



NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association



Summer 2021



Home adaptations give Faith her independence

Partnership funding provides £44,480.92 worth of home adaptations to give one little girl independence and a new lease of life.

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Our painting and decorating contractor is looking for carpenters.

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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME TO THE SUMMER EDITION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

We love this time of year, when the sun is shining it lifts our mood. There are plenty of stories in this issue that we hope will do the same for you.

We've been doing lots of work with residents - we've had input on our customer experience strategy and our domestic abuse policy, and the new scrutiny panel is looking at our training and employment service. You can read about these and more on page 9. There's a lot more coming to get the views of our residents. If joining a panel discussion isn't for you - we'll be doing a big survey later in the year, called a STAR survey. And we're introducing a new customer feedback tool to understand how well some of our services have been delivered - you'll find details on the back page.

The easing of restrictions means that we are able to offer our training and employment support face to face again - check out the

times and venues on page 12 if this is of interest.

We've included this year's Residents Annual Report alongside this magazine, which provides a snapshot of our finances, complaints and safety information. It also outlines our community services and has case studies so you can see where West Kent services made a difference.

And a final thing to lift our mood is that we are hoping to move back into our offices in September. Please contact us in the usual way for now, but you can read more about our covid guideline changes on page 19.

Enjoy the summer
and this edition!

The editorial team

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Time for a cuppa and a song at Strawberry Hill
- Resident involvement update
- Together we can stop abuse: we put the voice of survivors first.





A member of our customer services team

CUSTOMER SERVICES – YOUR ONE STOP SHOP!

Our customer services advisers are trained to be able 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,

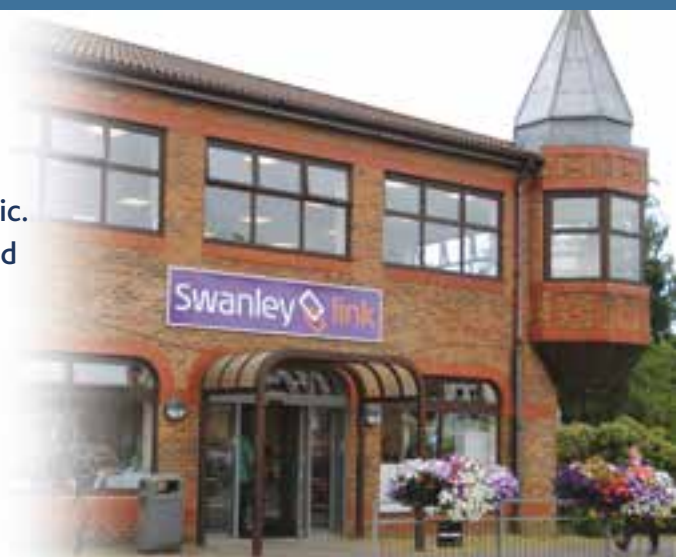
My West Kent: www.westkent.org/mywestkent

Office closures

Our offices at Sevenoaks and Swanley are still closed to the public. If you arrive at one of our offices, you’ll be turned away and asked to contact us another way.

If you need to speak to a member of West Kent staff, you can do this by:

- Emailing help@wkha.org.uk
- Calling 01732 749400
- Using our web chat on www.westkent.org



£35K funding boost for youth work



Our youth services team is celebrating after the award of not one but two generous grants towards providing their vital work in the community.

HOUSE, our youth club in Edenbridge, was awarded a grant of £25,136 from the Youth Centre Recovery Fund from the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust.

The Fund was designed to help youth centres survive and recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order that they may continue to deliver vital work for young people.

Julia and Hans Rausing commented: *"The last year has been incredibly difficult for young people, whose education and social lives have been severely interrupted by the pandemic. Youth centres play a vital role in providing young people with educational, leisure and social opportunities."*

"We are delighted to be supporting charities across the country that can make a real difference in their local communities and have a positive impact on young people's life chances."

A further grant of £10,000 has been awarded to Young Adventurers by the Garfield Weston Foundation. Young Adventurers provides low cost recreational and educational activity for children and encourages team work, communication skills, self-confidence and friendship. Activities are currently run in Swanley, Sevenoaks, Edenbridge, New Ash Green, Dunton

Green, Westerham and West Kingsdown.

The Garfield Weston Foundation is a family-founded, charitable grant-making foundation, which supports a wide range of causes across the UK, donating over £80 million annually. It was established in 1958 by the Weston family and is one of the largest and most respected charitable institutions in the UK which has donated over £1 billion in total. The Trustees are descendants of the founder and the Weston family continues to take a highly active and hands-on approach.

Heather Brightwell, Communities Director comments:

"We are over the moon to receive these generous grants. We know how valued our work with young people in our communities is and this vital funding will help to ensure that we can continue to enrich the lives of young people."

Tracy Allison, Chief Executive adds:

"West Kent prides itself on not just being a landlord and we know that the work we do with young people equips them with the skills that will ensure that they flourish. We're pleased that this important work has been recognised and are grateful for these generous grants in support of our ongoing work."



Home adaptations give Faith her independence

Partnership funding provides £44,480.92 worth of home adaptations to give one little girl independence and a new lease of life.

Faith is a seven-year-old girl with cerebral palsy, a disorder that affects balance and movement, this makes day-to-day activities like going up stairs or getting a snack from the kitchen a lot harder, and Faith often needs support from her mum, Danielle.

Last year Faith, her mum and her brother, moved into a new family home, a much-needed change as they had been living in a flat that wasn't accessible or suitable for Faith anymore. As Faith was growing up, what she needed also changed, she wanted to be more independent and move around like any other seven-year-old, and to achieve these goals she needed to live in a home that could be adapted to be wheelchair accessible.

Cathy McCarthy, Housing Director explains:

"West Kent's enablement team works closely with occupational therapists in circumstances like Faith's to provide the best, most accessible home environment. This can include installing grabrails, a stairlift or a wet room. For Faith the adaptations that were needed included widening doorways throughout the house, installing ramps, alterations to the bathroom

and installing a through-floor lift. Without these adaptations Faith's mum Danielle would still be carrying Faith up and down the stairs when she needed to go to bed or use the toilet."

We have a dedicated pot of money for home adaptations, and in cases like Faith's, where a lot of work needed to be completed, and it exceeded our budget we work with other organisations to help fund the work to residents' homes. Sevenoaks District Council and Kent County Council contributed £37,240.46. Now the work on the house is complete Faith is able to get her first power chair which allows her to move more freely around the house.

Danielle said: *"She loves it! She's zipping around all over the place learning how it works and having a lot of fun. She is so much happier and more independent now. It's so lovely to see her being able to do what any other seven-year-old can. It's made such a difference!"*

Jodi Kucers, Enablement Officer said: *"We deal with a lot of challenging and complex cases every day but being a part of this massive transformation for a little girl is one that I am really proud of and that I'll remember for a very long time."*

WE ALL NEED GOOD NEIGHBOURS

After the year we've had it's understandable that we're going to be making lots of plans to see friends and family. As restrictions ease please continue to be mindful of your neighbours and community:

- If you're having friends over and you expect it might be loud, let your neighbours know beforehand
- Turn your music down at 9pm and off by 11pm
- If you have communal gardens please be respectful of your neighbours, it's their space too
- If you're meeting outside, take your rubbish home with you
- If you have a dog, please make sure you keep it under control. Keep it on a lead when in a public space.



A poem for a new day

In the last edition of Neighborhood News, we asked you to submit your entries for a spring inspired poetry competition. Our Communities Director, Heather Brightwell picked 'To The New Day' as our winner for its reference to the recent struggles we have all experienced and for its uplifting ending. Congratulations to Mrs Midgeley who wins a £50 decorating voucher.

Flowers with their beauty, never disappoint.

Gazing out the window, looking at the day, Trying not to feel low, the seasons passing by.

Wondering how to manage, staying close to home.

Playing by the right rules, hoping soon they're gone.

We are all in time warps, trying to do the same, Knowing we will come through, praying for that day.

Friends will lift our spirits, with kisses and hugs to come.

While flowers, birds and wildlife, Point to where there's hope.



Changes to fencing

We've temporarily paused fencing repairs and replacements.

Due to a current supply shortage of concrete gravel boards and concrete posts, our contractor Brenwards has found it difficult to continue repairs and replacements as normal. Because of this, we need to pause all current and new fencing repairs and replacements.

This doesn't affect chain link fencing, which we're still replacing as normal.

We know this may cause some inconvenience and worry for some of our residents. Although we hope this will be resolved soon, we can't currently say when we will resume fencing repairs.

We've included some frequently asked questions on our website that might help you while you're waiting for the repair/replacement. Just visit www.westkent.org/fencing



Gas safety checks - let us in!

In the right hands gas is safe, but boilers and appliances not serviced regularly can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning.

We are legally responsible for ensuring that your home is safe and we are required to do checks every year by law.

We are confident that our staff are working safely. If you need to self-isolate or have concerns about us being in your home please let us know so that we can provide reassurance or reschedule your appointment if necessary.

These checks take less than an hour and could save the lives of you and your family. Help us keep you safe by letting us in each year to complete the gas check.



Time for a cuppa and a song at Strawberry Hill

Residents at Strawberry Hill, one of our extra care schemes, were treated to a day of outdoor entertainment and safe socialising to raise money for two charities close to the hearts of residents and their families.



The line-up included music, a tombola and a raffle with a fantastic pamper hamper as first prize.

The day was a real family affair with two of the three singers at the event having a close connection to Strawberry Hill. One was Kelly, the daughter of a resident who sadly passed away earlier this year, who sings in a duet with her partner Dave and is also a great supporter of the ellenor Hospice. The other solo performer was another Dave, the son-in-law of a resident who often helps out at events.

The line-up included songs by Elvis, Neil Diamond and hits from the musicals. The concert lasted over two hours and brought a huge amount of joy to both residents and staff.

As well as entertainment, the day raised awareness of and funds for two charities- ellenor Hospice, the choice of one of the singers, and Dementia UK, to support its 'Time for a cuppa' initiative. 'Time for a cuppa' is a Dementia UK initiative that encourages people to hold tea parties to raise awareness and money to fund specialist dementia nurses.

We thought it would be good for the residents to have something like this after the last 18 months of Covid and as we were nearing what might be a window of change we thought having an outside event would bring some joy to the residents.



The fun wasn't over when the music stopped as there was a host of prizes to be won with a luxury pamper hamper donated as first prize from a local branch of Asda.

Strawberry Hill manager Steve Hanley was delighted to offer such an event after a long time of isolation for residents,

"Seeing everyone come together and have such a great time is just a joy. We didn't want to over promote the event as we still needed to ensure we stuck to the government guidelines but we have really made the most of what we were able to do. Thanks to our fantastic residents and the incredible volunteers who sang for us, we raised a staggering £420 which we will split between the two charities. It was definitely a proud day for everyone at Strawberry Hill."

Resident involvement update

Scrutiny

The recently formed scrutiny panel has grown! After a successful second round of recruitment we welcomed four new residents to the panel. The scrutiny panel's first review on the employability and training service is ongoing.

Domestic abuse

Over the past year we've been working with a group of residents to review how we respond to cases of domestic abuse. As a housing provider we want to make sure your home is safe from abuse and to provide assurance to you, as our residents, that we can and will support you if you choose to reach out to us.

Complaints leaflet

We updated the process in line with new guidance from the Housing Ombudsman Service. Residents joined the customer experience and resident involvement teams to review the best way to display and communicate the new complaints process.

Equality, diversity and inclusion focus group

In June, 15 residents joined an online focus group to share their experiences, struggles and insight as well as commenting on the equality, diversity

and inclusion policy. As an organisation it's important to create policies that represent our values, to reduce exclusion and unconscious bias.

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

Call – 01732 749400

Message us on Facebook - @WestKentHA



Asda Foundation funds young people to realise their culinary dreams

Young people in the Sevenoaks District grabbed their oven gloves and dug out their saucepans to make feasts for their families.



Dustin

Our youth services team was awarded £750 by the Asda Foundation to deliver weekly cooking classes. 20 young people, from 8 to 19 years old took part, and each week ingredients, a recipe card and a list of the equipment they'd need was delivered to their homes. The cooking class was run by Dustin, a professional chef, every Friday. Dustin delivered the online cook-along to help young people to learn, cook with friends and discover the joys of cooking.

Over the six-week course they made a variety of dishes from simple meals like mac and cheese and fajitas, to more complicated meals like corned beef hash with dumplings and chicken and mushroom pie.

Richard Dowling, Youth Services Manager, said: "The young people had been asking us to do cooking classes since the beginning of lockdown, but we couldn't afford to deliver the sessions. Applying to Asda for funding meant we


could not only give the young people what they wanted but we could feed 20 families, a total of 90 people. They were so grateful, and it was a real success."

The sessions have had a really positive impact on the young people and have supported their personal development.

Billy's* mum said: "We have loved the cooking sessions. More importantly Billy has. He has cooked different dishes and we've really enjoyed it too. Dustin has been excellent, he explains everything and is really clear. These have been some of the best sessions because of the life skills Billy has developed."

Freddie's* parents said: "Freddie has really enjoyed cooking all the different dishes. The veggie pasta bake has become a regular dish in our house now. A really fantastic idea and much appreciated".

*Names have been changed



Together we can stop abuse: we put the voice of survivors first

We've reviewed our domestic abuse policy and procedure and will continue to involve residents with every step of this work.

We're aiming to gain DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation, which is the benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse and will sign up to the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) Make a Stand pledge. We are also working closely with a specialist Kent based charity, DAVSS (Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services).

Last year, a resident focus group was formed to make sure their voices and experiences influenced all the work in the review. This small group of residents met again recently to look at the draft of a new procedure for West Kent staff to follow when they get a report of domestic abuse.

Feedback from the group was sensitive, thoughtful and constructive with lots of excellent ideas for improving the procedure. Suggestions ranged from ensuring survivors were supported to manage their finances

if they had recently escaped an abusive relationship, to making sure ways to report abuse are straightforward and safe.

The group also looked at some campaign materials, such as posters, to support the launch of the new policy and to make sure residents and local communities are aware that West Kent can offer help and support to those experiencing domestic abuse. Again, the feedback was excellent, with a suggestion that some of the posters could have positive messages and images giving the message that 'there is life after abuse.'

Julie Terry, Head of Housing Services is leading on the review and says:

"We feel so privileged to have such a committed group of residents helping us with this work. We have had genuinely helpful suggestions from them that will help make sure we get our policy, procedure and campaign materials right. We want everyone to know that West Kent will listen to people experiencing domestic abuse, that we will believe them, and that we will hold perpetrators to account."

You can read the new policy and procedure and find out more on our website www.westkent.org/da

If you need help and support for yourself, or are worried about someone else contact:
The National Domestic Abuse Helpline- free, 24 hours a day 0808 2000 247

DAVSS (Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Service) – support services for West Kent
Helpline 10.00am to 1.00pm weekdays **01892 570538**

You can also report concerns anonymously by contacting Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111**

SEVENOAKS AND SWANLEY JOB HUBS ARE BACK!

Our popular job hubs are now back to running face to face each week. Our employment and training team can support you to:

- Create a bespoke CV
- Search for jobs, voluntary positions, work placements
- Find an apprenticeship
- Build your confidence in interviews with top tips and techniques
- Careers advice
- Find and provide training courses
- Find work after redundancy, whether that's through retraining, or confidence building

Sevenoaks

Every Tuesday, 9.30am-12.30pm,
The Plaza Suite, Stag Theatre,
London Road, TN13 1ZZ

Swanley

Every Wednesday, 9.30am-12.30pm,
The Clocktower Pavilion, The Alexandra Suite,
St Mary's Road, Swanley, BR8 7BU



Dawn and Pauline, our employment and training team

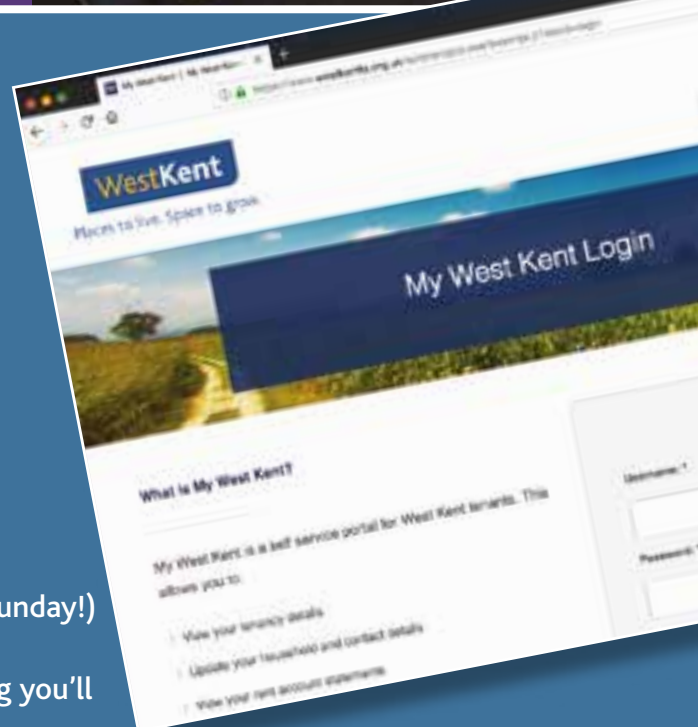
MY WEST KENT

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.





Do you have a balcony?

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

- Don't ever barbeque on the balcony
- Don't store anything flammable such as barbeque fluid, paint or camping gas on there
- Don't store any material that could catch fire – so no piles of clothes or cardboard boxes

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

- If you smoke, please make sure you have a metal container with a lid to dispose of the stub and that it is

properly extinguished before you bin it

There is more advice about keeping yourself safe and avoiding fires on our website www.westkent.org

Sheds

We understand that sometimes storage space can be an issue – especially for those bigger items like bikes, BBQs and lawnmowers.

We're always happy to consider agreeing to a shed being installed in your garden. If you would like to put up a shed, you must ask our permission and let us know a few details:

- How big the shed will be
- Where it will be situated in your garden - remember, sheds must always be at least two metres from your home to prevent fires from spreading.

Please complete the form on our website www.westkent.org/homeimprovements before starting any work. If we can agree to what you want to do, we'll write and tell you.



CAN YOU SPARE SOME OF YOUR TIME TO HELP US IMPROVE OUR 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.

It will only take an hour of your time,
and all residents who take part will receive a **£20 Amazon voucher**.
You'll need to have access to a computer, tablet or smart phone and
have an internet connection.

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

West Kent census

Later this year, we'll be contacting all residents to make sure the details we hold on our systems are up to date and accurate. It's important we have up to date information about you so we can contact you easily, especially if there is an emergency if you are away from home.

As well as all the usual details such as phone number and household members, we will also be asking some other questions related to equality and diversity (gender, ethnicity etc). Having this additional information helps us plan services that are inclusive and accessible for all residents. It will also help highlight areas of inequality that we need to address.

With over 7,000 homes, we expect this process to take several months but we wanted to let you know we will be contacting you and the reasons why. You don't need to do anything now; we will contact you (by post or email) with a copy of the details we currently hold on our system and will ask you to let us know they are accurate or update them if necessary. If we have any questions after you send back the updated information, we will get in touch again.

We are looking at how we can make it easier for residents to update the details we hold about them in the future, so we can keep things up to date and make sure our services are working well for all residents.



Looking for a new career?

Our painting and decorating contractor, Ian Williams Ltd, is looking for carpenters, working forepersons, and painters and decorators to join their growing team.

You don't need any formal qualifications, just the right experience and a 'can do' attitude! In return, Ian Williams Ltd offers some great benefits:

- Company van guaranteed
- Guaranteed weekly paid earnings based on a 39 hour working week – with an annual pay review
- The opportunity to increase your basic pay through a productivity-based bonus scheme

- Regular training and performance reviews, allowing you to develop within your role and progress within the business
- Funding towards job-relevant qualifications
- Preferred company supplier discounts.

If you'd like some more information or an informal chat, please email recruitment@ianwilliams.co.uk or call 01454 328000.



Digital skills shouldn't be a barrier to employment!



We Are Digital are making finding a job online easier with new, free, training for West Kent residents.

They provide a service tailored to you so you can get online and start searching for a new job with confidence. They can provide advice and guidance with finding the right equipment and internet provider, as well as showing you how to successfully search and apply for a job online. connecting with employers on social media

To start your digital journey contact We Are Digital and sign up today:

- Call: 0114 551 2551
- or text SKILLS to 88440 and you'll receive a call back within 48 hours.

We Are Digital are partnered and funded by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

For help with interview skills or writing your CV contact our employment and training team westkentworks@wkha.org.uk or 07850 506383.

What could you live without?

West Kent will not normally replace your possessions if you have a fire, flood or other disaster at home.

Without adequate home contents insurance you could end up with nothing at all.

Shop around, check the comparison sites and see what the experts are recommending. There are deals for social housing residents to bring the cost down.



Whatever you do, do it today.

West Kent helps residents qualify to work in schools

Eight residents received their accredited qualification after ten weeks of virtual learning.

Preparing to work in schools is a new fully funded course offered to West Kent residents, over the age of 14 with an interest in working in a school environment.

Eight residents completed the course and once restrictions eased, six of the graduates attended a level three paediatric first aid course to complement their recent qualification.

The schools course consisted of three units to help build confidence and improve understanding of working in a school environment, how to support children and young people and keep them safe, as well as a module on communication. Bernice, an attendee who recently qualified said: ***"The course has been really interesting to understand what happens in schools and learn about policies and procedures, as well as how to work with children with different or additional needs"***.

Susan, from Learner2mentor, delivered the course virtually for the first time this year, adapting her usual classroom-based style to accommodate



The graduates

lockdown life. She said: ***"I commend the students for keeping focused on their goals during the pandemic. Communication was vital during this time especially during tutorials which were scheduled between home-schooling and lockdown family living."***

Dawn, Employability and Enterprise Manager said: ***"It's a really great course and I'm so pleased with how successful it's been. Just because the course is over and the residents have graduated, doesn't mean the support ends there"***.

To support these newly qualified students the employment and training team is supporting them to update their CV, offer interview techniques training and help with the job search.

For more information about employment and training support contact Dawn on 07850 506282 or Pauline on 07715 993292 , or you can email them at westkentworks@wkha.org.uk.

Eviction ban lifted

During the Covid pandemic, the Government introduced a ban on evictions in England and although this ban ended on 1 June, we will only start eviction proceedings after all other options have been exhausted.

The most common reason for eviction is when residents persistently don't pay their rent, but if residents communicate with us and work with us, we can usually resolve situations before things get that far.

We launched a campaign last year to encourage residents, including shared owners, to talk to us if they were struggling with paying their rent and managing their finances. If you let us know you're struggling, we will help. We have specialist teams who can make sure you are getting all the benefits you may be entitled to, talk to you about managing your rent account and who can signpost you to specialist help with your finances if needed.

With the furlough scheme and the temporary uplift in Universal Credit ending in September, we know people might be worried about the future. If these changes will affect you, one simple thing you can do now is to check what benefits you might be entitled to by using our online calculator www.westkent.entitledto.co.uk/Home/Start

If your employment situation has changed in recent months, we also have a training and employment team who can advise you on training opportunities, improving your CV and interview techniques and who can help secure you a new job.

Don't leave it too late and make tough times tougher- if you talk, we will listen.

Email help@wkha.org.uk to talk about your rent and westkentworks@wkha.org.uk to get in touch with the training and employment team.

**WORRIED ABOUT
THE END OF
FURLOUGH?
TALK TO US NOW.**

**DON'T
MAKE
TOUGH
TIMES
TOUGHER**

STAR PUPIL

Tom Hockley joined us as an apprentice in the youth team after a week's work experience. Now, two years later, he's been accepted to university to become a primary school teacher.

Working with young people was never a consideration for Tom, he said: *"I didn't even know it was a job"* but after spending time in the youth team for his work experience, Tom knew that working with young people was a career he wanted to explore further. Luckily for Tom, the youth team was looking for an apprentice to join the team, and he joined the team in 2019.

Tom worked hard for two years building up his skills in communicating with young people aged between 8 and 19. He developed a knowledge of engaging with young people and running activities to aid learning. He said: *"Working with young people is a very fulfilling job, you get to see*



Tom

their personal achievements, like their public speaking skills improve, their confidence grow, or an overall positive change in their attitude".

In September, Tom is joining Canterbury Christ Church University and is looking forward to putting the skills he's learnt as an apprentice in the youth team into practice.

A positive start for our new complaints process

A brand new team launched a brand new complaints process in March and so far the results have been very positive. The complaints process was changed because a new complaints code was published by the Housing Ombudsman Service, that is designed to make sure complaints are dealt with efficiently, fairly and effectively, and that lessons learned from them are used to improve services.

The first stage of the new process is called 'quick fix' when our customer services team or other frontline staff try and resolve a complaint quickly and informally. If it's not resolved, the complaint then gets passed to the customer resolution team who focus on investigating further, finding resolutions and working out what we can learn.

With our previous complaints process, residents were often unhappy about how long it took to resolve complaints and could get frustrated when no-one contacted them to keep them updated. The new team is turning this around, as Cathy McCarthy, Housing Director explains:

"One of the big successes we have seen so far is that we can contact residents sooner, keep them updated much more effectively and also give them the opportunity to comment on the proposed resolution before we come to a final decision. We know complaints might not be seen as something positive,

but we see every one as a chance to learn and want to make sure that we give a great service throughout the process, no matter what the outcome- this new team and process is helping us do that."

We plan to publish details of complaints we've dealt with regularly so residents can see what's been happening. Here are some facts and figures relating to complaints from April- June 2021:

- We've resolved 132 formal complaints
- We upheld 68% of those and didn't uphold 32%
- 92% were resolved within our timescales of ten working days for a stage one or 20 working days for a stage two. All extended complaints were extended for no more than ten extra working days and for valid reasons.
- The majority of our complaints have been about our repairs service; mainly about the length of time to complete repairs and appointments being moved or cancelled. We are working with our iNHomes team and our contractors to see how we can improve this.
- We identified issues with some of our service charges relating to a small number of residents and will be carrying out a review into how we calculate these.

COVID – OUR PLANS FOLLOWING ‘FREEDOM DAY’

West Kent takes the safety of its residents and staff seriously and we want to continue to reduce the threat of covid until it has disappeared altogether.

With that in mind we will:

- Continue to wear PPE when we visit your home
- Maintain 2 metres social distance
- Not visit if we have any symptoms of covid

- Ask that you continue to tell us if you have been asked to self isolate or have tested positive for covid when you book an appointment with us
- Ask our staff to take tests at least twice a week to reduce the risks of any of our staff spreading covid

Most of our staff will not return to the offices until September and are continuing to work from home, please continue to be patient and understanding.

Our 2020 Social Impact Report is out now!

Our Social Impact Report gives a flavour of our work and the impact it has had on individuals, groups and communities.

Heather Brightwell, Communities Director says: *“Investing in our communities was more important in 2020 than ever before, as we faced the impact of Covid. It’s been amazing to see how people in our communities came together to*

support each other through such a challenging time. Thanks to the ongoing support of our partners, funders and commissioners, and the commitment and creativity of our staff, we were able to adapt our work to deliver alongside them and make a difference when it mattered most.”

Read it on our website: westkent.org/communities

New head of housing services

Julie Terry has been appointed as the new Head of Housing Services.

Julie has worked for West Kent for 19 years, starting in our income team before completing a Chartered Institute of Housing qualification and becoming a Tenancy Services Officer and later progressing to Tenancy Services Manager.

Congratulations Julie!



Julie

IT MIGHT BE YOU! LOOK OUT FOR THE STAR SURVEY

We are always looking at different ways to ask our residents how we can improve our services. In September this year we are introducing a new survey – a Survey of Tenants And Residents (**STAR**).

We are working with an external company who will call or email a selection of our residents and ask for your views on a range of the services we provide to you. If you are contacted we would really appreciate if you could spare some time to take part.

STAR is used nationally by housing organisations and coordinated by an organisation called HouseMark. It will be one of the most important surveys we carry out and an important way of gathering opinions from our residents because it means that we can see how we are performing compared to other housing associations of a similar size.

From August this year, we'll also be working with a company called **RANT AND RAVE** to find out how we're doing through regular text message and email surveys.

We will share the results via our website and include a summary in a future edition of Neighbourhood News.

If you would like any more information about the surveys, please contact help@wkha.org.uk

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 169 1122 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)

