



Read our
magazine
on the go!

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

Neighbourhood **news**



Nominate your
Neighbourhood Hero

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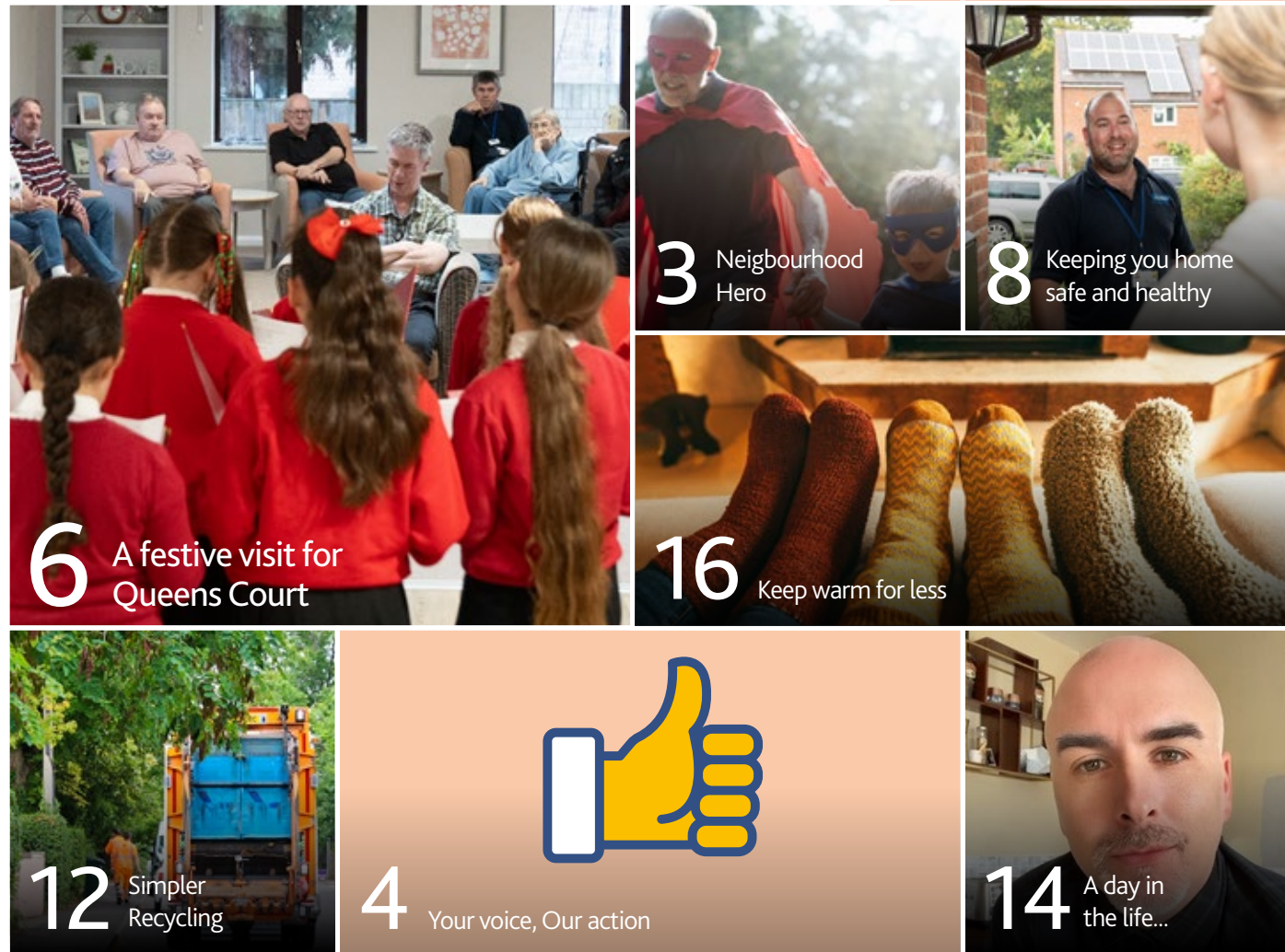
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Getting in touch

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

0800 169 1122 (out of hours)

Follow us on social media:

- WestKentHA
- westkenthousingassociation
- @1WestKent



Welcome

to the winter edition of Neighbourhood News

As the days get shorter and the weather turns colder, there's so much warmth to be found in our communities and in the pages of this newsletter.

Winter is a wonderful time to come together, celebrate the people who make our neighbourhoods special, and discover positive changes happening right on your doorstep. In this issue, we're launching something exciting: our first-ever Neighbourhood Heroes! Do you know someone who brings people together or makes a real difference in our community? We'd love to hear about them. Find out how to nominate below

We're also introducing our new 'Your voice, Our action' campaign, showing how your feedback leads to real improvements in your homes and neighbourhoods. It's all about listening, acting, and being honest about what we're doing well and where we can do better.

If you're looking for ways to save on your energy bills this winter, we've put together some practical tips on page 16 to help you keep warm for less. And don't miss our chat with Daniel Clifford, West Kent's Regeneration Development Manager, who shares what goes into creating sustainable, affordable, and built-to-last homes. Read more on page 14.

There's also heartwarming news from Queens Court, where school children filled the halls with Christmas carols, along with important updates on recycling changes coming to your area in March.

So, make yourself a warm cup of tea, find a cosy spot, and enjoy reading all the inspiring stories and helpful information inside.

Ellie

Resident communications group member



Nominate your Neighbourhood Hero!

We're happy to introduce our first Neighbourhood Heroes, a way to celebrate the everyday people who help make our area a great place to live.

We want to recognise residents who bring people together, make a positive impact, and help build a stronger, community-focused neighbourhood.

If you know someone who fits this description, we'd love to hear about them. Let us know who they are and why they should be recognised. Our resident communications group will review all nominations and select a winner and runners-up. Each will receive a small thank you and be featured in the spring edition of Neighbourhood News.

This is an easy way to thank the people who bring our

community together and make a real difference.

How to nominate: Send your nomination, including the person's name, and a few sentences about why they deserve to win by:

- Sending an email to: residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk
- Sending a direct message to one of our social media channels
- Writing to our resident involvement team at 101 London Road, Sevenoaks, TN13 1YG.

The deadline for entries is Friday 23 January 2026.





Better every day

You know what makes a real difference?
Your voice!

Every time you fill in one of our surveys, join a resident group meeting, or take a moment to share your thoughts with us, you're helping to shape the services that matter to your daily life.

That's why we're so excited to introduce our new campaign, 'Your voice, Our action'. We've developed it together with our resident communications group, and it's all about showing you something really important: we're listening – and we're taking action to make your homes and communities better.

Through this campaign, we'll be sharing uplifting stories from across our communities – the positive changes happening in your homes and neighbourhoods, and the brilliant work our colleagues are doing.



We'll also be completely open with you about our performance, including the areas where we know we need to step up.

Because here's what we're committed to being a landlord who:

- **truly listens** – your experiences and feedback genuinely matter to us
- **acts** – we don't just hear you; we do something about what you tell us
- **is honest** – we'll share openly about what we're doing well and where we're working to improve
- **delivers** – homes and communities you're proud to call your own, and services that actually work for you.

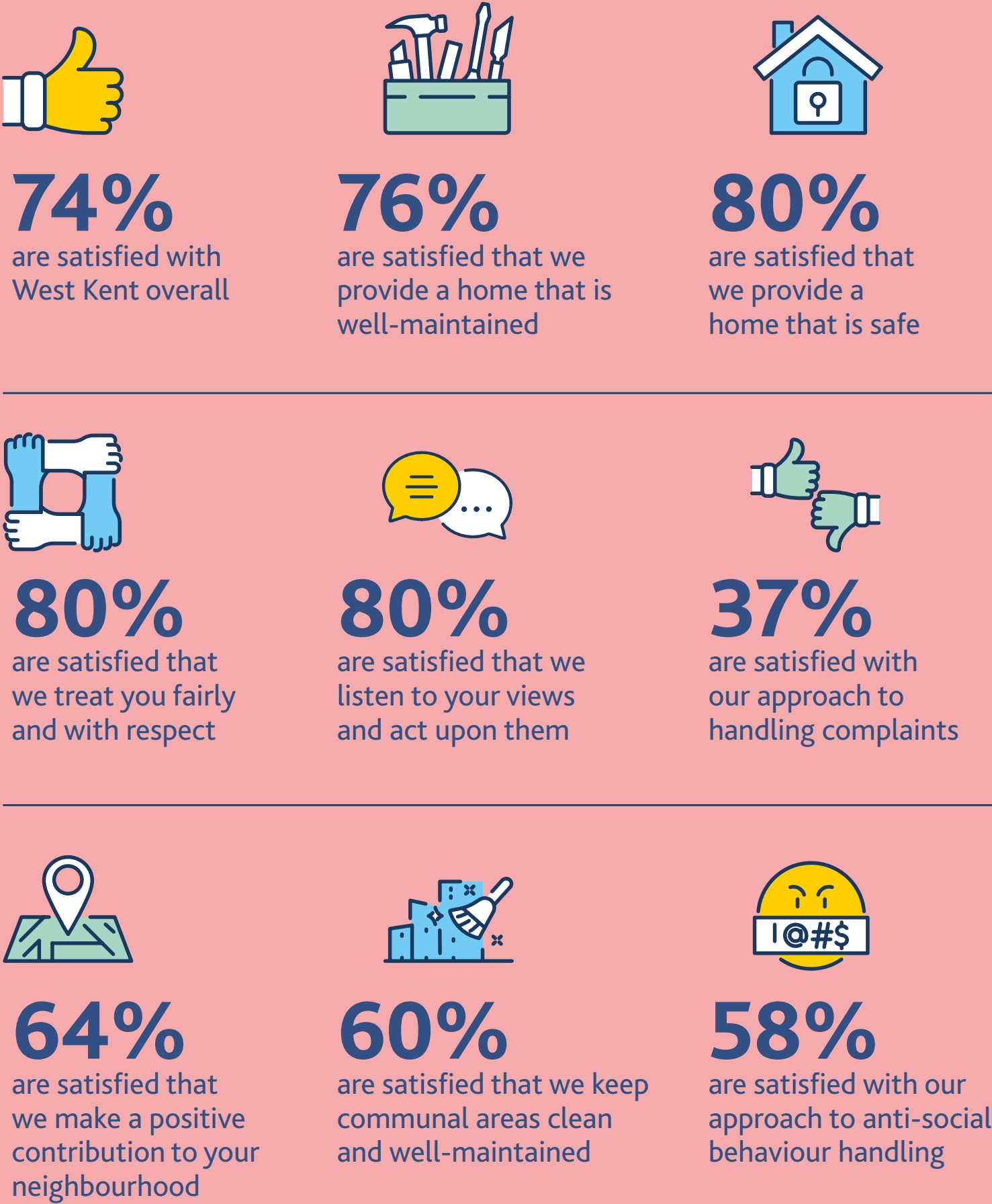
This isn't just about celebrating the wins. It's about showing you the real, tangible connection between what you tell us and the changes we make.

Your voice, our action. Together, we can make a difference.

Want to get involved or share your thoughts? We'd love to hear from you. Scan the QR code or drop our resident involvement team an email: residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk

How we measure up

Our latest Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) results 2025





Edenbridge Primary School Brings Festive Cheer to Queens Court

Residents at Queens Court, our vibrant over-55s scheme in Edenbridge, were treated to a heartwarming visit from Edenbridge Primary School earlier this month, as young voices filled the halls with traditional Christmas carols.

This delightful collaboration has become something of a tradition. The school choir previously performed at the scheme during celebrations for the completion of our refurbishment works. The performance was such a success that residents immediately requested a return visit - and the children were only too happy to oblige.

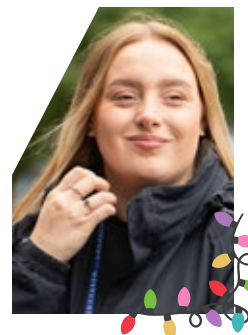
The intergenerational gathering brought smiles all round, with residents showing their appreciation by presenting each young performer with a special goody bag containing a money box, a selection box, and pens.

Brian Griggs, Scheme Manager, said *"The smiles on everyone's faces said it all. Our residents absolutely loved having the children here, and it really brightened everyone's day. These events are so valuable, bringing people of all ages together, particularly during this special time of year. We're so grateful for the partnership we've built with Edenbridge Primary School and we look forward to many more visits."*



The smiles on everyone's faces said it all. We're so grateful for the partnership we've built with Edenbridge Primary School.

Get to know us



Luci, Community Development Officer

“**Fairytale of New York by the Pogues.** I know every word, and it doesn't really feel like Christmas until I've played it whilst dancing around the kitchen on Christmas morning!



Benjamin, Customer Service Advisor

“If I had to pick one it'd be **Merry Christmas by Ed Sheeran and Elton John** - two of my favourite pop artists on a Christmas song, I really loved how they both kept their sounds but with Christmas spirit!



Our staff's favourite Christmas songs



Melanie, Fuel Efficiency Officer

“**Last Christmas by Wham!** as it reminds me of being a teenager!

Kate, Resident Involvement Officer

“My favourite Christmas song is **Santa Baby by Me First and the Gimme Gimmes.** It's high-energy, and my children and I like dancing to it in the car on the winter school runs. We also love watching the John Lewis adverts whilst wrapping our gifts, become somewhat of a tradition, and we love the songs in them too.



Michael, iNHomes Engineer

“For me, Christmas isn't defined by a particular song but by the memory attached to it. Back in 2003, my brother and I spent the week locked in an epic battle over which song would claim the Christmas number one - his pick, **Christmas time by The Darkness**, versus mine, **Proper Crimbo by Bo' Selecta!**. We were both so convinced we'd win. Then **Mad World by Gary Jules** blindsided us both.



What's your favourite Christmas song? We'd love to hear it! Tell us on social media @westkenthousingassociation.

An update on our portal, My West Kent

We know how frustrating it's been that My West Kent has been unavailable for most of this year. We took the difficult decision to remove access to the portal because it wasn't providing the service and features you need and deserve.

We're working with our provider and looking at all options to bring back a digital service that really works for you. It should make it easy to log repairs, check your account, and contact us in a simple, accessible way.

We're genuinely sorry for the disruption and the inconvenience

this has caused. Getting this right matters to us, and we appreciate your patience while we work on a solution.

In the meantime, you can:

Log repairs using our web form, westkent.org/reportarepair

Check your rent account and make a payment using our secure system, westkent.org/payrent

Get in touch about anything by using our web form, westkent.org/contactus or emailing help@wkha.org.uk.



Keeping your home safe and healthy

You may have heard about Awaab's Law in the news recently. It's named after two-year-old Awaab Ishak, whose tragic death in 2020 led to important new protections for people living in social housing.

The law sets clear deadlines for landlords like us to respond to emergency repairs and look into any reports of damp and mould. We want you to know that we're already meeting these standards, but we're also using this chance to improve our service even more.

What this means for you

If you report an issue, the process won't feel very different. We're making small changes to how

we assess each situation. For example, we now consider how many rooms you can use in your home and how much time you spend there each day. This helps us understand the impact on you and your family.

We're also working to improve how we communicate with you. You can expect clearer updates and better records, so you'll always know what's happening with your repair or investigation.

We're here to help

If you're worried about damp, mould, or any emergency repairs in your home, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We will investigate every report, and we're committed



to keeping you informed every step of the way.

Your home should be safe and comfortable, and we're here to help keep it that way. For more information and to read the policy, visit westkent.org/dampandmould

Loft spaces Why they're not for storage

We know lofts can seem like the perfect place to store those extra boxes, but did you know that using your loft for storage can cause serious problems? So, why avoid loft storage?

It makes repairs harder.

When lofts are full of belongings, it's difficult for our teams to access the area and carry out essential repairs. For example, fixing a water tank leak becomes much more complicated when the loft space is

cluttered. It is your responsibility to make sure the loft space is completely clear for any planned works or repairs.

It's dangerous.

Lofts are not designed for regular use. Walking on unboarded areas can lead to falls through the ceiling, causing injury and damage to your home.

We've even dealt with cases where a resident has moved out of their home and left many of their belongings in the loft!



We're improving insulation in many of our homes to make them warmer and more energy efficient. Items stored in lofts can get in the way of this important work.

Become a digital or energy champion



Looking for a rewarding way to give back to your community? Two fantastic volunteering opportunities are now available with Digital Kent – become a digital champion or an energy champion and make a real impact while developing valuable skills.

Do you have a knack for technology? As a digital champion, you'll help residents build confidence and skills to navigate the digital world. From setting up devices to accessing essential services online - your support can transform someone's day.

You don't need to be a tech expert. Patience, understanding, and good communication skills are what matter most.

You'll have the chance to get involved in Digital Hubs, community events, one-to-one sessions, and workshops, all designed to help people stay connected.

Passionate about sustainability? Energy champions play a vital role in promoting energy efficiency and helping residents reduce their bills. You'll share practical tips on saving energy and support residents

with carbon monoxide safety, registering for the Priority Services Register (PSR), and accessing grants and energy vouchers.

This role also includes specialist training, giving you the knowledge and skills to open doors in your career and beyond - all while contributing to a greener future.

What's in it for you?

- Forge meaningful connections within your community.
- Gain experience and insights that look great on your CV.
- Access free training and resources through the Digital Kent Knowledge Hub.
- Join a network of like-minded volunteers and attend quarterly webinars and newsletters.

Ready to get involved?

Both opportunities are flexible, rewarding, and designed to make a positive difference in our communities. For more information and to sign up, visit digitalkent.uk

Introducing our Home Improvement Policy

We know your home is more than just a place to live, so it's essential you feel comfortable and can make it your own. Our brand new Home Improvement Policy, published in December, sets out, sets out our approach for home improvements, including when you need permission and who is responsible for maintaining improvements in your home.

To ensure our approach aligns with what matters to you, we spoke with over 30 residents, including our policy influencers. Most residents liked the idea of removing permission for minor improvements and supported us taking responsibility for some repairs. We've listened to your feedback and made changes to keep our approach clear, consistent, and flexible so you can shape your home to fit your needs.

So, what exactly has changed with our home improvement approach?

Minor improvements? No permission needed. Want to decorate, lay new carpets, replace door handles, or add a garden shed? Go ahead - just follow the conditions outlined in the home improvement policy.

Major works? Permission required. You'll need our approval for major works, such as new doors or windows, or for any electrical work, such as electrical vehicle charging points. You'll also need to provide us with relevant certificates (such as warranty and electrical) when the work is complete.

When will we inspect? For major improvements like kitchens, bathrooms, driveways, or porches, we'll ensure everything meets the required standards. If it doesn't, you'll need to fix it or return your



home to its original condition. If there's a health and safety risk, we'll repair and recharge you.

Repairs for improvements. If you've upgraded something, we'll repair it in line with our Maintaining Your Home Policy - but only to our usual standard. For example, if you install an expensive gold tap, we will not replace it with another expensive gold tap - we will replace it with our standard tap.

For more information and to read the policy, visit westkent.org/homeimprovements

Important: If you live in extra care, supported housing or one of our Kent Excellent Homes for All (KEHFA) schemes, the process is a little different. Please speak to your Scheme Manager or Supported Housing Officer first. They'll guide you through your request and make sure everything is managed in line with your tenancy agreement.

Protect what matters to you!

Your home is your safe space, but what about the things inside it? From furniture and appliances to clothes and gadgets, replacing your belongings after a fire, flood, or theft can be costly. That's where home contents insurance comes in.

We've teamed up with Thistle Tenant Risks, who provide specialist tenants' contents insurance policies, like their My Home Contents Insurance scheme, which:

- Is designed for people living in social and affordable housing.
- Protects against theft, fire, flood, accidental damage and damage to external glazing.
- Gives you peace of mind knowing your belongings are covered.

The My Home Contents Insurance scheme helps replace your personal possessions if they're damaged, lost, or stolen. We insure your home, and it's your responsibility to protect what's inside.

Interested in getting covered? Contact Thistle Tenant Risks by emailing myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk or calling 0345 450 7288.

For more information, visit westkent.org/homeinsurance



Simpler Recycling

What's in your bin is about to change

Dig in and get ready to easily recycle more materials. Complicated seven-bin plans have been scrapped. A national overhaul is coming to every neighbourhood, including all flats and houses. The UK Government's new Simpler Recycling plan will standardise collections from March 2026, reducing confusion and creating a greener routine for everyone.



From March 2026, every council across England must collect the same core materials from all homes, regardless of size or type. Core materials you must be able to recycle:

Food waste (weekly): Every household will receive a weekly collection service for raw and cooked food waste, plate scrapings, tea bags, and coffee grounds. This is a major enhancement.

Plastics: Includes bottles, pots, tubs, trays and all food and drink cartons (such as Tetra Paks).

Paper and card: Must be collected and may be separated from other materials to keep them clean and reduce contamination.

Glass and metal: Includes bottles, jars, tins, cans, aerosols and clean foil.

Key deadline

All these changes, including weekly food waste collections for flats, must be in place by 31 March 2026.

The next phase of recycling

By March 2027, recycling will expand again to include flexible plastic film collected directly at the kerbside. This covers items such as plastic bags, bread bags, cling film and soft wrappers. Until kerbside collection starts in your area, please continue taking soft plastics back to supermarket collection points.



How councils are preparing

While the materials collected will be the same across the country, each local council will decide how and when to collect them. This means the containers, sorting systems, and collection days may be different depending on where you live.

Key local decisions driven by national rules

Separate collections: The national plan encourages councils to collect paper and card separately from other recyclables. This is why many areas are introducing new bins or caddies to change how residents sort and present waste.

The collection frequency may be changing across Kent. Medway Council has confirmed it will continue its weekly waste collection service for houses, while others, including Sevenoaks and Thanet (for most properties), have confirmed they are moving

to alternate weekly refuse and recycling collections.

For residents in flats, the introduction of a regular, accessible weekly food waste service is a major improvement. Medway Council has confirmed it will roll this out to all flats from April 2026.

Due to current long lead times for the new specialist collection vehicles, some councils have warned that services, including weekly food waste collections, may be phased in gradually after the March 2026 deadline.

While many plans have been confirmed, specific service details for various other districts remain under review and have not yet been confirmed at the time of publication.

What you can do

Monitor your council's updates:

Collection days, containers and start dates will be announced by

your local District or Borough Council. Look out for updates on websites, mailings and social media.

Plan for weekly food waste:

Reducing food waste is one of the biggest ways to cut your environmental impact. Start thinking now about how to use your caddy efficiently.

Prepare for how you sort your waste:

Make space for separate bins or containers in your kitchen or garden to make recycling easier.

Reduce what goes to landfill:

Find ways to cut waste at the source, such as buying only what you need, reusing containers and avoiding unnecessary packaging.

Spread the word: Tell your neighbours, friends and family. Big, positive changes are on the way for recycling in our community.

A day in the life...

Daniel Clifford, Development Manager for Regeneration

Behind every new home is a conversation. Daniel Clifford explains how listening to residents helps West Kent shape regeneration that is sustainable, affordable and built to last.

Listening is at the heart of Daniel's work. As West Kent's Development Manager for Regeneration, his role is about more than bricks and building sites. Every project starts with people, conversations and understanding what residents need from the places they call home. This focus on people runs through West Kent's regeneration projects in places like Swanley, shaping homes and neighbourhoods designed to work for the long term.

Daniel's day usually starts quietly. Although he prefers to be woken by the dawn of a new day rather than an alarm clock, he found the recent clock change had thrown him off a little.

Now that mornings are darker, he finds himself getting up before sunrise, waking usually around 5.45 am. His routine is calm: a freshly brewed cup of tea, relaxing while he reads the BBC News on his phone, and seeing to his dogs. For about half an hour, he gradually eases into the day, reading or listening to a podcast before the

morning pace changes completely. Then it is straight into the shower and a dash to get out of the house. "I do everything in double quick time," he says. "But I could never just jump straight up and go."

Daniel's working week is a busy mix of office time and site visits, but he is dedicated to starting early—around eight o'clock—to secure a quiet hour for planning. Having worked across both private and public sectors, what drew him to West Kent was the bigger purpose. "In the private sector, it was about numbers," he says. "Here it is about people. I stopped saying 'units' and started saying 'homes' - where people live."



That focus on people is why he loves regeneration. He gets to see the full process, turning properties that are not working into homes people genuinely need. "I can go home at night feeling really good about what I do," he adds.

If his demanding job could be a cartoon character, Daniel says it



would be Bob the Builder. "It is very much about fixing problems, isn't it? And there is always a positive end to the story," he says, neatly summing up his mission.

Daniel describes regeneration as an opportunity: taking an area that is not quite reaching its full potential and helping it grow into a strong, sustainable community.

"Especially in a cost-of-living crisis, if we can build homes that are energy efficient, economical to run, and importantly sustainable, why wouldn't we?" says Daniel.

This commitment extends beyond the rating itself. West Kent's new homes include triple glazing, air-source heat pumps and thoughtful planting, all designed to keep homes warm and affordable while supporting a greener future.

Daniel knows some residents are cautious about new technologies such as heat pumps, and he is keen to ensure people have the right information. These systems work brilliantly in well-insulated new homes, but older buildings may need a full retrofit to get the same results. The team are developing new ways to help residents get the most from their heating systems.



Resident feedback is a top priority. Residents have a say in everything from the bricks to the planting, and Daniel says their input genuinely shapes the final design.

That focus on practical design has helped Daniel and his team find creative ways to keep costs down. For example, they planned a block of eight flats that would have needed a lift, which would have meant higher service charges for residents. Instead, they redesigned the building with two-storey duplex apartments, similar to maisonettes, so a lift wasn't needed. This kept service charges lower and added extra open storage under the stairs for pushchairs, which is a big help for families.

"This is what we try to do in regeneration," Daniel explains. "Because we are designing these homes ourselves, we are not taking them from a developer."

Some of his most rewarding moments have been personal. Daniel once helped turn four garages into a bespoke three-bedroom home for a family with

specific needs. "I have seen the person who is going to get that home, and it makes me so driven to make sure I hand it over," he says.

I feel so lucky to know that when I finish my career, there will be people living in homes I've helped create. Their stories and their families' stories will carry on.

His working day is mentally intense, so his favourite way to unwind is spinning, an energetic cycle workout that helps him switch off. "It is the rhythm and the focus. The instructor is always pushing you to do more, and it clears my head completely." Away from work, he enjoys time with

his family and recently spent a weekend together watching fireworks and sharing a hearty stew. It was a welcome contrast to the fast pace of his week and made him smile.

Looking ahead, Daniel talks about the quiet pride that comes with seeing a development completed. There is a special satisfaction in walking past a place he helped bring to life and seeing families settled and thriving there. He says it is moments like that which remind him why regeneration matters. It is about helping people find a home, not just building one. For him, knowing that those homes will still be part of people's stories long after his career ends is what makes it all worthwhile.

When a project finally reaches completion, one song always plays in his mind: 'Speed of Sound' by Coldplay. For Daniel, it captures the feeling of pushing through and seeing everything come together, exactly what regeneration is all about.



Keep warm for less this winter

With colder weather on the way, now's the time to think about staying warm. Here are our top tips to keep both you and your house warm without costing a fortune.

Keeping your home warm and energy efficient

- Set your heating on low and keep it at a consistent temperature throughout the day. This helps maintain warmth without dramatically increasing energy costs.
- Set your heating to turn on a bit before you wake up and turn off after you go to bed.
- Use draught excluders at the bottom of doors to stop cold air from creeping in.
- Close curtains and doors to keep heat in and save warmth.
- Thick curtains are especially useful as they create an extra layer of insulation.
- Bleed your radiators to remove trapped air and keep them working efficiently – if you need a radiator key, get in touch and we'll send you one free of charge.
- Use radiator reflector panels to direct warmth back into the room.
- Dress warmly indoors.
- Wear multiple layers of clothing, as they trap heat better than a single thick layer.
- Don't forget thick socks, slippers and jumpers.
- Use hot water bottles and blankets to stay comfortable without turning up the thermostat.

Stay connected and seek support.

Check in on neighbours: colder weather can be especially tough for older residents and those with health conditions. A quick call or visit can make a big difference.

Ask for help if you need it: if you're worried about heating costs, food, or other essentials, support is available. Get in touch by calling 01732 749400 or email help@wkha.org.uk.

These tips will help you stay warm, save energy, and make winter a bit easier.

Need help with your storage heaters, thermostat, or bleeding your radiators?

Check out our YouTube videos featuring our Lead Gas Engineer, Jane.



Visit youtube.com/@1WestKent



Changes to your service charges



Starting in April 2026, we will move from fixed service charges to variable service charges for some residents. This change means we can charge you more accurately for the services you receive. All the money you pay in service charges goes directly to cover the actual cost of those services. We do not make a profit from them.

What is a variable service charge?

A variable service charge is a fee you pay for the actual cost of the services you receive, billed annually. We estimate your service charge based on spending from the previous year. At the end of the financial year, we will check the actual service charges incurred and compare them with the estimated charges you've paid during the year.

We will send you a year-end statement to show you whether the actual cost was more or less than the charges. Any overpayment or

underpayment will be reflected in future charges.

With a variable service charge:

You'll never pay more for services than we spend

You have the legal right to review any invoices or costs that make up your service charges

You have the legal right to scrutinise your service charges, including being consulted on contracts for services and any work we ask you to contribute to (if they are likely to cost more than £100 for services and £250 for work)

You have the right to have your service charges reviewed independently if you disagree with them.

The charges will be specific to your home and neighbourhood. The services you receive will stay the same.

Any service charges eligible for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will still be paid by your local authority.

What's next?

If you're affected by this change, we will have written to you to explain how it will impact you.

We will get in touch with you again by 28 February 2026 to share your estimated service charge for the 2026/27 financial year.

For further information, please visit www.westkent.org/servicecharges.

