



Dudley Federation



of Tenants and Residents Associations

DFTRA Newsletter

November/December 2013



Download the Housing Repairs App

If you have a smart phone you can now download a new app that provides tenants with a simple way to report and arrange repairs to their property.

The **My Landlord** app can be downloaded free from iTunes and Google Play.

The mobile app allows tenants to report a repair in just a few steps, with the ability to detail the issue, pinpoint the location of the property and add photos. It also enables tenants to confirm when they are available during the week to help schedule the work more efficiently.

As well as repair reporting My Landlord can also be used to report issues such as graffiti, potholes and dumped rubbish.



Housing Direct Debit prize draw

Tenants are being encouraged to sign up to Direct Debit with the chance of winning a £100 supermarket voucher.

Direct Debit is a more convenient payment method to pay their housing charges such as rent, garage rent and insurance.

Tenants can sign up to Direct Debit by calling 01384 815024 to speak to our dedicated housing staff. The line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, with an answer phone facility available out of hours.

There is also a choice of two payment dates to best suit tenant's circumstances - on or around the 6th or 28th of the month.

Everyone who pays their rent by Direct Debit before June 2014 will automatically be entered into the monthly free prize draw to win a £100 supermarket voucher.

July's winner Mr Hamer receives his vouchers from Housing Services' Lisa Lawley.

For your chance to win a £100 supermarket voucher sign up now for Direct Debit and you will be entered into our prize draw.

Call the Direct Debit Team on 01384 815024



New e-bulletin service

People are being urged to sign up to a new e-bulletin service that offers the latest news and information from the council. By signing up residents will be kept up to speed with latest news and information from across the Dudley borough as well as asked to participate in important consultation.

The bulletin includes the latest round of community forums where people can raise issues directly with councillors as well as forthcoming events at libraries, museums and the town halls. The bulletins are sent ahead of all school holidays to give families information on events and activities taking place in the borough. And the bulletins also include updates on changes to council services, such as the ongoing improvements to recycling collections in the borough.

The bulletins are also used to keep people informed of consultations to ensure people can have their say on local issues important to them.

To receive the bulletin simply register your e-mail address by sending an e-mail to:

community.council@dudley.gov.uk

Don't get sharked this Christmas

As Christmas approaches and money is tight more people will be tempted by loan sharks, but these criminals should always be avoided. Loan sharks will exploit families at this time of year, as they know they will be struggling for cash.

These lenders act like your best friend, they seem to be doing you a favour, and it may seem hard to resist the cash up front, but steer clear of them at all costs. What may seem like a small loan to tide you over for Christmas, could end up costing you dearly for years and years -and not just financially. It could end up having a horrific impact and your life and the lives of those around. You could be subjected to threats, violence and worse.

The England Illegal Money Lending are cracking down on these criminals and bringing them to justice. Look out for offenders and don't accept loans from them- report them in confidence. Typically loan sharks will:

- Appear friendly at first, enticing their borrowers to take out a loan but this is often a façade and very quickly the debt begins to spiral, extra charges are added sporadically
- Force their borrowers hand over items 'as security'. This could include passports, driving licences or even bank cards with the PIN, in order to withdraw directly from borrowers accounts. This is how people are left with little or nothing to get by on.

Offer little or no paperwork, and are unclear of the terms of the loan. People are then left in the dark as to how much they are actually repaying.

As the debts can't legally be enforced, the lenders will resort to the most extreme methods to enforce repayment- tactics used to intimidate lenders have included cutting TV and phone wires then sitting waiting outside the borrowers home and

collecting the victims children from school without their knowledge.

The Team have seen loan sharks threaten to burn down the homes of victims and throw acid in their faces. A victim was even kidnapped and attacked with a machete and a baseball bat and one woman was raped by a loan shark. Don't put yourself or your family at risk.

Anne* took out a loan for £150 to buy her young children Christmas presents, but paid back more than £5000, as the loan shark continued to harass her for five years. When she fell ill and was unable to work she defaulted on payments. She was resting at home with her young daughter when the loan shark accompanied by two other men barged in, demanding to know why she hadn't paid and pulling items out of her living room.

She told us how frightened she was "There was nowhere to go. I wasn't even safe in my own house. I was screaming, crying, pleading with him not take my stuff. To think, that my little girl had to see that."

Think about setting up a savings account, to put a little aside for Christmas. If you do need to borrow, try to only borrow what you need but make sure it's from a reputable lender.

We'd recommend credit unions as a safe and legal alternative, find you nearest one: www.abcul.org

Remember loan sharks do not have a license from the Office of Fair Trading to lend money legally. Check that a lender is licensed before considering a loan; you can do so using the consumer credit register online.

<http://www2.crw.gov.uk/pr/Default.aspx>

Remember no matter how desperate you are loan sharks are never the answer. You can report these criminals in the strictest confidence and action will be taken.

We've already helped over 22,000 victims, secured nearly 300 prosecutions with custodial sentences in excess of 170 years and cleared illegal debts to the tune of £40.3 million.

To report a loan shark:

Call the 24/7 confidential hotline **0300 555 2222**

Text 'loan shark + your message' to **60003**

E-mail reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk

Private message us on www.facebook.com/stoploansharksproject

Welfare reform bus back on the road

Dudley Council's Welfare on Wheels bus went back out on the road recently to offer advice and support to anyone affected by the recent changes to housing benefits. The bus stopped off at a number of locations across the borough during the week beginning 30 September.

Visitors to the bus were able to pick up information about the reforms and talk to staff and volunteers about benefits, budgeting, moving home and much more.

The Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (DFTRA) secured funding to send the bus back out on the road and also proved volunteers to help on the tour.

The following account is from one of the volunteers:

Despite a very damp day, and a low response initially, things soon warmed up and I was able to signpost quite a few people onto the bus to speak to Dudley Council advisors.

Most of the people I spoke to had real concerns and issues around the benefits reforms. There were wide ranging issues not primarily around the bedroom tax and down sizing, albeit this was a key concern, but also about the Universal Tax Credit, PIPS and other benefits. They asked what support they could get if they were suffering hardship.

Below are a few examples of how I was able to help some people on the day:

One person was told they could receive an extra £80 per week. To that person that meant everything.

Another person was told that they may be eligible to move into one of the hard to let flats, which was very good news to them as they had thought they were going to be made homeless.

I personally helped someone who asked for help in a retraining programme. He had injured himself at work and was unable to do his manual job. I signposted him to the Adult and Community Learning courses which have changed the lives of many adults across the borough – I am sure he could be one whose life has changed.

I would not say I am an expert in providing advice – that's what the council's advisors did on the day. On arriving home I felt good about myself and despite catching a cold I felt very humbled in that at least I had made a difference.

My thanks to all those volunteers who helped on the day and to DFTRA for getting the funding for this second Welfare on Wheels bus tour



Tenant's Annual Report 2013/14 – We need your help.....

Ever fancied being an editor, and being in control of the front page? If your answer is yes, we need your help. We are looking for volunteers to help edit and design our next annual report, so that it contains information you want to know about.

If you are interested please contact the Participation Development Team as we are looking to start work on this in the new year.

☎ 01384 815168 or ✉ participation@dudley.gov.uk

TENANTS ANNUAL REPORT 2012/2013



Dudley

Darby End TRA - from derelict site to community allotments

Thanks to the dedication, commitment and green fingers of John Mason and members of the Darby End Tenants and Residents Association, the once derelict garage site in Darby End Road is now a fully utilised community allotment.

Following a series of successful grant applications work took place to clear and fence off the land. Raised beds and a large shed were constructed, 80 tons of soil was moved in and 10 water butts were fitted to create the allotments.



The community allotments give the residents, schools and charity organisations of Darby End access to grow their own produce and an opportunity to spend time outside and escape the pressures of modern living. It's also a good form of exercise and helps the children to learn more about where food comes from.

A HUGE thank you to everyone that has been involved in this exciting project.

Holly Hall & Woodside TRA litter pick

Holly Hall & Woodside TRA organised a litter pick in October to cover the Holly Hall side of the estate. Prior to the event radio WM contacted us following a tweet on the council's twitter pages and invited our chair Colin Day on to promote the event.

Despite the appalling weather volunteers turned out to collect litter with our participation development officer Jo Gumus and collected 16 bags of rubbish in total covering 14 streets.

The TRA would like to say a big thank you to everyone who made the event a success.

New TRA for Pensnett

The Pensnett Tenants and Residents Association is a newly formed TRA which has been working together for just over twelve months. I think I speak for all of the committee members when I say that we have all thoroughly enjoyed our first year.

When we first started to meet we set some aspirations for our first year of working and we have achieved most of these.

Our long term aim of lobbying for a play area for our children is still on-going. We need to obtain more evidence that such a play area is required by the local community and we are in the process of getting as many names as possible on a petition to help our local councillors put a case forward to hopefully find some funding to allow this to be built. We are all aware that the council is very short of money but hopefully there are other funding streams that can be approached with the support of our local councillors.

We are continually looking for projects to take forward on the community's behalf and would welcome your views on this.

We have a winter fete on Saturday 14 December 2013 at The Fens Pool Centre - 12noon 'til 3pm. Activities include Santa's Grotto, refreshments, tombola and raffles. We will also have seasonal arts and craft activities for children and parents as well as stalls from local groups and committees.

What is 'Social Media' and how can it benefit my TRA?

You may already be involved with Social Media, it may be something that interests you, you may have heard the term but not quite understand what it means, or you may not be interested in it at all. Whichever of these apply to you, social media is hard to ignore and can actually be an effective tool for your group—plus, it's free!

Social Media refers to websites that are used for social networking, in its simplest form, social networking is the use of websites to communicate with other users. This means that unlike a regular website which provides one sided information, social networking allows the visitor to interact with others using the same site.

So, why would this be useful? Well, as a lot of people are already using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, once your TRA has a profile it is ready for anyone to see. Blog sites are also a great way to share information with your community on projects and plans and also somewhere to put your TRA meeting dates for people in your area to see. Add to this the ability for people in your community to give comments, feedback and support and you can see why it can be so useful.

As well as using these tools to give out information, they are a great way to get information too. There are loads of community pages offering up to date local news and information allowing you to interact with other organisations and people.

Will it be complicated and take up a lot of your time? That's the beauty, you can make your social media profile(s) as easy or as complicated as you have time for. You can start off slowly and build up over time, or you can dive right in! It's entirely up to you and your committee.

Of course none of this will replace good old face to face communication or leaflets, think of it as another tool to use alongside the regular methods, after all it won't cost you anything.

In the New Year DFTRA along with the PDO team will be organising training for TRA members who are interested in finding out more about Social Media for their TRA. Following on from the training we have trained Mentors who can assist and support you with establishing your TRAs online space. If you are interested in the upcoming training let Caroline at DFTRA or the Participation Development Team know.

If you are interested in the training but don't feel confident using computers, don't worry just give us a call to discuss basic computer skills training options.

Training Opportunity

Coming up: Basic Food Hygiene and Emergency First Aid training.










Both courses are a full day and provide you with a certificate valid for 3 years. If you are interested in attending this training or currently hold a certificate with less than 6 months left please contact the Participation Team 01384 815168 or participation@dudley.gov.uk to register your interest.

Deck the halls – safely

Christmas will soon be here and with it comes the tradition of putting up the decorations to bring in some festive cheer.

We certainly don't want to be 'bah humbug' but we do want to remind you to take extra care with fire safety during the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

Here are a few recommendations:

-  **Candles** - don't leave lighted candles unattended and always make sure they are extinguished at the end of the day. Make sure they are not placed near any flammable materials such as tree, curtains, furnishings.
-  **Christmas trees** - Christmas trees are highly flammable. Keep them in a well ventilated area and do not leave unattended when lights are lit. Living trees should be watered regularly.
-  **Decorations** - use decorations which are fire retardant and non flammable whenever possible. If you use any tissue paper or cardboard decorations check them for wear and tear as they burn easily. Do not place decorations around or above a fireplace or light fitting.
-  **Electrical appliances** - turn off all electrical appliances when they are not in use and don't overload plug sockets. Make sure fuses are adequate and use RCD on any outdoor items.
-  **Fairy lights** - make sure that they are working and have no bare wires. Don't overload sockets and don't place near anything flammable. Turn off over night. Fairy lights should meet British Standards
-  **Fire doors** - should be kept clear of any obstacles or tripping hazards.
-  **Fireworks** - if using fireworks store them carefully and then read the instructions before use. If you live in a block of flats and have a balcony please do not release fireworks from your property.
-  **Smoke alarms** - make sure your smoke alarm is working and that the batteries aren't flat. We recommend you check batteries every week and that you keep it clean and remove any dust
-  **Communal areas in flats** - If you live in one of our high or low rise properties it is important that you do not put decorations in any of the communal areas as they are a fire hazard. If any are put up in these areas we will, unfortunately, have to remove them.

Keeping safe as darker nights draw in

People are being advised to take extra care this winter as dark nights and colder weather can put many older and more vulnerable people at risk. Dark nights can encourage bogus callers and distraction burglaries often increase at this time of year.

Dudley's Living Well, Feeling Safe service is encouraging people to lock both front and back doors, even while at home. People should also use a door chain and check the identity of any callers by asking for identification. If you are in any doubt at all don't allow callers into the home.

Statistics also show that more accidental house fires take place during the winter. Older people in particular are more likely to feel the cold and often rely on portable heaters and open fires which present fire risks. During the festive season Christmas decorations, trees and cards, which can be highly flammable, also add to the risk of fire. The West Midlands Fire Service offers free home fire risk checks and can also provide smoke alarms.

The Living Well, Feeling Safe service is a partnership made up of the council, West Midlands Police, West Midlands Fire Service, Victim Support and Age UK Dudley and provides practical safety, security and wellbeing advice for older and vulnerable people. For more information call 01384 817743.

DFTRA Update



All at DFTRA were very sad to hear that former DFTRA Chairperson Allan Miles had passed away on the 30th October. Allan was a strong voice in the community and will be sadly missed. The family have asked for donations to be made to Macmillan Cancer Support. The proceeds from our raffle at our General Meeting in November will be donated to this very worthy cause, we will also be looking into organising a coffee morning in the New Year.

Office updates



The Awards night has been confirmed and will take place in December at the Secret Venue at Insight House in Brierley Hill. We look forward to celebrating the hard work that TRA representatives do.



We would like to welcome two new TRAs into the DFTRA membership. Corbyns Bromley and Love Claycroft are newly set up groups and we wish them all the best in their aims for the future.

Partnership meetings

• Important news from the Rubbish / Waste Removal Group

We have received a number of complaints lately from Dudley Council tenants regarding rubbish being left outside properties after works have been completed. As a result of this, the Rubbish / Waste Removal Group which is made up of Operatives, Senior Management, Dudley Federation and other tenants' reps have agreed a new procedure.

From the 4th November 2013, there will be a new way for Dudley Council Direct Labour Operatives (DLO) to arrange a Building Waste Rubbish Collection. The operatives will now make one phone call to report the location and type of the rubbish as well as other important information, eliminating the need for time consuming paperwork. The target collection time will be as soon as possible but no later than the following working day.

We hope that this new procedure will mean that estates are tidier with fewer building materials being left outside properties.

If you have an article that you would like included in a future edition of this newsletter please get in touch!

Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations

The Ground Floor Complex, Booth Court
Lower Derry Street, Brierley Hill, DY5 2SJ

-- Tel: 01384 868010 --

-- Website: www.dftra.org.uk --

-- E-mail: info@dftra.org.uk --

