Winter is here
Like our Facebook page and follow us on Twitter for updates about gritting, school closures and lots more…

www.facebook.com/sandwellcouncil
@sandwellcouncil

Merry Christmas

Dog fouling
Sandwell takes a stand
SEE PAGE 2

Christmas bin collections
And your guide to festive recycling
SEE PAGE 12-13

Homelife
Housing and neighbourhood news
SEE PAGES 15-22
**Christmases at Sandwell Valley**

Sandwell Park Farm has been transformed into a winter wonderland for the festive season. The headline act for the first half is Sandwell (BUDS). Featuring a host of music, dance and comedy, the show will be raising money for Birmingham Midland Eye Centre and Better Understanding of Dementia for Sandwell (BUDS).

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**Mayor’s Big Night Out!**

The Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Linda Horton invites you to her ‘Big Night Out’ to raise money for her chosen charities. The annual charity event will be held at West Bromwich Town Hall from 7pm on Saturday 8 March 2014. Featuring a host of music, dance and comedy, the show will be raising money for Birmingham Midland Eye Centre and Better Understanding of Dementia for Sandwell (BUDS).

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**Dog fouling campaign steps up**

Here in Sandwell, we’re stepping up our ‘zero tolerance’ approach to dog fouling.

The council is launching a hard-hitting campaign to get people talking about the issue and urge irresponsible dog owners to clean up.

Our wardens have issued more than 50 £75 fines for dog fouling recently. And they’ve handed out thousands of dog mess bags and educated owners to help keep our streets and open spaces clean.

Working with waste partner Serco, the council is trialling temporary stencils on the pavements in areas where there have been lots of complaints, to warn people about fines.

Councillor leader Councillor Darren Cooper said: “As a dog owner myself, I’m fed up with the small minority of people who don’t clean up after their pets. It’s something that really annoys responsible dog owners as well as others who tread in it."

For many people, this is the number one priority problem they keep reporting to the council. They are worried, too, by the potential for mess to spread disease - especially in children and young people who play in our parks and open spaces.

**“We had nearly 800 dog fouling reports last year – council taxpayers’ money could be much better spent on other frontline services than cleaning up this mess. “We have to act – that’s why we’re taking such a strong approach. The council and residents are not prepared to put with this any longer,”\n
Winter is the peak season for dog fouling complaints.

Report those not cleaning up after their dogs at www.sandwell.gov.uk/dogfouling. Email contact@sandwell.gov.uk or call 0845 359 7501. Please give specific details – e.g. time, date, location, description of dog and owner – or any incidents so we can get mess cleaned up and track down those responsible.

**Are you a top dog owner?**

We want to thank dog owners who are doing their bit to keep Sandwell clean.

We have hundreds of free dog mess bag holders (including a set of bags) available on a first-come, first-served basis.

All you need to do is fill in the online form at www.sandwell.gov.uk/dogbags or call 0121 569 6889 (answer phone available).
Health and leisure under one roof

A landmark £18m leisure centre – one of the few of its kind nationwide – opened in Sandwell in September. Portway Lifestyle Centre in Newbury Lane, Oldbury, serves people with and without disabilities equally, offering improved healthcare and leisure facilities under one roof in a specially designed building.

It is open from 7am to 10pm on weekdays and 7am to 6pm at weekends with onsite parking available. Customers can pay as they go or join the centre’s membership scheme.

See the advert below for some of the fantastic facilities on offer.

The centre offers over 40 fitness classes every week including a new Aqua-Life session in the hydrotherapy pool. There are also spaces available on the centre’s popular swimming lesson programme, including parent and toddler sessions and adult lessons.

The centre also houses a GP surgery, the Portway Family Practice, which is replacing the Tividale Family Practice. Councillor Steve Eling, Sandwell Council’s deputy leader, said: “This is a fantastic centre that is a real bonus for the community. The combination of health and leisure services with special facilities for people with disabilities must rank among the best in the country.”

Deputy council leader Councillor Steve Eling joins Sandwell Leisure Trust staff to open Portway Lifestyle Centre.

For more info on Portway – and timetables and bookings – visit www.slt-leisure.co.uk or call 0300 012 0121.

Reach new heights

A new indoor climbing centre is now open to the public at the Portway Lifestyle Centre in Oldbury.

The 10-metre wall, which has 50 possible routes to the top, is managed by local adventure training experts Closer to the Edge.

People who have never climbed before can learn the basics of climbing by joining a coaching session or course. For the more experienced climber, the centre offers open access climbing sessions throughout the week.

The Closer to the Edge team also offer group bookings and adventure birthday party packages with optional catering.

Pedal power for Blind Dave and Juanita

Two of Sandwell’s London 2012 Olympic torchbearers have put pedal power at the front of their latest fundraising efforts.

‘Blind Dave’ Heeley, from West Bromwich, did the gruelling seven-day, 700-mile cycle ride from Zurich to Birmingham this autumn, raising more than £7,000 for Help Harry Help Others as part of the ‘7inSeven’ challenge.

Steve ‘Duggie’ Dugmore, Dave’s friend and former Sandwell Police commander, rode tandem. They were part of a group of 25 riders taking part in the challenge, which passed through seven countries.

You can still donate at www.justgiving.com/blinddaveheeley

Help Harry Help Others was started by the incredibly brave Harry Moseley. Money raised will help with much-needed research into brain cancer, along with specialist nurses to give important treatment.

Meanwhile, Juanita Williams (pictured), from Langley, is gearing up for a life-changing cycle ride across the Himalayas.

Juanita is taking on the mammoth 315-mile challenge from Amritsar – which is twinned with Sandwell – to Delhi, in October 2014. And she’s calling on other Sandwell people to join her. Juanita will be raising money for Macmillan Cancer Relief in memory of her late father Bob Mansell, who ran a cycling shop in Smethwick.

People wanting to contribute to Juanita’s sponsorship fund should go to www.justgiving.com/juannydoesindia
Alcohol is involved in three quarters of domestic abuse offences.

To check your recommended daily alcohol limits, visit: www.drinkaware.co.uk or www.nhs.uk/Change4Life

For help with an alcohol issue, call:
Swanswell – 0845 112 0100 over 18s
DECCA – 0845 352 7701 under 18s
www.sdap.co.uk
www.ourguideto.co.uk

Follow us on Twitter @sdapinfo
Keep warm this winter

Keeping warm in winter is a simple but effective way to reduce illness.

What you can do

Keep warm:
• Heat your home to the right temperature – your living room should be 21°C (70°F), and your bedroom and rest of the house heated to 18°C (65°F). Above this and you may waste money; below this you may risk your health. This will keep your home warm and may lower your bills.
• If you can’t heat all the rooms you use, heat the living room during the day and your bedroom just before bedtime.
• Don’t use a gas cooker or oven to heat your home; it is inefficient and there’s a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and this can kill.
• Fitting draught proofing, drawing curtains and making sure radiators are not obstructed help keep rooms warm.

Look after yourself:
• Food acts as a vital source of energy in keeping your body warm – so eat and drink plenty.
• Keep moving – ideally at least once an hour – to keep warm. Wear slippers and warm clothes.

• If you take medication, make sure you have some spare so you are not caught out in the cold.

Home energy efficiency:
• You may be entitled to grants or benefits to help make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills.
• The Energy Saving Advice Service provides impartial advice on energy saving measures around the home. Visit www.energysavingtrust.org.uk or call 0300 123 1234.
• Your gas and electricity suppliers should have a service offering advice on usage for older customers.

Look after others:
• Check on older neighbours or relatives, especially if they are living alone or have serious illness, as they are most at risk.

Let’s look out for ourselves as well as others, so we can all stay warm together.
Choose Well when you are unwell

There’s a range of NHS services on your doorstep:

- **A&E or 999**
  - Choking
  - Chest pain
  - Blackout
  - Blood loss

- **NHS 111**
  - Call 111
  - Unwell?
  - Unsure?
  - Confused?
  - Need help?

- **NHS Walk-in Centre**
  - Cuts
  - Strains
  - Itches
  - Sprains

- **Your GP**
  - Vomiting
  - Ear pain
  - Sore belly
  - Back ache

- **Pharmacy**
  - Diarrhoea
  - Runny nose
  - Painful cough
  - Headache

- **Self-care**
  - Hangover
  - Grazed knee
  - Sore throat
  - Cough

Visit www.choosewellmidlands.nhs.uk

Sandwell and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group

Follow us @ SWBCCG
sandwellandwestbhamccg.nhs.uk
Three Sandwell parks and a cemetery have been voted into the top 25 best-loved green spaces in the whole country.

Warley Woods came fifth in Keep Britain Tidy’s Green Flag People’s Choice Awards and Sandwell Valley Country Park came 10th.

Tipton Cemetery was 17th and Haden Hill Park, Cradley Heath, was 23rd.

Sandwell’s four entries mean we have more green spaces in the top 25 than any other council area in the country.

Members of the public voted online for their favourite Green Flag park or open space out of 1,448 across the country.

Sandwell has 12 Green Flag spaces in total – the most out of any borough in the Midlands.

Congratulations to all of our staff, Serco, Warley Woods Community Trust, the friends groups and volunteers involved in our parks and green spaces – great job!

Public vote joy for green spaces

Free swims

Young and old can sign up now for free swimming in Sandwell.

Sixteen-year-olds and under can swim for free in school holidays – including the Christmas break – and people aged 60 and over can swim for free up to 1pm every day of the year.

The two-year pilot scheme is open to Sandwell residents only and is available at Haden Hill Leisure Centre, Langley and Smethwick swimming centres and the new Tipton Leisure Centre.

To register, visit www.stl-leisure.co.uk and follow the links to free swimming. For more info, call your nearest swimming centre on 0300 012 0121.

New leisure centre on track

The new £11 million West Bromwich Leisure Centre is on course to open in summer 2014.

Mayor Linda Horton and council deputy leader Councillor Steve Eling unveiled the centre name at the front entrance at a ‘topping out’ ceremony in November.

The centre will include a 25m pool, learner pool, sauna and steam room, four-court sports hall, 100-station fitness suite, two dance studios/activity rooms, indoor children’s adventure play centre and cafe.

Councillor Eling said: “It’s fantastic to see this superb building being completed. This is an important milestone for West Bromwich and Sandwell in continuing to provide excellent sport and leisure facilities for the residents of the borough to enjoy.”

Peter Kirkham, development director at DC Leisure, said: “We are very pleased with the building progress to date. In the new year we will open a customer information centre for the local community to visit and enquire about the leisure facilities and membership options.”

Gert-Jan Peeters, UK director of main contractor Pellikaan, added: “Progress on site is going very well thanks to great partnerships within the team – not only with Sandwell Council and DC Leisure, but also with the designers, engineers and subcontractors, many of whom are local to the area. We look forward to handing over the new centre on time.”

Making your New Year health resolutions?

If so, just call 0800 011 4656 and you’ll get quick and easy access to a range of lifestyle services including:

• healthy eating;
• physical activity;
• stopping smoking;
• sexual health;
• confidence and wellbeing;
• weight management.

SMOKEFREE

The council provides this free and confidential lifestyle telephone service for you.

Here’s what one caller had to say about the Sandwell Lifestyle Choices service: “I’m in the 13th week of attending the Slimwell programme. I have lost 10 pounds and gained more awareness about foods, fats and sugars. The lifestyle service was helpful as they told me how I could use Slimwell and they provided encouragement.”

Sandwell Lifestyle Choices is available from 9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday and from 9am to 4.30pm on Fridays.

Need emergency contraception?

If you have had unprotected sex or your contraceptive method fails, then you may be able to use emergency contraception.

If taken within three days (72 hours), it may prevent pregnancy. The sooner you seek advice the better.

Services in Sandwell are free and confidential and welcome under 16s.

Visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/contraception for a list of services open in Sandwell over the Christmas and New Year period.

And if your doctor’s surgery is closed, you can go to another surgery in your area. You don’t have to be a patient at the surgery to obtain emergency contraception.
New foster carers always wanted

Sandwell’s Fostering Service is set to make 2014 its busiest year for recruiting new foster carers, with a rolling campaign of information evenings.

Starting at Smethwick Library at 6pm on 29 January, the team will be running bi-monthly open events in each of the six towns of Sandwell during the year.

Called ‘Become A Foster Carer’, the events will include a short film about fostering and the chance to have a one-to-one conversation with a member of the team.

Cabinet member for children’s services Councillor Simon Hackett said: “We want caring people to look after our children - people who want to be professionally trained and supported while bringing out the best in children.

“That’s why we are determined to reach out across Sandwell and give everyone the opportunity to find out about fostering.”

For more details about all of the events and general fostering enquiries, visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/fostering or call 0800 358 0899.

Or drop in at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury, and ask to speak to a member of the team.

Youth fundraising success

Young people who braved the rain to hold a charity festival in Smethwick raised more than £4,500 for Muslim Aid to help victims of the Syria conflict.

Rapper Muslim Belal, comic Prince Abdi and composer Ehsaan Tahmid – as well as many talented local young people – performed at Tasty Mo’s charity park event at Lewisham Park.

Organisers would like to thank all sponsors and every volunteer who made the day a success – including Hadley Group, Shaacl Studio, Smethwick Youth Forum, Anondo and West Midlands Police. Special thanks to Unity FM and Raaj FM for help with promotion.

One volunteer said: “Meeting the special guests and seeing the park with many people was wonderful. It’s a day I shall never forget as nothing has ever been organised like this in Smethwick.”

Council leader Councillor Darren Cooper said: “I am very proud of our young people. I was very impressed to hear about this event organised by local young people and would like to say well done to all involved.”

Courtesy of Ador Photography

Top award for Alaine

A Sandwell social worker is celebrating after winning a top award for championing professional development.

Alaine Shaw was named Link Officer Newcomer of the Year in the prestigious Research in Practice annual awards.

Link officers encourage colleagues to use online learning and related resources to reinforce good practice and evidence-based planning.

Alaine joined Sandwell as a frontline social worker before moving into children’s social care workforce development.

Team manager Alaine said: “I was proud to receive this award but it is really a testament to everyone at Sandwell who is committed to giving children and families the best service they can.”

Sandwell Council...working for you

If you think you might not be able to foster, come along and get the facts: You don’t have to be in a relationship or own your own home. We do ask you live in, or reasonably close to,

Sandwell and you will need to have a spare room in your home.

We do not discriminate based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality or gender. With some of our best carers already defying the stereotypical foster carer, we want anyone who’s thinking of fostering, or just curious to know more, to come along and talk to us.

Are you registered to vote?

If you don’t register to vote, you may also have problems getting credit – including a mortgage or mobile phone contract.

It’s really easy to register.

If there have been no changes in your household since last year you can register for free online, by text or by phone. Full details are on your form.

If you can’t find your form, you can download one from www.aboutmyvote.com or contact our Electoral Services team by emailing electoral_services@sandwell.gov.uk or call 0121 569 3244.

If you don’t confirm the details on your form, someone will visit your home to confirm your details. It would be helpful (and save us money) if you could respond before we send someone to visit you.

If you have recently moved house please contact us to make sure you are registered at your new home.

Postal votes

You can register for a postal vote to get your ballot papers delivered through the post just before the elections. You then post them back to us free of charge.

The deadline to apply for a postal vote is Wednesday 7 May, 2014.

Did you know?

Two Sandwell residents have recently been prosecuted at court for failing to fill in their electoral registration form.

Magistrates were told they repeatedly failed to provide information required by the electoral officer.

They were each fined £200 – and ordered to pay £276 costs with a further £20 victim’s surcharge.

Sandwell chief executive and the borough’s electoral registration officer Jan Britton said: “Measures like this are only taken as a last resort and they are only pursued when we are actually refused the information on a house visit.

“The aim is to obtain information that we are entitled to by law and without which we cannot perform our statutory duty.”
Medals return to Sandwell

Four medals awarded to a former Mayor of Wednesbury who fought in the Charge of the Light Brigade are to go back on display at Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery after going “missing” for nearly 40 years.

John Ashley Klverk was blown off his horse in the charge and was treated for his injuries by Florence Nightingale. His injuries by Florence Nightingale.

The medals went “missing” when the borough of Sandwell was formed in 1974. Museum staff thought they had gone forever until recently when they were contacted by Birmingham auction house Fellows to say they had them.

They had been submitted for auction by 94-year-old Joyce Hands, from Walsall, who was selling her late husband Walter’s medal collection which he had bought over 20 years ago, unaware they belonged to Sandwell Council. It is believed they had changed hands several times before he bought them in all innocence.

Sandwell Council deputy leader Councillor Mahboob Hussain said: “It was a wonderful gesture by Mrs Hands and we are delighted the medals are safely back in the council’s hands where they belonged to Sandwell Council. It was bought over 20 years ago, unaware they changed hands.

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On being discharged from the Army, Mr Klverk settled in Coventry where he married and had a son George. But when his wife died he moved to Wednesbury where he married again.

Mr Klverk entered public service where he was elected to the town council in 1886 and served in a number of positions before becoming mayor in 1905. He died in 1920 aged 87.

Youth focus

Wasim Ali, chair of Sandwell’s Shadow Youth Cabinet 2012-2014, gives his end of year message.

“The past year has been one of great achievements and celebration for the Sandwell Shadow Youth Cabinet and Sandwell members of UK Youth Parliament. Our members have continued to use their passion and energy to represent the young people of Sandwell.

Our achievements for 2013 have included the sixth annual STAR (Sandwell Teenagers Achieve Recognition) Awards. We’ve also campaigned on the issues of youth unemployment, bullying, hate crime, gang culture and crime in general.

As we come towards the close of our term of office, we are busy planning the youth elections taking place in January and February next year. The new Sandwell Shadow Youth Cabinet will be welcomed into office on 7 February, 2014.

We are also planning the seventh annual STAR Awards for March 2014 to recognise the achievements of Sandwell’s young people. We’re really grateful to the organisations whose funds keep this event going.

At a time when we have all been celebrating various cultural festivals, coming together with families and friends; sharing the message of goodwill, our hearts go out to those affected by the typhoon in the Philippines last month. We are looking at ways of fundraising for people caught up in this tragedy.”

For further information about any of the events mentioned here, visit our website: www.justyouth.org.uk, join us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SandwellYouth or call 0845 352 1278.

WORDSEARCH

• AMRITSAR • GRIT • HOMELIFE • YOUTH • CABINET
• FOOD • BANK • QUEENS • SQUARE • AGEWELL

ACROSS
1. Native of Britain (6)
2. Not much happening in this state (7)
3. Kind of veg (5)
4. Native of Britain (6)
5. Accomplish (7)
6. Frank — film director (5)
7. Strange way of saying ‘explode’ (8)
8. Eskimo house (5)
9. Wanting (7)
10. Opposite of fears (5)
11. Public school (4)
12. Taken as a whole (7)
13. Anything offered (8)
14. European country (6)
15. Shone (6)
16. Feeling (7)
17. God or task (7)
18. A blacksmith uses this (5)
19. From China (7)
20. Animal (5)
21. Chop choice never wins (5)
22. State of cantlusion (4)

DOWN
1. Loud noise (4)
2. Not much happening in this state (7)
3. Kind of veg (5)
4. Nat. of Britain (6)
5. Accomplish (7)
6. Frank — film director (5)
7. Strange way of saying ‘explode’ (8)
8. Eskimo house (5)
9. Wanting (7)
10. Opposite of fears (5)
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20. Animal (5)
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22. State of cantlusion (4)

Win £25 in Sainsbury’s vouchers

Send your answers to The Editor, Sandwell Herald, Communications Unit, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury B69 3DE, by 31 January 2014. 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, M Hayhurst, Tipton
Wordsearch, J Durrant, Oldbury
Sudoku, M Jefferson, Rowley Regis
Bigger schools!

A £2.7m block at an Oldbury school was officially opened by the Bishop of Aston, the Right Reverend Andrew Watson.

Pupils, staff, governors, parents and the council’s cabinet member for children’s services Councillor Simon Hackett attended the grand opening at Christ Church CofE Primary.

The new block includes new classrooms, assembly area and a dining hall.

The council worked with the Diocese of Birmingham and the school on the scheme, project managed by Sandwell Futures, the local education partnership.

Councillor Hackett said: “Christ Church is one of several schools in Sandwell to be expanded to meet soaring demand caused by significant increases in the birth rate and more people choosing to live in the borough.”

Works were also completed at Crocketts Community and Shireland Hall primary schools in Smethwick, Rowley Hall Primary, Rowley Regis, and Summerhill Primary, Tipton, in time to welcome pupils for the new school year.

The council plans to expand eight more primary schools to create 1,420 new places by next year.

Sandwell is going places

An experienced children’s social care boss has joined the council as its director of children and families.

Matthew Sampson, who began his career as a frontline social worker, moves from the equivalent job in Sheffield.

He arrives as Sandwell and its specialist partner IMPower change the way children’s services work to make them fit for purpose.

He said: “I am really happy to be in Sandwell. It’s an exciting time as the council leads the way in giving children and families effective services.”

Improvements already in place include a new system to assess referrals so children and families receive the right service at the right time.

And community groups have been launched in each of Sandwell’s six towns to help children and families in need at the earliest time.

Cabinet member for children’s services Councillor Simon Hackett said: “A big welcome to Matthew who brings with him a wealth of experience and knowledge at all levels.

“The fact we can attract someone of his calibre shows Sandwell is really going places.”

Looking for a nursery?

Sandwell Council has opened its nursery at the Council House in Oldbury to parents and carers looking for quality care for their children.

There are free places for two, three and four-year-olds available – call Penny Berry on 0121 569 3165 for information.

The nursery has experienced staff with levels 2 and 3 nursery nursing qualifications and is accredited by Basic Skills Quality Mark to promote literacy and numeracy in Early Years.

Cabinet member for children’s services Councillor Simon Hackett said: “This nursery plays a vital role in providing high quality childcare for Sandwell children. As a parent who has used its services, I can highly recommend it.”

Your child may be entitled to FREE childcare in Sandwell.

To find out more contact Sandwell Family Information Service

0121 569 4914 or visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/familyinfo

Sure Start

Sandwell Family Information Service
Ready for winter

Winter is well and truly here and in Sandwell we’re well prepared.

We have around 7,000 tonnes of grit in stock at our depot in Taylors Lane and our gritting crews are on 24-hour standby until March.

Our staff will be out gritting the roads as soon as the temperatures drop. Each time they go out, they grit more than 300 miles of Sandwell’s roads.

We’re also giving more than 40 tonnes of salt to our 7,000 Snow Champions this winter for them to help clear pavements and paths. That’s two 3kg tubs for everyone who has registered as a Snow Champion in previous winters, and one 3kg tub plus a snow shovel and a high vis jacket to the 500 new Snow Champions who applied in October.

Deliveries of salt and Snow Champion kits started in mid-November, so everyone should receive their supplies before Christmas.

All of our Snow Champions kits have now been claimed. We may have some more available later in the winter, please keep an eye on our website www.sandwell.gov.uk/snowchampion for details.

We’re also giving free grit bins and snow shovels to Sandwell schools to help them stay open if it snows. It means schools will be able to clear their playgrounds and sites to make it safe for pupils and teachers.

Park for 15 minutes

Council parking charges in part of West Bromwich have been slashed to allow people to buy ‘short stay’ 15-minute tickets for 30p.

The new charges are now in force along High Street, George Street, New Street, Victoria Street, Lombard Street, Lombard Street West and Lodge Road.

Cabinet member for highways & environment Councillor Maria Crompton said if popular and successful it could be adopted in other parts of Sandwell.

Sandwell Burial & Cremation Services

West Midlands

Committed to providing the highest standard of care and attention in our cemeteries and crematoria

Can we help?

- We care for people at a difficult time and tailor our services to meet your requirements.
- We offer burial and cremation services regionally.
- Cremation and burial services are available 7 days a week.
- We are able to broadcast and record cremation services to loved ones worldwide via the internet.
- We have a large car park and a dedicated coach parking bay.
- Wide range of music and visual tributes are available.

Our promise to you

We take great care to create a peaceful and tranquil environment in our award winning gardens for people to visit and pay their respects.

Contact us

To arrange a visit or speak to us directly call 0121 569 6700, or email bereavement_services@sandwell.gov.uk

Sandwell Valley Crematorium
Newton Road, West Bromwich
West Midlands B71 3SX

Sandwell Council House
Oldbury

One Stop Shop
NOW OPEN
every Saturday*
9am to 12 noon

Ask about:
Council Housing | Benefits | Council Tax

We’re open 24/7 online, visit www.sandwell.gov.uk

* Please note the One Stop Shop will be closed on Saturday 28 December
Have you been good this year?

Firstly a big thank you to everyone for helping Sandwell recycle. By using your blue lid recycling bin and food waste container more, we can make 2014 the year that Sandwell recycles over 50% of its waste.

When making your New Year’s resolutions, please remember to put recycling at the top of your list. It’s one resolution you can keep all year round.

Have a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Recycle your small electrical items for FREE by calling 0845 359 7501 to book a collection.

For more information about recycling this winter, or the
Sandwell residents can make recycling one of their New Year Resolutions for 2012 thanks to their new waste and recycling service. By February 2012, homes in the borough will have received their new household waste bin and food recycling containers.

The new wheeled bins will reduce the amount of rubbish from split black sacks and help make neighbourhoods cleaner. The new service, which includes weekly blue lid recycling collections, can also help you save money by reducing the amount of food you throw away.

People living in flats, apartments, sheltered housing and properties with communal bin stores will receive recycling facilities next year.

### Household Recycling Centre
The Household Recycling Centre, Shidas Lane, Oldbury, B69 2BP, will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day.

### Garden waste collections
There will be no garden waste collections between Monday 23 December 2013 and Friday 3 January 2014.

### Christmas and New Year Bin Collections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal collection day</th>
<th>Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday 23 Dec</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 24 Dec</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 25 Dec</td>
<td>Saturday 28 Dec</td>
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<td>Thursday 26 Dec</td>
<td>Sunday 29 Dec</td>
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<td>Monday 30 Dec</td>
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<td>Tuesday 31 Dec</td>
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<td>Wednesday 1 Jan</td>
<td>Saturday 4 Jan</td>
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<td>Thursday 2 Jan</td>
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<td>Friday 3 Jan</td>
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**Food Waste**

**Nice**
- Recycle all your food leftovers in the brown container.
- You can line your caddy with compostable liners, kitchen roll or newspaper.

**Naughty**
- Don’t line your container with carrier bags as they cannot be composted.
- Don’t put any packaging or liquids in your food waste container.

### Real Christmas Tree Recycling
Real Christmas trees can be cut up carefully and put in your garden waste bin. Alternatively you can leave your real Christmas tree next to your garden waste bin at the edge of your property on your scheduled garden waste collection day.

Garden waste collections will start again on Monday 6 January 2014.
Do you know who is taking you home tonight?

ALWAYS, ALWAYS
use a Taxi or Pre-booked Licensed Private Hire Vehicle

Taxi and Private Hire Licensing
Tel: 0121 569 6655
www.sandwell.gov.uk/taxi

REMEMBER
Always use a Licensed Taxi or Pre-booked Private Hire Vehicle.

Taxis (Hackney Carriages) can be hailed in the street. Many of the Taxis look like black cabs. All Taxis have an illuminated Taxi sign on the roof. They may also have corporate advertising that covers the entire body of the Taxi.

Licensed Private Hire Vehicles cannot be hailed in the street. They must be pre-booked with an operator otherwise they are not insured and no record of the journey can be traced.

The vehicle must have a Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council ID plate fitted to the rear of the vehicle and another displayed on the inside. The driver will have two photo ID badges, one must be worn and the other must be displayed inside the vehicle.

Cars cruising the streets looking for customers are illegal, uninsured and potentially dangerous.

If possible, book a Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle in advance. Ask for the driver’s name, as well as the make and colour of the car.

Confirm the driver’s details when they arrive - is it the Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle you ordered?

If you are ordering a Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle from a public place try not to let people overhear your name and address - anyone could pretend to be your Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle.

Sharing a Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle with a friend and sitting in the back of the car are all good safety strategies.

If you chat to the driver, be careful not to give away any personal details.

NEVER
use Taxis or Private Hire Vehicles that are not licensed. If you do you are getting into a vehicle with a stranger.

Many people who have used unlicensed vehicles have been the victims of crimes such as rape, assault and theft.

SAY ‘NO’ to the norovirus stomach bug

Recognise symptoms
Symptoms can begin suddenly and may include:
• Nausea
• Projectile vomiting
• Diarrhoea (watery stools)
• High temperature
• Stomach cramping

Avoid catching it
• Wash your hands regularly throughout the day
• Keep your environment clean and clutter-free
• Avoid sharing food utensils and drinking containers
• Rinse fruit and vegetables before eating
• Cook shellfish thoroughly before eating

Prevent spreading it
• Close the toilet lid before flushing after each episode of diarrhoea or vomiting and then wash your hands with soap and water
• Avoid visiting GP and hospital unless advised by medical professional
• Clean all surfaces with detergent followed by a bleach based product
• Avoid cooking for others if you have symptoms
• Do not return to work/school for 48 hours

Treatment
• Stay at home
• Drink small amounts often
• Eat little and often
• If you still feel unwell after a few days seek telephone advice from NHS Direct on 111
• Rest

The Royal British Legion now holds regular advice sessions at the One Stop Shop at Sandwell Council House in Oldbury.

Every other Thursday anyone who has served or is serving in the Armed Forces, or their families, can come to the Council House in Freeth Street for social, emotional and financial advice and support.

The Legion can help with queries about benefits, pensions, help at home and lots more. The stand will be manned from 9.30am to 4pm every other Thursday. Dates include 12 December, 9 January, 23 January, 6 February, 20 February and onwards.

For more information about the Royal British Legion and the services it provides check out the website www.britishlegion.org.uk or call 0845 772 5725.

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Safety drive

Thousands of Sandwell residents received safety and crime prevention advice during our Safer 6 campaign.

The six-week campaign involved the council, fire service, police, probation service, Serco and many other partners working together to provide targeted action and community safety work.

Safer 6 ran from 30 September to 10 November across the six towns to time with the darker nights, Halloween, Bonfire Night, Diwali and fireworks season, building on organisations’ day-to-day activities.

The fire service did home safety checks at more than 500 homes, fitting smoke alarms where needed, and checked 37 shops selling fireworks.

Police and council housing officers visited homes to chat to residents, discuss anti-social behaviour issues and give advice.

Offenders doing Community Payback – supervised by Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust – cleared more than 10 tonnes of waste.

Police seized drugs 10 times and made 19 arrests for offences including drugs, theft, anti-social behaviour and driving offences.

The police and fire service gave road safety advice to 845 road users. In traffic operations, police seized five vehicles and issued warnings to drivers caught speeding.

Council trading standards officers seized more than 300 bottles of suspected illegal booze from shops. Trading standards and HM Revenue and Customs seized suspected smuggled goods, including 12,200 cigarettes, 2.2kg of hand-rolled tobacco and 50 boxes of cigarillos from a shop in West Bromwich.

Trading standards found seven out of 15 part-worn tyres they checked at random at suppliers were considered dangerous by an independent expert – investigations are ongoing.

Dogs Trust charity microchipped more than 500 dogs for free and council wardens issued dog fouling fines. Thousands of dog mess bags were handed out.

Council private sector housing property intervention officers inspected more than 400 empty private homes, to check they were secure as they look to get them back into use.

The council’s Youth Bus provided activities and safety advice to hundreds of school children and visited youth and community groups.

Sandwell Crime Prevention Panel volunteers gave out 349 home safety packs and 231 purse bells and ‘postcoded’ 86 mobile phones. Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership and Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board gave advice on services at information roadshows.

This is just a snapshot – for more information about Safer 6 and results in each town, visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/safer6
Homelife

Council earns animal welfare award

Sandwell Council has been awarded a prestigious Community Animal Welfare Footprint (CAWF) award by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

The council has scooped a Silver Footprint in the housing category for the work that has been done by housing staff in making sure tenants are aware of animal welfare and their responsibilities as pet owners.

This includes:
• having a clear application process in place for tenants applying to keep a pet;
• providing a list of local and recognised animal welfare organisations for tenants;
• giving tenants pet care advice and information approved by a reputable animal welfare agency when they register their pet;
• promoting the permanent identification and neutering of pets;
• providing provision for pets whose owners are housed in temporary or emergency housing; and
• keeping an updated register of all animals kept in each dwelling.

Councillor Mahboob Hussain, deputy leader of Sandwell Council and cabinet member for town and neighbourhood services, said: “I am delighted that we have won this prestigious ward from the RSPCA.

“Winning a Community Animal Welfare Footprint award is a fantastic achievement for our staff and demonstrates our commitment to animal welfare by supporting our tenants in being responsible pet owners.”

Lenny Rolles, the RSPCA’s senior parliamentary advisor for local government, said:

“I congratulate Sandwell Council on their Silver Award.

“It is fantastic to see organisations working hard to maintain and improve standards of animal welfare despite the tough economic climate.”

To register your pet, or for further information about the scheme, please contact your local neighbourhood services centre on: 0121 569 6000.

Council gets greater powers to crackdown on tenancy fraud

Council tenants can now face prosecution if they are illegally subletting their council home.

New legislation came into force in October giving social landlords, such as the council, the power to prosecute tenants.

And depending on the severity of the offence, they could face a prison sentence of up to two years and/or a fine of up to £50,000.

The new Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act aims to make sure that social housing is occupied by those in greatest housing need.

Major changes brought in under the Act mean:
• it is now a criminal offence for social housing tenants to unlawfully sublet their property;
• councils now have powers to prosecute in cases of unlawful subletting; and
• courts can order the recovery of any profit made from unlawful subletting.

Councillor Mahboob Hussain, deputy leader and cabinet member for town and neighbourhood services, said: “Tenants who are illegally subletting their property are ‘stealing a home’ from families who are in genuine need of affordable housing.

“Where tenancy fraud is being committed, we will use the full weight of the law to take firm action against them.”

If you want to report a case of tenancy fraud you can:
Email: fraud_investigations@sandwell.gov.uk
Call: 0121 569 2650
Write to:
Counter Fraud Unit, PO Box 16328, Oldbury, B69 3DB

What’s going on at Sandwell’s libraries?

With more and more information only being available online, it’s more important than ever to be able to use a computer, navigate the internet and access the services you need to help you in your everyday life.

Sandwell libraries can help you to get online with more than 300 computers at 19 libraries, as well as providing support from knowledgeable staff, trained to access quality digital information.

Below is a brief run down of some the areas they can help you with:

**BENEFITS**
Support from staff to claim GOV.UK’s Universal Credit. Advice sessions from partners such as Citizens Advice Bureau and others.

**CAREERS AND JOBS**
Support from staff to access GOV.UK’s Universal Job Match website. Information on volunteering and work experience opportunities in libraries. Local job vacancy listings including Sandwell Council and Think Local. Copies of local and national newspapers and magazines. Courses and classes available with UK Online. Business start-up information packs. Advice session from partners such as the National Careers Service.

**HEALTH**
Information on Sandwell Library and Information Service’s health and well-being offer. Books on prescription – health-related books. Health information and displays from partner agencies.

**PERSONAL FINANCE**
“Money Matters” scheme - leaflets and free print outs from recommended websites available in large print, Braille and other formats on request. Advice sessions from partners such as 6 Towns Credit Union and Sandwell Financial Services.

For more information call 0121 569 4911 or visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/libraries
High-rise fire safety campaign

Sandwell Council joined forces with West Midlands Fire Service and Riverside Housing to raise fire safety awareness among tenants and leaseholders who live in Sandwell’s 55 high-rise blocks.

Enter the “Dragon’s Den”

Sandwell Council is offering a “Dragon’s Den” style scheme to help young entrepreneurs aged 18 to 30 set up their own businesses.

The successful entrepreneurs will be offered a council-owned unit for a rent free period of 12 months, intense start-up support by a partnering organisation and mentoring, as and when required during the first year of trading.

Once the business ideas have been tested, the young people who want to start up a business would face a “Dragon’s Den” style session in front of a panel of experts including successful business people from the private sector.

It is hoped the scheme will help reduce unemployment in Sandwell.

Cabinet member for jobs and economy Councillor Ian Jones said: “There are a lot of highly motivated young people in Sandwell who are struggling to put their business idea into practice because they don’t have the finance or the support required to start a business.

“We see this as a golden opportunity to offer proper and sound advice to these youngsters. At the end of the day they are Sandwell’s future.”

Anyone interested in finding out about the scheme should email enquiries_sector@sandwell.gov.uk or call 0121 569 3309.

METRO PLAZA

is coming

Work has started on Metro Plaza – a scheme to improve links to shopping areas for commuters to West Bromwich town centre.

A new public space is being created by the Metro station, allowing pedestrians priority over the vehicles on West Bromwich Ringway.

As part of the work, the ringway will be reduced in width to cut traffic speeds, making it easier for pedestrians to cross into the town centre.

As well as improving the look of the town centre, the project aims to boost the local economy by increasing footfall to the High Street.

Other improvements include filling in the subway between the tram station and King’s Square shopping centre, making it easier and safer to cross, as well as providing better footpaths, high quality paving, street lighting and new trees planted in the area.

Metro Plaza has been funded with £200,000 provided by Sandwell Council and provided £200,000 towards the scheme.

A temporary road is being constructed in the New Year to keep traffic moving at all times. Pedestrian routes to the town centre will be clearly sign-posted throughout the work.

Metro Plaza is the final phase of the £8.2 million Public Realm project, which is improving streets, squares and other open spaces in the town centre.

In April 2011, Sandwell Council and its partners won match funding of £4.1 million from the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) for the project, which has overseen improvements to the High Street, Duchess and Princess Parade and Bull Street.

More information at www.sandwell.gov.uk/metroplaza
We’re ready for winter, are you?

Important information for council tenants about your central heating.

Planning for winter
Last year we faced sub-zero temperatures in what was the coldest winter for 30 years. This had a huge impact on tenants’ boilers.

Many of the problems related to the new-style condensing boilers. During long periods of sub-zero temperatures the water in the waste pipe freezes. This causes the boiler to shut down until the blockage is thawed.

Last winter, we had plans in place which meant that we could call on additional engineers, from a sub-contractor, if needed. This year, we have two sub-contractors on standby, in case another cold snap happens. While we’re all hoping for a milder winter this year, we’ve put together some useful tips to help you if temperatures should drop dramatically.

What to do if you have a frozen pipe
If you have a condensing boiler and do experience a frozen pipe this winter, here are some tips to help you unfreeze the pipework.

1. Please make sure that you are able to carry them out safely and do not put yourself at risk.
2. First you need to be sure that a frozen pipe is the cause of the problem.
3. There should be a fault code on the boiler but if this is not clear, listen for the gurgling noise when you try to reset the boiler.
4. Try to gently unfreeze the pipe by placing a hot water bottle on it. As an alternative you could apply the type of heat pads you use for easing muscle pain.
5. If this doesn’t work try pouring warm water on the pipe from a watering can. **DO NOT** use boiling water as this can ruin the pipe.
6. Once your pipe is unfrozen, you will still need to hold down the boiler’s reset button.
7. Your system should then spark back into life.

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7. Your system should then spark back into life.

If you are in any doubt about the type of problem you have, please call Sandwell Council repairs service on 0121 569 6000.

A regular boiler vents out of its exhaust pipe around a quarter of its heat in the form of steam and carbon dioxide.

A condensing boiler turns the hot exhaust gases into water in a heat exchange. This reclaims around a fifth of the heat energy.

This water is taken out of the property through a plastic condensate pipe which can be prone to freezing. The boiler senses the blockage and shuts down.

Using a wider, lagged pipe stops it freezing.
Tenants to see lower fuel bills thanks to new windows

Thousands of council tenants still living with single-glazed windows in their homes are set to have them replaced over the next two years, after the council signed a £4 million deal with two national companies, Anglia Building Products and Vinci Facilities.

The move to replace single-glazed windows is part of the council’s investment programme and follows an increasing number of requests from tenants for more energy-efficient double-glazed windows.

Both contractors started surveying properties in October which involves measuring the windows to be replaced and preparing tenants for any potential disruption.

Anglian Building Products is working in the south of the borough, starting in Cape Hill, Smethwick, with Vinci Facilities working in the north, working in and around the Pine Avenue area of Wednesbury first.

Councillor Ian Jones, cabinet member for jobs and economy, said: “This is part of our commitment to help tenants save money and be warmer in their homes.

“By the end of the programme in 2015, all low-rise homes that still have single-glazed windows will have had them replaced with modern and efficient double-glazed windows.”

Anglian sales director John Fairweather said: “We are delighted to secure the contract with Sandwell Council and look forward to working in partnership to deliver the window replacement programme for the benefit and comfort of tenants.”

Project manager for Vinci Facilities Kevin Stewart said: “The scheme will result in savings in energy costs for tenants and a reduction in carbon emissions into the environment.”

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In the autumn edition of Homelife, we told you that the council was having to review its £492 million housing investment programme.

There were two main reasons for this. The first is the introduction in April this year of the Government’s Welfare Reform, the so-called ‘bedroom tax’, which has led to an increase in the demand for and turnover of smaller properties for tenants to move into.

The second reason is the increase in the number of right-to-buy applications from tenants wanting to buy their properties.

Unfortunately, these factors are outside the council’s control and have led to a reduction in the amount of rental income the council receives to fund the investment programme.

This has had to be balanced against the commitment we have made to tenants to improve their homes.

Reluctantly, we have had to review some of the timescales and make some changes such as extending the time it will take to deliver our internal improvements programme, (previously known as Decent Homes), which we realise is frustrating, if it affects you.

Despite this, this programme will go ahead as planned from January 2014 and will see improvements to kitchens and bathrooms, replacement central heating and new electrical rewiring where required to more than 1,000 properties during the coming year.

Our surveyors are programming work for our contractors to start in early January. Details will be available on the council’s website.
Sandwell Financial Services Hub...
Helping tenants plan and save...
Make it your New Year’s resolution

Help is available if you are a social housing tenant living in Sandwell AND are in ONE of the following groups:
- A first time tenant
- A young tenant aged 16-24 years old
- A tenant in and out of work of any age.

Last year, Mrs R from Smethwick saved with a hamper company to buy supplies and presents for Christmas. This did help spread the cost. When she did some price comparisons of her own, she realised she was paying over the odds for many of the items and there was a limited choice.

Donate to food banks this Christmas

Like many areas, Sandwell is seeing an increase in people facing a crisis and needing emergency help such as food, clothing, nappies and household items.

Local food banks have set up Sandwell Emergency Provision Network to find ways to help.
To donate tinned or dried food, contact:
Keith Turner at West Bromwich Food Bank, West Bromwich Community Church, Victoria Street, West Bromwich.
Call Keith on 0121 580 0068 or email keith@elimwestbrom.com
Read more information about what food banks need at www.keithturner240.wix.com/making-a-difference
All donations will be shared between network members who distribute food from several places across Sandwell.

Cabinet member for trading standards Councillor Paul Moore said: “These are extremely frightening results and it shows the importance of the testing that we do. “Faulty electric blankets are at best dangerous and could easily lead to major fires and even death. “It is vital people take advantage of the free testing that we do. They know then they can sleep safely at night in the knowledge that their blanket is in good working order.”

Each year dangerous electric blankets are considered to be a major cause of house fires. A staggering 97 per cent of these fires are caused by electric blankets which are more than 10 years old.

Sandwell Trading Standards officers carried out a five day survey in October in partnership with Age UK Sandwell, Ideal for All and West Midlands Fire.

The free testing was carried out on 205 electric blankets of which 45 – 22 per cent – were found to be dangerous. All of the dangerous blankets were destroyed and replaced with new ones.

Councillor Moore said it was worrying that the number of electric blankets found to be dangerous had jumped by three per cent on last year. He said:

“At least 45 potentially lethal blankets have been removed from use.

“In addition, a further 160 Sandwell residents have been reassured that their electric blankets are safe for use over the coming winter.” he added.

A bank account with a difference

The West Bromwich-based 6Towns Credit Union has become the country’s first to launch its own current account.

The account, which is being actively promoted by the Government and several housing groups, was launched in November and any Sandwell resident is able to apply.

Why do I need a current account?

This autumn the Government plans to bring together all major benefits (including housing benefit) and pay them electronically into your account. This will require all claimants to have good budgeting skills. And, as some organisations such as energy companies offer better deals to those who pay bills electronically by direct debit, having a current account makes sense.

Costs

The Credit Union will charge £1 per week running costs and 15 pence per transaction. Other charges have still to be finalised.

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All donations will be shared between network members who distribute food from several places across Sandwell.

If you need help or would like to find out more about the Sandwell Financial Services Hub, you can contact the team on:

Phone: 0121 561 7935
Email: ifcsandwell@bcha.co.uk
Website: www.sfsh.org.uk

www.facebook.com/sandwellfshub
twitter.com/sandwellfshub
Skills academy status first for Sandwell

Sandwell Council has been recognised for its commitment to creating local job and training opportunities.

It has become the first council in the West Midlands to be awarded National Skills Academy for Construction Status.

The award recognises that the council works with construction employers who train and support their workforces.

Sandwell Council is one of just 15 organisations across the UK to have achieved NSAIC status, which is delivered by the CITB, the Industry Training Board for Construction.

The council is currently building more than 700 homes across the borough. The project is expected to generate more than £70 million worth of construction work for the region and create more than 100 jobs with local employers.

Developers involved in the project have signed construction pledges to work with local suppliers and will team up with the council’s ‘Think Local’ and ‘Find It In Sandwell’ initiatives.

Sandwell Council has set targets in accordance with the NSAIC model, which includes supporting 47 work placements, 33 new apprentices (in addition to the 26 already in existence), 21 new jobs and three graduate positions. The project will also include construction workshops for local residents and schools, providing skills opportunities to at least 21 people.

Councillor Ian Jones, Sandwell’s cabinet member for jobs and economy, said: “We have set goals for residential housing in Sandwell and want to ensure that we are making the most of local talent and giving them all the support and training they need.

“We are extremely proud to have been awarded National Skills Academy for Construction status, and hope this national recognition will further help us in offering apprenticeships and work experience placements and local jobs through the contractors we use."

Success for safety days at schools

Events at two Tipton schools to help students stay safe and healthy have been hailed as “fantastic”.

Entrepreneurs talk to young people around Sandwell

They chatted with young people around subjects including drugs and alcohol, healthy relationships and anti-social behaviour.

Sarah Barnes, vice principal at RSA Academy, described the day as “fantastic” and said the impact on students and staff was amazing.

She said: “The day was an absolute success on every level. Students engaged with a wide range of vital information and learning through the skilfully-led and crafted sessions delivered by the agencies involved.

“These sessions helped our young people understand the responsibilities, challenges and differing roles that people have in life.

“They gained essential learning to equip them to grow up happily, healthily and safely as part of an ever-changing community and society. Students and staff loved it!”

PC Hughie Treasure, Sandwell Police youth engagement officer, said: “The safeguarding days at RSA Academy and ACE academy went very well and seemed to be well received by the pupils.

“With the feedback I have received, it gives us confidence that the rest of Sandwell schools could benefit from a safeguarding day.”

The National Careers Service is helping people with learning difficulties and disabilities to find work.

Jasbir Basra Singh with his portfolio of certificates and his National Career Service Adviser Carol Tweede.

Jasbir Basra Singh, from West Bromwich, has learning difficulties. He turned to the National Careers Service for help after being made redundant and struggling to find a new job for several years.

National Careers Service adviser Carol Tweede worked with Jasbir and helped him get qualifications and improve his skills – and he’s since found a job.

Jasbir said: “I am ecstatic to finally be working again. I would urge anyone with a learning difficulty or disability to contact the National Careers Service. The encouragement and support that I received from Carol improved my confidence and helped me find a job.”

Anyone looking for education, employment or training opportunities – come to the New Year, New Start careers event at West Bromwich Town Hall on Saturday 18 January 10am-3pm or call 0845 352 0055 to book an appointment with a National Careers Adviser.

Councillor Simon Hackett, Sandwell Council’s cabinet member for children’s services, said: “These events are a great way to engage with young people, not just to offer them advice and support but also to hear their views.”

Andrew Clarke, Tipton neighbourhood manager at Sandwell Council, said: “With the real success of the events at RSA and ACE, we hope to be able to roll this programme of work out to other Sandwell schools to help our young people prepare for the future.”
A Heritage Lottery funded project is looking to capture the memories and experiences of people who lived in eight local tower blocks built in Tipton and Wednesbury in the 1960s.

‘Block Capital’ aims to create an archive of material relating to 20 blocks built during the decade, across the Black Country and the people whose lives have been connected with them.

The project will also support 30 volunteers who will receive specialist training in using public archives to investigate council housing history and how to record people’s experiences and stories about living in the flats.

The 12-month project, which started in August, is a collaboration between tenants’ and residents’ federations in Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, as well as ‘distinctly black country’ – a heritage network based at Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

Paul Quigley a researcher with the project said: “We want to capture the memories and impressions of those who lived in high-rise accommodation across the Black Country, many may no longer be tenants and the archive of material created will provide material for future generations to enjoy.”

‘Block Capital’ is focusing on the following flats in Sandwell:

• Bolton Court (three blocks) – Ocker Hill, Tipton (now demolished)
• Beatty House, Tipton (now demolished)
• Drake House, Tipton (now demolished)
• Jellicoe House – Tipton (now demolished)
• Nelson House, Tipton and
• Russell House, Wednesbury

Did you or your family live, or still live in one of the blocks listed above? Do you want to volunteer for the project?

For more information visit www.distinctlyblackcountry.org.uk/blockcapital or contact Chaz Mason on 01902 552194

Are you a victim of neighbourhood nuisance?

If the answer is yes, Neighbourhood Restorative Justice could help.

What is Neighbourhood Restorative Justice (NRJ)?

It’s an initiative that’s been used widely all over the country for a number of years and is a method used to resolve disputes or conflicts. It is free of charge.

What is involved?

A council officer will speak to all parties affected by the disagreement independently. They will explain the process to you and check if the matter can be considered for NRJ as a way of getting you and your neighbours together.

How does it work?

A specially trained officer will arrange for all parties to meet at a neutral place, to discuss how the problem has affected them and give each party the opportunity to explain how they feel and what would make things better in future.

Why should I consider Neighbourhood Restorative Justice?

• It’s free of charge
• It’s a quick process and avoids legal action
• It’s a process that can help you without involving other agencies
• It’s available to anyone

For more information about Neighbourhood Restorative Justice contact: Helen Williams or Stuart White on 0121 569 6000.

Customer services boost

Sandwell Council’s housing services has successfully retained its Customer Service Excellence Standard.

The standard is nationally recognised and rigorously tests areas which customers have highlighted as being important to them such as delivery, timeliness, quality of information, professionalism and staff attitude.

The assessment, which includes interviews with employees, customers and partner organisations, saw the service pass all 57 elements of the re-certification.

The standard was first achieved in 2009 and housing services is reassessed every two years to ensure that standards are not only being maintained but also improved.
Here is the Norovirus piece (in fresh word document) along with other pieces for page 23. Perhaps you could

*See what you think*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Councillor</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smethwick Ward</td>
<td>Bob Badham</td>
<td>07730 309366</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smethwick Ward</td>
<td>Dr. Ann</td>
<td>0121 429 9216</td>
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<td>Smethwick Ward</td>
<td>Bob Piper</td>
<td>0121 429 4276</td>
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<td>Friar Park Ward</td>
<td>Malcolm</td>
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<td>Bridges</td>
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<td>Cashmore</td>
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<td>Steven</td>
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<td>Frear</td>
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<td>Friar Park Ward</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>07853 969171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friar Park Ward</td>
<td><strong>Contact your Councillor</strong></td>
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*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.
Carols by Candlelight
Thursday 12 December, 6.30-8pm
Oak House Museum, West Bromwich
Beautiful setting for a carol service performed by the Salvation Army Band. Ticket price includes a drink on arrival and mince pie. Not suitable for children under 10. Booking essential.
Tickets £5
Call 0121 553 0759

Mayor of Sandwell Charity Evening
Saturday 14 December, 7pm
West Bromwich Town Hall
Famous dhol blaster Gurcharan Moli plus many more entertainers helping to raise money for the Mayor’s charities - Birmingham Midland Eye Centre and Better Understanding of Dementia for Sandwell (BUDS).
Tickets £25 (includes food and drink), £200 for a table of 10
Call 0121 569 3041

Christmas Little Helpers and Festive Jazz
Saturday 14 December, 11am-3pm
Oak House Museum, West Bromwich
Help Santa by bringing along any good quality new/used toys (not stuffed animals) for children at Sandwell Hospital. Quizzes, trails and kids’ crafts, bop along to Christmas tunes played by the Jazz on Tap band.
Free entry (£1.50 maximum charge for crafts)
Call 0121 553 0759

Deck the Halls
Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 December, 11am-3pm
Haden Hill House Museum, Cradley Heath
See Haden Old Hall decorated for Christmas in a Tudor style with real greenery and pomanders. For Christmas in a Tudor style with real greenery and pomanders.
FREE event.
Call 01384 569444

Santa in his Grotto
Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 December, 11am-3pm
Haden Hill House Museum, Cradley Heath
Visit Santa in his fabulous Emerald City grotto in the Victorian house. £2.50 per child to see Santa, includes a small gift.
Call 01384 569444

Christmas Fayres at the Valley
Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 December, 10am-4.30pm
Sandwell Park Farm, Sandwell Valley
Carol singing, a choir, brass band, jazz band. Free children’s craft activities. Buy your Christmas tree, wreaths and decorations plus plenty of gift ideas. Festive food on sale, including a hog roast. Buy traditional meat from our own farms and plenty more.
For prices / more info, visit www社会资本.com/sandwellvalley or call 0121 553 0220.

Through the Christmas Decades
Friday 20 December, 7-9pm
(doors open 6.45pm)
Manor House Museum, West Bromwich
Join Ian Casey for nostaligic look at Christmas tunes past and present. Booking essential.
Tickets £6
Call 0121 588 2985

It’s a Wonderful Life Film Show
Saturday 21 December, 10am
Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery
A festive cinema experience. Tickets £3 adults, £2 children
Call 0121 566 0683

Christmas Pantomime
Sunday 22 December 2013, 2.30-3.30pm
Central Library, West Bromwich
Join Jenco Promotions present Little Red Riding Hood, a magical family pantomime suitable for all ages. All children also receive a gift from Santa!
Tickets £3.50 adults, £1.50 children
Call 0121 557 0371, email steve.dawning@hotmail.co.uk

The Snowman
Tuesday 31 December, 2.30-3.30pm
Central Library, West Bromwich
Be creative and design your own snowman using card glue sequins, cotton wool, etc. Use your imagination to look and discover the Snow Man come to life.
FREE event
Call 0121 569 4911

Pantomime – Aladdin
Monday 17 February to Saturday 22 February 2014, 7.30-10pm
Wesley Centre, Spring Head, Wednesbury
A family pantomime held by Holden Amateur Dramatic Society in association with Central Methodist Church. Wednesbury Prices include refreshments, group rates available upon request for parties of over 10.
Tickets £6, concessions £4, family ticket £18 (two adults, two concessions)
Call 0121 556 0420 or email treasurer@wesleycentreforall.com

Visit Santa’s Grotto at Sandwell Park Farm
Each weekend from Saturday 30 November until Sunday 22 December
10am - 4.30pm
Entry to the Grotto is £6 per child which includes a great gift too!
Normal admission prices to the Farm apply
Adults £1.90, Children/over 60s £1.40, under 5s free
Family tickets available.
GROUP BOOKINGS
Santa is also available for group bookings.
Please call Sandwell Park Farm on 0121 553 0220 for further details.
Sandwell Park Farm
Salter’s Lane, West Bromwich, B71 4BG
0121 553 0220

Mayor’s Big Night Out
Saturday 8 March 2014, 7pm
West Bromwich Town Hall
A great night of music, dance and comedy by talented performers in aid of the Mayor’s charities.
Headlining the first half are George Salter Academy students performing excerpts from ‘Beauty and the Beast’. Soul’d Out will headline the second half. Event supported by Serco.
Tickets £6
Call 0121 569 3041

First Christmas at New Square
Meanwhile, shoppers are getting their first taste of Christmas at New Square in West Bromwich – and there’s a whole host of festive treats taking place.
For more information on opening times, directions, Christmas events and more, go to www.newsquarewestbromwich.co.uk or visit New Square West Bromwich www.facebook.com/ NewsquareWestBromwich or Twitter @newsquarewesb