In this issue...

- Page Two
  Council offers ‘affordable mortgages’

- Page Four
  Safer 6 campaign successes

- Page Six
  Sports stars back leisure plans

- Pages Eight – Nine
  Christmas waste and recycling

Jingle bells!
It’s Christmas
Festive fun in Sandwell

Reduce your wasteline this Christmas and in 2013

Government changes to benefits
Will you be affected? See Page 10

Get social with Sandwell

Winter 2012
www.sandwell.gov.uk

The Sandwell Herald

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

•

Government changes to benefits
Will you be affected? See Page 10

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Government changes to benefits
Will you be affected? See Page 10

Get social with Sandwell
Council offers ‘affordable mortgages’

Sandwell Council has launched a new ‘affordable mortgages’ scheme in a bid to help first-time buyers get a foot on the housing ladder.

The scheme is also aimed at getting the housing market going and increasing house building in the borough. First-time buyers can now apply for up to 95% mortgages on new build homes in Sandwell.

The council’s deputy leader Councillor Steve Eling said the scheme is self-funding and offers sensible, affordable mortgages. The council will hold properties as security so taxpayers’ money is not at risk.

Councillor Eling said: “Young first-time buyers in Sandwell are struggling to get a foot on the housing ladder and we want to help them. We think it’s very important for people to have the chance to buy their own home — and it’s good for the economy and housing market too.”

The council will require home buyers to put down a deposit of at least five per cent of the house value. Banks, building societies and other providers have put in place many more restrictions on mortgages since the banking crisis, and deposits can be up to 40%.

Councillor Eling added: “The mortgages we are offering are sensible and affordable, not the type of reckless mortgages that some of banks and building societies used to offer. It’s good to see our first applications have been received and we are now processing them."

Visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/councilmortgages, email revenues_postroom@sandwell.gov.uk or call 0845 351 0016 for more information.

Help to stop homelessness

Sandwell has launched a new drive to prevent homelessness.

A key aim is getting people to seek help early if they find themselves in debt and struggling to meet their rent or mortgage payments.

Sandwell’s prevention of homelessness strategy sets out how the council aims to prevent homelessness and ensure housing and support will be available for people who are sleeping rough, homeless or at risk of losing their home.

Anyone having difficulty paying their mortgage or rent is urged to seek advice now by calling the Housing Options Service on 0121 569 6000 and selecting option 3. Or email housing_options@sandwellhomes.org.uk.

The service offers money advice and a range of services to help homeowners and people renting their homes. Last year, the service prevented 776 households from becoming homeless by helping people stay in their current home. It supported a further 1,681 households to find and settle into new homes.

Launching the strategy, left to right, Julie Hickman, Sandwell Homes; Councillor Simon Hackett; Neville Rowe, Sandwell Council; Steve Clay, YMCA Black Country Group and Diane Millichamp, Sandwell Council.

Your emergency guide

Sandwell Council’s resilience unit has developed a short guide to help people deal with emergencies, such as severe weather.

The guide includes a handy template for producing your own household emergency plan. When the plan is completed it will not only provide you with reassurance but also your friends and family, especially if they are not close by or able to offer support as they would wish to during an emergency.

Copies of the booklet are available in Sandwell libraries, council office receptions or to download from www.sandwell.gov.uk/emergencyguide

Or you can call 0121 569 3983 or email emergency_planning@sandwell.gov.uk and a copy will be sent to you.

Published by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Council House, Oldbury West Midlands B69 3DE

For general council enquiries please telephone 0845 358 2200 or email contact@sandwell.gov.uk.

When you have finished with this Sandwell Herald please recycle it.
Mayor opens A41 underpass

Sandwell Mayor Councillor Keith Davies has officially opened the new £25 million A41 underpass in West Bromwich. And to celebrate the opening, the borough’s first citizen then led a cavalcade of cars through it.

He said: “I am delighted to have opened the underpass and been the first person to travel through it. I would like to congratulate everyone who has been involved. They have done a fantastic job.”

The underpass has been designed to speed up traffic flow and reduce congestion along the dual carriageway which runs from Junction 1 of the M5.

It is a key project to unlock West Bromwich for the massive multi-million regeneration programme in the town centre that is already under way. As a result, the capacity of the junction will increase from 70,000 to 115,000 vehicles each day.

Cabinet member for neighbourhood services Councillor Ian Jones said: “This has been a massive project made all the more difficult by the fact that we have been determined to keep traffic flowing throughout the period of the construction. I have nothing but praise for everyone involved. At times it has been a logistical nightmare, but they have kept everything moving at a pace.”

He said it would benefit commuters, help increase bus service reliability and improve pedestrian and cycle links into the town centre. Tesco said the new underpass increase bus service reliability and improve He said it would benefit commuters, help moving at a pace.”

nightmare, but they have kept everything involved. At times it has been a logistical nightmare, but they have kept everything moving at a pace.”

Mayor Sandwell Mayor Councillor Keith Davies thanked everyone for their patience while the complex project was completed. Other West Bromwich regeneration news:

- Nearly £7 million will be spent refurbishing Queen’s Square Shopping Centre after Sandwell Council signed a long-term lease. Work will include a new main High Street entrance, improved malls and new toilets.
- Stretches of High Street have been boosted by new paving, bus shelters, upgraded bins and the planting of new trees. The work is part of the £8.2 million ‘public realm’ project, which will also create a new public square and boost links around Sandwell College, Providence Place, the Eastern Gateway and Dartmouth Park.

Sandwell Homes officials and local contractors recently showed West Bromwich East MP Tom Watson and councillors around the Lincoln Road site. Councillor Simon Hackett, cabinet member for housing, said: “Many older tenants have requested two-bedroom bungalows as an exchange for giving up their larger council houses for families. An extension to a bungalow will help us make better use of existing housing and improve the quality of housing on offer.”

The project complements a scheme to convert lofts in overcrowded council homes into bedrooms.

Bungalow plan

A new project has been launched to extend bungalows in Sandwell to help free up council homes for families and people on the housing waiting list.

The scheme plans to extend 12 of the borough’s one-bedroom bungalows into two-bedroom homes by April 2013. It started in the summer with a bungalow in Lincoln Road, West Bromwich, which has already been completed, and another which is under way in Worcester Road, Oldbury. Others are due to start in the New Year.

The project provides a strategy to help free up housing for more families. So far, 12 of the 15 bungalows have been extended, with the remaining three under construction.

Councillor Simon Hackett, cabinet member for housing, said: “Many older tenants have requested two-bedroom bungalows as an exchange for giving up their larger council houses for families. An extension to a bungalow will help us make better use of existing housing and improve the quality of housing on offer.”

The project complements a scheme to convert lofts in overcrowded council homes into bedrooms.

Christmas fun at Sandwell Park Farm

Father Christmas has set up his grotto at Sandwell Park Farm, which is also the perfect place to do some festive shopping

You can buy presents, festive food hampers, plants and even your Christmas tree at the Park Farm Visitor Centre, Salters Lane, West Bromwich, which is open daily 10am to 4.30pm. Usual admission to the Park Farm is £1.75 for adults and £1.25 for children and seniors. Under-fives go free. Family tickets are available. Father Christmas will be in his grotto every weekend up to Christmas from 11am to 4pm. It’s £6 per child and includes a present. If you wish to see Father Christmas in the week, please call 0121 553 0220 to book an appointment.

You can also enjoy a magical Victorian Christmas fair, including a band, carol singers and seasonal craft fair – in addition to all the usual attractions at the Park Farm – on Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 December, 10am to 4.30pm. Admission is £2.50 for adults, £2 for children and seniors and under-fives go free.
Safer 6 successes

A seizure of fake clothes and shoes worth £1.5 million from an industrial unit in Sandwell was among many successes in this year’s Safer 6 campaign.

Police and council trading standards officers raided the unit in Oldbury after searching a vehicle in West Bromwich. Elsewhere, HM Revenue & Customs seized smuggled booze – including 5,500 crates of beer (662,757 litres), 1,000 cases of spirits (8,318 litres) and 1,200 cases of wine (5,178 litres) – from a unit in Greens Green. The haul was worth £120,000 in lost revenue.

Police and Sandwell Homes officers seized drugs worth £10,000, including cannabis plants and suspected Class A drugs, from a flat at Harry Price House, Oldbury. Safer 6, in its third year, ran from 15 October to 25 November. Organisations built on their day-to-day work together to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and give extra reassurance as the nights drew in and for the bonfire and fireworks season.

Activity across the six towns included:

- Reassurance patrols / visits by police, supported by council wardens, Sandwell Homes, Safer Travel Team and others
- Over 30 arrests by police – many for drugs
- Around 30 tonnes of waste cleared from ‘grot spots’ by offenders on Community Payback – supervised by Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust and working with Sandwell Homes and British Waterways
- Over 1,000 empty homes checked for security by the council’s private sector housing team – part of ongoing efforts to get private homes re-let
- Safety checks at around 150 homes by firefighters, with alarms fitted at many
- Over 100 firework sellers inspected by fire service and trading standards
- Over 10 abandoned vehicles removed by council wardens
- Over 40,000 smuggled cigarettes, 20 kilograms of tobacco and 110 litres of booze seized from shops and homes by police, trading standards and HMRC
- Road safety operations held by police and fire service – motorists were advised on seat belts and car seats and police seized illegally used vehicles
- Crackdown on off road bikes on Weddell Wynd, Tipton – warning letters sent to homes of 15 people by police.
- Sandwell Crime Prevention Panel joined partners at information roadshows and Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership gave advice on alcohol issues in Queen’s Square, West Bromwich, for Alcohol Awareness Week. Partners publicised advice, activities and results on Twitter and Facebook and in the local media. Read more about the campaign at www.sandwell.gov.uk/safer6

Young people in Safer 6

Hundreds of young people visited the Youth Bus during Safer 6 – taking part in activities and getting advice on issues such as personal safety, drugs and alcohol.

Run by the council’s young people’s services and supported by DECCA and other partners, the bus has helped detached youth workers build new links with teenagers across Sandwell. A wide range of youth activities were held in half-term.

Young people visited Wednesbury Police Station for ‘Prison Break’ sessions, to gain an insight into criminal justice. Firefighters gave firework safety advice to hundreds of children in schools. Children learned about litter and recycling – and safety at Halloween and during bonfire and Diwali season – thanks to sessions on the Eco Bus, run by the council, Litterwatch and Serco.

Help available on drugs and alcohol

There’s a new website in Sandwell for people who want information and support about drugs and alcohol, whether they or someone they know has a problem.

Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership (SDAP) has launched www.sdap.co.uk – which contains a host of useful information.

SDAP is working hard to make sure residents know the harm a dependence on drugs and alcohol can cause.

This has included:

- Alcohol awareness campaigns – including sensible drinking advice during Euro 2012 and over the summer
- Promoting national guidance on alcohol units – and encouraging people to come forward to get help if they, or someone they know, are having a problem with alcohol.

Neil Parkes, alcohol strategy development manager for SDAP, said: “Our next campaigns will focus on the dangers of mixing cocaine and alcohol and will also encourage people to be sensible in their drinking over the Christmas period. We don’t want to be killjoys – but drinking too much alcohol could end up in a trip to hospital, or the local police station. We also know that drinking heavily increases the chances of there being problems such as domestic violence.”

If you would like to speak to someone about a problem with alcohol and drugs, you can call Swanswell on 0845 112 0100 (for 18s and over) or DECCA on 0845 352 7701 (under-18s).

We also know that drinking heavily increases the chances of there being problems such as domestic violence.”

Try to have at least 2 alcohol free days a week

Tackling underage drinking

A new project is helping reduce underage drinking and harm linked to misuse of alcohol.

Sandwell’s Community Alcohol Project is working with young people, parents, schools, police, the council’s anti-social behaviour team and trading standards and health partners.
Great people, Great place, Great prospects, Great performance

Council open longer

Sandwell Council has increased opening times to make life easier for residents to report problems and pay bills.

The ground floor One Stop Shop at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury, offers a range of services including payment of council tax, paying bills, general enquiries and revenues and benefits.

The One Stop Shop will be open on Saturdays from 5 January to 23 March 2013, 10am to 1pm. This is extra to its usual opening hours, which are 8.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 8.30am to 5pm Friday.

Deputy council leader Councillor Mahboob Hussain said: “We want to make it easier for everyone to use council services, whether getting advice on housing or paying a bill. These new and extended opening hours will particularly help people who are at work during the week and can’t get to the council house during traditional opening times.” The new opening hours will be run as a pilot to see how popular they are with residents.

Council tax bills by email

You can now receive your council tax bill by email. Just go to www.sandwell.gov.uk/counciltax and go to the council tax e-billing section and fill in the registration form. By receiving the bill electronically you will help the council make savings on postage and paper and help the environment. You will also get your bill quickly and efficiently; and be able to view your bill as often as you like and save a copy on file for your personal records if you wish.

Changes to electoral registration

From summer 2014, people in Britain will need to register to vote individually rather than by household.

This new law will be the biggest change to voter registration in nearly a century.

At present, one person in every household is responsible for registering everyone else who lives at the address.

To make sure the electoral register is accurate and as complete as possible, the council will be using information it holds to identify people who are eligible to vote but not registered.

This is just one initiative of the council’s electoral participation cabinet committee to improve the electoral register and ensure eligible people can exercise their right to vote.

For more information call 0121 569 3220 or email electoral_services@sandwell.gov.uk.

Sandwell Council House
Oldbury
One Stop Shop
Open Saturday
from 5 Jan – 23 March 10am – 1pm

Council Tax | Paying Bills | General Enquiries

We’re open 24/7 online, visit www.sandwell.gov.uk
Sports stars back Portway

Two world-class athletes are backing the Portway Lifestyle Centre.

Paralympic silver medallist guide runner Mikail Huggins and Paralympics hopeful Shannon Wallace are looking forward to the venue in Newbury Road, Oldbury, opening next year.

Mikail, who coaches Shannon, scooped silver at London 2012 – running as guide to blind athlete Libby Clegg. He worked for three years as school sports co-ordinator at the Meadows Sports College in Oldbury.

He said: “Portway Lifestyle Centre is a great way to inspire a generation to come along, get active and be proud of your community.”

Sandwell Academy student Shannon, who has cerebral palsy, is a world junior runner aiming for the next Paralympics.

She said: “I want to qualify for Rio 2016 and hopefully training at Portway Lifestyle Centre will help me.”

Tony Zaiedel, the Meadows Sports College’s senior leader, is a mutual friend of Shannon and Mikail.

He said: “Sandwell has done something ground-breaking by creating a venue to help the people who would normally find it almost impossible to access sport and other social outlets. This will help to create Paralympians of the future.”

For more information on Portway Lifestyle Centre visit Sandwell Leisure Trust’s website www.slt-leisure.co.uk or call 0300 012 0121. ■

People shape Portway centre

Local people with disabilities are helping to ensure they will have full access to services and facilities at the new £18m Portway leisure, health and wellbeing centre.

The Portway Lifestyle Centre Reference Group is working with Sandwell Council and its partners on designing the pioneering venue in Oldbury.

Made up of people who use social and care services, the voluntary sector, GP patients, and carers’ representatives, the group has looked at everything from lighting design in corridors to bus timetabling.

The centre is due to open next year and will have a sports hall, hydrotherapy pool, gym and weight area, dance studio, climbing wall, a multi-use area, sensory room and external Life/Therapy trail, café and floodlit football pitches.

Support for jobseekers

A new support, training and advice centre for jobseekers has opened at Blackheath Library.

The Online Learning and Employment Centre offers IT and employability courses to help people gain new skills and qualifications or retrain. Staff can also advise on other training opportunities, jobs and careers. The courses are free for people on Jobseekers Allowance.

Courses on offer include: Beginners IT, Internet & Email, IT qualifications, CV Writing and job-related training, Food Hygiene, Sage Book-Keeping, Customer Service Skills, Manual Handling, Coach Skills, Assertiveness and many more.

Colin McClean, from Rowley Regis, said: “Since attending the Online Centre, I have really developed my IT skills. The staff are friendly and have given me information on new courses and job opportunities.”

Other services available at the library include a work club run by Black Country Housing every Tuesday that supports CV writing, job searches and interview techniques. Young people’s careers service Connexions also attends the library and offers its services free of charge.

Cabinet member for jobs and economy Councillor Derek Rowley said: “The online team is striving hard to support local people gain IT skills, employment and a variety of other training opportunities.”

Call the Online Learning Team on 0121 285 0604 or visit the library to talk to one of the team. ■

New social workers’ flying start

Newly qualified social workers in Sandwell have got their careers off to a flying start.

Fifteen of them have given children’s services in the borough a boost by taking part in Sandwell’s newly qualified social worker programme.

This is part of a national scheme which provides support, learning and development opportunities for social workers during their first year of practice.

Each social worker has to complete a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate developing skills, knowledge and competency. Cabinet member for children and families Councillor Bob Badham and children’s services director Helen Smith thanked the group for their hard work.

Councillor Badham said: “This programme aims to support newly qualified social workers as they find their feet in the challenging transition between university and the world of work.

“I would encourage our young people in Sandwell to consider social work as a career – it is a fulfilling profession with good prospects which can give people the opportunity to help the community they live in.”

The council also runs an early professional development programme to support social workers as their careers progress. ■

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New era for children’s services

Sandwell Council has launched a new era for children’s services by teaming up with a leading firm to boost its drive for excellence.

The local authority is bringing in iMPOWER to build on a number of recent achievements, including an improved rating for safeguarding – keeping children safe from harm.
iMPOWER, and its personnel partner Penna, will offer fresh ideas and expertise, working alongside the public, frontline staff and managers over 30 months in the first deal of its type in the country.
The £1.15m contract, largely paid for by savings in management costs, includes an interim director of children’s services – the top official for children’s services in the borough.
He is Simon White, an experienced professional with a track record of success.
Cabinet member for children and families Councillor Bob Badham said: “iMPOWER will help us to hit our target of providing excellent children’s services. Some of the media have wrongly said this contract is a privatisation. In fact it’s a temporary measure which will see iMPOWER become a part of our department, adding to what has already been achieved.”
Max Wide, director of iMPOWER, said: “Sandwell has made great strides in improving children’s services and our approach will be to build on what it has achieved, working alongside Simon and Sandwell’s staff to deliver a set of transformational projects that will put it ahead of the curve.”

Foster carers plea

Here in Sandwell we have a team of dedicated foster carers and prospective adoptive parents.

But we still need more people to come forward so we can meet the needs of all the children in our care.

We want every child to have a stable, loving and safe home environment, whether in Sandwell for those who need to stay close to their wider family, friends and school, or further afield if that is in their best interests.

Fostering and adoption are different and you have to decide what’s right for you and your existing family. In many cases children are fostered for a short period of time whereas adoption is permanent.

We welcome all enquiries. We are particularly keen to hear from the following:
• Potential foster carers with a medical background or who would like to offer short breaks to children with disabilities
• Prospective adopters for sibling groups, children aged over three and children from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Councillor Bob Badham, cabinet member for children and families, said: “Whether you want to become a professional foster carer working with Sandwell or make the long-term commitment to adopting a child into your family, I would urge you to get in touch with us. The possibilities might surprise you. We welcome people from different cultural backgrounds as we want our adoption and fostering services to reflect the people of Sandwell we are serving.”

To find out more about the training and support available to applicants visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/adoptandfoster or call us on 0800 358 0899.

Could you foster or adopt?

The answer might surprise you. In Sandwell we need to hear from people interested in becoming foster carers or adoptive parents, whatever your background, whatever your experience. You don’t know until you try. So call us and find out.

To find out more about fostering and adoption with Sandwell Council, call us on 0800 358 0899 or visit us at www.sandwell.gov.uk/adoptandfoster
Reduce your wasteline this Christmas and during 2013.

Thanks to you, we’re now recycling more than ever before in Sandwell. This is the first Christmas all homes with kerbside collections have a food waste container, blue lid recycling bin and a household waste bin. So, if you’re not already, make sure you reduce your wasteline and get recycling this Christmas and during 2013.

- **Cards and Wrapping**: (non-metallic paper with no glitter)
- **Bottles and Cans**
- **Boxes and Packaging**: (flatten your packaging for more room!)
- **Fruit and Vegetables**
- **Christmas Pudding**
- **Christmas Meats**
- **Christmas Pudding**
- **Bottles and Cans**
- **Boxes and Packaging** (flatten your packaging for more room!)
- **Fruit and Vegetables**
- **Christmas Pudding**
- **Christmas Meats**
Remember...

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- The Household Recycling Centre in Shidas Lane, Oldbury, will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day.
- There will be no garden waste collections between December 24 and January 4.
- Christmas trees can be cut up and put in your garden waste bin. Alternatively, arrange for a collection between January 7 - 25 by calling 0845 359 7501.
Welfare Reform

Managing your money – 6Towns Credit Union

For many people getting benefits, welfare reform changes will mean taking more control of their money and running their financial affairs for the first time. This may mean problems for some who have not been able to get a bank account, for example, or are used to having their rent paid for them and will now have to do it themselves.

In Sandwell the 6Towns Credit Union, based in West Bromwich, can help. It provides all the financial services people need – from savings accounts to payday loans – and helps keep them out of the clutches of ‘loan sharks’ charging sky-high interest. It works closely with services that can offer financial advice.

Get help NOW

Joining 6Towns NOW means you can get immediate help with things like:

• low-interest loans;
• having your rent paid direct from your account to your landlord so you have peace of mind;
• building up savings (30 collection points across Sandwell – three more by the end of 2012).

Some local employers offer ‘payroll saving’ so you put money into your 6Towns account as soon as you are paid. 6Towns is always keen to work with new employers on this, and if you are in work you could ask your firm about it.

6Towns also visits schools to talk to pupils about money matters and welcomes approaches from schools on this.

There are savings clubs at some schools and children’s centres in Sandwell so children can get in the habit of putting by small amounts regularly. Ask your child’s school or centre about this.

And in the FUTURE

6Towns is always looking for new ways to help people manage their money and next March will take a big step forward when it becomes the county’s first credit union to launch a fully functioning current account. This will be available to members regardless of their credit history and will open up banking services to people who have previously had trouble getting them. It will mean that no-one will be excluded when Universal Credit – which will pay benefit directly into a bank account – is launched in October 2013.

Tenants getting housing benefit (and in future Universal Credit) will be able to have rent paid direct to their landlord (council, a housing association or private) from the account – and 6Towns will protect the payment so it goes on time every month. Features of the new current account will include:

• fully functional online banking;
• protected funds to pay council tax and other bills as well as rent;
• a full range of savings accounts;
• direct debits;
• debit card you can use at any cashpoint;
• loans from £50 and payday loans;
• online shopping;
• mobile phone APP; and
• 24/7 help desk.

Contact 6Towns – at 382 High Street, West Bromwich – on 0121 553 3110. Email info@sixtowns.co.uk or find out more at www.sixtowns.co.uk.

‘Under-occupying’ - how much could it cost you?

From 1 April 2013 housing benefit will be linked to the number of bedrooms the Government says you need.

Up to 4,500 council tenants in Sandwell are set to lose an average of £747 a year. Under the new rules council tenants will lose:

• 14% of their gross rent for one ‘spare’ bedroom - about £10.80 per week; or
• 29% of gross rent for two or more ‘spare’ bedrooms - about £20.36 per week

For example

Mr Smith lives in a two-bedroom flat costing £73.71 a week.

At the moment housing benefit covers the full cost of his rent. Under the new rules he will have one ‘spare’ bedroom. His housing benefit will be reduced by 14% of his rent. This means his benefit will go down by £10.32 to £63.38 per week. Mr Smith will have to pay £10.32 a week towards his rent so he doesn’t fall into arrears.

Get advice now

Don’t wait until April to get help. Speak to a housing officer at your local Housing Service Centre about your options.

Housing benefit for people in work

Housing benefit is help with rent for people on low incomes.

You might be able to get it, even if you work. Ring the council’s Revenues and Benefits Service on 0845 351 0020. They can check over the phone to see if you might get help. You can also check online calculators on the council’s website or on Gov.UK to see if you might qualify.

If you have been receiving housing benefit and start a new permanent job after being unemployed for at least six months, you can sometimes get an ‘extended payment’. This means your rent is paid in full for the first month that you are back at work. Contact Revenues and Benefits to see if you might qualify for this.

To find out what you need to know, visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/welfarereform

We’re open 24/7 online

www.sandwell.gov.uk

The Government is making far-reaching changes to the country’s benefits system. They will affect many people in Sandwell. On this page we continue the Herald’s information and advice on welfare reform.

Will you be affected?

The council’s Think Local Employment and Skills service helps Sandwell residents get jobs.

Think Local……………

• puts local people first
• puts local businesses first
• champions apprenticeships and opportunities for young people
• provides first-class training, mentoring and support
• helps grow Sandwell’s economy
• raises aspirations and expectations
• raises Sandwell’s profile locally and regionally in terms of employment and skills

We work in three areas:

Employment Team

• We help employers find the right people for their business, identifying individuals’ level of experience and skills before forwarding applications to the employer.

• We support and advise employers interested in employing apprentices, offering mentoring support and mediation between the apprentice, their family, employer and training provider.

• We help people with mental health problems find and keep jobs.

• We support people with learning disabilities to find jobs or work experience.

Recruitment enquiries ring 0121 569 3074

Apprenticeship enquiries ring 0121 569 2099

Sector Development Team

• We work with many partners so local businesses and residents benefit from investment, developments and regeneration in Sandwell.

Training & Skills - Future Skills Sandwell

• We provide quality training in areas including construction, business administration and customer services.

• The HUB – Building Futures supports young ex-offenders and those on the fringes of crime to get ‘hands on’ experience in the construction industry. Young people get a recognised qualification and improve their chances of finding jobs they can keep.

Training enquiries ring 0121 569 2069

For general information contact Kim Mocroft on 0845 352 1255 or email kim_mocroft@sandwell.gov.uk.

The HUB – Building Futures

Revenues and Benefits Service

The HUB – Building Futures

Revenues and Benefits Service

Think Local……………

FIND A JOB

www.6towns.co.uk

www.sandwell.gov.uk
Like many areas, Sandwell is seeing an increase in the number of people who are facing a crisis and need emergency help such as food, clothing, nappies and household items. Sandwell Emergency Provisions Network has been set up to support food banks in Sandwell, to share resources and find ways to meet these growing needs. If you would like to make a donation of tinned or dried food, please contact Keith Turner at West Bromwich Food Bank, West Bromwich Community Church, Victoria Street, West Bromwich, B70 8EX. Call Keith on 0121 580 0068 or email him at keithturner@elimwestbrom.com.

More information about the type of foodstuffs that food banks need can be found at www.elimwestbrom.com/mission/foodbank.

All donations will be shared between the members of the network, who distribute food from a number of locations across the borough.

You can nominate now in the annual Star awards for Sandwell young people who have made a special commitment and positive contribution to their community over the past year. Organised by Sandwell Youth Cabinet, the awards are now in their sixth year and there are now 10 categories, which are – Young Carer; Volunteering; Performing Arts; Sporting; Bravery & Courage; Anti-Bullying; Education; Adult Star (nominated only by young people); Long Term Dedication; Star of Sandwell. Please get your nominations in by 25 January 2013. Either fill in the online nomination form at www.justyouth.org.uk or email shobha_sharma@sandwell.gov.uk or sultan_ahmedi@sandwell.gov.uk to ask for a form. Or call young people’s services on 0845 592 8432.

The awards will be presented at a ceremony at The Hawthorns on in March 2013.

Nominate young stars!

Now we are in winter, I want to take the opportunity to reinforce messages around young people keeping safe. With darker nights, it is often this time of year when thefts go up and young people often find themselves more at risk.

As a Youth Cabinet we have been busy preparing for the UK Youth Parliament House of Commons Debate. To ensure we are representing the voice of Sandwell’s young people, we have worked with young people’s services to hold a debate event around the top five issues voted for nationally by 254,000 young people, including 1,946 from Sandwell.

These issues are – make public transport cheaper, better and accessible for all; getting ready for work; marriage for all; an equal national minimum wage for all; and a curriculum to prepare us for life.

The debate timed with national Anti-Bullying Week (19 – 23 November) so we have also debated that as it’s another of our top priorities. We have also been working tirelessly on the Youth Cabinet’s first campaign on youth unemployment, including meeting with professionals and writing and developing our consultation questionnaire to find out the views and experiences of young people. If you’re a young person, please fill in the questionnaire at www.sandwelltrends.info. Or if you live or work with young people, please encourage them to fill it in.

Around 30 young people were taking part in the National Children’s Commissioner’s sixth annual Youth Takeover Day in November. This offers children and young people a chance to work with adults and get involved in decision making, benefiting young people and those who want to show their commitment to listening to children and young people.

Our future plans include hosting our annual Star Awards – please take the opportunity to nominate young people that you feel deserve recognition. On behalf of the Sandwell Youth Cabinet, I wish you a joyous festive season.

For more information on the Youth Cabinet, UK Youth Parliament or the initiatives mentioned above visit www.justyouth.org.uk or ‘like’ our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/SandwellYouth.

Youth voices

Sandwell town crier Adrian Holmes will be crying his hardest for the borough when he competes in the European Championships in 2013. Adrian, who performs his official duties as an unpaid town crier, has already scooped several awards in competitions across the country this year, with a string of first and second places. He’s taken part in various events across Sandwell in 2012, from Blind Dave Heeley’s Freedom of the Borough ceremony in March and the Armed Forces Day and Olympic torch event in Oldbury to a book launch about Bill Savage VC and Remembrance service at St Mary’s Church, Bearwood, in November.

Adrian, from Great Barr, said: “I am honoured to perform this honorary role for Sandwell and have entered town crier competitions across the country at my own expense to help get Sandwell’s name known further afield.”

“Business as usual” for council tenants

Council tenants in Sandwell have been assured it will be "business as usual" in housing service centres when responsibility for housing matters returns to the council in the New Year.

Norman Fletcher, general manager at Sandwell Homes, said: “The employees in housing will be as committed as ever to keeping up the high standards of service to our tenants. And we will be working to develop our services to tenants in the future as part of an ongoing plan to continue to improve standards on our estates.” Mr Fletcher said both the council and Sandwell Homes are committed to a seamless changeover and that tenants will see no difference in the service they will get at the housing service centres, on special freephone lines at libraries and at late-night openings. And he said housing employees would be working within a new Neighbourhood Services Directorate within the council to come up with further new improvements.

During 2013 we will be turning our six offices into neighbourhood service centres and offering new services for local residents in the six towns,” he added. Councillor Simon Hackett, the council’s cabinet member for housing, said: “Both organisations are working closely together to ensure it’s business as usual for our tenants from 1 January. The money saved by our decision to return management of council housing to the council will be ploughed back into improvements and frontline services.”

The council’s decision followed the Government cutting Decent Homes money for improvements. Councillor Hackett added: “We have a 10-year investment programme which will see us working to provide the next generation of good quality, warm and energy efficient homes for the future. For the first time in a generation the council will be building new council houses year-on-year.”

The important numbers for housing remain the same:

General enquiries: 0121 569 6000
Emergency out-of-hours service: 0800 844 112

Food bank donations wanted

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Gongs for town crier!
Sandwell to offer work experience

Sandwell Council is believed to be the first local authority in the country to offer young people high-calibre work experience sessions in a bid to help them gain vital job experience for the future.

The pioneering new scheme will start next year and is because council leaders believe it is vital out-of-work youngsters get specialised help to get them on the employment ladder.

The council already offers work experience placements for youngsters, usually for two weeks at a time in the final stages of their school careers. But it is now planned to launch a brand new scheme for youngsters who have left school at 16 and have not gone on to further education or got a job.

They will be offered three-month placements with the council where they will be given high-calibre specialised training. It will be available to all youngsters living in the borough.

Sandwell Council leader Councillor Darren Cooper said:

"Specialised work experience for young people is now more vital than ever. These are the people who are our future. These youngsters are vital for the future of the area and find they cannot get employment. We believe we are the first local authority in the country to offer this sort of specialised training and it is a major development for Sandwell.

"These youngsters are vital for the future of the area and must not be allowed to fall into unemployment at the first hurdle. We have spent the last 12 months looking at how we can help and this is clearly the way forward."

Councillor Cooper said at the end of the three-month placement the youngsters would have gained key experience and developed first-class CVs.

He added: "They will have developed the skill to get them into work and make something of their lives."

Record GCSE results

Sandwell’s education chief has praised schools for the borough's massive rise in the Government's league tables for GCSE passes.

In the Key Stage 4 tables, Sandwell youngsters achieving five or more passes at A* to C grades, including English and Maths, jumped 10 places to 128th out of 151 local authorities.

Councillor Bob Badham, cabinet member for children and families, said: “This is a marvellous achievement that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago when the department was in special measures.

"Now we are shooting up the table and are achieving results above the national average."

Councillor Badham said Sandwell was now achieving year-on-year improvements in exams results, which was a tribute to the hard work that has been put in by the council, head teachers, staff and pupils.

And in the table for any five GCSEs, the borough is now 52nd in the Government’s league tables.

In the table covering the points that pupils achieve for all qualifications, not just GCSEs, Sandwell comes in at an impressive 24th out of 151 local education authorities.

Councillor Badham added: "I am determined that we give our youngsters the best possible start in life. These figures back up what I have always said that education is very much on the up in Sandwell.

"There have been improvements year-on-year and, as good as these results are, we must strive to do even better next year. We have shown that with the right leadership and direction we can get up the league table and the aim is to rise again next year."

"It should be remembered that we have achieved this against a backdrop that all authorities are under pressure to improve – so a jump like this is really fantastic."

Tividale school success

Staff at a Sandwell primary school got ‘six of the best’ after being awarded top marks in their latest Ofsted report.

And to make it even better, it is the second time in four years that Tividale Community Primary School has got the accolade.

Tividale is the first school in Sandwell to get this status under the new Ofsted inspection framework. Ofsted carried out its inspection in October. They judged that the school, in Dudley Road West, is “outstanding” in six areas of inspection.

They cover:

- achievement of pupils
- behaviour of pupils
- overall effectiveness
- safety of pupils
- quality of teaching
- leadership and management.

The school was last inspected in 2008 when it was judged “outstanding”.

Delighted head Emma Burnell and governors’ chair Josephine Brown said: “This success marks a moment in time which we should celebrate after years of continued effort and determination to maintain our outstanding status. Nevertheless, we will not stand still – there is always much to do. Education is always moving on and we are always looking for further improvement.

“We would like to thank all our parents, as always, for their support, and pupils, staff and governors for everything they do to make this an outstanding school. Tividale values having such a wonderful school community and the inspectors were very impressed with our ethos of inclusion, tolerance and respect for the school and wider community.”

Cabinet member for children & families Councillor Bob Badham said: “This is a fantastic achievement and I congratulate everyone involved in getting this outstanding Ofsted report.”
Great people, Great place, Great prospects, Great performance

The Public ready for 2013

In 2013, iconic arts centre The Public will welcome some of the finest touring comics, holiday activities for the whole family and a special Black Country themed exhibition.

Award-winning comics Shazia Mirza (15 February), Lucy Porter (17 April) and Robin Ince (18 May) are among the top names set to delight audiences at the West Bromwich venue.

And the co-host of Frank Skinner’s Absolute Radio Show, Alun Cochrane, will head up a new monthly comedy club, ‘Sit Down, Stand Up’, in association with Avalon Promotions, on 1 March.

A free exhibition launches on 13 February called ‘Black Country – Legends’, a special celebration about all things Black Country – its charm, quirkiness and characters. Highlights include:

- ‘Ray’s A Laugh’ by Dudley-born photographer and Turner Prize nominee Richard Billingham
- A short film and artwork by mysterious local artist AJW, who has secretly left over 250,000 drawings and sketches of 1940s’ Hollywood star Mario Lanza in pubs and shops across the region over 50 years
- A giant map constructed by Brendan Jackson, revealing the things that are odd and peculiar about the region.

And throughout February half-term, there will be family activities including:

- Family craft day on 18 February – using brightly coloured recycled materials to make fabulous creations
- The ever-popular den building on 20 February
- Stop Motion Animation workshop on 21 February.

On 21 February, The Public will also welcome ‘Little Red…You Know Who’ by Freehand Theatre, a magical spellbinding play based on the traditional well-known story.

For more information about events, exhibitions and family friendly activities at The Public visit www.thepublic.com or call 0121 533 7161.

‘Bearwood on Ice’ is back!

The popular ‘Bearwood on Ice’ event is back – bringing magical fun for all the family in the build-up to Christmas at Lightwoods Park.

The event, organised by the Friends of Lightwoods Park, Sandwell Council and Sandwell Leisure Trust, will run from Saturday 15 to Saturday 22 December.

The synthetic skating rink is the star attraction – but there will also be music, a fun fair, giant inflatable slides, bouncy castles and Bearwood traders selling a wide range of seasonal food, drink and gifts for all ages and tastes. The council’s deputy leader Councillor Steve Eling said: “It’s great to see the community and council working together again for another Bearwood on Ice. I’m sure that it will be every bit as successful as last year and enjoyed by all”

Check out times, prices and contact details in the What’s On on the back page of the Herald or visit our www.sandwell.gov.uk/bearwoodonice webpage.

Industry through a lens

A West Bromwich community arts organisation has won £329,404 from the Arts Council to tell the largely untold story of British manufacturing and industry through the lens of 10 of the world’s greatest photographers.

Multistory has secured the funding from Arts Council of England’s Strategic Touring Programme for the project, called Open for Business. During 2013, Multistory will work in partnership with Magnum Photos to document manufacturing industries in 10 areas around the UK, including Sandwell.

Griffin Woodhouse Ltd, chainmakers, Cradley Heath, Brian Cartwright and his son Ross, 2010 © Martin Parr

During 2014 to 2016, there will be a major photo exhibition that will visit a venue in each of the locations.

The photographers will also capture the everyday life of communities within each of the unique locations, to create a local exhibition for each venue that will be placed within the context of the large-scale show.

The project will tell the story of British manufacturing, capturing the current landscape and its effect on people, community and culture through the unique, international perspective of the Magnum photographers.

Emma Chetcuti, director of Multistory, said: “Multistory is absolutely delighted to have received this funding from Arts Council England and we thank them for their continued support and belief in the work we do. We are pleased to be working in partnership with the renowned agency Magnum Photos and, through the association of some of the UK’s key cultural institutions, we believe this will be a landmark project with national importance.”

Multistory delivers projects across Sandwell and the Black Country, working with communities and artists to make art that celebrates lives. Multistory is supported by Sandwell Council and Arts Council England.
Sandwell’s 72 councillors are here to represent you.

They hold regular ‘surgeries’ where you can go to discuss council-related issues. Ring 0121 569 3129 or 0121 569 3044 to get details of exactly when and where. You can also ring these numbers if you are unsure who your councillors are.

Contact your councillor

**Your Councillors**

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<th>Ward</th>
<th>Councillor</th>
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<td>Abbey Ward</td>
<td>Steve Eling</td>
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<td>Dr. Ann Jaron</td>
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New Tipton Leisure Centre

Pre-opening offer
UNLIMITED Swim • Gym • Fitness Classes
£19.50 per month frozen for life

SANDWELL LEISURE TRUST
www.slt-leisure.co.uk
0303 303 0121

New leisure centre to open in 2013

A “topping out” ceremony has taken place to mark the completion of an £8 million leisure centre in Tipton.

The final tile of the new Tipton Leisure Centre in Alexandra Road was laid in November, just 11 months after work got under way.

Representatives of Sandwell Council, Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) and Willmott Dixon were on hand for the ceremony.

The centre, which is expected to be open in March 2013, will include a 25-metre, six-lane main pool, 12.5-metre teaching pool, gym and fitness classes, dance studio and much more.

Councillor Linda Horton, cabinet member for leisure services, said: “It’s fantastic to see this superb building completed. Tipton Leisure Centre will offer a state-of-the-art facility to meet the different needs of local residents.”

Peter Owen, managing director for Willmott Dixon, said: “As a company with a strong presence in Tipton and the West Midlands, we are really proud to have reached this milestone, which signals that we are nearing the home straight in completing a superb new leisure facility for residents.”

Paul Slater, chief executive officer for Sandwell Leisure Trust, said: “We are delighted that we are managing the newest leisure facility for Sandwell and look forward to it being a popular health and fitness hub for the local community.”

A discounted membership for the first 500 members is currently on sale through SLT’s website www.slt-leisure.co.uk

Prize Puzzles

Crossword

Across
1. Shuns (6)
4. A hot citrus drink to cure your cold (6)
9. Gets (7)
10. Not tight (6)
11. Helen of (4)
12. Uproarly (7)
14. Opposite of rights (6)
16. Human beings (6)
19. To show approval by clapping (7)
21. You can wash your hands with this (4)
23. To eject from a house (5)
24. Feeling (7)
26. Uses money (6)

Down
1. Short for ‘anonymous’ (4)
2. A Canadian province (7)
3. You get milk here (5)
4. To make big (7)
5. Recreational activity (5)
6. Someone who preaches (8)
7. Enquired about (5)
8. Allowed (7)
10. Participating in sport (7)
11. Flexible (5)
12. Opposite of subtracted (5)
20. Goes before a fall (5)
21. Animal’s trail or track (5)
22. Upon a time (4)

Wordsearch

C V D D O F Y S N C
Z A U T Q M N I V A
S J M S W I Z O B B
K C P B J N I M I
E P L Z A P N W R N
X A G N I G F O E
U R P E J L M O R X
B H T U O Y N W U C

Find the following words concealed in the grid:

Campaign
Snow
Food
Banks
Youth
Council Business
Town
Birks
Reform

Name…………………………… Telephone……………………………

Name…………………………… Telephone……………………………

Name…………………………… Telephone……………………………

Name…………………………… Telephone……………………………

Sudoku

Fill the grid so that every column, row and 3 x 3 box has the numbers 1 to 9.

Name…………………………… Telephone……………………………

Win £25 in Sainsbury’s vouchers

Send your answers to The Editor, Sandwell Herald, Communications Unit, Sandwell Council House, Freebry Street, Oldbury B69 3DE by 31 January 2013.

First correct entry for each puzzle out of the hat wins the prize. The editor’s decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

Lucky voucher winners from puzzles in the last Herald are:

• Crossword, Mrs Lynall, Cradley Heath
• Sudoku, Mrs Cheed, Smethwick
• Wordsearch, Joan Smith, Wednesbury
Christmas with the Warley Male Choir
Wednesday 12 December 2012
Manor House Museum, West Bromwich
Booking essential
Time: 7pm (doors open at 6.45pm)
Price: £5 (includes glass of mulled wine and a bag of chestnuts).
For info: 0121 588 2985

The songs of Christmas with Ian Casey
Thursday 13 December 2012
Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery
Ticket price includes light refreshments of mince pies and non-alcoholic mulled wine.
Time: 7pm – 9.30pm
Price: £6
For info: 0121 556 0683

Hangover Run
Tuesday 1 January 2013
The Pavilion, 101 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick
Join the Warley Woods Pacers in their annual (birthday) run around Warley Woods.
Time: 10am
Price: FREE
For info: info@reason2run.co.uk

Stargazing
Friday 15 February 2013
The Pavilion, 101 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick
Explore the night sky at Warley Woods with Birmingham Astronomy Society. Telescopes will be available on the night and if the evening sky is cloudy there will be talks indoors.
Time: 7pm – 9pm
Price: £3 (children free)
For info: 0121 420 1061

Utter Bearwood - Moon Stories
Thursday 20 December
Thimblemill Library, Smethwick
Christmas story cafe with resident storyteller Cath Edwards.
Time: 7pm – 10pm
Price: £4 book in advance; £5 on the door
For info: 0121 429 2039

Big Garden Bird Walk
Saturday 26 January 2013
The Pavilion, 101 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick
Come on a walk and find out about the bird life in Warley Woods from Liz Coleman, RSPB and Warley Woods volunteer.
Time: 10am
Price: £2 adults
For info: 0121 420 1061

Christmas with the Warley Male Choir
Wednesday 12 December 2012
Manor House Museum, West Bromwich
Booking essential
Time: 7pm (doors open at 6.45pm)
Price: £5 (includes glass of mulled wine and a bag of chestnuts).
For info: 0121 588 2985

Festive Family Quiz Night
Thursday 20 December
Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery
Spaces are limited so call us on to book in your team of up to six people. Ticket price includes a fish and chip supper.
Time: 7pm – 9pm
Price: adult £4; children £3
For info: 0121 556 0683

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Utter Bearwood - The King of Denmark's Son
Thursday 24 January 2013
Thimblemill Library, Smethwick
Author and international storyteller Cat Weatherill will bring storytelling to life.
Time: 7pm – 10pm
Price: £4 book in advance; £5 on the door
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Christmas through the decades
Wednesday 19 December 2012
Manor House Museum, West Bromwich
Ian Casey is back with classics, carols and tap-your-feet Christmas songs.
Booking is essential.
Time: 7pm start (doors open at 6.45pm)
Price: £6 per person
(includes chestnuts and mulled wine).
For info: 0121 588 2985

Christmas comes to Sandwell Park Farm
Sandwell Park Farm is the perfect place to begin the Christmas season!
For a magical Victorian Christmas, a chance to meet Santa, stock up on presents – and even buy your tree.
Thimblemill Library, Smethwick
Saturday 24 November
Free entry

Festive Celebration and Craft Fair
Join us for a weekend of traditional festive celebrations: Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 December
Sandwell Park Farm
Salter Lane, Wednesbury
B71 4BG
Tel: 0121 553 0200

Christmas Comes to Sandwell Park Farm
Thimblemill Library, Smethwick
Saturday 24 November
Free entry

What’s On in Sandwell

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Christmas at the Manor House Museum
Sunday 16 December 2012
Manor House Museum, West Bromwich
Family fun day with lots of festive entertainment and visit Santa in his grotto.
Time: 11am – 3pm
Price: FREE admission; small charge for some activities
For info: Sandwell Leisure Trust 0300 012 0121; Sandwell Council 0121 569 4703

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