

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The magazine for residents of
West Kent Housing Association



A right-royal knees up!

Find out how our residents at White Oak Court, Swanley celebrated the Coronation.
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Does your home have damp and mould?
Find out about what we will do to help.
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Resident Involvement Strategy
We want your views to help us shape our resident involvement strategy.
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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

WELCOME TO THE SUMMER EDITION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS!

The sun is shining, and we've had lots to celebrate this year. The Coronation has been a perfect opportunity to get together with friends, family and neighbours, read more about the get-togethers in some of our schemes on page 12.

We know that things are still tough for some of our residents financially, despite some fuel prices coming down, it's likely to be a hard winter period. Remember, we're here to help, so get in touch if you are worried about the cost of living - details are on the back page.

As always, we really value your feedback on our services, and we'd encourage you to be honest and reply if you're contacted for your opinion.

Read page 15 for the outcomes of our latest mystery shopping exercise and details about our next round of tenant satisfaction (TSM) surveys.

While writing this edition we had the very sad news that one of our colleagues, Mandie Parsons, had passed away. Mandie worked for many years in our Extra Care Schemes and will be greatly missed by West Kent residents and staff alike.



We hope you enjoy reading the summer edition.

The editorial team



West Kent Community Chest supports SWANLEY'S SHED

The West Kent Community Chest is one way we support our residents and local groups to build successful and resilient communities.

We provide financial assistance to help get project ideas off the ground and bring communities together – this could be through running activities, developing an existing project, or starting something completely new.

Swanley's Shed is one of our recent recipients of a grant from the Chest. The project is aimed at those who have retired or who are currently out of work. It is also open to those who wish to develop a new skill or want to share their skills with others. The aim of the Shed is to connect people while participating in group, community or individual projects. It is to also maintain or improve individuals' health and well-being.

The project applied for funding to purchase tools, which would increase the amount of work

they can produce and allow more individuals to join the project.

Christine Holdbrook, West Kent's Swanley Community Development Officer said: "It's an amazing space, with wonderful members making a difference in the community that they live in. It's lovely to witness the progress they have made and have no doubt that they will outgrow the space sooner rather than later."

Members of the Shed are currently making bird boxes, along with other woodwork projects. They have a regular bike maintenance workshop and plan to start a gardening and sewing group soon too.

If Swanley's Shed sounds like something you'll be interested in, please do go along and meet the group! The shed is located on New Barn Road in Swanley Park, Swanley.

For more information about the Community Chest, visit our website www.westkent.org/communitychest



Civica hosts workshop for school pupils in Swanley

A team from Civica, an organisation who is supporting West Kent to upgrade our housing system, visited Orchard Academy School in Swanley this April to give a series of talks to year ten students on tech careers and the world of work. The visit was part of Civica's social value programme, to support development, education and careers advice in the local community.

Laura Kennard, Programme Director in Civica's housing team explained: "We aimed to put together a session which would really add value to the young people as they consider their future career plans."



Laura was joined by Implementation Consultant Jimmy Murphy, Commercial Associate Easha Alam and two Civica Apprentice Project Managers Charlotte Smith and Connor Whitmore, to talk to students studying IT, Computer Science and Finance at GCSE level.

'HOW TO' VIDEOS FOR RESIDENTS

We've launched 'how to' videos to help residents around their homes.

We work closely with our resident scrutiny panel on incorporating their feedback into our services, as well as how we communicate with our residents on a range of topics.

The scrutiny panel works collaboratively with our teams - meeting once a quarter to scrutinise our performance information, ask questions, and make suggestions for service improvements.

In late 2022, they told us that residents would appreciate some updated 'how to' videos

covering household tasks that people may wish to carry out themselves. These included topics such as:

- How to bleed a radiator
- How to repressurise your boiler
- How to unblock a sink.

We took this feedback on board and worked with our iNHomes team to develop a suite of new videos to provide residents easy access to some practical household maintenance.

Neil Diddams, Director of Property and Asset said: "We value having such a close working

They highlighted the different routes into a tech career and how software is vital to peoples' everyday lives.

The team also helped students to understand both the technical and soft skills needed in work as well as things to look out for in a good employer such as Investors in People and charitable work. They also discussed the exciting opportunities to work with emerging technology, mobile and cloud, as well as topics such as phishing and cyber security.

Laura continued: "Going into school to talk to these students really showed it's so important to demonstrate the different ways into a tech career – it's not just about being technical and if you're passionate about social change, public sector tech is the perfect career. Soft skills and critical thinking skills are crucial too. It's not just what you put on paper but what you do with it. The pupils asked great questions and were very engaged."

Apprentice Charlotte said the day was important because when she was at school, she was not exposed to information about the wide variety of jobs available. "Talking to the students about our different backgrounds and experience showed them that jobs in tech are accessible to everyone if you put in the work. I enjoyed the day because the students really engaged with us and hopefully it will help

some of them realise that there are many different routes into a career in tech to suit them and their goals."

Barbara Home, Executive Director for Strategic Programmes at West Kent said: "We are thrilled to see this project coming together with Civica to benefit ambitious young people in Swanley. We are working closely with Civica on implementing a new housing solution at West Kent that will modernise the services we provide to our residents and streamline the way our teams work together. Social value is a crucial part of our work together and is at the core of our strategy and values. Providing opportunities for students to access training and career advice is a brilliant way to enable the next generation to reach their full potential, wherever their career may grow."

To continue the programme, two placement students spent a week at Civica's Southbank hub this July, to learn more about technology infrastructure, coding and software development. We will have more on their stories in future editions of Neighbourhood News.

CIVICA

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relationship with our resident scrutiny panel. Our teams have been busy over the last few months developing videos that reflect feedback from our panel and residents on videos that can help them around their homes. We are always here to help but it is nice to know that short practical videos like these will help our residents when they need a hand at home."

Linda, Review Lead for West Kent's Resident Scrutiny Panel said: "After our review of the repairs service, we recommended that West Kent create new videos for the website so that residents could carry out simple checks and home maintenance tasks confidently. We really welcome these videos, and they are clear, helpful and easy to understand."

Watch the videos on our YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/1WestKent



BREAKING THE LAW WITH TENANCY FRAUD?

Hand your keys in as part of 'key amnesty'.

We're giving tenants who are breaking the rules and cheating others out of a home the chance to change their ways without punishment.

West Kent is joining other housing associations and local councils across Kent in offering a 'key amnesty' to tenants who are committing tenancy fraud, perhaps by subletting their home or charging other people to live there while they stay elsewhere.

Tenants who hand in their keys so that their property can be offered to someone who really needs it will not face prosecution or legal action of any kind.

There are several ways that tenants can defraud their housing association and the penalties can be severe, with a jail term of up to two years and fines of up to £50,000.

The most basic form of fraud is simply lying about your circumstances to rent a home you

wouldn't otherwise be entitled to. It is also against the law for a tenant to make a profit from subletting a spare room without asking our permission or to move out completely and charge another family rent on the home that is registered to them.

If you are breaking the rules and want to take advantage of the amnesty, contact your Tenancy Services Officer or call in at our Sevenoaks office to hand in your keys with no questions asked. Please include the address of the property so that the home can be re-allocated.

If you have information about someone you think is breaking the rules, please get in touch with us in confidence. If you believe you might be living in a home that is being sub-let illegally, please get in touch and we will give you as much advice and support as possible.

Call **01732 749400** or email help@wkha.org.uk



WE'RE HERE TO HELP IF YOUR HOME HAS DAMP AND MOULD

We recently updated our damp and mould policy with the help of our resident scrutiny panel, to ensure you receive all the information and support you may need.

What causes damp and mould?

Damp and mould is caused by condensation, which is when excess warm moisture in the air like steam or water vapour meets a cold surface and turns into water. Over time, this can cause patches of damp or mould to form. This can be more common in rooms with poor ventilation or insulation, which can make it more difficult to treat. There are often other factors at play in creating damp and mould, which is why it is important to investigate it as soon as possible.

To help you spot this as early as possible, we have a dedicated page on our website full of tips and advice and a helpful video on our YouTube channel, visit www.westkent.org/dampandmould. We will also have printed materials that our staff will be sharing in communal areas this autumn.

How can we help you?

If you have any concerns about damp and mould in your home, please contact our customer services team, who would be happy to help. Call [01732 749400](tel:01732749400) or email help@wkha.org.uk

We understand that financial hardship and other factors can contribute to damp and mould, and we're here to help. For information and support, visit www.westkent.org/helpforyou or contact us using the details above.



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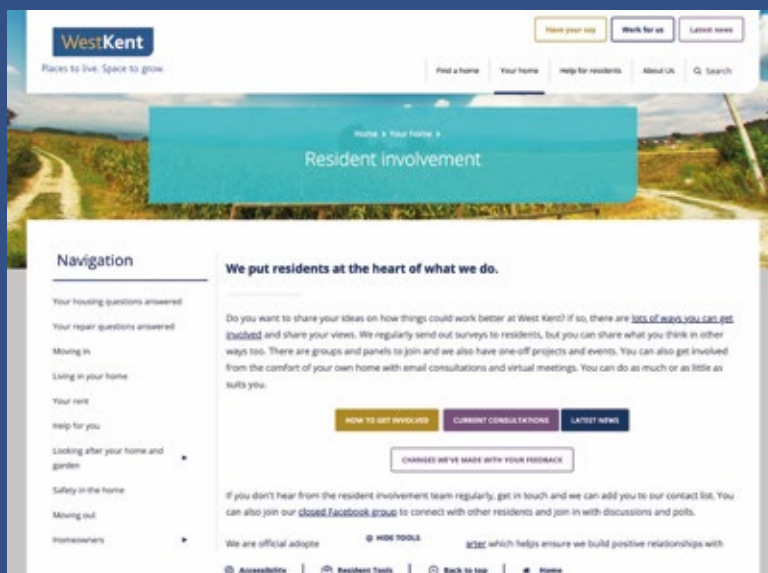
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Resident involvement news and views

Did you know there's an area of our website that covers everything about resident involvement?

As well as an overview of the ways you can get involved, it's also the place to find out about current consultations on specific policies and services. You can also find out the latest news on how residents have been involved at West Kent, and national news about how housing providers are listening to the voice of residents.

Visit www.westkent.org/residentinvolvement



OUR NEW GROUNDS MAINTENANCE PROVIDER

We're pleased to announce that after a tender process involving residents, we've chosen The CGM Group to complete grounds maintenance in our communities for the next ten to fifteen years.

The CGM Group was founded in 1985 and provides a complete service to both domestic and commercial customers. They are an award-winning Horticultural, Arboricultural and Landscaping organisation.

The CGM Group says: "We have immense pride in our work, commitment to better client care and relationships throughout every job we carry out, caring more about the communities and environment we live and work in. Every member of every team sees a project not as a job to get done, but away of making positive change for those who live in those communities. It is job satisfaction and more."

The tender process started in February this year and involved residents and staff looking at in-depth application forms over two days. The group looked at all sorts of information about the contractors that applied, focusing on the resident engagement and communication aspects of the applications and social value ('added extras' the potential contractors could provide outside of their contract to support or benefit our residents).

CGM has already completed most of their work following a settling in period, including all health and safety jobs, grass cutting in our over 55 and supported living schemes, and those on our garden assistance programme. All other gardens will be completed by September. Hedge cutting will take place as usual after the main nesting season.



WE'RE CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

October is Black History Month (BHM), where we come together to celebrate and recognise the contributions of black people and communities to British society.



Places to live. Space to grow.

PROUD TO BE SUPPORTING
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The theme for 2023 is 'Saluting our Sisters', highlighting the crucial role black women have played in social justice, shaping history, and inspiring change in the fields of literature, music, fashion, sport, business, politics, academia, social and health care, and more.

Black History Month will also feature a poetry competition, encouraging young people to express themselves creatively and learn about the diverse experiences, struggles and triumphs of black women.

How can you get involved?

- We're inviting all our young residents' to participate and submit poems for a chance to be recognised for their talent and to inspire

others – and be in with a chance of winning one of our £50 Love2Shop vouchers! Email edi@wkha.org.uk with your entry by 31 October 2023.

- Hold an event in your community or scheme. Why not get together and share different foods and music? It's a great way of meeting your neighbours and learning more about different cultures. We're also offering up to £200 in funding for your event, email edi@wkha.org.uk for more information.

If you do host something, email communicationsteam@wkha.org.uk and you could be featured in the next Neighbourhood News magazine!



RESIDENT TELEPHONE AND ONLINE SURVEYS



The Regulator of Social Housing has introduced a new survey that all social landlords must complete.

The survey is a general satisfaction survey (perception survey) asking residents what they think about their home and the services provided by West Kent. 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 carry out surveys every three months, which we started in October 2022, 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.

The surveys should take no more than ten minutes and the aim is to interview around 250 residents every three months. Thank you to everyone who has given their feedback. Phone calls will come from the number 01273 093939, from Acuity Research & Practice, who carry out the surveys on behalf of West Kent. The surveys are strictly confidential and if a tenant requests, the results will be given back to West Kent anonymously without their name attached.

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

HELPING YOU KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE AND MAINTAINED

Our priority is ensuring your home is as safe and well-maintained as possible. To do this, we need you to work with us to report repairs that we are responsible for.

Our "Maintaining your Home Standards" set out the timescales for each repair to be completed, so you can be clear on when to expect us. To find out the full list of repairs we carry out, please visit our [website www.westkent.org/repairs](http://www.westkent.org/repairs)

When you report a repair, we'll either give you an appointment time or our contractor will call with

a time slot that suits you. Always ask for proof of identity before letting anyone into your home. This includes staff from West Kent and anyone working on our behalf. If you're not sure just give us a call.

There are several ways you can report repairs to us, choose the one that works best for you:

Phone [0800 169 1122](tel:08001691122)

Email help@wkha.org.uk

My West Kent portal
www.westkent.org/mywestkent



FIRE SAFETY

A fire safety campaign called “Let’s Stay Fire Safe” has been launched in Kent and Medway. The campaign is split into two parts, covering fire safety advice in the home and guidance on keeping communal areas safe in blocks of flats.

At the heart of the “Let’s Stay Fire Safe” campaign are the following key messages:

- Have a working smoke detector, and test it regularly,
- Make sure you do not overload your electrical sockets,
- Read the fire safety advice for any portable heaters you use,

- Don’t leave lit candles or cigarettes unattended in your home,
- Shut fire doors in communal areas and report any damage to them to your landlord straight away,
- Keep communal areas like corridors, entrance halls and stairwells clear from clutter,
- Don’t charge personal items in communal areas or store them in communal cupboards,
- Don’t light open fires or BBQs in your home, balcony or communal gardens (without gaining permission from your landlord)
- Make sure you and your family know what the fire escape plan is for your building.

Watch out for some helpful videos and resources coming soon, which we will share across our website and social media. For more information on the campaign visit www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/fire-safe

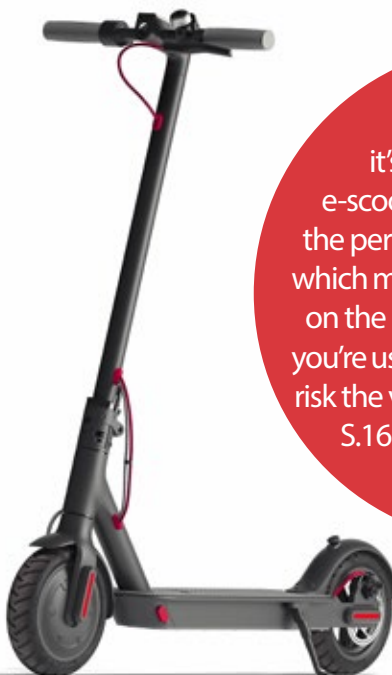


E-bikes and scooters - are you keeping safe?

If you own or use an e-bike or e-scooter, there are some important things you need to do and remember when charging your e-bike or e-scooter to stay safe and avoid endangering yourself, your loved ones, and your home.

E-bikes and e-scooters are mostly powered by lithium-ion batteries and can be charged at home. However, if they are not charged correctly and safely, these batteries can catch fire, fail catastrophically and ‘explode’, or lead to a fire. If your e-bike, e-scooter or lithium-ion battery catches fire - get out, stay out, and call 999 - do not try to put out the fire yourself.

There are some great tips on how to safely store and charge your e-bike or e-scooter on their website to help to reduce the risk of fire, visit www.kent.fire-uk.org/a-z/e-bikes-and-e-scooters



Remember...

it’s only legal to use an e-scooter on private land with the permission of the landowner, which means it’s illegal to use them on the road or in public spaces. If you’re using a private e-scooter you risk the vehicle being seized under S.165 Road Traffic Act 1988 for no insurance.

A RIGHT ROYAL

We hosted a Coronation 'After Party' this June, open to all residents of the White Oak area of Swanley and their families.

The event provided a space for community engagement, a free afternoon tea and the chance for residents to find out about support from our staff. There was a range of partners who provided information, advice and support on the day, including staff from:

- One You, who brought a show-stopping smoothie bike
- Green Doctor who provided helpful energy advice

- Kent Police, offering personal and home safety tips
- Swanley Children's Centre, who had some exciting craft activities for the children, along with advice for parents.

The party was also an opportunity to thank our residents for their patience and collaboration with recent building works and a welcome to the new residents in the area. Anabel Palmer, Development and Partnerships Director said: "The event was a fantastic opportunity to meet with so many of our residents and hear from them directly on what's important to them and how we can improve our services. It also gave our partners the chance to



KNEES-UP!

highlight their services and make sure our residents know about and can benefit from some of the great work going on locally. And the sun came out!"

We are committed to using residents' views to help shape our current and future services. On the day we gave residents an opportunity to share their views with our staff via a survey on community development.

To find out more about our community development work across Kent, please visit: www.westkent.org/help-for-residents/



Have your say, your way!

We want to put your views at the heart of our decision-making, so need to make sure we're offering the right opportunities for you to share your views.

Our resident involvement strategy covers 2021-23 and sets out the different ways residents can get involved in influencing and shaping services. Soon, we'll be creating a new strategy that sets out how residents can get involved over the next three years, and we'd like to plan this with you.

Emma Henry, Resident Involvement Manager says: "The people who can help us create the right approach to involving residents, are residents

themselves – our new strategy should be jointly designed and I'm really looking forward to working with residents on this."

If you'd like to get involved:

- Read our current strategy on our website and let us know what you think needs to be changed, or added, and share any other thoughts with us by visiting www.westkent.org/strategy at a time that suits you.
- If you prefer to talk face-to-face, come along to a focus group. Contact us by emailing residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk or calling 01732 749403 and we'll be in touch with details.



MYSTERY SHOPPERS REPORT GREAT RESULTS!

Our resident involvement and customer service team recently worked together with residents to establish a new mystery shopping programme.

Almost 70 residents expressed an interest in becoming mystery shoppers with six members recruited to join the shop this time around. These residents called our customer services team over the course of four weeks with a range of pre-agreed scenarios and queries. After their calls, they let us know how it went, checking staff did everything they should, but also letting us know how they felt about the whole experience.

Once the results were in there was great news- our mystery shoppers told us that our customer service staff are “very helpful and informative”, “lovely and friendly”, and 100% of mystery shoppers said that the customer services advisors they spoke to were polite and courteous on the call.

We’re really proud of this, but we know there are things we also need to work on. We know our phone system occasionally lets us down, and this is something we are working with our supplier on resolving. No-one should be cut off during a call or have connection issues. We’ll also remind staff to use ‘plain English’ – which means avoiding overly technical language and jargon – and make sure they summarise at the end of a call, so residents know they’ve been listened to and understood.

Wayne, one of our mystery shoppers said: “I very much enjoyed it, I enjoyed the chance to do something productive for myself and the community.”

Kim Parkins, Head of Customer Experience summarised how important it is to work with residents to make improvements:

“Residents are the people contacting our customer services team every day, so they’re in the best position to let us know how we can improve. We were overwhelmed that so many residents wanted to get involved with this and really welcome their positive comments and constructive suggestions- we’ll be taking all their feedback on board so we can deliver the best possible experience to everyone who contacts us.”

We’ll be running more regular mystery shops next year so there’ll be other chances for all those interested to get involved. A huge thank you to those residents that completed the shop this time round and we’re looking forward to working with residents again to continuously improve the service you receive when you contact us!



ARE YOU ENTITLED TO PENSION CREDIT?

Pension Credit gives you extra money to help with your living costs if you're over State Pension age and on a low income. It's separate from your State Pension, which means you can still be eligible even if you're working or have some savings.

Pension Credit tops up your weekly income to £201.05 if you're single, or £306.85 if you have a partner and you might get extra help if you're a carer, severely disabled, or responsible for a child or young person. If you get Pension Credit you can also get other help, such as:

- Housing Benefit
- Cost of Living Payments

- a Council Tax discount
- a free TV license if you're aged 75 or over
- help with NHS dental treatment, glasses and transport costs for hospital appointments
- help with your heating costs through the Warm Home Discount Scheme.

A recent study has shown over 850,000 eligible people are not claiming Pension Credit. To make sure you're not one of them:

- Use the Pension Credit calculator on the gov.uk website www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator
- Contact our welfare benefits team, who can support you in ensuring you're receiving all the benefits you're entitled to. Call **01732 749400** or email help@wkha.org.uk
- Contact your local Citizens Advice.

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

Phone: 01732 749400

REPORT A REPAIR

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 OR OTHER BILLS?

Contact us as soon as possible for help and advice

Phone: 01732 749400

Web: westkent.org/helpforyou

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

Facebook: WestKentHA

Twitter: @West_Kent

Instagram: [westkenthousingassociation](https://www.instagram.com/westkenthousingassociation)

YouTube: @1WestKent

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Places to live. Space to grow.