

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

Resident Annual Report 2016



Contents

Message from the Board



Colin Wilby

"We will continue to concentrate on getting things right first time to save frustration and wasted effort."

The new Government elected in May 2015 brought a number of challenges to the housing association sector. The most important of these was the unexpected requirement that social rents must be reduced by 1% each year from 2016 to 2020. The loss of income to West Kent over this period will be very significant and means that we are having to review our plans and costs.

You will recall that we have been pursuing our customer strategy It's Your Call over recent years. This involves us continually reviewing our services to make sure we operate as efficiently as we can and give you value for your rent. As a result, we have not cut back on services as other landlords have in response to the new rent requirement.

There will, though, be changes to how we do things in 2016. We will still provide tailored, customer-focused services to support you, but we will also encourage you to 'self-serve' through our new website. For our part, we will continue to concentrate on getting things right first time to save frustration and wasted effort.

We are pleased with the success of the Your Rent, Your Responsibility campaign. This makes it easier for you to pay your rent online and brought arrears down to 2%. Remember, if you are struggling to pay your rent, please contact us straight away, as our team is here to help you get through any difficult period.

West Kent has an excellent reputation for being 'more than just a landlord' and so we have combined our Lifeways and West Kent Extra teams to create a new single Communities team

under the leadership of Will Campbell-Wroe. Our landlord services – led by Deborah White – now come under the banner of 'Homes – places to live' and our other community work will fall under 'Communities – space to grow'.

Last year we launched our Emerald accommodation strategy to make our homes for older people fit to meet growing needs. This will be boosted by the fruition of the Kent Excellent Homes for All project, which brings 218 new homes during 2016.

There were other important Government initiatives announced last year that will have implications for who we house and the services we are able to provide. These include the reduced household benefit cap, increased rents for higher earners in social housing, restrictions on lifetime tenancies and the extension of the right to buy to housing association tenants. The details are still being finalised nationally and we will be in contact with you when we know more.

These are difficult challenges but West Kent remains financially strong and, with the commitment of board, staff and residents, I am confident that we will continue to provide exceptional services and play an important role in meeting housing need across Kent and Medway.

I would also like to thank our three resident board members, Joanne Frawley, Angela George and James McQuarrie for their continued time, commitment and valuable contribution to the running of West Kent.

Colin Wilby, Chair - Board of Management

From the resident involvement team

In 2015 we focused on encouraging more tenants to get involved and help shape and improve our services, and we were delighted to engage with more than a third of our residents over the year.

Reviewing our activities and forums has increased the number of service recommendations and consultations with residents. We have trained more than 30 new resident mystery shoppers who have now completed three mystery shops and made suggestions for improvements.

Our focus on removing barriers to engagement has seen more of our tenants get involved. Meetings are now held at local community venues, rather than at a central location, and we make sure the venues we use are accessible to everyone.

We publish the results of all our consultations on our website and provide paper copies to those who request them. We look forward to meeting and engaging with even more residents in future.

"We engaged with more than a third of our residents over the year."



Looking after your home

In 2015 we invested more than £14.7m looking after rented homes. We worked with contractors Brenwards (general and electrical works), Ian Williams (painting and decorating), Bridglands (grounds maintenance), IG Doors and Prima windows, as well as with our in house gas and plumbing teams.

During the year we replaced 205 doors, 24 windows, 415 boilers, 82 central heating systems, 261 kitchens, 212 bathrooms and 4 roofs.

We carried out a major refurbishment at our scheme for older people at White Oak Court, Swanley, where we replaced the heating, upgraded the electrics, renewed carpets, refreshed the decorations and improved the communal areas.

This project is part of our wider ambitions around housing for older people in Swanley and we are awaiting planning permission to build 31 new apartments at Northview.

Help with repairs

While we work hard to make sure our homes are kept in good repair and regularly modernised, we also believe that tenants should play their part, and that's why we created a series of DIY videos to help you tackle jobs that are your responsibility.

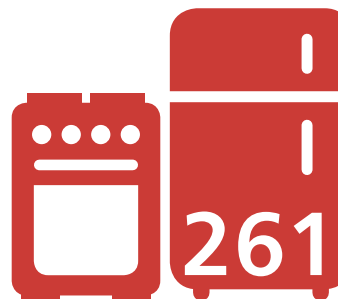
The films show you how to bleed your radiators, fix minor plumbing leaks, set your heating and water controls and more.

Please do make use of these films for your benefit.

At the end of 2015, we had 23 homes that had not met the Decent Homes standard for more than 12 months. 16 of these were because tenants did not agree to the works to their homes, so we need to have further discussions with them. The remaining seven were brought up to standard by March 2016.



new doors



new kitchens



new boilers



new bathrooms



new roofs

Shared responsibility

We're proud of the homes we provide and work hard to keep them well maintained but we need you to do your bit, too. In 2015 we made sure there were no overdue gas checks for eleven months in succession. This took a lot of work and making sure you keep appointments and are in when we visit is one of the most important things you can do to help.

We finished the year with just one overdue asbestos check and are now taking legal action to get access to that tenant's home.

You continued to call us about damp and mould but this rarely comes down to something we can fix. The problem is usually condensation caused by lifestyle, and the tenant is the only person who can put it right. Please take advantage of all the information we provide about reducing condensation.

"...making sure you keep appointments and are in when we visit is one of the most important things you can do to help."

While we are responsible for the fabric of your home, we must stress that the contents are your responsibility and yours alone. It is up to you to make sure your possessions are insured and we continue to promote that message online and in Neighbourhood News.

Repairs and maintenance:

the average cost of a new kitchen was

£3,670



the average cost of a new bathroom was

£2,420



on average we spent

£2,335

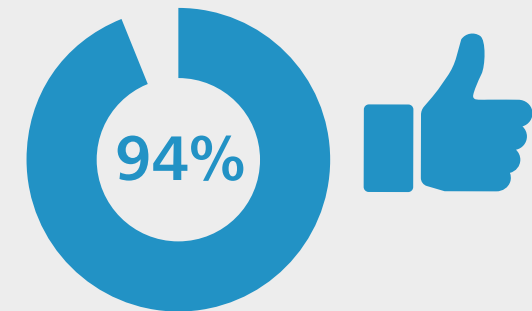
on repairs and maintenance



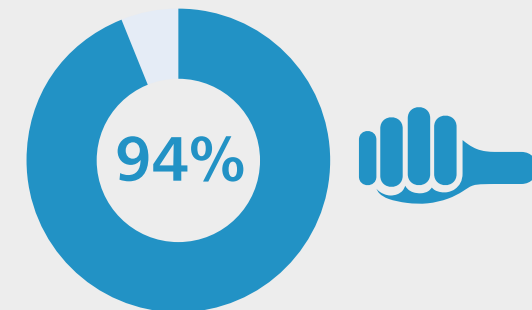
in each home in 2015

Repair service satisfaction

Satisfaction with our repairs service met our target for 2015, reaching 94 per cent.



We were slightly below target on the number of jobs completed in the agreed timescale, reaching 94 per cent against a target of 96 per cent.



New homes

Kent Excellent Homes for All project

The year saw the first two completions of the seven housing schemes being built under the Kent Excellent Homes for All project, thanks to the £100m Private Finance Initiative scheme led by Kent County Council.



In January Housing Director, Deborah White and Property Director, Mark Leader, joined representatives in Ramsgate to mark the start of work. The remaining five schemes are for extra care, providing 218 homes for people aged 55 years and above in Tenterden, Dartford, Dover, Hawkhurst and Ramsgate. Tenants settled in well at the supported housing schemes in Ashford and Ramsgate. The remaining five extra care schemes are due to be handed over in 2016.



New homes

Spotlight on Lantern House and Library House

Our new 'Move On' accommodation, Lantern House for people who have experienced homelessness welcomed its first tenants in early December 2015. Supported Housing Officer Gemma Braybrooke will work with all eleven residents to ensure they have the key skills to manage their tenancies now and in the future through a series of resident led workshops. Residents are nominated for Lantern House by Ashford Borough Council, and can live at the scheme for up to two years, before securing their future homes.

December 2015 also saw the opening of Library House which offers nine one bedroom flats for people with a need for mental health support.

This is provided by Kent and Medway NHS Partnership Trust offering residents an on site presence seven days a week, alongside a variety of activities such as 'healthy eating' and 'photography for beginners'. Residents must have a local connection to the Thanet district to be eligible to live at Library House.



Shared ownership sales

In 2015 we saw good sales results in this area, with our team selling homes soon after they were built. Only one of the 45 homes available for sale during the year remained unsold at the end of the year.

140
HOMES =
Completed
during the year

105 available
for rent

35 shared ownership
properties

New homes

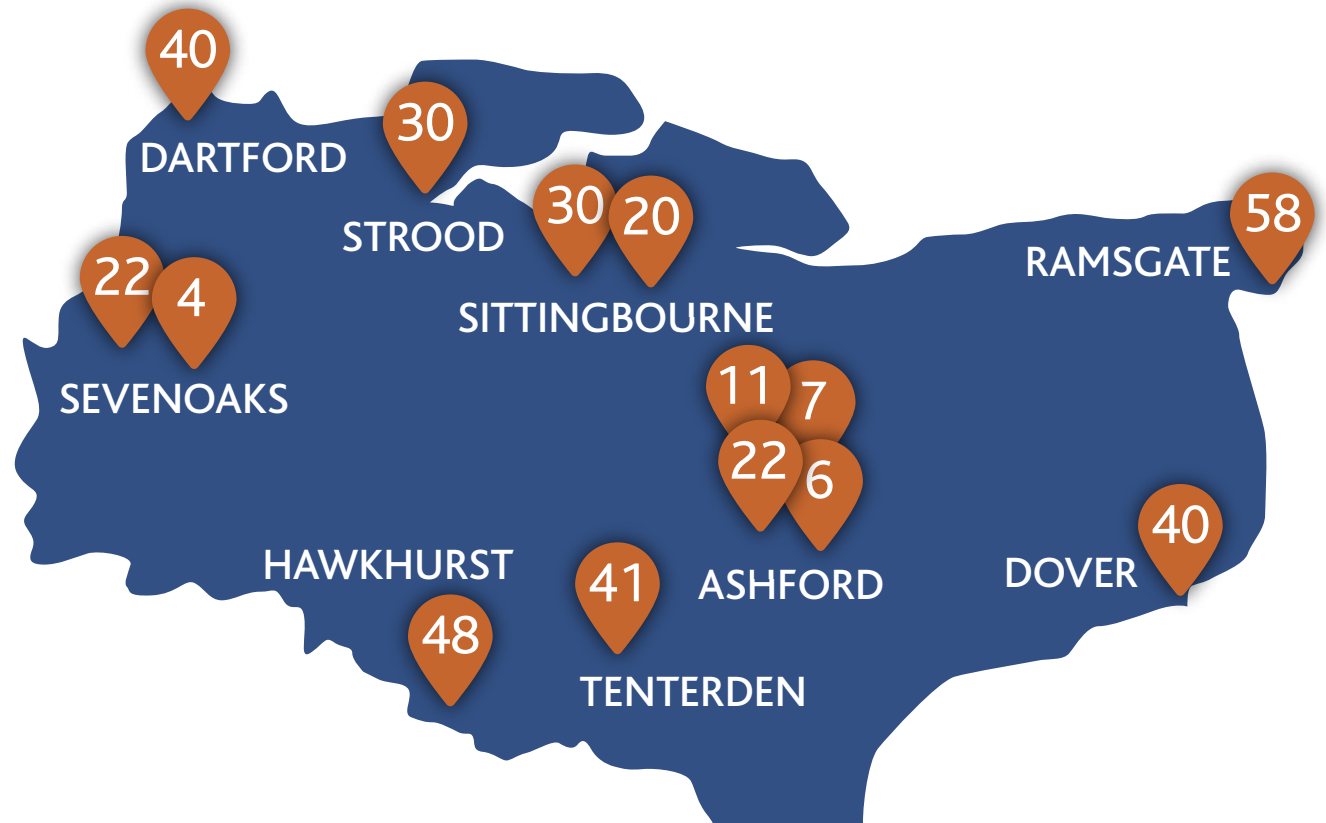
New areas

In Sevenoaks we completed 22 homes at the former Police Station and four apartments at Blighs Meadow. We also completed 30 homes with developers Bellway in Strood and 22 in Ashford built by Crest. We completed six homes with Hillreed Homes also in Ashford, and signed contracts with McCullochs and Redrow to deliver homes in Tonbridge & Malling and Swale, respectively.

The contract with Redrow is for providing affordable rented and shared ownership homes at Archers Park in Sittingbourne, a new area for us.

As well as acquiring 25 homes for rent and a further 20 shared ownership properties, we bought, and are now renting out, five other Sittingbourne homes from Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

A further seven homes for shared ownership were built at New Town Works in Ashford in partnership with the Town and Country Housing Group.



Low cost homes for local people

A low-cost rural housing scheme we unveiled at Kenardington, Ashford in June has allowed a local lady to move back to the village where she grew up.

She lives in one of five new homes at Lorden Cottages with her partner and their toddler son.

The three and two - bedroomed homes can only be let to people who are considered to be in housing need and have a local connection.

"I love it – I couldn't ask for anything better. The house is well set out and spacious with a nice garden and I am really pleased to be back in Kenardington."

Laken Thompson who was born in the village and whose parents were married in Kenardington Church.

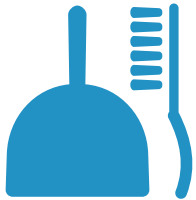


Being involved

There are 555 residents on our consultation database



CLEANING SURVEY



366 people took part
50 service recommendations

CLEAN AND CLEAR CONSULTATION

The clean and clear consultation found that residents felt it was more than fair for residents to leave a property in the condition they found it.

ASSET MANAGEMENT SURVEY



1520 households took part
26% of all West Kent's residents

TENANCY SUSTAINMENT PROJECT

Identified people who would like to take part in focus groups and established what support would be the most beneficial for residents.

CONSULTATION WITH COMMUNITY TO IDENTIFY COMMUNITY NEEDS ACROSS KENT INCLUDING:

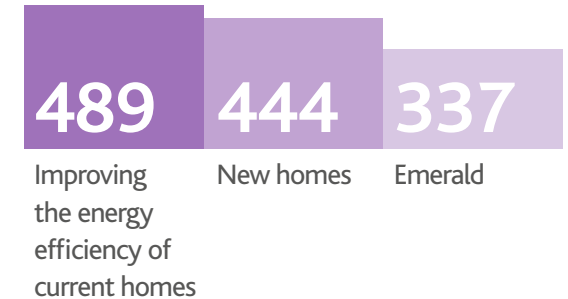
Wainscott
there is a strong demand for a youth centre

Sevenoaks
really wanted to have more investment in playgrounds

Swanley
wanted more investment in leisure facilities



Top priority for future investment according to those who took part



COMPENSATION SURVEY

Residents felt it was reasonable to tell them by 10am if we were unable to attend a repair appointment. After this time we should compensate £20 for the inconvenience.

REPAIRS CONSULTATIONS

Identified how the repairs service can be enhanced through spotting where communication could be improved between contractors, West Kent and residents.

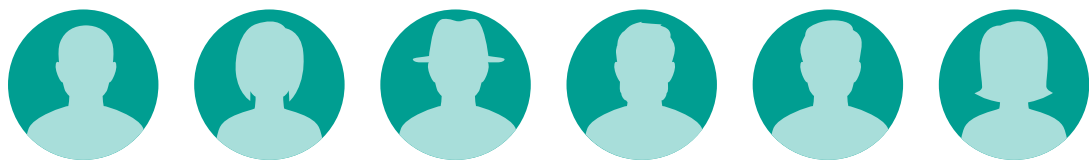


There is quite an even split across the three priorities, indicating our strategy is in line with customer demands.

Mystery shoppers

Mystery shoppers spent three-months contacting our customer services team. Most of the mystery shoppers said they received a good standard of service over the telephone, by email or in person. We'll use the results to help us improve and we're already tackling the issues raised.

They enquired about a wide range of issues including repairs, rats, dog barking and kitchen refits.



15 SHOPPERS were very or fairly satisfied with their experience



THREE were fairly or very dissatisfied



Introducing – Julia, resident internal auditor



"When I knew that West Kent was looking for people to help with its internal audits

I got in touch because I saw it as a new opportunity.

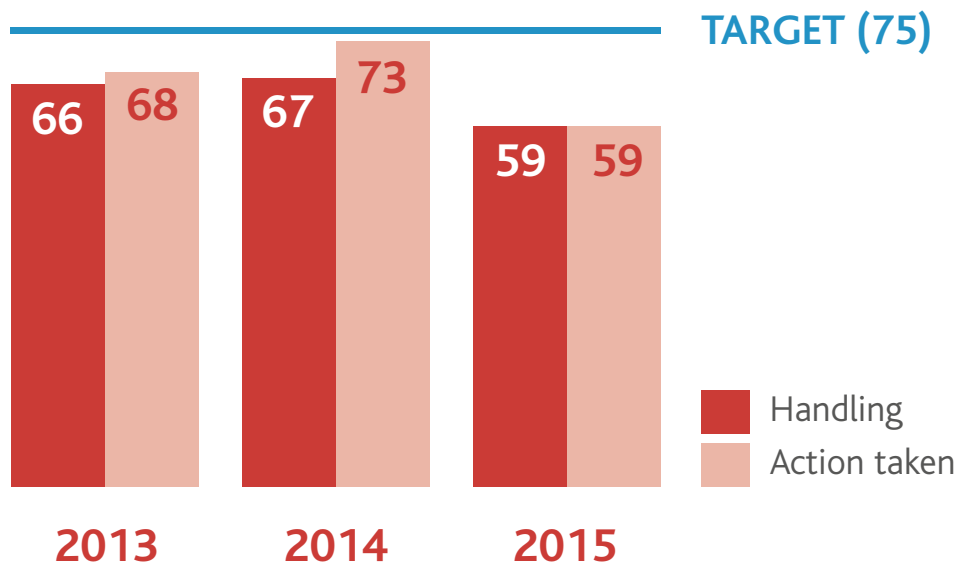
"I worked with Mazars, West Kent's internal auditors, when they looked at how we deal with gas servicing and repairs. It was very interesting and helped me learn some new skills. I think this is a great opportunity for tenants."

Customer service

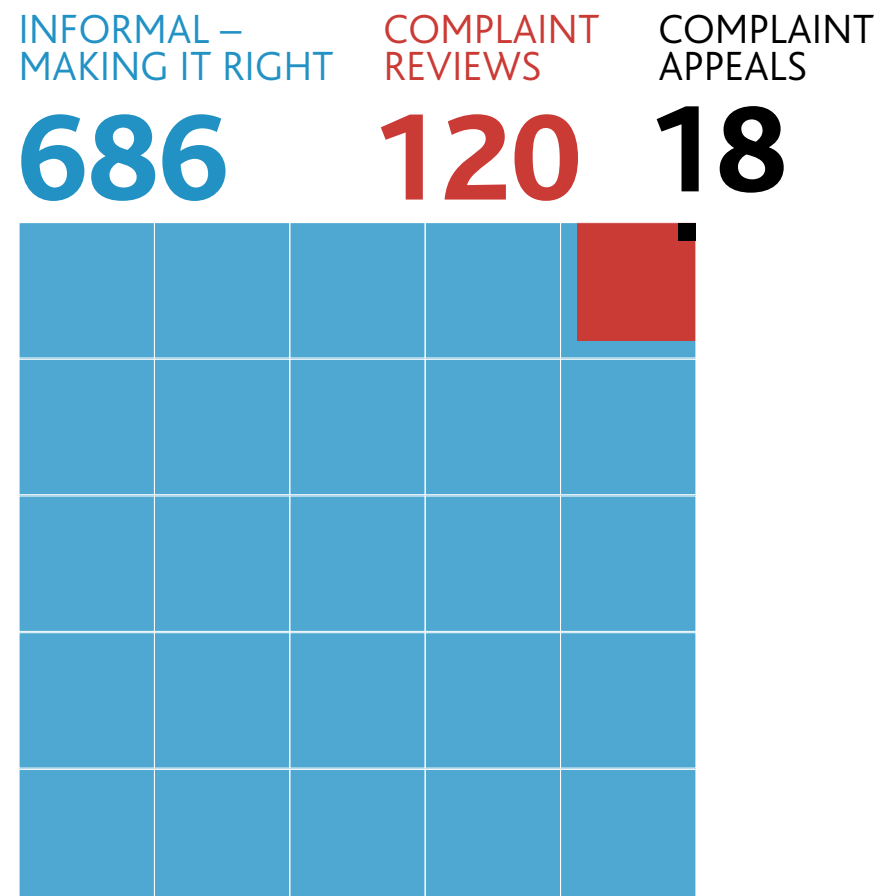
We introduced a new process in January 2015 called 'Making it Right' to make it easier and quicker to resolve your complaint the first time you contact us. We got better as the year progressed, with only 3.6% of complaints in the second half of the year escalating to a formal complaint.

Now we have addressed the issue of better resolving complaints at the first opportunity, we are focusing on customer satisfaction as only 59% of the people we surveyed were satisfied with how we handled their complaint.

Customer satisfaction



Complaints full year



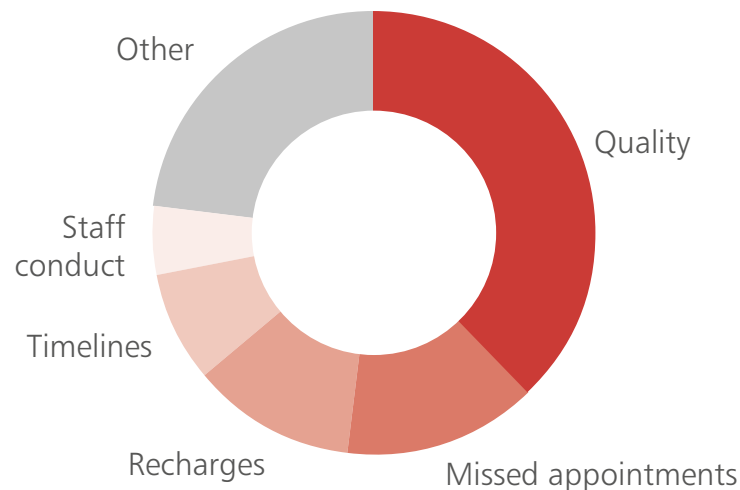
Customer service

Housing associations tend to receive most complaints about their repairs and maintenance service and West Kent is no exception. The graph opposite shows what our repairs and maintenance complaints were about.

We listen and put things right when we get them wrong. We agreed with 63% of formal complaints in 2015. Where we do not agree we explain why. If a customer is still unhappy we will review our decision, but if we feel we're right, we will act with integrity and stand firm. The new process allows us to end a complaint at an earlier stage if we feel earlier decisions are reasonable. We take this decision seriously and only stopped one complaint in 2015.

In 2015 one customer escalated a repairs complaint through a legal route, the court found in West Kent's favour. We received two Housing Ombudsman Service decisions in 2015, they found that our actions were reasonable and did not make any recommendations.

What made you complain about repairs and maintenance?



What people told us

We didn't respond immediately when a customer reported asbestos in their home.

We asked a tenant to replace internal walls they had removed without permission, making their home unsafe.

We started work which impacted a party wall without notifying neighbours.

We told a tenant there was a fault with their television which caused it to black out when the heating thermostat came on, when it was actually caused by the way we had wired up the boiler.

What we changed

We reminded staff about asbestos awareness and updated the information we give to tenants when they start their tenancy.

We trained non-technical visiting staff to identify disrepair in homes at the earliest opportunity.

We reminded staff of party wall obligations.

We changed new build design briefs so central heating boilers run off their own circuit, rather than being linked to circuits serving other electrical items.

Swanley Link open for business

Bringing together a range of public-facing services in a central space, Swanley Link was created from a £1m conversion of the former library and information centre.

It houses a Post Office and café and gives our customers access to all our services as well as a full range of town council and Jobcentre Plus services.

As well as sharing space in the building and being part of the 'one-stop shop', we are providing another important aspect of the new venture - the café.

“We are delighted to be part of a project that is so closely in tune with our own well-established track record on partnership working”

Property Director Mark Leader



Supporting the community – our grant schemes

The Rising Stars Bursary helps young people aged 13 to 19 with personal development needs, and the Linda Hogan Community Fund provides funding of up to £500 to small groups and local organisations for community activities.



benefitting an estimated
4,938
people during the year



Friends of Holcot in Edenbridge received £500 towards the cost of a week's summer camp holiday for 20 local children from low income and disadvantaged families.



Holiday at Home received a grant to provide a 'holiday' experience for elderly people in the Dartford area who don't have the money or the mobility to go away on holiday.



Monique received £150 from the bursary to help pay for a bus pass to travel to school, where she is studying for A levels.

Ethan wanted to volunteer as a mentor for other young people on a horticultural programme in return for horticultural lessons and work experience. The fund paid £38 to cover administration and staff travel costs.

Abigail needed some specialist riding kit to take up her place at the British Racing School in Newmarket to train as a jockey.

Supporting the community – our life-changing role

The life changing work we carry out with young people hit the headlines in 2015.

Our success was highlighted in academic research carried out by experts at the University of Kent at Canterbury and unveiled by the university's Centre for Philanthropy at West Kent Extra's well-attended Annual General Meeting.

Researchers Eddy Hogg and Alison Body looked at the long-term benefits we had achieved by working with young people over the past decade and found that it made a real difference not just to the youngsters but to their communities.



Summer fun days

The summer fun days that brighten the holidays for so many youngsters each year continue to be popular. With the spread of West Kent to new areas across the county, our free, family-oriented fun days took place across an increasingly wide area.

Look out for details of 2016 activities on our website www.westkent.org



Supporting the community – making a difference

6 + 2
YOUNG PEOPLE **ADULTS**

took part in work experience

8
APPRENTICES IN POST THROUGHOUT 2015

THE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OFFICER SUPPORTED
452 RESIDENTS

in 2015 offering advice on the opportunities available to them

7
YOUNG PEOPLE

took part in placements in 2015

14 TRAINING COURSES
were offered to adults in 2015, resulting in
92 ATTENDANCES
39 ACCREDITATIONS

159 young people achieved
829 RECORDED AWARDS
and **34** young people achieved
151 ACCREDITED AWARDS
through our youth work

There were
19
ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS
across West Kent projects

2
YOUNG PEOPLE
supported our residents to use computers in an extra care scheme

36 **NEW BUSINESSES WERE CREATED**
as a result of Pop Up Business Schools we arranged
(52 PEOPLE TOOK PART)

10
YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED RISING STARS BURSARIES
2 of those received laptops donated by West Kent

16
COMMUNITY WORK PLACEMENTS

6
SUPPORTED BACK INTO WORK

Supporting the community – changing lives

Martin was evicted by his landlord, as the property was uninhabitable. By the time Martin was referred to Colin in our support team, he had been sleeping rough for three nights and had been housed in temporary accommodation. He had no income and no savings.

Although he was already registered with Kent Homechoice, Martin was unable to bid independently so Colin agreed to bid on sheltered housing on his behalf.

Colin went with Martin to view a sheltered property at Sovereign Court at the end of April and also attended a risk and needs assessment the next day. Martin soon settled into his new home, integrated well with the other residents and began looking forward to exploring his new area.

Supported independence service wins high praise

Our supported independence service had plenty to celebrate in 2015 after receiving a clean bill of health from watchdogs the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

In 2013 we registered the service with the CQC so it could support care managers as part of Kent County Council's care framework. The supported independence service helps people live independent lives by providing them with support and advice with general living skills so they can remain in their own homes.

Not only did the year see a steady increase in the number of people being supported, but the service also received a 'good' rating in all five categories following an inspection in August.

“(Staff) knew each person well and understood how to meet their support needs.”

Care Quality Commission 2015

The Pop Up Business School

The Pop Up Business School (PUBS) made a real difference to several people's lives in 2015. PUBS works with people who are tempted to set up their own business but aren't sure where to start.

Inspired by the success of the first Swanley event, we brought them back to run the events in Chatham and Ramsgate.

The three day Chatham event attracted plenty of people and was followed by a week-long session in Ramsgate, which covered everything from how to make a website and how to use social media to the basics of marketing and accounting.

"The course has given me advice on building a website, using social media, finding customers and marketing the new business."

Tina St George, hypnotherapist

"This seemed like a great opportunity to strengthen my business knowledge and that's what it turned out to be. I have picked up a huge amount of information – and all for free."

Mark Moreton, Flippin' Furniture



Sally Geldard was one of the would-be entrepreneurs at the Ramsgate event



Training and apprenticeships

In 2015 we ran a variety of training programmes to help people find a way back into work. The sessions are available to anyone who is over 19, unemployed or low waged.

One attendee who originally came to us for some benefits advice, was invited to join one of the training courses and told us that getting in touch with us “turned out to be the best call I have ever made.” She described the course as ‘life changing’ and had even been offered a job.

“turned out to be the best call I have ever made.”

Supporting apprenticeships

Our apprentices make a huge contribution to the work we do. Some of our apprentices, such as 21 year-old Charlotte, have proved so invaluable we’ve offered them a full time job.

Charlotte began a one-year apprenticeship with our customer services team in October 2014, but just seven months later we offered her a permanent role.

“The great thing was that West Kent also gave me the chance to carry on with my college course,” she said. “I was able to complete my Level 2 NVQ in customer service even though I was a full time employee.”



Award-winning apprentices

Two of our apprentices were rewarded for their efforts at the 2015 Kent Housing Group awards.

Shane Finch won the Bouyges UK Construction Apprentice Award, while Ryan Scott was highly commended in the same category.

Apprentices Shane and Ryan both joined us on two-year apprenticeships and were praised for their commitment to work and their keenness to take responsibility and learn new skills.



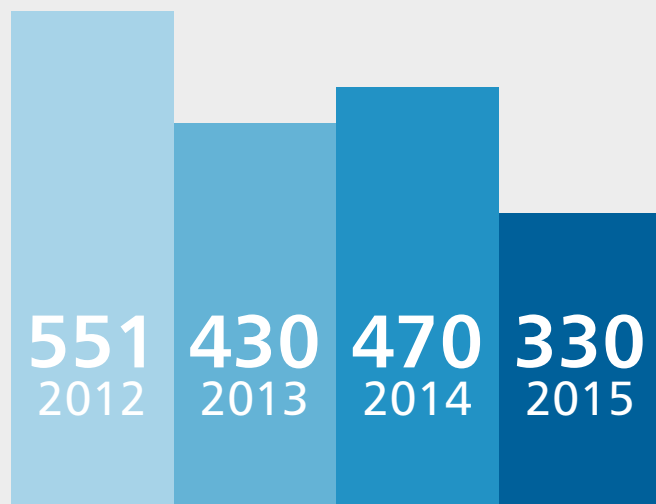
Your neighbourhood

We have a strong focus on community as well as on providing homes and we work hard to encourage people to live side by side as good neighbours.

We are determined to reduce the amount of anti-social behaviour that takes place in the areas where we have homes and in 2015 we saw a significant fall in the number of cases reported. The graphic opposite shows how we handled the incidents that were reported to us.



Number of cases reported in 2015



45

cases span across categories including logged in error; cases withdrawn

10

Enforcement successful

12

referred to third party (as sole lead)

53

Moved/not engaging/not assisting

35

specific intervention was successful
Interventions in 2015 included:

Floating Support

Mediation

Partnership Working

Restorative Justice

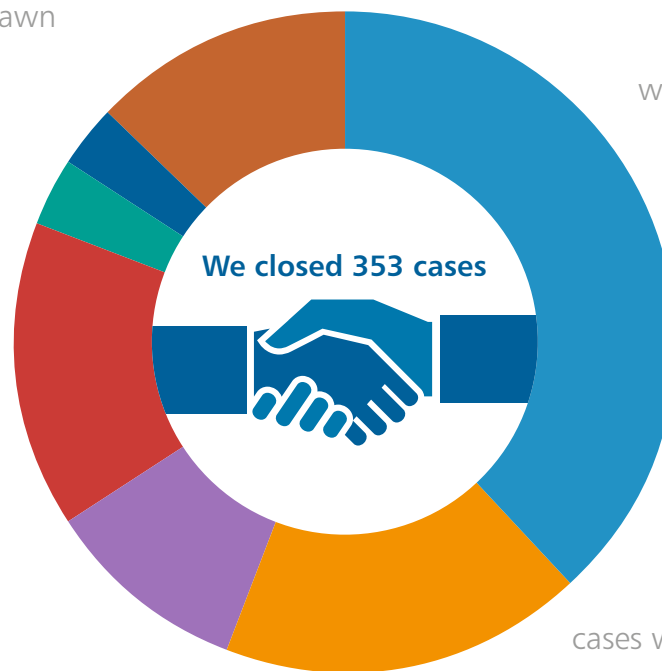
Outright Possession Order

Suspended Possession Order

Injunction

Site Improvements

(Note that not all of the closed cases were opened in 2015, which is why the figures do not match)



135

were closed due to no further reports

63

cases with no further action required

Nicer neighbourhoods

During the year we worked hard to raise awareness of responsible dog ownership, with a series of road shows in different locations aimed at giving people advice and support with their animals.

“A lot of people didn't know that micro-chipping will become compulsory this April. They were speaking to us and then rushing home so they could bring their pet back to be chipped.”

Brighter neighbourhoods

We introduced a splash of colour to Utah Rise in Wainscott in the summer when we organised a hanging basket workshop for the residents of Liberty Park.



Cleaner, safer, greener neighbourhoods

Our fourth Cleaner, Safer, Greener Charter was unveiled in 2015 for people living in Horton Kirby and South Darent.

Representatives from a number of other agencies joined us in signing the charter, which sets out a shared vision aimed at improving the environment and boosting community safety.

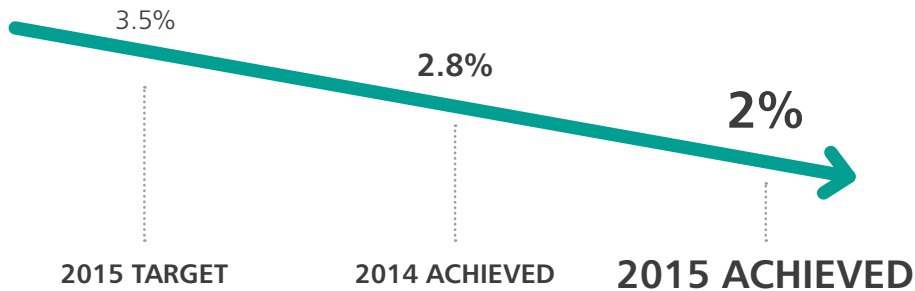
We launched our first Cleaner, Safer, Greener Charter in 2008 and followed it with charters in White Oak, Swanley, Spitals Cross, Edenbridge and now Horton Kirby and South Darent.



Income collection



Rent arrears



14 tenants evicted for rent arrears

Welfare reform

The Government’s welfare reforms will affect many of our tenants and we worked hard to publicise the likely effect of the changes throughout 2015 to help those affected to be ready.

One of the most critical changes is the benefit cap, which is due to be phased in from April 2016 and will reduce the yearly benefit a family can receive from £26,000 to £20,000, including housing benefit. Working age households will have their out of work benefits capped at £385 a week, while the cap for single people will be around £258 per week.

We wrote to all households we believe will be affected by this reduction and offered help and support.

Small is Beautiful

During 2015 our Small is Beautiful project with Sevenoaks District Council helped another:



33 residents to downsize which released



14 three bedroom properties

and



16 two bedroom properties

resulting in



These properties were mostly re-let to households who were living in overcrowded conditions, or who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. The average cost to release each bedroom was £1,182.

In addition, the under occupation officer also helped a number of residents move to smaller homes by mutual exchange. Some of these residents exchanged because they were too young to be eligible for any financial assistance while some chose to exchange because they did not meet the criteria to join the housing register.

Places to live

	2014	2015
General needs housing	5,218	5,295
Housing for older people	912	912
Supported housing	38	58
Intermediate market rent	38	36
Low cost home ownership	400	431
Total social housing units	6,606	6,732
Units managed by others	4	4
Leaseholders	161	163
Total owned and managed accommodation	6,771	6,899
Units under construction	141	85

Where the money goes

We receive income from residents and the Government through grant and housing benefit.

