

RESIDENTS' ANNUAL REPORT 2017



WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

CONTENTS



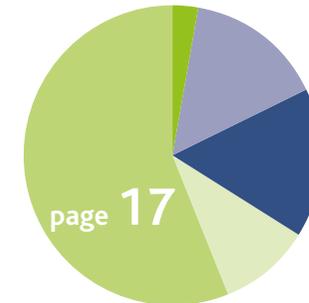
Maintaining
your home

Community



New homes

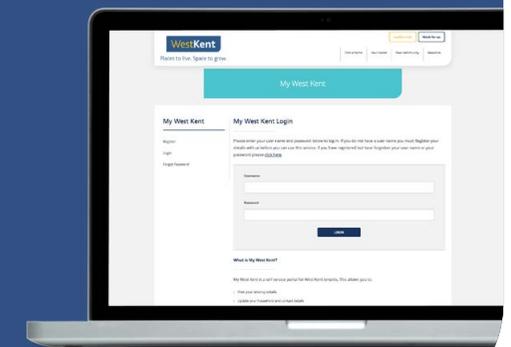
Making age
a positive
experience



Where the
money goes

**Sign up now to
My West Kent.**
Do it online 24/7.
It's so easy.

See page 8 for details.



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD



"In April 2016, we reduced most rents by 1% in line with government policy."

2016 was an important year for West Kent as we opened five new extra care schemes providing 218 new homes for older people across Kent. At the same time, we have been investing heavily in refurbishing our existing Emerald homes, notably in Swanley. In combination, these make West Kent an important provider of housing for older people in the county. Our building programme of new rental and shared ownership properties continued and we are now present in nearly all local authority areas from Dartford to Dover.

The 'Your Home, Your Responsibility' process continued to evolve last year, improving the ways in which you can contact us and interact with the various services we offer. This includes more ways to report repairs, book appointments, and pay your rent or service charges. Rent arrears were contained at the previous low level of 2%, which was very welcome as, in April 2016, we reduced our social rents by 1% in line with government policy, followed by a further 1% reduction in April 2017. As a working charity, every £1 of reduced income is £1 we cannot spend on maintaining our existing homes or building new homes.

Many of you will have seen our new website, which went live in December, bringing new functions and services to you. If you haven't already done so, please take a look – it offers 24-hour access and additional options to pay rent and book appointments. If we can handle all the 'routine' tasks through these systems, it frees up our time with you for the more important or difficult issues.

I mentioned in last year's report that we were in the process of combining all our community support activities into one team. This has now completed and, under the banner of 'West Kent Communities – Space to Grow', the team has been developing some excellent programmes. In particular, their new training and employment initiatives have been extremely successful helping many people to gain new skills and new jobs.

The housing shortage across the country has been much discussed in the media over this past year and the board and executive team are keen that we do our part to help solve it by continuing to build as many new homes as we can. West Kent is a financially strong organisation and we have decided to increase our development ambitions to achieve more than 200 new homes per year over the next few years. In order to do so, we have successfully secured additional borrowing of £54m in April 2017 to fund the next phase of our building programme.

I would like to thank again our three resident board members, Joanne Frawley, Angela George and James MacQuarrie, for their commitment and input to the West Kent Board.

Colin Wilby

Chair – Board of Management

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

We have included feedback opportunities in all our resident activities and made changes based on suggestions received, including the Resident Involvement Strategy itself and digital inclusion.

Resident scrutiny work includes mystery shoppers and two resident internal auditors working with Mazars, our auditors. During 2016, our resident internal auditors worked on two audits with their recommendations being included in the main audit report. We were very proud when one of our auditors, Julia Ferris, won a national award at the Customer Scrutiny Inspection Awards 2016 for Most Inspiring Individual Contribution.

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

We agreed a new Resident Involvement Strategy for 2017 – 2019, which focuses on increasing tenant engagement by developing and testing innovative methods through active participation

and events. The team are working hard to promote and develop awareness of resident involvement and the importance of customer insight. The new strategy will see more emphasis on digital inclusion through training and raising awareness of West Kent's move toward more digital channels through consultation and discussion.

"The team are working hard to promote and develop awareness of resident involvement and the importance of customer insight"

As a tenant you can get involved and positively affect your customer experience by influencing the services you receive from West Kent.

If you would like to be involved in influencing and decision-making to help us improve our services to you and your community, please get in contact through our website. Or, you can call 01732 749 420, email getinvolved@wkha.org.uk or follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

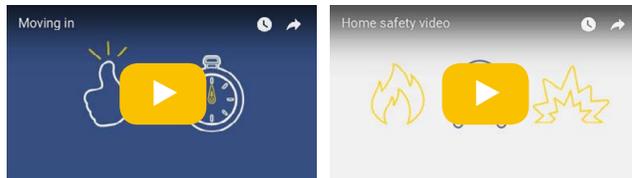


Julia Ferris, Most Inspiring Individual Contribution winner, Customer Scrutiny Inspection Awards 2016

YOUR HOME, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

When you become a West Kent tenant you enter into a relationship. Over the past year, we've worked to clarify what that means. Thanks to all tenants who helped us do this. Whether you've recently moved into your home, or you've been living there for years, you'll find the information you need about your tenancy on our new [website](#).

We produced some short films to explain what we expect from you and what we will do. If you've not seen them yet, take a look. Click [here](#) to see the films:



My West Kent

A big 'thank you' to everyone who pays their rent promptly, which kept our rent arrears below 2%. This is essential. As a charity, every £1 we don't collect is £1 we cannot spend on maintaining your home or building new homes. Remember - you can use our customer self-service [My West Kent](#) to check your rent account and make payments. If you haven't registered yet, do it today! Almost fifty per cent

of rent payments were made online last year. Have a look at the payment options [here](#). Our website also gives helpful tips on [managing your money](#) and important guidance if you're having [trouble paying your rent](#).

We all want to live in happy, hassle free neighbourhoods, but this doesn't always work out. We take all reports of anti-social behaviour very seriously. [Find out more](#).

The number of anti-social behaviour reports has gone down steadily over the past four years. We think this reflects the success of our good neighbour campaign work, being clearer about what West Kent can do and what is the tenant's responsibility. We encourage residents to talk to their neighbours, be respectful of them and use services such as mediation. We had 323 reports during 2016: the year saw reductions in reports of noise, rubbish and harassment but increases (though still small numbers) of reports of vandalism, damage and violence.

Last year, we had to evict 14 tenants: 12 for arrears and two for anti-social behaviour. We only evict when we've exhausted all our options for helping the tenant put things right.



Our proactive approach in encouraging responsible dog ownership.

We are proud to be one of 11 housing providers in the country to receive a gold Community Animal Welfare Footprint award from the RSPCA for the fourth year running. This is due to our proactive approach in encouraging our residents to be responsible dog owners.

MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

Gas and asbestos inspections went well. Thank you for co-operating with keeping appointments and allowing us in. This is important for your health and safety, as well as your neighbour's, and to keep your home well-maintained.

For your safety all our

393

Fire risk assessments are up to date.

"We completed 96% of repairs on time and completed all gas safety inspections."

"Thank you for co-operating with keeping appointments and allowing us in."

"We delivered on our promises for 93% of jobs out of a total of 38,981 jobs."

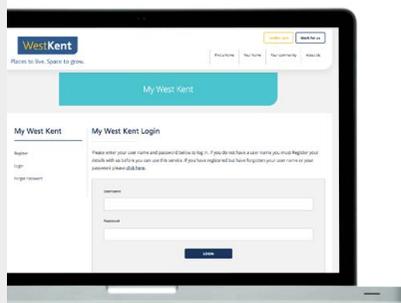
Our repairs service

We are always looking to improve our efficiency and value for money on repairs, and to give you better customer service. So, in 2016, we reviewed our repairs service. We wrote to you about the new **Maintaining Your Home** service in January this year.

Your repair responsibilities: we reminded you of what repairs you are responsible for and this seems to be working well, so we can focus on what we need to do and do it better and quicker.

Our repair priorities: repair timescales changed to help us plan your jobs better. If a job is not finished, our iNHomes team or the contractor will arrange another visit to finish it.

You can now book a repair appointment on our website – it's early days so there are only a few job types available but we will be building on this over the coming years.



During 2016 we also changed the way we check your satisfaction with our repairs service. We are refining the way we use text messaging, to follow up and get better feedback from you on our repairs service. Your feedback is very helpful as it means we can follow up promptly if things are not right. Alongside these changes, we introduced a new way of measuring how well we are delivering on our Maintaining Your Home standard.



Get involved

We want to hear from you about how we can improve further and we'll be asking what you think of our changes. Make sure you're registered with our resident involvement team to make your views count. Register at getinvolved@wkha.org.uk

MAINTAINING YOUR HOME

7

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 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.



New for 2017!

We'll carry out an annual 'Property MOT' to check the condition of your home and carry out any 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 when things like kitchens and bathrooms will need to be renewed.

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

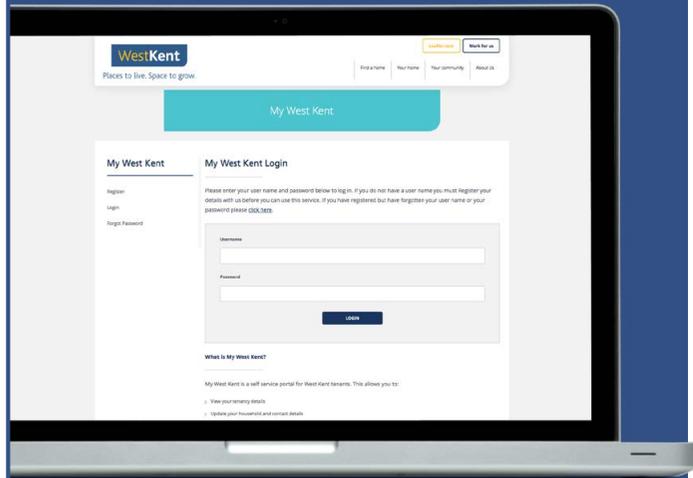
in each home in 2016

on repairs and maintenance



CUSTOMER SERVICE – IT'S YOUR CALL

**Not registered yet?
do it now!**



**Already registered?
Click here to see
what's new!** ➔

Right Person; Right Answer; First Time

A key aim of our Customer Strategy 2014-19 is to deliver a 'right person; right answer; first time; response for at least **90%** of our customers. During the past few years, we've invested heavily in our systems and staff training to move towards this. We are pleased to report that, during 2016 we achieved 'right person; right answer; first time' **86%** of the time. This was a **4%** improvement on 2015, which was an improvement from the first year of the strategy. We have raised our target for 2017 from 85% to 88%, so we're now within sight of our strategy's aim.

Our staff are now using portable devices such as tablets and mobile phones, so when they're working in your home they can record information you give us directly on your account.

My West Kent Self-Service

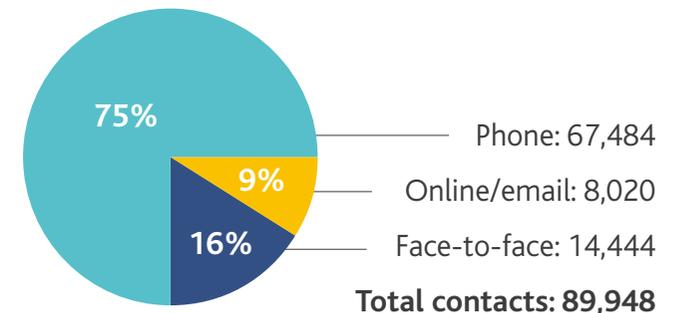
We launched our new website in December after consulting with over 500 people. You told us you wanted a clearer design with less text so you could find information easily. We listened and created a modern looking website where you can get information more easily and quickly complete various activities online, any time, without having to visit our offices or call us. You can perform various tasks including paying rent

online, reporting anti-social behaviour, registering a compliment or complaint, making a general enquiry or even applying to rent a garage.

By signing up to **My West Kent**, our self-service portal, you can:

- Log, view and schedule a repairs appointment
- Contact your tenancy services officer
- View your tenancy details
- Update your household and contact details
- View your rent account statements.

In the weeks following the launch of the new website we were delighted to see increased use of the self-service facilities through **My West Kent** including new registrations and our first self-service repairs being logged. If you are not registered for My West Kent, or haven't used it recently, why not give it a try? We'll be continuing to improve our website and making more services available to you online.



MAKING IT RIGHT

When we get things wrong we want to make it right as quickly as possible. In 2016 we received 673 complaints from you, 2% fewer than the year before. We resolved 93% of these complaints at our 'make it right' stage – the first stage of our complaints process. 44 complaints escalated to our review stage and five went to our final appeal stage. If you're still unhappy after exhausting our complaints process you usually have the right to take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

During 2016, you told us about three main areas:

- Repairs
- Not keeping you up to date
- Missed appointments

We resolved 93% of these complaints at our 'make it right' stage.

We aim to respond to your complaint within ten working days. If we can't meet that timescale we should tell you and agree a new target date with you.



COMPLAINTS
RESOLVED

MAKE IT
RIGHT STAGE



REVIEW STAGE

5 APPEAL STAGE

MAKING IT RIGHT

YOU TOLD US

We don't always complete repairs first time, and when we need to order a part we don't always keep you informed about when we will return to complete the work. You also told us the quality of the work we do isn't always good enough.

We don't always tell you what we're doing when you report something to us.

We don't always tell you when we'll have to miss an appointment.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

We're now using more local suppliers, closer to the areas you live in so we can get the parts quicker. Our engineers are using mobile technology to immediately report back on what they need to complete a job. We then book the next job and tell you when we'll be back. The new annual 'Property MOTs', allow us to programme works in before something goes wrong.

We know this is not good enough. We know you want to be told what's happening and we're committed to contacting you regularly to give you an update instead of waiting until we have a full answer. We are also planning to add the facility to track your reports of anti-social behaviour and complaints to **'My West Kent'**.

We recognise how frustrating it can be when we miss appointments and in 2016 we've worked hard and reduced the number of appointments we miss by 38%.

In April our iNHomes team introduced the '20/20' service to reduce the level of missed appointments. Now, if the engineer finds while in your home that the expected work time will overrun by more than 20 minutes, they will contact the office. The planning team will either reschedule the work with you right then or adjust the rest of the engineer's work for the day so they can complete your job without affecting later appointments.

The number of missed appointments is less than 3% of the total numbers of jobs logged in 2016 across all contractors. Being able to call you by 10am on the day of your appointment to tell you if we can't make it is helping. As are changes to our work practices and staff having better technology so they can communicate when they are out and about. Thank you for helping us to use our time efficiently by telling us by 10am on the day of your appointment if you're not going to be available. We won't recharge you if you let us know in good time.



Our contractors Bren Wards help maintain your home



Our iNHomes team ready for action

COMMUNITY

Space to grow

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 aim to build and support strong, cohesive and inclusive communities across Kent.

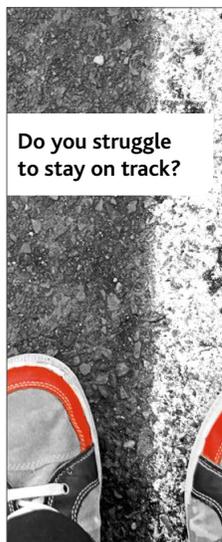
We'll work towards understanding and tackling community needs that aren't already met using existing resources, and our work will be guided by a clear idea of the difference we want to make.

Our clear goal is to work with a range of partners across Kent to grow our community work in the next five years. We will deliver services ourselves, influencing others where we can't deliver, through the strength of our relationships.

We aim to be a greater influence and contributor within Kent and beyond, on building effective community relationships and forging strong communities.

Over the coming years, we expect grant and trust funding for our community work to become more scarce. We also expect our local government partners to commission services in a new way, so we'll have to act quickly and effectively to build new partnerships, new skills and new ways of working. Our recent changes to structure and approach mean we are well positioned to compete for and win these.

2016 was the busiest and most successful year to date for our community work and we are well placed to achieve this.



COMMUNITY

Space to grow

Find out more about our community services on our website.

Engagements across Kent

51,460

Fundraising total

£2M

Total supported into training and employment

83

Number of partnerships

146

% of West Kent tenants engaged in consultation in the year

39%

Volunteered hours

5,484

People accessing tenancy advice and support

371

Apprentices

12

Tonnes of furniture recycled

142

Number of service recommendations made by West Kent tenants

62

Funding for individuals and groups

Find out more about West Kent's funding for individuals and groups. [➔](#)



Linda Hogan
Community Fund



Totalling **£15,000**
An estimated **6221** people benefited



Rising Stars
Bursary



Totalling **£1,360**

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 we provide, such as care navigator, crisis support and HERO project (Housing, Energy, Retraining Opportunities). We also completed 554 tenancy catch up visits. We collaborated on local projects to provide volunteering opportunities, 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 householders (in 2016) whose housing benefit entitlement reduced or stopped due to government changes. We know this number will

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 work, which meant they were no longer hit by the benefit cap of £20,000 a year. Our Income team had great success in maximising income, getting discretionary housing payments paid to top up the housing benefit.

Read about Stacey, a single mother with five children whose weekly benefits were capped and who has since increased her weekly income by 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.



800

residents used support services



554

tenancy catch up visits completed



86

householders' benefit entitlement reduced or stopped due to government changes

NEW HOMES – OUR BEST YEAR EVER

We believe that a good home is the foundation for getting on in life. Our core purpose is to help the many people for whom a good home (to rent or buy) is too expensive, and to nurture their communities. West Kent's new homes programme is the largest in our 27-year history. 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.

[Read more.](#) 

Our investment in Kent

“Over the past five years we have invested £118m in building or acquiring 935 homes (including 238 homes as part of Kent Excellent Homes for All), receiving £23m of HCA grant. In the same period we made surpluses of £43m. For every £1 generated in surpluses we spend £2.26 on building new homes.”

218 of the new homes completed in 2016 were extra care apartments within our five new extra care schemes across the county. These were made possible through the Kent Excellent Homes for All venture with Kent Council County and Galliford Try.



Shared Ownership

We have shared ownership homes coming up in and around Gravesend, Ashford and Maidstone areas. If you or people you know are thinking about getting on the property ladder, visit our [website](#) for more information.

We always encourage shared owners to think about the benefits of buying a larger share in their home, and last year 16 shared owners opted to 'staircase' in this way.

[Current shared owners can find out more here.](#) 

Independent living

Emerald homes and services are for people aged 55 and over. We offer three housing options – independent living, sheltered housing, and extra care. If you're interested in any of our services for the over 55s, [visit our website](#).

2016 was a landmark year in reaching our aim to be a leader in meeting the accommodation needs of older people. The handovers of the five extra care schemes through the Kent Excellent Homes For All programme meant that within a five month window we took on 218 homes and our teams worked magnificently to get them up and running. Our Kent County Council partners were surprised and pleased with how many tenants we moved in so quickly.

All change in Swanley

Our Emerald Accommodation Strategy is about making current homes fit for the future. We made significant steps towards creating a Swanley Emerald community where people can use the support services around Whiteoak Court. As part of this we're redeveloping Northview, replacing 16 less popular flats with 31 new homes, working closely with our Emerald Forum and the affected residents.

Some Emerald housing is unpopular due its size or first floor location with no lift. We are working with affected tenants to change these homes gradually by reducing the minimum age criteria down from 55 years to 40 years for around 100 homes in Swanley, and supporting those tenants wanting to move.

More flexible support



We are also replacing the out of date life-line alarm systems in 600 of our Emerald homes. The latest 'plug and play' technology offers more flexibility, easily connecting to health and care aids. The Government grant historically paid to monitor these alarms is ending, so we are talking to affected tenants and identifying the most cost effective options for tenants who will have to meet this cost themselves. There are numerous systems out there and we will be giving tenants a choice that will suit them. For more information contact andrea.ware@wkha.org.uk



A resident and his son enjoying lunch at one of our new Extra Care schemes

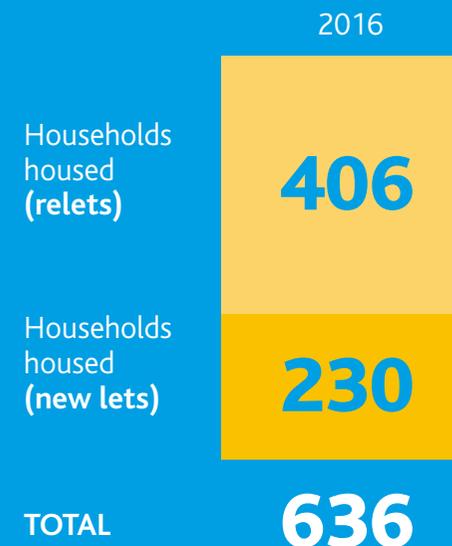
MAKING BEST USE OF OUR PROPERTIES

16

Demand for our homes remains high, especially for one and two bedroom properties, with demand determined by the local authority housing register rules. We let 636 homes in 2016 of which 230 were new builds. This year it took 23 days on average for us to re-let these against the target of 21 days – a significant improvement from 2015 when it was 32 days – meaning people were housed quicker. We achieved this by changing processes and moving inspections for works needed to the time between tenants giving notice to leave

and moving out, as well as using technology to improve speed of processes and communication.

Other changes included carrying out repairs after tenants move in, if they aren't a health and safety risk. New tenants can move in quicker and have more choice of colours and styles for replacement kitchens and bathrooms. We also introduced decorating packs. Where we consider a room requires redecorating we'll give you the equipment and materials to do this and you can choose from a colour range to suit your own style.



We hope you are happy in your West Kent home, but circumstances change and if you are thinking of moving, there is plenty of information and guidance on our [website](#).

Small is beautiful

Many of our residents are living in homes that have become too big for them. Demand for family sized homes is rising and there is an increasing need for us to free up bigger family homes. You may be eligible for the '**Small is Beautiful**' scheme, which helps you downsize to a home more suited to your needs. The scheme offers financial support to help you move. 62 tenants have benefited from this scheme since 2014.

Mutual exchange

111 tenants applied to swap their home with another tenant through mutual exchange during 2016. We're keen to support tenants do this as it can be a good way to match people to homes, helping them find the right home faster. If you are thinking of exchanging, you first need to find an exchange partner. Visit Exchange Locata to register your details. Another popular way to find exchanges is on Facebook.

Find out about [mutual exchanges](#).

And [shared ownership](#) is a good option for some.

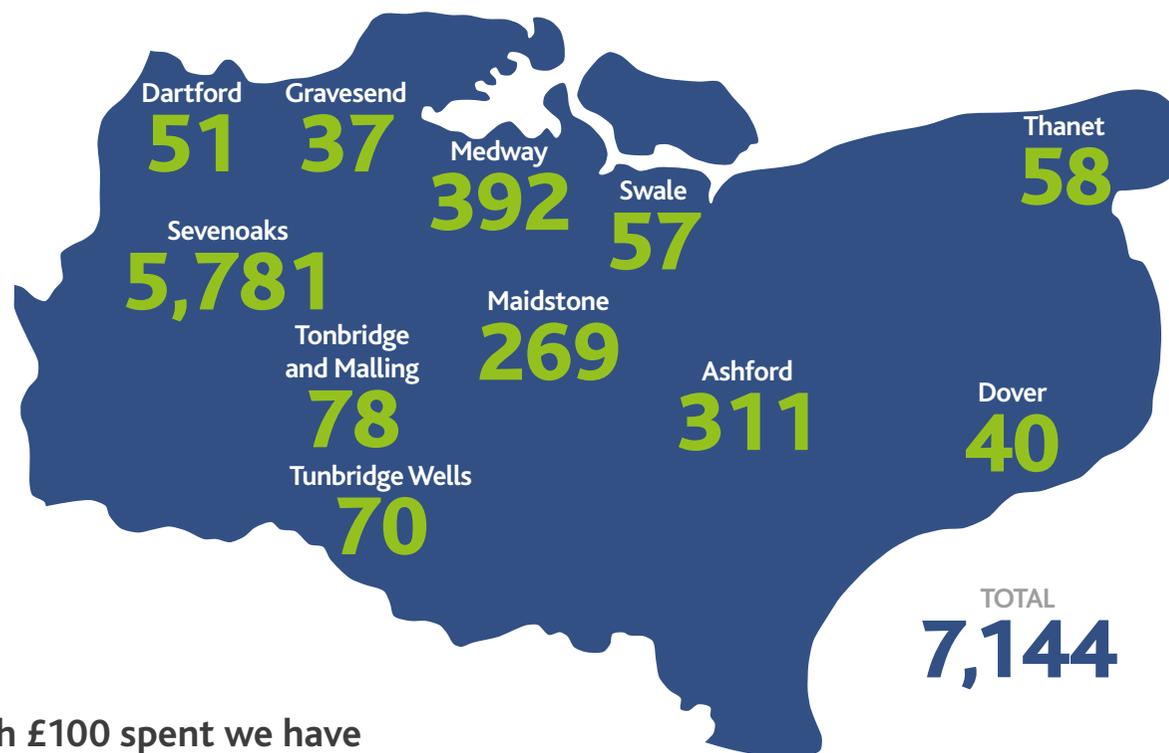


West Kent homes come in all sizes to suit your family

WHERE THE MONEY GOES AND OTHER KEY FACTS

Homes

Rented	5,401
Rented – older people	1,127
Low cost home ownership	442
TOTAL HOMES	6,970
Homes managed by others	4
Leaseholders	170
TOTAL HOMES OWNED AND MANAGED	7,144
Homes under construction	299



For more detail about West Kent's finances and accounts, see our full Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2016 [➔](#)

Each £100 spent we have allocated this to:

