

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association

ISSUE 88



Winter 2020

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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME TO OUR WINTER EDITION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

That was a funny old year wasn't it?

As we head towards the end of 2020, we're hearing hopeful news of a vaccine and an end to Covid-19 at some point, so we can head into the new year with optimism.

Delivering our services this year has been a challenge but it's that feeling of optimism – that we can still make a difference – that has kept us going.

This edition features some of the ways that we are continuing our business as usual but also some of the innovative things that we have been doing to ensure that we aren't standing still.

Inside on page ten you can read about some of the great work we have been doing with residents to improve the way we deal with domestic abuse calls and the information on our website.

Resident involvement remains a focus for us and never more so now that the government

has published its social housing white paper. The White Paper contains a lot of proposals that will change how social landlords operate – from new tenant satisfaction measures, to improved complaints processes. We've set out the headings of the charter on page 19.

We've also included information that you would expect to find at this time of year about checking your boiler is working, financial help available if you're struggling and when our offices will be closed for Christmas and New Year.

Wishing all our residents a very Merry Christmas with best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year.

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

The editorial team

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Our youth services team receive high praise!
- Making a stand against domestic abuse



A FLY ON THE WALL

by Philip Greewood,
a West Kent resident

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a fly on the wall? WELL, LET ME TELL YOU!

In August this year I was invited to sit in on an interview process at West Kent. At first when this request came to me, my initial thought was that I was there as a token tenant, and to make up the numbers. HOW WRONG I WAS. The staff welcomed me and I was given the liberty to be part of the process, as I sat there listening it was soon time for me to ask questions, I was not given any guidelines of what to say or ask, this gave me the opportunity to ask things like, "*if you were a tenant what would you expect from West Kent?*", not forgetting "*it's a two way street, both parties have to give and take*", and "*if you're successful in getting the position what would you bring to the table?*" What our [tenants'] expectations would be and how it would affect us. I wanted to know, if the applicant was given the job, what their involvement with regards to tenants would be, each time this put the applicant on the spot, and it gave me the opportunity to be frank.



I was there some five hours and it gave me an insight into the workings and processes that go on behind closed doors. At the end of the day I walked away with a better understanding and a great feeling that, in a small way, I was able to be a valued part of a team of people that care.

I think it was a great idea to invite me to these interviews and I realised that I was not just a number on West Kent's lists of tenants. I live in one of their Emerald buildings (over 55 years old), and as we all get older we tend to think that we are not listened to. How wrong I was, it was refreshing that my input was taken into consideration.

Christmas CLOSURE

We'll be closed from 3pm on Thursday 24 December 2020 until 8.45am on Monday 4 January 2021.

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

We hope you all have a peaceful and healthy Christmas and New Year.



Celebrating

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

HOUSE

our 11-19s project based in Edenbridge, celebrated Black History Month this October.

The #BlackLivesMatter protests have sparked deeper discussions this year among our young people, about what it means to be young and black, today. Members have been making posters and having group discussions about black history, heritage and culture. In honour of Black History Month, we're recognising the achievements of one of our **HOUSE** members, Nia.

Nia, 15, has been attending **HOUSE** for around four years and has become a voice for change and making a difference in her community. Nia is passionate about making her community a better place to live and is part of the Edenbridge Youth Forum, which Nia joined *"to get my voice and ideas heard and to be the voice of the young people of Edenbridge and I wish to make a difference in the community I live in"*.

Nia has often given up her free time to volunteer at a variety of community initiatives, such as discos for adults with learning disabilities, attending Remembrance Day processions, volunteering at our weekly Young Adventurers club for 8-12 year olds, and supporting our team at family fun days organised by West Kent.

In honour of her hard work, West Kent has nominated Nia for a Kent County Council Try Angle Award two years in a row. Nia won both times – in 2018 in the 'Good Friends & Carers' category and in 2019 in the 'Personal Intervention' category. Nia says this is one of her proudest achievements.

Nia has had great success in seeing through projects and activities in the whole of the district, setting a fantastic example to other young people, which encourages them to get involved too.

We couldn't be prouder of Nia and we're keen to recognise the contribution she makes to our **HOUSE** project. Nia has previously been the target of racist



Nia

bullying, while at school and on public transport on her way to school. Nia has asked for the support of the Edenbridge Youth Forum and the **HOUSE** youth workers, to approach her school to encourage them to address racism and racist bullying. She told us: *"people at school make fun of the Black Lives Matter movement and have discussions about why it shouldn't be 'a thing'. It really hurts me to see people discuss why my life should or shouldn't matter"*.

When she is older, Nia would like to become a vet and is hoping to pass all her exams to eventually get into university to study for this. She has big goals for the next five years and is really inspired by her idol, Lauren Jauregui, a singer. On being young and black today, she says: *"It's a challenge being a young black girl in today's society. You get judged because of the colour of your skin which is something we can't control. It really confuses me when people are racist to me because I don't understand what is so bad about being different. But, being black is also a blessing in disguise as it shows me the real world and how cruel people can be. I really enjoy educating people on racism because it's about time people understand what we go through. Racism can be straightforward and to your face, but it gets complicated. Institutional racism is the hardest thing to deal with. Working harder to get the same results as a white person or even having to deal with a corrupt justice system"*.

We'd like to thank Nia for coming forward to speak to us about her experiences and shining a light on what it means to be young and black, today.

WEST KENT'S youth services team receive high praise!



West Kent's youth services team has changed the way they deliver their services during Covid-19, adapting to meet the needs of young people. They shifted the focus from a programme based in youth centres, to deliver more sessions online, and more recently expanded this to offer street-based youth work, in line with government guidance and the youth sector exemption.

Richard Dowling, Youth Services Manager said "We needed to change our approach when people were asked to stay home. We worked up to delivering 15 sessions of online youth work on Zoom including; cooking, fitness and mental health support sessions. As restrictions were lifted, we built up our street-based programme and since July, have been delivering four to six detached youth work sessions around the Sevenoaks district. We're really proud to have been able to support children and young people during this time".

Detached youth work is just one element of street-based youth work, where youth workers travel on foot around an area, engaging with young people. This year, youth workers have been working with young people they meet out in the community, to make sure they understand what restrictions are in place (such as social distancing and rule of six), while also ensuring young people feel supported and know where they can access mental health support services if they need it.

West Kent produced a handy 'young people's pocket guide', that lists all the services they might need to access - not just limited to mental health support. The guide is free and is being distributed across the district. Matt Hazelton, Lead Commissioner for Youth Work at Kent County Council said "West Kent and its staff have produced a wide-reaching detached offer for the young people of Sevenoaks, reacting quickly to the challenges imposed by the pandemic. Young people continue to be well supported within the necessary health and safety measures".

Parents and young people have commended West Kent for their ongoing youth work, at a time when it's been needed most. One parent said "I would like to thank you and your team for the variety of amazing activities the children have been able to take part in, especially throughout the summer while we were in isolation, through Zoom, and the safe bubble activities once we were allowed to mix at a distance. Being part of this club has given the children much needed safe, positive, interaction and healthy exercise with others (and me peace of mind) which, without your support, my family would have struggled to maintain. A true God send!"

To find out more about West Kent's youth services, please visit: www.westkent.org/youth

ONLINE ZOOM SESSIONS!

Our youth services team are setting up online courses for young West Kent residents across Kent.

The courses will all be things that young people might not be able to learn otherwise, such as guitar lessons, sign language, and resilience and mental health. The first course is 'Guitar for Beginners' and 'Ukulele for Beginners', taught by James Rowden. The courses start on Thursday 7 January 2021.

There are six places available on each course, which will be offered on a first come, first served basis. The courses are completely free, but you will need to be a West Kent tenant and have your own guitar or ukulele (but please let us know if you don't have a one but would still like to join - we may be able to help).

A member of West Kent staff will be in every session, to make sure those taking part have a familiar face there with them and for safeguarding purposes.

If you'd like to sign up, send us a DM on Facebook (WestKentYouthServices) or Instagram (@westkenthousingassociation) or email youthservices@wkha.org.uk.



DISCOUNTED DECORATING FOR DIY DEMONS!

We've all had to spend a lot more time at home recently and staring at the same four walls has led to lots of people tackling those overdue jobs and giving their homes uplifting makeovers.

If you're feeling fed up of your current colour scheme, you're in luck as West Kent residents can get a fantastic 35% discount at Johnstone's decorating centres.

Johnstone's sells all the high-quality essentials you'll need to give your home a new fresh look, with experienced staff on hand to give advice. All you need to do to get your discount is download a voucher from the West Kent website www.westkent.org/decorating, or use the one on the address sheet included for this magazine, and take it along when you make your purchase. You will also need proof of tenancy - if you don't have a copy of your tenancy agreement, just let us know and we can send you one. Look out on our Facebook page in the new year as we will be giving away a Johnstone's decorating voucher to

one lucky resident!

West Kent also offers a Housing Plus scheme that gives residents a whole range of help with decorating from buying discounted decorating packs to a free decorating service for residents who meet certain criteria. Visit our website to find out more about home improvements and decoration and find out what help you can get www.westkent.org/housingplus



Encouraging complaints

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

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

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

Complaints help us to improve our service, and so we aim to make it easy for you to let us know where we have gone wrong. You can use email, web chat, phone

us, fill in the form on the website or send us a message on social media.

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

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

We'd also love to hear if you've received great service too. To log a complaint or give us a compliment, visit westkent.org/feedback

Is your boiler working?

It's likely we'll all be spending a little more time at home than we usually would at this time of year, so it's important to check everything is working as it should before it gets even colder. 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. So, it's important to check your boiler and radiators now so you and your family can stay warm this winter.



If your boiler doesn't work as you expect it to, try these troubleshooting tips:

- Check the power supply is turned on; these 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.

If you're still having trouble, ask our customer services team to guide you through an easy boiler reset by calling 01732 749400.

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.

If your boiler is working but some of your radiators aren't heating up, your radiators may need 'bleeding'. You will need a bleed key which costs about £1 in any DIY shop. Open the little valve at the top of the radiator, listen to the air hiss out and then close it tightly as soon as the first drip of water appears.

Need some extra help? You can find DIY videos on our website at www.westkent.org/selfhelpvideos

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WestKent Neighbourhood News
Winter 2020

THE EASIEST WAY TO PAY YOUR RENT

Did you know, you can pay your rent using our online payment page? It's open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, just visit www.westkent.org/payrent.

You will need to enter your ten-digit tenancy reference number and confirm your postcode.



Resident Voice Strategy – have your say!

We are updating our Resident Voice Strategy. This sets out how we are going to involve residents in the decisions we make as an organisation.



The strategy will set out our aims for resident involvement over the next three years, these are:

We will involve residents in co-creating our services

This means that we will involve residents right from the start when we are doing something new so that they can work with us to be sure we get things right.

We will train our involved residents so that they have the skills they need to challenge us constructively

The people that volunteer to take part in our consultations, scrutiny and other involvement activities will be offered training so they have the confidence to know what being an involved resident means and how they can improve the services we offer.

We will ensure that no one is excluded from taking part

We'll find out what prevents people taking part in our activities and find a way to remove any barriers.

We will demonstrate the value of resident involvement and how it improves our services

We will show that we have listened to the views of our residents, and what has happened as a result.

We will ensure that our residents' voices contribute to the national debate on issues that impact them

The Housing White paper has recently been published and the National Housing Federation

has launched a campaign called Together with Tenants. Both of these documents encourage putting tenants at the heart of decision making and we want to work with our own residents to influence national policy that affects them.

The resident involvement framework will be flexible, and feedback will not rely solely on our panels

We want to keep growing the numbers of residents that we can contact to invite them to take part in resident involvement activities and offer a wide range of ways to take part.

All areas of our business will work with residents to develop strategies and policies

We want to get to a position where all of our customer facing strategies and policies are produced with residents.

It will take three years to achieve some of these, but we want to know your thoughts.

- Are we focussing on the right things/ in the right areas?
- Have we missed anything? / Do we need to consider anything else in the strategy?

You can let us know your views by:

- emailing residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk
- visiting the website at www.westkent.org/residentvoice
- writing to us at the address on the back page

If you are not receiving emails or letters from us inviting you to take part in activities it's because we haven't had your consent to contact you.

If you want to take part simply email at residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk

What's been happening with resident engagement?

Resident engagement is about involving residents to help us improve our services. You are the best people to tell us what we're doing well, and what we could do better.

Despite recent restrictions on the way we usually work, we have had some fantastic involvement from residents in the past few months. So, a massive thank you to all of you!

New scrutiny group recruited

We recently recruited a new scrutiny panel at West Kent. A scrutiny panel is a group of residents who meet regularly and check how well West Kent is doing in all areas of the organisation. They then identify areas to examine (or scrutinise) more closely to see what's going well and what can be improved. There was a lot of interest from residents who were asked to complete application forms and attend interviews as part of the selection process. We are delighted to say that nine residents have been selected for the group and we will be sharing more news from them very soon.

Director interviews

Residents were invited to join a discussion panel when we interviewed applicants for two new director posts at West Kent. It's important that residents are a part of this process so they can tell us who they think would be best for the job. Philip, one of the residents who took part gave some great feedback: "I walked away with a better understanding and a great feeling that in a small way I was able to be a valued part of a team of people that care." Find out more about Philip's experience in the full article on page three.

Policy review survey and focus group

West Kent is currently reviewing its domestic abuse policy and asked residents to help with this. We sent a survey to check how much residents knew about what West Kent can do in domestic abuse situations and we held a focus group. The group discussed West Kent's current response to domestic abuse and made suggestions as to how we could improve. See the full article on page ten.

Linda Hogan Community Fund panel

The Linda Hogan Community Fund is managed by West Kent. It provides grants of up to £500 to charities and community organisations, across Kent, to support activities for groups of all ages and backgrounds. We recently asked if a resident would be interested in joining the panel to help decide how the funds should be allocated. We were really pleased that not one, but two, residents came forward and offered to sit on the panel. We are really pleased to welcome them on board.

Anti-social behaviour campaign

Covid-19 has impacted all of us, some more than others and reports of anti-social behaviour are rising. We are launching a campaign that we hope will be seen by the people who are experiencing or causing anti-social behaviour. Our key message is to encourage people to speak to their neighbour first if they are experiencing anti-social behaviour and encourage those who might be causing anti-social behaviour to change their behaviour. We ran two focus groups and an email consultation to ask residents what they thought about the campaign materials and ask for suggestions on how to improve them.

Do you want your voice heard?

Due to GDPR we can only send out surveys and other involvement opportunities to residents who have told us we can contact them. At the moment, we have around 1,000 residents on this list. If you want us to let you know when involvement opportunities come up, please email us at residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk, and ask for your name to be added to our consent list. There is no obligation to take part.

MAKING A STAND AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE

Did you know that West Kent can provide help and support for residents experiencing domestic abuse?

A review of the current domestic abuse policy and procedures is underway to improve services, raise awareness of domestic abuse and make sure residents know they can contact us if they have concerns.

The review will also include gaining accreditation from the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). DAHA was founded in 2014 because of the close links between housing and domestic abuse. The alliance recognises that housing issues can be the biggest barrier to someone leaving a domestic abuse situation, and that housing providers are in a unique position to identify and respond to them. Their accreditation process measures housing providers against a set of standards.

An important part of the review, and the accreditation process, is to involve residents in shaping the new policy and response to domestic abuse. An initial survey was sent out and over 130 West Kent residents responded with 40 offering to get more involved. An online focus group was then arranged and brought together residents, West Kent staff and representatives from DAHA and DAVVS (Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services) - a local charity West Kent works closely with.

The focus group's discussion was very in depth, with people drawing on their own experiences to tell us what they expect from West Kent in relation to domestic abuse. The group recognised what West Kent does well and clearly explained where improvements could be made. All their contributions will help shape services and the new policy.

Changes have already been made, with a new area of the website dedicated to domestic abuse, complete with a confidential reporting form. Training will also be given to all staff in the organisation, so everyone feels confident recognising and responding to domestic abuse.

Julie Terry, Interim Head of Tenancy Services is leading the project:

"The safety of our residents has always been a high priority for West Kent. We're reviewing our domestic abuse policy to make sure our response to victims of domestic abuse and management of perpetrators is compassionate, professional, current and effective. DAHA provides a benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse and we want to meet, or even exceed that standard. Having the involvement of residents is crucial, and the focus group gave them a safe space to talk and tell us how they think our response can improve"

The accreditation process is very thorough and unlikely to be complete until the middle of next year, but Julie says:

"It will be a lot of hard work, but getting the accreditation will reflect how committed we are to improving our services and doing everything we can to keep our communities safe"

We would like to say a huge thank you to the residents involved with this review. If you would like to be involved, please email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk



Julie Terry



daha

Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a crime and can be defined as:

"any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality."

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Domestic abuse is not the same as anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is 'behaviour by a person which causes, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to persons not of the same household as the person' so this is usually a situation where there is an issue between neighbours, not people who live together or are in a relationship.

Sometimes the two are linked, as reports of anti-social behaviour such as hearing neighbours shouting or fighting, could be a sign of a domestic abuse situation.

Where to get help

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, or are concerned about someone else, you can visit the West Kent website and use the confidential reporting form www.westkent.org/domesticabuse

You can also contact your tenancy services officer by emailing mytenancy@wkha.org.uk or calling 01732 749400

If you or someone else is in immediate danger call the police on 999

In a non-emergency, you can call 101 to speak to the police

The National Domestic Abuse free helpline- 24-hour support 0808 2000 247

DAVSS offers support to anyone living in West Kent experiencing domestic abuse - helpline from 10am to 1pm weekdays 01892 570538

Visit www.domesticabuseservices.org.uk to find out about support services near you

You can call Crimestoppers to report a concern and you don't have to leave your name 0800 555 111

HELPFUL TIPS TO SAVE MONEY ON YOUR BILLS THIS WINTER

Many of us are spending more time at home, and that means we're probably using more energy than normal, especially now it's getting colder. There are a lot of things you can do to save money on your bills.

Energy providers change their prices which can often lead to you paying more than you need to for your household bills. You can compare energy providers online. If you live in the Sevenoaks District, there is a free energy comparison site called 'Sevenoaks Switch and Save' run by Sevenoaks District Council. If you're in a contract you may have to wait to switch so you don't get charged a cancellation fee. However, if you haven't switched energy providers for your gas or electricity in the past year, it's possible you're paying too much and not getting the best deal.

Understanding your tariff

Energy providers have different tariffs so you can choose the best and most suitable one for you and your family.

- Fixed/capped tariff – this means the cost of energy won't go up, unless you use more or less than predicted. This is usually on a contract for 12 months.
- Variable/standard tariff – the cost of your energy is subject to change and can go up at any point and is often more expensive than fixed/capped tariffs, but you aren't tied into a contract.
- Prepayment meters – you have to pay as you go.
- Green tariff – the eco-friendly option where your energy comes from renewable sources such as wind or solar. They are often more expensive, but they do reduce your carbon footprint.

If you can't change your provider at the moment, or you run on a meter, there are still lots of things you can do to keep your bills down.

- Keep the warmth in the room by closing the curtains when it gets dark – and consider hanging thicker curtains.
- Leave the oven door open when you have finished cooking so that the heat warms the kitchen – but not if you have small children or pets in the house.
- When you leave a room, or you're going out, make sure all the lights are turned off
- Turn your appliances off at the plug and don't leave them on standby
- If you have a bath leave the water in when you've finished so the heat can warm the room – but again, be careful if you have small children or pets in the house.
- Check all of your taps to make sure they're not dripping
- Fill up the washing machine and wash clothes at a lower temperature
- Make sure you're paying the right amount by giving regular meter readings to your energy provider.
- Check to see if you are eligible to receive additional benefits or discounts e.g. working tax credits or the warm home discount.

What to do if you're struggling

Contact us! We have lots of resources, and teams of people that can offer support for a variety of issues including money saving, employment and emotional support.

TELETUBBY, SCIENTIST? NO, IT'S OUR LEAD GAS ENGINEER, JANE!

Although all our engineers wear PPE and work in a Covid-safe way, we're prepared for those visits where we have to be that bit more careful and have to wear extra protection.

If you have a medical condition where you need us to wear extra PPE, please let us know in advance of your appointment. We'll allow extra time for the job and make sure our engineers have everything they need to keep you safe, just like Jane.

Jane



Neighbourhood News YOU SAID, WE DID!

Earlier this year you might remember us asking you to fill in a short survey about Neighbourhood News

YOU ASKED FOR	WE DID
More competitions and giveaways	We've asked our partners for giveaways and in this edition, Johnstone's Decorating have kindly given us a £50 voucher!
More information on how tenants can help in their local area	We've included details on how you can help foodbanks in your local area.
More information on what housing services are available for over 55s and who to contact	We're looking to include this in future editions, but all this information can currently be found on our website, or by calling 01732 749400.
Promotion of healthy activities for residents – including local walks that residents can do.	We've included details of a walk residents can do in Halstead, near Sevenoaks. We'll be keeping an eye out for more walks across Kent to include in future editions.
The magazine to come in compostable wrapping rather than plastic.	We've now started using biodegradable wrapping made of potato starch, which is 100% compostable. The paper is FSC accredited (to make sure our forests are alive for generations to come). We've also teamed up with Climate Partners to offset the carbon created during the print and mailing process.
Information about youth projects across Kent, rather than just focusing on Edenbridge	We've included information on what our youth team is up to, and how young people in your family can get involved in their activities.
An email version	We're looking into options of how we can provide Neighbourhood News by email, while still complying with GDPR regulations. In the meantime, you can read it on our website www.westkent.org/neighbourhoodnews

We're always looking for more feedback on Neighbourhood News – it's your magazine and we want it to be the best it can be. If you're interested in getting involved, join our Neighbourhood News panel – visit <https://www.westkent.org/residentvoice/> for more information.

Do you love walking?

This year, our Linda Hogan Community Fund supported Halstead Walking Group to produce a walking map of Halstead.

Halstead Walking Group are a relatively new group, and while walking they noticed many Duke of Edinburgh students from inner London boroughs were doing their Bronze challenge across Halstead. They've also seen an increase in local people walking during the Covid-19 outbreak, so they asked for funding to help pay for some route maps. The maps will be available from the village school for local people, but also distributed via D of E regional offices and other locations.

The map is also available on Halstead Parish Council's website:
www.halsteadparish.org.uk/



Exciting plans at Kent Wildlife Trust's Sevenoaks Visitor Centre

Kent Wildlife Trust is planning to improve visitor facilities at its wildlife reserve in Sevenoaks. The proposed improvements will include an improved café and retail area, better toilet facilities and improved car parking.

There will be the opportunity to view the planned improvements in January on the Kent Wildlife Trust website
www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk

BRENWARDS HELP TO CLEAR BACKLOG

Over the first lockdown, we built up quite a backlog of jobs - over 3000! When the restrictions were eased and we were able to carry out routine repairs again Brenwards sent qualified staff members to help with these jobs, so residents didn't have to wait quite so long for their appointment.

Thank you Brenwards!



ABACUS SEVENOAKS

MAKING SAFE SPACE FOR SHEDDERS

The Sevenoaks Shed is a woodwork project based in Sevenoaks that provides a community space and the chance to learn new skills. It's part of the wider network of Men's Sheds, a national organisation that originally set up to tackle social isolation and loneliness in men after retirement. Since then the concept has evolved and now welcomes all ages and genders. The Sheds are set up across the country for a variety of activities including model making, gardening, carpentry, bike refurbishment and woodwork.



The people that attend the shed are bonded by common interests and shared experiences, so its loss meant a great deal to them. Charles, a committed Shedder, worked as a teacher in a workshop but after he retired, he really missed the daily interaction, as well as working with his hands and problem solving. He said:

"I travel all the way from Hartley to attend, I really enjoy being in a workshop situation again, and you get to meet people with similar interests".

Initially Shedders worked on fairly simple projects like bird-boxes, which were then sold in the Abacus store.

But once they became more established, they started taking on commissioned projects for local businesses and organisations. Currently they are refurbishing a bench for a school and building planters for a care home. The group also refurbish any furniture donated to Abacus that needs a little bit of TLC, for a small fee when it is sold.

Although the way the group runs has had to change, the group is a lifeline to many, including Ed who has been a Shedder since 2018 and is really pleased the group has started up again:

"It's great for people that might have lost their better half and are a bit lost for what to do. It's a shame that more people can't attend each day, as it limits how many people you see, but at least we're still able to attend."

If you want to know more about Sevenoaks Shed, call us on 01732 743365 or email abacus@wkha.org.uk

The Sevenoaks Shed operates from the Abacus warehouse and when Abacus had to shut, because of the coronavirus pandemic, members - known as 'Shedders' - lost not only their hobby, but also their way of staying connected and socialising. The Abacus team were aware that the Shed was a lifeline for many and worked with the Shedders, to make sure that when the warehouse could reopen, the group would have a safe environment to meet up again.

Alan, the group's chairman told us how important it was to get the group up and running again:

"People missed it, and when we started back up again people contacted us immediately. It's a great way to give back to the community and to know that your work has value."

The Shed usually has a capacity of eight to ten people but since August they are now limited to three people in the workshop each day. They have created a rota and a timetable for members who must sign in and wear a mask while they work and move around the workshop.



Shared ownership campaign relaunched as demand increases

A national campaign to raise the profile of shared ownership was relaunched recently. The campaign, backed by nearly 50 other housing associations across the country, aims to raise the profile of shared ownership and explain how it works to potential buyers.

Shared ownership is another way to get on the housing ladder, allowing buyers to purchase a percentage of the value of the home (which means a smaller deposit and mortgage), then pay rent on the rest.

West Kent has backed the campaign since its launch back in January, but the campaign was paused after the housing market was effectively suspended due to the Coronavirus crisis. However, many housing associations have seen increased interest in shared ownership since lockdown, as potential buyers have looked for properties with more space to work from home, a garden, or located closer to friends and family.

West Kent builds homes for shared ownership all across Kent, and the sales team is busier than ever. Sophie Palmer Head of Home Ownership says:

"Our team has been inundated with enquiries about our shared ownership homes in the last few months. We have a fantastic sales team at West Kent who can help with everything from explaining how shared ownership works to

dealing with solicitors and mortgage providers. We will also be there to hand over the keys on the day you complete your purchase and to welcome you into your new home. We encourage anyone interested in shared ownership to get in touch with us now so we can talk you through the process and help you take that first step towards home ownership."

With the campaign sparking interest at a national level, and changes in working life meaning people can potentially expand their search areas when buying a home. The sales team is seeing high demand for all current properties, and those in the pipeline, so if you are interested in buying a shared ownership home with West Kent, get in touch soon to avoid disappointment. Buying a home can feel daunting, but the sales team are there to help and support every step of the way:

To view all West Kent's shared ownership homes, and those coming soon, visit westkent.org/buy

**THE OPTION YOU NEVER
KNEW EXISTED**

That's what SHARED OWNERSHIP means

Buy a bit, rent a bit. Another way to buy a home.
Eligibility requirements apply.

Foodbanks support the community during the coronavirus pandemic



HOW TO DONATE?

Most large supermarkets have boxes that you can put your donations in after you've paid at the till.

WHAT TO DONATE?

Anything. If you use it, so does somebody else. It's not just food, but hygiene and sanitary items too.

WHAT TO AVOID?

Any item with a short shelf life such as fresh fruit and vegetables, meat or milk. Foodbanks also won't accept alcohol or medicines.

The furlough scheme and redundancies meant many people who were already on a low income were struggling to buy food. We work with 14 foodbanks across the county and are just one of many organisations that refer to these services, to make sure no one goes without food, or necessities such as toiletries or sanitary items. In April, the first month of the national lockdown, we referred 17 families to foodbanks across the county. This is a 143% increase compared to the previous month when we made seven referrals.

David Carter, from The Community Cupboard in West Kingsdown, said: "We receive referrals from housing associations, the council, community wardens and Citizens Advice. We only opened in January and at that time we were sending around six parcels a week. A few weeks after the country was put into lockdown the need for our service went up by over 500% and we were sending out 10 - 15 parcels per day".

This translates to around 3,000 meals a month, feeding 800 people.

ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

Please do not suffer in silence, we can help you. Just give us a call or send us an email.

Freephone – 0800 1691122
Email – help@wkha.org.uk

We're in this together



George

West Kent Together is a service offered by West Kent to help residents stay connected and supported through difficult times.

We know that many residents have been affected by Covid-19, whether through health issues, job and money worries, or feelings of loneliness and isolation. But whatever the issue affecting you, we are here to help.

West Kent Together can link you in with support services, whether it's needing food or medication delivered, employment advice, money advice or just someone to talk to.

Since we started West Kent Together in June, we have made 179 calls to 20 residents. One resident who had weekly calls with George, West Kent's Community Development Officer was really grateful for the service, she said:

"I want to say a massive thank you to George. He has been supporting me via the West Kent Together project with weekly telephone calls. George is never in a rush and listens to everything I have to say. I wouldn't be

here if it wasn't for him; I was having suicidal thoughts at one point and he has helped me to have a more positive outlook on life and I thank him for everything he has done."

We are all in this together so whatever your worry, get in touch. We will listen, give information and support where we can. The service is very flexible- we can do what works for you.

Any West Kent resident can self-refer for this service and there are lots of ways of doing this. Whichever way you contact us, someone from the West Kent Together team will get back in touch with you within 48 hours

- Email: together@wkha.org.uk
- Call: 0800 1970097
- Fill in the website form: www.westkent.org/together

WEST KENT AWARDED RSPCA GOLD HOUSING FOOTPRINT FOR EIGHTH YEAR

We're proud to have been awarded the Gold Housing Footprint in the 2020 RSPCA PawPrint awards for the eighth year running.

The award is the only award scheme across England and Wales to recognise good practice from local authorities and housing providers in relation to animal welfare. They celebrate organisations that exceed basic and statutory service requirements with to achieve higher animal welfare standards. Each Footprint has three levels – bronze, silver and gold.

This year, we have been awarded our eighth gold 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 dogs in our properties are of a good standard.

The popular Love Your Dog Roadshows began 2016 - and though we haven't been able to run any this

year - we found as a result, the number of complaints about animal nuisance reduced. As well as plenty of advice on health, wellbeing and behaviour, there are freebies available and while the focus will be on dog health and wellbeing, we are happy to talk to tenants about other more general issues.

We also reviewed our pets policy in 2019, cats and dogs are now allowed in most West Kent homes - so more residents than ever can enjoy the benefits of pet ownership.

Rachel Williams, Senior Parliamentary Advisor at the RSPCA said: *"Congratulations once again to West Kent for retaining your award in what has been, and continues to be, a very difficult year for all of us. And thank you for your - and your team's - ongoing hard work and commitment to your animal residents."*



PAW
prints

GOLD HOUSING 2020

NEW Social Housing White Paper

The government published its Social Housing White Paper in November. The white paper is introducing a new charter for social housing residents which sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect, these are:

1. To be safe in your home. We will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
2. To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government

will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.

6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

All social housing landlords, including West Kent will be required to deliver these. Some things we are already doing, some are planned. We will be involving residents in our future plans and providing regular updates about our progress. If you would like to be involved please email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk or call us on 01732 749400.

HOW WE'RE PERFORMING

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. Here is our performance against our service standards for the first half of 2020. We will publish another update in January 2021.

- 88%** Customer contact that was resolved first time
- 97%** Repairs that were completed on time
- 94%** Repairs that met our 'maintaining your home' promise

- 19** Number of complaint reviews and appeals
- 42%** Percentage of complaints upheld
- 50** Number of new homes built

2021 rent review

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

In April 2021, your rent will go up by 1.5%. For example, if your current rent is £125 per week, your rent for April 2021-March 2022 will be £126.88. This is calculated using the formula:

$$£125.00 \times 1.5\% = £1.88$$

$$£125.00 + £1.88 = £126.88$$

We'll send more details to each household by March 2021. 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 the income we receive in our Annual reports and Financial Statements.

These are added to our website in July 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.



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)

