

neighbourhood

# news



The magazine for residents of  
West Kent Housing Association

ISSUE 79: WINTER 2017



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**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.





## WELCOME FROM FRANK

Well the clocks have gone back and in our house, we have already made our Christmas pudding.

Since I last wrote for you we have had a general election and there has been the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower. West Kent has always taken the safety of our residents extremely seriously and will continue to do so. We also need you to do your bit - so please do read the articles inside about fire safety.

And the new government is now in listening mode. They are launching a housing green paper and will be talking to tenants up and down the country. They will want to know how you feel about your home, how having a decent home helps you in getting on in life and whether you feel that your voice is heard. We will let you know how you can get involved in this conversation.

Enjoy the festive season.

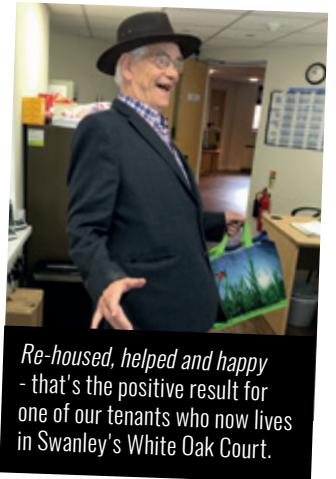


# DID YOU MISS THE AUTUMN eNEWS?

IF YOU'RE NOT SIGNED UP TO OUR ENEWS YOU MISSED ALL THIS AND MORE!



"Welcome to Beeches" - a sign of a great community. Guests at the opening of Beeches in Dover were welcomed by seven-year-olds from a nearby school using signing.



Re-housed, helped and happy - that's the positive result for one of our tenants who now lives in Swanley's White Oak Court.



The air smells of sweet success at Montgomery Court in Medway, West Kent's Emerald Extra Care scheme for over 55s, after five of their tenants and staff have successfully quit smoking.



Cookery skills provide food for thought - a group of Eynsford youngsters learned new skills before sitting down to enjoy a splendid lunch when they joined one of our Summer FunFest events.

### Sign up at [westkent.org/news](http://westkent.org/news)

- Gold in RSPCA Community Animal Welfare Footprints awards
- Residential fun for West Kent's 8-12s club members - Groups of children from some of the communities where West Kent has homes have enjoyed an exciting residential trip to Thriftwood scout camp in Essex.
- Triple success at Kent Housing Group Awards
- The newest members of our "West Kent family" were welcomed to their homes at the official opening of Spires extra care in Tenterden on 28 June.



Chief Executive Frank Czarnowski highlights the value of supported housing when Dartford MP Gareth Johnson visited Wellfield Community Hall in Hartley.

# IT'S GOOD TO SHARE

## BUYING A SHARED OWNERSHIP HOME HAS NEVER BEEN SIMPLER.

If you can't afford to buy a property outright, our shared ownership (sometimes called low cost home ownership) scheme will be a great option for you.

Our shared ownership scheme allows you to buy a percentage of your home and rent the remainder from us. Over time you can buy bigger shares in your property until you own it all, at which point you won't have to pay us any more rent - this is called staircasing. More information about being a shared owner is on our website.

West Kent has an exciting building programme offering homes for shared ownership across Kent. Contact us now to



find out about availability on sites in Headcorn, Ashford and Gravesend. We'll be even busier from next year with developments coming through in Canterbury, Tenterden, Sittingbourne, Hawkhurst, Lenham and Chatham, plus more homes in Ashford.

For more information on our new homes for shared ownership please email us at [sales@wkha.org.uk](mailto:sales@wkha.org.uk) or call us on 01732 749400.

## PAY BY DIRECT DEBIT

Why have the hassle of having to remember to pay your rent each week/month when you can set up a direct debit?

All you need to do is either call your Income Officer (if you don't have their details call our customer services team and they can direct you to the right person) or complete a simple direct debit form (you can download one from our website) and send it to us and we can set it all up to come straight from your bank account. You can choose to pay monthly, fortnightly or weekly and any changes to the amount you pay will be made

automatically for you. You'll receive confirmation ten days before the change happens.

***We have stopped taking payments at our offices in Sevenoaks and Swanley so a direct debit would be an ideal option for those that have previously paid this way. If this isn't for you there are other ways that you can pay:***

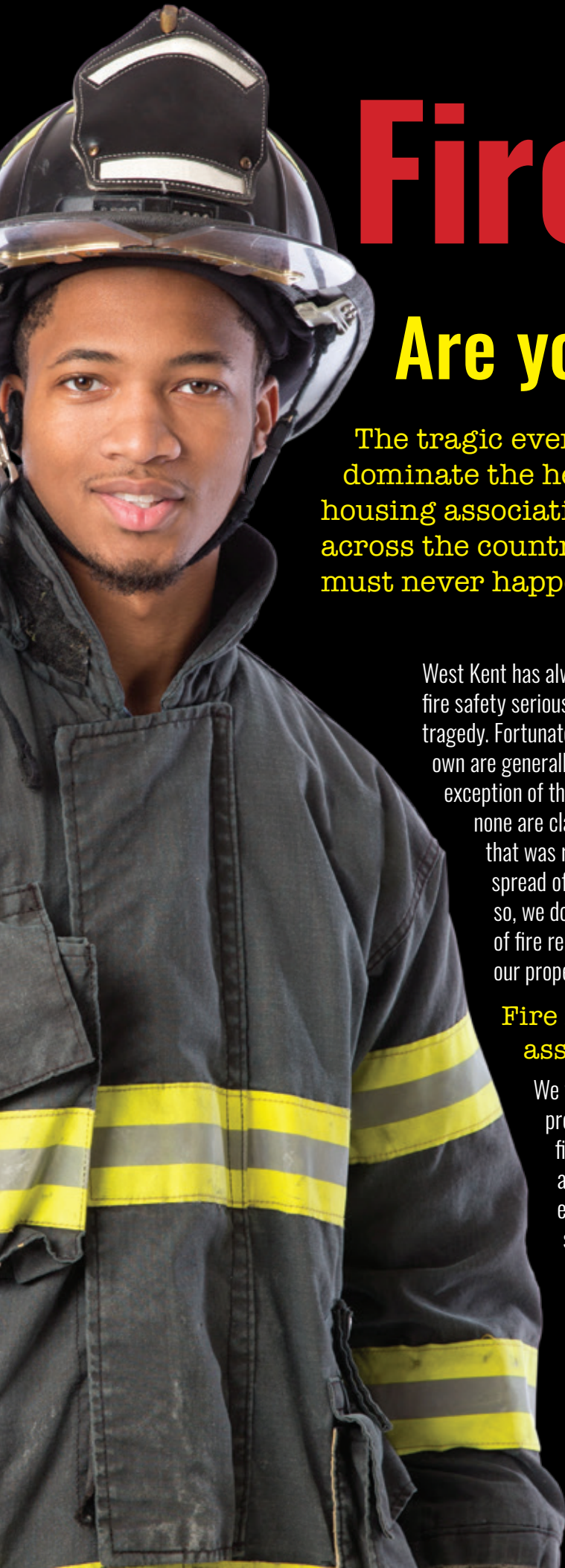
- automated payment line - 01732 749442
- online through Santander BillPay
- online, through your own bank

- West Kent payment card at a Post Office or Payzone outlet
- standing order - please visit [www.westkent.org](http://www.westkent.org) for further information

Further details are on our website at [westkent.org/payrent](http://westkent.org/payrent)







# Fire Safety

## Are you prepared?

The tragic events at Grenfell Tower continue to dominate the headlines with the government, housing associations, councils and organisations across the country determined that a fire on this scale must never happen again.

West Kent has always taken the issue of fire safety seriously, even before this tragedy. Fortunately, the properties we own are generally low rise, with the exception of three blocks of flats and none are clad with the material that was responsible for the spread of fire at Grenfell. Even so, we do a lot to ensure the risk of fire remains low throughout our properties:

### Fire risk assessments

We visit all our communal properties at least every five years and carry out a thorough check to ensure the risk of fire starting and spreading is low. We check outside, for risks such as fuel stored nearby or obstructed paths, and inside for signage, any areas that are cluttered or not

adequately lit, and that all doors to flats can resist fire for at least 30 minutes. We even check loft spaces because fire can spread if they are not compartmentalised.

**If you would like to see a copy of the fire risk assessment for your block please contact our customer services team and they will send it to you.**

### Regular checks

We carry out annual gas checks, including checking boilers are safe, fit smoke alarms in all our properties and check all electrics at least every ten years.

### Build and manage our properties well

Our new properties conform to all the latest safety standards and our existing properties are well managed with the correct signage and regular checks in place so we can pick up and tackle any risks early on.

## Fire action notice

All our communal blocks have clear information about what residents should do in the case of a fire.

## What you should do

You can help to ensure that the risk of a fire in your home is low by following the advice given by Kent Fire and Rescue Service:

- Keep communal areas free of clutter and know what to do in the event of a fire.
- Keep any appointments we make to do a gas, electrics or other safety check.
- Ensure you have working smoke alarms installed on all levels of your home. It can give you the vital time you need to escape in a fire. Test them regularly and never remove batteries!
- Don't overload sockets - ensure only one plug per socket. Always turn off electrical items when they're not in use, unless designed to be left on, like freezers.
- Never leave cooking unattended. Most fires start in the kitchen so this is a high risk area. Be sure to avoid cooking while under the influence of alcohol. Always turn off kitchen appliances when you've finished cooking.
- Put your cigarette out - right out! Make sure your cigarette is fully extinguished and take care when under the influence of alcohol or tired. It's very easy to fall asleep while your cigarette is still burning and start a fire.
- Always use a residual current device (RCD) on outdoor electrical equipment. This safety device can save lives by instantly switching off

the power if there is a fault and can be found in any DIY store.

- Have any gas cooker or other appliances checked every year by a Gas Safe registered engineer and service them regularly.
- Close bedroom doors at night, should fire start this could buy you precious time from the effects of smoke.

## Christmas

Some things are particularly important to remember at Christmas time:

- Make sure your family and any visitors staying for the festive period know what to do in an emergency. Tell them where you keep door and window keys so they can escape if a fire starts.
- Ensure you switch off fairy lights and unplug them before you go to bed, and before you leave the house. Check they conform to the British Standard (BS EN 60598) and are in good working order before use.
- Never leave burning candles unattended. Keep candles out of the reach of children, and away from decorations, cards and wrapping paper, fires, lights and heaters.
- If you have a real Christmas tree, keep it watered regularly to prevent it drying out. If your tree catches fire, a watered tree will burn more slowly.

Unless you live in accommodation with specific instructions to stay put, in the event of a fire - get out, stay out and call 999 and ask for the fire service.

# TAKING THE RISK OUT OF EVENTS

Residents at Wellfield have taken some positive action to ensure the safety of the people attending the many events they hold in the community centre.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) invited a number of regular users to a talk about fire safety and the precautions they should be taking to reduce the risk of fire starting or spreading.

Zoe Everest, Tenancy Services Manager, who organised the visit, explains, "The fire officer who attended spoke about general safety for residents in their flats as well as the use of the lounge and the importance of carrying out risk assessments for any events they hold there. We had some really positive feedback from those attending, who now feel much more confident about what to do to ensure the safety of people using the centre."



Andrew Pidduck from KFRS  
with Mrs Powell





# COME ON IN!



**LOTS OF FACILITIES ARE AVAILABLE AT OUR RESIDENTIAL SCHEMES IN HAWKHURST, RAMSGATE, TENTERDEN, DOVER AND DARTFORD AND THEY ARE THERE FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY - NOT JUST THE RESIDENTS LIVING THERE.**

All our Kent Excellent Homes for All schemes have been built with a small fitness/gym studio, health suite, activity and meeting rooms, hair salons and restaurants and they are all there to use or rent for very reasonable rates. They are available to anyone with no restriction on age or ability and are fully accessible. If you are running classes or events that our residents can also enjoy then all the better.



Our fitness studios in all five schemes would be ideal for a local person that wants to run classes for a small number of people (up to about 12). If you're a pilates teacher, run a ballet class or want to burn some calories offering an aerobic workout you can rent the space for just £10 an hour, provided you have your own insurance.

Our health and beauty facilities are bright and spacious and can be rented permanently or by the hour/day from just £20 a day or £52 a week. Space is available in Hawkhurst, Tenterden, Dover and Dartford. You'd need your own insurance and a Disclosure and Barring Service check.

If you are looking for a place to host a small informal meeting or group activity our meeting rooms hold up to 12 people. If you already have a group and are looking for new members why not hold it at one of our schemes and invite the residents there to come along too? Rooms cost just £20 a day and there are excellent restaurant facilities at all our sites.

The restaurants and hair salons at all the schemes are open to all non-residents, so if you live nearby why not pop in and give them a try?

For information on any of the schemes please email [customerservices@wkha.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@wkha.org.uk)



# LIFELINE ALARMS ARE CHANGING

We are making changes to the lifeline alarms that many of our Emerald tenants have.

We have written to all affected tenants. In the coming months we will be moving from a system that's hard wired in the property to a mobile unit that connects to the telephone line.

For more information about the lifeline service and how it is changing please contact the Freephone Emerald helpline 0800 197 0097 or email [emeraldteam@wkha.org.uk](mailto:emeraldteam@wkha.org.uk).







# AGE - A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

**WEST KENT PRIDES ITSELF ON PROVIDING EXCELLENT HOMES FOR OLDER PEOPLE. WE RECOGNISE AND BELIEVE THAT WITH KENT'S INCREASING POPULATION OF OLDER PEOPLE THERE IS STRONG DEMAND FOR SUITABLE HOMES THAT SUPPORT ACTIVE AGEING AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING.**

Our long term aim is to be a leader in meeting the accommodation needs of older people in Kent and we have developed a strategy that will ensure we achieve that. It's called *Age - a positive experience* and sets out

what we have already done, and what we intend to do, to provide excellent homes and services for older people in our communities.

Our aims are to provide quality homes, to support older people to live in these independently and to ensure they remain connected with their communities and the wider world. Our strategy states that by 2026 we will:

- provide 1300 more quality homes in good locations, with a range of design choices to meet individual needs and options of different tenures, to support individual lifestyles as part of active aging.
- offer a range of services to support older people to remain in

their own home safely and able to manage their daily lives. We will have strong partnerships with health, social care and other organisations to be able to provide a tailored response to the different needs of residents.

- reduce social isolation for older people by offering opportunities for them to come together with others to take part in activities, for lifelong learning and to ensure they can share their experience and knowledge for the benefit of others.

Find out more about our plans in the full strategy on our website at [www.westkent.org](http://www.westkent.org)



# LOOKING AFTER YOUR HOME

## WHEN YOU BECOME A TENANT WITH US YOU ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP.

We provide you with a place to live you can call home and in return you agree to pay your rent and keep to all your other tenancy responsibilities. Both you and West Kent have a responsibility to maintain your home and to carry out repairs.

This time last year we unveiled our new repairs service. This included the new 'Property MOT' where we check the state of your home and carry out any small repair jobs that are our responsibility right there and then within the time we have left, instead of booking an appointment to come back later.

When we perform this annual check we use a set of specific standards to identify

whether an item needs to be replaced and we take photos so we can monitor how well these items are performing compared to our expectation.

If the MOT inspection reveals that your kitchen, bathroom or doors need to be replaced we'll record that on our systems and tell you when this work will happen. Planned work like this may take up to 18 months to be carried out.

If your rent account is not up to date we may not replace major fittings like kitchens and bathrooms until it is. We'll work with you to set-up an arrangement to pay your arrears so we can then get on with that work.

We use good quality, long lasting products in your home so they should continue to work properly in line with industry standards. We expect major

fittings to last a long time, with proper care, depending on the item. For example, we expect kitchens and bathrooms to last up to 30 years, and doors 38 years before needing replacement. If these fittings in your home fail earlier than expected due to misuse or accidental damage we will charge you for replacing them.

So please help us to look after your home.



## KEEPING BENEFIT CLAIMS UP TO DATE

Do you claim housing benefit or receive council tax support from Sevenoaks District Council (SDC)?

You must inform SDC immediately if you have a change of circumstances such as:

- getting married, entering into a civil partnership or moving in with a partner
- getting a new job or pay rise
- taking in a lodger

- travelling or moving abroad
- no longer being sick or ill.

If you don't tell them, you will be charged £50 if the change results in an overpayment of housing benefit or £70 if it affects your council tax support.

You have one month to notify changes that affect housing benefit but just 21 days for council tax support so don't leave it too long - let them know as soon as it happens.

## ABACUS MAIDSTONE IS MOVING

Our popular furniture project in Maidstone is moving to a new home in Shepway.

**From mid-November you'll be able to find us at 1 Northumberland Court, Northumberland Rd, Shepway ME15 7JT.**

Open every day except Sunday from 8.30am to 4.30pm.

Kim Palmer manages the project and says: "The new building is in a great location for us to serve both existing and new customers. We're close to the shops and community facilities and easy to find.



"Our aim is to help everyone make their house a home without incurring debt enabling us to reinvest the money we make back into the community."

Abacus Furniture projects recycle unwanted, pre-used furniture and household items and sell them on at low cost to families and people in need. They also have some bric-a-brac items and clothing.

Most household donations are welcome.

Find them on Facebook @abacusfurnitureproject, Twitter @abacus\_westkent and on eBay abacusfurniture

## ESTATE INSPECTIONS

Come and join us on an estate inspection. Your local knowledge is important to us and together we can make a real difference to your neighbourhood.

Tenancy Services Officers walk around their patches four times a year, joining forces with our residents, resident groups and partners to identify areas of concern or for improvement, such as:

- Health and safety issues in the neighbourhood
- Repairs that haven't already been reported
- Abandoned or illegally parked vehicles
- Grass cutting and other estate services - checking these are being effectively delivered.

We welcome all our residents to join us on the regular quarterly estate inspections. Schedules are variable so please contact us to find out when we're next in your area.



# WINTER REPAIRS - TIPS TO KEEP YOU WARM THIS WINTER

## BOILERS

During busy periods it can take us up to three days to respond to repair requests, which could leave you without heating for a few days. Checking your boiler now means you can rest assured there will be no cold nights for you and your family, and if you find a problem we can book a convenient appointment. If your boiler doesn't work as you expect it to, try these troubleshooting tips:

- Check the power supply is turned on; these can easily get switched off accidentally.
- Check you have enough credit on your meter and that the meter is on. Call your supplier if you find any problems with the meter.
- 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.

Tell us straight away if you notice a leak from any part of your heating system as it can affect the function of your heating and damage your home.

Check our DIY videos at [www.westkent.org/videos](http://www.westkent.org/videos) for advice on troubleshooting other problems such as cold radiators or low pressure.

## PREVENTING FROZEN AND BURST PIPES

Make sure you leave your heating on low if you go away to prevent your pipes freezing - and top up the credit on prepaid meters for the time you are away.





# AND THE WINNERS ARE...



Keith Raggett



Mrs Jean Carter



Roy Watkins



Mr Matthew Smith



Residents of Bonney Court



Residents of Montgomery Court



**THIS SUMMER'S GARDENING COMPETITION ONCE AGAIN SAW GREEN-FINGERED RESIDENTS YOUNG AND OLD TAKE UP THEIR TROWELS TO BRIGHTEN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS.**

There were 45 entries across seven categories, and the judges who toured the gardens in July had their work cut out to choose the winners.

The winners received a £20 National Garden Voucher and the runners-up received a £10 voucher. Overall winner Zoe Bennett from Sundridge also received a trophy.

Results:

## Best back garden

### Winner

Zoe Bennett, Sundridge

### Runner up

Roy Watkins, Whiteoak Court, Swanley

## Best front garden

### Winner

Keith Raggett, Weald, Sevenoaks

### Runner up

Matthew Smith, Westerham

## Wildlife/eco garden

### Winner

David King, Edenbridge

### Runner up

Lilly Grant, Sevenoaks

## Young gardener (Under 16)

### Winner

St Mark's Church of England School, Tunbridge Wells (no runner up)

## Anything goes

### Winner

Jean Carter, Swanley

### Runner up

Lilly Grant, Sevenoaks

## Best small container

### Winner

Barry Munday, Sevenoaks

### Runner up

Ronald Martin, Bowles Lodge, Hawkhurst

## Best communal garden

### Winner

Residents of Bonney Court, Swanley

### Runner up

Residents of Montgomery Court, Wainscott

## Best overall

Zoe Bennett, Sundridge





# SUMMER'S YOUTH EVENTS

## OUR YOUTH SERVICES TEAM HAS BEEN KEEPING THE YOUNGSTERS OF THE COUNTY BUSY.

Youngsters from our six 8-12s clubs enjoyed a two-day summer break at the Thriftwood Scout Camp in Brentwood, Essex, the site of this year's successful residential week.



The youngsters took part in activities including water roller ball, raft building and a water splash challenge as well as a bonfire and barbecue - complete with campfire songs - followed by hot chocolate and a film.

A total of 44 young people joined in the fun, including children from the Swanley Nurture Club and the new 8-12s group at Dunton Green.

West Kent Youth Services members supervised the activities, which manager Kate Craib said had allowed the staff to spend quality time with the children.

"It was amazing to see the young people 'grow' so much during their time away," she commented.

"The children challenged themselves to do things they didn't think possible, they solved problems, explored, played, tried new things and overcame their fears - as well as making lots of new friends."

Youngsters also enjoyed learning new skills while having lots of fun at this

year's Summer FunFest, which took place in August.

FunFest gave young people an opportunity to take part in free cookery, circus skills, drama and urban art sessions run by our youth services team with support from experts in their fields.

The half-day sessions were held in Eynsford, Westerham, New Ash Green, Dunton Green and Chevening. Youth Co-ordinator Amy Cole-Perner said the idea was to give youngsters something exciting to do in the holidays while teaching them something new.

One of the first sessions was a *Come dine with us* event that saw a group of nine to 14 year-olds learn about food safety before cooking themselves bruschetta and chicken fajitas for lunch.

The fun and games continued into September, thanks to our Skatefest event in Gamecock Meadow, West Kingsdown, attended by more than 100 young people and their families.



Skatefest featured the Challenger Troop climbing tower and obstacle course, football skills training with Charlton Athletic Community Trust, a second obstacle course organised by West Kingsdown Rugby Club and other challenges designed to encourage physical and mental strength.

Youngsters ran the Smoothie Bike and enjoyed a free barbecue and ice creams as well as helping artist Graham Upton paint an 'urban art' style mural on the end of the skate ramp.

Also on offer was sexual health advice, an opportunity to watch BMX riders from Grind BMX in Swanley and a chance to listen to Andy Watson, from Inspirational Talks, discussing the dangers of drugs and alcohol. DJ Arick, who is also a skater, joined the young people at the free event.

"It was a great afternoon and thoroughly enjoyed by all those who attended," said Kate Craib.

"Following the success of Skatefest we have launched a new youth session on Thursday evenings at The Bus youth centre in Gamecock Meadow for young people aged 12 and upwards in partnership with West Kingsdown Parish Council."



## WELL-FEST

Former Paralympics wheelchair rugby captain Steve Brown captivated the audience recently at a series of events organised by West Kent to promote mental, physical and financial wellbeing.

The events were held in Sevenoaks, Swanley and at our residential scheme for older people in Medway, and marked Mental Health Awareness day on 10 October.

Steve talked openly about his struggle to come to terms with his injury, the result of a fall from a first floor balcony when he was 24. With help from family and friends he refused to let his injury define him and, since captaining the wheelchair rugby team for the Paralympics in 2012, he has gone on to present and commentate for the BBC and Channel 4 and recently landed his dream job as a presenter of Countryfile.

Steve says: "I really enjoyed meeting people at the Well-fest events and was pleased to share my experiences in an informal setting. It's important to me that people can continue to strive to realise their dreams - we are stronger than we think."

*"I really enjoyed meeting people at the Well-fest events and was pleased to share my experiences in an informal setting"*

Visitors to Well-fest enjoyed a number of other free activities throughout the day, including sports advice from Kent Sport, back and shoulder massages, healthy food demonstrations and tastings and advice on how to cut your bills.

Corinne Beech from West Kent, who organised the event said: "We are always looking for ways to encourage the people living in our communities to look after their health. This gave locals a chance to learn how to do just that and have a bit of fun at the same time. We are really grateful to Steve for his time, he gave a truly inspiring talk and left us all feeling that anything is possible."

# LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AT CHRISTMAS

**THE FESTIVE SEASON IS A TIME OF JOY AND SPENDING TIME WITH LOVED ONES, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE ONE OF THE MOST STRESSFUL AND LONELY PERIODS OF THE YEAR.**

During the December rush it is important to try and remember how to maintain your mental health and wellbeing.

## **Talk about your feelings**

It's hard to admit that at such an exciting time of year, you don't actually feel that great. But talking about your feelings can improve your mood and make it easier to deal with the tough times. It's important to create space for these conversations and also worth identifying who you can speak to if you are concerned about your wellbeing.

## **Eat well**

Christmas is typically a time of overindulgence, but what we eat can sometimes impact how we feel. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a little bit of overindulgence, but a good tip is to balance this out over the festive period - everything in moderation!

## **Keep in touch and reach out**

When putting the finishing touches on holiday plans, we can often become distracted from the support systems around us and lose our footing. Friends and family can make you feel included and cared for. They can offer different views from whatever's going on inside your own head, keep you grounded

and help you solve practical problems - enjoy this time to catch up. If alone and/or away from family, the *Campaign to End Loneliness* provides some helpful resources.

## **Accept who you are**

Some of us make people laugh, others cook fantastic meals. Some of us share our lifestyle with the people who live close to us, others live very differently. If you have mental health problems, don't feel pressured to do more than you feel up to. Remember Christmas is just one day of the year.

## **Keep active**

Research shows that doing exercise releases chemicals in your body that can make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you to concentrate, sleep and feel better. Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy.

## **Drink sensibly**

Christmas parties encourage socialising and it's very easy to get carried away, but know your limits - it's important to maintain your personal wellbeing too. For more information visit [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

## **Ask for help**

At times we all get overwhelmed by how we feel, especially when things go wrong. If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. The

Samaritans are available to speak to all year round, their free helpline number is 116 123 and calls to this helpline number do not appear on phone bills.

## **Care for others**

Present-buying is not the only way of showing that we care about others. Christmas is the perfect time to reach out to loved ones who you haven't spent much time with in the past year; ask how they've been and whether they have plans for the holidays. Caring for others is an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you.





# VOLUNTEERS PLAY A BIG PART IN READING CHALLENGE SUCCESS

**A SCHEME TO HELP KENT YOUNGSTERS FALL IN LOVE WITH LIBRARIES WAS A SUMMER SUCCESS, THANKS IN PART TO THE SUPPORT OF VOLUNTEERS WE RECRUITED.**

The Summer Reading Challenge, promoted in Kent's libraries each year, encourages children to get into the reading habit during the holidays.

This year's event, on the theme of Animal Agents, saw 18,700 youngsters sign up, an increase of around five per cent on 2016.

West Kent is responsible for recruiting volunteers to the county's libraries, and Volunteer Development Coordinator for Kent, Caroline Williams said their efforts had played a major part in the success of the reading challenge.

"Volunteers add value by supporting staff and doing the extra tasks that make a big difference to the success of our libraries," she explained.

"Volunteers help by getting craft materials ready before the sessions, or simply by making sure all the pencils are sharpened or wiping down toddler-age

books after they have been handled by sticky fingers."

We recruit volunteers to help in the libraries all year round, but they're particularly useful during the summer break, when the reading challenge results in an influx of young readers.

While most are adults, some, like Milly Gibbons, were making their own first visit to the library not that many years ago.

The Lyminge youngster, who turned 12 this September, volunteers regularly at the library across the road from her home, helping to organise craft events and inspiring young visitors at Baby Rhyme Time sessions.

Anna Kibble started working at Hythe Library as a sessional worker after she retired, and later became a volunteer.

"I love working with the children and there are some very rewarding moments, such as when a parent decides to join the library after visiting with their youngster," she commented.

Anna runs monthly craft sessions at the library with fellow volunteer Christine Court and finds the children - "the library users of the future" - an inspiration.

Anna and Christine had not met before they volunteered but have become close friends. "Meeting new people and making new friends is one of the unexpected extras you get from volunteering," said Anna.



Christine Court

Volunteering is becoming a habit for teenager Shannon Phillips, who thought helping out at the Kent History and Library Centre would be a worthwhile way to spend a few days in the summer holidays.

With the holidays over and her final year at Valley Park School in Maidstone now well underway, 17 year-old Shannon is planning to return to help out with a new after-school club she hopes to set up with her library supervisor Claire Bevis.

To find out more about volunteering contact Caroline Williams, Volunteer Development Coordinator, on 03000 421986.



Shannon Phillips



Anna Kibble

# HOMES PROPOSED FOR GARAGE SITES IN SWANLEY

**WEST KENT IS CONTINUING TO PROVIDE MUCH NEEDED AFFORDABLE HOMES ACROSS THE COUNTY.**

With land for new homes in increasing demand, West Kent is looking for opportunities on our own estates to build low-cost rented properties. Having carefully considered the options, it is proposed that land in Swanley currently occupied by garages that are no longer fit for purpose, would be better used for affordable housing.

Shauna Healy, Head of Property (Development) explains: "West Kent owns a number of garage blocks in Swanley, some of which are under-used, need

constant maintenance and are encouraging anti-social behaviour. We propose to replace them with much needed, affordable rented homes which will be let to families from the Sevenoaks district. We've consulted with local residents and we're grateful to those who have spoken to the team about the plans."

Shauna went on, "We are offering all affected garage tenants alternative West Kent garages in the area if they wish to keep a garage tenancy with us."



**There are a number of garages to rent in Swanley and other areas in Kent from just £10.10 per week (+VAT if you're not named on a West Kent tenancy). Visit [www.westkent.org/garages/](http://www.westkent.org/garages/) to see where there is availability or email [garages@wkha.org.uk](mailto:garages@wkha.org.uk)**

## DO YOU CLAIM BENEFITS?

You need to be aware of changes happening to the way benefits are paid. The changes will start to happen from the end of this year in some areas and will apply to couples and families with children.

Universal Credit has started to replace a range of benefits for working age people. The benefits being replaced are:

- Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)
- Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

All other benefits such as Child Benefit, Carer's Allowance, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Council Tax Support will continue to be paid as usual.

For now, everyone who is currently receiving one of the benefits that will be replaced by Universal Credit will continue to receive them as normal. But if they have a significant change in circumstances, such as moving home for example, these claimants will slowly be moved onto Universal Credit from 2019 through to 2021 when the government say they expect everyone to be claiming this new payment.

Universal Credit will be paid once a month directly into a bank account and

is normally only paid to one member of the household. As the payment includes an amount for housing costs it is important that you make arrangements to forward this amount to us, as your landlord, as soon as you receive it. The easiest way to do this is by arranging a direct debit from your bank which you can do by calling us on 01732 749400 or downloading the form from our website.

We want to hear from you if you are asked to claim Universal Credit or if you have any queries about how this might affect you so please contact our Financial Wellbeing Manager, Mark Faithful at [mark.faithful@wkha.org.uk](mailto:mark.faithful@wkha.org.uk) or on 01732 749910.

For more information about Universal Credit, please visit the government website at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)



# IT'S NOT OK TO ABUSE OUR STAFF AND THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES

## WE'RE SEEING AN INCREASE IN THE AMOUNT OF ABUSE OUR STAFF AND CONTRACTORS ARE RECEIVING FROM SOME OF OUR RESIDENTS.

This has included shouting and swearing on the telephone, racism, intimidating staff by entering their personal space, pointing fingers in people's faces and actual physical assaults.

Abuse towards our staff is never acceptable. It is a breach of the tenancy agreement to cause alarm, harm, danger, nuisance, annoyance or distress, or to harass, abuse, threaten or use violence. Any of this behaviour can lead to the abuser losing their home and/or being prosecuted.

Please treat our staff in the same way that you would like to be treated. Jo Fox, Head of Customer Services said "Most of the people we deal with on a day to day basis are polite and friendly but there are some, sadly in increasing numbers, who are not. We take abuse against our staff very seriously. While we understand that residents can sometimes get frustrated or may not agree with what they are being told, that does not give them the right to abuse staff. Shouting at someone will not mean that a person gets a better or quicker outcome and it may lead to action being taken against them".

We record all instances of staff abuse on the tenancy record and investigate them all.

We will take action, which can include:

- Ending your call or your visit - if you are repeatedly shouting or swearing we are not able to provide a service to you. If you do not stop when asked, we will end the contact at that time.
- We will send you a warning letter asking you to stop or change how you communicate with us, setting out the actions we will take if you do not.
- Calling the police. This could lead to you being banned from our offices and/or having restrictions in place around how you contact us.
- Impose contact restrictions - we may place restrictions around how you can contact us, such as only allowing you to contact us on certain days or at certain times, or go through a specific member of staff.
- If we think you are a threat to our staff or contractors because of your past behaviours we will place an alert on your tenancy record. This may affect how we plan our contact with you when meeting you at our offices or visiting your home.
- We may ask you to sign an acceptable behaviour agreement setting out how you must behave towards us or our contractors
- If your actions are serious enough to be a breach of your tenancy we will serve you with a Notice of Seeking Possession. This is a first legal step to losing your home and we can do this after just 24 hours if we need to.

If the abuse is serious enough there are further legal options open to us that can result in injunctions, banning you from entering your home, and possession orders, meaning you lose your home, or even a prison sentence.

Jo concludes, "Nobody at West Kent wants to have to take this kind of action against our residents. All we ask is that our staff are treated with respect."



# POSITIVE RESULT AGAINST ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

**RESIDENTS FROM ONE OF OUR ESTATES, WHO HAD BEEN ENDURING REPEATED ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR FROM A NEIGHBOUR, WERE RELIEVED AFTER A JUDGE ORDERED THE FAMILY RESPONSIBLE TO MOVE EARLIER THIS YEAR.**

West Kent takes reports of anti-social behaviour very seriously. We encourage residents to sort out their differences between themselves if possible, but if that fails we help them collect the evidence that will permit us to take appropriate action, including court if necessary.

In this case, the behaviour of just one family, tenants of another landlord, was threatening the safety and well-being of the entire local community. The residents were understandably nervous about coming forward but with the support of West Kent, the police and other local agencies carefully building up relationships between all the parties, a good case was put together.

This work led to five injunctions, a highly significant outcome, which prevented the family from being allowed into the area where they were causing anti-social behaviour. Our evidence and the partnership working allowed the other landlord to secure a possession order.

One of the affected residents said, "I and other neighbours had suffered from months of verbal, and at times physical, abuse and intimidation around our block of flats and the local shop. We worked closely with West Kent and the local police and eventually had our day in court, getting a positive result."

Phil Dey our Community Safety Manager (pictured) says, "We will not tolerate



anti-social behaviour and have proved that by working together with affected residents, and police and community safety partners we can resolve it and get positive results."

Since the family causing all the problems has moved away, life has returned to normal for the residents and they can get on with their lives without fear of being the targets of abuse.

If you are suffering from anti-social behaviour in your community, visit [www.westkent.org/ASB](http://www.westkent.org/ASB) for advice.

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## NEW RULES CHANGE HOW WE USE YOUR PERSONAL DETAILS

Through the work we do as your landlord we hold a lot of personal data about you - contact information, dates of birth, details of the children you have and some health information, for example. There are strict rules about how we use this data and we have always been careful not to share it with people we shouldn't, or use it in a way you haven't agreed to - such as selling or passing it on to third parties.

New data protection legislation comes into force in May 2018. This will give everyone rights over what personal data businesses can hold about people and how those organisations process it. It will also make it

easier for people to access the personal data organisations hold about them.

The new regulation will require West Kent to observe six principles when processing your personal data. These mean personal data will be :

1. processed lawfully, fairly and transparently
2. collected for specified, explicit, and legitimate purposes
3. adequate, relevant and limited to only what's necessary
4. accurate and kept up to date

5. kept for no longer than is necessary
6. processed ensuring appropriate security.

Although we are largely doing all this already, there are some areas where we will need your permission to use your data - for example, we may need to ask you to agree to us sending you information about our services. This may mean we'll be sending letters or emails asking you for consent to use your data in certain ways.

If you would like to know anything else about this please contact our customer services team on [customerservices@wkha.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400.



# YOUR GUIDE TO STAYING WELL THIS WINTER

**THE RUN UP TO WINTER IS A GREAT TIME TO MAKE SURE YOU KEEP HEALTHY AND THAT YOU KNOW THE RIGHT PLACE TO GO IF YOU DO FEEL ILL.**

## Your medicine cabinet

Make sure you keep your medicine cabinet well stocked, especially with cold and flu remedies, and painkillers such as ibuprofen or paracetamol. If you are prescribed regular medication by your GP, check you have enough and order more in plenty of time, particularly ahead of Christmas and New Year.

## Taking care of yourself

The best treatment for a cold is to drink fluids, take paracetamol and rest. Antibiotics don't work against viral infections such as colds and will not be prescribed by your doctor. Try not to spread illness. Use tissues for coughs and sneezes and dispose of them in a bin.

Diarrhoea and vomiting is very common in winter and will usually improve within four days. Stay at home for 48 hours after you last have symptoms to avoid giving it to anyone else.

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness, with potentially serious complications, particularly for young children, older people, pregnant women and people with a long-term health condition. That's why free flu immunisation is available for those people, along with family carers, and frontline NHS staff.

Children aged two to eight usually get it as a nasal spray - two quick sniffs is all it takes. The vaccine works very well in children and it also helps to protect other members of the family from catching flu.

Other eligible people will be contacted by their practice and invited to a flu clinic. If you haven't already had a letter about this from your GP practice, ask about vaccination there or at your local pharmacy as soon as possible.

Visit [www.nhs.uk/staywell](http://www.nhs.uk/staywell) for more information

## Feeling unwell? Don't wait - get advice from your nearest pharmacist

At the first sign of a winter illness, even if it's just a cough or cold, get advice from your local pharmacist before it gets more serious. Act quickly.

The sooner you get advice from a pharmacist, the better. Pharmacists are fully qualified to advise you on the best course of action. This can be the best and quickest way to help you recover and get back to normal.

If you can't get to a pharmacy yourself, ask someone to go for you, or call your local pharmacy.

## Minor Injuries Units

If you are injured and it is not serious, you can get help from a minor injuries unit (MIU). They can see a range of minor illnesses and

injuries such as burns, sprains, cuts and foreign bodies in the eye, nose and ear. Some units have x-ray facilities.

## NHS 111

When you need urgent healthcare but it is not a 999 emergency, ring 111, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Accident and emergency departments are for life-threatening or serious injuries only. Please help to keep them free for those who need it.



# CHRISTMAS CLOSING

Our offices will be closed from 3pm on Friday 22 December 2017 reopening on Tuesday 2 January 2018.

For emergency repairs during this period please call 0800 169 1122.

From all the staff at West Kent, have a very happy Christmas and joyful new year.



## RENT CATCH-UP WEEKS

The final two rent catch-up weeks this year are the weeks beginning 18 and 25 December 2017. 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. This may mean paying by another method because we don't collect direct debits on some tenancies through these weeks.

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.

Extra care residents do not have rent catch-up weeks because their rent is calculated differently.

## GETTING IN TOUCH

### CUSTOMER SERVICES

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

☎ 01732 749400  
✉ [enquiries@wkha.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:repairs@wkha.org.uk)  
🌐 [www.westkent.org](http://www.westkent.org)

### 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](http://www.westkent.org/payrent)

**WESTKENT.ORG**  
CONTACT US ON OUR WEBSITE



[www.carbonbalancedpaper.com](http://www.carbonbalancedpaper.com)  
Resource Housing Reg. No. 2111