

Appendix A: Resident Feedback and Case Studies

Engagement & Skills

“So helpful, thank you very much, this is a very good service that you provide. I now can understand a lot more, giving me more confidence.”

“This scheme is a lifeline for me. Without your help I would be lost totally and feel like giving up. However, I am starting to understand how my Gmail account works and mobile. Unfortunately, I still have a long way to go and hope I can continue to receive help.”

Hardware Access Scheme

“I can't thank you enough for providing me with a laptop. I have been without a working laptop for quite some time now, and now this will enable me to keep in touch with utilities, banking and above family and online classes. It will be put to good use. So, thank you so much for making it possible.”

“This is absolutely fantastic news! Thank you so much. This will make a huge difference to my son's access to learning and his future prospects. We are over the moon! Thank you.”

“During a recent event at a community supermarket in East Malling, to promote the 'Let's Get Tonbridge and Malling Digital' project, we met many eligible residents whom we were able to refer into the project. This project aims to provide digital hardware and skills development sessions to eligible residents within the borough. We spoke to a resident, who was currently studying at college for a level 3 qualification and had up to this point been completing all assignments including 3000-word essays on their smartphone. They explained to us how much easier it will be for them to complete all coursework and assignments with a laptop and how grateful they were that the project was in place. One of Digital Kent's key objectives is supporting educational outcomes, and this individual demonstrates a perfect example of this.”

Device Recycling Scheme

"This is a timely and much needed scheme - so congratulations on launching it!"

"This new scheme is very good news indeed, and we're looking forward to donating a number of unused devices via this scheme."

Warm Home Essentials

“It has made me so happy I got help as there was no way I could afford to do it myself. I would like to thank you all so much for your help.”

“This has completely transformed my life, being without carpeting for years, I cannot thank you enough for doing that for me and my children, it is much warmer now.”

ReferKent Case Study

Green Doctors (an organisation that helps people reduce their energy bills and save energy), received a referral from a ReferKent partner organisation for energy advice and support. The referral was to support a family living in a 3-bed end terrace house with two 2 adults, 3 children including 2 under the age of 5. One of the children is physically disabled. The mother of the home is a full-time carer for her child, her partner works part time with a top up of income from DLA, UC, and Carer's Allowance.

The cost of energy has seen the family's energy bill rise from £90 to £210 making it harder to afford, causing the family to get into debt. The Green Doctor advisor was able to call the families energy supplier to confirm the figure for outstanding debt and helped reduce the direct debit to a more affordable sum whilst helping the family access a payment plan for the excess. The Green Doctor advisor then contacted Southeast Water to let the company know about the medical need for constant water access, signing them up to a priority services register and also securing a discount via a social tariff. The Green Doctor advisor finished off the support focussing directly on suppliers by giving impartial advice about how to weigh up current offers, tariff changes, exit fees and services so that the family felt more informed about where they wanted to go next.

The family was then taken on a walkthrough of the home to identify ways to reduce energy waste and lower bills overall. The Green Doctor advisor explained good energy habits and how appliances can be used more efficiently. They also installed items for the family to help remove draughts such as reflective radiator foil in 3 rooms, a door brush on an external door to remove a draught and re-sealed the rubber around 2 windows which had large gaps appear over time.

The Green Doctor advisor completed their visit by putting another referral back into ReferKent to be able to reach out to the local council to enquire about benefits check to ensure that the family were getting the most out of what they were entitled to, and to be able plan a budget to prepare for future outgoings.

Money Advice Hub, and Debt Recovery Order (DRO) Project – Case Study

“K”, a 30-year-old Thanet resident, first sought advice and support with her debt issues in July 2022 from Citizens Advice in North and West Kent (CANWK). K has long term mental and physical health issues which have prevented her from working for many years. When she contacted CANWK for advice, she had almost £9,000 in priority debts and £1,500 in non-priority debts. With debts including rent arrears, council tax arrears and energy debts, K was extremely anxious about the future. K has had debt issues for many years, and a previous DRO application had been abandoned due to health issues. She explained to our Adviser that the stress of her debts exacerbates her mental health conditions, and she is often hospitalised.

The first steps taken by the Debt Adviser was to apply for Breathing Space, which is a government scheme to provide people with time to sort debts, with a freeze on interest rates and charges. They then worked with K to fully explore the debts she had and explained the options available to her. They also liaised with her creditors to ensure the Breathing Space period was enacted and were able to have the possession order on her home put on hold, by arranging for her rent to be paid directly to her landlord. Progress with K's case was extremely slow due to her health issues, as she was often unable to engage with Advisers or the debt advice

process. Whilst the debt advisor tried to remain in touch, K's case was eventually put on hold when she did not respond to us. Then in February 2023, K got back in touch with us through the Kent Money Advice Hub, because her creditors were again chasing her for repayments and bailiffs had been instructed for council tax arrears. CANWK supported K in communicating with the bailiffs and following further advice sessions, she decided to apply for a DRO for her debts. Whilst the process was again difficult to manage, CANWK were able to refer K's case to the Citizens Advice DRO Unit in April 2023. Whilst the assessment was ongoing, CANWK updated K's creditors on progress so that they could see that action was being taken. We received notice to pay the DRO fee on the 31st May, and were delighted by how easy the process was to access the DRO Fee on K's behalf. It was fantastic to have finally been able to support K through the DRO process successfully, and crucially, the fee was not another hurdle for her and CANWK to manage.