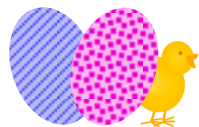




Dudley Federation



of Tenants and Residents Associations



Newsletter March - April 2013



Take off time for Pensnett Tenants and Residents
Communication...a 2-Week
Housing support advice
Home Contents insurance
Direct Debit insurance
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Street Association



Housing support advice sessions

Free, impartial and confidential advice sessions are available for Dudley Borough residents who need support and advice to help retain their independence.

Advice and guidance about many issues is available, ranging from finances, welfare benefits, mental health and leisure (plus many more).

Anyone interested in the service can make an appointment or just drop in for further information:

Lye:

Atlantic House, Dudley Road, Lye (for Atlantic House customers only), Tuesdays from 2pm until 4pm. Telephone 07827 873335/07799 070496

Halesowen:

The Hope Centre, Block 11, Andrew Road, Halesowen, Wednesdays from 10am until 12 noon. Telephone 01384 814139/07920 235009

Brierley Hill:

Housing office, Yeovil Court, Brierley Hill, Thursdays from 10am until 12 noon. Telephone 01384 814139/07920 235009

Stourbridge:

Stourbridge Library, Market Street, Stourbridge, Thursdays from 1.30pm until 3.30pm. Telephone 01384 814139/07920 235009

For more information telephone **01384 814139**.

Welfare reforms

The first of the major welfare reforms that will impact on many Dudley tenants claiming Housing Benefit comes into effect in April.

Under occupation (bedroom tax)

If you live in council accommodation or other social housing, and are assessed as having more bedrooms than you need, your Housing Benefit could be reduced.

You are classed as under occupying your home if you have more bedrooms than you need. The guidelines are that a separate bedroom is allowed for:

- **each couple or single adult over 16**
- **any two children of the same or opposite sex under age 10**
- **any two children/young people of the same sex under age 16**

If you are classed as under occupying the amount of Housing Benefit you receive will be reduced. There are two rates for the reduction:

- a) If you have one extra bedroom your Housing Benefit will reduce by 14% of your full weekly rent.**
- b) If you have two or more extra bedrooms your Housing Benefit will reduce by 25% of your full weekly rent.**

The bedroom tax does not affect people who are of state pension age.

For information about carers and other situations, such as fostering, visit the Government websites:

www.gov.uk

www.dwp.gov.uk

or phone **Dudley Council Plus** on **0300 555 2345**

If your Housing Benefit (and therefore your rent payment) is reduced because of under occupation you will have to pay the difference to your landlord – Dudley Council. To set up a payment method contact Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345.

If your rent is not paid and you run into arrears you risk losing your tenancy.

Other welfare reforms

Other changes to benefits, such as the benefits cap and Universal Credit, will be introduced later in the year. For more information please visit the following websites, pick up a leaflet from your housing office, Dudley Council Plus or your local library or telephone Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345.

Department for Work and Pensions

www.dwp.gov.uk

responsible for welfare and pension policy

DirectGov

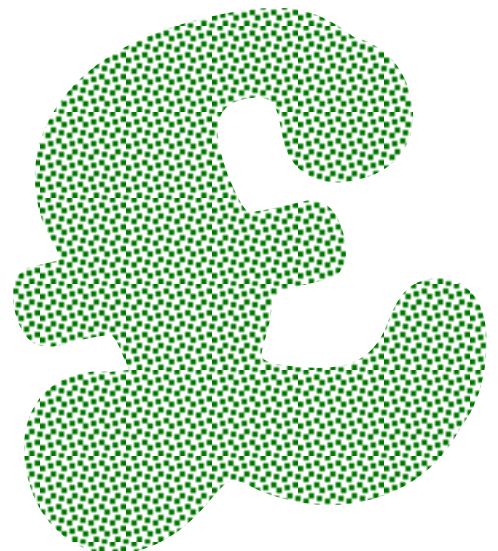
www.gov.uk

government services and information

Dudley Council

www.dudley.gov.uk/benefits

information on benefits



Direct Debit set up

Why not sign up to Direct Debit to pay your rent, garage or insurance?

- ❑ Paying via Direct Debit takes the worry out of making payments
- ❑ You have the control of when your payment date will be, on or around the 6th or 28th of the month
- ❑ You can ring to change your bank details or payment date
- ❑ If you receive partial housing benefit the balance of your rent can be paid by direct debit
- ❑ Over 3,000 Dudley housing tenants already pay their rent this way
- ❑ The scheme is covered by the Direct Debit guarantee and our specialist team are ready to take your call

Call now on 01384 815024

Home Contents insurance

Facts about buildings insurance!

- ❑ Dudley Council provides **buildings** insurance for council housing properties
- ❑ Dudley Council **does not** insure your **contents** such as furniture, belongings or decorations against theft, fire, vandalism and burst pipes
- ❑ Make sure you have **contents insurance only**
- ❑ For an application form for Dudley Council's contents insurance scheme call 01384 812345, or complete the slip available on www.dftra.org.uk
- ❑ If you are a tenant and paying for buildings insurance please let us know on 01384 815051

Communication...a 2-Way Street

If you are interested in communications then why not think about either:

- Joining the Reader Panel
- Joining the newly formed Communications Group



Reader Panel

The Reader Panel is a great way to share your views without leaving your home. The idea is we send you a copy of a leaflet which the Council would like to produce, we ask you a series of questions about the leaflet, for example: did you like the layout, could you find the contact number easily, that type of thing, you share your views by returning the survey to us through the post or via email. It really is that easy & you help us to make sure our literature is user friendly and easily understood.

Communications Group

The Communication Group is made up of TRA volunteers and meets three times per year for about 3 hours each time. Some of the things we discuss include:

- Home Affairs editorial content
- Look at ways to improve communications between the Council and TRA's
- Investigate innovative ways to increase involvement from the wider community

If you would like to get involved or have ideas which may improve communications then please contact, Kim Avantaggiato, Participation Development Officer on 01384 813066

Volunteer Focus – Michael Sidaway

Some of you may already know Michael Sidaway as the Treasurer of Arley and Compton tenants and residents association and a member of the Big Clean Up Group.

Michael recently invited Martin Smith and Emma Jones to visit Woodside Day Centre to talk to the User Forum about the Big Clean Up group. Martin and Emma were surprised to find a packed meeting hall of up to 40 user forum attendees. Michael has been organising, chairing and writing the minutes and producing the newsletter for these meetings very successfully since 2003.

As well as being at the centre to talk to the user forum, Michael gave Martin and Emma a guided tour of the centre. As well as being impressed by Michaels running of the forum they were also really impressed with the wood work shop where unique wooden garden products are created using donated recycled wood.

The company that make these quality items are called Woodside Crafts. Established in 2012, the company help people in need of rehabilitation by providing facilities for work and the opportunity to increase skills, confidence and empowerment.

The wooden items are unique and made of quality solid wood and cost at least half as much of the big stores. They also make items to your own specifications.

You can contact Woodside Crafts at woodsidecrafts@hotmail.co.uk or telephone: 07930999521 or 07847405912.

Norton Goes Digital...

Norton Green TRA has recently been awarded funding to purchase computer equipment and a digital camera. This funding now means the group are contactable via email and we are embracing the new technology...scanning, emailing & surfing the web!

We are looking forward to attending the computer training at DFTRA to hopefully learn more new computer skills!!

The funding from the former Stourbridge Area Committee was an easy process and we would encourage any group to apply for the funding from the new Community Forums which replaced the area committee's – your PDO can help you with the application if you need them to!

We would also like to tell you about our St Georges Day – Open House event on Saturday 20th April between 12noon and 4pm. There will be refreshments available & any funds raised will be donated to West Midlands Air Ambulance Service.

Norton Green TRA

Take off time for Pensnett Tenants and Residents Association

The second of July 2012 marks a significant day for the Pensnett area. This was when the Pensnett Tenants and Residents Association set up at a public meeting at Fens Pool Community Centre.

This was the outcome of several preliminary meetings involving tenants and residents who felt that such a group was needed, their housing manager, local councillors and their participation development officer.

Since this initial meeting this partnership approach has continued with the group going from strength to strength. One of the first priorities was to identify what resources would improve the area. It was felt that somewhere for local children to play would be one of their long term aspirations. So as to ensure that there was public support for this idea a wide scale consultation was held via the local school.

Conscious that everyone on the estate needed to know that the group was active, a small sub committee met for a few hours one night and between them came up with all the material for a newsletter that was distributed to everyone on the estate. They also came up with a very pleasant logo to identify the group.

To help raise funds a very successful chocolate stall was run at a Christmas Fete. An estate walk about was also organised and plans are now afoot for a spring litter pick.

Various committee members have attended numerous outside meetings including both DFTRA and Council run events. The year was finished off by the group winning an award from DFTRA for the best new Tenants and Residents Association. This was presented to happy committee members at the Federation's Christmas event.

Steps are now being taken to set up another Tenants and Residents Association in the area adjoining the existing group. If they reach the levels of achievement that Pensnett Tenants and Residents Association have then everyone will be happy.

If anyone is interested in contacting the group, or the proposed new group which will be based around the Corbyns Hall, Bromley and Tiled House Lane Area can they please contact John Doughty on 01384 815168.

If you would like a story about your TRA included in this newsletter please send it to us along with any photos to caroline@dftra.org.uk, or post it to the address on the back page of this newsletter

DFTRA Update

Since our AGM in September, the Board have continued to attend meetings and investigate issues and complaints. We now have a clear complaints system where we ask for all complaints and issues to be sent to us in writing, either by post or email. These complaints will then be dealt with as soon as possible and a response will be sent in line with our complaints procedure.

Partnership Meetings

Board members have attended a variety of Partnership meetings and have raised issues and concerns that have been brought to us by our members. If you have any issues that you would like addressed, please send them to us in writing and we will do our best to get issues resolved.

Website and newsletter

In line with our Service Level Agreement with DMBC, our up to date versions of our Complaints Procedure, Data Protection Policy and Equal Opportunities Policy are now available on our website. If you require a copy to be sent to you in the post, please let us know.

We are currently updating the 'Our TRA's' section of our website, and links from here will take you to your section of the Dudley Council website. If you would like any other information included in your section of our website, please let us know.

Our members are very important to us, and if you have any stories or information that you would like included in this newsletter, please send them to us.

Office updates

We are very happy to announce that we have received confirmation that our Awards for All grant has been approved and will be with us shortly. This will fund our project entitled: Resource Hub (Untangling the Web). We will use the funding to purchase laptops, provide training and officially open up our resource centre. Further information will be made available to our members as soon as possible. We are very excited about this project, and hope that we can provide you with the training that you need in order to be able to 'untangle the web'.

We have now officially launched our new logo, we hope that you like it. We feel that this is more descriptive for the organisation and will stand out. If you require the logo to be sent to you for use in documents, please contact us and we can arrange it.



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