



See what's  
happening  
in your  
community

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# Neighbourhood news



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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](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)  
Phone: 01732 749400

### Follow us on social media:

- WestKentHA
- @West\_Kent
- westkenthousingassociation
- @1WestKent



# Welcome

## to spring Neighbourhood News!

Spring is finally here! We hope you enjoyed the Easter break and took the time to be with your loved ones.

With the start of a new season, we've had some positive news on the cost of energy prices which are finally falling. We know while this is welcome news, the cost of living will still be a worry for lots of residents. Remember, we're still here to help if you're struggling, find out more on page 8.

Our housing team will be out and about in your community this spring and early summer, finding out what you think about our estate services. Please do take the time to have a chat with them so we can include what's most important to you in our new standards. Read more on page 7.

We also carried out a small review of Neighbourhood News, asking you if we needed a new name and choosing a new design. Thanks to all who got involved – we hope you like the new magazine! If you'd like to get more stuck into

Neighbourhood News and other publications, why not join our co-production group? Find out more on page 11.

You also told us during the review that you wanted us to include more about what's going on in your area, so we've included some of our events going on in Sevenoaks, Swanley and Edenbridge on page 12.

Finally, in March we entered into our 35th year. To celebrate this special anniversary, we'll be sharing lots of stories from our residents and staff over the next year, so keep an eye out on our social media channels, website and future editions of Neighbourhood News.

We're also wishing all our residents celebrating a very happy Eid! Eid Mubarak!

Enjoy reading!

*The Editorial Team*

## Cost of living help

We know things are more difficult for many of our residents due to the cost of living.

Our Help for You campaign has been shaped with resident feedback to help provide you with the right information to help you with your rent, living and energy costs. We don't just provide a signposting service. We have teams dedicated to providing help, advice, and financial support if you need it. Find out more in this edition or on our website - [www.westkent.org/your-home/help-for-you](http://www.westkent.org/your-home/help-for-you)





# 2024 closure dates

We have lots to look forward to this year! Here are a few dates when we'll be closed.

- Early May bank holiday  
5.15pm, Friday 3 May until 8.45am, Tuesday 7 May
- May bank holiday  
5.15pm, Friday 24 May until 8.45am, Tuesday 28 May
- Staff training day  
Friday 5 July
- August bank holiday  
5.15pm, Friday 23 August until 8.45am, Tuesday 27 August
- Christmas and New Year  
3pm, Tuesday 24 December until 8.45am, Thursday 2 January.

We'll still offer an emergency-only repairs service while we're closed. Just call **0800 169 1122**.



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West Kent Neighbourhood News Spring 2024

# Annual rent review

In February, we sent letters to all our residents and shared owners, letting them know their new rent and service charge cost for 2024.

Your letter comes with some FAQs that should answer any questions you might have about your new rent and payments.

## How is my rent calculated?

In October 2019, the government revised the formula for all social landlords to use for setting rents for the next five years on social rent or affordable rent homes. This ensures rents are affordable and set based on the size and location of your home, whoever your landlord is. This is usually the previous September's Consumer Price Index (CPI) + 1%.

However, in line with government guidance, we are capping the rent increase for the majority of residents to 7.7%. An example of this would be:

**Current rent of £125 x 7.7% = £9.63**

**£125 + £9.63 = £134.63**

## How is my service charge calculated?

Service charges are set using actual costs for communal cleaning, window cleaning (communal properties only), grounds maintenance and utility charges.

## I haven't had my letter yet

If you haven't received your rent review letter, please let us know as soon as possible so we can send it out to you again.

Email: [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk), call **01732 749400** or complete our web form at [www.westkent.org/contactus](http://www.westkent.org/contactus)



**Talk to us! We will listen and always try to be flexible enough to help if things are a little tight at the moment.**



## I'm worried about paying my rent, what do I do?

Talk to us! We will listen and always try to be flexible enough to help if things are a little tight at the moment.

We can offer a range of support and signposting; support with benefits, training and employment help, budgeting advice, and referrals to local foodbanks if needed.

For more information, visit [www.westkent.org/helpforyou](http://www.westkent.org/helpforyou) or call us on **01732 749400**.

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West Kent Neighbourhood News Spring 2024



# Rent free weeks



Each year, there are four weeks where we don't charge you any rent. The rent-free weeks for 2024 are:

- 1 and 8 April
- 23 and 28 December.

Rent is payable in advance and your account should always be in credit unless you receive housing benefit or universal credit.



## Who doesn't get rent free weeks?

- Shared owners
- Extra care residents and residents on some other tenancies, as their rent is calculated slightly differently.
- Those who pay by monthly direct debit, as your payments are based on 48 weeks (48 divided by 12 = your monthly payment).

If you're in arrears, you must continue paying through the rent free weeks to catch up.

For more information visit [www.westkent.org/payrent](http://www.westkent.org/payrent)

# Close the door on the risk of fire!

Fire doors are installed in many of our homes. They offer 30 minutes of protection against fire, prevent smoke from spreading, and give you the best chance of escaping should a fire break out.

Here are some dos and don'ts to help you look after your fire door and keep you and your family safe.

- Check the seals every three months, and report any issues to us straight away
- Wipe both sides of the door and the plastic frame every few months with a soft damp cloth and warm soapy water.
- Inspect the drainage holes in the threshold on a regular basis to ensure they aren't blocked and are clear of debris.
- Make sure whenever the door is shut, you lift the handle. This allows the multipoint locking system to fully secure into the frame.

If you have any questions or concerns about your fire door, please get in touch. Email [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400.



## Don't

- Fit anything to this door that would mean drilling into or through the door or its frame – including cat flaps or door numbers.
- Use solvents or aggressive cleaners on the door or its fittings.
- Use oil on the hinges, handles or locking system. If oiling is needed, use petroleum jelly or lithium grease.
- Paint the door.

Look after your fire door, so it can look after you too!

# Estate services review tell us what you really think!

## We want our residents to be proud of the home and neighbourhood where they live.

We're reviewing our estate services, which includes grounds maintenance, communal area cleaning, window cleaning and bin store management.

Our aim is to produce standards for each service, so you know for certain what work will be carried out, and when.

To do this, we need to know what is important to you – what we do well, and what needs improving. We want as many of our residents to get involved to make sure the standards are representative and inclusive of as many of your views as possible.

So, come along to one of our neighbourhood events and tell us what you think!



Edenbridge (Eden Centre) - 3 April, 11am to 2pm.

Deal (Mongeham Way) - 10 April, 12 noon to 3pm.

Tenterden (St Benets Way) - 16 April, 10am to 1pm.

Sevenoaks (Bat and Ball Centre) - 24 April, 11am to 2pm.

Ashford (Repton Park) - 8 May, 2.30pm to 4.30pm.

Cowden (Chantlers Mead) - 15 May, 10am to 12 noon.

Medway (Liberty Park) - 17 May, 10am to 1pm.

Maidstone (Otham estate) - 22 May, 10am to 12 noon.

Maidstone (Moorhen Road) - 22 May, 2pm to 4pm.

Swanley (Alexandra Suite) - 31 May, 11am to 2pm.

Tonbridge (Taylor Close) - 5 June, 10am to 12 noon.

Leigh (village green) - 12 June, 10am to 12 noon.

Ashford (Adams Drive) - 18 June, 10am to 12 noon.

Maidstone (Hadlow Close) - 20 June, 10am to 12 noon.

Sevenoaks (Hollybush Court) - 27 June, 10am to 12 noon.



If you can't make one of the events, you can still give us your feedback by:

- Completing our online survey – just scan the QR code here.
- Having a chat with us over the phone or face to face.



For more information about the consultation and the neighbourhood events, visit [www.westkent.org/estateservicesreview](http://www.westkent.org/estateservicesreview), email [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400.



# Energy price cap news

Ofgem's price cap is changing on 1 April 2024, with prices falling by 12%.



The average standing charges and unit costs from 1 April to 30 June 2024		
	Gas	Electricity
Direct Debit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit rate: 6.04p per kWh</li> <li>Standing charge: 31.43p per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit rate: 24.50p per kWh</li> <li>Standing charge: 60.10p per day</li> </ul>
Prepayment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit rate: 5.82p per kWh</li> <li>Standing charge: 31.43p per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit rate: 23.72p per kWh</li> <li>Standing charge: 60.10p per day</li> </ul>
On receipt of a bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit rate: 6.36p per kWh</li> <li>Standing charge: 35.21p per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unit rate: 25.79p per kWh</li> <li>Standing charge: 65.88p per day</li> </ul>

Rates and standing charges are averages, which vary by region.

\*Figures taken from moneysavingexpert.com

While this is great news, we know energy bills will still be a big worry for lots of our residents and their families. Support is available, and we're here to help. Visit [www.westkent.org/helpforyou](http://www.westkent.org/helpforyou) or call **01732 749400**.

You can also find out more about the price cap and what it means for you on the Money Saving Expert website, visit [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com)

## Let us know if your home has damp and mould

The weather might be warming up, but this won't stop damp and mould from growing within some homes.

You should always tell us if you have mould in your home. We will act quickly to investigate and make improvements to prevent it coming back. You can report it by:

- Telling any member of West Kent staff – engineers, your neighbourhood housing officer or customer services for example.
- Emailing [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)
- Calling **01732 749400**

- Completing our web form at [www.westkent.org/contactus](http://www.westkent.org/contactus)
- You can find out more about spotting and preventing damp by visiting our website [www.westkent.org/dampandmould](http://www.westkent.org/dampandmould)



# Complaints - let us know if we can do better.

We aim to deliver excellent services, but sometimes things go wrong.

If this happens, we will try and put things right as soon as you tell us where we can, before it reaches the complaints process.

You can make a complaint by:

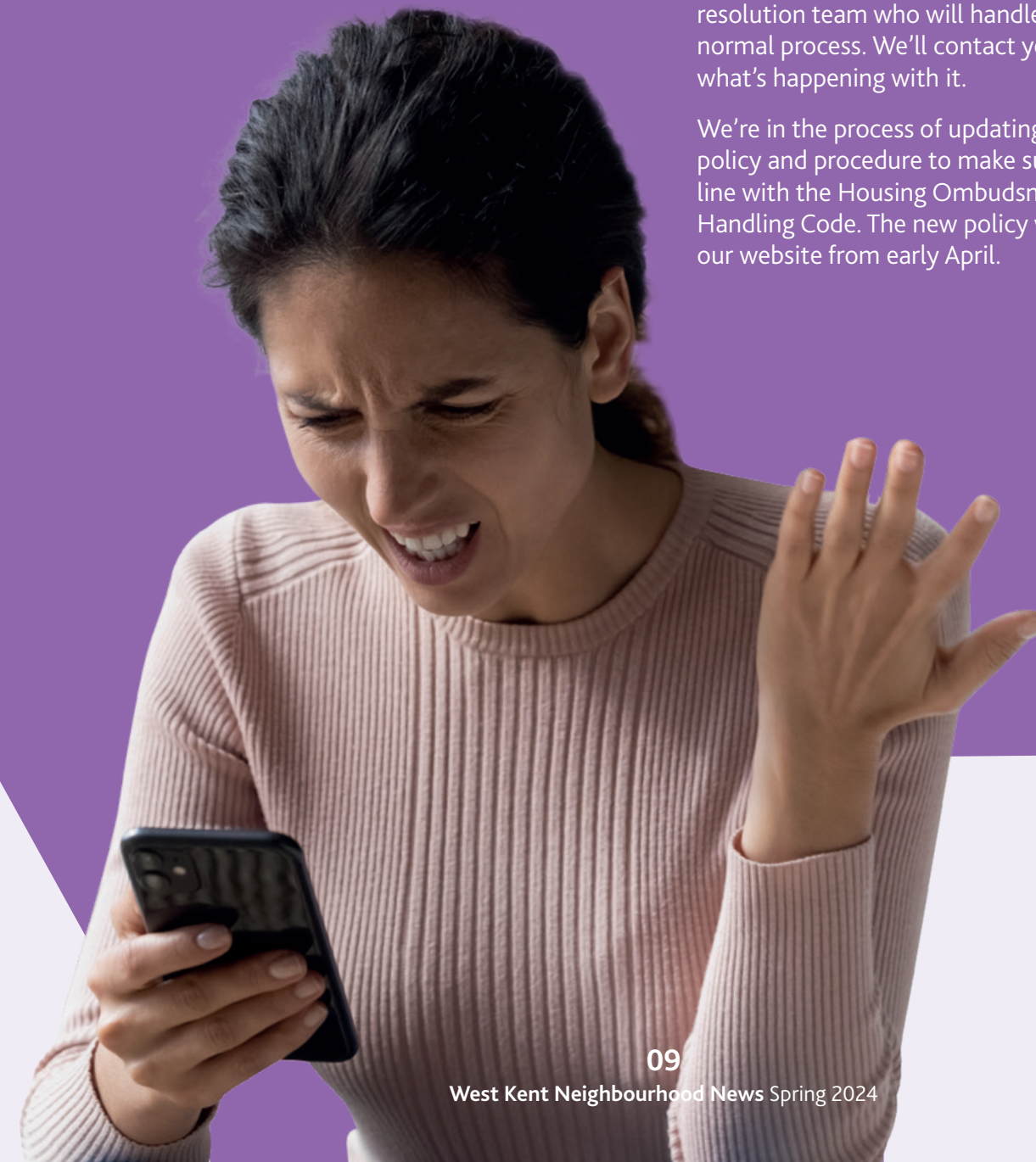
- Emailing [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)
- Using our web form on [www.westkent.org/complaints](http://www.westkent.org/complaints)
- Calling **01732 749400**.

If you contact us on our public social media pages, we'll ask you to contact us directly to protect your privacy.

If you need extra support to complain or you need us to make reasonable changes to our process because of protected characteristics, including, but not limited to, disability, health or any cultural or religious reasons, please let us know.

If you send a complaint to our Chief Executive or any of our Directors, it will be passed to our customer resolution team who will handle it in line with our normal process. We'll contact you to let you know what's happening with it.

We're in the process of updating our complaints policy and procedure to make sure we're working in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. The new policy will be available on our website from early April.







The Scrutiny Panel team

## Resident involvement – opportunities to get involved, introduce new team

### We have a brand-new resident involvement team!

Karen, Loral and Gavin are keen to work with residents who want to get involved in creating change and improving West Kent.

There are several exciting opportunities this year, and we'd love you to take part in as many as you can:

- Resident inspectors - you'll carry out regular reviews of grounds maintenance and cleaning work in your estates. You'll submit feedback letting us know what good, and what needs is improving
- Resident influencers – you'll review current and proposed new policies. You'll provide feedback and suggestions on how you think they could be more effective and easier to understand.
- Scrutiny panel – you'll be part of a small group of residents that look at areas in need of improvement and consider how we can deliver better service to our residents. Recommendations are then presented to the Board by members of the panel.
- Contractor representatives – you'll attend meetings with our repairs team and contractors, to discuss best practices, offer feedback and suggestions.
- Neighbourhood inspections – you'll join neighbourhood housing officer inspections to help us understand the issues that are important to you in the neighbourhood you live.
- Mystery shoppers – you'll test our systems and procedures, including speaking to our customer services team and feeding back on your experience.
- Communications co-production group – you'll support our communications and marketing team in creating, shaping, and evaluating campaigns and publications.



The resident involvement team

Find out more on our website [www.westkent.org/residentinvolvement](http://www.westkent.org/residentinvolvement), email [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400.

# We need your help!

Are you interested in communications and marketing? Or do you just love reading Neighbourhood News when it comes through your door?



### If yes, we need your help!

We're launching a brand-new communication co-production group, to help us shape publications - like Neighbourhood News and our residents annual report -, campaigns, and other communications seen by residents.

Here are four reasons why you should get involved!

#### 1. You're our target audience

You're the resident, so you know how our publications, and other communications land – and how they can be improved.

#### 2. Get top-class training

We'll offer you training from some of the leading experts in communications and marketing, which would usually set you back hundreds.

#### 3. It's great for your CV

The experience you'll have from co-producing campaigns and publications, along with your training will look great if you're looking for a career in the industry. We'll even give you a reference!

#### 4. Make a real difference to other residents

Our campaigns and publications are to inform, but most importantly support our residents. With your help, we can reach those who really need us and make a difference in their lives.

Email [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400 to register your interest in the group.

## Want to get Neighbourhood News by email?

While nothing quite beats sitting with a nice cuppa and flicking through the news from all around West Kent and its neighbourhoods, some of you might want to give it a read on your phone or tablet while you're on the go instead!

If you'd prefer to not get the magazine by post, but by email instead – let us know! Visit [www.westkent.org/neighbourhoodnews](http://www.westkent.org/neighbourhoodnews) and complete the web form.





# What's happening in a neighbourhood near you?

Our community development team is working in neighbourhoods across Kent to help build stronger communities. Have a look below to see what's coming up in your area soon!

## Swanley

- **Swanley Gardening Club** – email [communitydevelopment@wkha.org.uk](mailto:communitydevelopment@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400 for more information.
- **Buzy Beez craft group** – every Tuesday, 10am to 12 noon at Northview Community Hall.
- **Residents of St Mary's estate action group** – the group meets on the first Monday of the month at Elim Church, Cherry Avenue between 7pm and 9pm.
- **Residents of White Oak action group** – the group's first meeting is at 4pm on Wednesday 17 April at Northview Community Hall.

## Edenbridge

- **Lego Club at the Bridges Centre** – every Tuesday during term time, from 3.30pm to 4.30pm (For children aged 7 to 11)
- **Litter picks** - check out the 'Edenbridge Community Warden' page on Facebook to find out the next litter pick date!

## Other areas of Kent

- Keep an eye on our social media channels for upcoming events!

For more information, email [communitydevelopment@wkha.org.uk](mailto:communitydevelopment@wkha.org.uk) or call 01732 749400.

