

Homeaffairs

News and views for council tenants and leaseholders throughout Dudley borough

Welcome to the Spring edition of Home Affairs!

At the start of this new year, we're excited to share numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing our communication with you, our valued tenants.

Home Affairs serves as just one avenue through which we strive to keep you informed about your housing service.

We're thrilled to announce the launch of several Housing Hubs, providing you with convenient opportunities for face-to-face meetings with your community housing officer.

Our "Make Your Voice Heard!" article demonstrates the importance of your involvement in shaping our community. Recent events such as the Netherton litter-pick highlight the profound impact of tenant and resident participation, showing how our Tenants & Residents Associations (TRAs) work to address local concerns. Your dedication to your community inspires us every day.

We also delve into tenant satisfaction measures and the tenant perception survey. Your input through the survey enables us to continuously improve and tailor our services to better serve you.

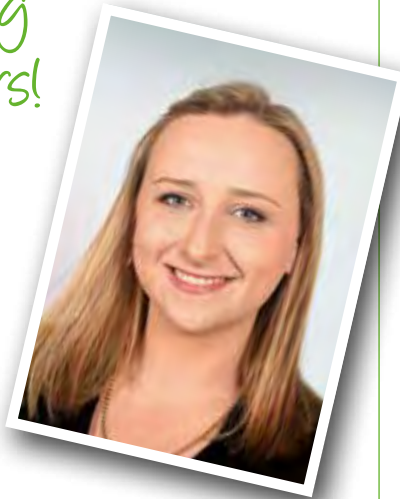
As we move into April, we wanted to ensure you're well-informed about the upcoming annual rent increase. So if you have any concerns at all about the changes, please don't hesitate to reach out to our dedicated rent team at 0300 555 0010. We're here to support you every step of the way.

For those of you receiving Universal Credit, we encourage you to familiarise yourselves with our article discussing the '53-week rule'. Your understanding of this rule can greatly help with your financial planning and we're here to help clarify any questions you may have.

Finally, as this is my final edition of Home Affairs, I would like to extend my thanks to all tenants, officers and partners for your continued engagement throughout the last six years. It has been an honour to serve as your cabinet member. I am proud of the journey our service has embarked on and wish everyone well for the future.

Councillor Laura Taylor-Childs

Cabinet member for housing and safer communities



Rent increase April 2024

By now, if you are a Dudley Council tenant, you should have received your annual rent letter. This letter informed you that rents for council homes will increase from April 2024.

It states what your revised rent will be and includes any additional sundry charges. All income from rents is invested in the maintenance, improvement and management of council homes.

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, your benefit payments will generally be adjusted to reflect the higher rent.

For Housing Benefit this will automatically be adjusted, but for Universal Credit you will need to update your rent details using your online journal. Please also read our Rent and Universal Credit - the 53-week rule article on the next page.

Universal Credit claimants will receive a 'confirm your housing costs to-do' message on their journal. Please use this 'to-do' option, but do not update your claim before 1 April 2024, and do not use the 'change of circumstances to-do' to report your rent change.

You can monitor your rent balance through our new MyDudley online portal.

Rent and Universal Credit - the 53-week rule

Council housing rent is charged weekly, but Universal Credit is assessed and paid monthly in arrears.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) works out your monthly rent by multiplying the weekly rent by 52 and dividing by 12. However, there are not exactly 52 weeks in a year - there's always an extra day, and two in a leap year.

Every few years when the extra day causes April 1 to fall on a Monday (start of rent week) it will show on your rent account as a full week's debt - meaning that you are charged 53 weeks rent. 2024 is one of these years and the DWP won't pay any extra Universal Credit to cover this.

If you are paying your rent account by Direct Debit your payments will automatically be adjusted to cover the extra week.

If you don't pay by Direct Debit, and you pay your rent every month, you will need to pay the additional week by paying an increased amount each month (one week's rent divided by 12). You will need to do this to prevent your account being in arrears at the end of the year.

It is important that you continue to pay your rent and other priority bills and not build debt in your home. If you think you are going to be affected by this and need support, please contact the council's rent team on 0300 555 0010. We can also make referrals directly to other support services if needed.

Getting in touch

You can talk to your community housing officer through a home appointment, by telephone, or by booking an appointment at a Housing Hub or Housing Hub surgery.

To request an appointment please go to MyDudley to make a self-service request or call us on 0300 555 2345.

When you contact us, you will be matched to the next appointment most appropriate to your location and circumstances. This service is not for booking repairs or chasing repairs.

Information about our repair service can be found at www.dudley.co.uk/housing

Make your voice heard!

Make a difference and help us improve our services

Whether you want to complete a five-minute survey, or attend a two-hour meeting, there is a way in which you can make a difference by getting involved, such as:

Home volunteers

opportunities from the comfort of your own home

Local volunteers

opportunities within walking distance of your home

Borough-wide volunteers

opportunities that require travelling from your home across the borough

Home volunteers

Join the Dudley 500 and have your say by responding to surveys, consultations and polls. You can join digital groups and opt in to receive briefings and send back your views online or take part in informal digital chats with other tenants. You could also become an online researcher and receive briefings from national bodies that represent tenants or attend free webinars to see what others are doing and identify good practice.

Local volunteers

As a local volunteer you could attend a neighbourhood walkabout to highlight issues and potential improvements in your local area or become a tenant inspector in your local area or communal block. There's also the opportunity to join local groups, including local forums or tenants and residents associations, and have your say on matters affecting where you live. You could also support your local neighbourhood by taking part in litter picks and helping with neighbourhood events and activities.

Borough-wide volunteers

Become a tenant inspector and help us improve standards of services across the borough or attend meetings boroughwide in person.

If you want to get involved, please get in touch. Contact the participation team and we'll offer you support and training for whatever role you choose.

Call 01384 815168, email participation@dudley.gov.uk or go to www.dudley.gov.uk/housing

You can also write to us at: participation team, 4 Ednam Road, Dudley, DY1 1HL. Alternatively, visit your nearest Housing Hub, speak to your community housing officer, or visit Dudley Council Plus, Castle Street, Dudley.



Netherton Central litter-pick

In January, members of Netherton Central Tenants and Residents Association (TRA), along with local residents, met to litter-pick in their local area.

Dozens of bags of rubbish were collected and areas with fly tipping were identified and reported to the council. A fun and productive morning was had by all, with several words of thanks from locals.

If you are interested in organising a litter-pick in your area, or if you are interested in joining your local TRA, please contact the participation team on 01384 815168 or email participation@dudley.gov.uk



MyDudley

There's a new way to interact with Dudley Council with the launch of a new online platform.

Whether you want to pay a bill or report a faulty streetlight, MyDudley allows residents to access a host of council services at the click of a button. You can also view your rent balance, make rent payments, set up a Direct Debit, or request contact from the rent team.

Register by visiting www.dudley.gov.uk and click on the MyDudley link at the top of the page.

To set up an account you just need your name, postcode, and email address.

People will still be able to talk face-to-face at Dudley Council Plus or over the phone with a customer service advisor, but MyDudley will allow you to report issues 24/7, 365 days a year.



Tenant satisfaction measures - tenant perception survey

Tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) are set by the Regulator of Social Housing to assess how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services

The council uses research company Acuity to carry out surveys on its behalf and a baseline perception survey was conducted via telephone in July and August 2023.

Where possible these results were compared to a previous survey carried out with tenants in 2018.

As part of the survey, tenants were asked for comments and the biggest area for feedback was the repairs service. In particular, the timescales for completing repairs and dealing with outstanding work. Seventy-six percent of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service in the last 12 months, while 72 percent were satisfied with the time taken to complete their last repair. Twenty percent were dissatisfied.

Overall, 65 percent of tenants surveyed were satisfied with the service provided by the council. However, this was significantly down from previous satisfaction levels recorded in 2018 of 85%.

Elsewhere in the survey, 70 percent of tenants found dealing with the council easy, with 15 percent finding it difficult. Sixty-seven percent agree that they are treated fairly and with respect, with 11 percent dissatisfied. However, 62 percent of tenants are satisfied with how they are kept informed about things that matter to them, falling from 68 percent in 2018.

Fewer tenants (55 percent) are satisfied that the council listens to their views and acts upon them, down from 60 percent, and 30 percent are dissatisfied with this aspect of service.

In response to these findings, the council is currently taking steps to improve communication with tenants, both in terms of information provided and listening to tenants' comments. Please see our article, 'Make your voice heard.'

A further survey was recently carried out in January/February 2024. The results from this survey will provide a valuable starting point for understanding our tenants and for identifying key areas of improvements for our housing and related services.



Fences

We've received a few queries recently regarding fences, with many people uncertain about who is responsible for erecting and maintaining garden fences.

Fences that are the council's responsibility

The council will maintain, repair and replace fences or walls in these locations only:

- When an existing fence or wall provided by us forms a boundary between a council home and a public footpath
- An existing fence or wall provided by us, which prevents falls from height
- All fences and walls provided by us when they form part of communal gardens, grounds, or drying areas in a block of flats or sheltered scheme

Fences that are your responsibility

Any fences or walls that act as a boundary between a council home and a neighbouring garden are the responsibility either of the tenant or their neighbour. You can find out whether the fence forms part of the boundary of your home by contacting your community housing officer via Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345.

When will the council build a new fence or wall

When a council home with its own private garden is re-let and there is no fence to mark the boundary, the council will usually install a simple post and plain wire fence along the boundary line.

When the council builds brand new homes, we install fences or walls on all boundaries between gardens and public footpaths, and we install post-and-wire between gardens to mark boundaries. We may also install fences or walls within the communal areas of the development.

Dog owners

If you allow a dog into your garden then it is your responsibility to ensure that it does not escape and that your whole garden is securely fenced, whether or not the boundary forms part of your home. If a neighbour's boundary is not sufficiently secure to prevent your dog escaping, then you should talk to them about it in the first instance. If they do not wish to make their boundary secure, then it is your responsibility to erect a fence or other barrier inside your own boundary to keep your dog safely within your own garden.

For more information about garden fencing contact your community housing team by calling Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345 or visit www.dudley.gov.uk/housing and click on 'housing contact points'.

Housing fraud

Tell us and we'll do the rest!

As part of International Fraud Awareness Week 2023, we campaigned to raise awareness about housing fraud and how we can all contribute to help stop it.

During the week, residents from Chapel Street Estate in Brierley Hill, Highfields Estate in Halesowen, and Darby End Tenants and Residents Association, were given the opportunity to meet the council's fraud team and to raise issues and ask questions.

Across the UK there are more than 100,000 social rented homes that are being occupied or used fraudulently. This means that these homes are not available to those who are eligible and in genuine need for rehousing.

Some of the most common ways in which people commit housing fraud are:

- not telling the truth when applying for a property
- renting out (sub-letting) a property without permission
- living in a property without the council's permission after a tenant has died or left
- not living in the property as their main or only home

We completed a short survey and found that many residents did not know how to report it. If you suspect housing fraud you can report your concerns anonymously by contacting us on:

Telephone: 01384 814242 / 01384 815903

**Email: hotline@dudley.gov.uk
fraud.tenancy@dudley.gov.uk**

Insurance for your home

The council offers a home contents insurance scheme to tenants from as little as 66 pence per week.

This covers fire, theft, flooding and accidental damage to your belongings. To find out more, please visit www.dudley.gov.uk/homeinsurance or call us on 01384 815051.

Our recently conducted customer satisfaction survey found that 100 percent of policyholders find the scheme very good or good, with 95 percent stating that the service they received was excellent.

Our prize draw winner for completing the survey was Miss S Allard of Halesowen who won a £30 shopping voucher

