

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association

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WestKent

1989
TO
2019

Celebrating 30 years in housing

WELCOME from Frank

Hello

As I write this the first bluebells are emerging, and it looks like there will be some fantastic displays this year. And in this issue, there is a great crop of articles about how you can get involved with your community and the work of West Kent.

The Edenbridge Youth Forum tell us about their centenary project, researching the life and fate of local people in the Great War and visiting some of their graves in France.

Maintaining your homes is one of the most important things we do. We are in the middle of reviewing our key maintenance contract, which Brenwards have held for 15 years. Two tenants, Linda and Alan, are working with us to help us choose which contractor will provide this service in the future.

Joanne Frawley, one of our tenant board members, will soon be stepping down having served nine years on the board. Read about her experiences inside. I would like to personally thank Joanne for her wisdom and the fearless way she has ensured that the tenants' voice is heard around the board table.



Enjoy the Easter break

West Kent turns 30

From housing stock being transferred from Sevenoaks District Council in 1989, we now have homes in most parts of Kent to rent and own. We're looking forward to what the next 30 years have in store.

Look out for our special 30th birthday edition Neighbourhood News coming this summer.

Follow us on social media!

Be the first to find out our latest news, events and jobs by following us on:

Facebook: WestKentHA

Twitter: @West_Kent

Instagram: westkenthousingassociation

WOODLANDS COURT



John and Kathleen Edwards

“I just fell in love with it instantly,” said Kathleen

John and Kathleen were West Kent tenants and lifelong Swanley residents. Living in a three-bedroom house not far from Woodlands Court, they enjoyed being close to family and having the grandchildren staying over.

Kathleen suffers with poor mental health and both have deteriorating mobility problems. Neither was keen to move, so the couple looked for support with adapting their house through a disabled facilities grant so they could continue to live there.

When it became clear that the adaptations necessary for them to live an independent life were not possible, Jodi Kucers, Enablement Officer, suggested they visit one of the two remaining flats at Woodlands Court since they met the criteria.

John and Kathleen weren't keen at first: “I was just thinking ‘block of flats, a high rise’,” explained John. “I thought flats were small and not very nice to live in and we had the space for family to stay and didn’t want to give that up.”

After a couple of days Kathleen was able to persuade John to make a visit after Jodi told them that there was only one left.

“I just fell in love with it instantly,” said Kathleen, “It has lovely carpets and curtains and the most amazing views, it felt like home as soon as I walked through the door. It’s so big, and because it has two bedrooms there’s plenty of room for the grandchildren to stay.

“The building is just so well designed and has character, the rooms are all laid out well and are spacious and it’s all decorated well. I think it’s been designed to last because everything has been so well thought out.

“The application process was really straightforward and Jodi has been an absolute star all the way through and supported us so well. I had to keep checking with her that the flat was really ours as I couldn’t quite believe we were so lucky to have it,” she said.

“I love it,” John added. “There are some really lovely people living here; some call me John, some call me David! It doesn’t matter, we all get along and we’re starting to build up some friendships. There’s a chap who lives along the corridor who is a handyman and has offered to do any odd jobs we need doing. We all help one another out, I helped a neighbour who had a problem with her door last week.”

John and Kathleen are keen to explore the wider community, too “I’m going to go and have lunch at White Oak Court,” John promised.

When John and Kathleen were asked what they would say to others who were hesitant about moving into one of West Kent’s supported schemes, John was emphatic:

“Go for it,” he urged, “it’s lovely.”

And he had a message for West Kent:

“You should build more of these!”

Safety checks are vital

We take our safety checks very seriously.

'We have changed our process for checking your home for gas, asbestos and electrical safety to be sure it's safe for you and your family.'

We now only offer you two opportunities to allow us to complete these checks. You'll still be able to rebook your first automated appointment if it's not convenient, but you'll need to make sure you, or someone over 18, will definitely be home on the rescheduled date.

If we can't get access, that's a breach of your tenancy and we may apply for an injunction - ask the courts to formally ask you to give us access

to your home - or serve a Notice of Seeking Possession, in which case you could lose your home.

All you need to do is make sure you're available for these all-important checks and let us know as soon as possible if you can't make the appointment. Help us to continue to keep you, your family and your neighbourhood safe.

If you have any questions about the new procedure, please contact the community safety team by emailing communitysafetyteam@wkha.org.uk or calling 01732 749400.

EXCITEMENT AS NEW STORE OPENING APPROACHES

Our exciting new Abacus Medway store is set to open in early May in the heart of Walderslade village.



The double unit outlet will focus on selling pre-owned furniture and cycles that have been given a new lease of life thanks to the Relove-a-bike scheme run in association with HM Prison Rochester.

The new shop, which replaces the old Medway outlet in Cuxton Road, Strood, is perfectly sited to support the local community, including our new tenants in Walderslade Road, Chatham, where we are currently building ten shared ownership homes, four

affordable rent houses and six homes for sale.

"We are really looking forward to launching Abacus in a new area, welcoming new customers, providing volunteering opportunities and supporting community engagement," commented Enterprise Manager Paula Meurs.

Our Abacus stores in Sevenoaks, the Shepway Estate in Maidstone and, shortly, in Walderslade, support the community by

providing low-cost goods while helping the environment by promoting re-use and recycling.

"The new store is the only charity shop in a busy precinct and we are hopeful that it will do really well," said Paula. "We have taken on four members of staff and we are really excited about the new venture."

The Walderslade and Shepway stores will shortly be opening on Saturdays as well as Monday to Friday, in line with Abacus Sevenoaks.

FREE PROPERTY CHECK

We make a promise to our tenants to maintain their homes – and to do that effectively we need to carry out a property check every two years.

Our aim is that after the check, your home will not need any repairs for at least 12 months, so that you can enjoy living in it in comfort.

We will contact you to make an appointment, so please make every effort to be at home when we call. We will be in your neighbourhood for a limited time and will only offer two opportunities for you to benefit from this free service, which is only available to tenants, not to leaseholders or shared owners.

Each property check appointment is for an hour. An engineer will check your:

- windows
- kitchen
- bathroom
- heating system

They will check for safety and make sure nothing is broken and all the component parts are there. If repairs are required the engineer will arrange for them to be carried out. If they consider anything to be an emergency they will make an appointment for the works to be done while they are with you.

If there is time, the engineer will carry out minor works during the appointment.

What happens after a property check?

If an engineer has identified that repairs are necessary, the customer services team will contact you within ten working days to make an appointment for them to be done.

We will send a copy of the form the engineer completes at the property check within ten working days. If you want this form quicker it can be emailed if we have your email address.

If you have any questions, please contact the customer services team at help@wkha.org.uk

DIRECT DEBITS MAKING PAYING YOUR RENT EASIER

We are now offering 'any day Direct Debits' for people who pay their rent monthly, giving you more choice and control about when you pay your rent.

If you pay monthly, you can choose any date between 1 and 26 of each month for the money to be taken from your bank. Weekly payments can be taken on either a Thursday or Friday. If your payment date falls on a weekend or bank holiday, we will take the payment on the next working day. We'll never take direct debit payments early.

Craig Reynolds, Finance Director says, "We've recently reviewed the Finance team and are working to provide our tenants a tailored, time and cost-effective service. Any day Direct Debits give control back to residents and offer a wider variety of payment options to suit them."

We also have paperless Direct Debits, so if you would like to set up or change a Direct Debit, please call 01732 749400. We can collect them weekly, fortnightly or monthly – whichever is most convenient for you.

Remember your rent is a priority payment and you can lose your home if you don't pay when you should. If you are having trouble paying your rent, please contact customer services.

OFFICE CLOSURE Our offices will be closed on 30 April for a staff conference. We'll be providing an emergency service only on this day. This does not affect our contractors. If you have any questions about how this will directly affect you, please contact customer services at help@wkha.org.uk

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

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 westkent.org

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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.



Join HomeSwapper and go places

New baby on the way? Job opportunity in a different part of the country? Or just fancy a change of scenery?

Whatever the reason, we have made mutual exchanges easier for tenants by joining HomeSwapper.

HomeSwapper is the largest national mutual exchange service in the country, an online portal that helps social housing tenants swap homes locally or nationally.

Signing up to the online service is free and easy, and the website is backed up by well-used social media channels. The website at www.homeswapper.co.uk has more than half a million users and claims that 90 per cent of people looking to exchange their home find at least one match within 24 hours.

Membership is growing at more than 5,000 new members every week, there are currently 200,000 homes available on the site and HomeSwapper notches up more than 23m page views per month.

"This is a great scheme that offers our tenants a much better chance of finding a home they prefer by swapping with someone from another area,"

explained Jo Mahieu, Head of Allocations.

"If you need extra space, or perhaps you need less space because your children have left home, then HomeSwapper gives you another option and is likely to be quicker than using the housing register route. Just sign up, tell people about your home, add some good photographs and off you go. It's easy and it works.

"Because the site is national it's also great if you or your partner get a job in another part of the country. You can move to the Isle of Skye if you want – as long as you can find someone there who wants to move down to Kent."

We will check the details you upload – particularly with regard to things like rent – and you need to make sure you have a clear rent account first, but otherwise signing up for HomeSwapper is simple, and could be the start of a new life for you and your family.

"Our previous mutual exchange scheme was more limited and less user friendly, so this is a great improvement,"

said Jo.

"We are confident that it will prove really useful, and with 500,000-plus homes on the site there's bound to be something suitable out there for everyone."





Linda and Alan
help us select our
next contractor

08

Working together with tenants

Two keen tenants have taken up an opportunity to work with West Kent for the next six months to help us choose a company to provide the buildings maintenance and electrical contract.

With the current contract, held by Brenwards, due to end in February 2020, we asked tenants Alan and Linda to help us select our next contractor.

Development Director Mark Leader explained:

"It's important to involve our tenants in this selection process as the company that will be awarded this contract will provide an important part of our landlord offer and it is right that residents help shape and influence the future."

"The successful company will deliver the programme for the next ten years with a possibility of an extension, so we need to make sure that tenants will be happy with the people coming into their homes."

**WORKING
TOGETHER**

Alan, one of the tenants working with West Kent on this project, said: "I'm really pleased to be asked to do this because it shows that West Kent cares what its tenants think."

To hear about similar opportunities to get involved, contact the Communications and Engagement Team at getinvolved@wkha.org.uk.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT ON OFFER IN SWANLEY

A drop-in crisis centre for people with mental health needs has opened in Swanley.

The new crisis support sessions are provided from the Citizens Advice building in the town centre, with separate sessions for 14 to 17 year-olds and for over 18s.

Mental health experts North Kent Mind are delivering the service, which aims to help some of the one in four people it is estimated will experience a mental health problem during their lifetime, while funding has been provided by Sevenoaks District Council.

"The drop-in sessions give people a safe space where they can discuss their mental health concerns and, if necessary, be referred on for more support," explained Peggy-Sue Nicholson, Tenancy Support Manager.

"We welcome this extra resource as additional support for our tenants and others in the community," she added: "The session for over 18s takes place on Saturday evenings from 7pm to 9pm, while the drop-ins for young people are every Thursday from 4pm to 6pm.

Mind was West Kent's nominated charity for 2018/19, with £4,500 so far raised for the cause. "It is encouraging to see that a charity we are supporting is now working to help those with a mental health need in Swanley," commented Peggy-Sue.

PLEASE RESPOND TO OUR INVITATION

Here at West Kent we believe the best way to make sure we deliver the best possible service is to work alongside the people who receive that service.

We want to be able to invite as many people as possible to put forward their views and give us their opinions by attending workshops and focus groups, taking part in surveys and getting involved in other ways.

To do that, though, we have to follow the rules and make sure we are only contacting people who are happy to be contacted. That's why you will receive an email or a letter from us over the next few months asking if it's OK for us to get in touch.

We have to ask for your consent under the new data protection legislation – and you have to let us know you are happy, so please help us to help you by replying to the email or letter to give us permission to contact you. We will make it as easy as possible to reply, so please get in touch.



EDENBRIDGE YOUTH FORUM EVENT

When a group of Edenbridge young people was invited to attend a Remembrance Sunday parade towards the end of 2017, they could have just gone along and played their part. But that wasn't enough for the Edenbridge Youth Forum members. As they thought about the invitation, the 11 to 19 year-olds realised how little they knew of the traditions around remembrance and the reasons behind it.

With the centenary of the first world war due the following year, the group decided they wanted to understand more about what Remembrance Sunday represented, and so began a remarkable project.

"The youth forum has always wanted to be as involved as possible in the community and wanted to understand the significance of the ceremony so that they could be fully involved in what they had been invited to attend," explained Youth Services Manager Charlotte Ede.

The young people set out to find out as much as they could about the First World War and its impact, beginning their studies at the library, searching online and then talking to experts.

They identified a soldier from Edenbridge who died during the fighting in France and found out where he was buried, as well as several of his family members and others who had fought in the war and died after returning home.

It was then they decided a vital part of their research was missing. *"They realised that to be able to fully achieve what they had set out to with the project, they would need to go to France and see the areas where the fighting took place, visit museums and memorial sites and view artefacts,"* said Charlotte.



Nia Brown explained: *"When we went to France I learned a lot about the war and different aspects of the battles. We learned about people in our local areas that died in France. It was fun to work with my friends and we also expanded our knowledge so much"*

With the support of Cheryl Banks, Leader-in-charge at HOUSE, the ten-strong group raised £8,600 to fund the trip, with support from the Stonebridge Trust, Waitrose and Edenbridge Town Council.

The four-day trip to Hadelot in October 2018 took in museums, memorials, cemeteries and towns that had been affected, while local expert guides also contributed to their research and brought home the impact of the devastating conflict.

Amy, one of the eight who went on the trip, said later: *"Seeing how small the food rations tins were has put into perspective how lucky we really are. Just walking around this museum and seeing photos of towns reduced to nothing and thousands upon thousands of dead bodies piled up leaves me speechless and incredibly sad."*



Back in Edenbridge for the 2018 centenary Remembrance Sunday, the group again took part in the services and the procession, attending the service at St Peter's and St Paul's and then walking through the town.

Jocie Mears: *"I was so saddened by the number of names on all the monuments. All those people who died. It really hit home just how privileged we are to live how we do today"*

To achieve their aim of helping to highlight the impact of the First World War and improve understanding amongst young people and the community, the group has created information panels that include written research, poetry, collage and photos.

The boards were displayed in the Eden Centre library during the Remembrance period in 2018 and used at a presentation event in March. Forum members will also be carrying out presentations to some of the funders.



SHARED OWNERS HOW TO STOP PAYING RENT

If you don't want to keep paying rent to West Kent, maybe now is the time to consider buying a bigger share of your home.

Technically known as increasing the equity in your home, it can be done in increments of ten per cent and could lead to you owning it outright. As you buy a bigger share of your home – by taking out a mortgage - the rent you pay on the rest of it falls.

We call it staircasing – here are some of the benefits:

- Your rent to West Kent reduces as you increase the proportion you own'. If you purchase 100% of its value, rent is not payable at all
- You have a greater financial interest in your property
- Your house becomes freehold when you own 100% of its value (not applicable to flats)
- You are free to sub-let your home when you own it entirely.



If you are interested in finding out more please visit our website
www.westkent.org/staircasing
or contact the Home Ownership Team at
sales@wkha.org.uk or 01732 749900.

HELP with home improvements

Looking to improve your home? We've changed the way we deal with tenant improvements and updated our Housing Plus offer. Here's everything you need to know.

Home Improvements

If you want to improve your home, you need to apply via the West Kent website so that we can monitor and process all applications efficiently.

The completed form is automatically emailed to Customer Services, where one of the team will grant permission for straightforward improvements such as fitting a water butt or outside tap.

We will send you a letter that you will need to sign and return to agree to our conditions. We will record the improvement and check it at our five yearly stock condition survey.

For more complex improvements such as anything structural, the Asset Team will check and inspect the works after they have been completed.

Housing Plus

Housing plus provides extra services free for tenants who meet certain criteria, while other tenants can choose to pay for them. You will not be eligible if you are in arrears.

Housing Plus services include:

- Decoration assistance - free for tenants who meet the set criteria. We will decorate a maximum of three rooms at one time and only once within a ten-year period.
- Garden assistance - free for tenants who meet the set criteria. This service includes grass cutting to the front, rear and side gardens eight times a year and any hedges cut twice a year. It does not include flower beds.

- Help to decorate – a paid-for service. Decoration packs, which include accessories and paint for up to three rooms, are available once a year. You will receive a Johnson's decoration voucher and instructions on how to choose your paint and arrange delivery. You will have to pay for your paint at that time.
- Help to garden – a paid-for service. This service includes grass cutting to the front, side and rear gardens eight times a year and any hedges cut twice a year. It does not include flower beds. We also offer garden clearance days.
- Help with trees – a paid-for service allowing tenants to pay for trees to be maintained or removed. Please note removal is the only option for conifers or Leylandii.
- Kitchen and bathroom upgrades – a paid-for service. When your kitchen or bathroom is due to be replaced, you can choose to have an upgrade, as long as you are on our kitchen/bathroom replacement programme. If you are eligible, our contractor will contact you to arrange a survey.

To find out more about Housing Plus and how to apply, contact Customer Services or complete the form on our website.



Tenants at the heart of decision making

Tenant Board member Jo Frawley is stepping down after nine years of supporting West Kent. Here she shares her experience and tells us why it's important for tenants to get involved.

I saw it as an opportunity to have a stronger voice in our homes, and therefore our lives

"It's 30 years since West Kent became the first large scale voluntary transfer housing association in 1989, taking over homes from Sevenoaks District Council.

During these 30 years West Kent has celebrated many successes; we were the first 'Excellent'-rated housing association in the country and the first in Kent to be named a Gold Standard Investor in People.

Having served my full term of nine years on the West Kent Board, I have to stand down from my role of Tenant Board Member at this year's annual meeting.

I have been a tenant in Swanley for more than 47 years. I was previously a tenant of Sevenoaks Council, so when in 1989 tenants were asked if we supported the formation of a housing association for West Kent, I, like many other tenants, saw it as an opportunity to have a stronger voice in our homes, and therefore our lives.

Over the years I have not been disappointed. I've seen many improvements in both our homes and the services we receive, along with the opportunity for tenants to become involved in various ways to ensure our voices and opinions are heard and tenants are kept at the centre of policies and plans.

I am particularly proud to have been involved with the work around fixed term tenancies, the improvements that were made to resident involvement and the advancements we've made towards making West Kent more digital. There were some difficult times; the imposed rent reduction was a hard time to be involved, especially when we had to agree to reduce some services.

I became an actively involved tenant around 2006, becoming a Tenant Representative, a member of the former Tenant Consultative Committee, and taking part in various other groups and activities with West Kent or supported by them.

In 2010 I was encouraged to apply to become a Tenant Board Member, and to my surprise was accepted. I was nervous and rather unsure whether or not I would be capable of participating in a meaningful way in this

role. To my relief everyone in the organisation - the brilliant and dedicated staff, the skilled Executive Team and my fellow board members - made me very welcome.

There was a lot to learn out about how West Kent operated and how the Board governs the organisation, but training, to expand my knowledge, and support was available.

I've gained so much from my time on the Board. I have a greater knowledge of housing-related issues and my confidence has grown. I've enjoyed working alongside many committed and talented people who care and are committed to providing good quality homes and safe, happy communities for people who, like me, are unable to either buy or rent in the open market because of their circumstances.

I was particularly honoured when I was asked to become the Chair of one of the Board's sub-committees, and then when I was made the Vice-Chair of the Board, proving that tenants really do have the chance to have a real, and meaningful voice in the governance and destiny of West Kent.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of West Kent's excellent and hardworking, staff, directors and current and former Board Members for all their help, support and fellowship during my time with West Kent.

I am going to be quite sad to step down from the Board in May, but I'm really pleased that as we have recently appointed two further tenants, we now have three excellent Tenant Board Members to pick up the baton.

Tenants are not on the Board to represent tenants' interests, but they do bring their perspective and life experiences to the broad mix of knowledge, skills and talents on the Board.

I congratulate West Kent for the past successful 30 years and I am confident it will continue to be a vibrant, accomplished and caring organisation for the next 30 and beyond. I'm very proud and feel lucky to be a tenant here.



FANCY MAKING MONEY FROM SOMETHING YOU LOVE?



An inspirational business course with a great track record is returning to Maidstone and Edenbridge.

PopUp Business School will again be offering would-be entrepreneurs advice and encouragement aimed at helping them set up in business on their own – or simply pick up new work-focused skills.

The PopUp team brought their unique – and completely free – business school to The Mall in Maidstone last year, with impressive results.

A number of those who attended the course, sponsored by West Kent and fellow housing association Golding Homes, finished the fortnight determined to use their new-found knowledge to turn their hobby into their business.

For one, in particular, the sessions led by PopUp business School co-founder and lead trainer Alan Donegan turned out to be the start of a whole new chapter.

Shirley Whitcombe was keen to pursue her dream of setting up her own maternity and baby clothes business, and after attending the course she went ahead with her plans. Although she has since moved to north Devon, she is now running her own shop, called bump-2-baby.

"Alan and the rest of the PopUp team certainly confirmed to me that you can follow your dreams, and attending the course helped me make some important decisions. I thought the business school was fantastic. I learned such a lot as I am sure that everyone who attended did too," she said.

The people of Maidstone have an opportunity to follow in Shirley's footsteps by attending the next PopUp course, which will be held over two weeks from Tuesday 23 April to 3 May at the PopUp Shop next to Superdrug on the upper floor of The Mall.

There will be an opportunity for Edenbridge residents to be inspired when PopUp is based at the Edenbridge Village Hall for one week from 24 to 28 June.

The events are part of an £8.6m, cross-channel project called Increase Valorisation Sociale (Increase VS), which is being led by South East-based Optivo housing association and supported by local supporters including West Kent.

The funding is being used to deliver workshops across the region aimed at kick-starting small businesses and creating jobs.

The PopUp message is that would-be entrepreneurs don't need a complex business plan, expensive legal advice and a frighteningly big business loan; just an idea, some basic marketing skills and plenty of passion.

"Clearly it would be fantastic if some people went on to start their own business as a result of the course, but there are lots of other benefits in terms of picking up new skills, gaining confidence and understanding more about the opportunities on offer,"

explained Pauline Smith, Training and Employment Officer

Breaking the rules?

Here's your 'GET OUT OF JAIL FREE' card

Tenants who are cheating people out of a home are to be given a chance to change their ways.

West Kent is joining other housing associations across the county in offering a 'key amnesty' to tenants who are subletting their homes or charging other people to stay in them while they live elsewhere.

During June's month-long amnesty, tenants who hand in their keys so that we can offer their property to someone who really needs it will not face prosecution or legal action of any kind.

But as our Head of Tenancy Services Genette Pinwill pointed out, the amnesty has a sting in the tail. "If the campaign raises awareness of this issue, there is always a possibility that someone will tell us about a neighbour they think is defrauding West Kent," she explained.

"If we investigate and discover there is illegal subletting, or similar, going on, then we won't hesitate to take action, and that is likely to involve prosecution. The amnesty only applies to tenants who come to us during the month."

There are several ways in which tenants can defraud the association, and the penalties are severe, with a jail term of up to two years and fines of up to £50,000 possible.

"The most basic form of fraud is simply lying about your circumstances in order to rent a home that you wouldn't otherwise be entitled to," explained Genette.

In other cases tenants move out completely, living elsewhere while charging a new family or families to rent the home that is registered to them.

"There are also cases where the tenant dies and a relative says that they have been living in the house for a number of years, perhaps claiming to have supported the former owner, in order to be allowed to take over the tenancy," said Genette.

"However it is done, tenancy fraud is a very serious issue. It restricts the amount of housing available for those with a genuine need and it is

a drain on the public purse because people still on the list have to stay in temporary accommodation.

"We are keen to play our part in stopping it and want to raise awareness of the problem across West Kent. Part of the difficulty is that tenants acting in this way make sure their rent is paid, don't report repairs and don't bring any attention to themselves, so they slip under the radar.

"We want people to realise this is wrong, understand the consequences – and the potential for a severe punishment if they are caught – and come forward. If they do that during the amnesty, we will take back the house but will not take any further action."

TV FAME FOR ABACUS IN SEVENOAKS

Celebrity 'upcycler' Georgina Burnett has been singing the praises of her favourite source of used furniture – West Kent's Abacus store in Sevenoaks.



Georgina, who lives in Sevenoaks and produces the popular property renovation and furniture upcycling video blog The Home Genie, appeared on ITV's This Morning to show a wider audience how to create stylish new items from previously unwanted pieces of furniture.

As part of the programme, Georgina was filmed visiting the Abacus store – one of her favourite haunts - and selecting items to transform as part of the programme.

The Sevenoaks store, along with our Abacus shops in Shepway, near Maidstone, and, shortly, in Waterslade, Chatham, keep unwanted furniture, electrical goods and other items out of landfill and give them a second life.

They also provide a useful source of previously owned items for less well-off residents or those setting up home for the first time and offer training and volunteering opportunities for local people, while the cash they generate allows us to support a variety of community projects.

In 2016 Georgina raised £1,770 for the BBC's Children in Need appeal in a 24-hour charity 'Paintathon' which again featured items she had selected from Abacus. The pieces were later auctioned online to raise money for our community projects.

After the latest TV plug for Abacus, Enterprise Manager Paula Meurs said it was:

"good to have a celebrity using Abacus in Sevenoaks for her raw materials and great to be featured on television."

Only put food on the hob!

A recent fire in one of our homes has sparked a warning about the danger of leaving items on top of electric hobs.

"The tenant fell against the cooker and accidentally turned one of the electric rings on without noticing," Peter Finch, Head of Property explained.

"That wouldn't have been too bad, except the tenant stored an air fryer on the top of her cooker. Because the fryer was plastic it caught fire and the

fire brigade had to be called. The message is really simple – don't store anything on the top of a cooker because it can cause a serious fire.

"You may not think something like that would ever happen to you but it might, so don't take the risk."

In another recent incident a smoker failed to extinguish his cigarette properly before throwing it into a waste bin full of paper, which caught fire.

"In this case the man was able to put the fire out by throwing water over it, but not before it had badly scorched the side of his sofa,"

said Peter.

"Use an ashtray and make absolutely certain your cigarette is stubbed out properly."

AWARD 2019 winners

We had a successful night at this year's Making It Happen Community and Voluntary Awards organised by Sevenoaks District Council.

Hartley resident Veronica McGannon, well known for her tireless efforts on behalf of local people and the many events she organises at Wellfield Community Hall, won the Older Persons' Group of the Year award.

In the same category, our Extra Care Team Manager Karen Gibbs was highly commended in recognition of the successful transition of White Oak Court to a full extra care scheme in April 2018.

"This was the first scheme in Kent to make this transition and the success was due to great partnership working by everyone involved, ensuring residents were kept informed and avoiding any breaks in the service,"

Karen explained.

When Kent County Council brought in Lauriem to provide the extra care services at the Swanley scheme, it meant a better deal for residents at White Oak Court.



At the same time it took a focus on partnership working and good communications to ensure that the transition was a smooth one that kept residents informed and avoided any breaks in the service.

"Before April 2018, West Kent had provided 24-hour staffing at the scheme, including emergency overnight support, but from that date we focused on managing the scheme, with Lauriem providing 24-hour care for our residents," said Karen.

"We were working towards the transition for two years to ensure it went smoothly and we are pleased with the great relationship the on-site team has helped to create."

Karen was put forward for the award after Cllr Michelle Lowe, who looks after housing and health for Sevenoaks Council, visited White Oak Court to take part in another event and was impressed with what she saw.

The scheme offers independent living for residents of the 52 flats.

"Some residents need up to four care visits a day and others are generally completely independent. That mix really helps the inclusive feel of White Oak Court,"

Karen added.

Of the award, she said:

"It's great that the efforts of staff working together as a team have been recognised."

Performance – second half year 2018

We want you to know how well we are performing. We also want to learn from our mistakes and ensure we continue to improve our services. You can find our annual reports on our website, or request a printed version from customer services. Here is our performance against our service standards for the second half of 2018. We will publish another update in July 2019.



Right person, right answer, first time:

80% of our customers contact with us was with the right person right answer, first, time. In other words, we are able to resolve enquiries within the first contact in 80% of cases.

Our target was 88%, so we were 8% below our target.

YOU SAID, WE DID

Last year, we reviewed our 'property MOT' process. You told us these visits did not meet your expectations. Many of the issues identified could not be fixed on the same day, and more appointments with other contractors had to be arranged.

We have redesigned these visits and now call them 'property checks'. You can read more about these on page five. We have made sure we communicate properly so you know what to expect when an engineer comes out to do a property check. These visits will start in April, and all our residents will get a visit once every two years.

Consultations to help shape our services

The future of Edenbridge

- We asked residents over 55 who live in Edenbridge about their future plans and aspirations. The information from this will be used to make sure the type of properties we are building are relevant and appropriate for the area.

Social Housing Green Paper

- The government asked for views on their plans for social housing. We asked residents for their experiences in the resident workshop and fed these back in our response.

Contact centre opening times

We wanted to change the opening times of our contact centre so it closed at 5pm rather than 5.15pm. We wanted to find out how this would affect residents. We posted polls on Twitter and Facebook so people could give their opinions.

Residents supported this change, so we're looking to change the opening times this summer.



Home Insurance?
Without adequate home contents insurance you could end up with nothing at all.

Changes to tenancy services patches

West Kent is growing every year as we build new homes for people across Kent. So we can keep providing an excellent service we have employed another full-time tenancy services officer, and are in the process of recruiting two new tenancy services co-ordinators to support the team.

We have made some small changes to patches, which means that some residents may have a new tenancy services officer. We are also working towards cross patch working, which means it may not always be the same member of staff you communicate with.



Tenancy Services Officer	Area managed
Ann Jones	Swanley – St Mary's estate, Squirrels close, Pemperton Gardens and Bonney Way
Karen Hewett	Swanley – Christchurch, Lullingstone, Farningham, Horton Kirby, South Darenth, Crockenhill, Gala Avenue, Discovery Drive
Zoe Everest	Swanley – Whiteoak area
Rebecca Curtis	Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, Sittingbourne, Hextable, Hoo, Canterbury, Broadstairs and Gravesend
Jane Hamblin	Longfeld, New Ash Green, Ash, Hartley, West Kingsdown, Hodsoll Street and Fawkham
Rebecca Petty	Halstead, Knockholt, Otford, Seal, Kemsing, Shoreham and Eynsford
Tony Bourne	Edenbridge and Cowden
Mike Perry	Maidstone, Ashford, Headcorn and Lenham
Jennie Swoish	Sevenoaks South
Dawn Follett and Katy Dee	Sevenoaks North, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Tenterden, Hawkhurst, Leigh, Penshurst, Fordcombe, Four Elms and Ide Hill
Ruth Cox	Westerham, Crockham Hill, Sundridge, Brasted, Dunton Green and Riverhead

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
Web: westkent.org
Phone: 01732 749400

REPORT A REPAIR

Web chat: westkent.org
Email: 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

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)