

neighbourhood news

The magazine for residents of West Kent Housing Association
ISSUE 75: WINTER 2016

WINTER IS HERE!

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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME FROM FRANK

WELL THE NIGHTS ARE DRAWING IN AND AS I WRITE THIS, ED BALLS IS STILL IN STRICTLY. SURELY HE CAN'T DO IT. BUT THEN THE TRIUMPH OF THE POPULAR VOTE OVER THE EXPERTS WOULD BE VERY 2016, WOULDN'T IT.

Lots of interesting content in this issue - spanning the generations. Read about how the House project is supporting young people to grow and make a difference to others and their makeover of Edenbridge Town station.

Over the last few months we've been busy taking handover of five extra care schemes - offering flexible independent living for over 55s. As our article

explains, there's plenty to do for the new residents.

And there's news of how we will be improving our website and maintenance service for you.

Enjoy the festive season.

Frank Czarnowski
Chief Executive



YOUR RENT YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Rent is payable in advance and your account should always be in credit unless you receive housing benefit or universal credit. If you owe us money you must continue paying through the rent catch up weeks in December. This may mean paying by another

method because we don't collect direct debits on some tenancies through these weeks.

We do take action to recover rent arrears. This year we have taken 30 tenants to court and evicted 11 households. Court costs of around

£500 will normally be charged to your rent account.

If you are struggling to pay your rent, or would like to make an agreement with us, please contact us on 01732 749400. Help is available if you work with us.



CHRISTMAS CLOSING



From all the staff at West Kent, have a very happy Christmas and joyful new year. Our offices will be closed from 3pm on Friday 23 December 2016 to Monday 2 January 2017 inclusive. For emergency repairs call 0800 169 1122.

FUNDING SUCCESS FOR YOUTH PROJECT

HOUSE IN EDENBRIDGE, RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THE COUNTY'S MOST SUCCESSFUL YOUTH WORK PROJECTS, HAS WON SOME OF THE FUNDING IT NEEDS TO CONTINUE HELPING OUR LOCAL YOUNG PEOPLE FOR ANOTHER 12 MONTHS.

Generous grants of £5,000 from the Great Stone Bridge Trust and £7,500 from Edenbridge Town Council have helped secure the future of the project run by our own West Kent Communities and supported by local organisations.

The drop-in sessions at the Eden Centre, which take place on three evenings each week, saw nearly 3,000 visits by local teenagers over the past year.

While HOUSE provides a safe, welcoming environment and plenty of traditional 'youth club'-style activities, it also offers workshops, training and a range of health advice geared to young people and the pressures they face.

The two recent grants will support funding already received from the Moat Foundation and West Kent itself to allow HOUSE to continue delivering its unique blend of fun activities and well-targeted healthy living advice.

"We can always make good use of additional funding, but we are really grateful that local organisations have recognised the value HOUSE provides and have come forward to back its work again," commented West Kent's Funding Coordinator Kevin O'Reilly.



"We would also like to thank the Whitehead Monckton Charitable Foundation, which supported us last year, and Kent County Council, which has funded various arts and sports activities."

In the past year, staff noted 821 instances in which a youth worker had identified a change in a young person's choices of behaviour - perhaps reducing their smoking or drinking.

Youth workers also deliver outreach sessions in the community, including giving talks on sexual health, internet safety, readiness for work, healthy eating and a wide range of other topics.

The sessions also help build confidence, something that leader-in-charge Cheryl Banks has often noticed.

"One lad came in one day to join a session especially for people who didn't like to mix. He rarely left his home, he didn't know how to interact with other people and when he first came to HOUSE he just stared at the floor," she said.

"We buddied him with another member of HOUSE and gradually helped him mix

with other people. Now he chairs the youth forum and never stops talking.

"He volunteers with a mental health charity, he has lots of friends and he wants to make a difference. He's just grown and grown - and he's not the only person who has responded in that way."

Overall Cheryl sees the young people - aged 11 to 19 - improve in a variety of ways, from their awareness around relationships to their understanding of sexual health and drugs and alcohol.

"We see a lot of vulnerable people and we provide the support and advice they need. We help them with relationships, peer pressure, bullying and all those other difficult teenage issues," she said.

"Many of them just drop in so that they can chat to someone in confidence about things that are worrying them."



WELCOME TO WESTKENT.ORG

OUR NEW WEBSITE IS NOW LIVE, REPLACING ONE THAT WAS MORE THAN SIX YEARS OLD - AND THAT'S A LONG TIME IN A DIGITAL WORLD!

We carried out some testing on our current site earlier this year using a variety of methods. Visitors to the site were invited to fill out a pop-up survey, and we asked another group of participants and some of our own staff about site navigation. Finally we spoke to a number of users by telephone, taking the total number of people consulted to more than 500.

You told us that good information was available but was hard to find, and you said the design should be simpler, cleaner and less text heavy.

Sandra Thompson, Communications Officer working on the project, said: "We knew that around half our customers were viewing our website on a mobile phone or tablet, mostly Android and Apple smart phones. As our site did not change to match the user's screen size it was really difficult to read. The new website is fully responsive, which means customers can easily access all the features on any device."

We have created a modern, flexible digital platform to deliver innovative customer services that give customers confidence, ensure services are owned and shaped by our customers and provide different ways to use our services, including self service options that are available at all times.

Sandra went on: "People have got used to being able to log into services online and do what they need to from their sofas.



It was clear that our customers were coming to the site to perform specific tasks, rather than just browsing. We've made it much easier for them to find those tasks as soon as they land on the homepage, rather than having to wait to contact us during office hours."

The new website allows logged-in residents to check their rent account, change certain personal details, choose a repair appointment, and give us a compliment or complaint. The secure customer portal My West Kent will be developed to permit more self service in the coming months.

"The new website is fully responsive, which means customers can easily access all the features on any device."

DO IT ONLINE

WHAT IS MY WEST KENT?

My West Kent is our 'self-service' area of the new website that lets you do various things online, any time, without having to visit our offices.

Designed specifically for West Kent residents, this easy-to-use system allows you to:

- Log, view and schedule a repairs appointment
- Contact Customer Services
- View your tenancy details
- Update your household and contact details
- View your rent account statements
- Pay rent on line using the Santander BillPay system
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Register a complaint or compliment

To use My West Kent you will first have to register online for a unique user identification number and password that only you will know. This makes sure your personal information stays safe and secure.

Protecting your personal information is very important to us. My West Kent is accessed through a secure web link that stops anyone else seeing your details while you're online. You can see that you are using a secure web link when a small padlock appears in the corner of your screen.



IMPROVING OUR SERVICE TO YOU

FROM FEBRUARY 2017, THE WAY WE DELIVER OUR REPAIRS SERVICE IS CHANGING.

Following a year long review, we're making changes to the way we will work with you to keep your home in the best possible condition.

We will be clearly setting out what you can expect from our repairs service and what we expect from you. We'll make it easier for you to report your repair through our website and arrange an appointment that's convenient for you.

You'll still be responsible for things like repairing or replacing internal doors and toilets seats and maintaining your garden. Where you have caused damage to your home and we have to come out and fix it, we will charge you for it.

There will be some changes to the time taken to respond to repairs. We'll make sure we deal with anything that poses an immediate risk to your health and safety or the fabric of your home within 24 hours. Other urgent repairs, such as getting your heating or hot water working again, will be fixed within three days. For anything else, we'll work with you to find an appointment within 21 days.

We will prioritise repairs for our most vulnerable tenants. It's important you let us know if you have any needs or conditions we should be aware of to help us give you the right service.

Most of the smaller routine jobs will now be done during an annual 'Property MOT' visit. This will check the state of your home and allow us to carry out any small repair jobs that are our responsibility there and then, rather than booking an appointment for us to come back at a later date. Some larger jobs spotted during the MOT will still need planning ahead.

"As an example, if we spot that the mastic around the bath has failed, we will just get on and fix it during the MOT," explained Darren Hall, Head of iNHomes, our gas and plumbing service. "That's a much better approach than leaving it for a few weeks and risking water damage to the downstairs ceiling."

"In the past the service has only responded as and when repairs have been reported to us" said Darren. "In future, we want to drive the process and plan repairs rather than waiting for a problem to arise. The MOT will be particularly helpful in allowing us to keep properties in great shape for our tenants."

If anything major occurs during the year, like a leaky boiler or pipe, it's important you tell us quickly, particularly if it's something that could cause more damage if left unreported. Just like with

your car, you wouldn't wait until your MOT to have your brakes fixed.

We'll still expect you to carry out basic checks and reset systems for common problems, such as checking for faulty appliances if you lose power, and will provide you with help and advice on how to do this. We would never ask you to do anything that should be carried out by a qualified plumber or electrician. This will help us to avoid unnecessary call-outs and help more tenants with emergency and urgent repairs.

We'll no longer install electric showers where there is a combi boiler, nor maintain those already fitted where there is no longer a specific need for one. If it goes wrong and you call us out, we may simply remove it.

This new approach follows a detailed review of our repairs service following consultation with residents about what they wanted from our repairs service. It's part of a number of reviews of our core services we're carrying out following publication of Your Home, Your Responsibility, which sets out how our 'special relationship' with our tenants works.

Between now and February, we'll be putting out further information about the changes to the repairs service. Keep an eye on our website over the next couple of months for more details.





ENJOY LIFE TO THE FULL

FLEXIBLE, INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR THE OVER 55S IS ON OFFER ACROSS KENT AFTER THE HANDOVER OF THE KENT EXCELLENT HOMES FOR ALL SCHEMES TO WEST KENT.

We have now taken on the role of landlord and housing manager at all seven of the schemes, which offer a total of 240 well-designed, spacious flats aimed at tenants who need some care but are looking to live independently for as long as possible.

The five extra care schemes, along with two 'move on' supported housing schemes, were built for Kent County Council by the Galliford Try consortium under a £100m flagship Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme.

We will manage the schemes, including finding tenants for them, over the next 25 years, while Galliford Try will continue to be responsible for repairs and maintenance.

As well as running the supported schemes at Lantern House in Ashford and Library House in Ramsgate, we are now placing tenants in Copperfields in Ramsgate, Strawberry Hill in Dartford, Bowles Lodge in Hawkhurst, Beeches in Dover and Spires in Tenterden, the last of the schemes to be handed over.

We were delighted with the response to the Ramsgate and Dartford schemes, both of which achieved occupancy of around 85% within the first few weeks.

The schemes all have a lounge, restaurant, gym, activities room, communal computers and a range of 'break out' areas where people can gather socially.

There is a mixture of one- and two-bedroom flats and the buildings are accessible, with lifts and wide doors and corridors. Tenants need to have a local connection of some kind.

With a 24-care team on site, they are aimed at over 55s who need an element of care but who still want to live independently. The units can be adapted to meet the changing needs of tenants as they grow older or more infirm.

"Taking over the management of these schemes is a very exciting development for West Kent," explained Fraser Ward, who shared the job of programme manager for the project with the late and sadly missed Emma Kent.

"It reflects our ambition to become a leader in meeting the accommodation needs of older people in Kent."

THERE'S PLENTY TO DO

OUR NEW EXTRA CARE SCHEMES ARE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE SOMETHING MORE THAN JUST A PLACE TO LIVE.

As well as comfortable and well-appointed accommodation, the schemes at Ramsgate, Dartford, Hawkhurst, Dover and Tenterden offer a community feel, with plenty of opportunities to learn new skills and join in activities.

Setting up those opportunities in a brand new care scheme, when the staff are busy settling everyone in and learning how the new building 'works', is no easy task, which is why West Kent Communities has taken a different approach.

We asked George Barnes, who began life with us as an admin trainee before joining our resident involvement team, to help out by setting up the first activities at all five of the schemes.

"The idea is that I set up a range of activities in the first 16 weeks that people can try," George explained. "Once residents have seen the kind of things that are available and the staff can see what's popular, I hand the running of the sessions over to the team at each of the schemes."

It's an important job because it's impossible to guess what people will enjoy. "We had 15 people at the tai chi taster in Ramsgate and no-one at the same thing in Dartford," George pointed out. "Each scheme is different and this is a way of finding out what works in each place.

"One man who had never had any interest in art attended one of our drawing classes

and immediately found himself hooked. In the past we have had men who discovered they had an interest in flower arranging and other examples of people learning new skills.

"Our extra care schemes aren't somewhere to come and hide in a corner. They are vibrant places with lots going on - and I love being able to help make that happen."

"One man who had never had any interest in art attended one of our drawing classes and immediately found himself hooked. In the past we have had men who discovered they had an interest in flower arranging and other examples of people learning new skills."



YOUNGSTERS' PHOTOS GO ON DISPLAY

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO TOOK PART IN A COURSE RUN BY WEST KENT EXTRA (NOW WEST KENT COMMUNITIES) TOOK PRIDE OF PLACE IN A MONTH-LONG EXHIBITION AT THE STAG THEATRE IN SEVENOAKS.

The pictures - many of them interesting abstract designs employing unusual photographic techniques - were taken a few years ago but enjoyed a new lease of life in their temporary home in the theatre's café.

One of the young people, Megan Morvan, recalled: "There was talk about exhibiting the photographs at the end of the course, but it didn't happen at the time. It's great that they have now been on display in such a super location."

Megan was 15 at the time but is now 18 and studying for the International

Baccalaureate at Sevenoaks School. A keen actress who wants to go on to drama school, she was photographed with some of the pictures after finishing rehearsals for the school's recent production.

Megan has had close links with West Kent's community arm, having taken part in the photography course, received a Rising Stars bursary to help with her drama studies and then sat as a member of the bursary judging panel.

The Seal teenager also won an iPad in a West Kent competition after coming up



with ideas for an 'app' designed specifically for tenants.

"I think West Kent does a great job of supporting the community and providing opportunities for young people like me to learn new skills," she said.

AWARD WINNER

West Kent's own Julia Ferries won the award for Most Inspiring Individual Contribution at a national awards ceremony held in the impressive surroundings of Gorton Monastery, Manchester.

Julia, who has worked alongside West Kent for several years to help us develop the way residents work with us on auditing the services we deliver, was honoured at the CSI (customer scrutiny inspection) awards.

"This national award is for excellence in customer scrutiny and is a real tribute to Julia," explained Innovation Manager Illa Scopel. "It's also very well deserved."

Auditors help our 'scrutiny' function by looking at the way we do things, working through the processes we use and trying to find ways of doing things better for our residents.

After working with Mazars, West Kent's internal auditors, when we were looking at gas servicing and repairs, Julia provided a great deal of valuable feedback on how we could improve our links with tenants in carrying out audits.

"All the recommendations Julia made after working on that audit were taken on board and became part of our approach," said Illa. "She has played a fundamental part in developing our work in this area and has helped shape the future of audit for the organisation."



USING PHOTOGRAPHY TO CHANGE LIVES

TENANTS AT ONE OF OUR SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEMES HAVE BEEN EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS - AND CAPTURING THEM ON CAMERA.

The residents at Library House, Ramsgate - a 'move on' scheme for people with mental health issues built as part of the Kent Excellent Homes for All project - are working with visual artist and photographer Sarah Bourne.

As well as learning new technical skills, the six-strong group has been exploring artistic avenues such as composition, lighting effects and a range of photographic techniques.

The ten-week course, which will culminate in the students organising an exhibition of their work, has been funded by social landlord West Kent, which manages both Library House and Lantern House in Ashford, another 'move on' scheme.

As well as studying the practical and artistic side of photography - and even completing homework assignments - they have visited the Turner Contemporary and enjoyed a number of other activities.

"The aim is to get people to think creatively, express themselves and explore the visual aspect of the world around them," explained Sarah, a professional artist as well as a respected photographer.

"It's amazing to see how much the course has boosted their confidence and broadened their horizons as well as teaching them new skills. One of the women on the course has produced some stunning work and is already planning to study photography at college.

"I want the students to understand how photography can tell a story and use the camera to explore their own creativity. One of the aims is to help them deal with their own issues by looking at the world through the camera lens."



Each of the students has been supplied with a simple digital camera that they have also been encouraged to use between the weekly sessions.

"I have been impressed with how the course has helped the tenants," said Sarah. "They really have come out of their shells, explored their creative sides and looked at the world in a new way."



MAKING LIFE BETTER FOR ROSE

MANY PEOPLE FEEL THE NEED TO DOUBLE CHECK THE GAS IS OFF AND THE FRONT DOOR IS LOCKED BEFORE THEY GO ON HOLIDAY, BUT FEW OF US FIND OURSELVES DOING IT OVER AND OVER AGAIN. AND AGAIN...

For Rose Rafferty-Clarke, checking and rechecking everything around her became an obsession that took over her life, upset her studies and left her anxious and exhausted.

It was when she was at her lowest ebb that West Kent stepped in and offered Rose a place in a supported housing scheme at Dunton Green, near Sevenoaks.

Four years on, Rose looks back on that move as the best she ever made and believes it was a vital step on her journey to recovery.

"I had no confidence, I was anxious the whole time and I wasn't able to concentrate at college," she recalled. "Now I feel calmer and more settled, I don't have the same anxiety attacks and life is better in every way."

Rose has now moved out of the supported housing scheme, although she still lives in social housing in the same village and she still has support from her West Kent case worker Gill English.

"I still have occasional issues but now I know how to deal with them. I am able to get myself back to feeling OK instead of continuing in a downward spiral, which is what used to happen," said the 26

year-old, now the proud mum of a four-month-old daughter.

"Supported housing gave me a new start and I will always be grateful for Gill's help during what was a bad time for me. I felt life was years and years away, but now that's all changed."

Rose, who has also learned to drive, now lives independently with just one hour's support a week from Gill. She explained: "I may be independent but I always know I'm not alone."

It's a long way from the life she used to lead. After several spells in a psychiatric ward she spent two years in a residential care home before moving into her own private rented flat when she felt the time was right.

Staff at the care home had helped her with life skills and Rose was keen to go to college, but life on her own proved tough. "I became anxious and developed OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) tendencies," she recalled.

"I spent my time checking everything, the cooker, whether or not I had locked the door, even the boiler pressure. And even when I knew I had checked something five minutes earlier, I just had to check it again.

"I couldn't concentrate on my college studies because I spent my time worrying about what I might have left on at home, even though I had already checked everything several times."

Rose moved back in with her mum in Southborough but knew she had to move on with her life, which is when she spoke



to West Kent and found herself in Dunton Green with the support of her "lifesaver" Gill.

"I felt settled and happy there and I stopped needing to check everything," she recalled. "It was a fresh start and I stopped feeling anxious. I was able to go to college without worrying and I felt I had got my life back."

After two years in supported housing Rose is now engaged to Ben, looking after her baby daughter and living independently. "It had an amazing impact on my life and I now feel able to move forward," she said. "Gill is still there when I need her but I am stronger within myself, too."

"What I particularly liked about living in supported housing was the fact that I wasn't left to struggle with issues on my own, but at the same time I wasn't treated like a child.

"The other thing that works well is the fact that the support is tapered and can be slowly reduced as the tenant builds up their own confidence. It really has changed my life."

ON TRACK FOR A BRIGHTER EDENBRIDGE

YOUNGSTERS FROM WEST KENT'S HOUSE YOUTH GROUP HAVE AGAIN PUT THEIR TALENTS TO GOOD USE TO BRIGHTEN UP THEIR HOME TOWN.

The youngsters took up their paints and brushes to work again with community artist Graham Upton to brighten up a previously drab section of concrete wall on the way to Edenbridge Station.

The art project, once more driven by the Sussex Community Rail Partnership (SCRCP), followed a similar initiative last year, when youngsters from the ECTreme youth club painted the subway under Edenbridge Town Station. It's now been named as the best permanent community art scheme at the Community Rail Awards and was described at the presentation event in Southport, opened by Rail Minister Paul Maynard MP, as "a great effort by a great community that has added in a colourful way to the station environment".

Sharon Gray, from the Sussex Community Rail Partnership, attended the presentations with Graham Upton. She said afterwards: "I have been told by the staff at the station that people are coming especially to see and photograph the mural so word is getting around about just how wonderful it is."

Zoe Keys, one of the seven young people who took part in this year's project, said it had been "a great experience", explaining that those involved had sketched out their individual ideas and



then worked with Graham to create the mural.

"I am really into art and I found the process fascinating. I like the way you can take an object and then use artistic ideas to do so many different things to it," she said. "We took a blank wall and worked together to turn it into a piece of art."

SCRCP's Sharon Gray said: "If you are able to see this art in the flesh, please do so as it is very difficult to get an idea of the scale and how beautiful it is from a photo.

"To the left the sign directs you to London and Gatwick, to the right it

directs you to Tonbridge and the coast, with the Southern train in the middle.

"I am reliably informed that the artwork in the underpass at Edenbridge Town is now a stand-alone visitor attraction, with people going to the station specifically to see and photograph it, so this new masterpiece can be added to the list of attractions in the town."

Edenbridge Town Councillor and Kent County Councillor Clive Pearman, again supported the project with a donation from his KCC members' budget, while other funding came from Southern and the Association of Community Rail Partnerships.

STAY SAFE IN THE KITCHEN

WHEN MEALTIMES FEEL LIKE A JUGGLING ACT

Mealtimes can be a busy time for families, with overworked mums and dads often finding themselves under pressure to do a number of other tasks while trying to cook for everyone.

From trying to get the children organised to catching up with household chores, it is tempting to try to fit in other jobs

while waiting for food to cook. Add in other distractions like receiving text messages, helping with homework or catching up with social media, and it is easy to find yourself not concentrating fully on the task in hand.

For most of the time, the worst that may happen is that you burn the dinner, causing a bit of an inconvenience. But as Kent Fire and Rescue Service knows only too well, unattended cooking can lead to a

serious fire that could result in severe damage to your home and put you and your family at risk.

Over half of all the fires the service attends start in the kitchen. Most are caused by unattended cooking, a build up of grease and fat on the cooker or kitchen mishaps such as where items like tea towels, chopping boards or washing baskets have been placed on a hot hob.

Make fire safety your main ingredient and help prevent a kitchen fire by following these tips:

- Keep an eye on your cooking and remember to switch off your cooker if you leave the room
- Use a timer for items in the oven or grill to tell you when it is done and save it from burning
- If you know you have a busy week ahead, try to plan in advance and prepare meals that do not require lots of cooking
- Avoid storing or placing household items on your cooker or stove
- Keep your cooker, grill and oven clean to avoid a build up of grease and fat that could start a fire
- Keep children and pets well away from your cooking area
- Ensure electric cookers, toasters and microwaves are turned off at the mains when you are not using them
- Fit a working smoke alarm on each floor of your home and test it weekly.

For further fire safety advice visit www.kent.fire-uk.org/cooking or call 0800 923 7000.

Do your mealtimes feel like a **juggling** act?

Make **fire safety** your main ingredient

Kent Fire & Rescue Service

www.kent.fire-uk.org/cooking

NOW YOU CAN SEE US COMING!



IT SAYS WHAT IT DOES ON THE VAN

Our newly painted repair vans are out and about spreading the West Kent message as well as bringing tradesmen to your door to sort out any niggles with your home.

We have had our fleet of 30 repair vans painted with our name, logo and contact details, letting everyone know about what we do across the community.

As well as advertising the good work the engineers do for our residents, the sign written vans provide an added safety measure. When a genuine engineer knocks on your door, you can be 100% sure that it is a West Kent employee, as the van outside will feature our name and logo.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR LAND

We need land to support our ambitious housebuilding plans - and that could be good news for landowners across Kent.

West Kent's bold decision to press ahead with plans to increase its housebuilding target to 200 affordable homes a year, despite changes in legislation that have made the financial climate tougher, means we now need land - and lots of it.

We already have homes across most of Kent, as well as most of our original stock in the Sevenoaks and Swanley area.

With work about to start on the first West Kent homes to be built in Canterbury, our vision to be one of the leading providers of affordable homes is clear - but we need more land to help us achieve it.

"We want to talk to land agents, contractors, architects, landowners, developers and local councils who have land we might be able to build on,"



explained Development Manager Ruth Hayward.

"The board has set ambitious growth plans to deliver across all of Kent, so we are really keen to talk to landowners with sites to sell. Ideally they will be suitable for between 15 and 60 homes."

West Kent has traditionally worked with developers to build the 'section 106' affordable element of developments, and while that is still part of our plans, we are also keen to buy sites outright and design the whole scheme from scratch.

The new policy applies for the next five years, which means we will be looking for land for 1000 homes between now and 2021.

DON'T BE A HOARDER

IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW HANGS ON TO AN EXCESSIVE NUMBER OF THINGS AND KEEPS THEM IN A CHAOTIC FASHION, THEY MAY HAVE A HOARDING PROBLEM.

Or perhaps this is something you recognise in yourself? We realise it can be a difficult issue to deal with, but it's important to tell us if you know someone may be hoarding, because then we can help.

Hoarding has a number of risks, including:

- **Risk to the tenant** - tripping is more likely if there are lots of things to fall over.
- **Risk to others** - it can be difficult for us to enter and carry out important gas, electric and asbestos checks.

- **Fire** - a fire in a West Kent home caused damage to the properties either side of it last year when the fire spread quickly because so many things were stored in the garden.
- **Pests** - caused by a build up of rubbish or other items.

We will always try to work with anyone who is hoarding and we recognise that involving support agencies and specialists, such as Kent Fire and Rescue Service, is important.

If we are unable to help and the hoarding continues, we have to take action to



protect our property and other residents so we will consider taking enforcement action against the tenant, which can mean going to court.

To talk to us about hoarding call our customer services team on 01732 749400.

GARAGES FOR RENT

Need more space? Fed up with trying to find a parking space outside your home? Solve your problem by renting a garage from West Kent.

We have 1,900 garages across Kent but mainly in Swanley, Sevenoaks,



Edenbridge and South Darenth, and a number of them are currently vacant.

We can offer garage licences for short or long-term use, and you only need to give us two weeks' notice to quit a long-term let if your circumstances change.

Our garages are typically 2.4 x 4.8 m and are suitable for medium or small vehicles or for storing those bits you just can't squeeze into your home. You aren't allowed to use them for commercial purposes or for commercial vehicles or for storing flammable or perishable items.

We charge a one-off, non-refundable set up fee of just £30 and we take care

of wear and tear repairs throughout your licence period.

Some garages have key-operated locks, combination locks or both, and you can add extra security if you need to.

For somewhere between £12 and £15 a week you can get your car off the street and gain a bit of extra storage space for things like garden tools and step ladders.

Register your interest and preferred location by calling Customer Services on: 01732 749400 or emailing our garage team at garages@wkha.org.uk.

GOLD AWARD FOR CARING

WHILE WEST KENT'S PRIMARY AIM IS TO PROVIDE GREAT HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS FOR OUR TENANTS, WE ARE DELIGHTED TO HAVE AGAIN BEEN RECOGNISED FOR OUR SUPPORT FOR ANIMAL WELFARE, TOO.

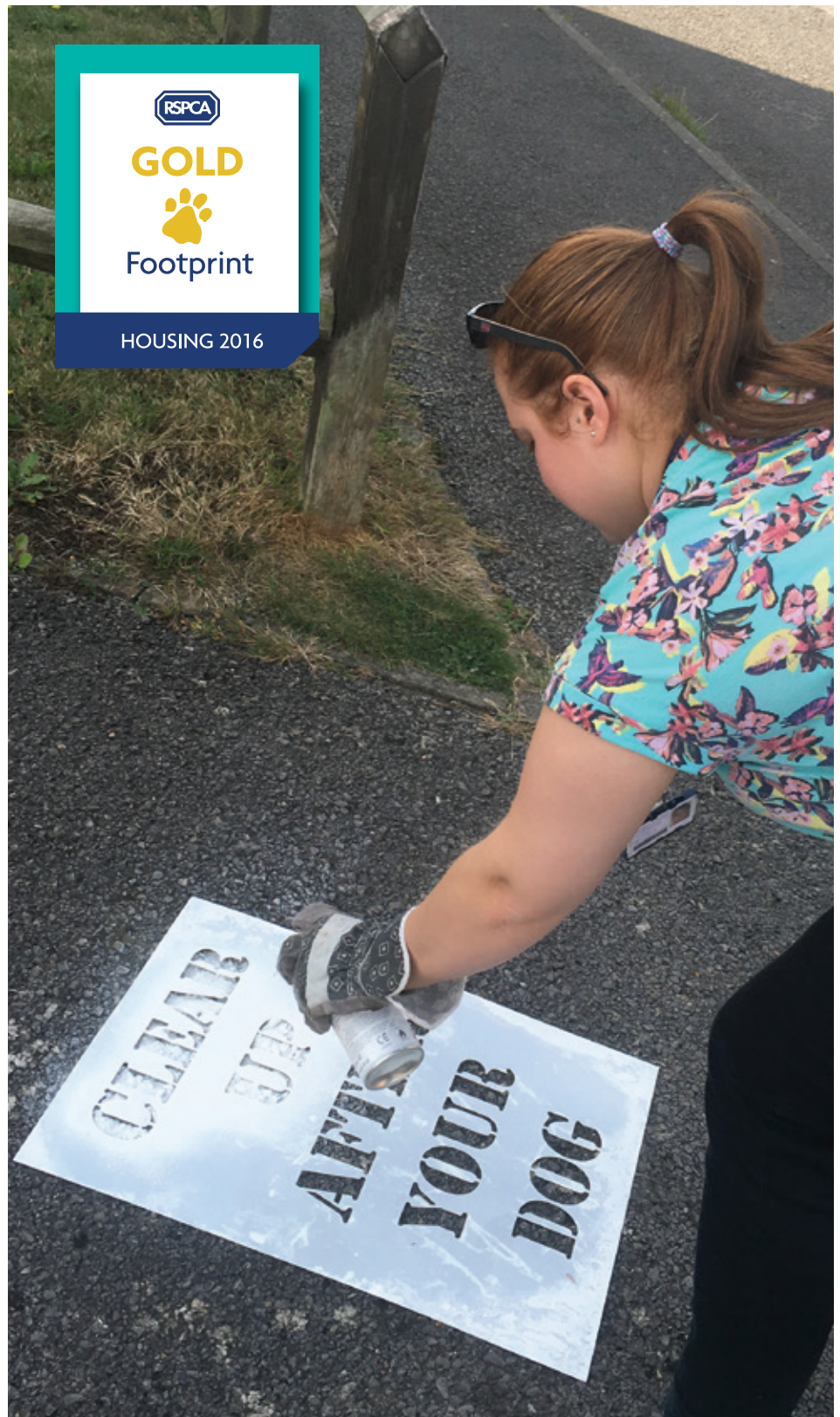
We are proud to have been named as one of 11 housing providers in the country to receive a gold Community Animal Welfare Footprint award from the RSPCA.

The award - presented to us for the fourth year running - reflects our proactive approach to encouraging our residents to be responsible dog owners.

This year we were on a mission to give our residents as many opportunities as possible to get their dogs micro-chipped free before the new law came into effect in April.

Meanwhile our campaign to tackle dog fouling included erecting posters and chalk stencilling the pavements in hotspot areas with 'clear up after your dog' messages.

Our approach brings together our pets policies, our database of animals kept in our properties and our close working links



with other animal-related companies and local partners. We even put on a festive doggy event at Christmas.

We continue to work closely with Sevenoaks District Council's animal control officer, carrying out joint visits to

check on animals living in our properties. Other partners include behaviourist DogsPsycheUK, Premier pet food suppliers, Hextable dog club, the PDSA, Dogs Aid and Guide Dogs for the Blind.

STAY WARM THIS WINTER

AS THE COLDER WEATHER APPROACHES, CHECKING YOUR BOILER IS WORKING PROPERLY IS THE KEY TO A COSY, WARM HOME. WE CARRY OUT YEARLY CHECKS TO ENSURE YOUR BOILER IS WORKING CORRECTLY AND SAFELY BUT IF IT HAS NOT BEEN IN USE FOR A FEW MONTHS, THERE IS A RISK THAT PARTS MAY HAVE SEIZED UP.



During busy winter periods it can take us up to 24 hours to respond, which could leave you without heating overnight. Checking your boiler before the winter means you can rest assured there'll be no cold nights for you and your family, and if you find a problem we can book a convenient, no-rush appointment with you.

TO CHECK YOUR BOILER

To check your boiler, just turn your heating on; if it doesn't work as you expect it to, try these troubleshooting tips:

- Check the power supply is turned on; it's surprising how easily they get switched off accidentally.
- Check you have enough credit on your gas meter and that the meter is on. If there are any problems with the meter, you will need to call your supplier.

- Check the thermostat is set to a temperature higher than the temperature in the room.
- Check the programmer is demanding heating and hot water. This is usually shown by red lights beside pictures of a radiator or tap.

If the system is still not working, ask our Customer Services team to guide you through an easy boiler reset by calling 01732 749400. The team can also provide any other advice you may need.

Advice on troubleshooting other problems such as cold radiators or low pressure can be found on our YouTube channel.

If you notice a leak on any part of your heating system it's important you tell us straight away as this can affect the function of your heating and damage your home.

PREVENTING FROZEN AND BURST PIPES

If you go away, make sure you keep your heating on low to prevent your pipes freezing - and if you are on a prepaid meter, make sure you have enough credit for the time you are away.

Taking these steps will prevent any costly damage caused by burst pipes that West Kent is unable to reimburse you for. Don't forget that if a leak occurs, you will need to rely on your own contents insurance to pay for any loss or damage to your belongings and furnishings.



BE MOULD FREE

THERE IS NO QUICK FIX FOR CONDENSATION AND MOULD - BUT YOU CAN TAKE ACTION TO PREVENT OR REDUCE IT.

Before reporting either problem to us, please follow the advice on this page.

REDUCE THE MOISTURE YOU PRODUCE

- Dry washing outside or in a bathroom with the door closed and the window slightly open
- Vent non-condensing tumble driers to the outside
- Cook with pan lids on, turn the heat down and use as little water as possible
- Run the cold water into your bath first - it reduces the steam by 90%
- Wipe down windows and sills daily.

VENTILATE YOUR HOME

- Use your extractor fan or open a window when cooking or washing up
- Open windows on all levels on opposite sides of your home for 30 minutes each morning, keeping internal doors open - but don't forget to close the windows before going out
- Close kitchen and bathroom doors when in use to stop moisture escaping
- Keep a small gap between large items of furniture and the walls
- Don't overfill wardrobes and cupboards, and remove 'false' wardrobe backs or drill air holes through them.



- Raise furniture on blocks so air can circulate.

AVOID COLD SURFACES

Make cold walls and ceilings warmer by improving insulation and draught proofing, which will also cut your bills - but don't:

- draught proof rooms that are affected by condensation or where there is a heater or cooker that burns gas or solid fuel
- block permanent ventilation or air-bricks
- draught proof kitchen or bathroom windows.

WARM YOUR HOME UP

- Keep your heating on low in cold weather and don't heat one room while others are cold

- Don't over-ventilate when it's cold, as that just makes the temperature drop and makes condensation more likely.

DEALING WITH MOULD

Deal with mould before tackling the condensation that caused it.

- Don't use a brush or vacuum cleaner to remove mould
- Wipe down walls and window frames with fungicidal wash approved by the Health and Safety executive
- Redecorate using fungicidal paint and resistant wallpaper paste.

If after several weeks there is no improvement please contact us. Report the problem by logging into My West Kent or emailing us at customerservices@wkha.org.uk.



ABACUS PLAY A PART IN CELEBRITY SHOW

PRE-OWNED FURNITURE RECYCLED BY OUR ABACUS STORE TOOK PRIDE OF PLACE IN A 24-HOUR CELEBRITY CHARITY EVENT.

Popular TV weather girl and celebrity upcycler Georgina Burnett painted the occasional tables during a charity 'Paintathon' for the BBC's Children in Need appeal.

Her marathon effort was screened live on her Facebook page and is the natural follow up to her "Proper PropertyPorn" blog and YouTube channel.

After completing the sponsored event and raising an impressive £1,770 in the process, a tired but happy Georgina donated the finished pieces back to

Abacus, which uses the money it generates to support projects delivered by West Kent Communities.

Georgina lives in Sevenoaks and is a regular visitor to the local Abacus store, where Stef Collini helps her find interesting bits and pieces to make over. Stef was happy to donate two nests of tables and an occasional table to the cause.

"When I decided to do a 24-hour Paintathon for Children in Need I knew that Stef would be able to find me some items to paint," Georgina explained.

"As well as raising money for the appeal through sponsorship, I plan to donate the painted items back to Abacus to sell because I know what great work they do as a social enterprise."

On her live video introduction to the event on Facebook, Georgina promised to "make what was once ugly beautiful and give you hints and tips on the way."

Our three Abacus stores, in Sevenoaks, Medway and Maidstone, achieve three important goals. They keep unwanted furniture, electrical goods and other items out of landfill, they provide a useful source of second hand items for the less well-off and they offer training and volunteering opportunities for local people.

"Georgina quite often pops in looking for furniture she can upcycle and it was great to be part of this fund-raiser," said Stef. "Now we are hoping that people will be keen to bid for one of these unique items."

LIBRARY CONTRACT

STRONG COMMUNITY LINKS AND A FOCUS ON WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS HAVE HELPED WEST KENT COMMUNITIES WIN AN IMPRESSIVE COUNTYWIDE CONTRACT.

We've been asked to provide the Volunteer Development Programme for Kent's Libraries, Registration and Archives (LRA) service, helping the county council maintain its place at the forefront of library based volunteering in the UK.

Kent's LRA service was one of the first council teams to establish a volunteering policy - almost 30 years ago - and now encourages local people to get involved through its network of 99 static libraries, five mobiles, five register offices and its archive centre.

Volunteers do not do the work of staff, but add extra value to the service through the time they give.

West Kent Communities is now responsible for developing that programme, encouraging more people to volunteer their time and making sure the system runs smoothly. There are 1,087 volunteers currently helping across Kent.

"This is a great opportunity for us to put our considerable experience of working with local communities to good use on behalf of the county," commented Pauline Smith, West Kent Communities' Training and Employment Coordinator

"We will be managing the whole scheme, making sure volunteers are welcomed, signed up, trained and briefed on their role."

Kent's libraries provide a wide range of volunteering opportunities that benefit customers, staff and the wider community, and volunteers have also played an active part in consultations, which reflects West Kent's own use of residents as a vital sounding board for better service delivery.

"One of our aims is to broaden the range of people who volunteer and we will be working with hard-to-reach groups, people with disabilities and prison offenders, among others," said Pauline.

Mike Hill, KCC's Cabinet Member for Community Services, said: "I am delighted that West Kent Communities will be taking our excellent volunteering programme forward.

"Volunteers do much to add value to our services and make a real difference to Kent's communities. I am confident that with the help of West Kent our programme will go from strength-to-strength."



STAY IN TOUCH

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

Everyone enjoys sitting down with a cuppa and catching up on stories that affect their neighbourhood - but sometimes the news moves faster than that.

We print 7,000 copies of Neighbourhood News twice a year, in June and December, and post it to every one of our homes, but sometimes we want to tell you about things more quickly.

That's why we introduced a special email version of Neighbourhood News that we send straight to the inboxes of everyone who wants to be kept up to date with all the news from West Kent.

Using email allows us to send you fresher, more topical stories, as well as saving us a significant amount of money.

All you need to do is make sure we have your correct email address on file.

To make sure you don't miss out, contact 01732 749400 or sign up for the email editions of Neighbourhood News by visiting www.westkent.org.



GETTING IN TOUCH

CUSTOMER SERVICES

Contact our customer service advisors to pay your rent, report a repair or for any other housing related question.

☎ 01732 749400

✉ enquiries@wkha.org.uk

REPORT A REPAIR

☎ 01732 749400

☎ 0800 169 1122

between 8am and 5pm.

In emergencies at other times

☎ 0800 169 1122

✉ repairs@wkha.org.uk

🌐 www.westkent.org

HOUSING OPTIONS

(waiting list, bidding for homes)

☎ 01732 749433

WORRIED ABOUT YOUR DEBTS OR STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR RENT?

Contact us as soon as possible for help and advice

☎ 01732 749400

🌐 www.westkent.org/payrent

ABACUS FURNITURE PROJECT

☎ Sevenoaks: 01732 743365

☎ Medway: 01634 296662

☎ Maidstone: 01622 620464

