

Read our  
magazine  
on the go!

**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.

# Neighbourhood **news**



35 years of West Kent -  
Rebecca's story

Page 6

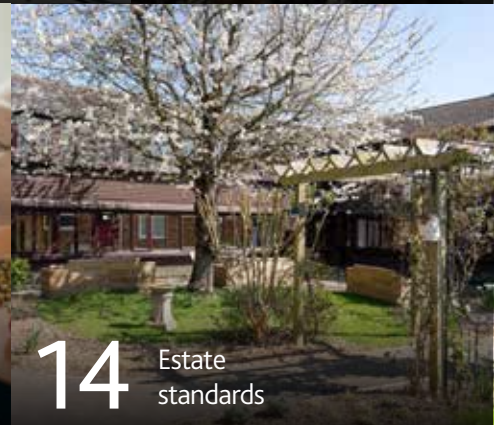
Festive  
recipes

Page 8

How we can help with  
your energy bills

Page 13

# Contents



## In this issue...

- 4** Transgender Awareness Week
- 5** We're here to help
- 6** 35 years of West Kent
- 8** Christmas dinner leftovers
- 11** Get ready for spring
- 12** Keep damp and mould at bay
- 14** Estate standards
- 15** Cardboard box-ing day
- 16** Meet your Neighbourhood Housing Officer

## 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](#)
-  [westkenthousingassociation](#)
-  [@1WestKent](#)



# Welcome

## to our winter edition of Neighbourhood News!

**A**s a West Kent resident and member of the communications co-production group, I am delighted to introduce the winter edition of Neighbourhood News, packed with inspiring stories and practical tips to help wrap up 2024.

This issue showcases how West Kent is dedicated to supporting residents. Inside, you'll find the heartwarming story of Rebecca, who found her perfect family home through shared ownership, and learn about how West Kent's fuel efficiency advisor

has helped residents stay warm and manage their energy bills as temperatures outside drop.

If you're looking for some festive inspiration, then turn to page 8 for lots of creative recipes to help you make the most of your Christmas

Get involved



dinner leftovers and reduce waste. Plus, discover fun ways to turn that pile of Boxing Day cardboard into eco-friendly activities with the kids on page 15.

As well as the above, this edition also highlights West Kent's continued commitment to making a difference. From raising awareness during Transgender Awareness Week, to taking part in the global campaign 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence, it is clear that West Kent strives to ensure that every resident has a right to feel safe where they live.

So, whether you're relaxing with a cup of hot chocolate or about to embark on some last-minute Christmas shopping, we hope this edition of Neighbourhood News brings some festive cheer and inspiration to your day.

Best wishes,

*Louise and the editorial panel*

## 16 days of action



This November and December, we took part in 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence, a global campaign that runs from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and White Ribbon Day) to 10 December (Human Rights Day).

The 16 Days of Action is a reminder of the ongoing struggle against gender-based violence, and it encourages individuals and organisations to take a stand and advocate for change. In October, a group of seven residents and representatives from local domestic abuse service, DAVSS, joined us for a focus group to review of our domestic abuse policy. They provided valuable feedback and suggestions on what should be included in our policy update.

On 14 November, a small group of staff visited a local refuge for male victims that opened in December

2023. This is the first of its kind in the west of Kent and one of only 108 in the whole of the UK that offer safe accommodation dedicated to male victims.

We also took part in a series of webinars run by Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership, to learn more about the different types of domestic abuse, such as coercive and controlling behaviour, victim blaming, and economic abuse.

If domestic abuse is affecting you, or you think it may be affecting someone in your community, we can help. We will deal with all reports sensitively and safely and can offer support and referrals to specialist organisations.

Call **01732 749400** Email [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)

Message us on Facebook [@WestKentHA](https://www.facebook.com/WestKentHA)

Visit [www.westkent.org/DA](http://www.westkent.org/DA)

# Transgender Awareness Week

This November we celebrated Transgender Awareness Week. Resident and communications co-production group member, Lio, held a 'lunch and learn' session with 25 staff members on transgender awareness.

He approached us earlier in the year, keen to share knowledge and guidance on a topic so close to him. He shared some upsetting statistics on the rate of homelessness and discrimination people in the trans community face, which is sadly on the rise. His presentation was informative, honest, and enjoyed by everyone who attended.

Loral Haywood, our Resident Involvement Officer, who supported the running of the session said: "This is a great example of how we can really learn from our residents and their experiences. This is a topic

people aren't always familiar with and don't want to get things wrong. It's key we use awareness days throughout the year to really learn and take something away to make positive changes."

We want to learn and make sure we're offering services which are inclusive and welcoming to all members of the community, working against hate.

We're all sending a huge thank you to Lio for his time, and for being so open with our colleagues to help us support those in the trans community better in the future.

**Interested in getting more involved?** Join our communications co-production group! Scan the QR code on page 3 or email [residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk](mailto:residentinvolvement@wkha.org.uk)





# We're here to help!

**O**ur customer services advisors are the first people you speak to when you get in touch. They're a friendly, skilled team that always aims to help you get the right answer, first time.

This year, they've:

- Answered 51,437 calls
- Replied to 15,112 emails
- Responded to 2,716 other contacts (by social media or letter for example)

## What can I speak to them about?

Almost anything! They can help with a range of enquiries, from logging repairs and finding you an appointment, help with rent payments, and get you through to the right teams if you're worried about the cost of living. They can also help with lots of tenancy-related questions and anti-social behaviour cases, you don't need to go through to your neighbourhood housing officer for this.

## What can I do?

Be prepared to answer some questions; the team will do some security checks to find out who you are and where you live. They'll also ask lots of questions to find out about your enquiry and make sure they can give you the best help possible, as quickly as they can.

Remember, our customer service advisors are people too. Please be polite and patient, they're here to help you.

## How do I get in touch?

If you can use one of our digital contact methods, please do! It'll keep waiting times down for those who really need to speak to us on the phone.

Email [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)

Call **01732 74942** or **0800 169 1122** (Freephone)

Message us on Facebook [@WestKentHA](https://www.facebook.com/WestKentHA)

Use our customer portal, My West Kent - find out more by visiting [www.westkent.org/mywestkent](http://www.westkent.org/mywestkent)



I'm extremely happy, extremely proud to look around this perfect home for me and my children.



# 35 years of West Kent Rebecca's story

**35**<sup>TH</sup>  
YEAR  
ANNIVERSARY

**A**s part of our 35 years of West Kent campaign we're highlighting different stories from our colleagues, residents, and communities, which make West Kent special.

"My name is Rebecca Wiggins and I've been a resident of West Kent now for two weeks.

I was going for a divorce. I lived locally in Swanley Village and contacted West Kent to see if there were any shared ownership properties in the area because I wanted to stay local as I would be sharing my children with my ex-husband.

I got sent details for Highland's Grove, which was perfect. Seemed a bit too good to be true. It was literally 30 seconds down the road from where I lived.

So that journey has gone on, watching this house be built, driving past it daily and here we are now.

I thought after separating from my husband, I thought I would just be on the rental market, paying somebody else's mortgage. That I would have no investment, no sort of inheritance for my children.

That was until I looked into shared ownership and thought, well actually this is a way of getting on the property ladder so that I can then purchase more and have inheritance and actually have something to pass on to my children.

Now, what I love most about this house is the kitchen. I love the fact that all the appliances, are integrated and it's just the most amazing, amazing kitchen. My daughters absolutely love the light in the bathroom on the mirror, that's their favourite feature of the house.

I would always recommend shared ownership now because that will give you that flexibility to purchase more when you are able to. And I would



**I would always recommend shared ownership now because that will give you that flexibility to purchase more when you are able to. I would recommend West Kent if you are looking into shared ownership because they're so supportive.**



recommend West Kent if you are looking into shared ownership because they're so supportive. They're always there. I've spent a year, so emails, phone calls, any, there was no question that was too silly. I just felt very supported the whole journey, from knowing nothing about it to begin with, to now owning my own home.

I'm extremely happy, extremely proud to look around this perfect home for me and my children, knowing that I'm now a homeowner. And that's all due to West Kent."

To read more stories from our residents visit [www.westkent.org/35years](http://www.westkent.org/35years)

You can also find out more about shared ownership and owning your home by visiting [www.westkent.org/sharedownership](http://www.westkent.org/sharedownership)

# Christmas dinner leftovers - don't let them go to waste!

Easy and cheap recipes to avoid wasting your Christmas day dinner leftovers. Public health advice is to keep leftovers in the fridge and freeze them if they aren't eaten after two days.

## Ultimate festive sandwich toastie

What better way to use up the odds and ends from your Christmas dinner than the ultimate festive sandwich?

### Ingredients

- 400g white, round, crusty loaf
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 3-4 tablespoons cranberry sauce
- 3-4 tablespoons crispy onions
- 250g leftover roast turkey
- 6 leftover cooked pigs in blankets, halved lengthways
- 150g leftover cooked stuffing

### Method

1. Slice a 3cm thick lid off the top of the loaf. Scoop out the majority of the bread from both the loaf and lid, leaving a 1cm thick layer.
2. Spoon the cranberry sauce and some crispy onions into the lid.
3. Layer the turkey, pigs in blankets, stuffing in the base of the loaf. Place the stuffed lid on the loaf, pressing down gently.
4. Wrap tightly and chill for at least 3 hours, slice into individual portions and serve.





## Christmas toad in the hole

What do you get when you cross pigs in blankets with toad in the hole? An ideal dinner for the festive season!

### Ingredients

- 175g plain flour, sifted
- 4 large free-range eggs
- 300ml full fat milk
- 12 pigs in blankets
- 4 tbsp sunflower or vegetable oil
- 2 onions, peeled and cut into wedges
- 200g sage and onion stuffing, rolled into 8 balls
- 200g Brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 2 small-medium leeks, trimmed and cut into 1–2cm thick slices
- 500ml gravy
- Cranberry sauce

### Method

1. Preheat the oven to 220C/200C Fan/Gas 7.
2. First make the Yorkshire pudding batter. Sift the flour into a large bowl and make a well in the middle. Beat the eggs and milk together, pour into the bowl and mix with until smooth. Season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
3. Heat 2 tablespoons of sunflower oil in a large roasting tin, add the pigs in blankets, onion wedges and stuffing balls and cook for 20 minutes until starting to turn golden brown.
4. When the sausages have cooked for 20 minutes, add the sprouts and leeks to the roasting tin along with the remaining 2 tbsp oil. Return to the oven for 5 minutes until the vegetables are starting to soften.
5. Remove the roasting tin from the oven and pour the Yorkshire pudding batter around the sausages, stuffing and vegetables. Return to the oven for a further 20–25 minutes until the batter is puffed and golden brown.
6. Serve with gravy and cranberry sauce on the side.

# Turkey pasta bake

Looking for an easy leftover turkey recipe? This creamy cheesy pasta bake could be the one.

## Ingredients

- 300g dried pasta shapes, such as penne or fusilli
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil, plus extra for greasing
- 4 rashers smoked streaky bacon
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 500g pasta sauce (homemade or from a jar)
- 150ml double cream
- 350g–500g leftover turkey, cut into small chunks
- 75g grated mature cheddar

## Method

1. Half fill a large saucepan with water and bring to the boil. Add the pasta, a pinch of salt and cook for 10 minutes, or until just tender.
2. Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan/Gas 6. Lightly oil a large, shallow, roughly 2.5 litre lasagne dish, or similar pie dish.
3. Heat the oil in a large frying pan and fry the bacon and onion for 8 minutes, or until lightly browned. Stir in the pasta sauce and cream. Add around 100ml of the pasta cooking water and bring to a simmer. Stir in the turkey pieces and season with ground black pepper.
4. Drain the pasta in a colander, then return it to the saucepan. Stir in the pasta sauce and leftover turkey meat.
5. Transfer to the greased dish and sprinkle with the cheese. Bake for 15–20 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and beginning to brown. Serve hot.



# Get ready for spring!

The new year is the perfect time to freshen up after all the busyness and fun of the festive season.

Johnstone's Decorating Centre offers a 20% discount to all our residents. Just cut out the voucher on this page and take it along to your nearest decorating centre, in:

- Ashford
- Tunbridge Wells
- Sittingbourne
- Orpington
- Maidstone

Visit [www.johnstonestrade.com/](http://www.johnstonestrade.com/) for more info.

**JOHNSTONE'S**
DECORATING CENTRE






**20% OFF\***  
FOR WEST KENT HOUSING ASSOCIATION RESIDENTS  
\*to receive your 20% discount, simply print this voucher and take to your local Johnstone's Decorating Centre

- ✓ Trade quality paints for a superior finish.
- ✓ Choose from over 16,000 paint colours or bring a colour sample for us to match in-store.
- ✓ Create a feature wall using styles, patterns and textures from a wide range of wallpaper collections.
- ✓ Decorating brushes, tools and accessories to get a professional look.



Places to live. Space to grow.

## Are you covered this Christmas?

It's a good idea to make sure you're covered in case of a fire, vandalism, flood or break-in.

Contents insurance is designed to help protect your possessions. No matter how careful you are, there's always a risk that your belongings could be broken, damaged or stolen, so home contents insurance can help provide peace of mind should the worst happen.

This festive season is the perfect time to make sure you have cover in place. At Christmas, burglaries are 20% more likely to happen, and you're 50% more likely to have a house fire; due to Christmas trees, lights, cards and candles often being used around your home.

My Home Contents Insurance is a specialist insurance scheme and all tenants living in social and affordable housing are eligible to apply.

My Home Contents Insurance can offer you insurance for the contents of your home, including cover for items such as furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments.

Cover starts from just £2.18 per month (or £25 a year), so make sure you set aside some money for insurance. It's much cheaper than

having to replace these items at your own cost!

For more information:

Call **0345 450 7288**

Email [myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk](mailto:myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk)

Visit [thistlemyhome.co.uk](http://thistlemyhome.co.uk) or [www.westkent.org/homeinsurance](http://www.westkent.org/homeinsurance)



**My Home**  
Contents Insurance

# Keep damp and mould at bay this winter

**W**inter is well and truly here. While the festive season brings lots of cosiness and warmth, it also leaves our homes at a greater risk of damp and mould.

Here are some top tips to keep your home free from damp and mould this winter:

## Open your windows

Open your windows each morning for ten minutes, to ventilate your home. If your windows have air vents, make sure to keep these open too. You can always use curtains to minimise any breezes!

## Use extractor fans

Extractor fans pull the moisture from the air, meaning it doesn't settle onto your walls and other surfaces, causing damp and mould. If you don't have an extractor fan in your kitchen or bathroom, please get in touch.

## Use lids on pans

Using pan lids will reduce the amount of moisture going into your home and cook your food quicker, win-win!

## Dry clothes outside

Believe it or not, your clothes will still dry outside in the colder weather. It might just take a bit longer. If you don't have an outside space, use drying racks in your bathroom instead, making sure you open windows to increase ventilation.



## Heat your home lower, for longer

Keeping your heating on at a lower temperature for longer periods (rather than higher for a short time) helps to keep damp and mould away. If you're struggling to pay your energy bills, please get in touch. You can find out more about how we can help you with the cost of living on page 13.

You can find more tips and advice on our website [www.westkent.org/dampandmould](http://www.westkent.org/dampandmould)

Remember, if you have damp and mould in your home, please contact us.

Email [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)  
or call 01732 749400

# How we're supporting residents through the cost of living crisis - Ben's\* story

**As a Fuel Efficiency Advisor, when I first met Ben, it was clear he was going through a tough time.**

Struggling to afford both food and fuel, his life was overshadowed by worry. His bills were based on old estimates from before he moved into his home, leaving him overcharged and confused about managing energy costs. Feeling isolated, Ben confided in me that he rarely went out or met any of his old friends.

I set to work by focusing on making sure Ben's immediate needs were met. I secured him a £150 voucher for Asda food shopping, ensuring he had enough to eat, and helped him obtain a £100 fuel voucher through the Kent County Council Household Support Fund. These steps gave Ben some breathing space while I worked on addressing his bigger challenges.

I was determined to reduce Ben's stress, so I collaborated with our teams to track down the accurate gas and electricity readings from the day Ben moved in. This resulted in a £350 refund from his energy supplier, accurate bills moving forward, and a £500 credit to carry him through the winter. I then reached out to his water supplier and successfully enrolled Ben in a social tariff, cutting his water bill from £60 to just £29 a month.

Despite these improvements, Ben was still nervous about rising energy prices. I patiently talked him through his options, and together we decided on a one-year fixed energy plan. This gave Ben peace of mind and the ability to budget without fear of any increases. I also spent time helping Ben understand how much each of his appliances cost to run, sharing tips for more efficient and cost-effective energy use.

It's great to say that today, Ben is thriving. With the plan set in motion, he is out of energy debt, his finances are under control, and he feels more confident about the future. The relief of being out of debt has had a positive effect on his life. Ben now goes out regularly, meets new people, and has even joined a local singing club.



If you're struggling with your bills, we can help.

Get in touch by emailing [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk) or calling **01732 749400**

\*Names have been changed

**HELP**  
for you

Help with  
the cost  
of living



We know things are more difficult for many of our residents due to the cost of living. If you're worried about your rent, bills, energy costs or damp and mould in your home, please contact us. We don't just provide a signposting service. We have teams dedicated to providing help, advice and financial support if you need it.

Visit [www.westkent.org/helpforyou](http://www.westkent.org/helpforyou)  
Call **01732 749400**  
Email [help@wkha.org.uk](mailto:help@wkha.org.uk)

# Giving back to our communities

How our contractors have made a difference to residents lives and communities this year through social value

**Social value is an improvement to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of our residents. Simply put, it's how we ask our contractors and suppliers to give something back to improve the lives of our residents.**

Here are some examples of what our contractors and suppliers have delivered since April 2024:

**Brenwards, our building and electrical contractor,** has donated £30,000 to the West Kent Community Chest, funding 37 projects benefiting residents. Projects supported include ten social events at schemes for older people, a residential trip for the Young Adventurers project, a summer fun day at St Mary's in Swanley, running costs for Saxon Place Community Association in Horton Kirby, a community Christmas tree project in Walmer, and new games equipment at Repton Court in Ashford.

**AD Construction Group, our cavity wall and loft insulation and replacement windows and doors contractor,** gave a £1,000 grant to Swanley Community Hub, which provides food to people in need

in Swanley. They also repainted the activity rooms at the Eden Centre, used by our HOUSE youth project.

**Wealdens, our cleaning contractor,** has donated £7,500 towards environmental activities. These include a litter pick event in Edenbridge, removal of garden waste at five properties, and the refurbishment of two benches at White Oak Court in Swanley.

**Beevers and Stuthers, our auditors,** provided a paid summer work placement to a resident.

**Resource, our Neighbourhood News supplier,** provided the design for our new communities' van, which was donated to us by Brenwards. The van will help our teams get out and about and hold more events in your neighbourhoods.

If you'd like to apply for a grant from the Community Chest to help fund your community project or group, visit [www.westkent.org/communitychest](http://www.westkent.org/communitychest) or call **01732 749420**

## Estate standards an update on your feedback

Earlier this year, we spoke to over 600 residents, asking what their priorities are and how we can better manage our estates and communities.

As a result of this, we're producing a set of 'standards', which make it clear what you can expect from us when looking after your community spaces.

One big theme was grounds maintenance. We know things haven't gone as well as they should have, and some of our residents haven't had the level of service they rightly expect. We're sorry for this and are working hard with our contractor to make sure this does not happen again next year. Changes have already been made and we're confident these will ensure the grounds

maintenance work is done on time, and to a high standard in future.

We've also made it a big part of our new standards, so you can hold us to account when the service isn't going well. Keep an eye out on our website and in our next magazine, where we'll go into more detail on our new standards and how you can help us to monitor them.

Visit [www.westkent.org/estatestandards](http://www.westkent.org/estatestandards) for more information.



# Cardboard box-ing day

**W**e know that come Christmas Day, some of our children end up playing more with the boxes than the toys themselves!

Here's a few ways you can make use of your cardboard boxes and wrapping paper come Boxing Day!

## 1. Cardboard Christmas decorations

Transform your cardboard boxes into Christmas tree decorations to use next year. It's a great way to reuse the cardboard, wrapping paper and get creative with your little ones!

## 2. Post box

Gather a selection of household items and name them as you 'post' them through your DIY post box. It's a fun way of introducing new words to toddlers.

## 3. Scrap people

Make characters out of your leftover boxes and wrapping paper tubes – work together but let your

child take the lead and ask them lots of questions about what they're doing.

## 4. Letting rip

The sensory experience of ripping paper is great for your child's development: make the most of opening gifts together and describe all the sounds you hear.

## 5. Shape puzzles

Cut out pairs of shapes from cardboard, mix them up and challenge your child to find the matching shape. If your child is younger, they could match up colours and if they're a bit older, try more complicated shapes.

## 6. Throwing game

Place different sized boxes on the floor as your targets and use waste wrapping paper as balls. The whole family can get involved and it's a great way to boost your child's concentration and focus skills.

**Remember, always recycle your paper and cardboard boxes where you can. Wrapping paper cannot be recycled if it contains glitter, foil or plastic.**



# Meet your Neighbourhood Housing Officer

**Our neighbourhood housing officers (NHOs) look after 8,000 homes across Kent!**

NHOs are here to settle you into your new home, complete visits throughout your tenancy to make sure your home is safe and well looked after.

While you can always contact them in the usual ways; by phone, email or by requesting a home visit, we're also planning a series of drop-in sessions in our communities, so you

can speak to them about anything you'd like, at a time and place most convenient to you.

They'll be advertised on our website early next year, so keep an eye on our events page. Visit [www.westkent.org/events](http://www.westkent.org/events). We'll also put a full list in the next edition of Neighbourhood News.

Remember, please contact customer services in the first instance, as they likely will be able to help straight away. Find out how to contact them on page 5.

