

neighbourhood news

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association

ISSUE 77: SUMMER 2017



CELEBRATING OUR 2,000TH NEW HOME

SEE PAGE 6

**SHARE IN THIS
OPPORTUNITY** PAGE 10

**RESIDENTS' ANNUAL
REPORT** PAGES 12 & 13

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.



FRANK

WELCOME FROM FRANK

Welcome to summer.

By the time you read this we will be at the sharp end of the general election. If you have a vote, use it, whoever you choose to vote for.

Housing features in all the party manifestos. Finally the penny is dropping with politicians - housing in this country is too expensive and we don't build enough of it. Housing associations, including West Kent, are doing their bit - producing nearly a third of the new homes built in England last year. Read inside about how we recently completed our 2,000th new home. And we are planning to build another 2,000 new homes over the next decade.

There are a number of articles in this edition about how we support individuals and communities - both young and old. And how you can help shape our digital future.

Enjoy your summer.

Frank Czarnowski
Chief Executive

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

OUR GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE IS PROVIDED BY G BRIDGLANDS LTD - SUPERVISOR SIMON BOWLES IS THE MAN YOU NEED TO TALK TO IF YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEMS, FEEDBACK OR COMPLIMENTS ABOUT THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE WORK.

The team will be working hard throughout the year to ensure the areas they operate in are kept clean, tidy and well maintained. This sort of work is often dependant on the weather so please be patient if they are slightly delayed.

Please remember that communal grass, parking areas and alleyways should not be used for storing your personal possessions. These areas must be kept clear to avoid personal possessions being mistaken for rubbish and cleared away.

When we are in your area:

Swanley: first two weeks of the month

Sevenoaks: third week of the month

Edenbridge: fourth week of the month

Dartford, Maidstone, Ashford and other areas: third and fourth week of the month.

All our estates receive the following service:

Grass cutting, hard surface clearance and individual gardens: ten cuts a year:

1 March - 31 December

Gullies: once a year:

19 November - 31 December

Hedges: two cuts a year:

January and July

Beds and borders: four times

a year: February, May, July and October



HELPING YOU TO BENEFIT

WE KNOW THAT ON-GOING CHANGES IN THE BENEFIT SYSTEM CONTINUE TO AFFECT SOME OF THE FAMILIES IN OUR HOMES AND WE ARE WORKING HARD TO HELP THEM MEET THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE.

Our aim is to help make work pay for young families, and we are doing that by providing support and advice as well as training opportunities.

When the government first capped benefits in August 2013, restricting income to £500 per week for out of work families, it affected 12 West Kent households.

In November last year the cap was further reduced to £385 per week, which had an impact on around 100 of our families.

As the case study here demonstrates, our aim is to provide support and guidance to help families deal with the cut in benefit by getting back into work - often ending up better off.

Our housing and communities teams have worked together to help these households understand the choices they have and the ways in which they can mitigate the loss in income.

“In essence the message is that we are here to help,” explained Financial Wellbeing Manager Mark Faithful.



“If you are worried about the changes and you aren't sure of the best way to tackle your new situation, just talk to us and we will take you through the options.”



STACEY'S STORY

Stacey, a single mother with five children, had her weekly benefits capped at £500 a week in August 2013.

As a result, her housing benefit was cut from the full rent of £126.60 to £78.96 per week, leaving her with £47.64 to pay each week.

Stacey's weekly outgoings are, on average, £400, which meant she was still able to pay her rent each week, but in November 2016 her benefits were capped at the new level of £20,000 a year (£384.62 per week).

This meant she needed to pay £126.10 each week into her rent account,

increasing her weekly outgoings to £480, a sum she clearly could not afford.

While she could apply for a discretionary housing payment, this would only support her for a limited period of time and might not cover the full shortfall.

West Kent's Financial Wellbeing Manager Mark Faithful visited Stacey before the new cuts came into force in November to explain how it would affect her.

“We discussed how working just 16 hours a week would entitle Stacey to working tax credit (WTC), which would increase her income and exempt her from the benefit cap,” Mark recalled.

“Our training and employment programme helped her find work in a local care home for 16 hours a week at minimum wage (£7.20 per hour), and her weekly wage of £115.20 is boosted by £76.37 from WTC, increasing her overall weekly income to £664.43.

“This includes uncapped housing benefit of £124.92, meaning she only has to pay £1.68 each week towards her rent. She is aware that her weekly outgoings may increase because of not getting free school meals for her two older children, but she also knows that this will be far outweighed by her increased weekly income of almost £300.”



STRATEGY REFLECTS CLEAR FOCUS

emerald
as life changes

WEST KENT'S SUPPORT PROVISION IS EXPANDING BEYOND OUR EMERALD SERVICE FOR THE OVER-FIFTIES, BUT WE STILL HAVE A CLEAR FOCUS ON MEETING THE NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE ACROSS THE AREA WE SERVE.

The new apartments we are now managing in the five recently opened Kent Excellent Homes For All schemes highlight the growing importance of providing modern, high quality homes for older people, and that focus is continuing.

"When we set out to review our Age a Positive Experience strategy, we soon found that to a large extent it was 'more of the same'," commented Rajinder Manger, West Kent's Head of Support.

"We launched the strategy in 2012 and five years on we are reviewing it to make sure it is fit to take us forward to 2022, but in essence the document is reflecting that not much has changed.

"People are living longer, older people are at risk of feeling isolated and we

need to help them live active, meaningful lives. We are refocusing parts of the strategy, but in essence we believe we are making good progress and there is no need for any radical new approach."

With more homes still needed for older people, we have made a good start on another new Emerald scheme at 58 - 88 Northview in Swanley.

We moved residents out of the four blocks of supported living flats, which were no longer fit for purpose, so that they could be demolished ahead of the developers, Chartway, starting work on a stunning new scheme.

This will create a large block of 22 one-bed and nine two-bed apartments that will be made available to people over

"People are living longer, older people are at risk of feeling isolated and we need to help them live active, meaningful lives"

the age 55 with a low level care or support need.

"This is another example of our determination to invest in new homes that are better suited to the current needs of our ageing population," explained Rajinder. "We were able to move tenants into alternative accommodation and the developers are now on target to hand over the new homes in March 2018.

NEW TEAM WILL SUPPORT ALL TENANTS

A revitalised approach to supporting tenants of all ages is being introduced by our Emerald and supported housing team.

As well as reviewing our Age a Positive Experience strategy, we have brought together a number of different groups to create a new, integrated Tenancy Support Team.

“This new team will be able to provide advice and guidance to a wide range of tenants across a broad range of issues, with the ultimate aim of helping tenants enjoy fulfilled and sustainable lives,” explained Rajinder Manger, West Kent’s Head of Support.

“This is a team that is not only growing in numbers, with a few positions still to be filled, but is also growing in expertise as we develop our skills and our knowledge base so that we can provide the right advice and signpost people to the best source of help.”

The team will pick up where our allocations team and our tenancy

“This is a very exciting time for us and we are looking forward to getting up to full strength and supporting tenants of all ages”

services officers would normally leave off and can offer support in areas including mental health, minor adaptations for disabled living and making sure tenants are receiving the right benefits.

“While we will provide immediate help, the new service is mainly about making sure the tenant knows where to go for longer-term support,” Rajinder explained. “We don’t have the resources to provide ongoing support but we have the contacts, the knowledge and the skills to put people in touch with the right agency.

The new arrangements bring together the care navigator, crisis support and Emerald support teams and extend the service to anyone requiring support, with a focus on high priority cases.

Our commitment to residents of our Emerald schemes for over 55s continues as we develop the service. We’ll still assist with the community hubs, but the wider role will allow us to help more older and vulnerable people with a diverse range of needs.

“This is a very exciting time for us and we are looking forward to getting up to full strength and supporting tenants of all ages, whatever their needs,” said Rajinder.



UPDATING LIFELINE

With a question mark raised over Kent County Council’s continued funding of the current hard-wired Lifeline systems last summer, we contacted all affected Emerald residents and explained that the system would shortly be removed.

Residents who told us they would still like a 24-hour emergency alarm service when the current system is switched off were given information about more modern Telecare equipment, ‘plug and play’ units that are more effective, more flexible and generally much more up to date.

While residents may have to contribute to the cost of the units, we believe it is critical to offer residents a tailored, up-to-date alternative ahead of any change in KCC’s policy.

“We are negotiating with Centra and approaching other providers about securing the best price for West Kent tenants who rent a ‘plug and play’ unit from them, and will work with all tenants to make the switchover as painless as possible,” said Rajinder.

Residents will be told in good time when their hardwired Lifeline system will be disconnected and no changes to the service will be made without advance notice.



RESIDENTS TAKE CENTRE STAGE

FAMILIES LIVING IN A DEVELOPMENT OF SIX NEW WEST KENT HOMES AT RYELAND WAY, PART OF THE BRIDGEFIELD DEVELOPMENT AT PARK FARM, ASHFORD, WERE GIVEN CHOCOLATES AND A GIFT CARD TO CELEBRATE THE LETTING OF OUR 2,000TH NEW BUILD.

And even as the families were cheering the 2,000th build, Chief Executive Frank Czarnowski promised: “And we are going to build another 2,000 new homes over the next decade.”

Housing director Deborah White, who met three of the families, said she was delighted to be able to celebrate such an important milestone with some of the people who had benefitted from West Kent’s commitment to building new homes.

“This is a really positive achievement,” she said. “We are dedicated to housing people and to giving them a safe and relaxed environment in which to thrive as a family.

“The homes here at Ryeland Way, which include our 2,000th new build, are a great addition to our stock. This is a mixed development which is fantastic as it helps to create a sustainable community - something else that is at the heart of our philosophy.”

While five of the impressive properties are rented, the sixth was built as a ‘shared ownership’ home, a way of getting onto the housing ladder by buying a share in a property and paying rent on the remaining portion. Shared owners can add to the amount they own over time.

“As the six homes were built as a block, we didn’t want to pick just one as the

2,000th, so we thought we would invite all the families to join the celebrations,” Deborah explained.

While the Ryeland Way scheme marks our 2,000th new build, our total stock has also been climbing and now stands at 7,000, despite the fact that many of the homes originally transferred in 1989 were lost to ‘right to buy’.

One of the new tenants, Sarah Holdstock, who lives with her partner Charlie Kingsnorth and children Courtney (9), Leyla (3) and one year-old Emilie, said she “absolutely loved” her three storey home.

“We were sharing with my mum before,” she said. “There were eight of us in the house and we shared the front room with the baby. It was incredibly crowded - to move in here with all this space was just amazing.”

The family was nominated to the home by Ashford Borough Council and moved in on the day they viewed it. “We couldn’t have asked for a better place to live, and West Kent has been incredibly helpful with the move and making sure we have settled in properly,” said Sarah.

“It’s is just a dream come true.”



Ryeland Way residents with West Kent’s Deborah White and Mike Perry (far right)

Cover picture shows Charlie Kingsnorth and (left) Sarah Holdstock with Deborah White, together with children (from left) Emilie, Leyla and Courtney.

OUR DIGITAL JOURNEY

WE ARE DOING OUR BIT TO MAKE LIFE QUICKER AND EASIER FOR TENANTS BY MOVING MORE OF OUR SERVICES ONLINE.

By making the most of technology, we believe we can give you more control and allow you to access more of our services - and your own rent account - at a time that suits you.

We took another step on our digital journey at the end of last year, when we launched our new website westkent.org. The website has a more modern look and feel and is compatible with smartphones and tablets, so you can access it on the go.

“The website offers a number of ways for tenants to use our services without needing to go through a member of staff first, including paying rent, logging a complaint or a compliment and reporting anti-social behaviour,” explained Jo Fox, Head of Customer Services.

“You can also access the My West Kent self service portal for West Kent tenants, which lets you do all this and more, including viewing your rent account, contacting your tenancy services officer and booking routine repairs.

“If you haven’t signed up for My West Kent, you can do so on the website just

by providing your name, date of birth and tenancy reference number.”

We will be expanding and improving the range of services you can access online throughout this year and into the future. Keep an eye on the website for new developments.

“The website offers a number of ways for tenants to use our services without needing to go through a member of staff first”



DOES IT WORK FOR YOU?

As we make the most of technology by providing more and more services online, we are committed to taking tenants with us on our digital journey.

To make sure this new way of doing things works for you, we are conducting a residents’ survey to understand how -

or even if - you access the internet, what you use it for and what help you may need to get online.

The results from this will be used to shape our online services, so it’s really important that we get responses from as many people as possible.

If you have been sent a survey either by email or post, please take the time to complete it and return it to us before 21 June.

CEDAR COURT PHOENIX RISES FROM THE ASHES

SUPPORT FROM A SEVENOAKS FUNDRAISER WITH IMPORTANT LINKS TO LEARNING DISABILITY CHARITIES HAS HELPED BOOST THE FACILITIES ON OFFER AT OUR NEW EDENBRIDGE HOUSING SCHEME FOR PEOPLE WITH SUCH DIFFICULTIES.

Cedar Court, rebuilt and refurbished following a fire, has been further enhanced by £5,000 worth of games and outdoor equipment thanks to the efforts of Athene Fenn.

The £1m refurbishment was part funded by the Homes and Communities Agency and Sevenoaks District Council, as well as by a significant investment from West Kent.

It features a carefully chosen colour scheme to help residents relax in their

new homes, while the communal garden benefits from 'sensory planting' - flowers that are good to touch and smell.

The building has been extended, modernised and refurbished to create a five-year, move-on scheme that will give residents the care and support they need to build skills for independent living.

It features eight spacious individual flats with separate bedrooms, together with a furnished apartment, a conservatory and a communal garden where residents will be able to enjoy games and use equipment after Athene was able to raise some external funding.

As well as being chairman of the Sevenoaks branch of Mencap, Athene chairs the Friends of Dartford Road, a home she helped set up in Sevenoaks which is run by charity MacIntyre and home to Athene's daughter Emma.



"It was seeing what a great job MacIntyre was doing at Dartford Road that prompted Sevenoaks Council to ask the charity to provide the care at Cedar Court," Athene explained.

"In the meantime I was able to use my connections to come up with some extra cash to provide the extras that I knew would help make Cedar Court a real home. It's an impressive facility, I know many of the residents living there and I'm delighted to have been able to help in a small way."

WARMER, SAFER, CHEAPER

We've made life warmer, safer and cheaper for the residents of Gilchrist Cottages in Weald, near Sevenoaks.

The six properties were built in the 1930s and are steel framed, with a small and ineffective cavity gap on the ground floor. Because they are remote from a gas supply, they are hard to heat and suffered in the past from condensation and damp, as well as being energy inefficient.

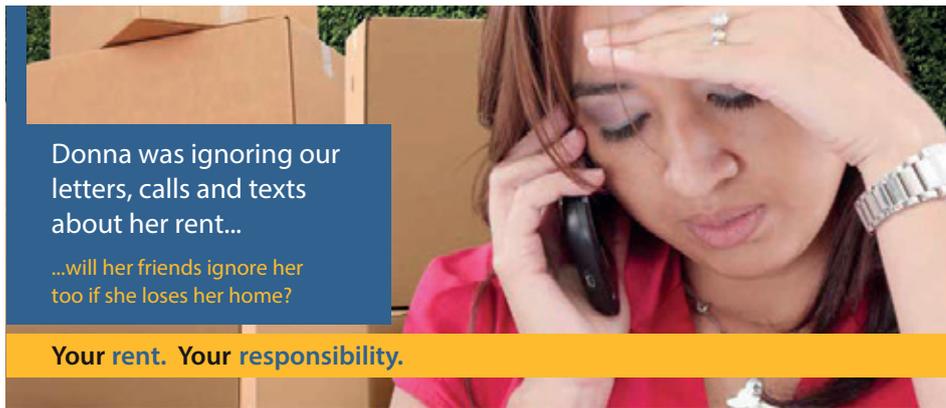
The homes were small and did not meet modern space standards for what were built as three-bedroom homes.

After deciding that the homes need to be made warmer and more energy efficient, we consulted the tenants on plans to

- move the bathroom upstairs
- reduce to two bedrooms
- insulate under floor areas, infilling the cavity walls on both floors
- install new, more efficient, air source heating
- install a new kitchen and bathroom
- upgrade and renew the electrics
- remove asbestos.



The works took just over eight months to complete and involved moving the tenants out of each home for around two months.



Donna was ignoring our letters, calls and texts about her rent...

...will her friends ignore her too if she loses her home?

Your rent. Your responsibility.

YOUR RENT, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

WE WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU CAN CONTINUE TO LIVE IN THE HOME YOU LOVE, AND WILL DO ALL WE CAN TO HELP YOU DO THAT, BUT AS A LAST RESORT WE WILL NOT HESITATE TO TAKE RECOVERY ACTION IF YOU DON'T PAY YOUR RENT.

While that new pair of shoes may look tempting, make sure the rent is paid before splashing the cash - and talk to us if things start to get difficult.

Rent is due weekly or monthly in advance, and your rent account should not fall into arrears between payments unless you receive housing benefit, which is paid in arrears

If you fall behind we will get in touch by phone, text, email or letter - and in more serious cases we could even visit you at home, with the possibility of legal action to follow. Court costs start at £325 but could reach £500, on top of the rent you owe.

The story to the right highlights how hard we will work to help you if you run into problems, but we need you to get in touch, do your bit to pay off the debt and work with us to avoid finding yourself in court and your family out of a home.

It's important that you contact us straight away to make the best use of

the help on offer. We will do all we can to offer guidance and support to everyone who asks for it and have already had some great success stories this year, helping tenants keep their homes by working with us and other supporting agencies to tackle problems and clear rent accounts.

The alternative makes for less cheery reading. Already this year we have made 17 possession claims to court, applied for 15 warrants to evict and have evicted 14 households, including families with children.

We want our tenants to maintain their tenancies, but that means paying your rent when it is due. Legal action is a last resort, and is almost always avoidable, but we will take it if we have to.

Our Income team is happy to discuss any concerns you may have about paying your rent, so call 01732 749400 or email incomeandlegal@wkha.org.uk

MANDY'S AMAZING JOB

When Mandy Davington, one of West Kent's income recovery officers, discovered that one of our vulnerable tenants was struggling to keep up with his rent payments, she worked hard to help him resolve the issues.

It took time to resolve the young man's issues but in the end she helped him find the way to clear his rent account and keep his home, prompting a heartfelt letter of thanks from the tenant's brother.

He thanked Mandy for going "above and beyond" to help his brother resolve issues around his housing benefits.

In his words he said Mandy was "a credit; she has done an amazing job, she is kind, effective and efficient - she has made all the difference to my brother's life - and in short is amazing. Not many people or organisations would have done as much as Mandy to go that extra mile."

The brother was so delighted with the help Mandy had given the tenant that he arranged for a huge bouquet of flowers to be delivered to her.



MAKE SURE YOU SHARE IN THIS OPPORTUNITY

AFFORDABLE HOMES IN THE HEART OF THE CITY WILL BE ON OFFER WHEN OUR SHARED OWNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN DOVER STREET, CANTERBURY, IS UNVEILED NEXT YEAR.

The redeveloped site within walking distance of the city centre - close to the Odeon Cinema - will provide 20 one and two-bedroom apartments, all of them available for shared ownership. It is called Marlowe Place in honour of 16th century poet and writer Christopher Marlowe, who lived not far from the site.

Shared ownership is a scheme that allows the buyer to take out a mortgage on part of the property and rent the rest from us. The buyer then has the option of increasing the share they own if they wish to, a process known as 'staircasing'.

We are developing new shared ownership sites as part of our determination to

achieve the growth plans set out in our strategic objectives.

Our business plan says we will complete 2,137 new homes for rent and home ownership by 2025 and will develop and sell properties to help pay for our new affordable homes. In the shorter term, we have a target of completing 987 new homes by 2021 - an average of 200 per year.

The Dover Street development is due to be finished by June 2018 and the flats will be available through Help to Buy, the government-backed scheme that aims to help people take their first step on the housing ladder.

With continuing demand for new homes across Kent, we have ambitious plans to expand our building programme across Kent and Medway, but that means finding new land.

"We want to meet the growing need for new homes and we are always keen to

"We want to meet the growing need for new homes and we are always keen to hear from anyone with land for sale"

hear from anyone with land for sale," explained West Kent Development Manager Kitty Mortimer. Please get in touch by emailing land@wkha.org.uk

More information on the Dover Street homes will be available on our website at westkent.org in due course, and anyone wishing to express an interest at this early stage should email sales@wkha.org.uk It is West Kent's policy to give priority to people who have a local connection - and all potential buyers need to register with Help to Buy SE at www.helptobuyese.org.uk

While the Canterbury scheme is a year or so away, we have other shared ownership homes for sale at a number of locations, including Headcorn and Ashford.

In Headcorn, we will shortly be offering seven three-bedroom and 14 two-bedroom houses in Grigg Lane and four three-bedroom houses and four two-bedroom apartments in Lenham Road.

There will be six two-bedroom apartments in a development at Ryeland Way, Ashford, also available for shared ownership and which can be reserved off-plan now.



FINGERS CROSSED FOR DIGITAL SUCCESS

THE TEAM THAT LOOKS AFTER OUR SPLENDID NEW SELF-SERVICE PORTAL MY WEST KENT AND RUNS ALL OUR VITAL ICT SERVICES HAS BEEN SHORTLISTED FOR A TOP AWARD.

The ICT team will be hoping for success when the judges announce the results of the Central Service Team of the Year category in this year's Housing Heroes Awards, due to be held in Manchester at the Housing 2017 event.

The close-knit, seven-strong team, headed by Claire Davidson, looks after all our information technology needs by providing and maintaining our systems and taking our ICT strategy forward.

Among other areas, the team focuses on the resilience of our infrastructure, value for money, data protection and helping to make sure our technology supports the way we want to work with, and for, our customer base. In 2016 the team completed 62 individual projects, including upgrading the operating system, launching the new website and putting more services online.

The team supported our 'right first time' ambitions by providing training that

"There is a high percentage of female staff, and some of the team had to learn an entirely new set of skills after moving from other areas"



Back row: (left to right) Hayden, Rex, Claire, Sareena. Front row: (left to right) Shirley, Francis, Holly

helped staff make the best use of the technology available, and various value for money initiatives have saved the business £75,000.

The ICT team has only worked together for the past year or so, following a restructure in 2015 that saw only one junior member remain in post. New Head of ICT Claire introduced a new ethos and way of working that has proved inspirational to the generally young team.

"There is a high percentage of female staff, and some of the team had to learn an entirely new set of skills after moving from other areas, but all have drive, enthusiasm, dedication and an ability and interest in ICT and in people," Claire said.

"There is real team spirit here, with everyone encouraged to share their skill sets so we can deliver as a team," she went on. In performance terms, the team supported the business by delivering 99.8% 'up time' in 2016 compared with consistently lower performance in previous years.

"I am extremely proud of my team, which consists to a large extent of young trainees and apprentices or people who worked in other departments and had to learn new skills, while bringing their knowledge from previous roles," she added.

"There is real team spirit here, with everyone encouraged to share their skill sets so we can deliver as a team"

YOUR RESIDENT ANNUAL REPORT

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

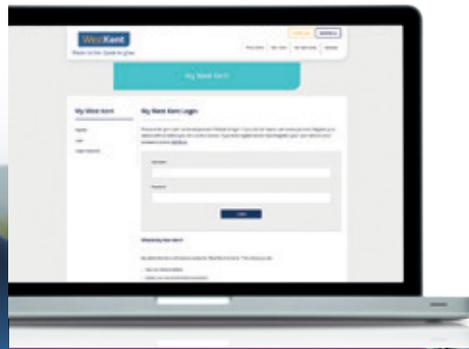
is now available to read on our website!

HERE'S A SNIPPET OF WHAT'S INSIDE...



Welcome

Read our Chairman's review of the year gone by and our aims for the coming year.



My West Kent

We launched our new website in December with a clearer design with less text so you can find what you want easily. You can get information quickly and complete various activities online, any time, without having to visit our offices or call us.

New Homes

We took handover of 254 homes, which is the highest ever number of homes in a single year. Another big landmark occurred when we completed the building of our 2000th new home.



Community

During 2016 we brought together all our community work into a new team and agreed a new Communities Strategy setting out the key aims of our community work. We'll work towards understanding and tackling community needs that aren't already met using existing resources, and our work will be guided by a clear idea of the difference we want to make.

RESIDENTS' ANNUAL REPORT 2017



WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

Residents' Annual Report 2017

MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

Missed appointments cost you and us money!

Not being in when we call to carry out a booked repair wastes time and money, and delays our ability to get all our repairs done. If we have your number we text you twice to remind you to be at home to let us in at the right time. If you miss your appointment, we will charge you £20. We try not to miss appointments, but if we do, we'll pay you £20.

A number of factors can cause a home to fail the Decent Homes Standard, and at the end of 2016 we had 52 such properties. Our performance target is to have no homes failing the standard for more than 12 months. There were 14 of these at the end of December 2016 and work to rectify this was planned with the tenants.

The number of homes that aren't energy efficient reduced to 14 at the end of 2016 compared to 19, a year before. Ten of these will be completed during 2017 but there are four properties where tenants do not want us to do the improvement works.

The average cost of a new kitchen was

£5,324



The average cost of a new bathroom was

£3,371



on average we spent

£2,077

on repairs and maintenance in each home in 2016

New for 2017!

We'll carry out an annual 'Property MOT' to check the condition of your home and carry out small repair jobs that are our responsibility there and then, instead of booking an appointment to come back at a later date. We'll take photos recording the condition to help us establish things like kitchens and bathrooms will need to be renewed.

128
central heating systems

159
new kitchens

33
window replacements

134
new bathrooms

210
new doors

370
new boilers

18
new roofs

Residents' Annual Report 2017

TENANCY SUPPORT

We want to work with you so you can enjoy your home and keep to your agreement with us. To help with that we can offer you a range of support, from helping you into work, to sorting out a problem with a neighbour.

During 2016 over 800 residents used support services such as care navigator, crisis Retaining Opportunities. We also completed 554 tenancy catch up visits. We collaborated on local financial wellbeing workshops and advice on benefits. We also funded a scheme to support tenants who were under-occupying to downsize.

"We want to work closely with households affected by benefit changes, supporting them to understand the effects and make choices about how to cope better."

You may be one of the 86 West Kent households (in 2016) whose housing benefit entitlement reduced or stopped due to government changes. We know this number will

800
residents used support services

554
tenancy catch up visits completed

£86

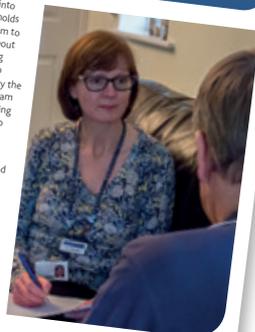
householders' benefit entitlement reduced or stopped due to government changes

grow as further changes to benefits come into force. We want to work closely with households affected by benefit changes, supporting them to understand the effects and make choices about how to cope better. Our Financial Well-being Manager has helped a number of people into benefit cap of £20,000 a year. Our income team had great success in maximising income, getting the housing benefit.

Read about Stacy, a single mother with five children whose weekly benefits were capped and almost £300.

Read more.

We also support tenants to deal with neighbour disputes, to find the right home when they need to move, to get the other services and help they need such as for mental health issues, adaptations that keep people living independently in their homes for longer, and lots more.



To read the full report and view videos and other articles go to westkent.org



No internet access?

Why not visit one of our offices to view the report online. Or your local library has internet access.

If you need any help or assistance please call West Kent on 01732 749400.



Beryl (left) and mum Amy

"We moved in at the same time and it has made a huge difference to us both. It's lovely being here with mum"

AN EXCELLENT JOB ALL ROUND

IT'S BEEN A BUSY YEAR FOR OUR EMERALD TEAM AS THE HUGE AMOUNT OF WORK PUT IN BY PARTNERS INCLUDING WEST KENT HAS SEEN THE KENT EXCELLENT HOMES FOR ALL SCHEME REACH ITS IMPRESSIVE CLIMAX.

Five supported housing schemes across the county have delivered 218 extra care apartments - and we have been awarded the contract to manage all of them. With two more schemes providing supported accommodation for adults, the total number of new homes now available is 238.

The five schemes, in Dartford, Ramsgate, Hawkhurst, Tenterden and Dover, provide

supported living for people who are over the age of 55, have a care need and are on the local authority housing register.

They were all built through the Kent Excellent Homes for All private finance initiative by Kent EHFA ProjectCo thanks to a partnership led by Kent County council that included West Kent, local district councils, Dalmore Capital and Galliford Try.

The result is a stunning line up of new buildings that feature one and two-bedroom apartments, each with a spacious lounge, kitchen and accessible bathroom and either a balcony or a patio area.

Communal facilities on offer at each of the five locations include a restaurant, lounge, bar, laundry, gym/dance studio, bathroom with hoist, hair salon and

activities/computer suite. The flats are large and well equipped and the schemes are fully wheelchair accessible, with good storage for mobility scooters.

Built by Galliford Try Partnerships, the schemes are being managed by West Kent under a 25-year contract, while Galliford Try Facilities Management will repair and maintain the buildings and grounds.

Strawberry Hill, Dartford, Scheme Manager Lorna Elcock spoke for all five schemes when she said the aim was "to help people live as independently as possible but with the comfort of knowing that there is help available when they need it".

Bowles Lodge, Hawkhurst has a particular claim to fame in that it is, unusually, home to mother and daughter

tenants. Beryl Finch, who is 77, loves the fact that she can keep an eye on her mother, Amy Chamberlain, an impressive 96. While they each have their own apartment, they are often seen together in the communal areas.

“Mum lived in Bexhill but I moved to Hawkhurst with my job 33 years ago,” said Beryl. “After dad died I found I was going backwards and forwards like a fiddler’s elbow and mum was struggling to cope on her own.

“I put her name down for Bowles Lodge while the old building was still here and then later applied for my own apartment. We moved in at the same time and it has made a huge difference to us both. It’s lovely being here with mum.”

The new scheme at Strawberry Hill, Dartford, hit the headlines when a picture of one of the tenants and his son, taken by photographer Sarah Bourne, came third in a national photography

competition to showcase the value of housing.

The iconic picture summed up the warm, relaxed atmosphere of the new schemes, and 92 year-old Fred Fordham said he was delighted by his new surroundings and the new friends he had already made at Strawberry Hill.

Son David, meanwhile, commented: “It’s a joy to see dad settling in to his apartment so well, making new friends and being so well cared for.

Marcia Clarke, Bowles Lodge scheme manager at the time of the opening, explained our decision to allow pets at the five extra care schemes had been a response to the strong bonds created in many cases.

“I have known situations in the past when elderly people who really needed to be in care refused to move out of their home because they would have had

to leave their much-loved pet behind,” she said.

“As well as preventing that kind of issue, this policy brings a lot of happiness to people like our resident Eileen Thornton, who would otherwise be on their own.”

Spires in Tenterden and Beeches, Dover are still waiting for their formal opening but already providing welcoming new homes to Emerald residents.



Eileen and Gizmo

DIGGING LIFE AT HOLLYBUSH COURT

There’s no better way to stay feeling young and healthy than to keep busy - and Hollybush Court, Sevenoaks, resident Maureen Nurse proves that every day.

Maureen, a sprightly 77 but looking much younger, is mad about gardening and cooking and puts her skills to use



by getting involved and encouraging others to do the same.

Maureen has certainly done wonders for the courtyard gardens at Hollybush Court as well as helping other residents with the plots that some have outside their windows.

After suggesting that the scheme should throw open its doors and show off its gardens at an open day, Maureen and scheme manager Vanessa Nicholls have planned an event for some time in June.

A £300 grant from the Linda Hogan Community Fund, available through West Kent’s Communities team, helped pay for more gardening equipment and

plants, and refreshments will be available on the day.

“We like to encourage our residents to keep active and Maureen is a great example of what individuals can achieve by getting involved,” said Vanessa.

Maureen commented: “The garden is very important to me and features highly in my life. To be able to continue this passion by tending the flower border at Hollybush Court is a bonus to living here.

“I’m convinced that keeping busy helps me stay well and feel good. When you are gardening, there is always the expectation of tomorrow.”

YOUTH FEST PACKS A PUNCH

FROM ALCOHOL ADVICE TO YOGA, VIA GRAFFITI, RAP MUSIC AND EXOTIC PETS, YOUNG PEOPLE IN EDENBRIDGE HAD PLENTY TO KEEP THEM BUSY AT THE FIRST YOUTH FEST EVENT HELD AT HOUSE IN THE EDEN CENTRE IN APRIL.

More than 70 young people aged between 11 and 19 took advantage of the free event, which combined new things to do and try, inspirational speakers and a chance to pick up useful information.

While many boosted their fitness with a spin on the smoothie bike provided free for the day by Sevenoaks District Council, others learned about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse from Andy Watson, a former user turned

inspirational speaker who gives talks to schools and at other events.

“Another activity that was surprisingly popular was yoga, with lots of young people having a go and really enjoying it,” said West Kent Lead Youth Worker Roxanne Frost, who organised the event with colleague Cheryl Banks.

Other activities included graffiti workshops, lots of music and a chance to get up close and personal with snakes,

“We wanted young people in Edenbridge to realise they should follow their dreams and work hard to achieve them”

a bearded dragon and other reptiles thanks to HJW Exotics.

While Reach Out provided mental health advice and Get It was on hand to deliver advice on sexual health, other special guests delivered inspiration.

Locally born rapper Daniel Andrews, now achieving nationwide success under his stage name of Tierz, was at the event with DJ and producer Macky Gee and other guests including Harry Shotta. Young boxer Lewis Syrett was also at the event, talking to youngsters about preparing for his first professional bout while taking his turn on the smoothie bike.

“We wanted young people in Edenbridge to realise they should follow their dreams and work hard to achieve them,” explained Cheryl, while Roxanne added: “The young people seemed really interested in the workshops and I’m certain everybody who came along learned something, as well as having a lot of fun.”

Local companies including Bradford Electrical and Champion Timber supported the event.

With West Kent now providing youth services across the Sevenoaks district on behalf of Kent County Council, further Youth Fest events will be rolled out across the summer.



Cheryl (left) and Roxanne



Left to right, Ryan, Olivia, Cheryl, Kate and Ben

HOUSE COMES HOME WITH A PRIZE

OUR GROUNDBREAKING HOUSE PROJECT AT EDENBRIDGE HAS BEEN AWARDED A TOP REGIONAL PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE.

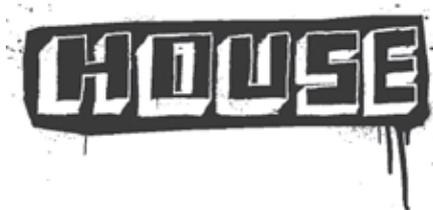
HOUSE beat four other youth projects to win the Excellence in Youth Involvement category of the annual awards made by Tpas, the national tenant engagement organisation.

HOUSE is renowned for involving young people in life in Edenbridge through the work of the town's youth forum, and they were there in force at the presentation event at the Wembley Hilton Hotel.

HOUSE Young Volunteer, Youth Forum Member and Kent Youth County Council Member Olivia Williams was joined by Youth Forum Chairman and Young Volunteer Ryan Everett to collect the award, accompanied by Leader in Charge Cheryl Banks, Youth Worker Ben Reynolds and West Kent's Youth Services Manager Kate Craib.

Community Development Manager Mark Murison said the Tpas award recognised the enormous impact that HOUSE and the Edenbridge Youth Forum continued to make on the local community.

"Through the youth forum set up as part of its remit, HOUSE has given young



people in Edenbridge a real voice," he said. "It has made HOUSE not just a youth club but an asset to the whole community.

"The principle of working with the young people rather than imposing our ideas on them is very much at the forefront of the youth work we are now beginning to implement in South Darenth and Horton Kirby, West Kingsdown and New Ash Green," added Kate Craib.

"Consulting the young people is more than just a tick-box exercise in Edenbridge," said Mark. "The youth forum has made a name for itself as a powerhouse of ideas and initiatives, and it was great that Tpas recognised that."

As the winner of the southern award, HOUSE will go forward to the national awards ceremony in July.

INTRODUCING: OLIVIA WILLIAMS

Olivia Williams explains how HOUSE has come to make such a big difference to her life.

Has HOUSE positively affected your personal development?

HOUSE has brought me out of my shell, I used to be shy and wouldn't speak and I didn't have many friends, but now HOUSE has made me confident and able to express my opinions.

What opportunities have you discovered as a result of being part of HOUSE?

I was asked to attend youth forum meetings, and then youth advisory group meetings. This led to me helping out the community and getting involved in opportunities like a graffiti project and attending the 2017 Tpas awards ceremony.

What are you doing now?

I represent Sevenoaks in the Kent Youth County Council and attend HOUSE as a young volunteer, helping to organise events like Youth Fest in April, all while studying for Level 3 Animal Management at Hadlow College.

What are your future aspirations?

I would like to do more for the community and represent Edenbridge and Sevenoaks on a higher level, and maybe as a Member of the London Council. I am also keen to work with animals, perhaps as a vet or a behaviourist. I want to see other young people achieve things and feel the sense of accomplishment that I enjoy.

RUBBISH WAY TO SPEND MONEY

GETTING ON FOR £100,000 WAS SPENT LAST YEAR ON CLEARING UP BEHIND THOUGHTLESS INDIVIDUALS WHO DUMPED RUBBISH ON OUR LAND.

To prevent the need for such costly clear up operations in future, we have decided to clamp down on 'fly tipping' - and have bought mobile CCTV cameras to help in the fight.

The cameras will be placed in 'hot spot' areas where fly tipping is a problem and have already helped us catch and identify individuals misusing bin stores or dumping large unwanted goods.

Those people were given the opportunity to remove the item before further action was taken, but we work closely with local authorities that will impose fines of up to £200 if the individual does not cooperate and remove their waste.

"Last year West Kent spent £86,000 removing dumped rubbish on our land, and that's a real waste of money that could have been better spent on improving our homes," commented



Community Safety Officer
Mandie Stallard.

"Most of our tenants dispose of their waste in the correct way and so we want to educate the ones who don't and reduce the amount of money we spend clearing up behind them each year."

BOOK YOURSELF IN AS A VOLUNTEER

We've been doing our bit to help youngsters learn to love books by supporting Kent County Council (KCC)'s 2017 Summer Reading Challenge.

The challenge is an annual event that aims to inspire new readers across the county, but to be successful it needs an army of volunteers to share their passion for books.

Our success in organising community events and in inspiring volunteers to

support our work led KCC to award us the contract to recruit volunteers for their libraries and archives service.

We are responsible for recruiting volunteers for a wide range of support roles across the county's libraries, but from mid-April onwards all new volunteers under the age of 25 begin by helping staff prepare for the ever-popular reading challenge.

In the summer, the 'reading champions' take centre stage, supporting events linked to the challenge, promoting library stock and then encouraging children to

read the six books that will see them complete the challenge.

Volunteers also help staff give incentives to the children, keep a note of how many books they read and use their creative skills to put together displays promoting the challenge.

We would love to hear from anyone reading Neighbourhood News who feels volunteering as a reading champion would be a fun way to gain new experiences and boost their CV. Just get in touch with Pauline Smith on 01732 749426.



ENJOY A NEIGHBOURLY SUMMER

EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE AND SECURE AND LIVE PEACEFULLY IN THEIR OWN HOME. HERE ARE SOME TOP TIPS FOR BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOUR.

■ Introduce yourself

Say hello, and get to know your neighbours.

■ Respect their life style

If your neighbours work nights, quiet mornings will be important for them. If they have young children, quiet evenings will be very important. Tell them about your lifestyle too. If you do a lot of noisy work, or if your teenage son plays the drums, let them know and mention that if it's getting too loud, they shouldn't hesitate to let you know.

■ Be aware of shared walls

If you're in a terrace or semi-detached house, put noisy household appliances such as washing machines and tumble dryers - even TVs and speakers - away from shared walls if possible.

■ Practice polite parking

When you park your vehicle, be sure not to block anyone's access, or make them have to pull out of a very tight spot. Only use your allocated parking spaces and ensure your visitors park considerately and only where allocated. Don't over-rev the engine of your car or motorcycle early in the morning or late at night. Park in front of your home, not

your neighbour's. Avoid slamming your doors or shining your headlights into your neighbour's windows late at night.

■ Control your dog

Keep your dog on a lead if it has a habit of running off and make sure you clean up after it. If you have problems controlling your dog's barking or whining, consider seeking advice from your local vet or a local animal organisation.

■ Alert your neighbours to parties

If you're planning a party, be sure to give your neighbours plenty of warning, letting them know when it's going to start and how long you expect it to go on. Leave them a telephone number to contact if they need to ask you to turn it down.

■ Keep your garden tidy

Mow your lawn regularly and keep your flowers, trees and bushes trimmed.

■ Put rubbish out on the right day

Only put your rubbish out on the day it's due for collection. If you accidentally miss the collection, bring it back onto your property and try to contain it well.



It might be music to your ears, but to others it's just loud noise

HAVE A WORD WITH YOURSELF

SHHH

To discuss issues with anti-social behaviour contact West Kent
Customer Services: 01732 749400 or 0800 1691122
E: enquiries@wkha.org.uk W: www.westkent.org

WestKent
Places to live. Space to grow.

Rubbish can attract vermin, insects, and other pests, and is also unsightly.

■ Talk to your neighbours!

Above all, keep them in the loop. Remember if anything you are planning to do may affect them, minimise it and let them know in advance.

■ Be aware of your surroundings as well as theirs

Even if you're not in a neighbourhood watch community, keep your eye on anyone you don't know acting suspiciously around your neighbour's property. When in doubt, call the police on 101 for a non emergency or 999 for emergencies.

■ Children playing

Children playing in the street is not a bad thing, but they can sometimes disturb your neighbours. Consider how the noise may affect your neighbours and whether there is a safer place to play, such as a park or skateboard area. Make sure children don't harass, intimidate or disturb others.



EXPERIENCE REWARDED WITH NEW CHALLENGE

OUR PAST SUCCESS IN HELPING TO IMPROVE THE LIVES AND LIFE CHOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE HAS SEEN US TAKE ON A WIDER ROLE ACROSS SEVENOAKS.

With the Edenbridge Youth Forum going from strength to strength and our various 8-12s Projects continuing to deliver great results, we have been asked by Kent County Council to deliver youth services across the whole of the district.

“The contract is based on us delivering services to young people that improve their well-being, give them new skills and encourage them to get involved in community development projects,” explained Youth Services Manager Kate Craib.

“We are tackling this exciting new challenge using the tried and tested model of working in outreach settings as well as in local communities and as always we are determined to give young people a voice and help them to address local issues.”

That approach reflects the success of the youth forum that has done much to tackle issues in Edenbridge, where young people have led the way in brightening the approaches to both the town’s stations.

Kate and her team are working with parish councils in South Darenth and Horton Kirby, West Kingsdown and New Ash Green to reach out to local young people and build services that reflect their ideas of what is needed locally.

“We have been holding four sessions a week to talk to local young people and involve them so that we can come up with a programme that will boost their skills and confidence, tackle anti-social behaviour and engage them in positive and worthwhile activities,” Kate added.

Local teens have already been attending a new outreach session at Hope Church, Mill Lane, Bat and Ball on Monday evenings between 6pm and 8.15pm and new faces are always welcome.

Other projects in the pipeline include working with schools and setting up a work experience programme that will allow pupils to work with us for a time.

We are also devising an online training programme focusing on young people and the team is continuing to develop new initiatives with the Edenbridge Youth Forum such as the successful Youth Fest event held recently.

PUTTING A BOUNCE IN THEIR STEP

WITH OUR YOUTH WORK CONTINUING TO EXPAND, GENEROUS FUNDRAISERS CHIPPED IN TO GIVE YOUNGSTERS AT ONE OF OUR PROJECTS THE CHANCE TO TRY SOMETHING NEW.

The West Kingsdown 8-12s Project, one of several such groups we run, plans to use a donation of just over £2,000 from a local golf club to fund outings including a trip to a trampoline park in Maidstone.

The excited youngsters, who meet each week at West Kingsdown Primary School, were handed the cheque by Paul Salvage, who raised the cash during his year as captain of Redlibbets Golf Club, based in New Ash Green.

Golfers at the club held a number of fund-raising events, including a charity day in September and an Easter raffle, collecting an impressive £2,027 in the process.

Paul, whose year as captain came to an end in March, said the West Kent initiative “does a great job” - and he should know.

Not only were Paul’s children all involved with New Ash Green 8-12s, but his wife Kim now works as one of our 8-12s project leaders after joining the team as a volunteer.

“The 8-12s Project does a great job inspiring confidence in young people and helping them learn new skills, make friends and have fun,” Paul said. “All three of our children really benefited from it, particularly by becoming more confident, and so I decided that I would name it as my charity for the year.”

Around 20 young people attend the West Kingsdown 8-12s Project every week in term time, enjoying craft activities, team games, sports, workshops and visits from organisations and people ranging from the fire brigade to exotic animal enthusiasts.

“I’m amazed at how much everyone contributed and I’m delighted that we have been able to help”

We also run 8-12s groups in Swanley, New Ash Green, Dunton Green and Sevenoaks, with around 120 youngsters benefiting from the activities on offer.

Children are referred to the project for a number of reasons, often because they are experiencing bullying or isolation, lack confidence or would simply benefit from learning new skills.

Paul, who said at the start of the year that the initiative “gets children out of the house, gives them opportunities to achieve new goals and boosts their self-confidence and social skills,” said he had been overwhelmed by the support of his fellow golfers.

“I’m amazed at how much everyone contributed and I’m delighted that we have been able to help,” he concluded. Paul also thanked Karoline Longhurst, one of the parents at West Kingsdown, for her support with the fund-raising activities.

While core funding for the 8-12s Project is provided by BBC Children in Need and the Big Lottery, donations from groups such as the golf club play a vital part in supporting trips out and other activities.



PUTTING LOCAL FAMILIES IN THE PICTURE



YOUNG FAMILIES ENJOYED AN EASTER HOLIDAY TREAT WHEN THEY WERE INVITED TO A PRIVATE SHOWING OF DISNEY'S BEAUTY & THE BEAST AT THE STAG CINEMA, SEVENOAKS, AS OUR GUESTS.

The invitation was designed as a way of getting to know local families with children, traditionally not an easy group to involve in the work we do.

In the event the innovative idea proved so successful that it was quickly oversubscribed, with a second event having to be hastily arranged for the following day to cope with the response.

The idea came from our Resident Involvement Team, which is charged with getting feedback on our services from as many groups as possible, including young families. The team wants to get people involved so they can tell us how we can improve what we do.

While families were able to simply enjoy the film, they were given a stylish reusable shopping bag containing



Corinne Beech and Steph Mitchell (centre) with Michelle Wood and son Toby



The Fuller family from Edenbridge

information about how they could get involved and invited to complete a form asking for more information.

“There is no pressure on anyone, but we hope that by giving people an idea of the range of ways they can make sure their voices are heard in future, some of them will choose to get involved,” explained Resident Engagement Officer Corinne Beech. “We had a fantastic response from the very people we were trying to reach, which was very rewarding for us.

“All the children were really excited about the chance to see the film; one even arrived on the Sunday dressed as Belle, one of the characters.”

Steph Mitchell, a member of our customer services team, was also on hand to answer any questions from people as they gathered ahead of the screening, and was kept busy with various queries about tenancies, repairs and other issues.

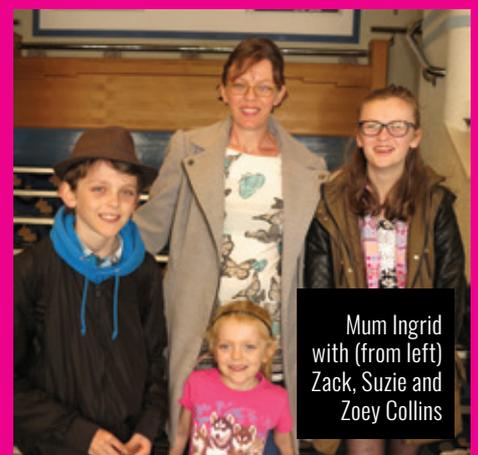
The ‘active participation’ event also marked the launch of our new resident involvement strategy, which sets out how West Kent will continue to involve as

many people as possible in providing feedback on the way we deliver homes and build communities.

The families were full of praise for an initiative that gave people who might not have been able to take a young family to the cinema the chance to see one of the most popular current releases completely free of charge.

Michelle Wood, who was at the event with son Toby, 11, said it was a really good opportunity to meet people as well as a chance to do something that normally she would have found it difficult to afford. “We missed out when it was only one day, but fortunately managed to get on the list for the second showing,” she added.

Also looking forward to the film was Ingrid Collins and her children Zoey (14), Zack (11) and six year-old Suzie, while Carol Fuller, from Edenbridge, highlighted the problems facing most larger families when it came to days out. Accompanied by her five children Kirsty, Rebecca, Abigail, Michelle and Michael - and with a sixth at home - she pointed out that such treats normally cost “an arm and a leg”.



Mum Ingrid with (from left) Zack, Suzie and Zoey Collins

“Even a discount would have been good, but to be able to enjoy the film for free is really great,” said Carol, who said she would be interested in signing up as a mystery shopper if she had enough spare time.

PROPERTY MOTS WILL DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS

A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE, THEY SAY - AND IT'S THE SAME WITH YOUR HOME.

Our new property MOT service is an innovative way to make sure your house is in good working order, much the same as its namesake checks that your car is safe to drive.

During the property MOT, we will check the condition of your home, including your kitchen and bathroom, so we can keep an eye on it over time and spot when it needs replacing.

The engineer will inspect each room and the outside parts we are responsible for. The good news is that if they notice a small repair that needs doing, such as tightening a loose window handle, they will try to do it there and then, rather than asking you to make an appointment.

Larger repairs will be reported back to the office and we will get in touch with you to arrange a suitable appointment.

By doing an annual inspection and catching small repairs before they turn into big ones, we'll be able to maintain your home more effectively and with minimal disruption to you.

We'll need to take photos of the parts of your home that we look after so we can compare them from year to year, but we won't take photos of you, your family, or your personal belongings.

Property MOTs will be carried out throughout the year by a member of our iNHomes team or by someone from our partner Brenwards.



iNHomes engineer Steve Waghorn

We'll write to you about a month before yours is due to offer you an appointment. It's important that we check what needs doing at your home, so if the appointment's not convenient, please let us know so we can arrange another one.

"Our new property MOT service is an innovative way to make sure your house is in good working order"

It's good to share...

Are you looking to own your own place?
Take a first step on the ladder with a West Kent
shared ownership home.

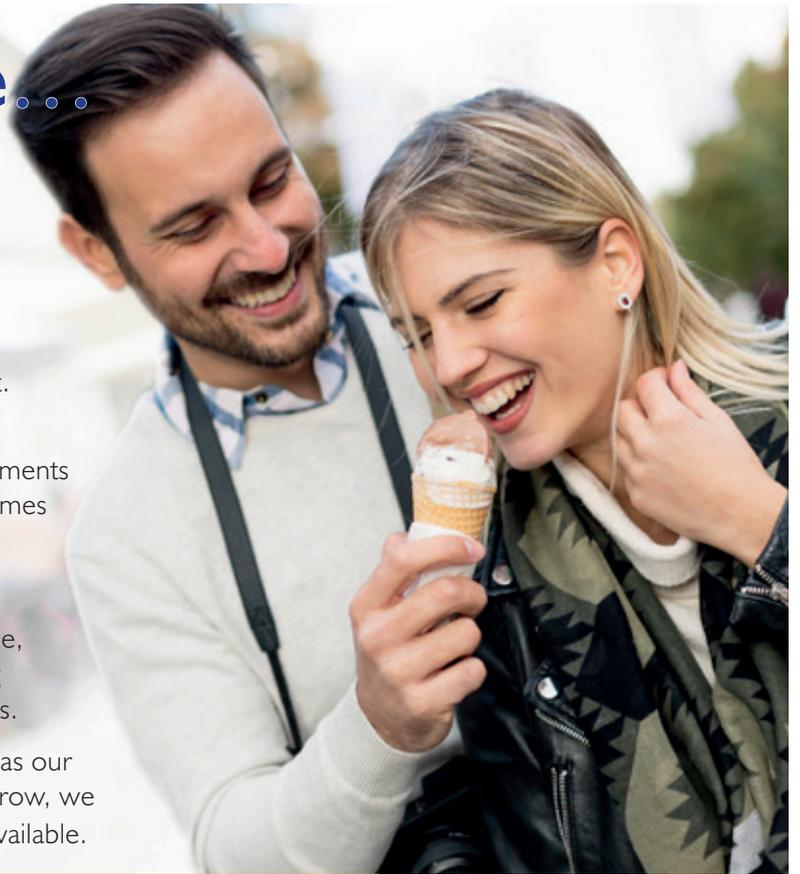
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homes throughout Kent and Medway. Our shared
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on part of your home and pay rent towards the rest.
As your income grows, you can buy a bigger share.

We will shortly be offering 'shared ownership' apartments
in Canterbury city centre – and we have other schemes
across the county. Get in touch to find out more at

westkent.org

As well as housing families, couples and single people,
West Kent manages a number of supported housing
schemes for older people and those with care needs.

We own and manage more than 7,000 homes, but as our
reputation for providing great homes continues to grow, we
need more sites – so let us know if you have land available.



Housing families – supporting communities

Call: 01732 749400 enquiries@wkha.org.uk westkent.org

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

GETTING IN TOUCH

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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

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

WORRIED ABOUT YOUR DEBTS OR STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR RENT?

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and advice

01732 749400
www.westkent.org/payrent

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