

# NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of  
West Kent Housing Association



## Summer 2019

### Supporting local food banks

Staff from West Kent used their volunteering leave to help Swanley Foodbank  
page 11

### New Chief Executive for West Kent

Tracy Allison has been appointed as Chief Executive at West Kent.  
page 3

### Creature Comforts

New Pets Policy means more residents are now able to keep a pet.  
page 6



@West\_Kent West Kent [westkent.org](http://westkent.org)

**WestKent**

1989  
to  
2019

Celebrating 30 years in housing

# WELCOME from Frank

## Welcome to summer

I am writing this the day after England's nail-biting victory in the cricket world cup. England are now the first nation to have won the football, rugby and cricket world cups – but in each case extra time was needed. I think it will take the rest of the summer for my nerves to recover.

In this bumper issue there is a special feature marking the 30th anniversary of West Kent. A lot has changed since we started in March 1989. There was still coal mining in Kent and the internet was just being invented - although nobody had yet heard about it.

There is also a lot that we have tried to keep the same over the last three decades. Providing good homes and customer service, building new homes to meet housing need, investing in our communities and making sure tenants' voices are heard in running West Kent.

Unlike the cricket, there will be no extra time for me. After 18 years at West Kent, I will be retiring at the end of this year. My successor Tracy Allison will be joining us later in the year.

## Enjoy your summer



## Did you miss the last eNews?

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

- Pop Up with Sue
- Pop Up Job Fair comes to Swanley
- Fun day raises £1200 for Memory Cafe

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



# NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE for West Kent

“On behalf of the Board, I am very pleased to welcome Tracy to West Kent as our new Chief Executive”

Colin Wilby, Chair of the Board



Tracy Allison

*Tracy Allison has been appointed as Chief Executive at West Kent to replace Frank Czarnowski, who retires at the end of the year.*

She was recruited following an open and rigorous recruitment process that involved staff, board members and residents.

Tracy is currently Deputy Chief Executive of Hyde Housing Group, with responsibility for the Group Directorate of Transformation and Business Services.

Tracy is a finance director by profession, with a career spanning international companies in the manufacturing, retail and logistics sector. She has a track record of creating a vision for change and delivering business critical projects in complex organisations and working to improve service delivery and business transformation.

She says:

“West Kent has a proud history, and I am delighted to be joining at such an exciting time when they are challenging themselves to do more. I look forward to working with the Board and the Executive Team to deliver their aspirations.”

Colin Wilby, Chair of the Board who led on the recruitment adds: “On behalf of the Board, I am very pleased to welcome Tracy to West Kent as our new Chief Executive and we look forward to working with her as the organisation moves into its fourth decade. Tracy has experience in the social housing and not-for-profit sectors and we are confident that she is the right person to lead the organisation to deliver our ambitious plans for the future.”

# Keeping your estates looking good

Our grounds maintenance service is provided by G Bridglands Ltd. The team works hard to ensure the areas they operate in are kept clean, tidy and well maintained.



When we're in your area:

- Swanley – first two weeks of the month
- Sevenoaks – third week of the month
- Edenbridge – fourth week of the month
- Dartford, Maidstone, Ashford and other areas – third and fourth week of the month.

This sort of work is often dependent on the weather, so please be patient if they are slightly delayed.

All our estates receive the following service:

- Grass cutting, hard surface clearance and individual gardens – ten cuts per year (March to December)
- Gullies – once a year (November to December)
- Hedges – two cuts per year (January to July)
- Beds and borders – four times a year (February, May, July and October.)



## DO YOU HAVE A BALCONY?

A fire in a block of flats in Barking hit the headlines recently, twenty flats were destroyed and 10 more were damaged; thankfully no lives were lost. It was thought to have been caused by a barbeque on a balcony.

**If you live in a home that has a balcony, please follow our advice and keep safe:**

### Don't

- Ever barbeque on the balcony
- Store anything flammable such as barbeque fluid, paint or camping gas on there

**Our advice would be to not store anything on the balcony, but we know this isn't practical, please try to do the following:**

- If you smoke, please make sure you have a metal container with a lid to dispose of the stub and that it is properly extinguished before you bin it
- Do not store any material that could catch fire – so no piles of clothes or cardboard boxes

There is more advice about keeping yourself safe and avoiding fires on our website [westkent.org](http://westkent.org)

# DO YOU WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?



Visit our Facebook page @WestKentHA for regular updates. If you'd like to get involved, email us at [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749420.

The law has changed, and we now need your consent to contact you to ask your views about how we can improve the services we provide to you.

The only way we can do this is to write to everybody. Please keep an eye on what's coming through your door – you'll be getting a letter that you need to return.

We have already written to over 3,000 people by email and had a fantastic response, so thank you if you have already given consent.

We can only make the service and experience you receive better with your input.

We have lots of different ways that you can share your views, with varying time and commitment levels. These include an editorial panel, focus groups and online surveys. If you have more time we have opportunities such as scrutiny and workshops. Full details are on our website [westkent.org/getinvolved](http://westkent.org/getinvolved)

05

WestKent Neighbourhood News  
Summer 2019

## RESIDENTS' ANNUAL REPORT

Would you like a quick summary of some of the stuff we got up to last year?

The Residents' Annual Report provides a snapshot of our finances, resident involvement, complaints and performance. We've provided a couple of case studies and some facts and figures so that you can understand how we operate and how we are delivering on our promises.

Visit [westkent.org/annualreport](http://westkent.org/annualreport) to read the full report.



# Creature Comforts

The West Kent Pets Policy has recently been updated, and more residents are now able to keep a pet.

The new policy allows for a lot more flexibility, and many residents who couldn't previously have a pet will now be able to apply. Each application will be looked at individually and our team of tenancy services officers will contact residents to discuss the application.

**Julie Terry, Tenancy Services Manager explains why West Kent made the change:**

*"Research suggests that owning a pet has many benefits, including reducing stress and loneliness and improving physical and mental health. We wanted as many residents as possible to be able to benefit from pet ownership, and after consulting with residents, updated the policy to allow more pets into more West Kent homes."*

Julie visited a number of over 55s schemes to discuss the changes, and most residents were very positive about the new policy. When permission for a pet is granted, residents will be given advice and information about being a responsible pet owner and we'll be encouraging residents to adopt or re-home pets.

To celebrate the launch of the new policy, we asked residents to share photos of their pets on our Facebook page, and we were overwhelmed by the number of responses. From cute and cuddly kittens to giant snails and geckos, we were delighted to see so many devoted pet owners get involved and share their wonderful pictures.

Julie picked a winner, a lovely photo of Springer Spaniel, Max and George the Labrador. We sent them a goody box as a prize.



For more information about the Pets Policy and how to apply to keep a pet, please visit our website [westkent.org/pets](http://westkent.org/pets)

Julie went on to tell us:

*"We know that just like Max and George, pets become much loved members of the family and we were so happy to see all the lovely photos that were posted. We are really looking forward to welcoming more cuddly residents soon!"*

# A PURR-FECT ENDING for Sid and Eunice

For one West Kent resident, the updated Pets Policy is life-changing.

Eunice, who lives in Woodlands Court said a sad goodbye to her beloved cats when she moved into her new flat, but the new Pets Policy now means they have finally been reunited.

When Eunice and her husband Ted decided to move into Woodlands Court, residents were not allowed pets, so they reluctantly made plans to re-home their beloved cats with a relative. Sadly, Ted passed away just before they moved in to Woodlands Court, which made saying goodbye to the cats even harder for Eunice.

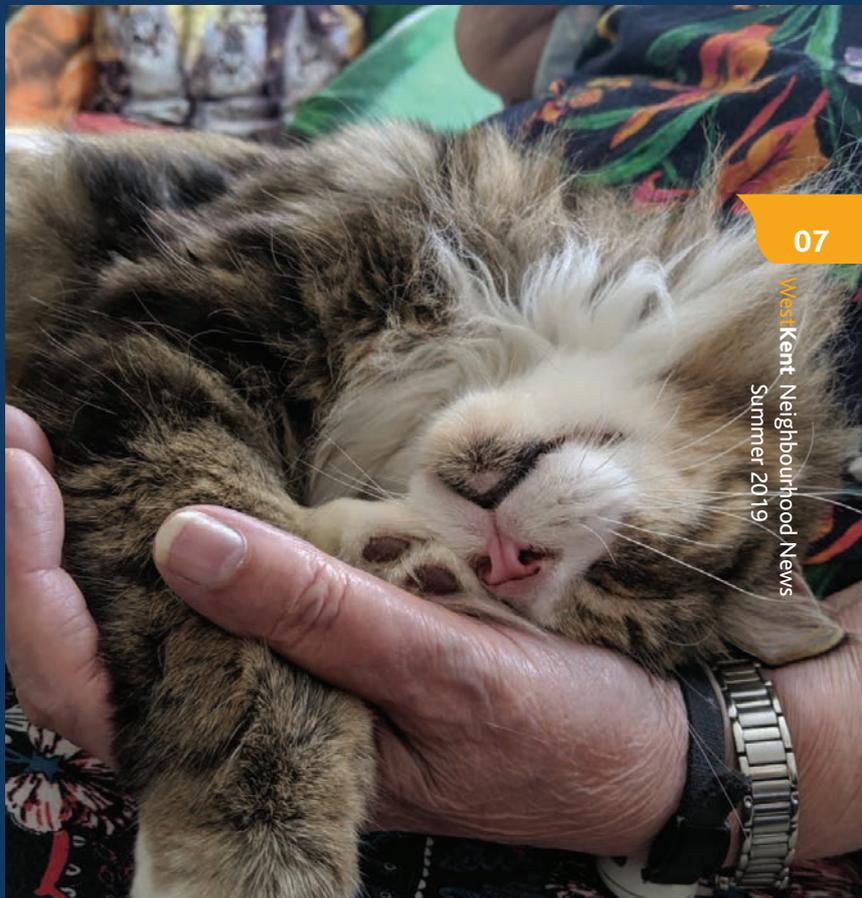
As Eunice settled into her new home, she hoped that the cats would do the same, but sadly Sid could not cope with the change, becoming withdrawn and refusing to eat.

Eunice told us:

*"It was awful knowing how sad Sid was and there was just nothing I could do about it. He'd visit every so often and he'd be so excited, but it was heart-breaking when he had to leave again."*

When the manager at Woodlands Court told Eunice that the Pets Policy was being updated and Woodlands Court residents would be able to have an indoor cat or small dog, Eunice was overjoyed.

*"I just couldn't believe I would be able to have him back after all this time. The thought of living without him permanently when he was so miserable was just so hard. This new policy means we can be together again."*



07

West Kent Neighbourhood News  
Summer 2019

*Purr-fect, Sid and Eunice reunited*

*"Sid has been my lifesaver – he's someone to talk to every morning and is good company. All my neighbours love him, I'm so happy he's home."*

# Home ownership

## For Sale – Shared Ownership Homes Coming Soon

We have a number of stylish one and two bedroom apartments and two, three and four bedroom houses for you to buy.

Name and location of new homes	Type of properties	Expected date of completion
Acres Green – Walderlade Road, Chatham	9 x four bedroom houses (4 private sale*)	Available now
Marlowe Place – Dover Street, Canterbury	8 x one bedroom and 12 x two bedroom apartments	Available now
Grove Paddock – The Paddocks, Lenham	4 x two bedroom houses, 8 x three bedroom houses and 5 x four bedroom houses	August 2019
Herschel Place – Highgate Hill, Hawkhurst	Last remaining two bedroom apartment	Available now
Three Fields – Small Hythe Road, Tenterden	6 x one bedroom and 3 x two bedroom apartments, 12 x two bedroom and 1 x three bedroom houses	Available now
Halden Fields – Halden Field, Rolvenden	2 x two bedroom houses and 4 x three bedroom houses	December 2019
Oakley Park – St John's, Edenbridge	15 x two bedroom houses, 25 x three bedroom houses and 1 x two bedroom coach house	Available now
Hinxhill, Willesborough, Ashford	3 x two bedroom houses and 20 x three bedroom houses	April 2021 to January 2023
Bicknor Wood, Maidstone	13 x two bedroom houses and 13 x three bedroom houses	Phased completions May 2020 to April 2022
Bluebell Walk, Harrietsham	7 three bed houses and 1 two bed flat over garage	Winter 2019
Weald Village, Sevenoaks	4 three bedroom houses	Summer 2020
Dover Road, Northfleet	20 two and three bedroom houses	Autumn 2020
Stoke Road, Hoo	13 three bedroom houses	Winter 2020

\*Help to Buy equity loan available

## from dream to reality - and no, you don't need to share your bathroom with strangers!

The average home in the UK now costs approximately seven times the average salary, so for many, owning a home just isn't an option. But rising prices don't need to be a permanent barrier, thanks to shared ownership schemes.

Shared ownership allows people to buy an initial share of a new home (usually around 35%). The deposit is lower – between 5 and 10% of the share price. Over time, they can gradually increase the share that they own, while decreasing the rent paid to a housing association that owns the other share.

Sophie Palmer, Head of Home Ownership at West Kent, explains:

*"Shared ownership allows people to get that first foot on the property ladder without it feeling too overwhelming. Many of our customers are first time buyers who otherwise wouldn't be able to buy a home. Our home ownership team is with them through the whole process, guiding them on everything from initial viewings to handing over the keys."*

Not everyone is eligible to purchase a shared ownership home, you'll need to have no other way of buying a house and your household income needs to be under £80,000.

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

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

West Kent is building new homes all over Kent, but as we transform building sites into communities, have you ever wondered how newly built streets get their names?

Naming streets is a legal process and certain rules and guidelines apply. With our newly built homes, developers will often pick a theme for naming the roads, or sometimes they do this jointly with the local council so that the road names reflect a local historic or cultural connection.

Our new shared ownership properties in Edenbridge are in the Oakley Park development and the theme for the street names is, unusually, motor-racing. The two and three-bedroom houses now available are on Surtees Drive



which is named after the motor racing legend John Surtees. Surtees famously raced both motorcycles and cars and won championships on both two and four wheels, including the 1964 Grand Prix. He lived locally to Edenbridge and his used car business was also based there.

Streets with unusual or creative names add character to the area and interest for residents, but can you guess the most common name for a street in the UK?

**You guessed it - High Street!**

# REPORTING ABANDONED CARS

Is that car parked in your space or across your garage really abandoned?

Most of our enquiries establish that they're not. Before you report one to us please check:

- Do you know who owns the car?  
Are you able to ask them to move it yourself?
- Have you checked the gov.uk website to see if it is taxed and has a MOT certificate?  
We can't act if it has either.

If after you have checked all of this, you are certain the car is abandoned, please report it to customer services by emailing [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk). Please ensure you have the registration number, make and colour to hand and give us as much information about where it is. We'll only be able to deal with cars abandoned on West Kent land.



# TOP APPRENTICE AWARD

## for Sarah

### West Kent's apprentice plumber, Sarah has been awarded Apprentice of the Year within the Plumbing Sector at JTL, London South East college.

She has been with us less than a year and is already proving herself to be an outstanding plumber. She studies one day a week and her sheer hard work and determination mean that she has almost finished the course, despite being only three quarters of the way through the year. She is expected to be finished in February next year rather than the summer of 2020. She has achieved 100% attendance so far and has passed every exam first time.

Sarah's boss and mentor Louis is full of praise for her and has been happy to support her apprenticeship as she is such a willing and capable student. He says:

*"Sarah isn't scared to ask questions to get things right first time. She puts herself out there and is eager and interested in the industry – and it really shows in her work.*

*She's developed skills working in tenants' homes that she'd never be able to learn in college. Things like working in tight spaces and with older fixtures and fittings such as iron and copper, and customer*

*service skills - you just can't learn that in a classroom, you need the experience.*

*I trust her to be able to get on with the job with very little guidance – even with the more complex jobs. I just check things are right at the end before she adds the finishing touches. It's rare I ever have to say anything other than "well done!" That's so rare in an apprentice who's been doing the job less than a year.*

*She wants to do the best job she can, and tenants really notice. They always comment how great it is for West Kent to have a female plumber – especially one so talented. They always ask me how she's getting on and take a real interest in her progress. She's a credit to West Kent.*

*West Kent is lucky to have her – and other companies have already offered her higher paid roles as they can see how capable she is, but she's happy working for West Kent as we share the same values as her. Sarah will be joining us permanently as a Trainee Maintenance Engineer after her course.*

*She's the best apprentice I've ever had, by far. If she continues this way she'll go very far."*



# SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD BANKS

In June, staff from West Kent used their volunteering leave to help Swanley Foodbank at Tesco Sidcup. Over 500kg of food was donated to the foodbank over the course of the day, filling the shelves to help people in need.



If you have a project and need an extra pair of hands, email [getinvolved@wkha.org.uk](mailto:getinvolved@wkha.org.uk) we may have some volunteers to help!

All West Kent staff are given three volunteering days per year to use helping community organisations and projects.

Over the last year, staff have used them to raise money for West Kent Mind, support activities at local schools and at local food banks.

## Help for homeless in Medway

West Kent has been commissioned by Medway Council to pilot a new service that will help rough sleepers in Medway.

Three new members of the team will offer a person-centred service that will help to reduce the numbers of people living on the streets or improve the health and wellbeing of those that are determined to remain there.

The service launched on 1 August and clients will be referred from Medway Council's outreach team and the team themselves will be out and about in the area, talking to rough sleepers to understand what help they need.

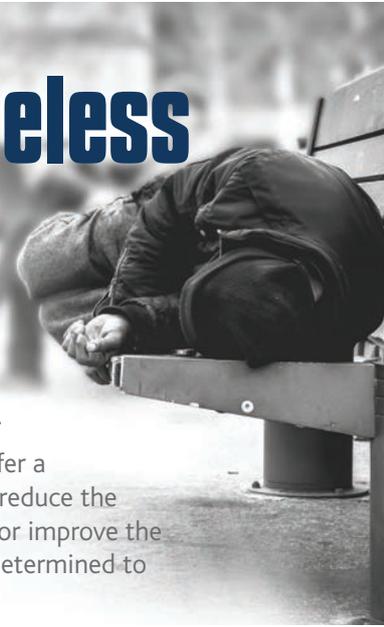
Sallyann Povey, West Kent's Crisis Prevention manager explains:

*"This service will focus on the needs of each individual person. We will be funded to give them the help they need - this could be paying off debts that are preventing a person from being eligible for a tenancy, providing furniture or simply giving them a hot meal and a new sleeping bag. People are homeless for a reason, if we can understand what that reason is and whether we can remove any barriers to them being housed that is what we are there for. We must also consider that some people don't want to be housed and our duty to those people is to ensure that we support them to live as well as they can on the streets, but get them engaged in other ways and in time perceptions and barriers might change"*

The team will assist to get rough sleepers any help they need, for example to tackle substance misuse, to register them with a GP, to give benefit advice or to offer training with cooking skills or other life skills, but most importantly building trust and confidence in the Support Worker and service. The service will be regularly reviewed throughout the year's trial and will remain flexible to ensure the team gets the best results for their clients.

An out of hours hotline will also be launched at the same time and a member of the team will be available at evenings and weekends to help the rough sleepers in an emergency. Sallyann explains:

*"We're offering the service during the day because this has been proven to be the best time to get people living on the streets to engage. There are less issues with them being under the influence of drink and drugs and they are more receptive to offers of support. We'll give them a number to call at other times though so that they know help is there if they need us."*



# Breaking the law?

## Hand your keys in and we won't ask questions

**"As someone waiting in temporary accommodation for the last four years, as far as I'm concerned you're doing the right thing"**

Concerned neighbours have ensured an empty home will soon be let to a family that needs it, thanks to the success of a Kent-wide key amnesty.

The property was handed back during June's month-long amnesty. West Kent was one of 14 housing associations and local council landlords that joined forces to encourage tenants who were committing tenancy fraud to give their keys back without risking prosecution or legal action if they did so during the amnesty.

Other partners in the campaign run by the Kent Tenancy Fraud Forum, part of the Kent Housing Group, also received keys back, either from tenants taking advantage of the amnesty or following tip-offs from members of the public.

"We have had several reports of keys being returned, and we know that we raised a lot of awareness about what tenancy fraud is and about how important it is that our homes are

occupied by people who need them," said Tenancy Fraud Forum Chairman Adam Simmonds.

*"Abandoning a property to go and live with a partner but keeping it as a 'bolt hole' simply isn't fair, particularly when the rent is being paid through Housing Benefit."*

Tenants can defraud their local authority or housing association landlord in a number of ways and face severe penalties if they are caught, with a jail term of up to two years and a fine of up to £50,000.

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

Do the right thing  
hand your keys in!



Illegally subletting your home could unfairly deprive someone of a place to live.

KEY AMNESTY MONTH

**AVOID PROSECUTION  
AND 2 YEARS IN PRISON  
AND A £50,000 FINE**

It is also against the law for tenants to sublet a spare room for profit without asking the landlord's permission, or to move out completely and charge another family or families rent on the home registered to them.

*"There are also cases where the tenant dies and a relative falsely claims to have been living in the house for a number of years, often claiming they were looking after the former owner, in order to be given the tenancy," Adam said.*

*"However it's done, tenancy fraud is a 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 the authorities have to provide people still on the list with temporary accommodation."*

West Kent's Head of Tenancy Services Genette Pinwill, one of the organisers of the county-wide campaign, added: *"The key amnesty was primarily designed to raise awareness of the costs of tenancy fraud and the risk of getting caught, and it did that very well. We received lots of shares and comments on our posts on Facebook, so the word is getting out there.*

*"The fact that it also persuaded a number of tenants to give back their keys and walk away knowing they were safe from legal action was a real bonus."*

The group urged concerned neighbours to continue to report potential fraud. *"This is not about snooping, but about ensuring our homes can be let to people who genuinely need a roof over their heads," Adam stressed.*

## PopUp Business School

Where would you find a clinical psychologist, a waste management expert and a photographer all in a room at the same time? At a PopUp Business School of course!

West Kent is working with other housing associations to bring these exciting free five-day workshops to Kent. Those that attend learn how to make money from their hobby without the need for a business plan, start-up loans or premises. The helpful team offers practical support, coaching and loads of advice to help those that attend turn their ideas into cash.

Three of our tenants Jamie, Rodney and Ryan attended to find out more about how to set up a waste management business and how to become a professional photographer. They were given lots of practical advice that included help to build a website.



Simon Paine runs PopUp, he says:

*"One of our participants told me the reason why she comes to PopUp is because of the positive energy, friendly approach and can-do atmosphere which is nothing like any other business course you'll go to.*

*The reason why we work with organisations like West Kent is they genuinely want to help their residents make progress. One of the best gifts they can give is the knowledge, skills and inspiration to start a small business without spending any money. What you get from a PopUp is genuine, practical help with no business plans, no loans and a really supportive environment that helps you get started."*

# TPAS NATIONAL TENANT CONFERENCE 2019

**The Tpas National Conference is the largest national event for involved residents. It's a chance to build networks, share experiences, and hear from high profile speakers in the housing sector.**

This year's conference took place in Warwickshire on 10 and 11 July. Tenant Board Member Angela George attended along with Communications and Engagement Officer, Emma Henry.

Workshops ranged from 'Housing policy in a post Green Paper world' to 'Tenant Engagement- are you up to it?' and were a brilliant way of learning, networking and sharing best practice.

The voice of residents was truly at the heart of the entire conference, with a series of 'tenant talks' taking centre stage and launching the first day of events. Emerging themes from the event included the importance of building trust between residents and housing providers, improving safety, tackling stigma and how to increase and widen resident involvement.

Polly Neate, CEO of Shelter gave a powerful and impassioned speech on day two, with a key message that 'social injustice is our enemy; social housing is the answer,' going on to explain the moral, economic and political reasons to build more social housing in the midst of a 'national housing emergency'.

The event took a light-hearted turn for the conference dinner, which had a 'stars of the small screen' theme and included a TV quiz. Unfortunately, Angela and Emma didn't bring home the prize, but both came back full of new ideas to share with West Kent.

If you would like to become more involved at West Kent, email [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk)



**You can get choose a way of getting involved that suits the time you have available.**

**Not much time to spare?** *Why not follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter? We post regular updates about what's happening at West Kent and are always keen read your comments on our posts. You can also contact us quickly and easily using direct messenger.*

**A bit of time to spare?** *Come along to one of our workshops. These are a face-to-face opportunity to have your say and to tell us what you think about West Kent. All travel expenses are reimbursed, and refreshments are provided. If this option doesn't work for you, you could sign up to be on our upcoming e-panel. We will ask for your input and feedback, but it's all done digitally, from the comfort of your own home!*

**A bit more time to spare?** *If you would like to get really involved in shaping and influencing the services West Kent provides, then you could join one of our scrutiny sessions. This is when residents review services, dig a bit deeper into an issue, challenge and question, and provide constructive feedback and suggestions for the board to action. Again, travel costs will be reimbursed, refreshments provided, and we can also provide training to help you get the most out of being involved in scrutiny.*

*We really value the involvement and input of our tenants, so please let us know how you would like to get involved!*

# If you eat, *you're in!*

**Do you know your French climbing bean from your tomato plant  
Your sage from your chives?**

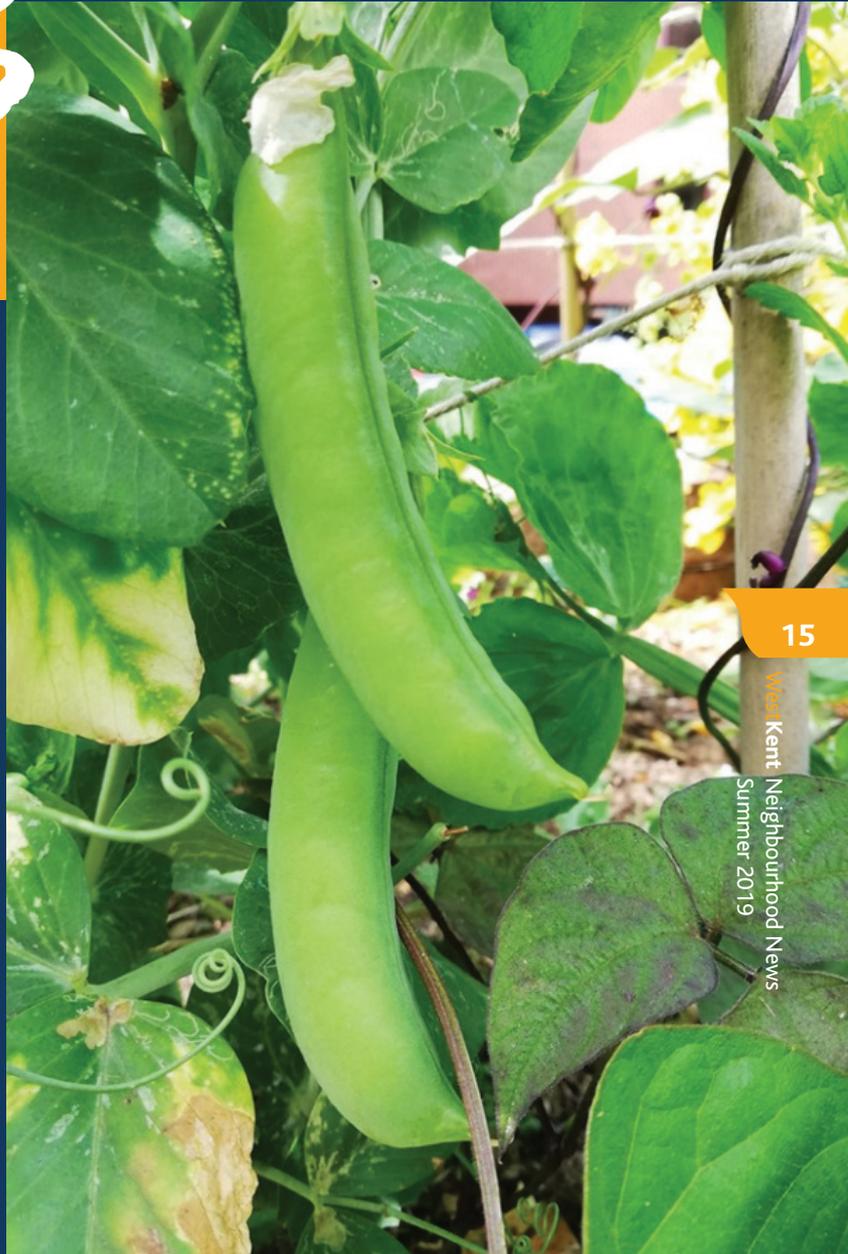
*Two of West Kent's passionate gardeners are teaching us about small scale 'edible' gardens.*

The international initiative Incredible Edibles has inspired two of West Kent's staff members to create edible gardens around the Sevenoaks office. They're now showing other staff how to grow their own fruit and vegetables – from sowing to picking.

This vegetable revolution has now spread as far as Japan, Brazil and New Zealand. The Sevenoaks Edibles plots aim to promote connected communities by encouraging local residents to get involved – even if that's just by picking the produce when it's ready to eat. Everything we have created at the West Kent office has been donated from garden centres or staff members.

The plots can pop up anywhere – outside your doctors, the train station, in the planters around town. If there's a green space, then there's a possibility for edible plants for the whole community to pick and enjoy. If you know somewhere suitable, let us know.

If you'd like to follow what we're up to, or get involved, follow Sevenoaks Edibles on Facebook and Instagram @sevenoaksedibles



# Appointment time slots why we can't be more flexible

iNHomes and West Kent contractors offer four time slots for all repairs:

- 8am-5.30pm
- 8am-1pm
- 12noon -5.30pm
- 9.30am -1pm  
(for those that need to do a school run)

Service demands and travel times mean we are not able to offer alternatives to the four time slots. This is something we keep under review and we appreciate this can be frustrating.

Chris Harvey, Customer Services Manager explains,

*"Our booking systems are supported behind the scenes by software that constantly matches the location of our engineers to the appointments that they are required to attend. This means that we can't change any times during the working day, nor can we give an exact time that an engineer will arrive. We know that this can be frustrating, but it's the best way for us to ensure that we get to as many people as we can during the day."*

If it is difficult to be in to meet an engineer you can ask a family member or friend – so long as they are over 18.

## Find a time that suits you...



You can now contact us 24 hours a day, seven days a week using a method that suits you.

You'll get the quickest response by using one of our digital methods; our web chat service, email, Facebook and Twitter.

If you don't want to be waiting in a queue, contact us using one of those methods. If you really do need to speak to someone over the phone, try and avoid our busiest times below:

	8.45 - 10am	10am - 12pm	12 - 12pm	2 - 4.45pm
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				

■ very busy   
 ■ quite busy   
 ■ less busy

# West Kent Works

West Kent Works is a free employment service which is open to all West Kent residents over 16 and looking for work.

We offer a personalised service, providing a wide range of support and employment opportunities. We can offer work placements, apprenticeships and training for job opportunities.

We can also help with:

- Online job searching
- Creating and updating CVs
- Completing application forms
- Careers advice
- Interview skills advice

For more information, email [westkentworks@wkha.org.uk](mailto:westkentworks@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749420.



**What could you live without?**

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

**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.

**Can you afford not to?**



# Residents advise on improvements to rent letters

18

## Start gently and then get tough – that’s the message from tenants about our rent arrears letters.

Eleven residents joined us in Swanley at our recent workshop to give their opinions on how our rent letters can be improved; to help us to decide whether to be independently accredited for our resident involvement work; and to decide on a topic for a scrutiny review of our services.

Working in two groups residents were given a selection of our arrears letters and asked how they could be improved. Their suggestions included a recommendation that rather than threaten legal action for a first missed payment we should take a light approach and maybe ask *“Are you OK? We see that you haven’t paid your rent this week, do you need our help?”*.

Their suggestions will now be considered by the income team and incorporated where practical.

We also asked for their help to get scrutiny reviews running again.

Scrutiny is about involving residents in designing the services we provide to improve organisational performance. Scrutiny is a critical examination of services, underpinned by good quality, up-to-date performance data and information that is made available to those involved in scrutiny activities.

The principles for effective scrutiny are:

- Independence – scrutiny activities should be separate from governance, management and mainstream tenant participation structures, but have a formal recognised status with support from West Kent at the outset.

- **Formality** – scrutiny activities should include clear roles, remit, terms of reference and lines of reporting for those taking part.
- **Power** – tenants and other customers involved in scrutiny activities should be able to examine services and standards and make recommendations for service improvements. West Kent should respond to this by agreeing which measures can be implemented and where they can't be implemented, explaining fully why not.

The group decided to scrutinise our decorating services. If there are other residents that would like to be involved in the review, please let us know by emailing [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk). We will cover all travelling costs and provide lunch.

Diane Talbot, Head of Communications and Engagement says:

*"We get such great feedback from our residents at our workshops and we make changes based on what they tell us. We would love to have a few more people attend though, if anyone is interested they should get in touch so that we can organise future workshops at a time and venue that suits the greatest numbers."*

# KEEP THAT NOISE DOWN!



Sevenoaks District Council has launched a new app, making it quick and easy for residents to report noise related complaints.

The 'Noise App' is easy to use and free for residents. The app takes recordings of the noise together with the time and location of the disturbance, and instantly reports it to the Council, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Residents can make as many reports as necessary.

Those making the complaints can enter details of the nature of the disturbance and the impact on them.

The Council will review the reports as part of any investigation. Data collected via the noise app can be used as evidence if the Council or West Kent take further action.

Prior to the introduction of the noise app, the Council sent paper diary sheets to residents who make noise complaints. Not only was this time-consuming for residents, it slowed down the process of making a complaint and gathering the

all-important evidence. Paper diaries will still be available for residents without smartphones or other suitable devices, or for those who live outside the Sevenoaks district.

The Council's Cabinet Member for Cleaner and Greener, Cllr Margot McArthur says: *"Noise disturbance, especially when persistent, can really impact on physical and mental health. This new service makes reporting noise nuisance quicker and easier. It means we can start to deal with the problem straight away and this will be welcomed by people suffering from noise disruption."*

The Noise App is available on iPhone and Android by searching for "The Noise App".

Please visit our website if you have any concerns about noise or anti-social behaviour [westkent.org/asb](http://westkent.org/asb)

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# Johnstone's decorating vouchers

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Visit  
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\*Terms and Conditions  
Terms and conditions: 35% discount available off shelfedge price on purchases of Johnstone's, Leyland and Fat Hog products only. Offer expires 31.12.2019.  
Offer available at Johnstone's and Johnstone's Leyland Decorating Centres only. Must be used in conjunction with any other offer, promotion or discount.  
This offer may be altered or withdrawn without prior notice subject to PPG Architectural Coatings UK Limited trading conditions.

## 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)

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