods to those without. A referral will still be required, the excellent service provided will not change, just the name!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Gill and all of our wonderful volunteers. If you would like to find out more about joining HOMELINK's volunteer team, please contact admin@leweshomelink.org.uk

Funding Report - Jane Lee, Vice Chair of HOMELINK

HOMELINK's income comes from many different sources, all of it vital, and enables us to support local people to have the home that nobody should be denied. In common with all small charities we find it increasingly difficult to raise the necessary funds. However, with a lot of hard work and amazing support we had a pretty successful year.

Rapidly increasing competition for grants meant that although we continue to have a good success rate, some of the awards were much reduced. Fortunately the impact of this was offset by a generous multi-year grant from the Enjoolata Foundation and increased income from other sources.

Staff and trustees helped build new relationships with local groups by giving talks about HOMELINK. This resulted in a number of new individual donors committing to regular giving and fundraisers being held for our benefit. Trinity Church, Lewes, has supported us in very many ways through our mission partnership, and our Small Grants service is supported by the Cliffe Feoffees.



After the disappointment of having to cancel our Garden Party we were delighted to celebrate our 25th year in style with a wonderful Gala Concert at which we premiered "Hannah's Story", a film in which one of our clients describes how HOMELINK helped her turn her life around. Other ways in which our supporters have raised funds for us this year include sponsored runs, Book and Plant Sales, a Clothes & Cocktails evening, Christmas Concert by the Ashdown Singers, Bonfire Night Street Collections and the Winter Appeal.

There are many ways in which people can donate, such as via Bank Transfer, CAF, Stewardship or by signing up to Easyfundraising. More information can be found here <https://leweshomelink.org.uk/donate/>. If you would like more information Gabrielle will be very pleased to help you. You can contact her at finance@leweshomelink.org.uk

Thank you to everyone who supported us in 2024, including:

TRINITY Church, Lewes
Diocese Arundel and Brighton
Christ Church, Lewes
Seaford Baptist Church
St. Leonard's & St. Luke's Seaford
Catholic Housing Aid Society (CHAS)
The Silver Lady Fund
Enjoolata Foundation
Cliffe Feoffees
The Homity Trust
Sussex Community Trust (SCF)
Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust (EKCT)
Garfield Weston Foundation
Albert Hunt Trust
Lewes Fund

**Thank you to everyone
who has given in any way
- whether money, time or
skills.
We really appreciate you.**

Paddock Singers
Littlestone Charitable Trust
Lewes Friday Food Market
Stafford Road Garage
The David Young's Charity
Lewes District Council
Lewes Castle Rotary Club
Inner Wheel Club, Lewes
Lewes Quakers
South Street Bonfire Society
Cliffe Bonfire Society
Lewes Liberal Democrats
Fam Jam Films
Recast Digital Ltd (formerly EMSL)
St Thomas More Church, Seaford

As well as everyone who has given a personal donation

You can support HOMELINK during this year's Artwave festival. Ros and Steve Toomey will be opening their beautiful gardens on 6th & 7th September displaying artwork from four talented local artists. HOMELINK will be raising funds by serving refreshments, selling plants and offering talks by Steve on the fascinating history of Castle Lodge. Do come!

Finance Report - Gabrielle Hill, Finance Manager

The year 2024 was another eventful one for our office, marked by both challenges and accomplishments. We received 237 applications, reflecting the ongoing struggle to secure rental properties due to a significant shortage in availability. In response, we issued 61 interest-free loans to support individuals and families in moving into new homes. At the close of December, we had 314 active loans, amounting to a £253,424 investment in our community.

A standout moment of the year was our 25th Anniversary Gala Concert, an incredible success with a sold-out event at the church of St John Sub Castro. This milestone celebration highlighted the strength of our community and the unwavering dedication of our supporters.

We remain deeply grateful for the generosity of our donors and grant providers, whose contributions are the lifeblood of our charity.

INCOME

Voluntary donations	£ 48,709
Charitable grants	£ 50,731
Local authority grants	£ 18,000
Fundraising events	£ 12,103
Other income	£ 10,191
Total income	£ 139,734

EXPENDITURE

Non-repayable grants	£ 30,574
Employee expenses	£ 88,589
Office expenses	£ 11,324
Write-offs	£ 754
Comms & events	£ 2,336
Audit	£ 600
Total payments	£ 134,177



61 new loans



146 people
helped into
homes



177 small
grants and
food vouchers

To all our supporters, we extend our heartfelt thanks for your continued belief in our mission.
Together, we are making a difference.



ABOUT US:

HOMELINK is a Sussex-based homelessness prevention charity. We help those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless by the provision of an interest-free loan which covers the cost of a landlord's deposit and advance rent. Loans are repaid at an affordable rate agreed with our clients, and repayments are recycled' as soon as they are made to help the next person in need. On referral, we also provide non-repayable grants for essential household items.

PLEASE PRAY :

For all those who are homeless today or will be soon. That they will find real and lasting solutions to their housing issues

For our trustees and staff

For the Annual Meeting

PLEASE GIVE THANKS:

For all of our volunteers

For those who give of their time, skills and money

For the many generous funders, churches and organisations we have worked with this year

For all of our supporters

*You're
Invited!*



Come And Join Us For Our

ANNUAL MEETING - 'HOMELINK: CERTAINTY IN AN UNCERTAIN TIME'

Guest Speaker: Cllr Mark Slater

Cabinet Member for Tenants & Those in Housing Need

**SATURDAY 14TH JUNE 2025 AT 5.30PM
ST LUKE'S CHURCH, WALMER ROAD
SEAFORD, EAST SUSSEX BN25 3TH**

Light refreshments provided (sandwiches, tea and coffee)
An opportunity to hear about the work of HOMELINK over the past year
and to speak to trustees and staff. We look forward to seeing you

ALL WELCOME

RSVP: ADMIN@LEWESHOMELINK.ORG.UK

CONTACT US:

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HOMELINK Trustees: Linda Fisher, Rosalind Kellaway, Terry Howell, Hugh Jones, Jane Lee, Graham Maunders, (from April 2024), Malcolm Mazey (until September 2024), Gill Short (from April 2024), Joanna Slaughter, Chris Tutt, Chris Whittick (from April 2024), 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

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

James MacCleary MP