

# HOME FRONT



RACE is working with parish councils and others in the housing sector to deliver rural housing schemes such as these at Smarden, which were delivered in partnership with English Rural housing association.

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## RACE is on to provide affordable rented homes in rural areas

**For people struggling to find affordable rented housing in their local rural community or older residents needing to move from their current home there is hope that help could be on the way.**

The Rural and Community Housing Enabling service (RACE) has been set up by the Kent Housing Group and is being hosted by Ashford Borough Council and supported by contributions from councils and housing associations working across the county. RACE provides a service which was previously undertaken by Action with Communities Rural Kent.

RACE is an independent service, providing expertise and working directly with communities to deliver housing that matches what local people need. RACE works with parish councils, housing teams at district and borough

councils, housing associations and local developers to identify rural communities where action needs to be taken to meet the housing needs of local people.

Central to its work are housing needs surveys which it carries out aimed at the residents of individual villages and rural communities to find out whether there is a need for affordable housing locally.

There might be a need for affordable rented accommodation because people may be living in unaffordable private rented housing or in temporary accommodation. **Continued on page 2**



## NEWS & EVENTS

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Or a young person is unable to move from the family home due to a lack of suitable housing in the area. There may be a need for housing for essential workers who have had to move away to find cheaper housing elsewhere.

The surveys – which are sent to every home in a village or rural community – also seek to understand whether there are older people, including homeowners who need alternative housing, maybe because their current home is too large or unmanageable.

The postcard surveys are carried out by RACE staff Tessa O'Sullivan and Kirsty McHattie (pictured above) in partnership with the parish council. People are encouraged to complete an online survey, with alternative arrangements made to help those who are unable to access the internet.

Responses to surveys are analysed



and if a need for affordable rented housing is identified the RACE team will work with the parish council and the local borough or district authority to find a suitable site for a small development, usually of around eight to ten properties. Any plans would then be presented at a village consultation event so that all residents can give their views.

These type of affordable housing schemes are rented through a housing association or the local authority at lower than market rent or as shared ownership (part rent/part buy). The new homes are only for people with a housing need who can demonstrate a strong connection to the village. There is

no right to buy the homes, which means they will forever remain affordable for the community.

RACE also supports community-led housing groups such as community land trusts (CLT), cohousing and co-operatives to achieve their aim. The RACE team are accredited community led housing advisors and have worked with Shepherdswell CLT who now have ten homes under construction and are the first CLT in Kent to achieve planning permission.

Brian Horton, Interim Chair of KHG, said: "We have a long standing commitment and success in supporting the delivery of affordable housing for the rural communities of Kent and Medway. This has been in partnership with a number of organisations, each of whom are passionate about protecting and invigorating our rural communities.

"RACE is all about bringing a rural community together, to understand what their housing needs are and to give them a voice when it comes to finding solutions that are going to work."

To find out more visit Rural and Community Housing Enabling Service (RACE) - Kent Housing Group and if you'd like more information about its work please email

[Tessa.O'Sullivan@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Tessa.O'Sullivan@ashford.gov.uk)



### Have your say on domestic abuse

The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group is preparing to consult on the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse strategy 2024-2029. It aims to 'reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse, and ensure that where domestic abuse takes place, all those affected get the right support, quickly'.

Your views are important in helping us ensure that we continue to develop our support services for people and families affected by abuse. The consultation runs from 24 July to 16 October 2023. Visit [www.kent.gov.uk/domesticabusestrategy](http://www.kent.gov.uk/domesticabusestrategy) to complete the questionnaire. The link will go live on the 24 July. Any questions contact [PSRPolicy@kent.gov.uk](mailto:PSRPolicy@kent.gov.uk)

### Home Front feedback

We recently asked you what you thought about the Spring 2023 edition of *Home Front*. Thanks to everyone who responded and the good news is that the newsletter gets the thumbs up. Most said it was an interesting read, others said it was useful and liked the varied content and the format. The number of pages and the frequency of publication also won approval. Comments included:

**"Really good to get this information in such a punchy bright way"**

**"Love the format – I find it easy to read and engaging – I can't think of any improvements"**

## NEWS & EVENTS



### "LET'S STAY FIRE SAFE"

**A fire safety campaign entitled "Let's Stay Fire Safe" is about to be launched in Kent and Medway.**

The Kent Housing Group has teamed up with a number of housing associations and local councils to deliver the potentially life-saving campaign. Although primarily aimed at residents living in social housing, the fire safety advice and tips are just as important to all householders.

The campaign is split into two parts, covering fire safety advice in the home and guidance on keeping communal areas safe in blocks of flats. Prior to the launch, we shared details of the campaign with Kent & Fire Rescue Service (KFRS) to ensure that our fire safety messages are in line with official guidance, which KFRS confirmed.

Brian Horton, Interim Chair of KHG, said: "Social housing landlords will be sharing details of this campaign with their tenants, to encourage them to take simple steps to keep themselves, their families and neighbours fire safe."

Participating landlords will be contacting their tenants with details of the "Let's Stay Fire Safe" campaign. It includes two animations (fully accessible with subtitle options), and a toolkit for landlords including images, social media assets and posts, QR codes, posters for communal areas and a dedicated KHG webpage.

At the heart of the campaign are the following key messages:

- Have a working smoke detector, and test it regularly,
- Make sure you do not overload your electrical sockets,

- Read the fire safety advice for any portable heaters you use,
- Don't lot leave lit candles or cigarettes unattended in your home,
- Shut fire doors in communal areas and report any damage to them to your landlord straight away,
- Keep communal areas like corridors, entrance halls and stairwells clear from clutter,
- Don't charge personal items in communal areas or store them in communal cupboards,
- Don't light open fires or BBQs in your home, balcony or communal gardens (without gaining permission of the landlord),
- Make sure you and your family know what the fire escape plan is for your building.

Brian Horton added: "A fire can happen at any time but there are some simple things we can all do to stay fire safe, in our homes and communal areas. By social housing landlords coming together like this and speaking with one voice, we hope that our "Let's Stay Fire Safe" messages are heard loud and clear."

KHG is encouraging tenants to speak with their landlord if they have any concerns about fire safety, either in the home or within the block. This could be reporting damage to fire doors, concern about clutter building up in communal areas the safety of electrical sockets and more. Visit [www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/fire-safe](http://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/fire-safe)

### Countdown to the awards...

The deadline for entries has closed, the judging in the 12 categories has been completed, the trophies and certificates are being produced and the venue is booked – yes the final countdown to the Excellence Awards 2023 is underway.

Our annual awards – the Oscars for our regional housing sector – celebrate the best projects, professionals and partnerships across housing in the county.

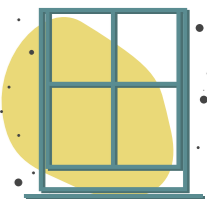
The winners will be announced at an awards ceremony at Eastgate on 26 September. KHG is grateful for sponsorship from the Kent Housing and Development Group, Southern Housing, Paramount Independent Property Services and the South East Consortium (SEC).

Invitations to those shortlisted have been sent out. Watch out for more details of the event...



### Health & housing – the impact of damp and mould

An interactive session on 15 September, from 10am-12, on Microsoft Teams aims to provide valuable insights into damp and mould-related issues in the housing sector and discuss the next steps in addressing these concerns. Speakers will include representatives from the Housing Ombudsman Service and Kent Public Health. If you want to attend, email [sharon.irvine@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:sharon.irvine@ashford.gov.uk)





## NEWS & EVENTS



Pictured L-R at the event are (standing) John Stokes and Perry Inglis, both Kent Savers; Sharon Williams, Ashford Borough Council; Kathy Cox, Kent Savers; Rebecca Wilcox, Medway Council; Dan Ford, Ashford Borough Council; and Jo Brown, Medway Council.

### Taking on the loan sharks

Kent Housing Group teamed up with Kent Savers Credit Union ([www.kentsavers.co.uk](http://www.kentsavers.co.uk)) to explore ways to build resilience in the housing sector among customers who are facing severe and ongoing cost of living challenges.

Around 40 housing officers attended an event in Ashford on 11 July to hear Kathy Cox, Deputy Chair of Kent Savers, introduce the work of the credit union and outline how Kent Savers is helping with the current cost of living challenges.

Topics under the microscope included helping customers to maximise their income, reducing outgoings, helping to budget, and the prevention of homelessness. The audience was heavily engaged in brainstorming ideas on these topics and these have been captured and will be shared by KHG after the event.

Case studies showing good practice were presented by Medway Council's Jo Brown (on tenancy sustainment) and Ashford's Dan Ford (debt relief order process).

Urging the audience to help Kent Savers reach more people in financial need, Kathy Cox said: "We have 5,000 members but 1.8m people live in the county. We have more than £1.7m in assets and we want to make it available as affordability-tested loans to ensure that families do not fall victim to loan sharks, who are having a field day during this cost of living crisis.

"Unregulated money lenders are preying on the vulnerable and it must stop. I would urge people who need financial help to talk to us. We will help if we can and if we can't then we can refer them to other sources of support."

Sharon Williams representing KHG said the Group has provided a 0% loan to Kent Savers to assist in increasing their lending capacity.

Sharon praised the work of Kent Savers and said that Kent Housing Group and its members looked forward to working more closely with the credit union to raise the profile of its range of savings and loans products.

### Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats

Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) presented an online session into fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats on 27 June.

Louise Burford, KFRS Competence and Customer Liaison Manager, Building Safety – Fire Risk and Inspection Team, gave an overview of the relevant guidance. Louise answered questions on fire safety of letter boxes, evacuation of sheltered accommodation, person centred fire risk assessments and managing the safety of communal spaces. The event demonstrated KHG members sharing information, as some offered to continue their discussions outside of the session. One of the attendees commented on how the session had refreshed their knowledge, and others appreciated the new information.

### TB in Kent

Responding to a request from Dr Claire Winslade of UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), we arranged for her team to speak to frontline housing staff about TB (Tuberculosis). TB team members presented to the Housing Health and Social Care group, the Kent Housing Options Group and most recently the Private Sector Housing Group.

TB is a bacterial infection that can affect any part of the body and can be treated with antibiotics. It can be transmitted to others when a person with infectious TB coughs or sneezes. Symptoms include a cough for three weeks, weight loss, night sweats, fever, tiredness and loss of appetite. Social risk factors include poor housing, low income, homelessness, overcrowding, substance misuse and being immunosuppressed. When a case is found the TB service will trace contacts and arrange testing and treatment. The UKHSA will be working with partners to seek pathways for homeless people with no recourse to public funds. Visit **Tuberculosis (TB) - NHS** ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))

## NEWS FROM THE SUB GROUPS

### Kent Homechoice Operational

Only housing register data has been taken across to the new Huume site. It had been planned that each council would receive a copy of their own historic data which is required for SARS requests and to comply with data retention policies. This has not been possible so a solution has been found using a Local Authority Trading Company to store data on our behalf and build a historic viewer. Attempts are underway to co-ordinate this across 13 councils so a contract can be put in place. A scoping meeting has been organised for IT, data protection, housing and information security staff to attend from each council.

### Events

As reported in this edition, the group organised a well-attended Fire Safety for Purpose Built Blocks on 27 June which attracted officers from across the private and public sectors with some thought-provoking questions. Planning is underway for a damp and mould event on 15 September, while please see our report on the Kent Savers event organised in Ashford on 11 July. Preparations for the Excellence Awards event is well underway.

The group has welcomed Hannah Rourke at Medway Way to the

team, together with Lauren Wilson and Toyah Bicker from Golding Homes – thanks to the Board for their encouragement around new members to boost the work of the Events group.

### Private Sector

The group had a presentation about retrofitting park homes to improve thermal insulation. It also discussed Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, the way the organisations respond and the challenges when balancing with the demand for services and staff vacancies. The group agreed that it is difficult to recruit and retain staff and the possibility of working together to train up staff in-house and in Kent.

### Asset Management

Josh Arthur at Gravesham presented on its successful SHDF wave one bid, including analysis of what went well and how they would do it differently. Darryl Mingay of ETS Health & Safety presented on the Fire safety (England) Regulations 2022, while Jan Taranczuk from the National Social Housing Fire Strategy Group for London and the South East spoke about topical fire safety issues. Emma Mahy from IoTSG presented on dampness, mould and Legionella prevention and detection.

### Housing Strategy & Enabling

A busy period for the group, including a presentation by Thanet Council on the 153-home affordable housing scheme at Westwood Acres – a really good example of the use of MMC (Modern Methods of Construction).

The new Rural and Community Housing Enabling service (RACE) is launched and will work directly with communities to deliver rural housing that matches what local people need – Tessa O'Sullivan from RACE aid the first local needs surveys will be carried out in September. A presentation from Homes England on its 2021-26 affordable homes programme led to many questions on estate regeneration and replacement homes.

### Invitation to join...

Calling all members – if you are interested in sending a representative to join one of our sub groups please drop a line to [helen.miller@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:helen.miller@ashford.gov.uk) You can find more information on the sub groups here **Our Sub Group – Kent Housing Group**

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