

# NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of  
West Kent Housing Association



winter  
**2018**

## Winter repairs

We've included some helpful tips on how to stay warm without breaking the bank  
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### New homes to buy and rent

We're building 200 new houses or flats for rent or shared ownership every year.  
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### Homes for over 55s

We currently have one and two-bedroom flats available in our sheltered housing scheme.  
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# WELCOME from Frank

Hello

Well, we had a glorious summer – one to remember, but the clocks have now gone back and it's getting colder. So, there are some tips inside about preparing for and staying warm in winter.

A theme in this issue is the many ways you can get involved with the work of West Kent. You could help edit this publication or get involved in our youth work, among other opportunities. Inside we profile our new resident board members – Megan Morvan and our new independent member Helen Edwards. A big welcome to all of them. We also report on some well-deserved recognition for the fantastic work done by Veronica McGannon to make Wellfield Community Hall in Hartley a vibrant centre for the whole community.

There is some practical but serious stuff about making sure the fire doors in our flats close properly – please read this. Keeping you safe is our top priority.

It was good to see that the Government announced some more money in the Budget to ease the introduction of Universal Credit. But if you do still experience difficulties, there is an article telling you how to get help.

## Enjoy the festive season



## Did you miss the Autumn eNews?

If you're not signed up, you missed all of this and more!

- Platinum in RSPCA Housing Footprint awards
- Our Instagram launched with a photo competition for young people
- We held our first Resident Workshop in Swanley

"Wellfest returns for second year" health and wellbeing events held for residents in Edenbridge and Ramsgate.

"West Kent winners"

Kent Support and Assistance Service and our young team members highly commended in their categories.

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



# CHERYL WINS PRESTIGIOUS YOUTH AWARD

Cheryl Banks, Leader in Charge at our popular HOUSE project in Edenbridge recently won UK Youth's prestigious 'Youth Worker of the Year' award, for her many years of hard work and dedication to young people in the Sevenoaks district.



HRH The Princess Royal has been a patron of UK Youth since 2003 and presented the award to Cheryl, one of only three shortlisted youth workers at the ceremony in London this November. Cheryl will now have the opportunity to have a private dinner with Princess Anne and Nigel Mansell to talk about her work.

The award scheme recognises the achievements of an individual working with young people who has made a real difference – whether that be on a one to one, group or community basis.

*"What strikes me as incredible about Cheryl's approach to working with young people is that she has an amazing knack for really getting through to each and every young person, no matter what the situation. She is challenging and pushes young people to focus on their self-development and find their place in the world. She is incredibly passionate about pushing forward positive change for young people"*

Charlotte Ede, Youth Services Manager

Cheryl's projects for young people include:

- Helping five young people into work this year by supporting them to gain their CSCS card
- Setting up a crime prevention programme, building relationships between young people and the local police
- Working in partnership with Edenbridge Town Council to paint murals on the walls and tunnels at train stations to prevent random graffiti
- 1:1 sessions with young people to provide advice on mental and sexual health, crime, relationships, bullying and cyber bullying and drugs and alcohol
- Supporting two young people through court proceedings and in mental health facilities
- Raising over £10,000 to fund a trip to France for the centenary and supporting young people in their research into soldiers from Edenbridge.

Although Cheryl manages a small team of youth workers, she has turned down the opportunity to take on better paid roles because she prefers working directly with young people, and feels her time is better spent in the delivery of youth work, where she feels she can make a real difference.

One young person Cheryl has worked with said:

*"Without Cheryl's support I might have been homeless, or worse. She has supported me with my mental health during a trying time, and in finding housing when I had nowhere to go. She is always there and knows so much about the support available to young people. Not only is she a wealth of knowledge, but she will be right by your side helping you to navigate through it all, encouraging you to keep going. She is the whole reason I want to be a youth worker. If I can support one young person half as much as Cheryl has supported me, I will be glad."*

# Get Involved!

**We've got loads of ways that you can help us improve the services we provide you. Please sign up, we need your input.**

Because of the new rules about how we use your personal data we can't simply send you all a letter or an email to see if you want to take part, so please sign up at [www.westkent.org/getinvolved](http://www.westkent.org/getinvolved).

We'll make sure that we notify you when we are organising something.

We always pay your transport costs and we'll provide a taxi if you are unable to use public transport. Refreshments are provided and depending on the time commitment we expect from you we will offer shopping vouchers in exchange for your time, or enter you into a draw to win some.



## Here's what opportunities we have over the next few months:

### Resident workshops

A chance to really influence some of the services we provide by giving us your views on a specific area of our services. Workshops normally last about three hours and a sandwich meal is provided. Dates for next year are:

13 March 2019, 1-4pm

12 June 2019, 6-8pm

16 October 2019, 1-4pm

### Scrutiny/ Task and Finish groups

These groups are where the real change is going to happen. We need a group of residents to work with us to have a really good look at how we deliver some of our services. This will take at least

a whole day, maybe longer, and we'll train you beforehand. We will focus on one area at a time, you will help us to choose what we scrutinise.

### Neighbourhood News editorial panel

We need a group of residents to help us decide the content of Neighbourhood News and our Residents' Annual report. We don't need you to write anything so we're just looking for people who will tell us what our residents want to know about. This doesn't have to take place during the day so could be a chance for people who work to influence these important publications.

### Focus groups

We want to hold lots of focus groups next year, this is a great way to really understand how you feel about things. Please register your interest in being involved and we can then write to you when we are looking for people – these are held at different times and places and we will let you know the subjects we will be discussing beforehand to help you decide if you have a view.

### Online panel

We often need to do online questionnaires or do a quick bit of research- please let us know if you'd be happy to take part in these.



# WARMER, SAFER HOMES

Our iNHomes team is coming to the end of their five-year programme, where they have replaced 350 back boilers, providing residents with a new, cleaner, efficient and user-friendly system.



Under 50 of our 6,562 rented homes still have old back boiler systems, which will be replaced by the end of this year.

Mark Mason, Installation Manager says: *"the programme will ensure residents have warm homes with a reliable, modern heating system, which will hopefully help save money on their energy bills and reduce the amount of maintenance and repair appointments needed"*.

We are encouraging all residents included in the programme to allow access for these works, as we are no longer carrying out repairs to back boilers. If the system fails,

residents may have to wait a while without heating and hot water until a replacement boiler can be installed.

**Here are some top tips to make sure your home is kept warm, and help to keep your gas bill down:**

- Use your central heating timer instead of the thermostat to control your heating
- Turn your thermostat down - even one degree could save you up to £80 per year
- Keep your radiators clear - furniture in front of radiators will absorb a lot of the heat

- Use thermal or heavy curtains during the winter, and close them at dusk so heat doesn't escape through the windows
- Run your heating for an hour less each day - even using a little less energy every day adds up to big savings over time.

Please contact our Customer Services team at [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk) if you have any repair requests or replacement enquiries.

## Shut that door!

It may be annoying when your flat door slams shut behind you – particularly if you have forgotten your keys. But it could save your life. Flat doors are designed with self-closing mechanisms so that in the event of a fire, the smoke and flames are contained within the flat and are not able to spread to the rest of the building.

*"Closing the door behind them will probably be the last thing on the mind of a tenant who is escaping a burning flat, which is why self-closers are designed to do that automatically,"* explains Head of Property Peter Finch.

After the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, government experts have stressed the need for self-closing doors where flats open onto communal areas.

Our surveying teams are now checking all door closers as part of our regular fire risk assessment programme and we will carry out any necessary work as soon as possible, but we would like your help.

*"If you live in one of our flats and you know your door-closer isn't working properly, please tell us so that we can add it to the programme," said Peter. "It's a simple test – just open the door and let go; if it stays where you leave it, get in touch using one of the methods to the right."*

Online:  
[www.westkent.org/about-us/contact-us/](http://www.westkent.org/about-us/contact-us/)

Web chat – visit  
[westkent.org](http://westkent.org) and look  
for the chat icon

Email:  
[help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)

Phone:  
01732 749400

# ENCOURAGING COMPLAINTS

We always try to make it right– but we can only do that if we know what is wrong.



**We will listen and do what we can to try and make it right**

At West Kent we have a clear policy on complaints and our aim is always to resolve any issues as quickly as possible.

We try to get things right the first time, and if we get something wrong we really want you to tell us.

Complaints help us to improve

our service, so we aim to make it easy for you to let us know where we have gone wrong. You can use email, web chat, phone us, fill in the form on the website or send us a message on social media.

However you get in touch, we will listen and do what we can to try and make it right.

We analyse and monitor any complaints we receive so that we can change the way we work if we notice a trend. All our staff are trained in how to help someone with a complaint, and our contractors also follow our process.

**You can see our full complaints policy on our website [westkent.org/feedback](http://westkent.org/feedback)**

## Let's Get Moving What is Shared Ownership?

Buying a shared ownership home has never been simpler. If you can't afford to buy a property outright, our shared ownership scheme will be a great option for you. The scheme allows you to buy a percentage of your home and rent the remainder from us. There will be opportunity for you to purchase more equity in your home

You could buy a shared ownership home through Help to Buy if your household earns less than £80,000 a year, you are a first time buyer or used to own a home but can't afford to buy one now. To be eligible for shared ownership, you must be registered at [www.helptobuyese.org.uk](http://www.helptobuyese.org.uk)

West Kent has an exciting building programme selling homes for shared ownership across Kent.



**Get onto the property ladder by contacting us now!**

Call: 01732 749400 [sales@wkha.org.uk](mailto:sales@wkha.org.uk) [westkent.org](http://westkent.org)

[@west\\_kent](https://twitter.com/@west_kent)

[f WestKentHA](https://facebook.com/WestKentHA)

[@westkenthousingassociation](https://instagram.com/@westkenthousingassociation)

**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.



# LIVE CHAT

We know you don't want to be facing a lengthy wait in telephone queues and now you don't have to.

After the launch of our trial web chat service in May this year, we've found it to be so popular that we have made it permanent.

Whether you are sitting at home on your tablet or using your mobile on the go, the Customer Services team is available on web chat between 9am and 5pm to answer any of your questions and receive or send you documents. It really is as simple as sending a text message.

So next time you need to contact us visit [westkent.org](http://westkent.org) and look for the chat icon on the right-hand side.



**Need Help?**

Click here and start chatting with us!

We look forward to chatting with you online soon.

## New homes to buy and rent

We are continuing to provide new homes across the county as we pursue our target of providing 200 new houses or flats for rent or shared ownership every year.

With five new schemes due to add another 72 homes to our stock in the next three months alone, we are already working on developments that will deliver another 300-plus units between now and 2023.

Out of the **72 homes** to be built this year,  
**46 will be affordable rent,**  
**22 shared ownership,** and  
**4 will be sold on the open market.**

Homes sold on the open market will help bring in the cash that allows us to build social housing on that site.

We are increasingly looking at building homes in new areas – currently including Broadstairs, Sandwich and Deal – as well as considering bigger schemes and different ways of working in partnership. We are determined not to compromise on quality and remain committed to providing our residents with homes they love.

We are close to the annual target of 200 per year set in 2016, but we won't rush. "The emphasis is always on quality, so we won't finish a development in a hurry just to fit the timetable," explained Property Director Mark Leader.

The five schemes are at Captain's Wood, Finberry in Ashford, Dalefield in Gravesend, Goldsel Road, Swanley, Grigg Lane, Headcorn and Walderslade Road in Chatham. A further six schemes providing another 89 homes will be coming on stream early in the new year, including a stunning block of apartments in the centre of Canterbury.

The biggest scheme currently on our books is on land near to Edenbridge (Kent) rail station, where we will be building 120 homes in a number of separate phases for Bellway Homes at St John's Way. The first phase is due to be completed in April 2019.

Head of Home Ownership Sophie Palmer and her five-strong team have been very successful in selling our shared ownership properties in recent months, again bringing in funds to support future new home building.





"We just need people who are passionate about working with young people and genuinely want to get involved."

## Do you have what it takes to be a youth worker?

We need passionate people to help us continue our great work with young people across Sevenoaks.



Our network of 8-12s clubs and our work with 11 to 19 year-olds is well known for giving young people a great start in life, particularly those from difficult backgrounds.

In recent months, we have found it difficult to recruit paid sessional youth workers to help support the various groups.

*"We aren't looking for any particular qualifications or experience," explained Youth Services Manager Charlotte Ede. "We just need people who are passionate about working with young people and genuinely want to get involved."*

And while our youth workers are paid, that's far from the only benefit of joining the team. Apart from gaining vital experience in an interesting area of work, our postholders receive fully funded training in a range of skills.

*"We train sessional workers in First Aid at Work, Safeguarding and a number of other areas, so it's great for the CV as well as providing unbeatable*

*experience," said Charlotte. "The sessions also work well for people who perhaps have another full-time job or work school hours."*

We are looking for 18 year-olds and above to work with the 8-12s groups and for the older groups we would prefer candidates to be at least 25.

Our 8-12s groups work with young people who are referred to us for a variety of reasons and who need help with building confidence and improving their social skills.

Sessional workers help with everything from craft sessions to physical and cultural activities.

*"We provide all the guidance needed," Charlotte stressed. "You just need to bring your passion and a willingness to engage with young people."*

To find out more about any of the posts available, email [charlotte.ede@wkha.org.uk](mailto:charlotte.ede@wkha.org.uk) or telephone her on 01732 749420.



# SWANLEY REDUCED HOURS

To make the best use of staff time we have decided that the visitor points at Swanley Link will now be open from 9am until 4pm each day, rather than 5pm.



Sarah, Tina and Lorraine,  
Customer Service Advisors at the Swanley Link

*"We noticed that we rarely had any visitors beyond 4pm so it made sense to allow the members of staff involved to deal with emails, web chat and phone calls rather than sitting there with no customers",*  
**Head of Customer Experience  
Stu Kaley.**

# UNIVERSAL CREDIT CALCULATOR

We've changed our Direct Debit arrangements to make it easier for working age tenants who are now receiving Universal Credit.

New claimants in the Dartford area moved onto Universal Credit in the summer, and the rest of Kent has now followed suit, with Tonbridge and Maidstone Jobcentres taking new claims since November.

Existing claimants who receive benefits such as Jobseekers' Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit are due to be moved to the new system between now and 2023.

Under Universal Credit, housing benefit payments are paid to the tenant, rather than to the landlord. This makes tenants responsible for making their own rent payments, and to make that

easier we have ensured that our system can take Direct Debit payments on any day of the month.

"It is important to remember that the changes only affect people who are of working age, not pensioners," explained Financial Wellbeing Manager Mark Faithful.

"Tenants should also be aware that council tax support is not included in the Universal Credit claim, so any queries on that need to be addressed to your local council."

We now have a useful benefits checker on our website that will calculate any changes to your benefits under Universal Credit. "The new system is intended to 'make work pay'," said Mark. "In the past a single person had to work at least 30 hours a week to be entitled to any uplift from Working Tax Credits, but with Universal Credit even one hour's work makes a difference."

Tenants can check changes in their own situation by logging on to [westkent.org/money](https://www.westkent.org/money)

The logo for Universal Credit, featuring a large blue 'UC' followed by the words 'Universal Credit' in a blue serif font.

# Homes for over 55s

Are you 55 or over and looking to move, or do you know someone that is? Perhaps you want to move to a smaller property or somewhere that is adapted to suit your needs? Then look no further!

Emerald homes from West Kent are available to rent for people aged 55 and over. We offer three housing options depending on your needs - independent living, sheltered housing and extra care.

All schemes are designed to support social activities and independent living. Residents have their own front door and access to communal facilities. If you need extra support, we can help you get the services you need.

Key features include:

- Secure door entry system
- Emergency pull cords
- Communal gardens and laundry facilities
- Modern communal kitchens and lounges
- Guest bedrooms
- Regular social activities.

Pat, who lives at Linden House, Sevenoaks explains *"I love living here. There's always someone to help you, if you need it"*.

We currently have one and two-bedroom flats available in our sheltered housing scheme Linden House, and our extra care scheme Spires, Tenterden. If you or anyone you know may be interested in our homes for the over 55s, please visit [westkent.org/emerald](http://westkent.org/emerald) or email [tenancysupport@wkha.org.uk](mailto:tenancysupport@wkha.org.uk).



## YOU SAID, WE DID

At our resident workshop in September, residents told us they would like to see our magazines on cheaper paper. That's why this edition feels thinner.





# WINTER REPAIRS

helpful tips on how to stay warm  
without breaking the bank

Winter's here, and whether this year stays relatively mild or brings another Beast from the East, it's important to stay warm.

We've included some helpful tips below on how to stay warm without breaking the bank, but the first thing to do is to check your boiler is working properly.

It can take us up to three days to respond to repair requests during busy periods, and that could leave you without heating or hot water. Checking everything is working now, rather than waiting for that first icy spell, will make it less likely you will find yourself in the cold.

We can make an appointment to come and check out any problems, but before you call us, check out these troubleshooting tips:

- Check the power supply is turned on as it can easily be switched off accidentally.
- Check you have enough credit on the meter and that it is on. Call your supplier if there are problems with the meter.
- Make sure the thermostat is set higher than the temperature in the room.
- Check the programmer is demanding heating and hot water by looking for red lights next to radiator or tap symbols on the boiler.

## Still not working?

Ask our Customer Services team to guide you through an easy boiler reset by calling 01732 749400 or contacting us on web chat.

## Look for leaks and prevent burst pipes

Tell us immediately if you notice a leak from any part of the system as it can affect the operation of the heating as well as damaging your home.

Make sure you leave your heating on low if you go away to keep your pipes from freezing – and make sure you have enough credit on prepaid meters.

## Stay warm

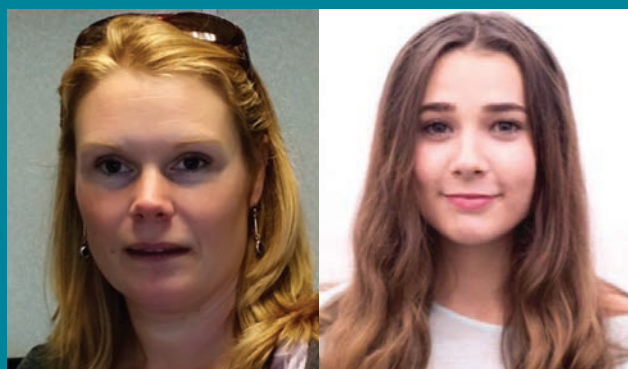
If your heating is working but some rooms are still not very warm, see if the radiators need 'bleeding'. You can buy a bleed key for about £1 in any DIY shop. Open the little valve at the top of the radiator, listen to the air hiss out and then close it tightly as soon as the first drip of water appears.

Keep the warmth in the room by closing the curtains when it gets dark – and consider hanging thicker curtains.

Leave the oven door open when you have finished cooking so that the heat warms the kitchen – but not if you have small children or pets in the house.

# New board members

**West Kent's board make the key strategic decisions that keep us moving forwards, focused and competitive. A quarter of our board places are reserved for current tenants. We recently welcomed two new board members to the team.**



Helen Edwards

Meg Morvan

## Helen

Helen Edwards has worked in both the non-profit and commercial sectors, with a strong focus on housing and an interest in developing and running services for older clients and those with disabilities.

She has worked across the UK for several housing providers, local authorities, commissioners and voluntary organisations in care and support areas at both an operational and strategic level, working as a consultant and on a freelance basis.

"I live just outside Sevenoaks and I have been aware of the impressive work West Kent does right across the community," she commented. "I jumped at the chance of applying for a place on the board."

In 2007 Helen successfully established the Bedfordshire Telecare Service in partnership with Bedfordshire County Council and she is keen to use her experience in that area with West Kent.

"I'm pleased to contribute to the governance of West Kent and support the delivery of its Emerald Strategy, which I feel is well directed," she commented. "This is a highly regarded organisation and I am delighted to have the chance to play a part in its future."

## Meg

Meg Morvan will never forget that it was West Kent that helped her pursue her dream of being involved in the arts.

Some years back, the then-teenager was awarded a bursary that paid for her to have some acting lessons that were beyond her family's means – and she hasn't looked back since.

Now 20 and at the helm of her own theatre company, Meg wants to "give something back" by becoming West Kent's youngest-ever tenant board member.

And one of the things she is keen to pursue in her new role is making sure that as many people as possible are aware of the opportunities we provide for tenants.

It's a continuing theme for Meg, who lives in Seal. At the age of 15 she won an iPad after taking part in a West Kent competition to design an 'app' for smartphones. Her winning entry, inspired by her West Kent bursary, was aimed at helping tenants find out what they could apply for because she was surprised at how few people were aware of the help on offer.

She explained: "I applied for a Rising Stars bursary in year seven or eight and what I learned on the acting course set me off on the course to receiving a drama scholarship at Sevenoaks School. This was a fantastic opportunity that exposed me to a world of possibilities I would not have normally encountered, including a drama tour to Germany. I can't thank them enough."

Although she did well in her International Baccalaureate (IB) studies, Meg decided not to apply for university because "most drama degrees involve studying various aspects of the theatre – and I want to act".

But that decision does not mean an end to Meg's aspirations. In collaboration with six other founding members, she has now set up the She Wolves Theatre Company, which is booked to perform The Regina Monologues at the Bread & Roses Theatre in Clapham early in the new year.

Although setting up a business is no easy feat – Meg feels she needs another challenge, which is part of the reason she has joined the board.

"I really wanted to play my part in the organisation that has done so much for me over the years, but I also felt my brain needed a bit of exercise now I've stopped studying, and I thought joining the board would stretch me."

"I'm really excited about joining the board and I want to help West Kent spread its message to more people, particularly youngsters who don't seem to know what's on offer".



# WOODLANDS COURT

Residents proudly opened their doors to show visitors their smart new apartments at the official opening of Woodlands Court in Swanley.



*Sevenoaks MP Michael Fallon declared the scheme open and praised our vision in creating 31 new affordable homes for the over 55s.*

We knocked down four old blocks containing a total of 16 flats at Northview before replacing them with almost twice as many comfortable, modern homes at nearby Woodlands Court.

Doreen Harding was one of those who opened her home to visitors after the official opening of the £6.5m scheme.

She moved with husband Paul to a two-bedroom apartment on the top floor of Woodlands Court after moving out of a three-bedroom house and explained: "Our daughters had grown up and left home and the house had too many steps for my husband, who is not very mobile.

**"We applied for a move to a flat and this place is just unbelievable. It has so much space, a lovely view over Swanley Park and a lift. It's modern and low maintenance."**

Doreen Harding

Residents of Northview were provided alternative accommodation while the new homes were being built and were given the opportunity to move back in to one of the new apartments.

Those who did so included Anne Surendran, who lived in Northview for five years before being housed temporarily in Walnut Way, and now lives in one of the spacious single-bedroom apartments at Woodlands Court.

**"I'm very happy here," she said. "The flat is bigger, there are more people around and the communal lounge is a bonus."**

Anne Surendran

As well as providing comfortable new homes, Woodlands Court is part of our 'hub and spoke' strategy to provide over 55s with central communal facilities to support their independent lifestyle.

White Oak Court, which is close to the town centre and has a 24-hour on-site care team, restaurant, hairdresser and activities room, acts as the 'hub' for residents living in Bonney Way apartments and the new development at Woodlands Court.

Chief Executive Frank Czarnowski told guests at the opening of Woodlands Court that it represented an important milestone in the Age – A Positive Experience strategy.



Sir Michael Fallon MP and Anne Surendran



Woodlands Court resident with Duncan Wilson, Head of Support

# Dazzling duo take top award

The driving force behind one of our most popular and vibrant community facilities has been recognised with a top award for excellence.



Vee McGannon

## Excellent Community Project 2018 Award

### Wellfield Community Hall in Hartley won the Excellent Community Project category in the Kent Housing Group Awards 2018.

The result is a tribute to the untiring work of Wellfield tenant Vee McGannon, and Kent County Council Community Warden Jackie West to provide activities that support the whole community.

As well as serving the over-55s who live in the 24 flats and nine bungalows that make up the Emerald sheltered scheme in Hartley, the hall has become a vibrant centre for the whole community. Regular drop-in events include singing sessions, and a walking group started recently.

Alongside setting up events including a memory café for people with dementia and their carers and a monthly get-together for carers, Vee has helped to raise thousands of pounds for charity with the support of local people.

Vee paid tribute to the Wellfield community, without which she said she could never have turned the hall into such a successful hub.

*"Tenants who want to make a difference to their community can only really do that if they have the support of local people and the backing of their landlord, in this case West Kent. I have enjoyed both and I am delighted that Wellfield has been recognised by this award,"*

Vee McGannon.

As Wellfield's reputation has grown, local organisations have also contributed to the facilities and support on offer, with Carers First, the local NHS and the police all supporting the various events.

Therapists, beauticians and advice services offer their services at drop-in sessions, often for free, and the local GP surgery refers people to the dementia and carers' get-togethers because they recognise the great work they do.

**Vee and Jackie also encourage young people to get involved and have organised inter-generational events with children from the local school.**



# WEST KENT RESIDENT WINS KENT WILDLIFE TRUST AWARD



*Benjamin*, who lives in Bough Beech began to enjoy nature when he was five. Diagnosed with Autism, he found that being outside and looking for wildlife calmed him down. Now 12, he has gone on to win the Kent Wildlife Trust Silver award for having a Wildlife Friendly Garden. The Wild About Gardens award recognises those who make their gardens welcoming to nature.

Encouraged by his parents, Benjamin has won photo competitions for his beautiful photos of wildlife in his garden and local area. His parents have bought him a professional camera, so he can pursue his passion further. Not only has he been taking photos of wildlife for the past two years, he has been completing wildlife diaries for the last five, noting the animals he sees in his garden. Soon he will be publishing these online to share with others who have similar interests.

His mum Christine says, "our garden may not be a beautiful

one, but it is very wildlife friendly". Their garden is home to bat boxes, insect hotels and an all-important 'hedgehog highway'. As Christine explains "hedgehogs are declining because they are struggling to travel from garden to garden to find food".

In the summer months, Benjamin helps birds repair their nests by putting down wet mud for them to collect, as they cannot find this themselves. As a result, House Martins became regular visitors to their home.

Benjamin has also written to Sir David Attenborough about his wildlife interests and has been invited on a behind the scenes tour of the Natural History Museum.

## Top tips for a wildlife friendly garden:

- Make a 13cm by 13cm gap under fences. This is enough room to allow hedgehogs through without risking any pets escaping!

- Wait until late winter or early spring to cut back any overgrown areas these give animals shelter from the cold
- Create a 'container garden' to encourage wildlife into smaller or land scaped gardens
- Do not leave bread or milk for hedgehogs - this can make them ill. Instead, leave unsweetened muesli or Weetabix. Putting out a bit of food at dusk will help see small animals through the colder weather.
- Peg any fluffy pet hair to your washing line. Birds use this in the winter to help keep their nests warm.



# RACHAEL SCOOPS TOP AWARD

Judges decided to name Rachael Salvesen as this year's Excellent Housing Professional.



"Rachael has built a thriving community at Copperfields. There is always something happening at the scheme and it's great to see so many individuals and groups using the facilities."

West Kent's Head of Support Duncan Wilson

Head of Support, Duncan Wilson and Extra Care Manager, Rachael Salvesen

Rachael Salvesen was far from disappointed after being taken out of the running for a 2018 Kent Housing Group Excellent Partnership award.

It soon became clear that the reason Rachael's name was not in the frame for the partnership award was that the judges were so impressed, they had instead decided to name her as this year's Excellent Housing Professional.

Rachael had been put forward for an award in recognition of her work in setting up events and activities at our recently opened Kent Excellent Homes For All (KEHFA) scheme for over-55s at Copperfields in Ramsgate.

Copperfields is designed to be used by the whole community and includes a hair salon, gym, treatment room, restaurant, bar and small shop and activity room, all of which are available to the public as well as residents.

Rachael has worked with organisations to set up a whole raft of events and activities at Copperfields, including the Kent Community Day Service Scheme for Thanet, twice-weekly visits by Age UK, a monthly church service,

Saturday music sessions and a weekly visit by the Kent Association for the Blind.

The Thanet Autistic Parents Group meets weekly in term-time and joins residents for breakfast, Action on Hearing offers hearing aid checks twice a month and Community Health NHS Kent visits weekly to promote healthy eating activities and fitness.

Rachael is also a member of Newington Wellbeing Network, which meets at Newington community centre and promotes wellbeing. One of the people who attends, Sarah (not her real name), asked if she could volunteer at Copperfields because she found it such a comfortable place.

"Before I started working in the shop I was very shy and would not talk to anyone, but now my confidence has bloomed with help from the amazing staff and tenants. Copperfields has helped me come out of my shell."

Rachael also asked Newington Primary School to bring its choir to sing for the residents and other local people at Christmas. On average, 71 local people use Copperfields each week, reflecting its role as a valuable community resource.

West Kent's Head of Support Duncan Wilson commented: "Rachael has built a thriving community at Copperfields. There is always something happening at the scheme and it's great to see so many individuals and groups using the facilities."

**2018  
KENT HOUSING  
GROUP**

**EXCELLENT  
HOUSING  
PROFESSIONAL**



# An early start to training opportunities



Pauline Smith, Training and Employment Officer

Helping residents achieve goals and improve their prospects

Our new Training, Employment and Aspirations (TEA) project is designed to help new West Kent residents achieve their ambitions by giving them support every step of the way.

Training and Employment Officer Pauline Smith now joins our tenancy services officers when they go out to welcome new tenants into their homes.

*"I sit down with each tenant and try to get a complete picture of what they want to achieve and if there are any gaps we can help to fill in", Pauline explained. "We talk about their qualifications, their CV, and benefit issues they may have, where the local job club is, and anything else which might be useful to them."*

"The idea is to make sure they have a complete picture of what is available to help them achieve their goals and improve their prospects - and it's not just one visit. We stay in contact so tenants know we are there to help them throughout the journey."

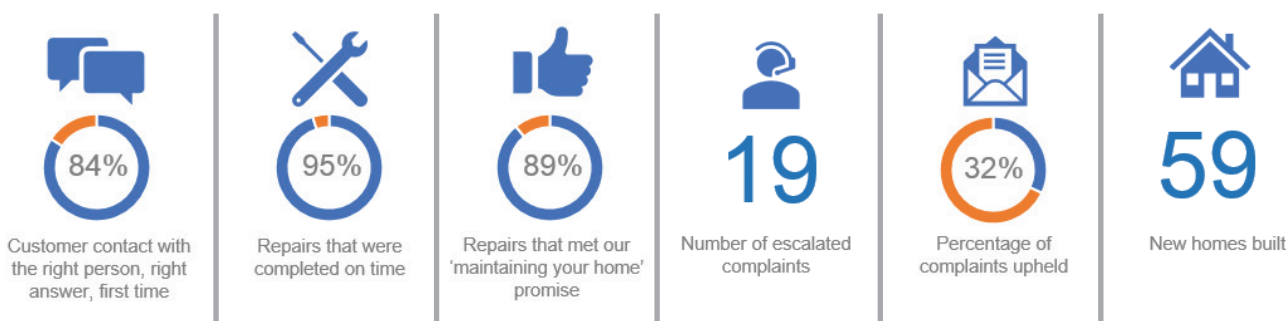
While the TEA is currently a pilot scheme, feedback has been very positive.

Pauline helped one tenant with a criminal conviction complete a disclosure form, without which she would not have been able to work. "She didn't even realise that she needed to complete the form and she was very pleased we were able to help her through the process," Pauline explained.

Another tenant in her early twenties with a qualification in animal care had always wanted to work in a zoo but faced a setback because of health issues. "We worked with her to get her a trial for a part-time job in an animal sanctuary, something she felt she could not have achieved without TEA's help," Pauline explained.

# Rating our performance

In September, we consulted with residents to find out what they would like to see in Neighbourhood News. Residents asked for us to report on our performance. Here's our performance information for the first half of 2018 (January to June).



## What our complaints are about:

Our repairs service • Recharge or missed appointment charge disputes  
Starter tenancy meetings • Former tenancy debt

## Consultations to help shape our services

### Small is beautiful - our scheme that supports people living in larger homes than they need to move to something smaller

- We asked **3,274 residents** what incentives they would want to encourage them to move into smaller homes
- We received **342 responses**
- Your responses will help us create better incentives, so we can free up larger homes which we can then allocate to people who need them most.

### Property MOT

- We asked **966 people** who had recently had a property MOT what their expectations were of the visit, and how it could be improved
- We received **129 responses**
- As a result of resident feedback we have stopped doing property MOTs while we rethink the process so that when we start again, they are more efficient, and customers have a better understanding of what they involve.

### Home standard

- We asked **352 people** who had recently moved into West Kent properties what they thought about their new home
- We received **101 responses**
- The responses will help us to understand what we can do better in the time when our properties are empty and waiting for new tenants to move in.

Full performance information can be found on our website  
[westkent.org/performance](http://westkent.org/performance)

Did you find this information helpful?  
Let us know by emailing  
[getinvolved@wkha.org.uk](mailto:getinvolved@wkha.org.uk)



# Property Checks – keeping your home well maintained

We're starting a new Property Check service in 2019. This will replace the Property MOT that you told us wasn't working. We have listened to your feedback and changed the way we will do these.

From now on one of our engineers will:

- Visit your home every two years – we'll confirm with you at least two weeks before
- Provide you with a list of the checks we are going to make at our visit and a report of what we found
- Keep our promise to ensure your home is well maintained – for example, we'll look for any leaks in your bathroom and kitchen and check your heating system
- Carry out any small - scale repairs that we have the tools, time and equipment for, particularly anything that could be deemed unsafe
- Provide you with advice for you to keep your home safe and well maintained.

Each visit will be scheduled to last no longer than an hour and that should be enough to do what is necessary. If our engineer does need more time we will arrange a follow up visit with you. The Property Checks will over time, reduce the number of repairs we need to make to your home.

We don't want you to save up your repairs for our visit though – please continue to report them as you do now.

Please look out for the appointment letter. We don't want you to miss it and be liable for a missed appointment charge.



**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.

**Can you afford not to?**

# Small is Beautiful

West Kent runs a scheme to encourage our residents over 50, living in a standard property that has more space than they need, to move to a smaller home.

The scheme, called 'Small is Beautiful' offers a financial incentive, depending on the size of home you're moving from, and how many bedrooms you're releasing. We will pay £500 for each bedroom you release plus a further £1,000 one-off downsizing grant.

We recently reviewed the scheme to understand why some people occupying larger homes don't choose to move, we were surprised that only one in five of our residents had heard of it. Residents we consulted with also told us that:

- A cash incentive or help with removals, as offered now, would encourage people to move
- Outdoor space, the local area and local facilities would all influence a decision to move
- Residents over 55 also indicated that they would like to keep their pet (currently some of our schemes don't allow them)
- We should consider extending the scheme to tenants under 50.

In response to the feedback we got from those that took part we will:

- Lower the age of those that we will help
- Consult with residents about our pet policy with a view to allowing dogs and cats at some schemes
- Develop policies for some of our new housing schemes to give preference to those that are downsizing
- Look at whether we can offer help with the practicalities of the physical move rather than costs to those that would prefer this
- Lower the age of the tenants we offer the incentives to.

For more details about the scheme please contact customer services.

# GETTING IN TOUCH

## CUSTOMER SERVICES

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

Email: [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)

Web: [westkent.org](http://westkent.org)

Phone: 01732 749400

## REPORT A REPAIR

Web chat: [westkent.org](http://westkent.org)

Email: [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)

Phone: 01732 749400 between 8am and 5pm.

0800 1691122 in emergencies at other times

## WANT TO MAKE A PAYMENT?

Phone: 01732 749596

## WORRIED ABOUT PAYING YOUR RENT?

Contact us as soon as possible for help and advice.

Phone: 01732 749400

[westkent.org/payrent](http://westkent.org/payrent)

Follow us on social media:

Facebook: [WestKentHA](https://www.facebook.com/WestKentHA)

Twitter: [@West\\_Kent](https://twitter.com/West_Kent)

Instagram: [westkenthousingassociation](https://www.instagram.com/westkenthousingassociation)