

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association



Summer 2020

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Linda Hogan Fund

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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER EDITION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

West Kent is in a good place. Most of our services are back on track and those that aren't are being delivered differently. Our engineers and contractors have worked their socks off to clear the backlog of repairs appointments that had built up during lockdown and here we are getting back to our usual service levels and responding within our usual timescales. Thanks to all of you for your patience and understanding, and to those of you that have sent in messages of thanks and appreciation – they were very welcome.

Our focus on residents continues, have a look on page three for details of what we are doing to support people into training and employment and if you have been impacted by Covid-19 and unable to pay your rent please talk to us – we can help. We've also included our Residents Annual Report, so please give that a read to find out how we're doing.

Our Sevenoaks and Walderslade Abacus stores are now open again so if you've had a clear

out during lockdown and have some good quality furniture that you could donate please give us a call, also if you are looking for good quality pre-used items, give us a visit.

Our youth team is still delivering some great activities for young people to get involved with – if you're struggling to keep your young people engaged have a look at what's on offer on page 17.

And finally – we're offering some great opportunities for you to make a real difference to the services we provide to you – there are loads of ways to get involved, have a look on page nine. We're recruiting to a scrutiny panel so if you really want to change things this is a great opportunity.

Enjoy the magazine, please let us know what you think.

The editorial team

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Read our Residents Annual Report
- An update on our repairs service
- Resident involvement goes digital



Adapting our employment and training service

To increase our capacity and reach more people, we've partnered with Clarion Futures, Golding Homes and local job centres

Our employment and training advisers have been working hard to make sure it's easy to access employment support and training opportunities. We know more people may be looking for work and aren't sure what to do next.

The team are experts in their field and they work closely with clients to get them into the best position to find a new job. They can identify different employment routes, and signpost to training opportunities. And, by working alongside other housing associations, organisations and job centres, they've created a robust and accessible service that is focused on residents and driven by their goals.

"Knowing that Pauline was there to support me has given me the confidence to take control of my life. I would definitely recommend this service to other people who are looking for work or a better paid job."

— a happy client

To increase our capacity and reach more people, we've partnered with two Housing Associations who work in Kent; Clarion Futures, Golding Homes and local job centres.

Each month we run a virtual job fair to provide:

- advice and practical support for your CV
- top tips on writing a cover letter
- advice to market yourself by identifying your transferable skills
- help to create goals that work around your daily life.

For details of our next job fair visit westkent.org/events

Contact Pauline on 07715 993293 or Dawn on 07850 506383, alternatively email them at westkentworks@wkha.org.uk

The team resumed face to face support in Sevenoaks every Tuesday from 11 August. Dawn and Pauline are back at the Plaza (behind the Stag in Sevenoaks town centre). You can book an appointment by calling 01732 749420 or emailing westkentworks@wkha.org.uk. If you're not comfortable meeting face to face, that's ok, they'll be providing phone and email support as well.

Funding for local community groups

West Kent's Linda Hogan Fund provides grants of up to £500 to charities and community organisations across Kent to support activities for groups of all ages and backgrounds. In some cases, the grants pay for the full cost of the project, but many contribute to larger initiatives, helping these organisations to run more ambitious activities and reach more people.

We had followed the same application process for a few years but felt it was long and over-complicated, and we were funding the same groups every year.

We wanted to see how we could encourage new groups to apply for funding by simplifying the process and agree who we should be giving priority to. So, in November 2019, we reviewed the fund.



- We've seen an increase in applications since the new form and online process were released.
- Fundraiser advice is available for small groups who aren't sure if they're ready to apply
- We are doing more promotion, meaning 13 groups who were awarded funding in the June round hadn't been funded by us before
- We have introduced a three year cap on groups reapplying from 2021
- The March round now has an annual turnover limit so smaller groups have a better chance of receiving a grant.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also impacted on the type of applications received, but we've been able to support organisations who've adapted their services to continue supporting their clients and communities.

This year, so far this year we've funded 21 groups a total of £8946:

- **Sevenoaks Three Arts Festival** was due to be held in June but had to be cancelled. A lot of the young people who would have taken part had already been practicing for their annual competition, so they decided to hold an event for solo artists to perform their chosen pieces to an online audience. The fund helped pay for some of the general costs.
- **Friday People** are running a new project for young jobseekers making masks, scrubs and aprons, which they distribute to vulnerable people around Edenbridge. The fund paid for sewing thread and other resources to keep their project running.
- **Lockdown Larder** provide a £25 weekly supermarket shop for people in financial need in the Sevenoaks district, and we assisted with funding to help support 20 families with a food shop.
- **Ashford and Tenterden Umbrella** support people with mental health issues or who are socially isolated in their area. We've helped them pay for the transport service which brings members to their activities.
- **Child's Vision** run a programme near Maidstone for children who have witnessed domestic abuse within their families. We paid for stationery, printer ink and some expenses for their volunteers.
- **Maidstone Mencap** used the funds to pay for some online Zoom music sessions for children, as well as arts and crafts materials, and materials used for sensory play.
- **The Kent Kidney Patients Association** applied for funding to pay for fresh food boxes suitable for a renal diet. This paid for 11 patients, who are currently shielding, to receive a food box for three months.
- **The Tunbridge Wells Counselling Centre** provides affordable counselling to adults. They also run an Assisted Places Scheme, which provides subsidised counselling for people on a low income. Our funding has paid for five people to receive five counselling sessions.
- **Prince of Wales Youth Club** in Canterbury had to close due to the pandemic, so they've adapted their service by providing healthy packed lunches and activity packs to local families, helping them stay connected with youth workers they know and trust. The fund paid for 250 packed lunches and 25 activity packs.

You can find a full list of groups we've funded on our website: westkent.org/lindahogan. If a group you know would be interested in applying for the fund, please visit our website. The deadline for our next round of applications is Thursday 15 October 2020.

DON'T MAKE TOUGH TIMES TOUGHER



We understand that you have a lot on your mind at the moment and one of those things may well be, how will you pay your rent in the months to come?

It's important you do, so you don't put your home at risk. Getting behind with your rent makes you vulnerable to this in the future, and it's a worry no one needs to deal with at the moment.

However, you can help yourself by simply keeping in touch with us, and letting us know your circumstances. We can offer you some simple advice to help you work through any difficulties so you are in the best possible shape when things return to normal.

KEEP TALKING

If you are worried about anything or need some help or advice because there have been changes in your situation, stay in touch. We will listen and will always try to be flexible to help if things are a little tight at the moment.

PAY WHAT YOU CAN

If you are worried you may not be able to pay all of your rent, then get in touch. Paying something every month will mean that you are not letting things get completely on top of you. We'd much rather help you with a smaller amount in the future, than see you in serious debt. Don't forget if it's hard to make one payment this month it'll be even harder to pay two next month.

MAKE SURE YOU CLAIM

You may be able to get financial help, so speak to us and find out more. We have experts who can help make sure you know your entitlement to benefits and other help.

If you're claiming Universal Credit you may receive an advanced payment as a lump sum. Remember you will have to pay this back so think ahead before you spend it. Make sure you pay your rent as a priority over other

bills. If you don't there will be no other options in the future if you get in arrears as you have already had the money.

FEELING OVERWHELMED?

If you feel like you're in a crisis and aren't sure where to turn for help we can provide referrals for support. Just talk to us and we'll try to help.

LOST YOUR JOB? WE CAN HELP.

You're not alone if you've recently lost your job – we can help. We have a dedicated team ready to help you find and apply for a variety of employment opportunities. It might be different to what you normally do, but it will help you get into a steady job. We can help you write a CV, access training courses and be ready to apply when opportunities come up.

SHARED OWNERSHIP WORRIES?

If you're in a shared ownership home, it's important to speak to your mortgage lender as well as us. If you need any advice about paying your rent, we're happy to help, so please give us a call and avoid any unnecessary issues in the future.

Call us: 01732 749400

Email us: help@wkha.org.uk

Repairs update

West Kent's repairs team and our contractors have worked throughout the lockdown period, at first attending emergency only appointments and then, from 15 June starting routine repairs again.

The lockdown meant that a backlog of over 3,000 repairs built up, the team has worked extra hard to catch up, and has now almost cleared the repairs backlog.

When West Kent staff carry out a repair at your home, they will work safely and within all current guidelines. We ask you to follow some guidelines too.

Our promise to you:

- We will wear PPE in your home
- We will carry antibacterial gel, and use it before entering your home
- We will observe current social distancing rules
- We will work quickly and efficiently so that we aren't in your home longer than we need to be.

What we ask:

- Open all the windows
- Open all internal doors to reduce contact with door handles
- Clear any household or personal belongings away from the area that needs work, or the rooms that need viewing. This is important so staff can gain quick and easy access.
- Observe social distancing rules, wait in a different room if possible.

- Do not invite other people into your home before or during your visit.
- Make sure all members of your household are aware of the visit and understand these guidelines.

If our staff feel you're not following these guidelines, they will leave your property immediately and ask you to rebook your appointment.

We understand that waiting for a repair to be completed can be frustrating, and really appreciate your patience.

If you have a repair logged that no longer needs doing, please make sure you let us know by contacting customer services as soon as possible so that your appointment slot can be reallocated- help@wkha.org.uk or 01732 749 400.

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West Kent Neighbourhood News
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The logo for Abacus, featuring a stylized pink 'a' with a circular arrow inside, followed by the word 'bacus' in white lowercase letters on a dark blue background.

is open

Our Abacus stores in Sevenoaks and Walderslade are now open.

So we can adhere to the government guidelines, we've had to make some changes to the way we can collect your furniture from you.

Due to the current quarantine regulations and space at our shops, all donations must be pre-booked.

When calling to book in your donation, we'll ask you if anyone in your household has, or is displaying any of the Covid -19 symptoms. If you can, we'll ask you to leave your item outside the house on the day of collection.

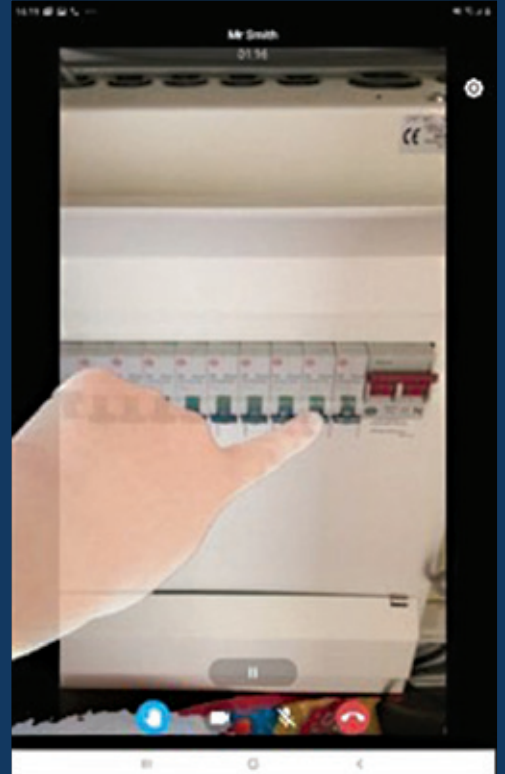
To discuss a collection or donation drop off, please call us on:

Sevenoaks – 01732 743365

Walderslade – 01634 -296662

A NEW REALITY FOR REPAIRS

The property team has come up with an ingenious solution to speed up repairs using cutting edge technology called 'augmented reality' - or AR.



AR enhances reality with images, text, or other virtual information – the children's game Pokémon Go is an example of AR being used in a fun way, but in this case, AR will have a much more practical use. Using it is simple for the resident, we send a link to their phone, they click on it and they will see a live image of the operative's hands on their screen during the 'virtual appointment,' they will hear the operative's voice, and they will point and gesture as they talk them through the repair.

A group of residents agreed to test the new software. They all had a virtual appointment scheduled and completed a range of repairs and checks around their homes. All reported that the software was easy to use and a quick and efficient way of dealing with repairs.

One resident's appointment included checking the smoke alarms in his home were working- he told us,

"We were able to pick up that one of our smoke alarms wasn't working. This has now been reported on the West Kent portal. Lifesaving equipment, so it certainly gets a thumbs up here!"

If a repair can't be resolved during the appointment, the technology enables staff to get all the information they need to make sure the right person attends, with the right equipment, so the whole process becomes much more efficient. A resident who had a fencing issue assessed in her virtual appointment commented on how useful this was:

"Fantastic that I spoke directly with the surveyor. Could show the problem straight away without numerous visits and incorrect information. Great service."

The staff and contractors involved in the trial have also been very positive about how easy and helpful this new software is.

Joanne Hiscock, Head of Property, explains that they hope to roll out this service very soon.

"It's exciting stuff, and with the pilot finished we will be going through the results to see how we can use this on a much bigger scale. I can't wait as it offers an efficient way to deliver a safe repairs service at a challenging time"

Resident involvement goes digital!

The Coronavirus outbreak and subsequent lockdown meant that resident involvement events had to be put on hold, but a number of alternative digital events meant residents continued to have their voices heard so they could help improve our services.

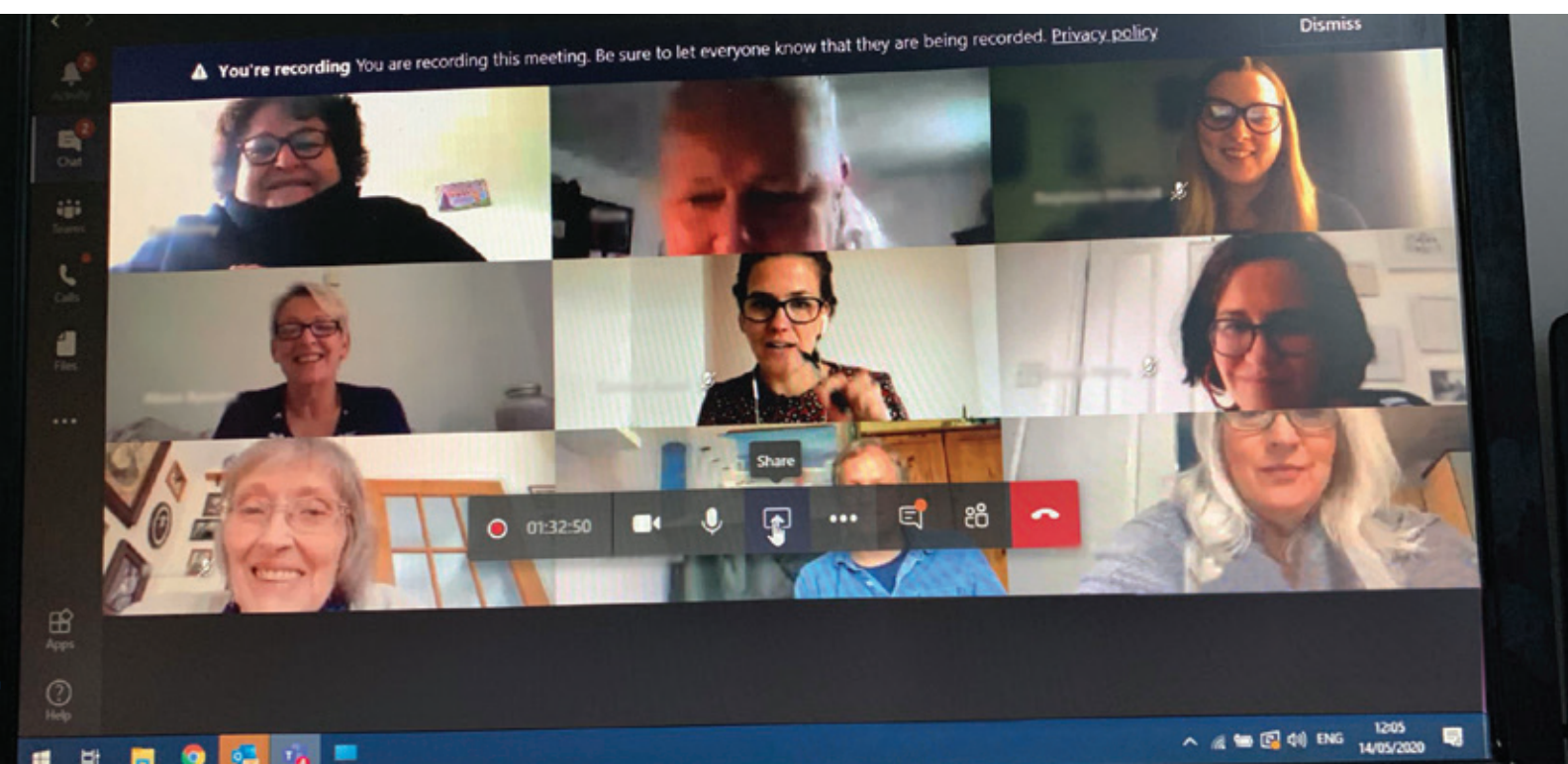
The first event involved a live testing of the West Kent website, with 50 residents taking part. They completed a series of specified tasks and then fed back on how easy it was to navigate the site and find information. All their feedback will be used to inform website updates and changes.

The next was a virtual meeting where residents gave their thoughts on a series of images and messages that would be used to create a new campaign to support residents who may be struggling to pay their rent. The campaign is designed to encourage residents to contact West Kent's dedicated financial wellbeing team who can help with financial issues. Residents shared their thoughts about the designs and tone of the messages, and also came up with some new ideas. Designs were changed and updated to take on board their ideas and the campaign messages are now being shared on social media.

A small group of residents also took part in a pilot project to try out a new repairs service. The asset team has been trialing some new 'augmented reality' (or AR) software so that operatives can guide tenants through repairs at home using their mobile phones or can effectively diagnose the problem to make sure the right person comes to fix it. The feedback from residents was fantastic and this service should be rolling out soon.

As well as these one-off events, residents also have the chance to get involved digitally by joining the West Kent residents' discussion group- a closed Facebook group for residents to share their views.

There is more information about how to get involved with events and the discussion group on the resident involvement page of the website www.westkent.org/getinvolved



Community champions take on overgrown alley

When the trees in an alleyway (not owned by West Kent) near two Swanley residents' homes became so overgrown and riddled with six-foot brambles that it blocked the rear exits to three properties, they decided to do something about it. Because the space was so poorly looked after it also became a hot spot for fly tipping and littering, and they were concerned that it might be a target for arson.

Chantelle and Rachel of Walnut Way and Acacia Walk said, *"we wanted to discourage people from fly tipping and littering and make the area nicer, and safer for everyone"*. They reached out to Hope Community Church to help their clearance efforts as they were worried for the safety of their neighbourhood, their children, and their pets.

Within two days these keen volunteers had almost completely cleared the area, using their own money to buy bin bags, litter pickers and gloves. They filled a massive 23 bags with garden waste and checked with their rubbish collectors that they were happy to take the additional bags. They tried to make sure they recycled where possible as well. Since then Chantelle said,

"we've noticed less rubbish, and fouling and are hoping that people will respect the space more and keep it clear".

In addition to this, Rachel noticed a rise in littering in the streets nearby and made the decision to tie bin bags to lampposts to encourage people to use a bin instead of dropping their litter on the floor. It started out with one bin bag, and it was so successful that another two bags were added to lampposts around the road. Every few weeks the bags are replaced, and the rubbish disposed of.

It's great to see residents working together to maintain their community and encourage others to respect the areas they live in. Well done!





Youth team's new boxing classes are a real knockout!

West Kent's youth team is now offering virtual boxing lessons as part of their engaging and varied online youth programme. Lockdown meant the team needed to provide an alternative to face-to-face youth work, and the programme they have developed is impressive. The team worked with young people to decide on the activity programme, and boxing was a popular choice.

The sessions are delivered by Olympia Boxing, a community interest company founded on the back of the London 2012 Olympics. England coaches lead the classes, providing a fast paced and fun physical activity, and a potential pathway into the sport for those who are interested. Boxing requires not just a high level of fitness, but also a lot of technical skill so it can help with focus and building confidence.

Richard Dowling, Youth Services Manager told us why the sessions are so beneficial;

"We have offered as much variety as we can within the online youth programme and have activities ranging from cooking to quizzes. The boxing sessions are a great way to encourage physical activity and also require a lot of concentration so it's a great combination. We're really pleased we've been able to partner with Olympia Boxing to offer young people such a high level of coaching and would like to thank Kent Sport and Safer Kent for funding the sessions."

The sessions are held via Zoom twice a week and have proved very popular with young people. The sessions are held in small groups so the qualified coach can give individual attention to those attending to help them develop their skills.

Feedback from parents has also been very positive, with one parent commenting,

"My son looks forward to the boxing sessions each week- he has learned a lot of moves and it gives him discipline. Thank for giving him this opportunity."

If you would like to know more about the boxing classes, and other online sessions being offered, contact the youth services team by emailing youthservices@wkha.org.uk

You can also follow them on Facebook
@WestKentYouthServices and Instagram
[westkenthousingassociation](https://www.instagram.com/westkenthousingassociation)



West Kent comes to Faversham!

Next year, West Kent will be offering new homes for shared ownership and rent in Faversham, a charming market town halfway between Canterbury and Sittingbourne. It's known to be one of the most desirable places to live in Kent and West Kent will have homes available at two different developments, Oare Lakes, and Ospringe Brickworks.

Faversham has been a settlement since pre-Roman times and was also the UK centre for the explosives industry in the late 17th and early 20th century. The town today is steeped in history but also has all you would expect from a Kentish market town- a wealth of independent shops, inns and eateries, regular markets, festivals and events, and a range of good primary and secondary schools, including the 'outstanding' Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School.

The heritage of the sites will be preserved, with the restoration of eight listed buildings at Oare Lakes and the restoration of the existing structures of the wash mill and chimney, which are associated with the Ospringe site's former use as a brick works.

The Oare development will also see a public country park and an educational heritage hub. West Kent has secured 99 homes across both sites that will be available for rent and shared ownership.

Adam Jenner, who is leading on the Faversham project for West Kent told us;

"We are so pleased and excited to be involved in these developments, and to be branching out into a new area of Kent. Faversham offers so much to its residents, and what's special about the Faversham Lakes sites, is that the town's rich and historic heritage is being preserved, and the natural habitat is being nurtured. This, and the wonderful community spirit of the town and local area, will mean this really is going to be a fabulous place to live."

Faversham Facts

- Faversham is home to Britain's oldest brewer, Shepherd Neame
- Faversham has 300 listed buildings
- The first gunpowder plant was built in 1773

For more information visit
www.westkent.org/find-a-home
For shared ownership enquiries
email sales@wkha.org.uk

Our Board and Executive Team recently released a statement stating their commitment to combat racism in all forms.

We know we need to learn and understand more and we are asking for your help with this- so you can help us identify where change and improvement needs to happen. We have set up a working group to consider how we can ensure diversity and inclusion across the organisation and are looking for residents who would like to be involved with this. If you have thoughts about how we can be more inclusive, please get in touch by emailing residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk

We would particularly like to hear from black and minority ethnic residents.



we're always here for a chat

West Kent Together

West Kent Together is a new service to make sure no West Kent resident feels lonely.

The aim is to provide all residents with someone to talk to if they feel isolated, whether it's just for a chat, or to find out about local support services if they are needed. So far, postcards with details of the service have been delivered to over 2,000 tenants and the service is also being promoted on social media.

A trained team is taking referrals, either from West Kent staff, or self-referrals from tenants themselves. To self-refer, tenants can call the dedicated phone number and leave their details, then a member of the West Kent Together team will call them back within 48 hours. Those using the service will then receive a weekly call from the same member of staff for a friendly chat.

Thomas Foreman, Wellbeing Services Manager

tells us why this service is so vital at this time;

"We know that the pressures of isolation will be building up for many of our tenants and we hope this new service will provide an accessible and consistent form of contact for those who need it. Some may want to just chat or to 'unload' and that's fine, we're here as a listening ear. But we can also help signpost people to useful community services too. We don't want anyone to feel alone- there is a friendly voice just at the end of the phone."

If you would like to know more about this service, or to self-refer, email together@wkha.org.uk or call 0800 197 0097



WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.



We're always here
for a chat.

West Kent tenant superheroes!

During the Coronavirus outbreak, many West Kent tenants have been out working on the frontline or volunteering to help keep their communities safe and well.

From making scrubs, to entertaining the neighbours, so many people have wanted to do their bit to help others and lift spirits.

We asked tenants to share their experiences during lockdown and were overwhelmed with the response. Meet some of the tenants who have been making a big difference.

Mrs Smith



For Mrs Smith, sewing was just a hobby, but when she saw how desperate NHS workers were for scrubs, she quickly became a more serious seamstress! She asked all her neighbours to donate material, but with no computer or printer, finding a pattern proved impossible. Luckily the West Kent facilities team was able to step in- they printed one off and popped it in the post for her. Once she got started there was no stopping her and she produced piles of face masks, scrubs and laundry bags.

Tina works in a care home for people with dementia and carried on working throughout the pandemic, she told us *"the most rewarding thing I find about my work, now, and always, is a smile on a resident's face- it makes my day. The situation with the Coronavirus outbreak is a huge challenge but working in care gives me so much back."* Tina still found time to deliver vital medication and a Sunday lunch each week to her mother in law, and can't wait until she can see her grandchildren again. With lockdown easing, we hope this happens soon!

Tina



Betty

Betty volunteers at a day centre for older people, but this work had to end because of lockdown. Betty felt it was really important to stay in touch with the people who used the day centre as they could so easily feel isolated and lonely, so she set up phone calls with them every day for a check in and a chat. She told us,

"I love to chat, so it's not a chore! We don't talk about this terrible virus, we talk about positive things, and what people like to do. It's fascinating listening to everyone. It might not be much, but it's our little corner of the world and we are keeping our community connected. And planning the party for when all this is over!"



Jenny

Jenny has been living at our over 55s scheme White Oak Court for less than a year but has already become a valued member of the community. During lockdown, Jenny could see that it was a struggle to get all the hot lunches delivered to residents after the communal restaurant had to shut, so she offered to help. Equipped with all the correct PPE she delivers lunches to flats with a smile and a wave, meaning residents get to see a familiar friendly face every day.

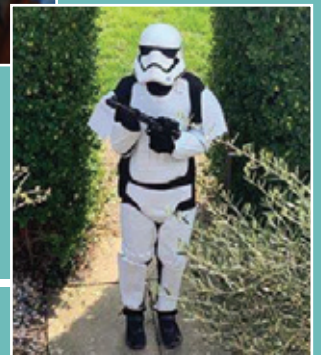


Benjamin

Benjamin is a younger West Kent resident who found an imaginative way to keep children on his street entertained. He has a range of costumes at home that he uses for regular fundraising events he takes part in, but as these were put on pause, he wore a different costume to entertain children in the neighbourhood every day for a week and was met with smiles all round!

One neighbour said

"Ben, we think you are just brilliant! What you have done for our children and continue to do through your fundraising is truly inspirational! You are a credit to and a reflection of your equally brilliant family. Not only have we had these daily character visits but they have also been delivering daily parcels of things for the boys such as chocolate treats, stickers, drawing books, fancy dress costumes, toys and games. So incredibly kind, we cannot thank you enough. Quarantine is certainly showing us how very fortunate we are in living so close to such wonderful humans."





Treat yourself!

At the beginning of lockdown, we teamed up with The Hygiene Bank and Soap and Glory to deliver pamper packs to residents and 'super mums' across the Sevenoaks district.

21 packs were delivered to super-mums and those who had been working hard in their communities during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Packs included Soap and Glory items and chocolate and were hand-delivered (socially distanced of course), to make sure the right person received them safely, and so we could say a big thank you face to face.



A big thank you to all the residents helping in their communities, and to the Hygiene Bank for providing the packs.

Tina, (see page 14) one of our superhero tenants received a pack to say thank you. Her husband had contacted us to nominate her, he said:

"I have just seen your Facebook post about the super mums. Could I nominate my wife Tina? she is a care assistant, working 12 hour shifts caring for dementia patients. She has never once complained about working during these times and even volunteered to live at the care home to help reduce the risks to the residents. She has also been getting medicines and shopping for my mum as well as training in her spare time for higher qualifications in the care industry. All this while I am furloughed from my job and taking a reduction in wages."

Oh rubbish!

A lot of us have spent the past few months sorting through our homes, spring cleaning and having a good clear out. Even our gardens have had some much appreciated attention, but what do you do with all the stuff you don't want anymore, or the garden waste you've accumulated?

If you have any rubbish or unwanted items, we've got a few options for you to help you, your community and the environment

- Book a slot at the tip. They're open and you're now able to book two visits per month
- Got a bulky item? Councils are offering bulky collection, just go to your council's website, or contact their customer services to find out more.
- Check out sites such as FreeCycle, Gumtree or Facebay - as they say 'one person's trash is another person's treasure'
- Boot sales are reopening in many areas too – and they're a great way to sell your unwanted items
- Our Abacus stores are now open - we can collect your items for free if they're in a good condition.

Please make sure that you arrange for a collection or to drop off your items – do not leave donations outside charity shops.

We know it's tempting to have a bonfire to get rid of some garden waste, but at the moment it's being strongly advised not to. Coronavirus affects the lungs, so the smoke and air pollution caused by a bonfire could make it difficult for people to breathe, please be considerate of others.

We've also seen a rise in fly tipping. Please be aware that fly tipping is against the law and dangerous. It can also be a fire hazard.

Don't be selfish, take responsibility for your own unwanted items and rubbish.



Community Impact Report

not
just a
landlord

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“West Kent’s mission is to create in Kent a prosperous, strong and sustainable society; a place of opportunity for all; where people can plan for their futures.”

Heather Brightwell, Communities Director

West Kent has a variety of community-based projects that support different people across the county. The services we provide and fund positively impact and benefit the entire community, not just our residents.

Each year, to monitor the progress and impact of this work, we create a report that focusses on our three key areas:

Strengthening employability, skills and enterprise

The employment and training team works with job centres and other housing providers. They support clients with practical skills such as CV and cover letter writing, as well as helping them to identify their strengths and their goals. Last year 83 people were supported into employment and training, 107 attended training courses and 360 people attended Pop Up Business School events, which helped 270 attendees start their own business.

Our strategic plan

West Kent's Board agreed our new strategic plan that sets out our objectives to 2025.

Our vision is to deliver places to live and space to grow for our current and future residents. As we enter our fourth decade there has never been a more important role for us.

Over the next five years, our objectives are:

- **Excellent services** – we want to continue to deliver excellent services in a friendly, solution-focused way
- **Successful communities** – we want to provide homes and build communities residents are proud to live in, with better support to sustain a successful tenancy and manage life changes

- **Grow and reshape** – we want to increase our homes in management to 10,000 by 2025 and begin to re-shape our portfolio to better meet the current and future local needs across Kent and Medway.
- **Best in Kent** – we want to be known as Kent's housing provider of choice.

Our new Chief Executive Tracy Allison says:

"I am pleased to share with you our new Strategic Plan to 2025. At West Kent we are passionate about the role a housing association can play in society and believe the values of an organisation are what makes it special. By working in partnership with like-minded organisations, and being open to learn from others, we believe we can deliver the best for Kent."

Our three Abacus furniture stores, in Sevenoaks, Medway and Maidstone have diverted 124 tonnes of furniture from landfill this year, and they offer voluntary opportunities for people in the community to develop their skills in a practical setting, and build their CV.

We work closely with HM Rochester Prison and Youth Offending Institute, and Medway Norse to refurbish unloved and discarded bikes. The bikes we sell in store are refurbished by offenders in workshops, saving them from landfill, building skills and giving offenders the opportunity to gain a qualification too. Some of these bikes were even used in a project with Better Medway to help adults learn to ride.

Promoting wellbeing and crisis prevention

Kent Support and Assistance Service (KSAS) has helped 974 families by providing essential household items to people in crisis including white goods and furniture.

We provide support services across Kent and Medway that have helped over 700 people. These services allow people to live as independently as possible by providing support with paperwork, registering with a GP, life skills such as cooking, or support with substance misuse and mental health.

Building active resilient communities

Each year we set aside £15,000 for our Linda Hogan Community Fund. This fund provides grants to small, local charities and community organisations to deliver a range of activities. Last year we supported 32 different organisations across Kent to fund activities for 6,513 people. Staff at West Kent are encouraged to support their local community and are given three paid volunteering days every year. Each year, a local charity is nominated for staff to support through fundraising events and awareness raising, last year staff raised £8,258 for West Kent Mind, a charity that supports people suffering from poor mental health.

Contacting us

When you contact us, you are put through to a member of our customer services team.

We're finding an increasing number of people are refusing to tell our customer service advisors what their query is, and only want to speak to their tenancy services officer, leading to a much longer wait for a reply.

Remember, you should always tell our customer services team why you're contacting us. They can deal with most queries there and then, including:

- Repairs
- Complaints and compliments
- Advice about anti-social behaviour
- Housing advice
- Rent payments, direct debits and arrangements for arrears

If they can't help you, they'll make sure you speak to the right person who can.

Please also make sure you tell them your full name and address when you contact us, especially when emailing.

Contacting you

We know some of the contact details we have for you aren't right, and this makes it difficult for us to contact you when we need to. We need you to tell us when your contact details change.

We'll be asking every household for their most up to date contact details – home and mobile phone numbers and email addresses. In the meantime, though, you can make sure these are up to date, and change them on our tenant portal, **My West Kent**. Just visit www.westkent.org



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

Web: westkent.org/payrent

WORRIED ABOUT PAYING YOUR RENT?

Contact us as soon as possible for help and advice

Phone: 01732 749400

Web: westkent.org/renttrouble

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)

