



# Action 4 U



## Are you throwing money away?

AROUND 30,000 people in Kent are paying too much Council Tax, say the Kent Benefits Partnership. Are you one of them?

The Kent Benefits Partnership—set up by all the councils in Kent and Medway—is there to help people claim the money they are missing out on in Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit.

Entitlement to Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit is based on income, savings and circumstances. You have to have less than £16,000 in savings (unless you receive Guarantee Pension Credit). The amount of income you can have will vary depending on your circumstances and the amount of Council Tax or rent you pay. However, occupational pensions or low earnings do not nec-

essarily mean you wouldn't get any help.

The KBP has an office in Maidstone with trained officers able to work out whether you might be able to get some help with either your Council Tax or rent. We have links to the majority of benefit systems in Kent and Medway and normally process your claim in our office. There is also a Visiting Officer available to come to your home and help fill in the forms. We need to see a number of documents to support your application and the Visiting Officer is able to photograph these in your home so you do not have to worry about your documents leaving your sight.

For more information call The Kent Benefits Partnership on: 0845 345 0310.

## 'We're not starchy and stuffy'

'WE ARE a friendly lot—a real community,' says Wendy Reynolds, Vice President of Thanington Without Women's Institute. And there can be no greater endorsement of that than having members, like Pam Blackman, who have rarely missed a meeting in 50 years.

Pam, who has been a parish councillor for 20 years, first joined the Thanington WI in July 1956 because she and a friend, another young mum, 'felt a need to do something out of the house'.

At this meeting, held in a member's garden in Cockerling Road, a memorable event took place—the new WI banner, hand-stitched by all the Thanington women, was unveiled. The banner stayed in an attic for years until the opening of new ARCA hall in 2000, when finally it could be put on public display. 'I often look at it and remember my first entry into WI life,' says Pam.

'WI has given me a lot,' she says. 'In the early days I was very shy and lacked confidence.' But by the end of her first year, Pam had taken on the role of assistant secretary and over the 50 years since she has become secretary and president many times. She has been involved in countless competitions, outings and charity events and taken courses including the history of furniture and Morse in Oxford (following in the footsteps of the famous TV detective).

So what has changed in the 50 years since Pam joined the WI? In some ways a lot—'We're not so starchy and stuffy now—there's no real formalities like there used to be with everyone addressing each other by their titles and wearing suits and hats,' says Pam. But in other ways, not a lot at all.

*William Blake's 'Jerusalem' still raises the rafters at the opening of every meeting and, in this, there is something comforting and quintessentially English.*

At least 25 members regularly turn up every month to the meetings at ARCA hall. That says a lot about the enduring popularity of the Women's Institute. Nationwide it has 211,000 members and it is still the largest voluntary organisation for women in the UK.

'In 50 years, time has, of course, taken its unwelcome toll,' says Pam. 'And now, when I look around, there is only one face left who welcomed me on my first meeting—Phyl Palmer, our last remaining founder member. I have learnt a lot

from WI speakers over the years and have become interested in the wider aspects of the movement and made many friends.

*'I hope the spirit that keeps Thanington Without WI alive will go on for many more years.'*

**Thanington Without WI welcomes new members. You don't have to join straight away—come along and 'try us out' first. Please ring 01227 455 659 for details—Wendy Reynolds (Vice President)**