

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association



Spring 2021

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Helping to access online services
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Places to live. Space to grow.



WELCOME TO OUR SPRING EDITION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

Spring has sprung and there's a feeling of optimism in the air. The NHS is motoring through the vaccine programme and we are beginning to hope that we can see the end of covid. We are all beginning to get a little bit excited about the prospect of getting out and about and seeing more of you in person.

We've been consulting on our resident engagement strategy over the last few months, we haven't let a pandemic stop our progress in this area. You can read about some of the things that residents have been involved with since our last newsletter on page 11.

The Housing Ombudsman has also been busy and in April this year we will be adopting a new complaints process that will be the same for all housing associations. There are some changes to the timescales that you may be used to and the process is a little bit different from our previous process. You can read about the changes on page 13, thank you to our residents that helped with our communications around this.

And as you tend to your gardens and nurture those little shoots that will blossom into something useful at this time of the year we are doing just that with our new apprentices. Read about one of our new recruits on page 18 as they start their career journey with us. There's plenty of support for those that need help to get into new or better employment too – you can find all those details on five.

Finally, we were devastated to lose a much loved and valued colleague at the beginning of the year. Jackie Foreman managed our older persons' scheme at Hollybush Court in Sevenoaks. Her colleagues pay tribute to her on page five.

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

The editorial team

WHAT'S INSIDE

- A tribute to Jackie Foreman
- Complaints – our process has changed
- Meet our new Board members



ELLIE WINS TRY ANGLE AWARD!

Ellie, a regular visitor to our HOUSE project is a talented artist and was recognised in the Arts category.

The Try Angle Awards were introduced by the county council in 1994 to raise the profile of people aged 11 to 18 (up to 25 for those who have additional needs) who really try, often with little recognition, to do their best.

Ben Reynolds, Lead Youth Worker said: *"Ellie is an astounding artist with a great talent, leaving everyone in awe. She should be really proud of all she's achieved. Keep up the amazing work."* Congratulations Ellie!



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Jackie Foreman

Jackie Foreman, our much-loved Scheme Manager at Hollybush Court, Sevenoaks, passed away in early February surrounded by her family.

Jackie was diagnosed with cancer in December last year. She was hospitalised but repeatedly said to us that she would be back at work soon. She returned home and had further scans which unfortunately confirmed a terminal diagnosis.

She showed us the incredible courage that she has, planning to come in to say goodbye to all the residents at Hollybush Court. However, what had been predicted as three months turned into just a few days, and she did not have a chance to say goodbye to the residents and staff she has worked closely with since 2013; as peers, assistants, as managers and all as friends.

For my part, I will remember speaking to a large group of tenants at Hollybush Court, and their delight in finding out that Jackie was to be their Scheme Manager, and her shy happiness as she took in their overwhelming joy. For those that knew her, we knew someone whose commitment and care for those in her responsibility made their lives so much better. She will be hugely missed by us all.

Duncan Wilson, Head of Support



KICKSTART YOUR CAREER

We're proud to be a part of the Kickstart housing partnership providing jobs for young people across Kent.

Finding a job can be difficult at the best of times, let alone during a global pandemic, and when you don't have much experience. Kickstart aims to provide paid job placements for young people aged 16-24 to gain essential skills, build their confidence and kickstart their career.

Dawn Grant, Enterprise and Employment Manager, said: *"We're dedicated to providing opportunities for young people that will support their futures. They're entering the employment market at a really unfortunate time where employers are struggling to maintain their existing workforce. The Kickstart programme gives West Kent, and the other organisations in the Partnership, the chance to support their community and help young people build their skills, gain experience and harness their potential."*

We've created three new roles exclusively for young people across the business. Each vacancy is for a fixed six month period, so if you miss out this time, don't worry.

- Retail Assistant
- Team Administrator
- Activities Coordinator

We're hoping to start recruiting to these roles in April.

To apply for these roles you must be 16-24 years old and receive Universal Credit. You will need to speak with your job coach about applying.

If you need any employment and training support please contact Dawn or Pauline by email westkentworks@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749420.

KICKSTART SCHEME

Easter CLOSURE

We'll be closed from 3pm on Thursday 1 April until 8.45am on Tuesday 6 April.

Our email accounts and social media channels are not monitored during the closure. If you have an emergency during this period, please call

0800 1691122



What's next for the employment and training team?



After a busy and productive 2020, the employment and training team is making big plans for the coming year to provide even more services and opportunities for residents.

The team is continuing to provide CV help and interview prep and focussing on helping residents that have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Providing redundancy support and advising those on the furlough scheme has become a core function for the team, and in response they applied for lottery funding to deliver the support residents needed. The extra resource allowed their service to increase in capacity to provide tailored, individual support.

The team wants to provide training opportunities that give residents practical skills and the best opportunity to find a job. Some of the training courses available are:

- SIA – security guard course, complete with covid marshalling module
- CSCS – essential for construction
- Computer courses
- Hospitality training
- NVQ Level 1 preparing to work in schools.

To get in touch with the team and find out how they can help you to find employment or training, email westkentworks@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749420.

A rhyme about spring could take you far, with a £50 voucher for a poetry star!

After a very long winter, spring is finally in the air, and to celebrate, we would love you to write a poem, rhyme or limerick that captures all the joys of spring!

As most of us have been at home a lot more than usual, you might be feeling a bit fed up looking at the same four walls and feeling in the mood for some spring cleaning and decorating. That's why we've teamed up with Johnstone's Decorating Centre who have kindly donated a £50 voucher for the winner of our poetry competition.

It's open to all residents, young and old and as well as receiving a decorating voucher, the prize poem will be published on our social media pages, website and in the next edition of Neighbourhood News.

To enter, email your spring themed poem to residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk with your name and address.

Please get your entries in by 31 May and Heather Brightwell, Communities Director, will pick a winner!





EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION - YOUR STORIES

Last year, we started reviewing our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at West Kent following the Black Lives Matter movement. This was about reinforcing our commitment to creating a culture where people feel respected, included and heard, and where prejudice and discrimination is recognised and addressed. We also wanted to find out what more we could be doing as an organisation.

We have a group of EDI staff champions who are looking at what we do internally, and we are also working with an external organisation, the Housing Diversity Network, to help us make positive changes.

But we would like to include the voice and experiences of residents in this work.

- Can you share an experience that highlights prejudice or discrimination you have experienced?
- Do you feel you are treated differently because of a particular characteristic e.g. your religion, gender, disability or sexuality?

- Would you like to share something about your culture or heritage that you feel other people don't understand?
- Do you celebrate festivals or special days that you would like to tell people about?

If you can share your experiences or would like to celebrate and share your culture, we would love to hear from you. We'd like to share your stories with staff, to raise awareness, and with other residents through social media, our website and publications. We can keep you anonymous if you prefer but would like to share photos and first names if possible.

If you are interested in getting involved, please email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749400 and ask to speak to a member of the resident involvement team.

We would particularly like to hear from anyone who would like to feature in an article about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history.

What is Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)?

Equality – we use the word equality to describe equal opportunities in the workplace and in accessing our services

Diversity – we describe diversity as celebrating differences and valuing everyone. This means respecting and appreciating our colleagues and customers' individuality and embracing alternative views and experiences.

Inclusion – this is about ensuring fair treatment and opportunity for all -. making sure colleagues or customers feel able to get involved and valued for their contribution to the workplace or their communities.

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Being married or in a civil partnership
- Being pregnant or on maternity leave
- Disability
- Race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

West Kent also makes a commitment to:

- Stop unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Promote equality of opportunity between people
- Foster good relations between people.

West Kent Together

West Kent Together is a service 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 with support services, whether it's needing food or medication delivered, employment advice, money advice or just someone to talk to.

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.

Since we started West Kent Together in June, we have made over 200 calls to 23 residents.

How can I get in touch?

Any West Kent tenant can use 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.

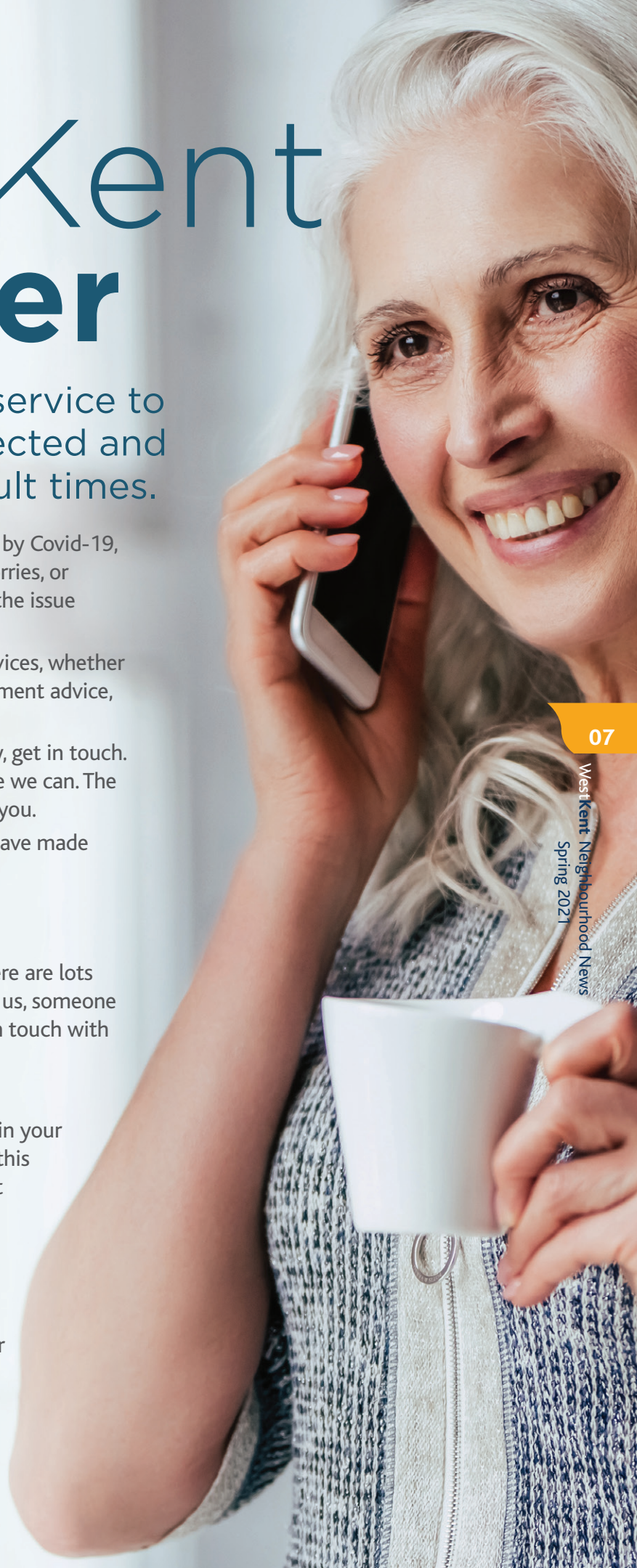
- **Email: together@wkha.org.uk**

You can give details of the issue affecting you in your email, but you don't have to. You can also use this email address just to find out a bit more about the service.

- **Phone: 0800 1970097**

This is a direct line to our customer services team. One of our customer service advisors will take your details and a West Kent Together team member will call you back within 48 hours.

- **Write to us: West Kent Together, 101 London Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 1AX.**



Working from home - or living at work?

West Kent's offices have been closed for almost a year now. We have done everything we can to keep the business running as usual throughout the various restrictions and lockdowns so that we could keep delivering services- the phones are still getting answered, and work is still being done.

But have you ever wondered where West Kent staff actually are when you call them and when they are getting on with day-to-day tasks? We caught up with three members of West Kent staff and asked them where they work and the upsides and downsides to their new ways of working.



Diane

Diane is an Income Recovery Manager, she helps residents who have fallen into arrears to get back on track. She is working out of her kitchen in her home that she shares with her husband. He works nights so she can't work out of her spare bedroom for fear of waking him.

Best thing – I love not having to drive every day. My car isn't getting wear and tear and because I am not stuck in traffic I am more productive. I really like that I can have lunch with my husband each day.

Downside – I really miss my colleagues, after a difficult phone call I don't have anyone to take me off and get me a cup of tea to offload, I literally stare at the wall instead. I suffer with OCD and have poor mental health and finding a space in my home to work comfortably was a challenge. My space had to look right and be right.

Karen

Karen is a Customer Services Advisor, the team she is a part of answers more than 200 calls and responds to 100 emails or other digital contact each day. She lives alone while her son is at university, but has her cats and guinea pigs for company. Her working space means that she can't fit two screens in like she does at work and with lots of different systems to access on each call she is finding that things are taking longer.

Best thing – I don't have to walk up three big hills to get to work each day! And I really liked not having to leave the house when it snowed.

Downside – my house has always been my sanctuary and bringing work into it, makes me feel like I can't escape. I miss the office, the support and the banter.

Beki

Beki is also a Customer Services Advisor, she lives with her two teenage children and husband. He works mostly with clients in the USA so they are able to juggle the working space they have in their kitchen because his day starts later than hers.

Best thing – family life has been much easier to organise, there is no mad rush every morning to get the children out of the door every morning and no worries about traffic. I also feel that I am more confident in dealing with calls because without colleagues to constantly check in with it means that I have been left to make my own decisions more.

Downside – we're lucky that most of the residents that call me are lovely and have been really understanding when we can't do things as quickly as we would normally. I really miss my colleagues and the support we give one another though.



Food for thought

Louise Halliday, Head of Customer Care at Brenwards, started making food packages after her son came home from school and told her that some of the other children didn't have enough food to eat.

"It broke my heart to hear that children were going hungry and had to watch others eating. I had always encouraged my son to take care of others – so I decided to do something" Louise said.

Louise initially used her own money to buy fruit to gift to children at the school but soon realised it wasn't sustainable and she'd need additional help. Louise began by contacting supermarkets to ask for donations, Tesco in Lakeside Thurrock committed to donating 180 pieces of fruit a week, and the local Asda and Co-op both made large fruit donations. She realised that as Christmas was approaching some children might be going without presents too. She decided to ask companies such as Bellway Homes and Next for donations and was overwhelmed by their response. They donated money, chocolates,

and sweets, and McDonalds donated 50 football books. She said, *"I'm so glad that we could help make life happier for children during this difficult time"*.

Using the donations, Louise and her son made 60 gift sets for children in her son's year group. The gift sets included stationery, sweets, stickers and personalised bookmarks. Louise said, *"It was wonderful to see the little smiles on their faces on the last day and knowing that this was down to what we had done."*

Louise also approached the managing director at Brenwards, Scott Edwards, and he agreed to donate £500 to the school for playground equipment. Scott said, *"The covid pandemic has changed so much for children, so we wanted to gift them something they could enjoy while being outside."*



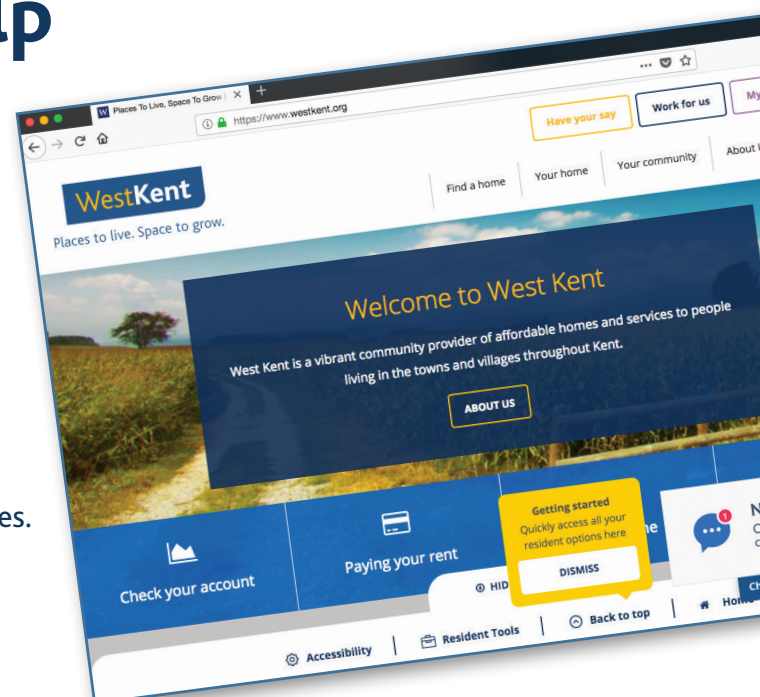
Would you like to help us improve the West Kent website?

We're looking for residents to take part in an event that will help us to find out what works well on our website, and what we need to improve.

You'll need to have access to a computer or smart phone and have an internet connection.

We carried out a similar activity last year, and because of your feedback we've been able to make some great changes.

If you'd like to get involved, please email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk



Old garages make way for new homes in Swanley

14 brand new West Kent homes, including some specially adapted for wheelchair users, will be built in Swanley later this year. The homes will replace 67 old garages across three sites.

West Kent rents garages to residents across Kent, and regularly reviews them to make sure they are fit for purpose. The garages to be demolished had reached the end of their life and were a perfect opportunity for re-development.

Kate Flaherty, Property Development and Partnerships Director said *"This is the first time in West Kent's history that we have taken on a project like this. We're replacing garages that weren't fit for purpose any more with homes for people that really need them"*.

Helix Group is building the new homes and they started work at the beginning of February by putting up fencing around the sites. By July all the garages will be demolished and building work will have begun.

The new homes will be a mixture of one-bedroom flats adapted for wheelchair users, and two and three-bedroom houses for rent.

A cuppa and a concert

Jazz duo serenades residents at an outdoor concert at their homes in Dartford.

Lorna Elcock, Scheme Manager at Strawberry Hill in Dartford, was contacted by a local councillor about a singer and saxophonist to perform for residents. The musical duo is part of an Arts Council initiative and throughout the pandemic they have been performing outdoor concerts to people in care homes and extra care schemes.

Staff that manage schemes like Strawberry Hill regularly organise activities such as arts and crafts, singing sessions and tea and cake afternoons, but since March last year they had to look into alternative entertainment options that would keep everyone safe.

Lorna said *"It was a great success! The residents loved it, and even though it was cold they still came out with their tea and coffee to listen. Many of them are shielding and don't see other people so it was really beneficial for them."*



SPOTLIGHT ON RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Last year, in our winter edition, we told you we'd recruited residents to a new scrutiny panel. Since then, they have completed training with Tpas, the national tenant participation service, on running successful scrutiny reviews, and they've also received training to understand how and why we collect and present data. The members have also agreed how the panel should be run, and what information they'd like to see to complete a successful review. It's been great to see the panel come together and get to know each other and we are delighted to have such a committed and enthusiastic group.

Their first review is on the employment and training service. We will report their findings on the website and in the summer Neighbourhood News magazine.

At the moment there are seven residents on the panel, but we're always looking for more people to get involved to represent the wider resident community. If you're interested in finding out more contact 01732 749400, or complete the form on our website westkent.org/scrutiny

WHAT IS A SCRUTINY PANEL?

A scrutiny panel is a resident led group who check how well West Kent is doing. They're provided with performance information and documents such as the residents annual report and the strategic plan to identify areas to examine more closely. The main objective of the scrutiny panel is to see what's going well and what can be improved whether that's through additional training, money saving ideas or even recruiting a new member of staff.

WHAT ELSE HAS BEEN GOING ON THIS YEAR?

Contractor standards

Two residents attended a national consultation to develop new contractor standards with Tpas. These standards will outline best practice, and expectations for contractors working with housing providers.

Customer satisfaction tender

We're changing the way we send satisfaction surveys, like the one you receive asking for feedback when you've had a repair. Five residents joined a panel of staff members to help decide which company would deliver this service.

Service charges

We reviewed our service charges policy and asked a group of ten residents to tell us what they thought and whether it made sense.

Board member interviews

We've recruited three new board members. As part of this process six residents joined interview panels to ask questions and give feedback. Go to page 14 to find out who the new members are.

Why should you get involved?

As a West Kent resident and the recipient of our services, you have a unique perspective. Sharing your feedback with us is really useful, because only you can tell us what's going well and what might need a bit of work.

Throughout the year we will be letting you know how you can get involved on social media, in Neighbourhood News, and on our website. However, because of data protection we're not able to contact you directly about topics we're looking at, so if you want to be kept updated on what we're reviewing please let us know so we can add you to our mailing list.

Email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749420.

CUSTOMER SERVICES – YOUR ONE STOP SHOP!

Our customer services advisors are trained to deal with almost any call that comes in – whether that’s a repair, giving advice about anti-social behaviour, or helping you with your rent payments.

We’re finding lots of people are contacting their tenancy services officer (TSO) directly, or only want to talk to their TSO, and are having to wait much longer for a reply as a result.

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 behavior
- 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.

If you don’t have an emergency, our online methods of contact are always the fastest way to get in touch with us. You can do this by:

Using our web chat: www.westkent.org

Emailing: help@wkha.org.uk

Using our tenant portal,

My West Kent: www.westkent.org/mywestkent



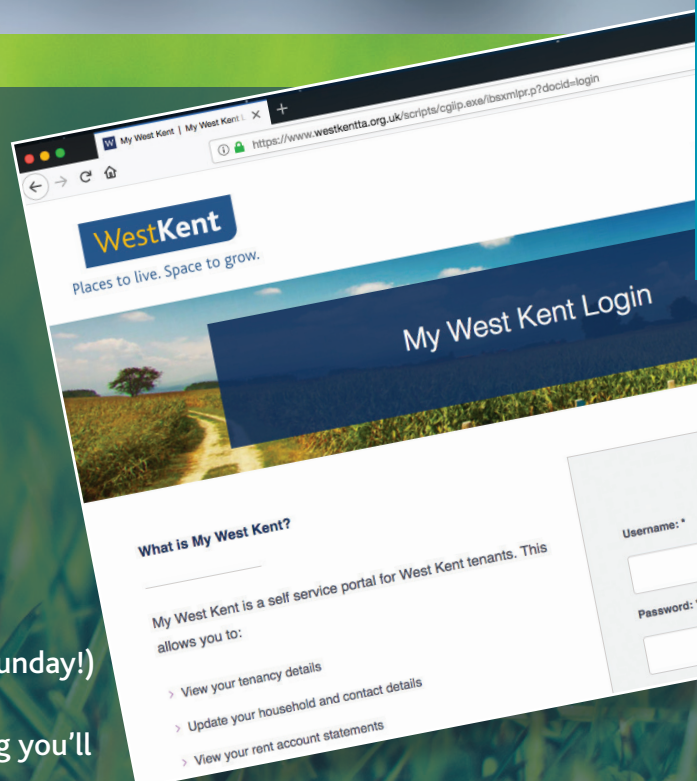
MY WEST KENT

My West Kent is our self-service portal for West Kent tenants. It’s really easy to use, and allows you to:

- View your tenancy details
- Update your household and contact details
- View your rent account statements
- Report, book and view outstanding repairs
- Contact your tenancy services officer
- Report anti-social behaviour
- Register a complaint or compliment, or make general enquiries

all at a time that suits you (yes, even at 2am on a Sunday!)

To login or register for an account, visit www.westkent.org/mywestkent. If you’re registering you’ll need your tenancy reference number to hand.



New process for customer complaints

Last year, the Housing Ombudsman Service published a new complaints handling code that sets out how housing organisations should respond to complaints. The new code is designed to make sure landlords deal with complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively and that they use the lessons learned to make improvements.

We have not only updated our complaints policy so we meet the new requirements, but we have a new customer resolution team managing and responding to our formal complaints.

When a customer first tells us they are unhappy, we'll try and sort it out for them without needing to go through our formal process. We call this a quick fix. We will investigate and respond to the customer within two days with a suggested solution. If the customer isn't happy with this, it will move to stage one of a formal complaint.

Stage one: the customer resolution team will look further into the issue. They will suggest a solution within ten working days, but if the customer isn't happy with it, the complaint will go to stage two.

Stage two: the complaint will be reviewed in depth by the customer resolution team who will suggest a solution within 20 working days. This is the final stage of the process at West Kent. If a customer isn't happy with the outcome, they can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service, their local councillor or MP.

Some complaints may go straight to stage one, and sometimes the timescales are changed, depending on the circumstances. You can find out more on our website.

We value all feedback, including complaints and use everything we learn to improve our services. Sometimes, you might not want to make a complaint, but may have suggestions or comments on how we could make improvements. We regularly hold events with residents to make sure their voices are heard. If you are interested in getting involved, and aren't already on our mailing list, email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk and keep an eye on your inbox. We also post events and opportunities on our main Facebook page and have a closed discussion group just for West Kent residents www.facebook.com/groups/westkentdiscussiongroup

WHAT'S THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE?

The Housing Ombudsman Service looks at complaints about social housing providers and resolves disputes between landlords and tenants. Their service is free, independent and impartial. You can contact them at any stage for help about your complaint, but they will usually only look at it once you have completed our two stage formal process.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We're pleased to be able to share the details of our new board member appointments. These will take effect after the June Annual General Meeting. The appointments were made following interviews with West Kent staff and selected residents.



Tracy Allison, Chief Executive at West Kent says:

"I am delighted to announce our new Non-Executive Directors Janet Eilbeck, Akintoye Durowoju and Kevin Corbett, who will be joining the Board in June. Together they bring experience of the private and public sector, and also knowledge of the housing sector which will be invaluable. There was a lot of interest in these roles and we were very pleased with the high calibre of people that applied."

Janet Eilbeck has been appointed as the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Janet's career as Partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) included a number of leading roles within the successful Public Sector Assurance Practice, including leading the audit part of that business for a time, and acting as audit partner responsible for many public sector bodies in Kent and nationally. She is currently a Non-Executive Board Member and the Chair of the Audit Committee, National Audit Office.

Janet said: *"As Partner at PWC I had an interesting group of housing association clients and really enjoyed working with the sector. I grew up in Sunderland, which had an exceptionally large stock of local authority housing. My father and his mother were hugely grateful for the lifeline it provided in the 1940s and 50s and I can identify with the vision and the difference the services provided by West Kent make to people's lives."*

Akintoye Durowoju has been appointed as a Board Member with a development interest.

Akin is a Chartered Surveyor by background, currently leading for the NHS on the £200m built environment and technical aspects of the St Pancras Development Project. He has over 24 years' experience of delivering major regeneration and housing development programmes across the UK, working with Homes England and Housing and sector-leading housing associations. He is currently a non-executive director for First Wave Housing.

Akin said: *"I am impressed by the ambition of West Kent to grow the number of new homes whilst delivering high-quality services, and by their commitment to service improvement, putting customer service and working with communities at the heart of their plans."*

Kevin Corbett has been appointed as a Board Member with an IT/digital interest.

Kevin is seasoned IT Director and CIO with experience of organisations from privately held, to non-profit and the public sector, leading and driving digital change and ensuring the IT strategy enables the strategic ambitions. Currently partner with the advisory firm, Gartner and before that IT director, Clarion Group. He is currently deputy chair and trustee for the West Kent based charity Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services.

Kevin said: *"West Kent has fantastic people who show great passion for making their tenants lives better and communities thrive. I believe there is a great opportunity to make a difference through the use of digital technologies and I am very keen to help achieve West Kent's ambition."*

Helping our Sevenoaks district residents online

With digital skills becoming ever more essential to everyday living, West Kent has partnered with local charity, Compaid and Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to help the less digitally enabled in our community to have access to a tablet and support them to access online services.

Compaid will provide participants with tablets and pre-loaded data/wifi devices, and recruit a dedicated local tutor to offer tailored, flexible one to one support sessions to get people online and doing what they need to do – so anything from online shopping or applying for jobs to talking to family and friends via Zoom or facetime.

The support sessions will be online initially, but they will look at options to offer in person support when restrictions allow. To start with, the service will only be available to residents in the Sevenoaks district and West Kent and SDC will refer people into the service but in time it will be offered out more widely.

Heather Brightwell, Communities Director says:

"The pilot will give us an opportunity to help our residents that need this support to get online, we hope it will also give us some idea of the level of demand that there is for help and support in this area and help us plan to meet that need in the future."

Tracy Allison, Chief Executive adds:

"Too many people are missing out from being fully engaged in their communities and families because of a lack of digital skills so we are really pleased to be able to offer them this support at such a crucial time. Compaid are experienced at providing this support already, they have been successfully providing it online for some time, so we know that it works. But like everyone, they are looking forward to being able to do even more when they can meet our residents in person."

If you would like some support to help you get online, please contact us. Call 01732 749420.





West Kent aims high with first net zero energy homes

West Kent is seeking to be one of the first housing associations in Kent to build nearly net zero energy homes for its residents at Mills Crescent in Sevenoaks.

Construction on the new homes will begin later this year after demolishing four homes that weren't energy efficient on part of the same site.

We have announced plans to develop 13 new affordable homes for rent as part of our commitment to improving our environmental performance. Each of the homes is designed to generate the maximum possible energy 'on site', with the remaining electricity purchased from 'offsite' renewable energy sources, including wind and solar farms.

We have committed to using construction materials and methods that offer environmentally better alternatives to traditional ones. The aim is to help the UK reduce its CO2 emissions to net zero by 2050 – a target set by the Government.

Kate Flaherty, Director of Property Development and Partnerships at West Kent, said: *"By using the latest design and specification options, we will be as near to net zero as possible. This will be achieved by creating an airtight super insulated home with control systems that ensure a ventilation system that boosts the comfort and health benefits of super energy efficient homes"*.

Chief Executive Tracy Allison added: *"The homes will cost West Kent more to build than traditional ones, but this will benefit residents over the lifetime of the homes by providing significantly reduced running costs. It is important that we do what we can to reduce residents' energy bills whilst also reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. Mills Crescent will be the first of many such schemes by West Kent housing association"*.

The West Kent board is committed to delivering ultra-low energy homes on as many of the new developments as possible, future proofing new homes and protecting the environment.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Safe Spaces are open in Boots, Superdrug, Morrisons, Well pharmacies and many independent pharmacies across the UK.

If you're experiencing domestic abuse, you can use Safe Spaces to call a helpline, support service or loved one.

For more info, visit www.uksaysnomore.org/safespaces



Amazing Albie!

Albie is 12 years old and lives in the Sevenoaks District. He learned about our online guitar course on our Facebook page and was really keen to sign up.

Having ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, social anxiety, Sleep Apnoea, ticks and Tourette's, Albie can find it quite difficult to sit through an entire hour of one activity. Albie was worried that he may not be accepted onto the course due to his additional needs, but we were quick to reassure him that we'd love for him to take part and all of our youth services activities are open to all.

It was clear from the first session that Albie was passionate about learning guitar, giving the session his full attention and asking questions as the hour progressed. It was also really obvious Albie had been learning a bit in advance of the first session, as he was quick to pick up the notes and chords. As the course progressed each week, it became a defined part of Albie's week and of his routine, which was really important.

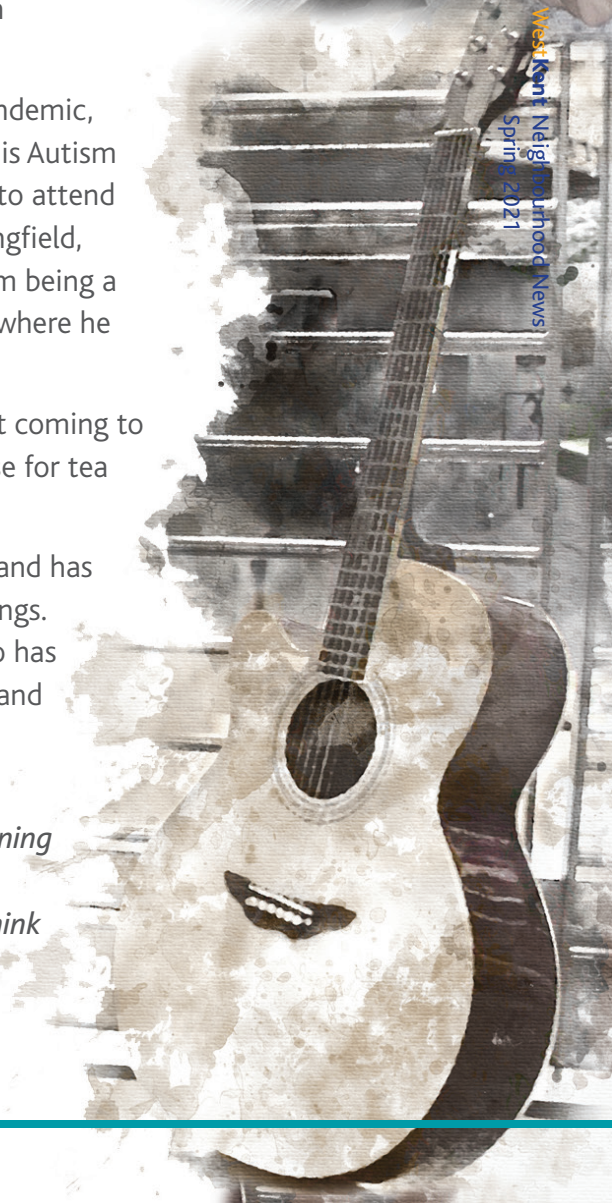
Being at home and having his world turned upside down due to the pandemic, it's been really important for the family to have a routine for Albie, as his Autism means that this is how he feels most comfortable. Albie has continued to attend school three days a week during the pandemic, at Rowhill School in Longfield, where many of his lessons focus on learning by doing. Having gone from being a school-refuser a few years ago, Albie is now thriving at his new school, where he enjoys music therapy and is also learning to play the keyboard.

There are some aspects of the pandemic that Albie has found it difficult coming to terms with, such as wanting to invite the guitar tutor round to his house for tea and cake. Albie's mum Dawn calls this one of "*the joys of Autism*".

Albie is now very close to completing our ten-week guitar programme and has learned all the notes, chords, finger movements and around ten new songs. This is just the latest in a string of amazing achievements for Albie, who has also performed live in a choir, in a showcase for Andrew Lloyd-Webber and at the Bluewater opening ceremony.

Charlotte Ede, Community Investment Manager says:

"It's been a pleasure to see Albie progress over the last eight weeks, learning a new skill and having the patience and perseverance to see it through. Albie is a truly amazing young person with a lot to offer the world. We think he's a shining example of what a young person can achieve if they put their mind to it."



West Kent welcomes three new apprentices



An apprenticeship allows you to earn qualifications, get workplace experience and earn a wage – all at the same time. You receive on-the-job training in your chosen field and sometimes additional training from the apprenticeship provider.

Pauline, Employment and Training Officer, said *"Apprenticeships offer an opportunity to combine a qualification with work place experience. We are able to offer outstanding individuals an opportunity to learn, develop and progress."*

West Kent has been a supporter of apprenticeships for many years and has provided opportunities across the business. Our newest recruit, Shenelagh, shared why she chose an apprenticeship at West Kent:

"I've always enjoyed learning and implementing new skills, especially when I'm able to gain

knowledge on new topics and contribute to a bigger picture. A housing association appealed to me as I enjoy being able to make people happy through my work. We can make a real difference to people and I will always do my best to be helpful and make someone's day. My personal goal is to carry happiness with me wherever I go and being at West Kent allows me to do this!"

Did you know that West Kent has a dedicated employment and training team who can help West Kent residents find apprenticeships? Not just at West Kent, but in all sorts of organisations. They can also help find training opportunities, improve your CV, support you into work and advise on how to improve your career prospects.

If you're interested, contact the team by calling 01732 749420 or by emailing westkentworks@wkha.org.uk.

KEEP YOUR NEW HOME SAFE FROM FIRE

Some of our new build homes have heaters installed in cupboards. Please make sure you do not cover the heater or overfill the cupboard. This can cause the heater to overheat and restrict the airflow, which may cause a fire.

If you have any concerns about a fire risk at your home, please contact us.

You can also arrange a free Safe and Well visit from Kent Fire and Rescue Service. They will check all your smoke alarms are working and give you advice on any potential fire risks (such as overloaded sockets). Call 0800 9237000.



HOME IMPROVEMENTS

We know lots of you want to make some changes to your home. Maybe you want some extra kitchen cupboards, a new front door or a shed in the garden.

Please remember you must get our permission before you make any improvements. We're usually happy to agree to these and we won't refuse without good reason.

We do need full details of what you're planning to do before you start any work. You should also check with your local council if local planning consent is needed for what you have in mind.

You can ask for permission using our website form on www.westkent.org or by emailing help@wkha.org.uk.

If you make any improvements without our permission, we will charge you to put them right.

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 July - December 2020.

88%	Customer contact that was right first time	22	Number of complaint reviews and appeals
97%	Repairs that were completed on time	68%	Percentage of reviews and appeals upheld
97.5%	Repairs that met our 'maintaining your home' promise	109	Number of new homes built

88% of customer's contact with us was right first time. This means that we were able to answer 88% of customer queries straight away without having to pass the question or task on to another member of staff.

What our complaints are about

We received 201 "Making it Right" complaints in the second half of 2020. A Making It Right complaint is the first part of our complaints process.

These were mainly about:

- the way that we communicate important information with customers

- the quality of repairs and the length of time it took to complete them
- the attitudes or actions of our staff and contractors.

22 issues were escalated to complaint reviews or appeals. This is three more escalated complaints compared to the previous six months.

68% of complaints were upheld. This is 26% higher than the previous six months.

Our complaints processed changed in March 2021, you can read more about these changes on page 13.

**West
Kent**

Places to live
Space to grow

[YOUR SPACE]

Your Space offers drop-in sessions for young people in the Edenbridge area, who are finding the challenges of everyday life tough.



The initiative is being offered in partnership with the Eden Christian Trust and is focused on supporting the needs of young people – whether that's offering signposting and information, or just a listening ear to chat about worries and concerns.

The drop-ins will run until the end of April, when our normal clubs will resume.

You don't need to book or tell us you're coming, it's your space – just drop in! The sessions are completely safe and adhere to all Covid-19 guidelines.

Our youth services team will be at the Bridges Centre, High Street, Edenbridge, every Tuesday between 4 and 6pm.

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

Twitter: @West_Kent

Instagram: westkenthousingassociation