

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR, ROS TOOMEY



I am very proud of the work done by Lewes District Churches HOMELINK in helping local people at risk of homelessness into a permanent home. Over the last twelve months HOMELINK has helped 147 local people get a permanent roof over their heads, and this represents 61 households, and around seventy of those people are children.

HOMELINK's support takes two forms:

Firstly our main purpose is the provision of interest free loans for the deposit and the first month's rent to those trying to find private rented accommodation. Loans are subject to a need and affordability assessment and repaid over an agreed period;

Secondly, as a subsidiary activity to our main purpose, we provide, free of charge, essential items for people who often have nothing, or nearly nothing, as they move into accommodation through our Home Essential Goods Service.

Our mission is to relieve the plight of many who are the "hidden homeless"; not yet on the streets, these are people who are at very serious risk of becoming permanently homeless. They are sleeping in their cars, in tents, or sofa surfing from one friend to another as they look for a permanent roof over their head. Increasingly we are seeing single parents with children escaping from domestic abuse and violent relationships. Housed in temporary council accommodation, they are desperate for a permanent roof over their heads. With our help, they can achieve this.

We are proud of the relationship we have built with Lewes District Council, who refer a large number of people to us for help. The financial and voluntary support we receive from the local community is of vital importance to us, whether it is from local charities, local churches or community groups. Many individuals living locally give generously, knowing that they are helping local people. We obtain over one third of our annual donations from individuals, local churches and groups. This is my chance to thank everyone for their support.

We have strengthened our Board through the recruitment of new trustees and this process is continuing. We have also set up an improved process for the recruitment of volunteers to help particularly with fundraising, our IT needs and events. We are following closely the reorganisation of local government and I express my thanks here to all who are helping us understand the implications of this for HOMELINK.

A great strength of our charity is the fantastic people who work for us and the respect and compassion with which they treat our clients. My thanks once again to all our trustees, staff and volunteers for their commitment and effort to relieve homelessness in the Lewes District.

CONTACT US:

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

HOMELINK Trustees: Ken Cowley (from April 2026); Linda Fisher (until January 2026), Terry Howell (until 11 April 2026), Richard Jayawant, Hugh Jones, Jane Lee, Graham Maunders, Gill Short, Joanna Slaughter (until June 2025), Ros Toomey, Chris Tutt, Christopher Whittick, 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 | Vacancy, Bishop of Arundel and Brighton |
The Revd Barbara Evans-Routley, Methodist Superintendent for Central Sussex United Area |
Vacancy, Moderator of URC Southern Synod | James MacCleary MP

VIEW FROM THE FRONTLINE - REFLECTING ON ANOTHER HECTIC YEAR

GARY BRETTLE & SHAUN GILBERT, CLIENT MANAGERS

We have noticed little change in housing and homelessness issues presented by the considerable numbers seeking our help. Additionally, the cost-of-living crisis shows few signs of getting better and we are seeing far too many people presenting with insufficient money to their names after meeting essential commitments. Time will tell if the new Renters' Rights Bill (effective 1 May 2026), regional government restructuring and the ambitious house building targets will tip the balance in favour of those struggling to find and/or maintain a safe, secure and affordable rental home.

HOMELINK had many successful outcomes in 2025. Our core interest free loans service to assist applicants who are offered a tenancy processed.....

195 referrals including self-referrals
Those referrals converted to 120
interviews which delivered 61 New Loans
(the same as 2024) at a total value of
£88,971.

Applicants will be able to afford to maintain the tenancy but lack resources for some/all the upfront costs needed to secure the property on offer, hence the loan from HOMELINK.

The most important outcome was the 147 people who were housed/rehoused because of our core work (2024, 146).



We had an impressive loan repayment rate of 78.75% being clients making regular repayments. This provides sustainability for the charity and is testament to well-made loan cases and management of the same. Acknowledgement is due to Team Member, Frances Hymas, for her work with clients after loans have been made.

Our Hardship Vouchers (HV) service has increased exponentially for those presenting in crisis. This is a service for current registered applicants and clients. It provides an immediate solution to the crisis (maximum £30 per case) by providing supermarket or energy top up vouchers by SMS or email. 96 vouchers issued for a total of £2,392 (2024, 69 for £1,435).

Our Household Essential Goods service (HEGS, formerly Small Grants – see separate report) for those without the means to pay for key items was delivered again, for the greatest part, by stalwart HOMELINK volunteer and now trustee, Gill Short. We extend our appreciation for her dedication to the service in what was her final year of dealing with the offering. Gill will stay as a trustee, and HEGS will continue from the HOMELINK office.



2025 brought change to office operations with a commitment to a new IT system to capture the charity's activity and client records. Client Managers with Finance Manager, Gabrielle Hill, under the guidance of IT Specialist volunteer, Simon Chant, worked on tailoring the software for HOMELINK's needs. The system should 'go live' in Summer 2026. Our thanks are extended to Simon for expertise shared and the many hours he spent with us on this project.

Finally, we extend our appreciation to all who helped us deliver/support our services for the many grateful beneficiaries of our work.

Thank you.

◆ **61 new loans made** ◆ **147 people housed** ◆ **at a value of £88,971** ◆

“

Good afternoon Gary and Shaun. Just wanted to thank you for the help and support you have provided to get our place. We are extremely grateful and we are very happy.

”

HOME ESSENTIAL GOODS SERVICE

GILL SHORT, HEGS VOLUNTEER CO-ORDINATOR

2020-2025

HOMELINK's Home Essential Goods Service (HEGS) provides, on referral, essential items to those who have few, if any, possessions. Often these individuals and families have been homeless or in emergency accommodation and have no beds or bedding, nothing to cook with or to keep their food cold, no carpets or blinds to keep their new home warm.

In 2025 the HEGS service received 127 referrals and was able to support 94 households, providing assistance to 122 adults and 100 children. This represents a significant rise in the number of children supported compared with 76 in 2024, reflecting the growing impact of child poverty across the country. Total expenditure for the year was £33,043, funded through £25,043 from the core budget and £8,000 from Cliffe Feoffees. We are thankful for Cliffe Feoffees and others, such as the Silver Lady Trust, for supporting this work.

Demand for essential household items has remained high due to the ongoing cost of living crisis and it is clear that there is just as much, if not more, need than in 2023 and 2024. Many individuals and families moving on from homelessness or emergency accommodation arrive with very few possessions and require basic items such as beds, bedding, cookers, fridges, carpets and curtains. The service continues to play a vital role in helping people establish safe, warm and functional homes during extremely challenging periods in their lives.



Many of our clients have faced considerable hardship including relationship breakdowns, physical and mental illness and domestic abuse and we are making a real difference to people as they start their lives afresh. One recent client had been rehoused but her property had no carpet, her heating wasn't working, and she had nothing to cook with. We were able to supply carpet for her bedroom and a reconditioned cooker.

She rang me to say how pleased she was with her cooker and lovely grey carpet. The heating had been mended so it was beginning to feel cosy, and she was making friends locally.

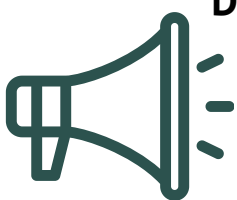
We are changing the staffing for 2026 as I step down from day-to-day involvement as a volunteer after 5 years in the role. I will, however, continue my involvement as a trustee to support the ongoing development of the service and ensure it continues to meet the needs of vulnerable people across Lewes District.

Gill Short Home Essential Goods Service Volunteer Co-ordinator 2020 - 2025

◆ **94 households supported** ◆ **122 adults and 100 children** ◆ **at a value of £33,043** ◆

HOMELINK would like to express huge thanks to Gill for all the work she has carried out on HEGS over the last five years as a volunteer - always cheerful and always wanting the absolute best for every client, often going over and above to ensure their needs were met.

Home Essential Goods Service: hegs@leweshomelink.org.uk

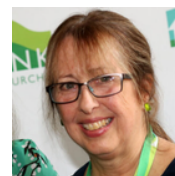


Do please join us for our Annual Meeting to hear more about our work of helping people into housing

Wednesday 17th June 2026
King's Church, Brooks Road, Lewes BN7 2BY
11am Welcome / tea and coffee served
11.30am-12.30pm Annual Meeting
12.30pm-1.30pm Light sandwich lunch and the chance to chat

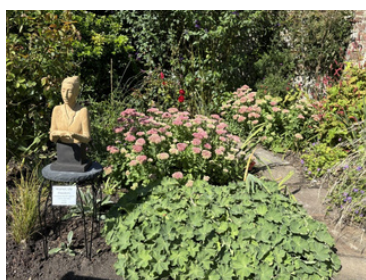
EVENTS AND FUNDRAISING

JANE LEE, TRUSTEE AND VICE-CHAIR



With the help and dedication of our wonderful staff and volunteers, HOMELINK enjoyed a successful year of fundraising.

We love bringing people together through local events, and this year was no exception. A highlight was our Artwave gathering, generously hosted in the beautiful home and gardens of Ros and Steve Toomey. The event combined inspiring artwork, delicious homemade cakes, and, along with glorious weather, drew a fantastic crowd—including many visitors discovering HOMELINK for the very first time. Not only did the day raise vital funds, it also sparked new connections and even inspired a few attendees to join us as volunteers.



Artwave Event



The Ashdown Singers at our Christmas Concert

The Christmas Concert by the Ashdown Singers was met with enthusiastic support and festive cheer. We're deeply grateful to everyone who helped make these events possible, as well as those who contributed their time, energy, and resources to fundraising efforts throughout the year. Together, these initiatives play a crucial role in sustaining our Home Essential Goods Service, alongside the ongoing support from our annual Winter Appeal.

Behind the scenes, a tremendous amount of work goes on applying for grants. This is a detailed and time-intensive process but is essential to securing the funding needed to keep our core services running. We're especially thankful for the continued backing of local charitable/statutory organisations, including the generous multi-year support from the Enjoolata Foundation and Lewes District Council, which helps ensure we can keep delivering for those who need us most.

Finally, HOMELINK is blessed with the support of very many individuals and local organisations. This regular giving contributes more than a third of our income so if you would like to consider making a regular donation, however small, please contact Gabrielle, our Finance Manager, at finance@leweshomelink.org.uk

HOMELINK is very grateful to the following organisations and churches who provided funding during 2025:

Enjoolata | Lewes District Council | Sussex Community Foundation | Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust | Albert Hunt Trust | Silver Lady Trust | Rotary Club of Seaford | Cliffe Feoffees | Ringmer Carol Singers | St Lawrence Church, Telscombe | Seaford Baptist Church | Trinity Church, Lewes | St Michael's Church, Lewes | Christ Church, Lewes | St Leonard's Church, Seaford | Catholic Housing Aid Society | Diocese of Arundel & Brighton | Littlestone Charitable Trust | David Young Charity | Glynde Place | The Catenian Association - Haywards Heath Circle | Ringmer Good Neighbours | Stafford Road Garage, Ringmer | Phoenix Cohousing, Lewes | Nevill Residents Association | South Street Bonfire Society | Ringmer Support Group

Huge thanks to Deacon Stephen Sharpe and his team at St Thomas More Church for hosting our Christmas Concert and for providing the wonderful refreshments

Thank you to Holly Maunders and Tom Hesmondhalgh for walking/running their socks off for sponsorship for HOMELINK

And thank you to every individual who gives to HOMELINK in any way - financially, through their time, volunteering, etc

We couldn't do it without you. Thank you.

FINANCE

GABRIELLE HILL, FINANCE MANAGER



INCOME	£
Voluntary donations	44,748
Charitable grants	64,965
Local authority grants	13,127
Fundraising events	8,106
Other income	14,310

Total income £145,256

EXPENDITURE	£
Home Essential Goods	35,435
Employee expenses	92,149
Office expenses	12,492
Bad debts	355
Comms & events	1,008
Examiner's fees	630

Total expenditure £ 142,069

The demand for our services remained high throughout last year, as the rising cost of living continues to affect many of our clients. By the end of December, we had 287 active loans, amounting to a £227,395 investment in our community. We organised several successful fundraising activities, including during Artwave and the traditional Christmas concert in Seaford. A local supporter completed a 25-kilometre run to raise funds, and the Ringmer Support Group generously donated the proceeds from their carol-singing event. We are very grateful to all our generous supporters, whose commitment enables us to continue this vital work.

◆ **78.75% repayment rate** ◆ **287 active loans** ◆ **190 HEGS & Hardship Vouchers** ◆



Good Day Gabrielle
Thank you so much for your email and Homelink's assistance when we needed help. It honestly made all the difference.



Finance Manager: finance@leweshomelink.org.uk

In last year's Annual Report we introduced new trustee, Richard Jayawant, to you. One year on, here are Richard's thoughts on being a HOMELINK trustee. Thank you Richard.

One year ago, I was appointed as a Trustee. I had a reasonable idea about what HOMELINK does, but no real understanding of the detail of what goes on.

Reflecting on the last year, a few items have struck me:

- The dedication of our staff and how important their relationships to the local authority staff are.
- How strong the board is on governance, policies and process, particularly with the input of Ros and Graham, my fellow trustees. This propagates down to a well-run organisation at all levels.
- The strategic challenges faced by HOMELINK, particularly with the re-organisation of local government.
- Running a project in a voluntary organisation is not the same as one in a commercial organisation.
- It has been challenging and in certain aspects significantly outside my comfort zone (through my choice), but it has been very rewarding and I certainly feel that I am making a difference.

Richard Jayawant

If you have ever considered becoming a charity trustee and would like to find out more, please do get in touch. We are particularly looking for someone with HR expertise.

Administrator: admin@leweshomelink.org.uk



A TRIBUTE TO TERRY HOWELL, FOUNDING TRUSTEE

Thank you, Terry

Being a charity trustee is, for a large part, about being content to be invisible. Few people outside of the organisation know your name, your role, how long you've been involved. The clients, who only deal with frontline staff, don't know you even exist.

Nobody sees the hours you put in. The quiet consideration of difficulties. The attendance at meetings. The wrestling with complex issues. The dedication. The compassion.

And yet, for those privileged to know you, to have worked alongside you, your fingerprints are everywhere.

And so it was with Terry Howell, our long-serving trustee who died on Wednesday 11th February 2026.

A founding trustee, Terry responded 25 years ago to an issue he observed all around him: the increase in people sleeping on the streets. And whilst many would look away, indeed still do look away, Terry looked the issue straight in the eye and, with others, considered what could be done to help. And so HOMELINK was born.

With his precise analytical brain, his polite and respectful manner, with energy and deep commitment, Terry helped HOMELINK grow and develop to a point where it has helped many hundreds of people into safe and secure accommodation from homelessness, near homelessness, domestic abuse, unaffordable and unsuitable housing. It is no exaggeration to say that across the Lewes District, many hundreds of people will be sleeping soundly tonight because of Terry's work with HOMELINK. What a legacy!

He was a principled man of great faith, coupled with great humility.
He was a husband and a father. He was our founding trustee.

We will miss him enormously.



Terry welcoming guests to the Christmas Concert

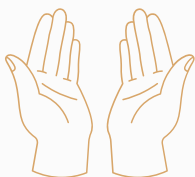


Terry on the LHS with Sir Peter Field, Joan Wignall and Bishop Richard Jackson



Terry on the LHS, outside the House of Friendship

Terry Howell (28th July 1935 – 11th February 2026)



In these uncertain times, please pray for everyone who is facing the loss of their home or worrying about how to meet basic needs. May they find the strength to continue searching and seeking help.

Please pray also for those who help to meet the needs of others. May HOMELINK make the best use of its resources and discern a way forward in difficult situations.

HOMELINK is a Sussex-based homelessness prevention charity. We support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness by providing interest-free loans to cover a landlord's deposit and advance rent. Each loan is repaid at an affordable rate agreed with the client, and repayments are then recycled to help the next person in need. On referral, we also provide non-repayable grants for essential household items.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT