



Working Together for a better future

# Federation Newsletter

March 2011

## In this issue...

**Page 2 - Making the most of your local community  
Changes to Brierley Hill Housing Office**

**Page 3 - Parkes Street Area Community and Police Together**

**Page 4 - Lettings and Voids Updates**

**Page 5 - Lettings and Voids Updates**

**Page 6 - DFTRA Response to the rent increase**

**Page 7 - Norton Green News  
DFTRA Awards**

**Page 8 - New name for Gas services  
DFTRA on the Web**

## **Making the most of your local community**

As the nights start to get lighter we are more inclined to want to venture out and enjoy our leisure time. However, with ever growing pressures on finances, activities and events need to be local to avoid costly travel expenses and at low cost or even better, free.

The Dudley community information directory ([www.dudleyci.co.uk](http://www.dudleyci.co.uk)) has almost 3000 entries of local clubs, societies and organisations and also a 'What's on' section listing local events. You will find information to cover every possible interest or hobby plus learning and volunteering opportunities all within the Dudley area.

The directory has also been expanded to include helpful information for people arranging their own care and support, for example, you will find details of cafes who will deliver hot meals.

For people suffering from long term health conditions there are details of self help groups where people can share their experiences and gain support from each other

The directory is the ideal tool to help you find out what is going on in your community and make the most of it. Don't forget if you are running a group or an event you can add your details to the directory and advertise for FREE!

---

## **Brierley Hill housing office**

Advance warning:

Brierley Hill housing office will be re-located to the Brierley Hill Library facility from 9th May 2011.



## Community and Police Together

Parkes Street Area TRA have been working for the last 6 years with the police to help improve the estate.

**Lettings and Voids—Test & Refine**  
**Key Changes from 31st January 2011**

Old way of working	New way of working
General information about lettings policy and process is available	Customer receives sufficient information to know their chances of success prior to making an application
Customer hands in housing application and waits to receive points letter. Timescale eight weeks (sometimes longer)	Form is checked, customer is advised what proofs will be required and booked an appointment. At the appointment the application will usually be entered and made live for bidding. Timescale two to three weeks
Council tenants applying for transfer are subject to rent checks and a 'doorstep check' by the Housing Manager.	Council tenants applying for transfer will have a full Home Check prior to their application appointment. The application will not be progressed if there are any outstanding breaches of tenancy. Their home must be in good order including decoration
There is no early warning system alerting us to possible voids	We will be visiting tenants for whom we have received mortgage or rent reference requests
We occasionally advertise properties during their notice period	We will aim to advertise every void during the notice period, to carry out certain checks and repairs, and to achieve as many 'back to back' letting as we can

**Lettings and Voids—Test & Refine**  
**Key Changes from 31st January 2011**

<b>Old way of working</b>	<b>New way of working</b>
On the day that the tenancy ends, the tenant hands in the keys at a council office	A council officer will visit the property to accept the keys and check that everything is in order
Accompanied viewings used to take place on all voids, but there was a very high level of refusals and time wasting	Accompanied viewings will be offered again. Reasonable refusals will not be penalised but bidding may be temporarily suspended where the reason should have been foreseen
Work to void properties is decided entirely by council officers	Work to void properties will be negotiated with the prospective tenant
When a property is ready to let, the new tenant can collect the keys to view it and then make their arrangements to move in	On move in day there will be a formal handover of the property to the new tenant, at which the officer will check that everything is ready and all services are working
Most tenants look after their homes and take notice of the Council's policies and procedures	All prospective tenants will be fully informed of our terms & conditions of business, and will need to agree to them in order to receive our service

**Any issues, please call us on 01384 868 010**



## Rent Increase - April 2011

The DFTRA Board is aware that since 2002 the Council has set rent increases using a government formula that takes account of property values, numbers of bedrooms and regional average manual earnings. The maximum increase for any property is inflation plus 0.5% plus £2.00. We anticipated that the next rent increase would take effect from 4th April 2011 and that future increases will continue to be in April of each year.

This year the increase will be considerably more than usual in these financially trying times in order for the councils to conform with Government guidelines. The Coalition Government has signalled its intention to continue with the current rent setting process with a revised target convergence date of 2015/16.

The DFTRA Board think although any increase is not ideal, the next increase coming in at 6.7% - higher than the rate that pensions and benefits will increase in April - will inflict further hardship on people losing their jobs, those whose pay is frozen, lower paid people and pensioners. We know that it is somewhat deflating to know that despite the large rent increase, there will be no extra services or improvements. In fact there could be fewer services depending on where the council cuts will take place.

Unfortunately it seems that the best we can hope for with an almost inevitable reduction in resources is that service remains the same.



## Norton Green News

Firstly our thanks must go to Myra, Allan and all Committee Members for organising yet another great social evening. As always the food, raffle and company were exceptional. Janet was over the moon receiving her charity award, thanks to all concerned.

We held our general meeting in January which was well attended considering the weather problems. Our aims this year include a day trip to Weston in June, others being considered are Blackpool illuminations, Windsor and York Christmas Market.

There is a St Georges Day Coffee Morning on April 23rd from 11am to 1pm with a raffle. All donations will go to charity. Any raffle prizes would be gratefully received.

### Awards given out at the January 2011 Federation General Meeting



**Sylvia Townsend -  
Commitment to the  
Community**



**George Williams -  
Service to the  
Community**



**Doreen Wells -  
Commitment to the  
Community**

**Congratulations again to all above, who were presented with their awards at the last DFTRA General Meeting.**

## **New name for gas services**

In the next few months a brand new contractor is set to provide the council's gas service for tenants' homes.

The new contract has been awarded to PH Jones and will replace E.on this Spring. The new contractor will be responsible for undertaking service and maintenance to council owned gas heating and hot water appliances.

Look out for the PH Jones logo on vans and uniforms. All personnel will carry appropriate identification.

Tenants can contact the Repairs Management Centre on 0300 555 8283 to confirm that a contractor is working on behalf of the council.

---

## **DFTRA on the Web**

Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations are now also on Facebook and Twitter, links to both pages (as well as a link to the Dudley MBC Twitter page) are at the bottom right of our website at:

**[www.dfta.org.uk](http://www.dfta.org.uk)**

By joining us on these social networking sites you will be kept up to date with all news and information relating to the Dudley Borough, TRA's and much more.

We currently have a mailing list set up in which we send the DFTRA Newsletter by email bi-monthly, plus any information we think you may like to know. If you are not on the mailing list but would like to be, please email [info@dfta.org.uk](mailto:info@dfta.org.uk) stating that you wish to be included on the mailing list.

If you have any information or additions to the newsletter, please call Caroline on 01384 868 010 or email [caroline@dfta.org.uk](mailto:caroline@dfta.org.uk).