

# homelife

Issue 8  
Winter 2006



▲ Tenants and employees with Chief Executive Brian Oakley celebrating Sandwell Homes being a Best of the Black Country winner

## We're the **Best** of the Black Country!

It's official, Sandwell Homes is a best of the Black Country winner!

Sandwell Homes continued its winning streak when we scooped the Customer Service award at a special presentation evening held at Dunstall Park, Wolverhampton.

A representative group of board members, tenants and employees went on stage with Chief Executive Brian Oakley to collect an elegant crystal trophy and a cheque for £500.

The win followed a nail-biting four weeks since a three-strong judging panel visited Sandwell Road in mid-October, for a robust question and answer session with officers

and a tenant representative and then visited the Oldbury Repairs Call Centre.

Video filming of a tenants' meeting at Blackheath Local Office and photographing work being carried out at a tenant's property were also part of the process.

Chief Executive, Brian Oakley said: "The judging panel said they were impressed with how we were responding to the challenge of delivering the Government's Decent Homes standard and that we admitted, we didn't always get things right, but had feedback mechanisms in place which we acted upon.

"This is another fantastic achievement for us, in the face of some very strong competition

and another well-earned success for everyone involved with Sandwell Homes which we should all enjoy."

Chair of Sandwell Homes, Len Gibbs said: "Winning this award is a magnificent achievement and a fitting tribute to an organisation that is going from strength to strength.

"Well done to everyone concerned."

The Best of the Black Country Awards are organised by the Express and Star newspaper and are now in their fifth year. They showcase the best of Black Country organisations and businesses.

### First with the news for tenants and leaseholders of Sandwell Homes

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE





# Property Shop Opens in Blackheath

A new Property Shop has been launched in Blackheath in a bid to improve the service to new and existing council tenants seeking a home.

Prospective homeseekers can now visit the third Sandwell Homes Property Shop, which was officially opened in October by Chair of Sandwell Homes Operations Committee and board member Bill Woodhouse and first successful customer Mr Alexander Smith.

"The Property Shop is a proactive new service which gives tenants a real say in their future homes," commented Bill Woodhouse.

"This latest service is one of many initiatives to involve tenants in all aspects of their housing so that we can fully meet their needs."

New and existing tenants can now call into the Sandwell Homes Property Shop in Payne Street, Blackheath and view advertisements for every property which Sandwell Homes has to let.

Alexander Smith, the first customer to be housed by the Sandwell Homes Property Shop in Blackheath comments on the new system: "I'm delighted with my new home and the new service."

"I would recommend the Property Shop to anyone, the staff are really friendly, the shops are really nice with a bright and inviting environment and most of all everything happens so quickly!"

The Blackheath Sandwell Homes Property Shop is now open from 9am - 4pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays (closed all day Tuesdays and Saturdays).

More information is available by calling a free phone service on 0800 027 0463.



▲ Bill Woodhouse, Chair of Operations Committee, Maureen Farmer, Blackheath Neighbourhood Office, Alexander Smith and Peter John, Director of Operations

# Hat Trick for Sandwell Homes!

Good things certainly come in threes at Sandwell Homes with three major awards being picked up in as many months.

In September, Sandwell Community Alarms was successfully audited for Parts 2 (Alarm Assessment and Installation) and 3 (Mobile Response) of the Telecare Services Association Code of Practice.

This follows the team's earlier success in December 2005 when they gained Part 1

(Call Handling). They are now one of only a handful of organisations to hold all three parts of the standard which is recognised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Sandwell Homes has also achieved the prestigious corporate Charter Mark award, a national benchmark for public services judged as delivering excellent standards of customer care.

And last but not least, Sandwell Homes was shortlisted for a Best of the Black Country

award and won the customer service category (see front cover story).

Brian Oakley, Chief Executive said: "All of these achievements are great news for everyone involved with Sandwell Homes, tenants, employees, board members and our collaborative partners.

"It proves we are focusing on our customers, constantly improving and giving value for money as we move closer to becoming a three star organisation."

# Right to Buy

Under the Right to Buy scheme as laid down in The Housing (Right to Buy) (information to Secure Tenants) (England) Order 2005, you can buy your home at a price lower than the market value.

The circumstances in which the Right to Buy CAN be exercised:

You probably have the Right to Buy if you are a secure tenant.

If your secure tenancy began before 18 January 2005, then you must have spent at least two years as a public sector tenant. If your new secure tenancy began on or after 18 January 2005, then you must have spent at least five years as a public sector tenant.

## Applying to Buy

Start by asking the council for a Right to Buy claim form (form RTB1). Forms are available for collection at all Local Neighbourhood Offices, Property Shops in West Bromwich, Wednesbury and Blackheath and receptions at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury and Council House, Smethwick. Forms can be issued through the post by telephoning any of the above offices or the Home Ownership Unit on 0121 569 5029 or by emailing: [homesales@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:homesales@sandwell.gov.uk). Forms can also be downloaded from the website [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk). More information is available in the Government booklet "Your Right to Buy Your Home".

Please note there are exceptions to the Right to Buy set out in schedule 5 of the Act.

# Tenants take Action in Tool Box Talks

Tenants on the Kenrick Park Estate, West Bromwich are celebrating after long awaited refurbishment work started on two high-rise blocks, Neale House and Macaulay House, marking the start of Decent Homes improvement works to all six of the blocks on the estate. Once completed, the works will have dramatically transformed the look of the buildings on the estate and will improve the standard of living for tenants.

Tenants have played a key role from the beginning of the project and have been involved in selecting options and the final design proposals. Kath Nightingale, MACNEA member commented: "Working in partnership with both Sandwell Homes and the contractor Lovells has really been of benefit to us."

Tenants with help from Participation Officer, Bal Gill have set up MACNEA the MACaulay and NEAle House Action Group, to monitor the improvement works as a representative voice of residents from both blocks and to communicate and inform the rest of the residents about developments and progress being made. The 12-month

improvement project, which comprises of 72 flats will see the exterior of the blocks being improved to include, window and balcony improvements, external cladding, fire and safety improvements, communal redecoration and environmental improvements. Once completed, each home will see the benefit of thermal insulation, which should reduce Tenants' fuel bills.

John Clayton, Investment Director of Sandwell Homes comments: "We look forward to working with MACNEA during the course of refurbishment work to Neale & Macaulay Houses in the coming months. Living in a multi-storey block undergoing refurbishment can be a testing time for residents and we welcome the opportunity to work with them on the planning and delivery arrangements we are making for the work."

▼ Members of the MACNEA Action Group and officers from Sandwell Homes



# Tenants on Board

Sandwell Homes is currently reviewing how it appoints its six Tenant Board Members.

Over the next couple of months we will be consulting with tenants and leaseholders on the review of our current system.

## What will the review cover?

Taking into account good practice from other ALMOs we will be looking at a number of options and will require feedback from tenants and leaseholders.

## What is the current system?

Our current system is that we look at a Tenant Board Member from each of the

six Towns of Sandwell. We advertise in the local press or via the homelife magazine, those people who show interest are required to complete an application form.

A panel of tenant volunteers then consider the applicants and via a formal interview process select the successful applicant who will then serve on Sandwell Homes Board. Norman Fletcher, Business Development Manager said: "I do hope tenants and leaseholders take this opportunity to give us their feedback on the appointment process for Tenant Board Members".

All feedback received by January 15th 2007 will be considered within the review.

Do you have a view on how we should appoint Tenant Board Members?

If the answer's yes . . . we want to hear from you!

Please contact us if you want any more information or you would like to give your views.

Telephone: 0121 569 5130

Email: [lisa\\_shakespeare@sandwellhomes.org.uk](mailto:lisa_shakespeare@sandwellhomes.org.uk)

By post: Sandwell Homes Business Development Division Freepost Plus RLUK-GKTZ-JSXX Sandwell Road West Bromwich B70 8TB.

# Up Close and Personal with Grace Mary's TRA

"We're not just a group of committee members – we're a group of friends"

The Grace Mary tenants and residents association have been established for just over 12 months, and already have a very strong voice in the community, and it all started when a couple of busy young mothers Nikki Cooper (25) and Tammy Dell (27) set up an action group to fight for more children activities on the Grace Mary Estate in Tividale as a result of a little boy being knocked over.

We visited both Nikki who is the Chair of the Grace Mary TRA and Tammy who acts as secretary to find out exactly what they do, and how they set up.

**Q: Why did you set up your own TRA?**

Nikki: "We want to be a TRA with a difference. We want to do everything and anything to improve where we live from supporting the kids to the elderly."

Tammy: "We want to make the estate a better place to live for us and for the future. I have lived here all my life and want to see the estate back where it used to be."

**Q: How did it all start, and what support did you receive?**

Nikki: "Well it all started when the little boy was knocked over, we started petitioning for extra facilities, and got an action group formed and from that the Grace Mary TRA was born."

Tammy: "Gail (Participation Officer for Rowley Regis) helped us and got the ball rolling. She set us up with the framework, providing us with details about Sandwell Homes and what they offer in regards to tenant participation – and from that we started."

**Q: Do you have any personal ambitions or receive any personal gratification from running a TRA?**

Nikki: "I get satisfaction from the kids faces when we have done something. It frustrates me that children are forgot about, and one of the things I am really proud of is forming a subgroup called GMTV (Grace Mary Talking Voice), which is a subgroup for the teenagers to voice their opinions."

Tammy: "I love helping people, and I get a real buzz from it. We're not just a group of committee members – we're a group of friends – and it's not all hard work – we do have a laugh along the way."

**Q: Do you think it is important for tenants, especially the younger generation such as yourselves to get involved with the future and the decisions of their homes?**



▲ Nikki Cooper and Tammy Dell – Making a difference

Tammy: "I think it is really important for people to get involved, especially the younger generation. It's us as tenants who know what is going on in our neighbourhoods, so it should be up to us to get involved. Sometimes organizations like Sandwell Homes and Sandwell Council need shaking up – and if you don't get involved in putting things right then you can't expect it to be right."

"We can't expect everything if we're sitting on our backsides!"

**Q: Can anyone join the TRA, or even set one up?**

Nikki: "We had no experience of this sort of thing before, and we're learning every day – so anybody can really get involved in their local TRA or even set one up. It is

hard work, but it's manageable. I have 3 children and still find the time. It's not all paperwork and minutes – we do actually have fun and see it as a social aspect in our lives."

Tammy: "Yes, anybody can do it. You don't have to be clever because you get lots of support from your participation officer. We're involved in loads at the moment, and it is a learning experience all the way. We're not phased by meetings with Sandwell Homes, Sandwell Council or even the West Midlands Police Authority – we have learnt how to be diplomatic in getting what we want."

**Q: And finally, if other tenants in your area wanted to get involved with your TRA or even other tenants in other towns wanted to set up a TRA what advice do you have for them?**

Nikki: "Well we would love more tenants and residents to get involved around here, and my door is always open for anyone to drop in and have a chat. We really do need more people to get involved as we have so much to do, and any support offered will be gratefully appreciated."

Tammy: "Well like Nikki says, we are more than happy for anyone else to get involved around here, and if a group of tenants and residents from other towns want to set something up similar – we would be more than happy to speak to them and offer advice. If we can do it – I'm sure everyone else can!"

For further details about setting up a TRA in your area or getting involved in the Grace Mary TRA contact Gail Ashfield, Participation Officer on 0121 569 5324 or email [gail\\_ashfield@sandwellhomes.org.uk](mailto:gail_ashfield@sandwellhomes.org.uk).

# Hard Work of Tenants Recognised with Qualification

Sandwell Homes has recently begun working with a nationally recognised training and accreditation provider, the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), to offer recognition and accreditation for the work done by tenants currently engaged in tenant involvement structures.

The Certificate In Community Volunteering (CCV) is a nationally recognised qualification, which is available at Level One and Level Two, with successful completion of Level Two being equivalent to a GCSE grade B.

Areas covered by the programme include; preparing for your volunteering role, personal skills for volunteers, dealing with meetings as a volunteer, meeting your organisation's standards of good practice, describing needs, issues and your own voluntary work, and working in a team as a volunteer.

The Participation Team is coordinating the programme, and has recently begun a pilot scheme, working with 12 tenants (two from each of the six towns) towards the successful

completion of Level One.

It is then hoped that this programme will be rolled out and offered to others, to recognise the invaluable contribution made by so many individuals who work in partnership with us.

Darryll Garland, one of the tenants taking part in the scheme said: "I'd like to thank Sandwell Homes for allowing me and my fellow tenants the opportunity to be the first of many to undertake the ASDAN course in community volunteering.

"As this is a new venture for all concerned it will take a lot of commitment from both tenants and the Participation Team. This initiative demonstrates the mutual respect we have for each other. PS Good luck to all concerned."



▲ Edward Gilbert, Gwen Cherrington, Participation Officer for Tipton - Richard Alonzo and Darryll Garland

Taking part are: Edna Barker, John Cash, Gwen Cherrington, Nikki Cooper, Tammy Dell, Darryll Garland, Edward Gilbert, Dot Gospel, Sue Hutchings, Sue Kelly, Christine Nelson, Aynols Reid and Julie Vaughan.

If you would like to find out more about the Community Certificate in Volunteering, or would like to hear how you can get involved in the various tenant involvement structures, please contact Dean Wright (Participation Officer) on 0121 569 5046.

## Leaseholders – get Insured!

Further to the article in the autumn edition of *homelife*, the Contents Insurance scheme is now being offered to all Leaseholders and will be offered on identical terms to tenants.

and £1.33 for all other tenants and there is no excess payment if you make a claim.

The service has recently been improved to increase the maximum sum insured from £25,000 to £35,000.

Payments can be made in weekly instalments from as little as 84p a week for senior citizens

For more information about the scheme or to request an application form, contact the Contents Insurance Section on 0121 569 5024 or email at [mark\\_stokes@sandwellhomes.org.uk](mailto:mark_stokes@sandwellhomes.org.uk) or the Home Ownership Unit as below.

**0121 569 5024**

## Leaseholders – get Heard!

The Leasehold Forum met in November 2006 at Wednesbury Town Hall, continuing the objective to reach as many Leaseholders as possible by meeting in all six towns.

presentation by Asset Management and it is intended to set up a Leasehold Group to review and consult on choosing options. We are now seeking volunteers from among our Leaseholders to part of this group and would be pleased to hear from interested parties. Contact Home Ownership Unit on 0121 569 5199.

The main item on the agenda was the new Charging Policy on repairs. There was a

Despite changing venue and time of the Forums, the attendance has not increased. Sue Whitehouse, the Chair of the Forum, is looking for more volunteers, so this is your opportunity to make a difference. The dates for the next two meetings are 22nd February 2007 to be held at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury at 6.30pm and 24th May 2007 also to be held at 6.30pm at a venue yet to be confirmed.

**0121 569 5199**

# Satisfaction levels on the up but more to do

## Customer Satisfaction Survey (STATUS) 2006 Results

A big thank you to everyone who responded to our STATUS survey questionnaire which was sent out to a random sample of 8,000 tenants between July and August 2006.

A total of 4169 were completed and returned, a 52% response rate, which is good for this type of survey. All returned surveys were entered into a £50 prize draw and the lucky winner was Mrs Jeanette Gardiner-Anderson from Oldbury, who received her money from Vikas Gupta, consumer research assistant. She said: "I can't believe it. I have never won anything before. This money will come in really handy for Christmas, especially as all I did was complete a survey. I am really grateful for this."

The annual Government customer satisfaction survey offers tenants the opportunity to voice their views and opinions about a wide range of services provided by Sandwell Homes, including: -

- Information about the household
- Information about your housing and area
- Contact with your landlord
- Your repairs service
- Communicating with your landlord and opportunities for tenant involvement.

### The key findings from the results are:

#### Overall Satisfaction with landlord:

- 77% of tenants are satisfied with the overall services provided, which has

remained the same as 2005. Overall satisfaction amongst BME tenants improved by 1.98% from 68.22% in 2005 to 70.2% in 2006.

#### Rent:

- 75% of tenants feel that their property represents good value for money; compared to 73% in 2005 and satisfaction has increased amongst BME tenants by 2.9% to 69.31%.

#### Accommodation:

- Overall satisfaction of accommodation has increased by 1.38% to 83.10%. Satisfaction amongst BME tenants has increased by 2.98% to 70.16%.

#### Repairs:

- Satisfaction in the way repairs and maintenance is dealt with increased by 1.89% to 75.32%. With a significant increase amongst BMS tenants by 5.26% to 65.03% in 2006.
- There has been a 4.45% increase in tenants stating time taken before work started is very/fairly good, now at 79.51%.
- Satisfaction with the overall repairs and maintenance service has increased by 1.9% to 84.45%.

#### Communication / Being Kept Informed:

- 80.03% of tenants felt that they were kept informed, compared to 76.95% in 2005, with a 3.38% increase amongst BME tenants from 73.95% to 77.33%.
- There has been a 3.52% increase in tenants finding they could get hold of the right person.



▲ Mrs Jeanette Gardiner-Anderson from Oldbury accepting her prize from Vikas Gupta

#### Taking their views into account:

- 67.34% of tenants said that their views were taken a lot/little into account in decision-making. This was an increase of 1.62% from 2005. There was a 3.36% increase amongst BME tenants from 52.76% to 56.12%.

#### Participation:

- Overall satisfaction in opportunities for participation in management and decision-making has increased by 2.89% to 67.12%. There has been a 2.04% increase amongst BME tenants from 62.37% in 2005 to 64.41%.

#### Tenants Compact:

- There has been a 10.22% increase in tenants satisfied with the tenant participation compact, now at 69.4%.

# Working Together to Achieve Excellence

A big thank you to everyone who attended the special conference staged at Oldbury Council House last month – (November).

Tenants and members of the Repairs and Maintenance Directorate worked together to develop ideas to continuously improve the repairs service.

Tenant delegates then attended three workshops based around the following themes:

- Empty (void) property standard
- Garden Tidy scheme
- Re-charges that are the tenants' responsibility
- Customer satisfaction levels with repairs
- Reporting of repairs
- Opening hours
- Access to carry out gas maintenance
- Electrical maintenance.

Although the aim of the day was to get serious feedback about different service areas, there was an element of interactive fun involved as tenants formed themselves into teams and took part in two games -

"Wipeout" and "Do you know the difference between right and wrong?" Delegates were asked to rank their perception of the Repairs service before and after the conference. Initial findings showed that tenants already had a very high understanding of the need for Sandwell Homes to gain annual access to properties, to carry out gas safety checks. Tenants' perceptions of the Garden Tidy scheme and Recharges to Tenants, rose considerably as a result of the event.

Tenant Ann Marie Miller (pictured top right), from Tipton said: "I welcomed the opportunity to go to the repairs conference, the content and delivery of it was really good. Speaking to the people in charge at the repairs department at Sandwell Homes also gave me a valuable insight as a tenant."



## Be Watchful this Winter

Every year there is a rise in burglaries when the clocks go back, the peak comes when the evenings draw in and it's easy for burglars to see where homes are empty.

There are simple measures you can take to avoid being a victim of burglary:

#### The 12 'dos' of Christmas:

1. **Do use an ultra violet marker pen** and/or bar code labels. Research shows thieves are less likely to steal property that could be traced back to its owners.
2. **Do write your house number and postcode** onto valuables, including TVs, computers, DVD players, new bicycles and even your wrapped Christmas presents.
3. Do keep gifts out of sight inside your home. **Don't leave them under the Christmas Tree** until Christmas Eve!
4. **Do give your home a security health check.** Consider installing a burglar alarm and make your home look occupied even when you're out?

Use time switches, leave a battery-operated radio tuned in to a talk radio channel, draw all curtains after dark.

5. Do break up boxes, put them in a bin liner or take them to the household waste and recycling centre/recycling banks. **Do not leave empty boxes and packaging from gifts outside home.** It's an easy clue to valuable items inside.
6. Do make absolutely sure you know who is calling at the door. **Do not open the door to anyone** who comes calling unless you are sure that they are genuine. **Remember - Stop, Chain, Check.**
7. **Do be extra vigilant** and look out for any suspicious people hanging around, whether they are men, women or children. Bogus callers come in many shapes and forms.

8. **Do ensure garden gates are closed and hedges trimmed** so that burglars cannot hide.

9. **Do keep valuables** like house and car keys, wallet and mobile phone out of sight in your home. Make it difficult for thieves to access your property.

10. **Do cancel the milk and paper deliveries** if you're going away, and ask a friendly neighbour to keep an eye on your property and collect any post.

11. **Do ensure your car is locked at all times** when not in use. Use the steering wheel lock even when the car is on your drive. Use immobilisers, etc, to make it difficult for the would-be thief. **Do not leave anything of value** in the car when you leave it, for however short a time.

12. And finally do enjoy a **happy, safe and enjoyable Christmas** period.



## 50 Years of Married Bliss

Ros Sadler, a neighbourhood warden covering the Smethwick area had a pleasant duty to perform when she presented a fabulous bouquet of flowers to Ray and Beaty Palmer who are celebrating 50 years of wedded bliss.

When asked what was the secret of reaching 50 years of happy married life? Ray replied: "Letting your wife get her own way!"

**Congratulations to them both!**

◀ Ray and Beaty Palmer celebrating with Ros Sadler

# Software for Satisfaction Proves Popular

Vision Management System (VMS) is a software tool that enables us to capture satisfaction feedback across a range of service areas and respond to the results. This involves a service-specific questionnaire set that is repeated on a regular basis, with 10 questions on each survey.

A big thank you to everyone who has responded to our new satisfaction surveys 'Scorecards', to date we have received 2573 completed surveys. We have now implemented surveys in the following service areas; repairs & maintenance, new tenancies, cleaning and janitorial services, improvement works (Decent Homes),

security and concierge, tenancy support, rent arrears, gas services, gas breakdowns, warden service and finally homelessness, that is tenants who have recently been housed under the homeless policy. Sandwell Homes is committed to improving services to its customers and to help us to do this we need feedback from you on how satisfied you are with our services.

If you receive a survey we urge you to complete it and return it to us. All completed surveys will be entered into a £50 prize draw every two months. We have now awarded five tenants £50 each since the surveys commenced.

Any survey response that shows low satisfaction levels is automatically investigated to find out why our customers are dissatisfied. Service Improvement Groups are being set up in each service areas to discuss the results of each survey and to propose changes to improve satisfaction.

In future editions of homelife, we will be keeping you informed on improvements made to services, which have been introduced as a direct result from your comments.

If you would like more information on the VMS system, please contact the Business Support Team on 0121 569 6464/5178.

Survey results are marked as an average out of 10. The results to date for each service area are as follows:-

Repairs and maintenance	7.67	Rent arrears	5.82	Tenancy Support Service	8.54
New tenancies	7.74	Gas servicing	8.42	Wardens	8.63
Security & concierge	5.97	Gas breakdowns	8.18	Investment Division	6.89
Janitorial & cleaning	6.41	Homelessness	7.31		



▲ Vikas Gupta congratulates David Pearce



▲ Sonia Ward congratulates Anthony Collins

# Customer Housing Suggestion Scheme

## Tell us how to improve and you could win a £10 gift voucher!

Sandwell Homes is committed to making continuous improvements to the services you receive.

To help us do this, we welcome suggestions from our tenants and leaseholders.

Our customer suggestion scheme gives you the opportunity to tell us what we can do to deliver an even better service. Suggestions can cover anything related to council housing and the repairs service.

Customer suggestion forms are available from your local Neighbourhood Office.

You can also telephone our general enquiries line on 0845 359 7600, email [customer\\_relations@sandwellhomes.org.uk](mailto:customer_relations@sandwellhomes.org.uk) or go on-line to [www.sandwellhomes.org.uk](http://www.sandwellhomes.org.uk)

Suggestions can be anonymous, if you prefer but named suggestions will receive a reply and if put into practice, you could win a £10 gift voucher.

# Campaign - get People to Vote

Council chiefs in Sandwell are launching a top-level study into why only a third of voters bother to turn out for local elections.

A new committee of councillors will carry out the probe. The Select Committee on Electoral Participation is being chaired by Cllr Simon Hackett. He said: "The biggest chance for the people of Sandwell to have their say in the running of the council is by voting in the local elections each May.

"Staggeringly, only about 34% of people who are eligible to vote bother to turn out.

"We want to find out what we can do to encourage more people to register on the electoral roll and to vote in local and general elections.

"The select committee wants to hear people's views on all aspects of elections.

He added: "We are also interested in what people already know – or think they know – of the voting system.

"Does everyone know, for example that by law, all eligible people must be registered on the electoral roll?"

"Do they know that not being registered could be bad for their credit rating?"

Issues the committee will cover in its work will include:

- why people vote
- why they don't bother
- and what would make it easier for them to vote.

More details can be found on the council's website at [www.sandwell.gov.uk](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk) - follow the link from Council and Democracy to Elections to Select Committee on Electoral Participation. Meantime, people can:

- email their views to [sue\\_phelps@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:sue_phelps@sandwell.gov.uk)
- or write to Sue Phelps, Head of Governance Services, Council House, Oldbury B69 3DE.



▲ Sandwell Homes Tipton and Wednesbury Rent Team Leader Tony Baker, Housing Officer Ann Marie Hilton and General Manager Adrian Scarrott launch the pay your rent first advertising campaign

# Sandwell Homes go 'On the Buses' this Christmas

Here at Sandwell Homes, we have launched our annual winter advertising campaign to remind our tenants to pay rent first, before spending on Christmas gifts.

The campaign was kick started by Sandwell Homes General Manager for Housing Management, Adrian Scarrott.

Adrian Scarrott said "I would like to thank all our tenants who pay their rent on time.

He said: "However, we do need to remind tenants about their responsibility to pay their rent, as taking firm action against tenants and removing them from their home isn't in anyone's best interest."

The 'pay your rent first' message will appear on posters inside and on the outside of buses running throughout the borough over the winter period.

**Do you know that you can pay your rent by the following methods?**

### Direct Debit

Ask at your local office for a Direct Debit mandate form; choose your preferred payment date, complete the form and we will do the rest.

### Automated telephone payment line

Use your debit or credit card to make a rent payment over the telephone. All you need is to dial the number below and follow the automated instructions. You will need your rent account number and debit/credit details handy. The payment will be made to your account without having to leave your front door 0845 355 3500.

### Internet

Rent payments and on line statements are now available on the Internet. To access the service log on to the Sandwell Homes Internet page at [www.sandwellhomes.org.uk](http://www.sandwellhomes.org.uk) and follow the links. Payments can be submitted by either debit or credit card.

### Payment cards

Each customer should have received a payment card, which allows you to pay your rent at various Pay Point locations throughout the borough. To make a payment take your card to the local PP outlet along with your cash payment, the operator will then give you a receipt to show you have made the payment. If you are unsure of your local pay point outlet we have published an up to date list of locations below.

If you have not received or you have lost/mislaidd your payment card don't worry your local office can take details and arrange to reissue a new one.

### In person at one of our offices

You can also pay in cash, by cheque or credit/debit card within our local offices.

If you would like further information on any of the above payment methods please ask at your local office, check out our website at [www.sandwellhomes.org.uk](http://www.sandwellhomes.org.uk) or call the general enquiries line for your area.

# The Winners!

Many thanks to all of you who returned our readers' survey in the autumn edition of homelife. Feedback will be included in the spring edition next year. Congratulations to: B Jones of Tipton who won £100, G Price of Cradley Heath and L Percival of Smethwick who both won £25 in the prize draw.

## Are You Covered?



Did you know that Sandwell Homes offers a cost effective way for tenants to insure the contents of their homes against a wide range of common risks such as fire, flood or theft?

Payments can be made in weekly instalments from as little as 84 pence a week for senior citizens and £1.33 for

all other tenants and there is no excess payment if you make a claim

For more information about the scheme, visit your local housing office or contact the Contents Insurance Section on 0121 569 5024 or email Mark Stokes at: [mark\\_stokes@sandwellhomes.org.uk](mailto:mark_stokes@sandwellhomes.org.uk) There are three chances to win £25 worth

of gift vouchers courtesy of Sandwell Homes and Royal and Sun Alliance who underwrite the scheme.

Simply find the insurance related words listed in the wordsearch grid and return your entry to the address below.

Good Luck!

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

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