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WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

Neighbourhood **news**



Free Easter
fun in Kent

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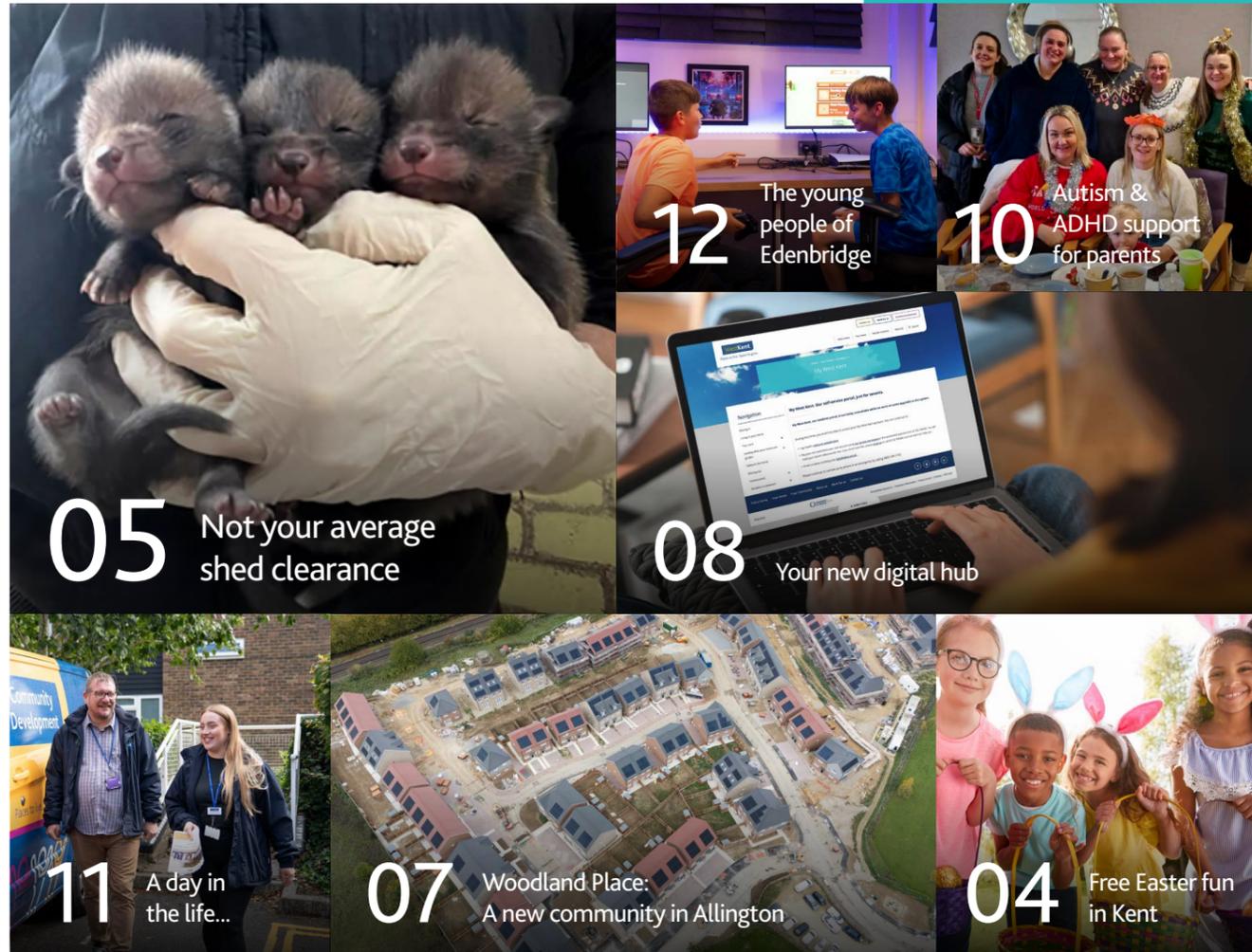
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A message

from our new chief executive



Hello everyone. As many of you know, I've recently joined West Kent as Chief Executive, and I wanted to introduce myself properly.

Social housing isn't new to me. I've spent most of my career working for or with housing associations. But joining West Kent feels different. What we do really matters and I'm excited to be here and looking forward to helping make a difference. I live locally, which means I have a strong personal connection to the work we do and the communities we serve.

There's lots that we're already doing really well, but equally we know we're not perfect and there's times we don't get everything right. So, I won't make promises I can't keep. I can't say we'll get every decision right or that we'll be able to say yes to every request. What I can promise is that we'll listen. At West Kent, you and the homes you live in will be at the heart of everything we do.

We do lots of things in our communities but at our centre we're a landlord, and the homes and services we provide are what we're here for. I know how much it matters to have a safe, warm, well-maintained, and affordable home. That will always be our priority.

This means continuing to invest in your homes and communities, whether that's improving energy efficiency, supporting financial wellbeing, or creating places you're proud to call home.

Your voice matters. We make better decisions when we listen to the people who live in our homes. I've already been out visiting communities, meeting residents, and hearing your feedback directly. And I'll be doing that on a regular basis. I want us to be open, honest, and accountable in how we work with you.

Thank you for welcoming me to West Kent. I'm proud to be joining an organisation that exists for its residents and communities, and I look forward to working with you to build a positive future together.

Ian
Ian Joynson,
Chief Executive



Scan the QR code to welcome Ian, our new CEO.

Easter and spring bank holiday closures

We will be closed on:

Easter Weekend: 3pm on Thursday 2 April until 8.45am on Tuesday 7 April.

Early May Bank Holiday: Monday 4 May

Spring Bank Holiday: Monday 25 May

If you need us in an emergency, please call **0800 169 1122** and our out-of-hours team will be happy to help. We hope you have a peaceful bank holiday season, however you choose to spend it.



Free Easter fun in Kent



Looking for ways to celebrate Easter without breaking the bank? Kent has plenty of free events and activities happening during the Easter holidays this year. Whether you're interested in food festivals, creative workshops, or outdoor fun, there's something for everyone to enjoy from April 3rd to 19th.

Broadstairs Food Festival

April 3rd-5th (Easter Weekend)

Kick off your Easter weekend at Victoria Gardens in Broadstairs, where over 100 food stalls will showcase the best of Kent produce. This free festival offers live cooking demonstrations, music performances, and a vibrant family-friendly atmosphere with stunning beach views. It's the perfect opportunity to sample local delicacies and soak up the seaside ambiance.

Creative Workshops at The Amelia Scott

Throughout the Easter Holidays, Tunbridge Wells

If you're feeling creative, drop into The Amelia Scott for free art activities. Both children and adults are welcome to explore painting, weaving, sculpting, and embroidery in these no-booking-required sessions. It's a wonderful way to spend a rainy afternoon and perhaps discover a new hobby!

Canterbury Cathedral Easter Activities

Easter Weekend

Canterbury Cathedral is offering free Easter craft workshops where families can make woven paper-plate flowers or paper crosses to contribute to community displays. Musical workshops are also available for children aged 4-11, featuring singing, percussion, and games. Please note that while the workshops are free, standard cathedral admission applies (though kids go free).

Tonbridge Castle Grounds

Throughout Easter

Take advantage of free entry to the impressive grounds of Tonbridge Castle. The riverside location is perfect for a family picnic, and you can explore the magnificent 13th-century gatehouse. While specific Easter activities are still being confirmed, the castle grounds alone are worth a visit.

Tunbridge Wells Family Hub Outreach

Thursday 10th and Tuesday 15th April, 2pm-5pm

Head to Calverley Grounds for free sporting activities including basketball, Easter crafts, and face painting. Kent Fire and Rescue will also be in attendance, making this a particularly exciting afternoon for younger children.

Kent Country Parks

All Easter Holidays

Don't forget that Kent's beautiful country parks offer free access year-round. Spring is a particularly lovely time to visit, with bluebells, wildflowers, and baby animals making an appearance. Pack a picnic and enjoy the great outdoors without spending a penny.



With so many free options available, there's no excuse not to make the most of the Easter break. Whether you prefer cultural experiences, outdoor adventures, or creative pursuits, Kent has something to offer. Remember to check individual venue websites closer to the dates for any last-minute changes or additional activities that might be announced.

Not your average shed clearance!

What our community development team thought would be a straightforward shed clearance in Swanley turned into an unforgettable wildlife rescue!

A local resident had inherited a shed filled with household items and called upon our Clearance Heroes to help sort through it all. The team arrived ready for a day's work, but moments after opening the shed door, they were met with a surprise.

A startled fox bolted from the shed, leaving behind six tiny fox cubs, no more than three weeks old. The team immediately contacted wildlife experts for guidance and carefully kept the vulnerable babies warm while waiting for professional help to arrive.

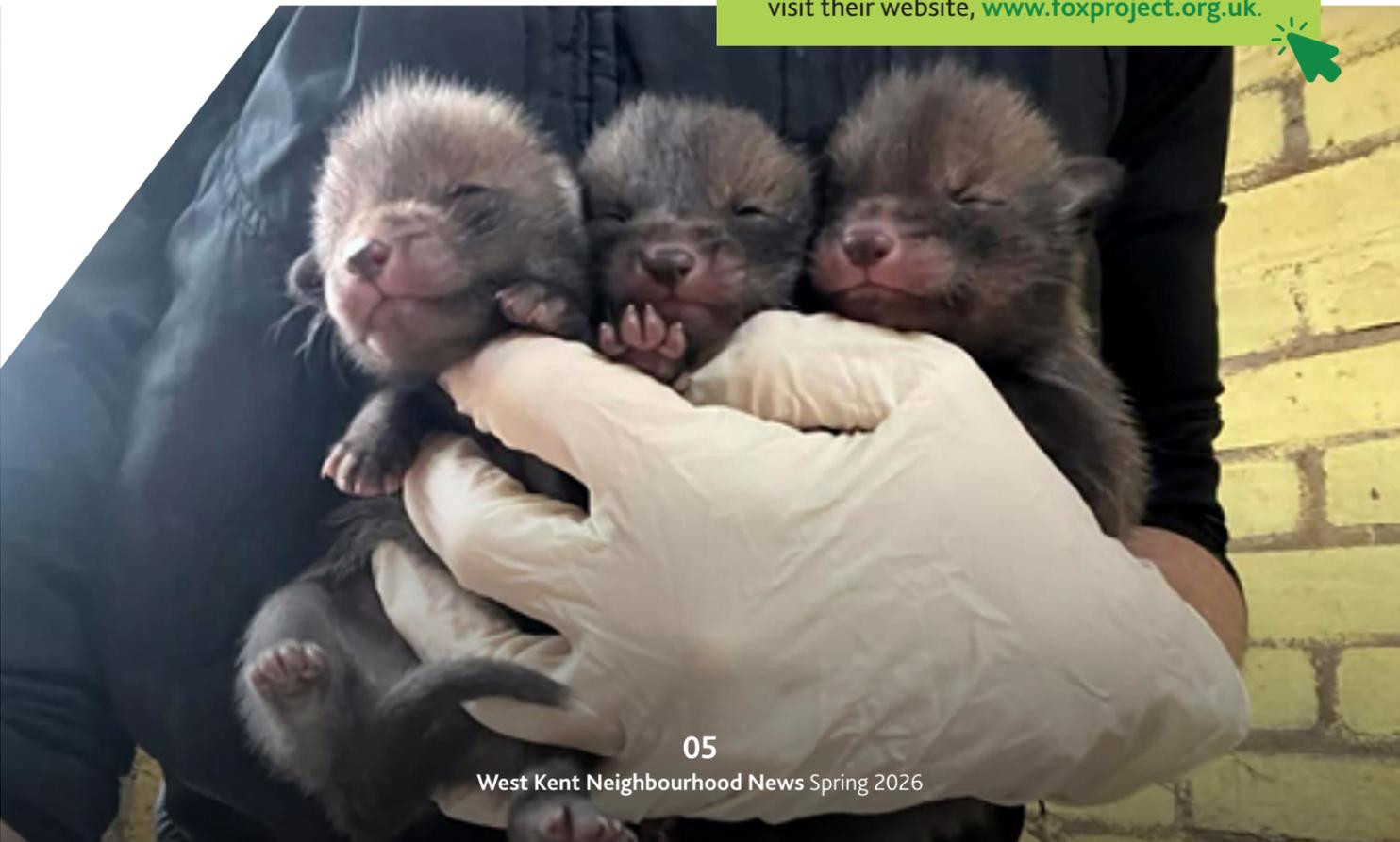
The Fox Project, a local wildlife rescue organisation, responded quickly to assess the situation. After examining the cubs and confirming they were healthy, the rescue team returned them to the

shed and installed a monitoring camera, hoping their mother would return once the disturbance had passed.

Sadly, the mother fox didn't return for her cubs, despite monitoring the shed for a couple of days. As they're too young to survive on their own, they were taken to The Fox Project rescue centre. There, they will be hand-reared by experienced wildlife carers until they are old enough to be safely released back into the wild.

The incident serves as a gentle reminder to check sheds, garages, and outbuildings carefully during spring months, as they often provide shelter for wildlife raising their young.

For more information about The Fox Project and their important work with local wildlife, visit their website, www.foxproject.org.uk.



Your 2026 Neighbourhood Heroes

Last year, we asked you to nominate your neighbourhood hero, our new award, which celebrates residents who go out of their way to help others and support our community. We were inspired by your responses. Every nomination showed how important it is to have someone you can count on in your community. Our resident communications group reviewed all the entries and chose a winner and runners-up.

Colin

Colin, who lives in Ramsgate, was nominated by his neighbour, Malcolm.

Malcolm said: "Colin helps anyone who needs help. A tenant only needs to ask, and he's there. Be it changing batteries on phones, hearing aids, watches, and numerous other things. He sets up and tunes in TVs, organises coffee mornings, take aways and BBQs, Friday entertainment, raffles and special social events. He also helps with forms and letters."



Valerie

Valerie, who lives in Swanley, was nominated by her neighbour, Gill.

Gill said: "Valerie does so much for us; she is a lovely, lovely person. There are so many things she does, I can't really put them all into words. If we have any celebrations, she helps arrange the event. If anyone goes to the hospital, she takes them. She has also been taking neighbours to collect their food shopping because of the recent bad weather. She does everything she can to help her neighbours."



Iain

Iain, who lives in Rochester, was nominated by his neighbour, Sam.

Sam said: "Iain and I have known each other since we both moved here about 12 years ago. Over this time, he and his dog Porter have become such good friends to me and everyone else in our block. Iain has helped me through a lot these past years, mentally and physically, by giving me good advice on things I struggle with and by always offering a different perspective, which is always a breath of fresh air. Iain and Porter are always very friendly and do everything they can to make you feel part of a caring community"



Woodland Place: A new community in Allington

Our biggest development in decades is almost finished. We're preparing to welcome residents to Woodland Place in Allington, where our team has worked hard to build 106 new homes. This is our largest project, and we're very proud of it. With the first homes nearly ready, we're excited to see this new neighbourhood grow.

The homes include two, three, and four-bedroom options, with several adapted for residents who need better accessibility. Most homes have an EPC A rating and come with solar panels, air source heat pumps, and electric vehicle chargers to help keep energy costs down.

Creating a new community

We want Woodland Place to be a great place to live, not just a group of new houses. Since West Kent will own the whole site, we have a unique chance to build a new community from the very beginning.

Two play parks

There's a smaller play park for younger children, with a gravity bowl, timber balance beam, and a small climbing frame that has a slide, cargo net, and climbing wall.

The larger park has a team bucket swing, timber stilts, and swinging steps. It also features a big climbing frame with monkey bars, a fireman's pole, a slide, and several climbing nets and balance beams.

We hope children - and maybe even some adults - enjoy exploring these new spaces!

A link to the past

Among the new homes, you'll find a Type 24 pillbox, built in 1940 as part of the Medway Stop Line to defend important transport routes to London. Another pillbox stands across the A20 on Bunyards Way. We've worked to protect this structure and ask residents to help care for this special piece of history.



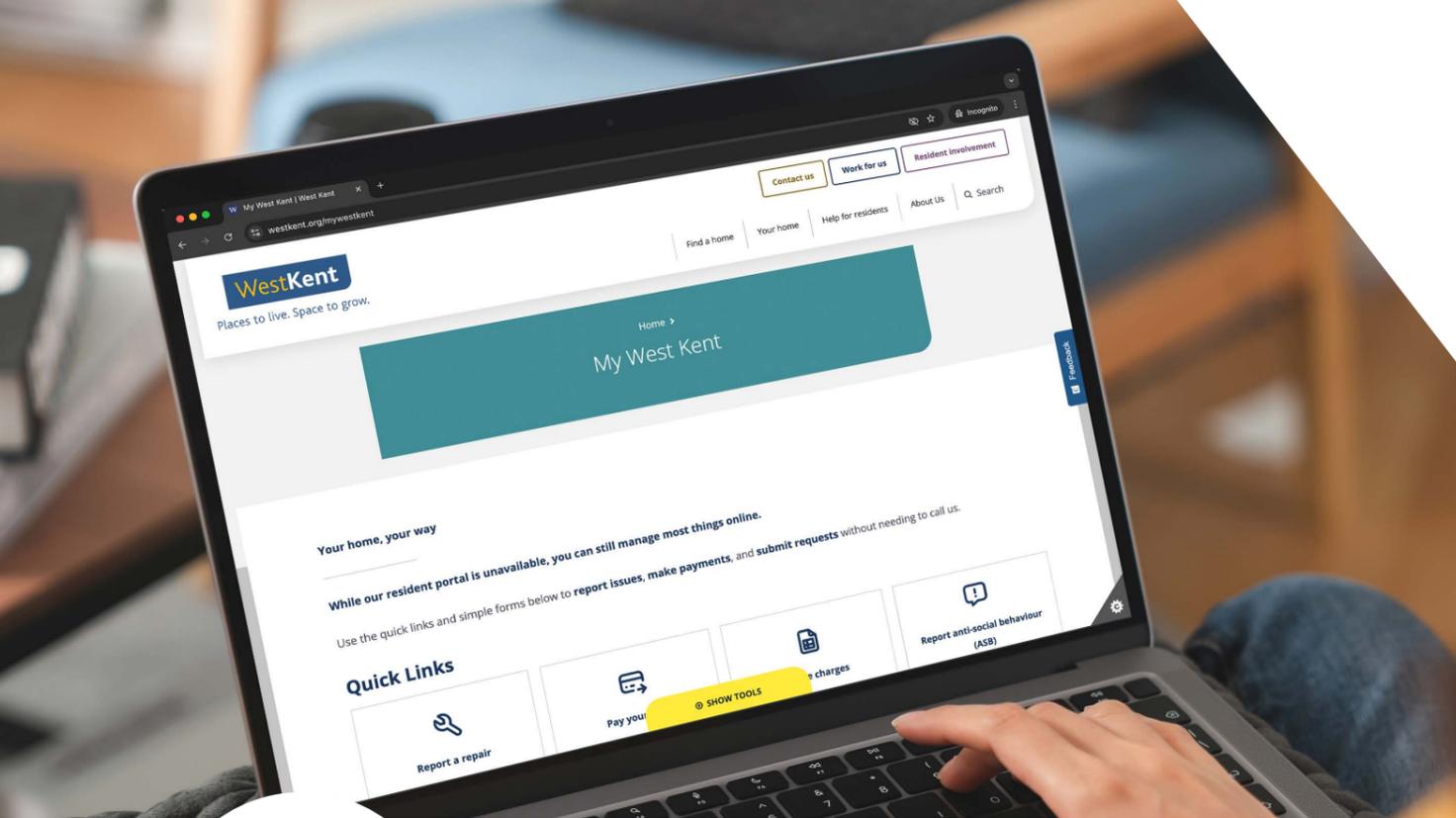
Social value

Our builder, Penenden Heath Developments, is making social value contributions that will help us to host welcome events and offer important support to residents facing hardship.



These early investments will help build a sense of belonging, connection, and pride as soon as the first residents move in.

We're excited to watch Woodland Place grow in the coming months and look forward to welcoming everyone to this new community.



Annual rent and service charge review

In February, we sent you a letter with details about your rent and service charges for the next year, from 1 April 2026.

Your letter has important details about changes to your account, so please read it carefully. If you haven't received it yet, just contact us and we'll send you another copy right away.

Changes to service charge calculations

This year, we are changing how service charges are calculated for some residents. Some properties will switch from fixed charges to variable charges. This will make sure your charges match the real costs of the services you get.

If these changes affect you, we have already sent you a separate letter explaining what it means for your account. For more details about service charges and how they are worked out, visit our website at www.westkent.org/servicecharges for full guidance.



Available
24/7

Your new digital hub



What can you do on the digital hub?

The new page makes it easy to access the services you use most. You can:

- Report a repair
- Report damp and mould
- Report anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Give us a compliment or make a complaint
- Pay rent and manage your tenancy
- ...and much more.

We understand how important it is for you to manage your tenancy online, especially with your busy schedules. After hearing your feedback since our previous portal went offline, we're excited to introduce our new webpage that restores some of the digital access you've been waiting for.

Go to www.westkent.org/mywestkent to easily manage your account whenever it suits you, whether that's before work,

during your lunch break, or after the kids are asleep.

We've made this change to give you simpler and clearer ways to self-serve while the portal is unavailable, and to help keep phone lines open for residents who need urgent support.

A major benefit of our digital hub is that it's always available. You no longer need to hurry to call before we close or wait until Monday. You can check your account and request services whenever it's best for you.

Ready to begin? Visit www.westkent.org/mywestkent

Questions?

If you have questions about your rent or service charges, or need a new letter, please contact us by visiting our digital hub (more information on page 8) or calling 01732 749400. We are here to help you understand your account and answer any concerns.



Join our growing group of resident inspectors!

As trees become fuller and green spaces grow, it's essential that we stay on top of grounds maintenance and ensure nothing is missed.

As a resident inspector, you'll carry out a short monthly inspection of your estate grounds maintenance and complete an online survey to tell us what's working well and what could be improved. Your feedback helps us keep your neighbourhood looking its best.



Scan the QR code or call 01732 749400 for more information.

Support for parents in our communities through Autism & ADHD Parent Support UK CIC

Autism & ADHD Parent Support UK CIC provides a welcoming space for parents and carers of children who are Autistic or have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) across the UK.

The organisation offers a range of services, including 1:1 parent support, online newsletters, and an in-person parent support group in Swanley and West Kingsdown, all designed to respect, support and empower parents and carers of children living with Autism and ADHD. The weekly drop-in sessions allow attendees to talk openly, meet others with shared experiences and access practical guidance.

The sessions also include wellbeing-focused activities such as wreath-making and lantern-making, giving parents the chance to relax, be creative and take time out for themselves.

Funding from the West Kent Community Chest has helped the group continue running these sessions and remain accessible to anyone who needs support. The grant has contributed towards promotional materials, refreshments and activity costs, helping the group reach more families in the community.



Kertrina Gearing, who founded the group, said: "The West Kent Community Chest grant has made such a difference to our families. We've seen friendships form, confidence grow and well-being improve as parents realise they're part of a community that truly understands."

The group regularly invites organisations such as IASK and Beams to attend sessions, giving families access to specialist advice and wider support networks.

Parents and carers are welcome to drop in, take part in activities or simply meet others who understand their journey. More information is available on Autism & ADHD Parent Support UK CIC's website, <https://aaps-uk.org>

A day in the life...



Of a Community Development Officer



Lucinda headed back to the Edenbridge office for lunch. On her way, she stopped to update the community notice boards, making sure residents have the latest information about local support and activities.

After lunch at the Edenbridge office, Lucinda and I talked about her morning and what she planned to do for the rest of the day.

In the afternoon, Lucinda went to a meeting at the Eden Centre to start planning the Family Fun Day in July. West Kent will also showcase their youth club, HOUSE, during an open day at the event. This is a great chance to connect with the wider community and highlight local youth activities.

Lucinda finished her day at 5.15 pm by completing important admin tasks. She responded to emails, uploaded data to the internal Cx system, and updated her spreadsheets to ensure everything was recorded and up to date.

Every day is different for Lucinda Herring, Community Development Officer for Edenbridge, Sevenoaks, and soon Woodland Place. Her workday starts at 8.45 am, when she checks her emails and replies to any urgent or important messages. This helps her get ready for another busy day.

This morning, Lucinda drove to Sevenoaks to meet the right-sizing officer for West Kent and help a resident sign up for her new home. For the past four months, Lucinda has supported this resident by arranging bulky waste clearance, providing a keep-warm pack, and organising emergency food parcels from the local food bank.

Watching the resident sign up for her new home was a big moment. Afterward, Lucinda introduced her to the team at Abacus, where she can find affordable furniture to help make her new place feel like home.

It was another busy and meaningful day spent helping residents and building a stronger community.

Meet the young people of Edenbridge

Life, hopes, and what's happening at HOUSE

We want to listen to the voices that matter most, especially our young residents. That's why we spoke with the young people at HOUSE youth club in Edenbridge and asked:

- What's it like living in Edenbridge?
- What would you love to see improved?

Their answers were honest, sometimes funny, and always heartfelt. Here's what they shared with us, along with how West Kent and its partners are responding.

Life in Edenbridge: what young people love

Even though they have different ages and interests, many young people said they really value the local community. Several talked about how much they enjoy summer events, the Christmas market, bonfire night, and how everyone comes together.

Emma*, age 11, loves going for walks and using the leisure centre. Others like fishing, playing football, or just spending time with friends outside. C*, age 15, said Edenbridge has "a great community feeling, especially in the summer."

And of course, there was one favourite everyone agreed on: HOUSE youth club is a big hit!

The young people we spoke to had great things to say about HOUSE. Here are some of their highlights:

A safe, supportive space

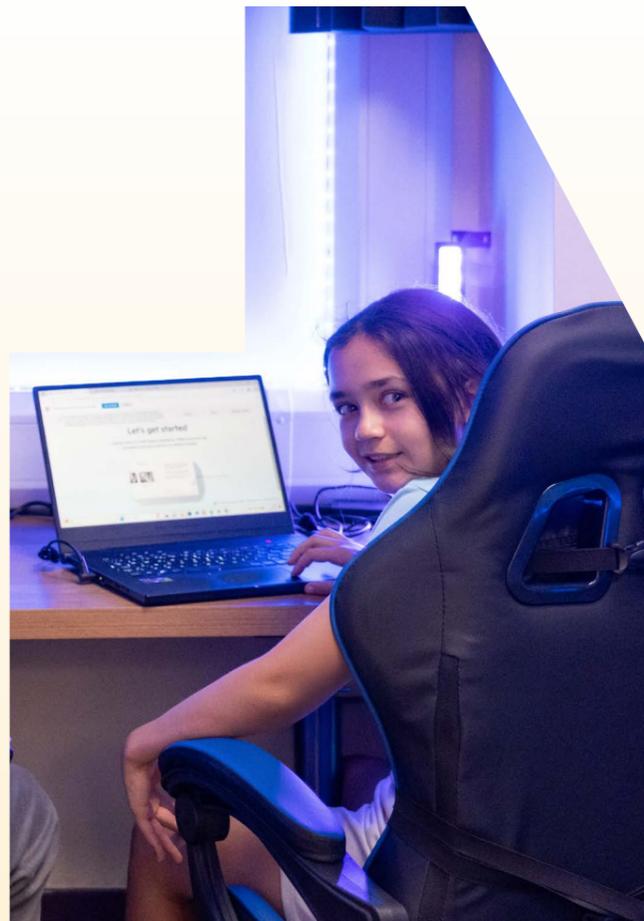
Many young people said they feel safe, heard, and welcome at HOUSE.

"The staff are supportive, kind and caring"

"Staff are easy to talk to and always there if you need someone"

Activities, food and chill time

With a gaming room, pool, comfortable spaces to relax, and free snacks, HOUSE is a place where young people truly want to spend time. It's clear there's a lot to enjoy!



*Names changed for anonymity.



The tough stuff

We also heard about the challenges young people face or worry about, such as knife crime, antisocial behaviour, safety after dark, littering, fly tipping, and road safety.

Our young people want to live in a safe and clean environment. They articulated wonderfully how important good street lighting, adequate provision of bins, safe speed limits and crossings are. They would like to see a greater police presence and more community pride in their area.

STAFF ARE EASY TO TALK TO AND ALWAYS THERE IF YOU NEED SOMEONE

How we are supporting safer neighbourhoods

We're acting on the concerns young people have raised by working closely with partners across Edenbridge.

Local police visit HOUSE youth club to offer workshops on staying safe, building positive relationships with young people, and understanding the risks of knife crime. Their friendly presence in a relaxed setting helps boost young people's trust, confidence and sense of safety.

We also work with the Kenward Trust, which offers early-intervention programs about choices, consequences, and personal safety. These sessions help young people handle peer pressure, build resilience, and get support when they need it. This makes HOUSE a place for both fun and helpful guidance.

These concerns will be included in wider community safety and environmental improvement efforts, such as talks about better lighting, waste management, and local projects, working with councils and agencies in the area.

STAFF ARE SUPPORTIVE, KIND AND CARING

Edenbridge through young eyes

What stood out most is that young people in Edenbridge really care about their community. They love their community, appreciate the places where they feel safe, and know what would make things better.

HOUSE youth club is a big part of this; offering fun, friendship, support, and chances to grow.



A new focus on resident feedback:

Meet Victoria Ferguson

Victoria Ferguson is the new Head of Customer Voice at West Kent. We talked with her about her background in social housing, how she listens to residents, and how she plans to turn your feedback into real changes for your home and community.

Victoria believes that really listening to residents brings new energy. In her role at West Kent, she works to ensure that residents' voices help shape how the organisation operates and develops.

"Customer voice is the heart of everything," she says. "Customer voices are the clearest signal of what really matters. If you listen to them properly, then you can understand exactly what your business needs to do." When she read the job description, she was impressed by how seriously

West Kent takes the customer viewpoint and what matters to people in how the business is run. Her focus is on making sure what residents and customers experience day to day is reflected in service improvements across the organisation.

CUSTOMER VOICE IS THE HEART OF EVERYTHING

Victoria has spent over 15 years working in social housing. She draws on both her personal and professional experience. For many years, she was a single mum, working to provide a safe home for her children. To her, a home is more than just a building; it's a place to feel safe and secure. Without that, she says, it's hard to do anything else in life. This is why she believes residents should have a say in where and how they live, and why she feels privileged to help support people's stability and security.

Victoria's approach to listening is practical. She believes good listening means setting aside your own opinions and taking time to understand someone else's experience with empathy and patience. *"You can tell because the person that's listening to you isn't listening to answer. They are listening because they're genuinely interested."* Good listeners don't interrupt. They repeat what matters and work together to find solutions. Victoria often returns to this idea because she believes that listening should lead to action. She is clear that feedback only matters if it is used; otherwise, it is just lost words. She sees feedback as a tool for learning and something to seek out. Having children changed her perspective and taught her that she doesn't know everything. For her, doing a good job means being open to what everyone has to say.

Victoria is clear about the changes she hopes residents will notice. She wants people to see that what they say matters and that West Kent acts on their feedback.

She hopes residents will feel a difference in the services they receive and see how their input leads to real changes. Whether it's a complaint, a survey, or a compliment, every effort should result in visible improvements. She also wants colleagues across West Kent to see themselves as champions for customer voice, so listening and learning happen everywhere.

This should be most noticeable in areas like repairs, moving home, and shared spaces - everyday services that shape community life.

Victoria is leading two main projects: the Resident Influence and Impact Strategy and the Excellent Services Strategy. She also wants West Kent to connect what it already knows by bringing together complaints, survey results, and lessons learned. Her goal is to turn this information into a clear action plan so no opportunities are missed.

Victoria also talks openly about social housing. She says it is often misunderstood, and old stereotypes about residents still exist. In her view, this doesn't match today's reality. West Kent's communities include renters, shared owners, and homeowners, and she sees this mix as a strength that should guide how services develop.

In the next year, Victoria wants to see measurable progress. This means fewer complaints, higher satisfaction, and more resident engagement. She also hopes to see a wider range of people involved, including younger residents, working people, shared owners, and single-parent families, so everyone feels included.

Outside of work, Victoria lives in Hastings, which she describes as a brilliant and lively town. Home life matters a lot to her. She enjoys spending time with her partner, two children, dog, and cat, saying, *"I just genuinely love spending time with those people that make me glad."* She shares that life hasn't always been easy, as she raised her children on her own for a while. Now that they're older, she feels she has a great team at home. A long dog walk helps her relax after a busy week, and good food is always welcome, especially with a chef in the house.

West Kent cannot be the best social housing provider in Kent without the people who live in West Kent homes.

Throughout our conversation, one theme kept coming up. Victoria wants customer voice to be part of everyday life at West Kent. She wants residents and customers to see how their feedback leads to real change. *"West Kent cannot be the best social housing provider in Kent without them."* By "them," she means the people who live in West Kent homes, whose views should shape how services improve. Her job is to make sure those voices are heard, understood, and acted on. Heard, understood, and used.

Your Voice, Our Action:

improving our services together

Your voice
Our action

Every resident should have a positive experience, feel listened to, and be proud of their home.

That's why we've written two strategies, our Resident Influence and Impact Strategy and our Excellent Customer Services Strategy.

Putting your voice at the heart of decisions

We're giving you more ways to help shape our services, policies, and priorities; whether you join our resident scrutiny panel, become a mystery shopper, take part as a resident inspector, or join our communications network. We're also making it easier and more inclusive to get involved, whether that's in person, online, or through quick feedback options, so we can hear from even more residents, including those we might not usually reach.

You've told us that staying informed, feeling respected, and seeing action on your feedback are what matter most. So, we're sharing clearer updates, showing the results of "your voice, our action" - how your input leads to real improvements in our services.

Getting it right first time

When you contact us by phone, online, or in person, you should receive friendly, helpful support and timely updates. We're updating our customer service standards to focus on getting things right the first time, setting clear expectations for repairs and estate services, and making sure you're kept informed throughout. We'll keep learning from your compliments and complaints, fix problems faster, and use what we learn to improve our services.

Clearer standards you can hold us to

We understand that repair times, communication, and estate care are important to you. We're setting clear standards for emergency, urgent, and routine repairs, and sharing estate schedules, such as how often we cut the grass or clean. You'll be able to see all of this

in one place, and we'll report on our progress so you can easily see how we're doing and where we're making improvements.

We're strengthening our approach to anti-social behaviour by providing faster contact for high-risk cases, regular updates, and support tailored to each situation, because feeling safe at home matters to everyone.

Making it easier to get things done online - without losing the human touch

It's now easier to find our most-used website pages. Read more about this on page 8.

We're also working to ensure everyone can use our online services by removing barriers such as a lack of access, skills, or confidence. This way, more residents can enjoy simple, convenient online options if they choose to.

Inclusion, respect and support when it matters

We're using better information to adapt our services to people's needs. This could mean extra help during a repair, clearer communication, or teams working together to provide the right support.

How we'll measure progress and keep ourselves accountable

We'll keep listening to you through regular surveys and quick feedback, and use complaints data to understand what's happening. We will share our results openly, so you can see where we're improving and what we're working on next.

Your ideas make a difference

If you have five minutes to fill out a survey, want to join a resident group, or have an idea for your neighbourhood, we'd love to hear from you. Your voice is shaping West Kent more than ever, and together we can make our services simpler, faster, and fairer for everyone.

For more information on how to get involved, visit www.westkent.org/residentinvolvement or keep an eye out in future editions of Neighbourhood News.