

Spring 2024

Your borough **YOUR HOME**

News and information for Dudley borough residents

Inside...

**New garden waste
collection service**

See page 3 for details

Home Affairs

News for council tenants and leaseholders

Centre pull-out

**Celebrating
volunteers -
working together
for a green
borough**
pages 4-5

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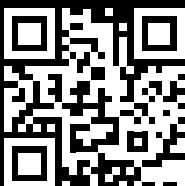
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Welcome to the Spring edition of Your borough **YOUR HOME**



As you will no doubt have read, these are extremely challenging times for all local authorities, and Dudley is no exception.

The council has already put a range of measures in place, including spending controls - including a recruitment freeze, but there will continue to be difficult decisions to make to set a sustainable budget and protect essential services.

The council has always had low council tax, amongst the lowest bills in the country, but that has only added to the financial situation we find ourselves in. Increasing council tax is the right thing to do if we want to continue providing vital services for people. There's more detail about our budget on page 8.

One of the measures we are proposing is to introduce a £36 a year charge for garden waste collections from April. This will be an opt-in service, which will run all year round. There are more details about this in the story to the right.

In this edition on page 4 & 5 we celebrate and say a big thank you to all the volunteers who help keep our borough green. From the litter pickers in our Litter Busters movement to friends groups and the Park Active volunteers, you are all amazing and we greatly appreciate everything you do.

We've also an update on our draft Dudley Local Plan on page 8, which sets out our commitment to use brownfield land to meet our housing and employment needs.

Finally on page 20, there's information on our living well feeling safe service, which provides advice and practical support to thousands of borough residents to help them live independently. Please take a look to find out more and do contact the service if you need help.

Councillor Patrick Harley

Leader of Dudley Council

In this issue...



Page 20

Living well, feeling safe



Page 12

Free healthy lifestyle service



Pages 4-5

Celebrating volunteers



Centre pull-out

Home Affairs

Charge set to be introduced for green bin collections

Residents are set to be asked to pay £3 a month* for garden waste collections from April - but will get the service all year round.

The proposals will replace the current system, where the free service running from April to November is supplemented with the option of paying £30 to add six extra collections between December and March.

Council bosses have now unveiled plans to charge £36 per year to provide all green waste collections, which will now run all year round.

The move is part of measures to offset estimated budget pressures of more than £12 million this year on critical front-line services to protect vulnerable children and adults in the borough.

Residents will have to opt in to the service, so can choose not to pay and not have the fortnightly collections.

The move is part of budget proposals which will be voted on at a meeting of Dudley's full council on Monday March 4.

Councillor Damian Corfield, cabinet member for highways and environmental services, said:

"Most councils, including our neighbours in Sandwell and Wolverhampton, are already charging to collect green waste."

"It will equate to £3 a month - and in exchange for that, residents will get more collections as we move the service to all year round."

*The fee of £36 will be payable in one lump sum - the option to pay monthly will not be available.



Sign up to our e-bulletin and be the first to receive news and information about our green waste service direct to your email

Your borough **YOUR HOME** e-bulletin

Keep up to date with all of the latest news and information by signing up to our e-bulletin. Just visit www.dudley.gov.uk and sign up at the bottom of the page.

Information correct at time of going to print.



Working together for a green borough

Thousands of borough residents are being thanked for volunteering their time to help keep the borough clean and green.

Over the last 12 months, it is estimated more than 30,000 hours of volunteer time has been given to the borough's parks and green spaces.

Volunteer activities include litter picking, maintenance work in park and nature reserves and leading Park Active sessions and local walks.

There are 550 volunteer litter pickers registered with Dudley Council's Litter Busters movement. In 2023 more than 2,000 hours were spent litter picking, with more than 2,000 bags of litter collected.

The council provides litter pickers, bags and any other equipment needed for a litter pick and arranges collection of the bagged waste. Items can be loaned as a one-off or semi-permanently for people wishing to undertake regular litter picks.

Councillor Damian Corfield cabinet member for highways and environmental services, said:

"We are blessed with fantastic volunteers who give up so much of their free time to help to keep the borough clean and green."

"I would like to thank each and every one of them and we look forward to continuing to work with them over the coming months and years."

Claire Wills, is joint litter picking group coordinator in Woodsetton. She said:

"My friend and I started to litter pick in Woodsetton during lockdown and it has grown more than we ever could have imagined."

"More than 30 regular volunteers enjoy working and socialising together, with many taking control of their own local streets in Coseley, Upper Gornal and Sedgley."

"Dudley Council has provided us with litter pickers and vests and has been really supportive of the work we do."

"We also hold monthly community litter picks and more than 200 people have joined our Woodsetton Community Litter Watch Facebook group."



Parks and Nature Reserves >>>>

The borough has 38 friends groups, with volunteer members giving more than 20,000 hours of their time over the last 12 months.

The groups work in partnership with Dudley Council to organise events and fundraisers, while helping to clean and maintain parks and green spaces.



The Friends of Russells Hall Park won a Dudley CVS award last year for their work to improve the local park and green spaces.

Gemma Blackford from the friends group said:

"It is a joy to volunteer with the friends group. I have made so many friends and the work we have done has had such a positive impact on the local community."

"Over the last few years we have been successful in attaining more than £140,000 in funding, which helps to buy equipment and pay for the fantastic improvements we have made at the park."

"The money also goes towards events, which helps to bring people together in the local community."

Park Active volunteers also help residents to keep fit in the borough's parks, with some contributing more than 100 hours of their time last year enabling more people to enjoy the benefits of exercising outdoors.

Park Active sessions are currently held at Stevens Park in Quarry Bank, Buffery Park in Kates Hill, Abbey Street Park in Gornal, Stevens Park in Wollescote and Grange Park in Dudley. For more information on Park Active, visit the Let's Get Healthy Dudley website.

Meanwhile Dudley Council's countryside services team has partnered with The Kings Trust (formally The Princes Trust) to run a series of "Get Into" programmes at Saltwells National Nature Reserve.

The four-week placement is designed help young people to prepare for careers in the environmental management sector. Participants learn about conservation and survey skills, wildlife identification, woodland and grassland management, geological conservation, environmental education, teamwork and task management. To date four programmes have been delivered to a total of 41 young people with more than 30 per cent having gone on to work in the environmental sector. The next programme is scheduled for September 2024, with further information to be made available through the Dudley Nature Reserves Facebook pages.

Pictured left: (left to right) Woodsetton Community Litter Watch members Anne Robinson, Julie Nicholls, Neil Williams and Claire Wills. Pictured above: (left to right) Russells Hall Friends Group members Gemma Blackford, Debbie Parkes and Debra Warren. Background: Saltwells National Nature Reserve

Dudley Bus Station Redevelopment: Our Journey to Better Journeys and Upcoming Improvements

From Sunday 14th January 2024, the bus station within Dudley town centre has been closed to progress the exciting redevelopment of Dudley Interchange. All services have since been transferred to other temporary bus stops.

What's Happening?

Dudley bus station is undergoing demolition and reconstruction to become a modern, efficient, and sustainable transport hub. Expect an improved commuter experience, enhanced station efficiency, and better accessibility for everyone.



As part of the plan to revitalise public transport in the region, significant progress will be made during the Easter 2024 school holidays. Construction on the first phase of the much-anticipated Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension to Dudley will continue to move forward, with the new track set to be tied into the current rail on line one.

Sandwell Borough Council will take advantage of this opportunity to conduct bridge repairs near the Gun's Village Metro stop, to streamline construction activities and minimise disruption.



**For further information please visit
tfwm.org.uk/Dudley**

We appreciate your understanding during this transition. For any queries, contact our Customer Services Team at 0345 303 6760 (option 2, then option 3).

**Thank you for your cooperation
as we build a better Dudley!**

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More than 200 have their say on Dudley Local Plan

More than 200 residents and stakeholders have had their say on how land across Dudley borough could be used for housing and employment in the future.

Draft proposals for the Dudley Local Plan were published at the end of last year after council bosses had vowed to protect greenbelt land from developers.

Stakeholders were asked to comment on the draft plan and more than 200 responses were received.

The responses will be reviewed and used to inform the next stage of the Dudley Local Plan, which will be published for a further consultation in the autumn.

Councillor Patrick Harley, leader of Dudley Council, said:

"Thank you to those who have taken the time to comment on our draft local plan.

"It sets out our commitment to use brownfield land to meet our housing and employment needs, which I hope has been welcomed by local people and alleviated any concerns they had about the use of greenbelt land."

The stages for the development of the plan can be found at: <https://www.dudley.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-policy/dudley-local-plan/>

New growth support for Dudley borough businesses

Businesses in Dudley borough are now able to access fully funded guidance and business support programmes from Business Growth West Midlands.

Dudley Council has worked with West Midlands Combined Authority to introduce schemes to help local firms to increase productivity. These programmes are funded by the government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Established small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can call on a team of business growth advisers in partnership with Oxford Innovation Advice. The advisers will help businesses to develop growth action plans and access funding.

Start-ups and potential entrepreneurs will be supported by the new Start Up programme delivered by growth specialists Good2Great. The programme includes one-to-ones, mentoring and workshops.

Two new grant schemes have also been launched, opening up more than £450,000 in government funding for SMEs that have been trading for 12 months or longer.



The SME Grants Programme is designed to boost growth, encourage investment, and create jobs. The Decarbonisation and Net Zero Grants Programme will help businesses to become more efficient, reducing energy costs and carbon emissions.

Register your interest in these programmes at www.businessgrowthwestmidlands.org.uk/enquire or contact Dudley Business First via info@dudleybusinessfirst.org.uk or 01384 812001.

Budget

A range of measures are in place at Dudley Council to help the authority deliver a sustainable budget amid growing financial pressures.

It follows a peer review earlier this year by the Local Government Association which saw the council's financial position scrutinised.

An annual audit of the council also said the council's finances need attention. The council started the financial year with £21.8m in the general reserve, but that could run out next year.

An independent Improvement and Assurance Board has been set up, made up of members from the main political parties in Dudley along with senior officers and supported by the Local Government Association. It has been tasked with helping the council get a firmer grip on finances and set a sustainable budget. The council also introduced spending controls, including a recruitment freeze.

A draft budget has been agreed which includes £40million extra for adult social care and children's services.

There are also plans to charge for green waste collections and raise council tax rates by 4.99% to raise extra money.

The proposals will be determined by councillors at full council on March 4.



Be election ready

Voters are being urged to make sure they have everything they need for the elections later this year.

People will be heading to the polls in early May for a series of elections, including local elections at Dudley Council as well as West Midlands Mayor and the police & crime commissioner.

People need to make sure they have ID if they want to vote at a polling station - a full list of approved forms of ID are available via the council's website. A free alternative voter authority certificate is available and people can apply via the council's website.

There are other ways people can cast their vote, including by post or nominating someone to vote on your behalf, or proxy.

A series of deadlines are approaching:

- Register to vote: April 16
- New postal vote applications: April 17
- Voter authority certificate applications: April 24
- Proxy vote applications: April 24



For more information visit www.dudley.gov.uk and search for elections.

A full list of election results will be available on the council's website and social media channels in May.



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DUDLEY



Dudley Electoral Services

Praise for adult learning courses

People can learn new skills and boost their job-hunting power with a range of courses, which have been praised by national inspectors.



Dudley Council's adult learning courses have just been rated 'good' by government Ofsted inspectors.

They praised the range of subjects on offer that 'have a clear focus on developing skills that residents need to enter employment.'

Courses on offer include floristry, digital, English and maths, photography and many more. There are also classes designed to help people when applying for jobs, such as writing CVs and interview techniques.

Councillor Paul Bradley, deputy leader of the council, said:

"This is a fantastic endorsement for the range and quality of adult learning courses we have on offer.

"I am absolutely delighted inspectors have praised what they found and hope this inspires other people to sign up to one of the many courses we have."

More than 330 people are enrolled on accredited and non-accredited adult learning courses across seven venues.

A full list of courses is available at www.dudley.gov.uk/residents/learning-and-school/adult-and-community-learning/

Interchange works in Dudley

Temporary changes are in place in Dudley town centre as work gets underway on the new Interchange.

The Sustainable Interchange Hub, which will see £24 million of investment in the town, will link bus services with the town's Metro terminus, enabling easier access to the rail network.

With the bus station closed, all bus services have been temporarily relocated to Tower Street, Ednam Road and Priory Road and certain bus routes have changed.

There is also a one-way traffic system in place to enable services to run efficiently around the temporary bus stand locations.

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which is leading on the work, is reminding people to check timetables and plan ahead when using public transport in the area.

Businesses around the bus station will be open as usual and accessible to visitors.

Councillor Patrick Harley, leader of Dudley Council, said:

"The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro extension works are making big changes to the town and it's great to see the Interchange getting underway as this will help to link people's journeys and connects us to the rail network."

The new hub is expected to open in 2025.

Visit www.tfwm.org.uk/plan-your-journey/major-roadworks-and-events/dudley-regeneration/





The **STOURBRIDGE SHUTTLE** is a local lifeline, linking the Town with Stourbridge Junction. We are proud to operate this community connection, sponsoring local events and charities, such as the Annual Military Vehicle Parade and the Side By Side Theatre Company.

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You don't need any qualifications or experience, just the right values, dedication and of course a spare room. An Enhanced DBS check, training, assessment and on-going support is provided. It could be the start of a new and rewarding career in adult social care.

To find out more go to www.camphillvillagetrust.org.uk or call on **01384 441505**.

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Peter
Praise
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Caring
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Fabulous

New

Free healthy lifestyle service

Do you and your family want to be happier and healthier? Dudley Council has launched a free wellbeing service for people who live or work in the borough.

Your Health Dudley, run by ABL Health, is the new support package for local people being offered by Dudley Public Health.

A mixture of one-to-one assistance, group support and digital, online and phone guidance is available to help people move more, lose weight, quit smoking and drink less alcohol. Your family could even get dedicated support from a wellness coach for up to 12 months to help you all make healthier lifestyle choices.

Find out more at www.yourhealthdudley.co.uk and search for 'Your Health Dudley' on Facebook.



New

Local health advice at your fingertips

The new website for Dudley Public Health is launching soon. It will make it even easier to find local health and wellbeing advice and information when you want it.

Visit the new address, www.healthydudley.co.uk, for details from Dudley Public Health and Wellbeing.

The website covers everything to do with physical, emotional and mental health for babies, children, young people and adults. It also provides lifestyle information on topics like bereavement, how to avoid scams and free outdoor exercise classes.

From recipe ideas, cancer screening and immunisations to healthy pregnancies or ageing well, the website provides insight for all the family.



NHS health checks

What if 30 minutes could improve your health, would you do it?

Every five years your GP practice will invite you to receive a free NHS health check if you are between the ages of 40 and 74. It is open to anyone who doesn't already receive care for an existing heart condition, circulatory disease, or diabetes.

The checks measure your blood pressure and cholesterol and find out if you're at higher risk of developing heart problems and diabetes. Medical staff will then support you to reduce your risk of developing these conditions. Hopefully, this will mean you never develop them, or that they will come much later in life.

The appointment takes about half-an-hour and gives the chance for better health.

For more information go to www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-health-check



Dudley Young Health Champions

Opportunities exist for young people in Dudley borough to have their voices heard as Dudley Young Health Champions.

Run by Dudley CVS, on behalf of Dudley Council, this free initiative gives young people aged 11-25 the power and training to raise awareness in their community about health-related topics. They also help shape and improve future services by giving feedback to decision-makers.

People can be introduced to the project through participating schools, colleges, or community groups. Or they can contact Dudley CVS directly.

All young health champions are given training for six weeks in topics that could help them in the future workplace. It includes learning about teamwork, project planning and being a role model.

Recent young health champion successes include a project run by pupils at Pegasus Academy in Dudley to tackle isolation and loneliness at break and lunchtime. Meanwhile, creative students at Beacon Hill Academy, also in Dudley, realised that health topics would be easier to communicate with a visual aid. With this understanding they created the health wheel, which uses a circle divided into brightly coloured sections to help young people recognise the importance of looking after their wellbeing. The health wheel is now used by champions across the borough.

To find out more about the Dudley Young Health Champion programme, email info@dudleycvs.org.uk or go to www.izone.org.uk/dudley-young-health-champions



Health website by young people, for young people

Young people in Dudley borough have helped to shape iZone, a new digital online guide on health and wellbeing, for fellow teenagers and young people.

The vibrant site uses the Dudley Young Health Champions health wheel concept to allow visitors to find information and local groups or support services to do with sexual health, mental health, emotional wellbeing, environmental health and physical health.

Information included on the site has been chosen and vetted by youngsters working with Dudley CVS and Dudley Council, including Dudley Young Health Champions.

Visit the website at www.izone.org.uk





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Homeaffairs

News and views for council tenants and leaseholders throughout Dudley borough

Welcome to the Spring edition of Home Affairs!

At the start of this new year, we're excited to share numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing our communication with you, our valued tenants.

Home Affairs serves as just one avenue through which we strive to keep you informed about your housing service.

We're thrilled to announce the launch of several Housing Hubs, providing you with convenient opportunities for face-to-face meetings with your community housing officer.

Our "Make Your Voice Heard!" article demonstrates the importance of your involvement in shaping our community. Recent events such as the Netherton litter-pick highlight the profound impact of tenant and resident participation, showing how our Tenants & Residents Associations (TRAs) work to address local concerns. Your dedication to your community inspires us every day.

We also delve into tenant satisfaction measures and the tenant perception survey. Your input through the survey enables us to continuously improve and tailor our services to better serve you.

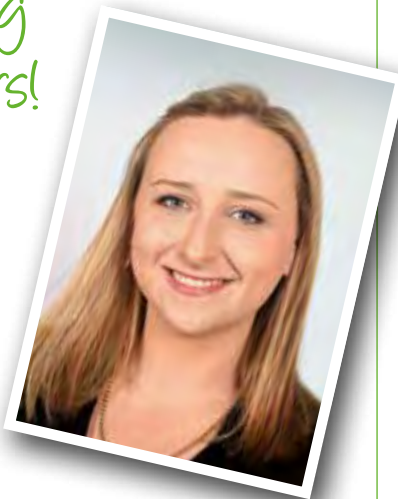
As we move into April, we wanted to ensure you're well-informed about the upcoming annual rent increase. So if you have any concerns at all about the changes, please don't hesitate to reach out to our dedicated rent team at 0300 555 0010. We're here to support you every step of the way.

For those of you receiving Universal Credit, we encourage you to familiarise yourselves with our article discussing the '53-week rule'. Your understanding of this rule can greatly help with your financial planning and we're here to help clarify any questions you may have.

Finally, as this is my final edition of Home Affairs, I would like to extend my thanks to all tenants, officers and partners for your continued engagement throughout the last six years. It has been an honour to serve as your cabinet member. I am proud of the journey our service has embarked on and wish everyone well for the future.

Councillor Laura Taylor-Childs

Cabinet member for housing and safer communities



Rent increase April 2024

By now, if you are a Dudley Council tenant, you should have received your annual rent letter. This letter informed you that rents for council homes will increase from April 2024.

It states what your revised rent will be and includes any additional sundry charges. All income from rents is invested in the maintenance, improvement and management of council homes.

If you receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, your benefit payments will generally be adjusted to reflect the higher rent.

For Housing Benefit this will automatically be adjusted, but for Universal Credit you will need to update your rent details using your online journal. Please also read our Rent and Universal Credit - the 53-week rule article on the next page.

Universal Credit claimants will receive a 'confirm your housing costs to-do' message on their journal. Please use this 'to-do' option, but do not update your claim before 1 April 2024, and do not use the 'change of circumstances to-do' to report your rent change.

You can monitor your rent balance through our new MyDudley online portal.

Rent and Universal Credit - the 53-week rule

Council housing rent is charged weekly, but Universal Credit is assessed and paid monthly in arrears.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) works out your monthly rent by multiplying the weekly rent by 52 and dividing by 12. However, there are not exactly 52 weeks in a year - there's always an extra day, and two in a leap year.

Every few years when the extra day causes April 1 to fall on a Monday (start of rent week) it will show on your rent account as a full week's debt - meaning that you are charged 53 weeks rent. 2024 is one of these years and the DWP won't pay any extra Universal Credit to cover this.

If you are paying your rent account by Direct Debit your payments will automatically be adjusted to cover the extra week.

If you don't pay by Direct Debit, and you pay your rent every month, you will need to pay the additional week by paying an increased amount each month (one week's rent divided by 12). You will need to do this to prevent your account being in arrears at the end of the year.

It is important that you continue to pay your rent and other priority bills and not build debt in your home. If you think you are going to be affected by this and need support, please contact the council's rent team on 0300 555 0010. We can also make referrals directly to other support services if needed.

Getting in touch

You can talk to your community housing officer through a home appointment, by telephone, or by booking an appointment at a Housing Hub or Housing Hub surgery.

To request an appointment please go to MyDudley to make a self-service request or call us on 0300 555 2345.

When you contact us, you will be matched to the next appointment most appropriate to your location and circumstances. This service is not for booking repairs or chasing repairs.

Information about our repair service can be found at www.dudley.co.uk/housing

Make your voice heard!

Make a difference and help us improve our services

Whether you want to complete a five-minute survey, or attend a two-hour meeting, there is a way in which you can make a difference by getting involved, such as:

Home volunteers

opportunities from the comfort of your own home

Local volunteers

opportunities within walking distance of your home

Borough-wide volunteers

opportunities that require travelling from your home across the borough

Home volunteers

Join the Dudley 500 and have your say by responding to surveys, consultations and polls. You can join digital groups and opt in to receive briefings and send back your views online or take part in informal digital chats with other tenants. You could also become an online researcher and receive briefings from national bodies that represent tenants or attend free webinars to see what others are doing and identify good practice.

Local volunteers

As a local volunteer you could attend a neighbourhood walkabout to highlight issues and potential improvements in your local area or become a tenant inspector in your local area or communal block. There's also the opportunity to join local groups, including local forums or tenants and residents associations, and have your say on matters affecting where you live. You could also support your local neighbourhood by taking part in litter picks and helping with neighbourhood events and activities.

Borough-wide volunteers

Become a tenant inspector and help us improve standards of services across the borough or attend meetings boroughwide in person.

If you want to get involved, please get in touch. Contact the participation team and we'll offer you support and training for whatever role you choose.

Call 01384 815168, email participation@dudley.gov.uk or go to www.dudley.gov.uk/housing

You can also write to us at: participation team, 4 Ednam Road, Dudley, DY1 1HL. Alternatively, visit your nearest Housing Hub, speak to your community housing officer, or visit Dudley Council Plus, Castle Street, Dudley.



Netherton Central litter-pick

In January, members of Netherton Central Tenants and Residents Association (TRA), along with local residents, met to litter-pick in their local area.

Dozens of bags of rubbish were collected and areas with fly tipping were identified and reported to the council. A fun and productive morning was had by all, with several words of thanks from locals.

If you are interested in organising a litter-pick in your area, or if you are interested in joining your local TRA, please contact the participation team on 01384 815168 or email participation@dudley.gov.uk



MyDudley

There's a new way to interact with Dudley Council with the launch of a new online platform.

Whether you want to pay a bill or report a faulty streetlight, MyDudley allows residents to access a host of council services at the click of a button. You can also view your rent balance, make rent payments, set up a Direct Debit, or request contact from the rent team.

Register by visiting www.dudley.gov.uk and click on the MyDudley link at the top of the page.

To set up an account you just need your name, postcode, and email address.

People will still be able to talk face-to-face at Dudley Council Plus or over the phone with a customer service advisor, but MyDudley will allow you to report issues 24/7, 365 days a year.



Tenant satisfaction measures - tenant perception survey

Tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) are set by the Regulator of Social Housing to assess how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services

The council uses research company Acuity to carry out surveys on its behalf and a baseline perception survey was conducted via telephone in July and August 2023.

Where possible these results were compared to a previous survey carried out with tenants in 2018.

As part of the survey, tenants were asked for comments and the biggest area for feedback was the repairs service. In particular, the timescales for completing repairs and dealing with outstanding work. Seventy-six percent of tenants were satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service in the last 12 months, while 72 percent were satisfied with the time taken to complete their last repair. Twenty percent were dissatisfied.

Overall, 65 percent of tenants surveyed were satisfied with the service provided by the council. However, this was significantly down from previous satisfaction levels recorded in 2018 of 85%.

Elsewhere in the survey, 70 percent of tenants found dealing with the council easy, with 15 percent finding it difficult. Sixty-seven percent agree that they are treated fairly and with respect, with 11 percent dissatisfied. However, 62 percent of tenants are satisfied with how they are kept informed about things that matter to them, falling from 68 percent in 2018. Fewer tenants (55 percent) are satisfied that the council listens to their views and acts upon them, down from 60 percent, and 30 percent are dissatisfied with this aspect of service.

In response to these findings, the council is currently taking steps to improve communication with tenants, both in terms of information provided and listening to tenants' comments. Please see our article, 'Make your voice heard.'

A further survey was recently carried out in January/February 2024. The results from this survey will provide a valuable starting point for understanding our tenants and for identifying key areas of improvements for our housing and related services.



Fences

We've received a few queries recently regarding fences, with many people uncertain about who is responsible for erecting and maintaining garden fences.

Fences that are the council's responsibility

The council will maintain, repair and replace fences or walls in these locations only:

- When an existing fence or wall provided by us forms a boundary between a council home and a public footpath
- An existing fence or wall provided by us, which prevents falls from height
- All fences and walls provided by us when they form part of communal gardens, grounds, or drying areas in a block of flats or sheltered scheme

Fences that are your responsibility

Any fences or walls that act as a boundary between a council home and a neighbouring garden are the responsibility either of the tenant or their neighbour. You can find out whether the fence forms part of the boundary of your home by contacting your community housing officer via Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345.

When will the council build a new fence or wall

When a council home with its own private garden is re-let and there is no fence to mark the boundary, the council will usually install a simple post and plain wire fence along the boundary line.

When the council builds brand new homes, we install fences or walls on all boundaries between gardens and public footpaths, and we install post-and-wire between gardens to mark boundaries. We may also install fences or walls within the communal areas of the development.

Dog owners

If you allow a dog into your garden then it is your responsibility to ensure that it does not escape and that your whole garden is securely fenced, whether or not the boundary forms part of your home. If a neighbour's boundary is not sufficiently secure to prevent your dog escaping, then you should talk to them about it in the first instance. If they do not wish to make their boundary secure, then it is your responsibility to erect a fence or other barrier inside your own boundary to keep your dog safely within your own garden.

For more information about garden fencing contact your community housing team by calling Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345 or visit www.dudley.gov.uk/housing and click on 'housing contact points'.



Housing fraud

Tell us and we'll do the rest!

As part of International Fraud Awareness Week 2023, we campaigned to raise awareness about housing fraud and how we can all contribute to help stop it.

During the week, residents from Chapel Street Estate in Brierley Hill, Highfields Estate in Halesowen, and Darby End Tenants and Residents Association, were given the opportunity to meet the council's fraud team and to raise issues and ask questions.

Across the UK there are more than 100,000 social rented homes that are being occupied or used fraudulently. This means that these homes are not available to those who are eligible and in genuine need for rehousing.

Some of the most common ways in which people commit housing fraud are:

- not telling the truth when applying for a property
- renting out (sub-letting) a property without permission
- living in a property without the council's permission after a tenant has died or left
- not living in the property as their main or only home

We completed a short survey and found that many residents did not know how to report it. If you suspect housing fraud you can report your concerns anonymously by contacting us on:

Telephone: 01384 814242 / 01384 815903

**Email: hotline@dudley.gov.uk
fraud.tenancy@dudley.gov.uk**

Insurance for your home

The council offers a home contents insurance scheme to tenants from as little as 66 pence per week.

This covers fire, theft, flooding and accidental damage to your belongings. To find out more, please visit www.dudley.gov.uk/homeinsurance or call us on 01384 815051.

Our recently conducted customer satisfaction survey found that 100 percent of policyholders find the scheme very good or good, with 95 percent stating that the service they received was excellent.

Our prize draw winner for completing the survey was Miss S Allard of Halesowen who won a £30 shopping voucher

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BRSK - FAQs

Telecoms company BRSK is currently working in the area to provide a fibre broadband network.

Residents have raised questions about the installation of poles, whether the council can refuse permission, residents' rights and how they can object.

Can Dudley Council refuse permission for the poles to be installed?

BRSK have been granted a licence by the Department for Transport, giving them permission for streetworks to "install, replace, maintain, and renew" apparatus in the highway.

While they do have to comply with certain regulations, the council cannot unreasonably withhold permission - to do so would be an illegal act by the council.

Can the poles be installed without planning permission?

The installation of telegraph poles is generally exempt from planning permission. As planning permission is not required, no planning enforcement can be undertaken. The location of poles can only be objected to by the Highway Authority in relation to highway safety issues.

Are there byelaws which would prevent the installation of telegraph poles?

No such byelaws exist to prevent their installation

Can poles be installed in grass land next to the highway (not specified on the permit), which is not maintained at public expense?

In these cases, we will contact BRSK and state they need permission from the relevant land owner.

Can they be installed outside my property?

As long as poles do not compromise highway safety or prevent a resident from being able to access their property, the council cannot legally refuse permission for their installation.

Who do I contact to discuss issues about a pole being installed?

Complaints to Dudley Council cannot be actioned due to the reasons outlined above. Residents should contact the company directly to discuss any issues or log a formal complaint.

Visit www.brsk.co.uk
email info@brsk.co.uk
Call 0203 9255 299

To see our FAQs visit
www.dudley.gov.uk and search BRSK



Housing advice and support available

Residents are urged to contact Dudley Council 'as early as possible' if they need housing advice and support.

The council's homelessness prevention team can provide specialist advice to anyone who feels that they may be at risk of losing their home.

This includes people who cannot meet their monthly housing costs or those who have been given notice to leave by their landlord.

Councillor Laura Taylor-Childs, cabinet member for housing and safer communities, said:

"One of our key pieces of advice is to contact the team as early as possible as there is a greater possibility that they will be able to resolve an issue, before it gets to crisis point."

"If anyone is worried and in need of help, I'd urge them to contact the team via Dudley Council Plus on 0300 555 2345."

More information is available at dudley.gov.uk, search homelessness.

Keeping people safe and secure at home

Residents can find out more about support available to help them stay well, safe and secure at home and to live independently at an event in April.

Council led service living well, feeling safe provides tailored information, advice and practical support to thousands of people living in Dudley borough each year.

It is especially useful for older people, people who have a disability, or those who may be vulnerable.

Living well, feeling safe partnership advisors will be at the Merry Hill Centre on Friday April 19 from 9am until 3pm, in the lower mall near the customer service desk to talk through the support on offer.

The team will be offering advice on home safety, including pendant and personal alarms as well as home adaptations. They can also direct people to support for dementia patients, unpaid carers, weight management and also activities going on in the community which help tackle loneliness.

To find out more, or to ask for help or a free home visit, call the service on 01384 817743.



living well, feeling safe



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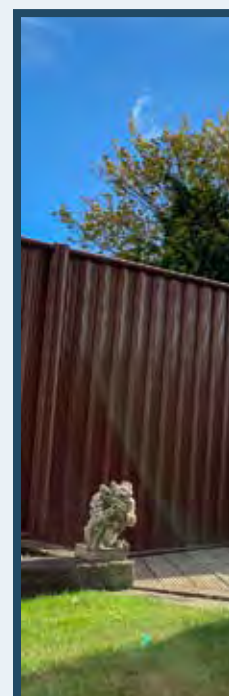
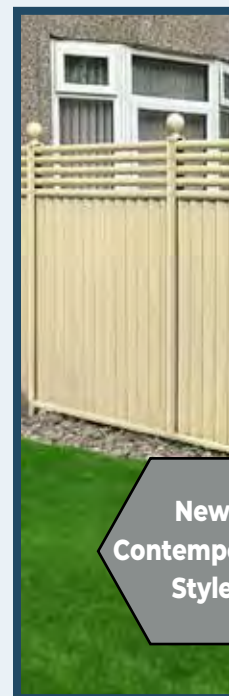
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Noticeboard



PARK ACTIVE

Let's get active in our local parks

Free exercise classes

2024 marks the fifth anniversary of the start of the free outdoor Park Active exercise sessions, which take place in parks across the borough.

Group fitness sessions for all ages and fitness abilities are led by trained volunteers. Since the start of Park Active, 50 volunteers have been trained and around 4,500 people have taken part.

Sessions take place at Stevens Park, Wollescote; Grange Park, Dudley; Buffery Park, Kates Hill; Stevens Park, Quarry Bank; and Abbey Street Park, Gornal.

For more information, to book to attend, or to find out how to become a volunteer, go to www.lets-get.com/park-active

Have your say for a safer borough

Safe & Sound, Dudley's community safety partnership, which incorporates the borough's local police and crime board, is asking local people what should be done to help make the borough a safer place.

People who live, visit or work in the borough can take part by booking a place at a public event on Tuesday March 19 from 6pm at Stourbridge Town Hall. There are limited places available, so booking is essential.

To find out more and book a place visit www.dudleysafeandsound.org/have-your-say or call 01384 814735.

safe & sound
Dudley's Community Safety Partnership

Council tax discounts and reductions

The council is encouraging people to find out if they can get a reduction in their council tax.

- people who live alone could be eligible for a 25% discount off their council tax
- a reduction may also be due where all, or all but one, of those usually living there are students, severely mentally impaired, carers, apprentices or long-term hospital/care home patients
- help is available if someone with a disability lives in the property and needs an additional bathroom, kitchen or other room, or uses a wheelchair indoors
- special arrangements are in place to support care leavers (aged 18 to 24)
- the council tax reduction scheme can reduce the amount of council tax that low-income households, including those receiving universal credit have to pay

In addition, help with rent payments may be available via discretionary housing payments. To be considered for this, residents need to be in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit.

For more information call 0300 555 2345 or visit www.dudley.gov.uk

Brierley Hill Library

Brierley Hill Library has re-opened following a £670,000 refurbishment.

The library's internal works, new décor and flooring has been organised by Dudley Council with funding from the government Future High Streets Fund.

The library now has improved ground floor access, a children's library and new meeting rooms for community use, such as school classes, group sessions and family activities.

The nearby St Michael's Church hosted a pop-up library during the refurbishment, and this has now closed.



Stay and play and baby sessions

Dudley borough's five local family hubs are now holding weekly stay and play sessions for children aged from birth to five years with parents and carers, as well as parent and baby sessions for babies up to a year old.

All sessions are free and families can enjoy craft activities, baby sensory play, messy play, singing and music, as well as free play. Refreshments are provided.

A warm welcome will be on offer, as well as advice, chat and fun. Find out about your local sessions at www.dudley.gov.uk/start-for-life

Heritage walking trails

There are a number of self-guided walking trails that explore the history and heritage of the borough.

- The Dudley, Halesowen and Brierley Hill architectural heritage trails explore the history of the towns through their buildings
- The Stourbridge Canal and Glass Quarter Heritage Trail is a circular walk telling the history and heritage of the Stourbridge Glass industry and the importance of the canal network and geology connected with the glass industry
- Dudley Geological Heritage Trail showcases millions of years of geology through the town

Find out more about these and other trails in the borough at: <https://discover.dudley.gov.uk/walking-trails/>



New way to donate to Mayor's charities

Throughout her Mayoral year, the Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Andrea Goddard, is supporting four charities: Dudley Community First Responders, Prostate Cancer UK, Mary Stevens Hospice and Up & Downs.

A new banking procedure for anyone wishing to donate to the Mayor's charities is now in place with the council's bank, Lloyds. The previous account at HSBC is closing and will no longer be able to take donations after the end of March 2024.

For details on how to make a donation visit: www.mayorofdudley.org.uk/charities

Childcare support is expanding

15 hours funded childcare is now available for eligible working parents of two-year-olds.

If your child turns two before 31 March, you can apply for a place now to start in April 2024.

Find out more at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

School admissions decision dates

If you applied for a place for your child at primary or secondary school for September 2024, we will be sending decision emails out soon. Secondary school offers will be issued on 1 March and primary school offers will be issued on 16 April.

Search 'school admissions' on the council website for further details.





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The new and improved website finds gadgets and products to help with all sorts of daily activities like cooking, bathing, getting upstairs, getting out safely and even hobbies.

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<https://dudley.livingmadeeasy.org.uk>



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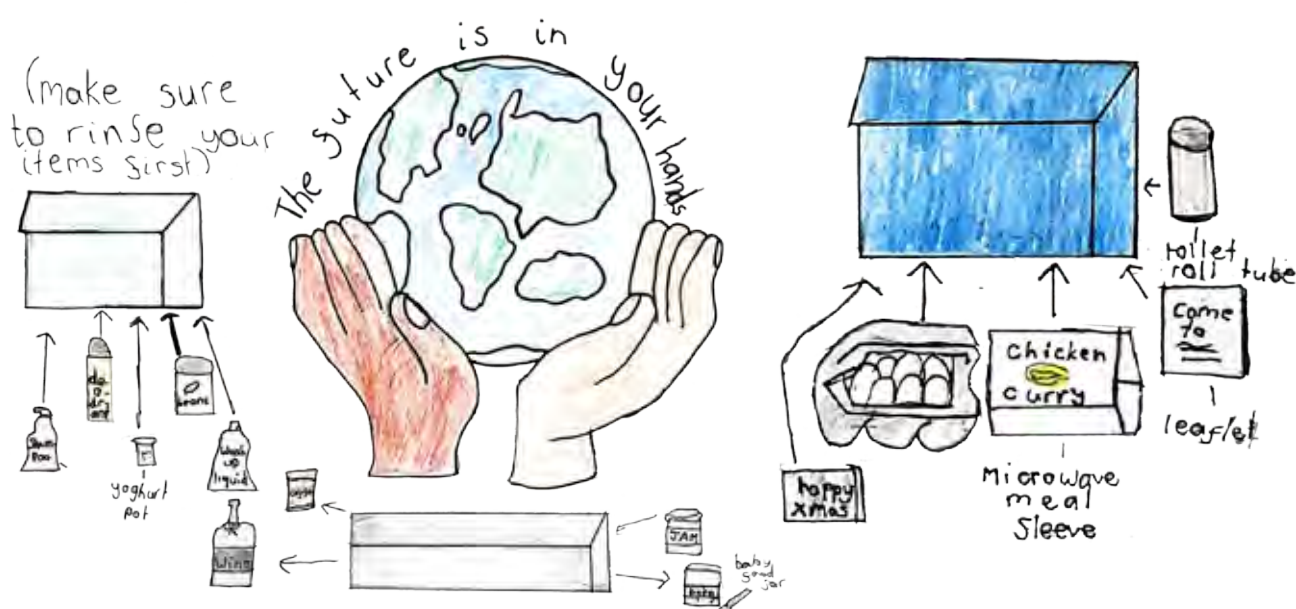


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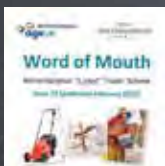
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What's on

Highlights from Borough Halls

March 2024 - June 2024

Please visit www.boroughhalls.co.uk for the latest information and full show listing.

Dudley Town Hall

Cash Returns Tribute to Johnny Cash and June Carter
Thu 14 Mar

Women In Rock Celebrating Anthems

Fri 15 Mar

The Fureys Acclaimed Irish Folk Band

Sat 16 Mar

An Evening of Burlesque

Sat 23 Mar

Jerry Sadowitz Comedian, Magician, Psychopath!

Thu 28 Mar

The Story of Guitar Heroes

Sat 30 Mar

The Specials LTD Tribute band

Sat 6 Apr

Charity Dance Show Starring Vito Coppola and Luba Mushtuk

Tue 9 Apr

Graffiti Classics Comedy String Quartet

Fri 12 Apr

Post Office Scandal The Inside Story

Fri 19 Apr

Paul Young Behind the Lens

Sun 21 Apr

Ed Byrne Tragedy Plus Time

Sat 11 May

All Our Yesterdays The ultimate feel-good show

Tue 14 May

The Magic of Motown

Fri 17 May

Frank Sinatra

The Retirement Concert recreated by Richard Shelton

Thu 23 May

Tommy Blaize Singer on Strictly Come Dancing

Fri 24 May

The Searchers Thank You tour

Thu 13 Jun

Jimmy Carr Laughs Funny

Sat 29 Jun

Stourbridge Town Hall

Alice In Wonderland Family musical

Sun 7 Apr

The Elvis Years The story of the king

Fri 12 Apr

Carl Hutchinson Today Years Old

Sat 13 Apr

Robert Vincent Acclaimed singer songwriter

Fri 19 Apr

Jackie Fabulous Comedian

Sat 20 Apr

Treasure Island Panto adventure

Sun 21 Apr

Steve Harley Come Up and See Me... and Other Stories

Wed 24 Apr

Six Chick Flicks hilarious parody

Fri 31 May

Sally-Anne Hayward Egg Shortage

Sat 15 Jun

Halesowen Town Hall

The Kilkennys Irish folk and ballad band

Fri 12 Apr

You're Bard! Shakespeare like never before

Fri 3 May

The D-Day Darlings D-Day 80 Anniversary Tour

Fri 21 Jun

MAYOR'S BALL AND CIVIC AWARDS 2024 CELEBRATING UNSUNG HEROES

Unsung community heroes from across the borough will be celebrated at the annual Mayor's Ball and Civic Awards. People who achieve great things or go above and beyond to make things happen in their communities are being nominated for a range of award categories.

Nominations close on Sunday March 3

The winners and runners up will be announced at the prestigious event, hosted by the Mayor of Dudley Councillor Andrea Goddard on April 19 at the Copthorne Hotel in Brierley Hill.

Funds raised will go to the Mayor's Charity Appeal, supporting Dudley Community First Responders, Mary Stevens Hospice, Up & Downs and Prostate Cancer UK.

People can nominate online or find out more information about the ball and the awards at www.mayorofdudley.org.uk/civicawards

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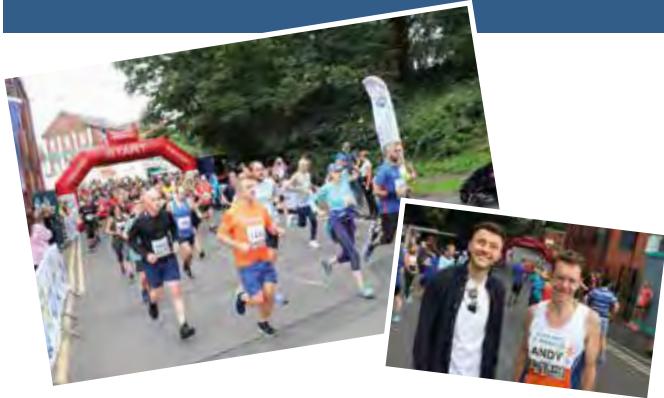
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Black Country Road Run – 30th June 2024



Starting and finishing in Halesowen, the 2 lap 10k course will start at 10am and is designed to showcase the town's architectural heritage and the picturesque surroundings. We welcome runners of all levels, from seasoned athletes to those taking on their first 10k challenge.

Lace up, hit the pavement, and be part of the heartbeat of the Black Country!

Birmingham Black Country Half Marathon – 6th July 2024



Starting from 8am, this unique point to point race goes along the canal towpaths, from Wolverhampton City Centre to Brindley Place in Birmingham.

It's suitable for all abilities, from Elite, club and charity runners to those who don't take it too seriously!

All finishers will receive a finishers medal and a well stocked goody bag!



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