

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association

ISSUE 85



winter
2019

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Providing activities for young people
in their own communities-
pages 10 & 11



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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME from Frank

Hello

Or perhaps that should be adieu, auf wiedersehen, goodbye as I am retiring at the end of the year. It has been my privilege to serve you all during my 18 years at West Kent.

A theme in this issue is the work we do to keep your homes in good condition. Our principal maintenance contractor, Brenwards, starts a new contract with us on 1 January. We hope this will be seamless from your perspective and that the only change you will notice will be an even better service.

And we are looking for some residents to get involved in monitoring the contractors who maintain your homes.



Enjoy the festive season. Over to you Tracy.
Frank

Did you miss the latest e-news?

What you missed:

- Work experience opportunities at West Kent
- Swanley Pop Up Job Club
- We celebrated supported housing on Starts at Home Day

Sign up at westkent.org/news to make sure you get a regular round up of all West Kent's news.



New year, new job

West Kent Works is coming to Swanley.

We regularly work with people who aren't sure how to take the next step at work, or how to get into work. These drop-in sessions will provide support with CV writing and interview techniques, searching available local jobs, training and skills or anything that you need to get you closer to the job you want. And if you feel ready, you could apply for a job there and then.

In partnership with the Royal British Legion Careers Service, Pauline and Dawn, our Training and Employment team (pictured) will be at Swanley Link every



Tuesday, starting 14 January to help make this process simpler and less daunting for you. They'll also be at Swanley market on 7 January to answer any questions you might have.

The drop-in sessions are for everybody – even if you're not ready for work right now but want to start preparing for when you are, or just to see what your options are.

For more information you can contact the team on westkentworks@wkha.org.uk or 01732 749420.

Christmas CLOSURE

Our offices and shops will close from 3pm on 24 December 2019 and will re-open on Thursday 2 January 2020.

If you have an emergency during this period, please call 0800 169 1122.



Winter repairs

tips to keep you warm this winter

Boilers

During busy periods it can take us up to three days to respond to repair requests, which could leave you without heating and hot water for a few days.

Checking your boiler now means you can rest assured there will be no cold nights for you and your family. If your boiler doesn't work as you expect it to, try these troubleshooting tips:

- Check the power supply is turned on; switches can easily get switched off accidentally.
- If you have a meter, check you have enough credit and that the meter is on. Call your supplier if you find any problems with the meter.
- Check the thermostat is set to a higher temperature than the temperature in the room.
- Check the programmer is asking for heating and hot water. This is usually shown by red lights next to pictures of a radiator or tap.
- Check our DIY videos at westkent.org for advice on boiler resets, cold radiators or low pressure.



Tell us straight away if you notice a leak from any part of your heating system as it can affect the function of your heating and damage your home.

Frozen and burst pipes

Make sure you leave your heating on low if you go away to prevent your pipes freezing – and top up the credit on any prepaid meters for the time you are away.

NEW

HOUSING DIRECTOR

Cathy McCarthy

Cathy McCarthy has been appointed as Housing Director to replace Deborah White, who retired in November.

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

Cathy joins us after being Interim National Head of Housing at Centrepont and has held previous Director roles at Southern Housing Group and Origin.

Cathy says 'I am so pleased to be joining West Kent, especially at such an exciting time of change. I am really looking forward to working with residents and colleagues on delivering our objectives and providing a great service.'



SEVENOAKS RECEPTION

We want to provide the best possible service for our residents. On average, we only have 21 visitors a day to our Sevenoaks reception, and only 20% of these are our residents. So, from 6 January 2020, we're offering a reduced service at Sevenoaks, meaning the customer services team can spend more time dealing with residents' emails, phone calls and web chat messages.



The reception area will be closed for improvement work from 5.15pm, Wednesday 18 December until 8.45am, Monday 6 January, and from 5.15pm, Tuesday 14 January until 8.45am, Monday 20 January.

If you need to return your keys during this time, you can visit us at Sevenoaks District Council Offices, just

across the road, between 9am and 12.30pm, or visit our Swanley office. Alternatively, please email help@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749 400 so we can let you know how to return them securely.

Our Swanley office is not changing and will remain open for face to face contact from 9am until 4pm, Monday to Friday.

2020 RENT REVIEW

what you need to know

As we get closer to April, we've started to look at the rents we'll charge next year.

Residents have benefitted from a rent reduction of 1% over the last four years in line with the government's Rent Standard. This has now come to an end, which means in April 2020, your rent will go up by 2.7%.

For example, if your current rent is £125 per week, your rent for April 2020-March 2021 will be £128.38. This is calculated using the formula:

$$£125.00 \times 2.7\% = £3.38$$

$$£125.00 + £3.38 = £128.38$$

We know this is a big change, so we'll send more details to each household by March 2020. This will tell you what your new rent amount will be.

If you pay by Direct Debit, we'll also send you a schedule, so you know what your payments will be. If you receive Housing Benefit you don't need to do anything. Your local authority will write to you to let you know about any changes. If you receive Universal Credit, you'll need to contact the Department of Work and Pensions. We'll be adding some FAQs to our website, to help you understand these changes and how they'll affect you. If you can't access the internet, please call us and we'll send a copy out to you.

These changes do not affect shared owners, Kent Excellent Homes for All schemes (KEHFA) or residents paying intermediate market rent. We'll write to these residents to let them know their new rent amounts.

You'll be able to see where we use this income in 2021's Annual Reports and Financial Statements. These are added to our website in June each year. If you don't have access to the website, give us a call and we'll send you a copy in the post.

IF SOMEONE PHOTOGRAPHS YOUR HOME



West Kent borrows money to invest in our existing homes and build new ones. To borrow this money, we need to have regular valuations of our homes, and we appoint a qualified valuer to do this each year.

They assess the value of the homes and take pictures as evidence of the value. This may mean your home is photographed. The valuer will only take a picture of the external features, and this picture will only be used in a report seen by West Kent and the bank. This is in line with data protection regulations.

As the valuer may go to any of our 7,300 rented homes, we can't give specific notice to individual tenants.

These valuations are only for obtaining loans and are not with a view to selling them.

Housing Register changes

The Housing Register is the waiting list for people in need of social housing in the Sevenoaks District. If you need to join the Housing Register, you'll need to know about these changes.

West Kent has managed the Housing Register for several years, but from 1 January 2020, Sevenoaks District Council will manage the Housing Register and support people with their applications. If you already have an existing application, there is no change to your application and the council will communicate with you.

These changes will not affect who can join the register or how people can bid for homes, which is set out in the council's Housing Allocations Policy. You can see the full policy on their website: sevenoaks.gov.uk/housingregister

After 1 January, if you need further information about your application, please contact the council on 01732 227000 or email housing.register@sevenoaks.gov.uk

To apply to the Housing Register for the Sevenoaks District, please visit kenthomechoice.org.uk

Can you give us some of

your time to improve

our services?

We're looking for residents to work with our contractors to improve the services they provide to you.

We work with various contractors to deliver different services to keep your homes warm, secure and in good condition.

- MILA - windows and doors
- Brenwards – building, electrical, fences, asbestos
- iNHomes – handyman, plumbing, gas
- Bridglunds - garden maintenance
- Ian Williams – decorators



We meet with the teams regularly to identify issues with the service, problems in the field and to share policy or safety updates. These meetings are a great opportunity for tenants to join conversations and offer a different perspective and opinion. We're looking for at least four residents to volunteer their time to help with this.

Email: residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk

Residents online discussion group

We have recently launched an online discussion group for residents, so you can help us improve our services, from the comfort of your own home.

Our regular workshops offer residents the chance to give their views, make suggestions and give feedback, but coming along to a mid-week workshop may not be possible for everyone. That's why we are keen to offer more flexible ways to get involved.

We will post all the discussion topics in the group, so you'll have the chance to join in and share your opinions. There will also be quick questions and surveys and residents will be encouraged to start discussions in the chat area.

The group can be accessed via our Facebook page by clicking on the 'groups' section of the menu on our homepage. The group is only for residents, so we'll ask you to provide your name and address and/or tenancy number. You will also need to confirm you have read the rules of the group.

If you would like to know more, you can access a guide to the online group on our website westkent.org/getinvolved. You'll need to have a Facebook account to be able to join the group – if you don't have one, don't worry - we've provided some information about setting one up in the guide.



One resident in the group says:
"I love getting involved with things that have an impact on me and sharing ideas with others. Having a say on things that affect you directly is important and I believe this is what this group will achieve."

www.facebook.com/groups/westkentdiscussiongroup

We've received our seventh
award for our continued work
in our homes and
communities.



RSPCA PawPrints

We are proud to have been awarded a Gold Housing Footprint in the RSPCA's 2019 Community Animal Welfare PawPrints awards.



GOLD HOUSING 2019

Since 2008, the RSPCA PawPrints awards has been the only award scheme across England and Wales to recognise good practice from local authorities and housing providers in relation to animal welfare.

The scheme celebrates good practice by rewarding organisations exceeding basic and statutory service requirements with the aim of achieving higher animal welfare standards. Each Footprint has three levels – bronze, silver and gold – each level carrying progressively more demanding criteria.

This year, we have been awarded our seventh award for our continued work in our homes and communities. Through the monthly Love Your Dog Roadshows, pet policies, and partnership working with our tenancy services officers and local organisations, we can ensure the health and wellbeing of pets living in our properties are of a good standard.

The popular Love Your Dog Roadshows began in 2016, and we found as a result, the number of

complaints about animal nuisance reduced. We offer advice on health, wellbeing and behaviour and there are freebies available. We also reviewed our pets policy this year - cats and dogs are now allowed in most West Kent homes - so more residents than ever can enjoy the benefits of pet ownership.

Mandie Stallard, West Kent's Community Safety Officer said: "Each year we have met the criteria for the highest level of the award. Through our partnership with Sevenoaks District Council's Animal Welfare Officer and other animal welfare organisations we have been able to make a real impact in our communities and promote responsible pet ownership."

The awards are supported by the Local Government Association, along with the Trading Standards Institute and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

ASBESTOS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Asbestos was commonly used in buildings up until the 1980s. It does not pose a risk to health if it is undamaged or in a position where it cannot be easily disturbed.

Some of your homes might still have asbestos, most commonly in bathroom or kitchen ceiling tiles or insulating pipes and boilers, but it might also be used in other parts of the home.

You should know if your home has asbestos because we will have told you when you moved in. You don't need to worry or do anything - just be aware of the guidance here:

Do contact us immediately in any of the following circumstances:

- If materials you believe may contain asbestos have been damaged or disturbed.
- If protective coatings or sealants are peeling or breaking off or special warning labels have been removed.
- If the hard durable surface of asbestos cement based products is broken, damaged, badly weathered or eroded.

Don't

- Work on, damage or remove materials containing asbestos. The law requires licensed contractors to be used for all work on asbestos.
- Sand down or scrape off dry Artex.
- Drill, cut or sand materials you may think contain asbestos. These tools create dust.
- Break off pieces or break up large pieces of materials that you believe contain asbestos.
- Jet wash or clean down asbestos cement products. For example, sheds/garage roofs.

A little THANK YOU

It's important to us that you can easily contribute to shaping the services you receive from us. It gives us insight that we would never get without you and it's an invaluable contribution to the way the business is run.

Resident contribution is essential to ensuring we are responsive, transparent and current. So, we want you to be able to share your views in whichever way is easiest for you - whether that's online via social media, our website, an online discussion group or by email, face to face or by responding to a questionnaire in the post.

2019 has been an eventful and busy year for resident involvement and we'd like to thank everyone that's spoken with us and helped us deliver the best service we can.

- You've fed back on 11 West Kent consultations and two national consultations for fire and building regulations and the Together with Tenants campaign.
- You helped us to shape the way we communicate with you and the way we deliver resident involvement.
- Six residents sat on interview panels for staff and contractors and directly influenced the way the organisation will be run, and services delivered.

- You've attended four resident workshops.
- You've shared your views on three editorial panels.

And there's always room for more! 2020 is set to be bigger, better and more exciting, with more ways to tell us what you think. We know we don't always get it right but with your involvement, we can only improve.



8-12s clubs

Our 8-12s clubs provide activities for young people in their own communities, helping to build confidence, resilience and positive relationships.

Children are referred to the clubs for a variety of reasons and are given a safe and caring environment, with a focus on positive behaviour and communication to develop their social skills. In addition to weekly activities such as art, sports and games, there are trips every term and an annual residential weekend.

The impact of attending the clubs regularly, is not just felt by the families involved, but also by the staff at the clubs, who provide consistent support and guidance. The clubs are staffed by volunteers and youth workers directly employed by West Kent. Cheryl Banks is a West Kent youth worker, she says:

'Being a youth worker is about reaching young people on their level. Lots of people don't remember what it's like being a young person and all the challenges young people face, which are more complex today than they ever have been. I am passionate about being a responsible, reliable adult in these young people's lives; someone who won't let them down and who will be a good role model.'

Alfie & Jake's story

For one family, the 8-12s club helped restore a relationship between two brothers and gave a family under pressure a much-needed break.

Alfie and Jake are the eldest of four siblings and started coming to the 8-12s club when their mum became concerned about their disruptive behaviour.

The boys give a lot of help and support to their younger siblings, who both have additional needs, but Alfie and Jake were fighting a lot, and Jake was showing some very challenging behaviour. Mum was really struggling, and wanted the boys to develop and learn to value their relationship as brothers.

The boys started to attend the 8-12s club regularly, and as they worked together during activities, the bond between them began to grow. Jake and Alfie went along to the 8-12s residential at Bewl Water Outdoor Centre. Affording the trip would have been difficult for the family, but we were able to provide the trip free of charge so both boys could go. The break, which involved raft building, movie nights and other activities, had a huge impact on the boys and on wider family life. Their mum said:

'Thank you so much for the incredible work you do. Both my boys came home different people, with so much excitement, enthusiasm and confidence. They are getting on well and have made heaps of new friends which they couldn't wait to tell me about. It was so needed, and I am just grateful something like this exists, as I wouldn't have been able to take them myself otherwise.'

All staff and volunteers have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring check and references are taken prior to staff or volunteers working at the clubs. We work on a minimum adult to child ratio of 1:10. All activities are thoroughly risk assessed.

8-12s clubs are referral only, but staff are always open to referrals from parents who feel their children would benefit from getting involved. To find out more email youthservices@wkha.org.uk

A final quote about the residential:
'It was the funnest time ever! All the workers were really nice to me and I made friends who are coming to the same club as me. We did paddle boarding and built rafts on the lake and we all fell in!'

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Youth work offers the chance to make a real difference in the lives of young people and can be a very rewarding career. When jobs in our youth team are available, we will post them on our website westkent.org/jobs



INTERGENERATIONAL FUN AT MONTGOMERY COURT

Montgomery Court residents recently linked up with Rochester Independent College to do some intergenerational work with young people and Montgomery Court tenants.

The first event, in October, was a poetry recital. Residents were given some poetry to learn in advance if they wanted to, and the young people recited the poems off by heart. The tenants joined in with them and together they read all the poems.

The young people noticed Montgomery Court's lounge has a Google Home, and loved demonstrating and teaching the tenants how to use it. They asked what music they would like to hear, and a tenant suggested The Beatles, 'Hey Jude'. and suddenly there was a room full of different generations singing the song together.

They mingled for a while, chatting to each other and sharing homemade cakes and sandwiches.

Amanda Fairman, Scheme Manager says: *"The event was really lovely, and the tenants, young people, teachers and I are all very excited about this new project. We hope it will be a long lasting one for some time to come."*

Amanda is talking with the college to create some more fun events - ideas so far are pumpkin carving, putting up Christmas decorations, carol singing, gardening, and crafts. The school has even spoken about transporting some Montgomery Court residents to their school to watch school shows.



New Customer Strategy

We recently launched our 2020-2025 Customer Strategy, which builds on our commitment to great customer service and continues to put residents and customers at the heart of what we do. You can read the full strategy on our website, but here's a summary:

We want to:

- Continue to build on what has gone before
- Be more realistic about what can be achieved around digitalisation based on our actual experience
- Support and encourage independence and self-service for most customers - while recognising the need to provide more support for others, by tailoring service to the customer.

To achieve this, we will:

Understand

- Our customers better and the services they wish to receive
- Our processes better to reduce frustrations and improve our customer journey.

Engage

- Our customers in designing and demanding better services
- Our staff to deliver exceptional service, always.

Deliver

- Services by understanding customer demand and use
- The same range and quality of service irrespective of access channel.

We will do this by focussing on these areas of activity:

Consolidation

- Continue the work to date to improve and create easier, more efficient processes and systems to deliver exceptional tailored services.

Channel shift

- Increase the quality and availability of digital services for customers who can and want to manage their tenancies independently.

Culture development

- Create a culture of exceptional service through genuine mutual relationships with customers based on respect and compassion.



Medway team provides an A grade service

West Kent doesn't just provide homes, we build communities too.

One of the services we provide is a housing related support service to people in the Medway area. We offer them the support they need to sustain their tenancy, or to move into accommodation. Currently we are working with 125 people who need anything from help to manage their finances to registering with a GP.

The services are provided on behalf of Medway Council who regularly inspect the services we provide and grade them according to how robust they are – this process is called a Quality Assurance Framework (or QAF). This time, it focussed on health and safety

and safeguarding for clients and staff. The team was awarded a grade A, which is the highest rating they can achieve.

The Commissioner said:

'The clients are consulted on a range of changes to the service and it is clear from the visit and by looking at evidence that the clients' views are listened to. There is a significant amount of work that has been done to ensure the clients are involved with as much of the service as possible.'

NEW SHOP OPENS AT MONTGOMERY COURT



A new shop, run by Medway League of Friends, has opened at Montgomery Court, our Extra Care scheme in Wainscott. The shop had been shut since March due to a lack of staff, but Medway League of Friends has stepped in to re-open it.

The shop is open to the public, as well as residents at the scheme, and stocks a wide range of groceries and everyday items.

The Mayor and Mayoress of Medway, Cllr Habib Tejan and his wife Bridget, attended a ceremony to officially open the shop, with residents and guests breaking into applause as a ribbon was cut. The Mayor has a personal connection to Montgomery Court, as his mother-in-law, Agnes, was one of the first residents to move in to the scheme and he is delighted Agnes will now have more independence and the chance to shop for herself.

Medway League of Friends Chairman Derek May MBE explained why the charity decided to take on the shop at Montgomery Court:

“Medway League of Friends has supported the local community for over 50 years, by enhancing the care and welfare of health service users, staff and visitors in the Medway area. We are offering a useful service, but more than this, encouraging connections and enhancing the local community. Some residents might just want to pop in to say hello and have a chat, and that’s fine with us.”

Staff in the shop were full of smiles, welcoming new customers after the opening.

Amanda Fairman, Scheme Manager at Montgomery Court, expressed her delight at the shop re-opening;

“We are so grateful to the Medway League of Friends for making this happen. This shop is invaluable to residents as it means they can shop for themselves and make their own choices. This helps to keep their independence, which is what living in an extra care scheme is all about.”

Shop information:

Medway League of Friends Shop

**Montgomery Court
Choir Close
Wainscott
Rochester ME3 8FP**

Opening times:

**Monday - Saturday 8am-5.30 and
Sunday 9am - 4.30pm**

West Kent winners!

We're celebrating after being recognised at this year's Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards!

The Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards were founded in 2010 and celebrate the very best partnerships, projects and staff who help make a difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our county. The awards are sponsored by West Kent, Optivo, Engie Regeneration Limited, DHA Planning, Capsticks Solicitors LLP, Paramount Independent Property Services LLP, and Rent Plus UK.

With nominations across 11 categories, the judges looked for entries that demonstrated best practice, positive outcomes and a joined-up approach to providing services.

We're very proud of all our nominees – full details of the awards can be found on the Kent Housing Group website.

HOUSE wins 'Best Community Project'

HOUSE is a youth-led community group in Edenbridge run by West Kent and funded by partners including; Edenbridge Town Council, The Great Stone Bridge Trust of Edenbridge, Moat, and Sevenoaks District Council.

The youth group is open to anyone between 11-19 and runs three times a week. On average, 25 young people attend the Friday session, and around 12-15 attend weekday sessions. HOUSE is supported by West Kent staff, but the group is directed by young people in the Edenbridge Youth Forum.

Throughout the week, the group discusses a variety of topics that affect young people on a day to day basis, including:

- Bullying
- Drugs, alcohol and smoking
- Sex education
- Anti-social behaviour
- Mental health



HOUSE also works with young people to identify additional interests how they can be developed. For example, running a cooking course alongside a Food Hygiene level one course and helping young people through the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.

Youth Services Manager, Charlotte Ede says:

"Without this project, there would be no support for some young people in Edenbridge. HOUSE gives them a space to be safe and supported without judgement. HOUSE has an easy going, flexible approach to youth work that is received well and respected by young people in the area. Their relationship with the community, the young people, council and police has seen very positive outcomes."

Medway Homelessness Forum were also Highly Commended in the Excellent Partnership category

Rebecca Curtis, Tenancy Services Officer awarded Highly Commended in the Excellent Young Professional category.

Rebecca is managing a challenging area, where there are lots of ongoing anti-social behaviour issues, lots of new builds and demanding schedules to get residents into new homes. Rebecca has shown her versatility at dealing with some demanding issues. Rebecca has developed a good reputation with colleagues and residents, and no challenge is too much for her.

Genette Pinwill, Head of Housing says: *"Rebecca will always go the extra mile for our tenants. She demonstrates a unique combination of compassion and tenacity to achieve the best outcomes for everybody."*

Sarah Palmer, iNHomes Maintenance Engineer awarded Highly Commended in the Excellent Young Professional category.

Sarah joined West Kent as a Plumbing Apprentice. She has been with us less than a year yet is already proving herself to be an outstanding plumber. She studies one day a week at London South East College 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 finish in February next year rather than the summer of 2020. She has achieved 100% attendance so far and has passed every exam first time. She has been awarded Apprentice of the Year within the Plumbing Sector at the college.



Sarah's manager and mentor Louis is full of praise for her as she is such a willing and capable student. He can already rely on her to undertake almost any job and complete it to a high standard. He says: *"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 real credit to West Kent."*



Woodlands Court, Swanley awarded Highly Commended in the Excellence in Development category.

Woodlands Court is West Kent's latest senior residential development in Swanley. The scheme consists of 31 high-quality, one and two-bedroom apartments providing affordable, independent living for over 55s. The stunning building replaces a community of flats in Northview, which were tired and no longer fit for purpose.

Woodlands Court provides the final piece of our Swanley older person's community jigsaw. West Kent owns two additional senior living developments nearby, Bonney Court and White Oak Court. Together the three developments have successfully created a larger social community for over 55s.

Resident Kathleen says: *"I just fell in love with it instantly, it has the most amazing views, it felt like home as soon as I walked through the door. Because it has two bedrooms there's plenty of room for the grandchildren to stay. The building is just so well designed. The rooms are all well laid out, spacious and it's all decorated well. It's been designed to last because everything has been so well thought out."*

Deborah White, Housing Director received the Special Recognition award, for her work over the years at both West Kent and the Kent Housing Group.



Though Deborah retired in late October, throughout her years in housing she has championed tenants tirelessly and gained a reputation for driving forward improvements - focussing services around the customer and developing others. She has time for everyone, for her team members, for colleagues in other housing associations and for tenants.

Deborah has been the driving force behind West Kent's culture and values. In the words of Head of Housing Genette, she has given the organisation 'a heart and a pulse'. She has worked hard to ensure that she leaves a legacy that will ensure that the values are embedded throughout and that staff are demonstrating positive behaviours.

Ex Tenant Board Member, Joanne Frawley says: *"Deborah is an extraordinary, talented, dedicated and committed advocate of social housing. She has the unique ability to inspire others to take ownership, while keeping herself very much informed about almost everything within her remit and beyond. I've marvelled at her energy, her wise logical thinking, but most of all her empathy and compassion."*

IT ALL STARTS AT HOME

Residents and guests at our over 55s scheme, Bowles Lodge, enjoyed a celebratory coffee morning to mark Starts at Home Day.



Guests included the Mayor and Mayoress of Tunbridge Wells, Cllr James Scholes and his wife Mrs Jane Scholes, Hawkhurst and Sandhurst Councillor Patrick Thompson, and representatives from Galliford Try and Kent County Council.

Starts at Home Day sees housing associations across the UK celebrate supported housing, and the positive impact it has on people's lives. Bowles Lodge, one of West Kent's extra care scheme, offers independent living with a dedicated housing management team and on-site care services.

Volunteers from Age UK Tunbridge Wells - who run a coffee morning at Bowles Lodge every Friday - created a party atmosphere which included a 1920s themed quiz, a sing-along of residents' favourite tunes and plenty of delicious home-made cakes.

Deborah White, former Housing Director explains why we support the National Housing Federation's Starts at Home Day campaign:

"Starts at Home Day has a simple but important aim to ensure people who need extra support will always have a safe home that meets their needs, so they can live fulfilling, independent lives. This is our third year of supporting this valuable campaign as West Kent remains committed to creating beautiful homes and thriving communities."

Guests included the Mayor and Mayoress of Tunbridge Wells, Cllr James Scholes and his wife Mrs Jane Scholes, Hawkhurst and Sandhurst Councillor Patrick Thompson, and representatives from Galliford Try and Kent County Council. Guests chatted with residents and were taken on a tour of the facilities; including a lounge, restaurant, gym, bar, hairdressing salon and beautifully landscaped garden.

After the tour, a birthday cake was presented to Amy, who moved to Bowles Lodge with her daughter Beryl so they could spend time together, with the added benefit of help and support when they need it. Residents were delighted to join in with the birthday celebrations and expressed how happy they are living at Bowles Lodge.

One resident, Daphne, summed it up by saying:

"I just love it here. We are all mates together and there's so much going on, without any restrictions. You can do precisely what you want - it's wonderful!"

Congratulations Brenwards



Brenwards has been awarded the buildings and electrical contract, continuing to provide buildings maintenance and electrical services for tenants for a further ten years.

Staff, two tenant representatives - Linda and Alan - and external consultants, worked on a six-month tender process with three competing companies. The new contract will start on 1 January 2020

Linda said, *"Brenwards came across very well in the meetings we had with them. They want to grow with West Kent. The other bidders appeared to view West Kent as 'business as usual'. I got the feeling with the others, that West Kent was just a small housing association to them"*.

Alan added, *'The system and process has been fair. It was all handled properly and above board, with external consultants helping to keep the process on track. If anything, I think Brenwards were scored more harshly. It was interesting to see that'*.

With the new service comes a number of changes that will ensure our residents receive an improved service. We're working closely with Brenwards to develop our relationship and the service we provide, focussing on customer feedback and delivering an efficient service.

One of the things we know from residents' feedback is that you expect our staff and contractors to look professional, wear a uniform and carry ID badges when they come to your home. Alan said that this was a concern of his: *"I worry about elderly people when this sort of thing happens. They should show their ID"*.

To make sure your repairs are completed quicker and more efficiently, Brenwards has increased the number of companies across Kent that they can order and collect materials from. This will ensure they won't need to delay a repair because the materials they need are at a store forty miles away.

Brenwards will also be improving their customer contact. Previously it wasn't easy to transfer calls from West Kent to Brenwards and could leave you waiting on the phone for longer than necessary. With this new contract we are improving the call centre links between West Kent and Brenwards, and your phone calls will be resolved faster.

Debbie Buckley, Project Manager said: *"I hope it's clear to our residents that Brenwards are listening and making the changes that residents have asked for. Their commitment to providing the best service they can is clear."*

If you have any suggestions, feedback or comments on the Brenwards service, you can contact Debbie Buckley, Project Manager at debbie.buckley@wkha.org.uk

Rating our performance

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 give us a call and we can send one to you. Here is our performance against our service standards for the first half of 2019. We will publish another update in February 2020.



We received 333 'Making it Right' complaints in the first six months of 2019.

These complaints were mainly about:

- Disputing recharges or missed appointment charges
- Compensation for damaged items
- The quality of repairs
- The length of time for repairs

- Door, kitchen and bathroom replacements
- Handling of anti-social behaviour cases.

24 issues were escalated to complaint reviews or appeals. This is down by nine compared to the previous six months.

35% of complaints were upheld. This is about the same compared to the previous six months.

Complaints

Our definition of a complaint is where a customer is unhappy with West Kent's action or response.

You can complain to any member of staff, in the way that best suits you. We aim to resolve complaints as soon as they are received. If we can't agree an outcome you can escalate your complaint. Our process is set out below:

Our complaints policy does not cover:

- Any action (or inaction) by us required by law
- Anti-social behaviour, tenancy disputes, insurance claims or legal action
- The actions of another resident or tenant
- The action of an individual or organisation that we have no control over
- If the complaint is communicated in an abusive or threatening manner

We may refuse a complaint that is received more than three months after the event, or 20 working days after the previous stage (except in exceptional circumstances).



You can view our full complaints policy on our website, or request a copy by contacting customer services.

Top Teamwork Helps Tenant

If you find yourself in a situation where you are struggling to keep up with your rent, we can work with you to find a solution.

One of our tenants, Mark, recently had to give up his job as he couldn't find public transport that could get him to his shifts on time. He signed up for Universal Credit but payment delays meant there was a gap in his income.

Staff in our income team became concerned when Mark missed a rent payment, as it was unusual. They contacted him and it became clear he needed some help. Because his Universal Credit payment wasn't due to him for another week, he hadn't eaten in three days. He walked for over an hour to access a computer to speak to someone about his rent payments.

Teams across West Kent worked to support Mark quickly. He was referred to our tenancy support service, they checked he was receiving all the benefits he was entitled to; and organised him a food bank voucher. Because he had no transport, they arranged for his food to be delivered meaning he could eat for the next few days.

Mark had been walking a four mile round trip to the job centre from his home in Swanley to Dartford. Our staff arranged for him to visit Swanley Link to meet his work coach instead, and referred him to Training and Employment Officer, Pauline Smith, to give him additional support to find a job that would work with the transport links near him.

Mark was so grateful for all the support he received. He didn't know West Kent offered so many services or that we had links with local businesses and charities who offer support. We kept in contact with Mark and called him regularly to see how he was.

Lisa Knowles, Income Protection Manager said *"In total, six members of staff, across three teams, were involved in supporting Mark. I am sure Mark will turn his life around, and the amount of work and support that we have given Mark this week shows that great team work can make all the difference."*

If you're in a situation like Mark, please get in contact. We aren't just your landlord, we are here to support and help you.

Apprentices ace assessments

Aiden Humble began his apprenticeship in September 2017 and completed his level two and three plumbing and heating qualifications, he now has a full-time job as a plumber.

Lewis Norris started with us as a Data Analyst Apprentice in 2017 and this year he became a Junior Developer in the ICT team.

Sarah-Louise Palmer our newest apprentice, started in 2018 on a level two plumbing and heating qualification. She finished her course early and started her permanent job with us while studying for her level three qualification. Sarah won Apprentice of the Year within the

Plumbing Sector at her college. In September, she also received Highly Commended at the Kent Housing Group Excellence Awards in the Excellent Young Professional of the Year category.

Pauline Smith manages our apprenticeship programme, she says:

"Apprenticeships offer an opportunity to combine a qualification with work place experience. We are delighted that we were able to offer these outstanding individuals an opportunity to learn, develop and progress into a permanent job with us."

As a social housing provider, we can offer apprenticeships in various roles. We have previously offered apprenticeships in:

- Youth work
- Business administration
- Plumbing
- IT
- Marketing
- Housing management
- Customer services

Keep an eye on our website for opportunities to work as an apprentice with us: westkent.org/apprentice



West
Kent

Places to live
Space to grow

Universal Credit

**2020's
financial
year has
53 Mondays,
rather than the
usual 52.**



If you receive Universal Credit, you'll still only be paid for 52 weeks. This means you'll have to save the money for the extra week's rent to make sure you don't fall into arrears. This needs to be paid by 1 April 2020.

If you receive Universal Credit, but pay by direct debit, you don't need to worry. We divide the extra week's rent throughout the year, so you won't have to pay it as one lump sum.

We have written to those affected, but we understand this might be confusing.

For more advice, please call customer services on 01732 749400.

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
remember to give your name
and address

Phone: 01732 749400 between 8am
and 5pm

0800 1691122 in emergencies at
other times

WANT TO MAKE A PAYMENT?

Phone: 01732 749442

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)