



NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association

ISSUE 93



Summer 2022

Cost of living – how we can help

We understand that many of you may have money worries at the moment, including how you will pay your rent and other household bills.

We want to work with you if you're struggling to pay.
page 3

You said, we did – doors and windows

In our recent surveys, you told us that door and window replacements were a priority for your home.
page 5

West Kent launches community development pilot in Swanley

This year we launched a pilot community-development project in the St Mary's ward of Swanley, to find out what residents thought about their community.
page 4



www.westkent.org

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME TO THE SUMMER EDITION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

It's been a scorcher of a summer, hopefully you're all keeping safe and enjoyed the sunshine.

Some gardens might be struggling with the dry weather, but the newly planted sensory garden at our Kent Excellent Homes For All scheme, Copperfields certainly isn't. Read more about the garden on page 10.

In this edition, we're focussing on how West Kent – and our partner organisations – can help with the cost-of-living crisis. We know things are tough for many of our residents at the moment, but please remember to talk to us if you're worried, we can help if you tell us.

We've also got an update on the STAR and Rant and Rave surveys residents have completed over the last year, which includes a programme to replace doors and windows that are no longer suitable or causing higher energy bills. Read more about what we're doing on page 9.

We have an update on what the resident involvement team and scrutiny panel have been up to since the last edition.

Remember, we'd love for as many residents as possible to give us their views and feedback, so find out more about how you can get involved on page 6.

We ended the summer with the sad news of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's passing. We send our condolences to the Royal Family at this sad time, and hope you all managed to watch the funeral or commemorate in your own way.

Finally, we've sent the residents annual report for the year 2021 alongside this magazine. Please do have a read through to find out how we've been performing. If you have any feedback, please let us know – email communicationsteam@wkha.org.uk

All the best for the rest of
the summer,

The editorial team

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Cost of living - how we can help
- Keeping you & your neighbours fire safe
- Copperfield sensory garden now open



Cost of living – how we can help

We understand that many of you may have money worries at the moment, including how you will pay your rent and other household bills in the months to come.

We want to work with you if you're struggling to pay. We can:

- Offer support and guidance about what benefits you may be entitled to, and how to claim
- Listen to what you can pay, and make appropriate payment plans with you
- Offer budgeting advice and access to income and expenditure reviews
- Agree for the housing cost part of your universal credit to be paid directly to us (if you receive this)
- Support you if you're looking for work by helping you with your job search, including getting ready for applications and interviews
- Signpost you to our partner organisations for further specialist advice – including energy costs
- Complete referrals to local food banks if you're struggling.

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

We have a wide range of information on our website about where you can get support, grants, and advice. Visit www.westkent.org/rentandmoney. If you don't have access to the internet, please call us on 01732 749400 and we can go through what support is available to you over the phone.

**DON'T
MAKE
TOUGH
TIMES
TOUGHER**

**TALK TO US
NOW IF YOU'RE
WORRIED
ABOUT THE
FUTURE.**

We do understand you might not want to talk to us about your personal situation. For independent advice, you can contact Citizens Advice or a free debt advice charity.

You can find your nearest Citizens Advice by visiting

www.citizensadvice.org.uk
or calling 0800 144 8848.

You never need to pay for debt advice.

West Kent launches community development pilot in Swanley

This year we launched a pilot community-development project in the St Mary's ward of Swanley, to find out what residents thought about their community.

We want to build communities residents are proud to live in, with support to manage life changes through tenancy support, community development and financial support.

From speaking to our residents in Swanley, we know they are facing challenges, especially financially. During the pandemic there was a withdrawal of face-to-face services from lock downs, which are key for lots of households.

Our new approach aims to:

- Re-engage with the community
- Rebuild trust
- Understand the communities' challenges by putting the residents voice at the heart of our plans.

This new approach puts direct, face-to-face engagement with residents at the centre and aims to collectively tackle issues.

So far, we have:

- Door knocked and spoken to 250 households face to face
- Held a free fish and chip consultation with over 90 residents
- Held a jubilee party for 175 residents
- Met residents in partnership forums (children's centres, Men's Sheds and local bingo sessions)
- Created a community plan identifying residents' priorities
- Built partnerships to work with us and deliver change.

We are working with the community to ensure this involvement is ongoing and sustainable.

We've had some great feedback from the pilot and events so far, and we're looking forward to continuing to work in the community in Swanley.

Ben, one of our residents said: *"Without a shadow of a doubt it is different in our community. You can see the effort. Instead of just words and planning its delivery and action and West Kent has delivered. Thank you so much."*

Anabel Palmer, Interim Communities Director added: *"It was great to meet our residents in person and understand the challenges they are facing. The last two years have been difficult for everyone and it's great to hear how families and communities supported each other during this time. We want build on this and ensure that our residents benefit from wider opportunities post-pandemic."*

If you'd like to find out more about the pilot or get involved, please email communitiesteamadmin@wkha.org.uk



MAKE SURE YOU'RE COVERED



Protect your home contents from
**fire, theft,
water damage.**

Contact My Home on 0345 450 7288
or visit:
www.thistlemyhome.co.uk



We know money is a worry for many residents at the moment, but you should think about whether your personal possessions and home contents are protected in case of a fire, flood, or other emergency at home.

No matter how careful you are, there's always a risk that your personal possessions could be broken, damaged or stolen – and West Kent will not normally replace your possessions if this happens.

There are lots of home contents insurance providers out there - shop around to make sure you get the best deal for everything you need to cover - this includes anything you are responsible for, such as broken windows.

For more information, visit
www.westkent.org/homeinsurance or call our
customer services team on 01732 749400.

YOU SAID, **WE DID** doors and windows

In our recent STAR and Rant and Rave surveys, you told us that door and window replacements were a priority for your home.

Some of our homes have doors and windows that although are still working, aren't at their best may cause higher energy bills and residents to not feel completely safe.

We've taken your feedback on board and are now changing our 'just in time' approach (replacing them when they are no longer fit for purpose), to replacing them before they reach the end of their lifespan.

If you're eligible for replacements, we'll be in touch to book in a survey with you. If you have any concerns about your doors or windows, please report these in the usual way to our customer services team, by emailing help@wkha.org.uk or calling 01732 749400.



How residents are getting involved and driving improvement at West Kent

We often talk about how residents can 'get involved' at West Kent, but what exactly does that mean and what do involved residents actually do?

It's about West Kent residents, challenging us and holding us to account. It's about you helping us to create changes that make us a better landlord, and ensuring better services for you, your neighbours and all our communities.

There are lots of different ways you can get involved and make positive changes, some take up quite a lot of time, but others are quick and easy.

Improving our repairs service

Our dedicated scrutiny panel are probably our most involved residents!

There are currently six members of the panel, who meet monthly (though often more than this). They dedicate lots of their time to looking at data and information about how we are performing as a landlord. If they spot any issues, they take an in depth look at what's happening.

They are currently carrying out a review of our repairs service and how we can make it better. They've worked with staff across the business - from our property director to our individual engineers.

The panel also wanted to understand residents' real-life experiences of repairs. They organised focus groups and 14 residents came and talked about what needs to change. These were online so people could join from the comfort of their own homes.

We run regular focus groups to talk about specific issues – they usually last about an hour and half, and you can come just as a one off if that suits you. There's usually no preparation or follow up involved. All the feedback from focus groups is recorded and informs changes to the way we work.

Watch this space as we will let you know the outcome of their review in the next edition and the full report will be on our website.

Reviewing policies

When we introduce a new policy or update an existing one, we'll ask you about it first. We might ask for feedback by email or invite you to a focus group to talk more in depth about it.

Last year we introduced a new domestic abuse policy, which our head of housing services created jointly with a group of residents – this meant we had real lived experience at the heart of the policy.



Inspecting the standard of work

We recently established a new resident inspectors' group. These residents check on the planned cleaning and maintenance of communal areas such as window cleaning and gardening. They check the work and fill in a form or online survey so we can make sure all services are up to scratch and are working for residents.

If you'd like to join the inspector team, just let us know! Email residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749420.

Coming soon....

Towards the end of the year, we will be introducing some new ways for residents to get involved.

- We'll be recruiting mystery shoppers who will have a similar role to inspectors but it's more about contacting us and letting us know how good a service you receive.
- We'll also be setting up a group just for our shared owners so they can have their voices heard and influence the way we do things.
- Plus, we'll be asking residents if they'd like to check our contractors are meeting targets and providing a high-quality service.

How do I know I've made a difference?

We know it can be frustrating if you've given your opinion on something then don't hear back about the difference it's made. Sometimes changes can take time to come about, but please be assured it is all happening behind the scenes! We are going to start publishing

more 'you said, we did' information both on our website and here in Neighbourhood News so you can see the real impact of your involvement.

We need you!

If you've ever had an interaction or experience with us and thought 'that needs to change' then we want to hear from you!

There are lots of different ways to get involved to suit different people. If you're interested in joining our scrutiny panel, shared owners' group or becoming a mystery shopper, please get in touch.

We know not all residents are able to or want to get involved so we hold a list of residents who've said they're happy for us to contact them. If you don't hear from us regularly, you might not be on the list, so get in touch to check and tell us what you'd like to be involved in.

You can find out more by visiting our website, calling one of the team on **01732 749402** or emailing residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk

What's in it for you?

Whether you're an inspector, on the scrutiny panel or answering a quick one-off survey, you'll know you're creating change and having your voice heard. You bring invaluable experience and ideas and are likely to have skills and knowledge you could bring from other areas of life.

We offer a full training and support package to our scrutiny panel and whenever we can we say thank you for getting involved with vouchers or charity donations. You can learn new skills, meet new people, and attend training courses. As with any voluntary role, it will improve your CV, so could help with your employment prospects.

We asked Fen, one of our scrutiny panel members about why she got involved:

"It's all to do with the tenants and how to improve communication between the tenants and West Kent. Ultimately, we're all members of the team; residents and the staff"

The scrutiny panel needs you!

We need to recruit more members to the panel so if you're interested, please get in touch and we can have a chat and send you an information pack. It's a great opportunity to use your skills and gain new ones and you'll be making a huge difference to West Kent and all its residents.

We need all applications in by 30 September.

Who's who in the resident involvement team:

- Emma Henry, Resident Involvement Manager
- Corinne Beech, Resident Involvement Partner
- Luci Herring, Resident Involvement Assistant

Keeping you and your neighbours FIRE SAFE



If you live in a flat with communal areas such as landings, stairwells, walkways, cupboards and loft areas, you need to make sure these are kept clear of any items in case of a fire.

Items kept in these areas can prevent you and your neighbours from escaping the building in an emergency, prevent the emergency services getting to where they need to be to prevent the fire spreading, or be a slip or trip hazard.

We want to help keep you and your neighbours safe, so we have a 'zero tolerance' approach to all items being left in communal areas. This means we will ask you to remove any items left in these areas.

These include:

- Plants
- Pictures or art on walls
- Shoes and shoe racks
- Pushchairs
- Mobility scooters
- Bicycles

Any items found in communal areas will be marked up for removal. If you own the item, you should remove it immediately. Any that are left, will be removed for you and you will be charged the cost of doing this - and even charged to get the item back if you still want it.

Let's work together to keep you, and your neighbours safe.

LIVING WITH ABUSE ISN'T LIVING



If you feel unsafe in your home or are worried that someone in your community may be unsafe, we can help.

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's safety, or you see or hear disturbances with neighbours that worry you, call us on **01732 749400** Monday to Friday between 8.45am and 4pm. You will be asked to press '3' to report your concerns and will quickly be connected to a member of staff. You can also use the form on our website to report concerns. You can report anonymously if you choose to, and our tenancy team will still respond to and investigate the concern.

Visit www.westkent.org/da

West Kent census what happens next?

Earlier this year, you might remember we sent a census to every West Kent household to make sure the details we hold on our systems are up to date and accurate.

We're now working through this information and updating any changes. This means that we may contact you to double check anything we're not sure about or need more information on, including disabilities or medical conditions you've told us about.

We'll always call from a West Kent number and will be able to confirm our identity to you. If you're still unsure, please do hang up and call us on our usual number, **01732 749400**, and we'll be

able to confirm if it was West Kent staff member that called.

Please send any information or documents we have asked for to westkentcensus@wkha.org.uk and make sure you include your address in the email.

If you have any questions or further changes to your household, please email mytenancy@wkha.org.uk or call **01732 749400**.

Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) – what happens next?

Many of you will remember our recent survey of tenants and residents, or 'STAR'. This is an important part of our ongoing work where we ask you what you think of our services, and we make changes based on your feedback. STAR is a nationally recognised industry standard survey, which is used across the country by housing organisations.

There are six priority areas that you told us about following the survey. We are working hard to make improvements and some good progress is being made. These are:

Repairs and maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The repairs you report sometimes get 'lost' and you have to chase us. We are working to get this right within the agreed timescales.• Sometimes there are multiple visits to your home to complete a repair, so it takes a long time to get sorted. Our resident scrutiny panel is reviewing the repairs service and will be making recommendations on how we can improve this. More information is on page 6.• Some doors and windows don't close properly, are draughty or have broken parts. We are making improvements to doors and windows. Read more on page 5.
Anti-social behaviour (ASB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to be better at updating you when you report ASB. In 2022, we worked with residents to review our ASB policy. This focusses on managing cases more effectively to tackle ASB in our communities and ensure our residents feel safe in their homes.• We have started piloting an 'ASB app' with resident so you can easily report issues without having to fill in forms and we can monitor and work to resolve ASB much more effectively.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to be better at updating you, so you don't have to chase us. We are reviewing our customer service standards, so it is clear for both residents and staff on how and when we will keep you up to date.• We are also training all West Kent and Brenwards (our repairs contractor) staff on customer service with a focus on communication.
Shared ownership and defects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defects in newly built homes can sometimes take a long time to resolve. We have changed the way we work with developers to have new homes with very few defects at the point you move in.• We have already reduced the number of outstanding defects by 41% during 2022 and have reduced the average number of defects in new homes from 2.9 per home in October 2021 to 2 in August 2022.
Complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to be better at keeping you up to date on complaints. We have introduced a customer resolution team that manage all formal complaints. They will work with you to resolve your complaint including tracking and monitoring any outstanding issues arising from the complaint to completion.• We are also working on changes to make sure we are working in line with the revised Housing Ombudsman complaint handling code. More information will be on our website in October and in a future edition of Neighbourhood News.
Estate services and communal areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are some improvements needed in grounds maintenance (gardening, grass cutting and litter), cleaning of communal areas, bin storage and fly tipping. We will be focussing on these areas in 2023 and 2024, where residents will agree standards so there is a good balance of quality and service charge costs.

The Regulator of Social Housing is introducing a new survey that all social landlords must complete. The questions in the survey are called tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs) and are very similar to the questions we asked in our STAR survey.

We will be carrying out surveys every three months starting in October and will let you know the results and actions we are taking. You will only be asked to complete one of these surveys a year.

For more information, please visit www.westkent.org/surveys

Copperfields Sensory Garden now open!

Copperfields sensory garden now open!
A new sensory garden has been developed in

The sensory garden has been developed during the pandemic to provide a space of relaxation and reflection for residents and their families. Initial planning by the tenants began several years ago but was delayed while permission was sought and then due to the pandemic. Now complete, it has already been put to good use and has had a wonderful summer bloom of flowers and plants.

A special thank you to the community-based organisation, Starlings Support CIC for providing lots of support with the project. This includes incorporating Copperfields within its wider community projects run through the Newington

Big Local and the Creative Newington projects.

Special thanks also go to West Kent's building and electrical contractor, Brenwards, who very kindly part funded and also carried out the works to make the garden look as attractive as possible, as part of their commitment to having a positive social impact.

Juliette Field, Scheme Manager at Copperfields said: *"It's great to see residents working in partnership to create something really beautiful that everyone can enjoy. They have really put so much effort into the garden, and seeing it bloom so beautifully really does put a smile on everyone's faces."*



What has the training and employment team been up to?

Our employment and training team can help you discover what you want to do, set goals, and support you to achieve them.

We've also got lots of great contacts with other organisations and charities who are there to help.

The team has been as busy as ever supporting residents to get into better paid work, start their career or set up their own business. Recently, the team has:

- Hosted a job fair in Swanley
- Held a free NCFE CACHE Level 1 award in 'Preparing to Work in Schools' course
- Held a free introduction to beauty course.



They will also be running 'Mums into Business' from September, where you can learn everything you need to start a business - for free!

The project starts 14 September and runs for eight weeks at Swanley Children's Centre, Swanley, every Wednesday, 1-3pm. A free creche is provided and lunch is included.

To sign up, or find out more about the training and employment team, visit www.westkent.org/trainingandemployment, email westkentworks@wkha.org.uk or call 01732 749400.

Together with Tenants

West Kent has become an official adopter of the Together with Tenants Charter.

The charter was developed by the National Housing Federation in partnership with residents across the country to strengthen relationships between housing providers and residents and to enable residents to hold their landlords to account.

Our scrutiny panel reviewed the charter and made an addition so that the charter directly referenced complaints.

The charter has six clear commitments:

- 1. Relationships:** To treat all residents with respect in all their interactions, and for relationships between residents and housing associations to be based on openness, honesty and transparency.
- 2. Communication:** To send you clear, accessible and timely information on the issues that matter to you, including important information about your home and local community, how the organisation is working to address problems, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues.
- 3. Voice and influence:** To seek and value the views of residents and use this information to inform decisions. Every individual resident should feel listened to on the issues that matter to them and speak without fear.
- 4. Accountability:** To allow residents to collectively work in partnership to independently scrutinise and hold their housing association to account for the decisions that affect the quality of homes and services. Resident will understand the impact of complaints.
- 5. Quality:** To ensure homes are good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.
- 6. When things go wrong:** To provide residents with simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints, and seeking resolutions. And for residents to receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

You can check on how West Kent is meeting these commitments by visiting our website www.westkent.org/residentinvolvement

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: www.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?

Web: westkent.org/payrent
Phone: 01732 749442

WORRIED ABOUT PAYING YOUR RENT?

Contact us as soon as possible for help and advice

Phone: 01732 749400
Web: westkent.org/rentandmoney

Follow us on social media:

Facebook: WestKentHA
Twitter: @West_Kent
YouTube: 1WestKent
LinkedIn: west-kent-ha
Instagram: westkenthousingassociation