

SUMMER 2024

WestKent

Places to live. Space to grow.

Neighbourhood **news**

35TH
YEAR ANNIVERSARY
SPECIAL EDITION



Read our
magazine
on the go!

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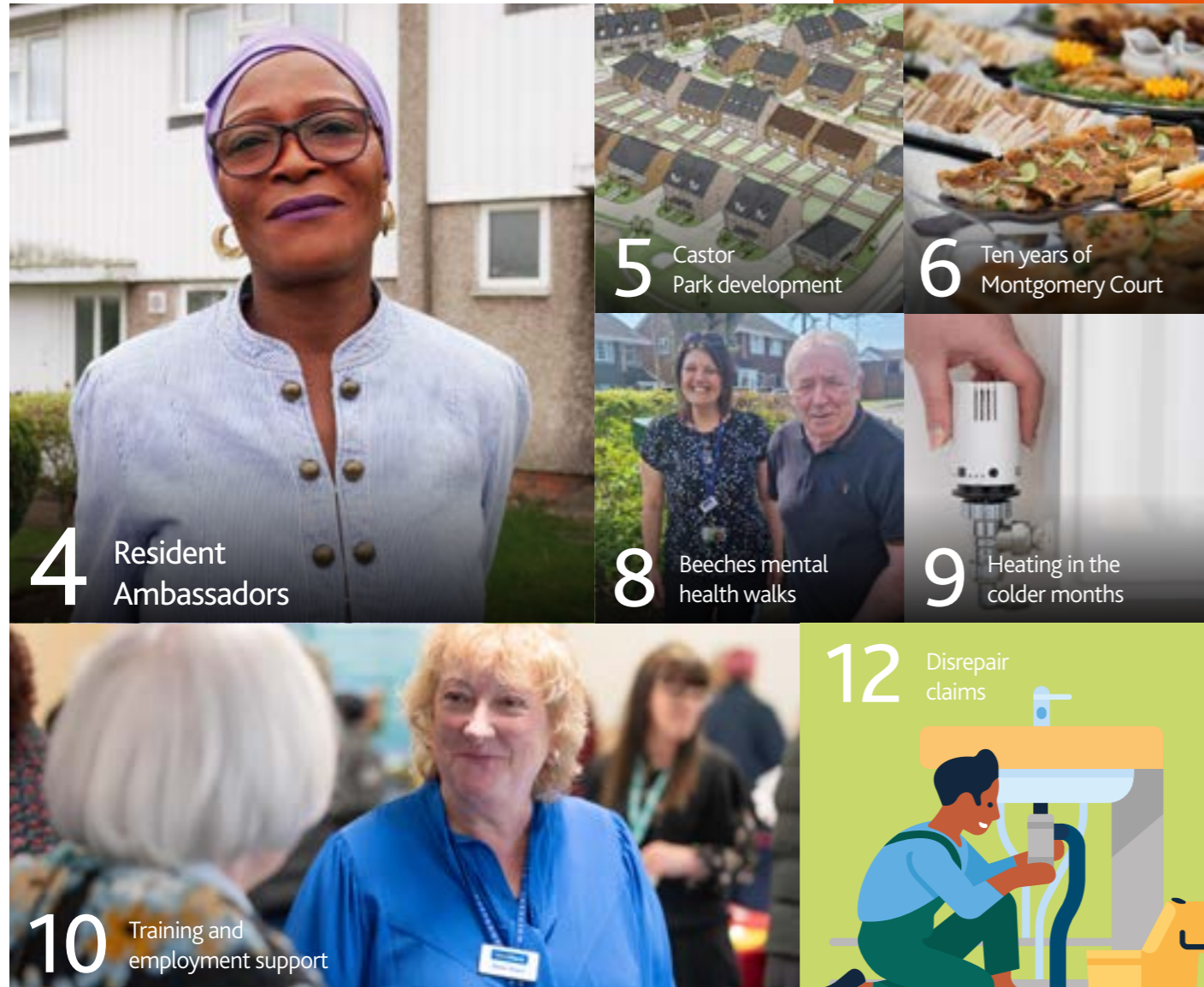


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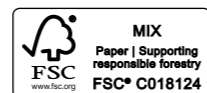
Customer services

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

Follow us on social media:

- WestKentHA
- @West_Kent
- westkenthousingassociation
- @1WestKent



Lots has happened since our last edition; we have a new government, we excitingly made it to the Euros finals, and the warm summer we remember from last year has finally made a brief appearance!

This year, we're celebrating our 35th anniversary! We're really proud of everything we've achieved since the stock transfer from Sevenoaks District Council in 1989. Please take the time to read our commemorative 35-year insert, which shares just a few stories from our staff and residents about why they're proud to be part of West Kent.

We've also got lots to share about what's happening

in our over 55s schemes. Montgomery Court has turned ten years old. You can find out more about their celebration on page 6.

We are passionate about using your views to shape our services and excited to share some ways you can get involved in shaping our services and having your voice heard. Read about our opportunity to join our communities and housing committee on page 9. This magazine is also the first to be produced with our resident communications co-production group, if you're interested in joining, please get in touch! Our contact details are on page 2.

Best wishes,

The Editorial Team

Complaints and service improvement report 2023

We want to deliver excellent services, and improving the way we handle complaints is part of that. As an organisation, we view complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve services for our residents and customers.

As part of this, we're required to publish a report that sets out how we're complying with the updated Complaints Handling Code; including what our complaints are about, and how we plan to make sure we change our services and ways of working to provide a better service to residents in the future.

Visit www.westkent.org/complaints to read the full report or scan the QR code.



Interested in working more closely with us to improve our services?

We're looking for two new resident ambassadors.

Why you?

As a resident ambassador, you'll help to scrutinise and challenge our management of the core services that we provide to residents.

This is an exciting opportunity for you to be involved in important decisions about residents' homes and communities.

Why now?

Our board currently has three resident board members, who all sit on our communities and housing committee. As well as scrutinising our performance and taking part in key decision making, these members provide valuable insight into the day-to-day experience of residents living in our communities.

We're now looking for our resident board members of the future. This new resident ambassador role will allow you to gain a good understanding of West Kent, the requirements of being a board member, and develop your skills and experience.

Why should you apply?

We're looking for residents who are passionate about where they live and can help the board by bringing the perspective of residents when making decisions and taking action.

You don't need to have experience of being on a board or working in senior management. What's important is you being willing to get involved and committed to ensuring the best outcomes for residents.

Relevant skills and experience could include:

- Some experience of working in with different communities (for example, education, health or social care or community safety)
- Some experience of governance or management, such as working as a team leader or taking on a voluntary position (for example a school governor or local councillor)
- Being passionate about your community and willing to help ensure our policies provides excellent services for residents.

This is a one-year role with an expected time commitment of one to two days per month. It has the potential to be extended each year, up to a maximum of three years. Payment will be available for your time and services.



Interested?

We're holding three drop-in sessions for interested residents to find out more:

Thursday 19 September 10am – 12pm, the Bat and Ball Centre, Cramptons Road Sevenoaks, Kent, TN14 5DN.

Monday 30 September 2 – 4pm Repton Court, 1 A Repton Avenue, Ashford, Kent, TN23 3TL.

Wednesday 2 October 2pm – 4:30pm, the Alexandra Suite, St Mary's Road, Swanley, BR8 7BU.

To express your interest or for more information, please contact our Company Secretary, Georgia Bruce, by emailing companysecretary@wkha.org.uk or calling 01732 749400.

Castor Park

our biggest development of homes in three decades



Our development team works with contractors to build new homes for those on their local council's housing register. Our new development, Castor Park, is a key part of this and will provide over 100 new homes by 2026.

We purchased a piece of land in spring 2023, in Allington, Maidstone. We now have full planning permission to build 106 rent and shared ownership homes on the site, made up of 98 houses, and eight flats. The homes will range in size from two to four-bedrooms, and we are building three homes for wheelchair users. This is our biggest development of homes in three decades!

We want to go beyond just building homes and ensure we are contributing to the wider community, so Castor Park will have two play parks to help keep children entertained.

We are committed to delivering as energy efficient homes as possible, and the new homes will be and have solar panels, electric vehicle charging, and air source heat pumps to keep bills affordable for our new residents and to future-proof the homes.

Our contractor, Penenden Heath Developments, has started construction of the new homes and many of the new roads are now in place. We expect the first homes to be complete in spring 2025, ready for new residents to move into.





Celebrating ten years of Montgomery Court

This March, partners, staff and residents came together at Montgomery Court in Rochester to celebrate ten years of the scheme.

Montgomery Court is one of our extra care schemes which means residents live independently whilst benefiting from having a care team on site 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Residents also have access to communal facilities such as a restaurant, activities room and hairdresser.

Residents and guests were able to celebrate over an afternoon tea while reminiscing over a slide show of memories.

It was great to hear how much residents enjoy living at Montgomery Court, Maisie who has been at the scheme since it opened in 2014, said: *"It's a lovely place, I came into it when it was brand new, and it was like a five-star hotel. My flat is nice and comfortable, and it is lovely and warm!"*

The event was a success and a reminder of the great work our schemes do to provide comfortable and safe living for residents.



To see our video of the celebration, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fOn6mVJqdc> or scan the QR code.



Mental Health Awareness Week marks three years of wellbeing walks at Beeches!

Our Beeches residents and staff came together on 17 May 2024 for their third-annual wellbeing walk.

Back in 2022, during Mental Health Awareness Week, the team at Beeches, Dover, held community walks throughout the week. They hosted different walks to cater to different abilities, enabling residents to get out, have a chat, and enjoy the fresh air.

The monthly walks were a great success, so led to the team continuing to organise walks for all abilities over the last two years, with an increase in participants including volunteers from family, friends and the local community.

Ange Moody, Emerald Extra Care Scheme Assistant, Beeches said: "When we started the wellbeing walks, we had two options, a smaller walk for less active residents and a longer walk to the Pavilion for more active residents. Now we sometimes have 15 residents at once! In all fairness, it's been great for my mental health as well as the residents!"

We have a gentleman whose health deteriorated being at home. Once he came to Beeches, his mental and physical health has improved – he's used his electric wheelchair to join the walks during Mental Health Awareness Week. He had a lovely, long chat with me and continues to attend now. Our walks are a great way to find out about the background of our residents, I found I learned more about them doing the walks."

Kevin, resident at Beeches said: "I look forward to these walks, it's nice to talk to people and nice to get some fresh air. We're very lucky to have this activity available and to get outside."

I feel better in my mind instead of sitting staring at the four walls in my flat. It helps me with my mental health and it's great we all get together for tea, cake, and a natter after."

Last year, Sarah Ambwar, Extra Care Manager at Beeches, organised a partnership with the Kent Wildlife Trust, where residents learnt about how being active and getting into nature can help with managing mental health.

This year, to mark the third-annual walk during Mental Health Awareness Week, the team at Beeches organised a walk followed by an afternoon tea and quiz, so residents who don't want to join the walk can still participate in the Mental Health Awareness Week activity, benefiting from the social aspect of getting together to help improve mental health and wellbeing.

Ange added: "Residents at Beeches enjoy a quiz, so it will be a fun and inclusive activity for all!"



Keeping you and your communities safe

Did you know we have an Anti-Social Behaviour App?

Our priority is to keep you and your communities safe. We have seen a rise in the number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases, and we take reports seriously. We always need good evidence to resolve issues, which is why the app is so useful. The ASB App is downloadable to your smart device and enables you to collect and submit noise recordings, diary sheets, videos, and photographs for us to review.

Last year we saw residents upload over 3,300 pieces of evidence to the ASB App. This is directly sent to the case officer with noise recordings and diary entries being the most popular.

The app helps us take swifter action when someone is engaged in anti-social behaviour. For more information about the please visit our website - www.westkent.org/help-for-residents/anti-social-behaviour-and-crime/the-asb-app



Check your heating ahead of the colder months

Although we have had some lovely weather this summer, it is best to start thinking ahead for the colder months. It's important to make sure your heating system is in good working order. We advise our residents to switch on their heating now for a quick test, and some routine maintenance. This helps to get your home ready for the colder months.

Please follow these steps to check your boiler:

First, turn your heating on. If it doesn't work, try these troubleshooting tips:

- Check the power supply for the boiler is turned on; it's surprising how easily they get accidentally switched off
- Check you have enough credit on your gas meter and that the meter is on. If there are any problems with it, you'll need to call your supplier
- Check the thermostat is set to a temperature higher than the temperature in the room
- Check the programmer is demanding heating and hot water. This is usually shown by red lights beside pictures of a radiator or tap
- Have the clocks changed? Your programmer time settings may need adjusting.

To help you with routine maintenance and troubleshooting, we have created several how-to-videos that guide you through tasks such as bleeding radiators and using a boiler. You can watch these videos on our YouTube channel

- www.youtube.com/@1WestKent

If you have gone through all these steps and are still experiencing problems, just call our customer services team on 01732 749400 or email help@wkha.org.uk





West Kent Works

Looking for work, want to start your own business, or want to change your job? We can support you to improve your skills and employment prospects.

Our employment and training team can help you discover what you want to do, set goals and support you to achieve them. The team can offer face to face appointments at Swanley, Edenbridge and Sevenoaks, online, or by phone. Since April this year the team have worked with over 125 residents, supporting 37 into training, 27 into employment and 7 into work placements.

We also work in partnership with other organisations to help you get back to work or into better paid work.

At West Kent we are passionate about providing career development and training opportunities through our employment and training team. We recently hosted a construction careers insight event in Swanley, drawing in almost 50 people, including job seekers and students from Orchards Academy, to speak with several employers.

The event that took place in late July highlighted the diverse career paths available within the construction industry and provided attendees guidance on applying for apprenticeships and jobs.

Employers who kindly attended were, West Kent suppliers: AD Group, Brenwards, Cablesheer, Nurture, and Wealdens. They were joined by BAM Construction, Baily Garner, and staff from the local job centre.

We can help you with:

- Employment support
- Training opportunities and work placements
- Self-employment and business start-ups.

For information and support, please get in touch with our friendly team.
 Visit www.westkent.org/westkentworks
 Email westkentworks@wkha.org.uk
 or call **01732 749420**

Spotting false disrepair companies



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

We know there are several companies targeting residents across the country with false repair claim information. Many of these agencies are trying to scam you, will not follow the correct processes and could leave you out of pocket.

What do I need to do?

The best thing you can do if you need to report a repair, is contact us. We'll ensure we complete any maintenance and repairs as quickly as we can. To find out the full list of repairs we carry out along with our service standards, please visit our website, www.westkent.org/repairs.

There are several ways you can report repairs to us:

- Visit our website, www.westkent.org.uk
- Email help@wkha.org.uk
- Visit our tenant portal, My West Kent, www.westkent.org/mywestkent
- Call us on **01732 749400**



When you report a repair to us, please provide as much detail as you can to help us identify the issue. If anyone in your household has any illnesses or vulnerabilities, let us know so we prioritise the repairs where they are needed the most.

Please ensure that we have up to date contact information, so we can contact you about the progress of your repair.

What if I don't feel my repair is being addressed?

We want to make sure you receive the right support at the right time, so please don't hesitate to contact us, even if the issue has already been reported.

If you feel that something that you are reporting has not been addressed appropriately you can:

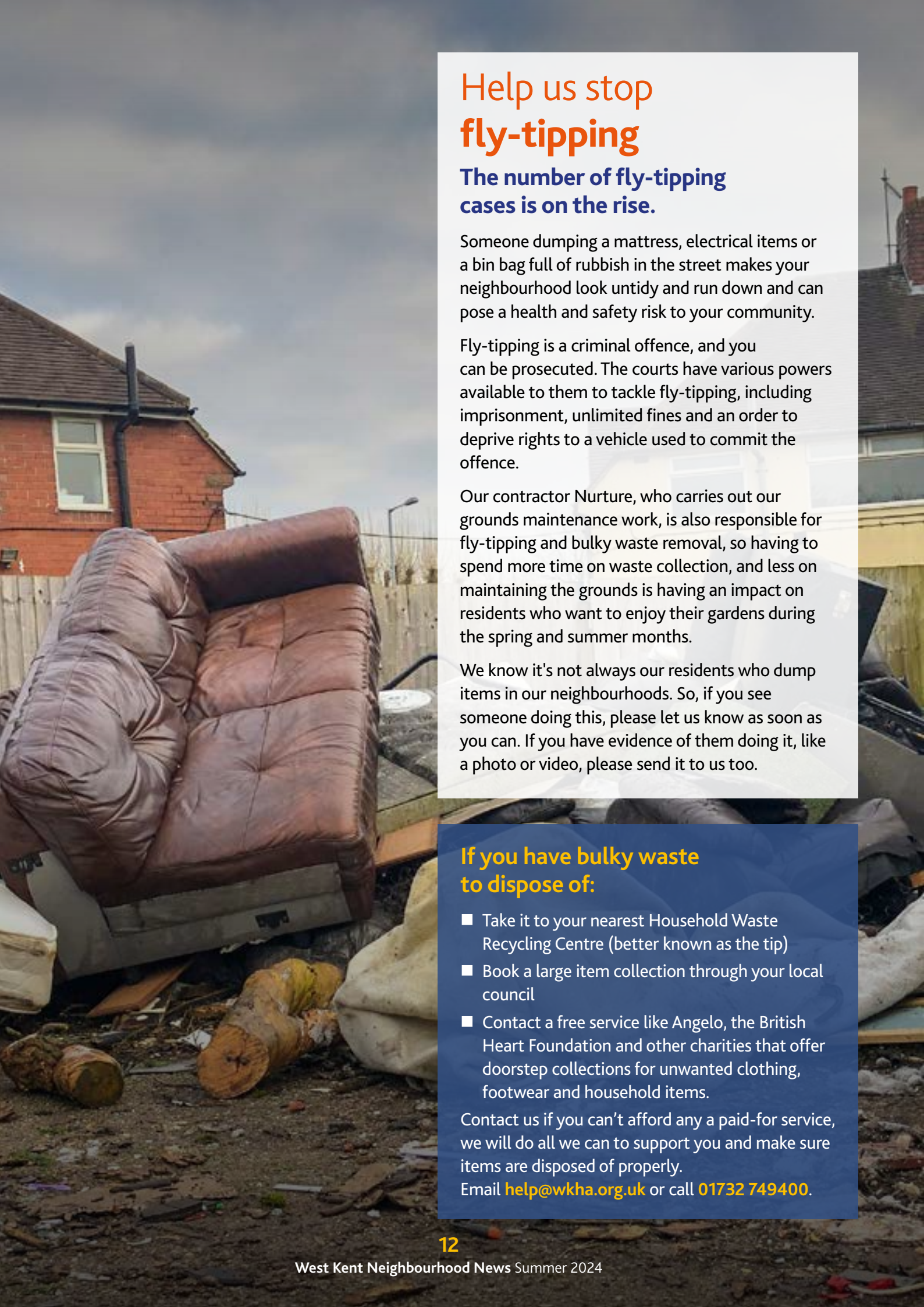
- Contact our customer services team
- Speak to your scheme manager
- Submit a complaint.

We will investigate all complaints where you have told us the service was not acceptable and take action to resolve the matter.

We like to get our residents involved and welcome your feedback. We regularly monitor and report on our performance to ensure we deliver on our plans. The figures we report on are combined with our quarterly Tenant Satisfaction Measure (TSM) surveys to show us areas we're doing well and areas that may need more attention.

To read more about what we're doing with your feedback, check out our 'what we've done with your feedback' page on our website www.westkent.org/about-usour-performance-plans-and-values/how-were-performing





Help us stop fly-tipping

The number of fly-tipping cases is on the rise.

Someone dumping a mattress, electrical items or a bin bag full of rubbish in the street makes your neighbourhood look untidy and run down and can pose a health and safety risk to your community.

Fly-tipping is a criminal offence, and you can be prosecuted. The courts have various powers available to them to tackle fly-tipping, including imprisonment, unlimited fines and an order to deprive rights to a vehicle used to commit the offence.

Our contractor Nurture, who carries out our grounds maintenance work, is also responsible for fly-tipping and bulky waste removal, so having to spend more time on waste collection, and less on maintaining the grounds is having an impact on residents who want to enjoy their gardens during the spring and summer months.

We know it's not always our residents who dump items in our neighbourhoods. So, if you see someone doing this, please let us know as soon as you can. If you have evidence of them doing it, like a photo or video, please send it to us too.

If you have bulky waste to dispose of:

- Take it to your nearest Household Waste Recycling Centre (better known as the tip)
- Book a large item collection through your local council
- Contact a free service like Angelo, the British Heart Foundation and other charities that offer doorstep collections for unwanted clothing, footwear and household items.

Contact us if you can't afford any a paid-for service, we will do all we can to support you and make sure items are disposed of properly.

Email help@wkha.org.uk or call **01732 749400**.