



# Sandwell Community Information & Participation Service

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## Early Bird Reminder

We know its still early but a reminder that we have booked next years AGM for Saturday 14th April 2012.

Please get this date fixed in your diary!



## General Meeting

To be held on:

**Tuesday 24th January 2012**  
**in SCIPS offices at 7.00 p.m.**



## Welcome to 2012 everyone!

**We hope all our members had a really good December break and welcomed in the New Year in an appropriate style.**

Having just returned from the festive break we have our first General Members meeting fast approaching at the end of January. We will be delighted to welcome to SCIPS for the first time as a guest speaker for our meeting Jeanette Wade, Sandwell Homes Financial Inclusion and Income Management Development. Officer.

We have invited Jeanette to come along to the General Meeting to update the membership on some of the planned forthcoming changes to benefits payment system.

Although a lot of the planned changes are still awaiting final approval we feel it is very much in the interests of the members to

have as much information as is currently available.

We know that 2012 will be another year of change right across society and we will do our best to keep you up to date with all the forthcoming changes as we learn of them.

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As you will be aware from the December newsletter we have moved our Annual General Meeting from our normal March slot into April. Paperwork for this meeting will go out in February to ensure that the Easter break this year does not effect the smooth running of the event.

**As usual we would encourage everyone to book early for the AGM and return all paperwork as soon as you can.**

# Housing Office Service Review – Help Shape the Future

**This briefing note is an update from Sandwell Homes on the Communication/ Consultation process for the Housing Office/ Service Review to date and the timeline for 2012.**

## *Background*

In 2010 Sandwell Homes Board in agreement with the Council in their Delivery Plan for 2011/12 included a Review of the Network of Housing Offices.

The Council was of the opinion that we had too many offices and that our neighbours (Walsall / Dudley / Wolverhampton) had reduced offices to 5/6 Housing Service Centres.

Also customers are moving towards using the telephone (over 80% of our enquiries go to the Call Centre) with only 20% at Housing Office receptions. Also the use of Direct Debit to pay rent and self service for bidding for homes and registering repairs is increasing.

## *The issues*

Sandwell Homes via its benchmarking group have the highest

cost for premises which does not show Value for Money.

The Council informed us in early 2011 that from April 2012 our Management Fee would be reduced by £5m (10% cut) and no inflation increase would be made (£500,000) which is a reduction of £5.5m.

This monies would be used by the Council on the Decent Homes Programme (10% of the stock is not decent) due to the claw back of £29m by the Government (Decent Homes Grant).

For the Housing Management/ Local Office service we need to save £600,000 to ensure the company running costs are covered by the reduced Management Fee of £49m.

The decision was made to enable us to meet the target of £600,000 and to show Value for Money that with regard to premises we would reduce the number of offices to 6 Sandwell Homes Housing Service Centres.

The service is stretched via too many offices/the number of employees we have available in this service area.

Feedback is clear from tenants, they wish us to be out on estates being more proactive

We need to show Value for Money and continue to provide efficiency savings that can be used to improve the service.

We need to understand customer priorities for our services.

We need to improve the customer experience at reception.

## **How did we agree the Consultation Process?**

It was not possible to present our proposals to a Policy and Monitoring Group meeting however the Chair/Vice Chair of PAM agreed to go through the Communication/Consultation proposals with Officers.

The Communication/ Consultation proposals had three elements:-

1. To communicate due to the need for financial savings and to ensure Value for Money we would be reducing our network of Housing Offices/Estate Offices to 6 Housing Service Centres
2. We would be consulting with Tenants / Leaseholders to ensure from the proposed 6 Housing Service Centres we deliver services that

are important to you. This process commenced with workshops at the conference.

- 3. We are also looking at the opening times of Housing Service Centres and from the recent Tenants conference there was support to pilot late night opening in each Housing Service Centre (Wednesday or Thursday evening).

Therefore the Consultation Plans three elements were:-

- 1. Communicate the proposal to go to the 6 Housing Service Centres.
- 2. To consult on the priority services to be delivered via the Housing Service Centres.
- 3. To consult on the opening times of the Housing Service Centres

**What will be the desired outcome from this Review?**

A key element of the review is to make savings via buildings "It is not a Building that delivers services".

The reduction in offices will

show we are cost effective when compared with similar organisations and will also enable us to protect front line jobs ..... only £300,000 of the £600,000 savings (50%) will impact on employees.

Those employees who remain in employment will be based at the 6 Housing Service Centres.

This will enable us to provide:-

A high quality reception service with well trained employees.

Enable employees with local residents to undertake Estate Walkabouts.

Carry out home visits to Tenants.

Encourage Tenant involvement on estates and in developing and monitoring the service we provide.

We will also over time make the most of new technology such as self service kiosks.

We will publicise the 500 outlets which enable you to make a payment of rent in Sandwell in a number of cases 7 days per week, these being Direct Debit/Paypoint/Local Post Offices

*The Next Stage*

A report will be presented to the Sandwell Homes Board in 2012 covering the Review/ Feedback and Recommendations.

If the Board support the proposal for the six Sandwell Homes Housing Service Centres these will be introduced by July 2012.

They will be located at:-

The Council House, High Street, Smethwick.

Sandwell Council House, Oldbury.

High Street, Princes End, Tipton.

Payne Street, Blackheath.

Court House, High Street, West Bromwich.

High Bullen, Wednesbury\*

*\*Currently in discussions with the Council who wish us to relocate to Wednesbury Town Hall*



## SCIPS Customer Service Satisfaction Survey Update

Many thanks to all our members and partners who took the time to complete our recent survey for us.

Julie will then be on hand at our forthcoming January General Meeting to give some initial feedback to the membership prior to putting together her final report.

Julie Bridgwater is now in the process of going through the responses you sent to us.

*So please come along on the 24th to find out more about what our members and partners said.*



## Getting help for your group

**Did you know our CHAINS website now has more than 30 free advice sheets you can download plus free programs and practical tools to help you run your group more effectively?**

organised around 4 central themes -

- ◆ Funding advice & help.
- ◆ Promoting groups.
- ◆ Recruiting volunteers.
- ◆ Managing groups.

*New advice sheets, toolkits etc are added to the site on a monthly basis. The most recent additions for January 2012 are around:*

- ⇒ *Hints & tips for organising a local community event.*
- ⇒ *Team building within your group.*
- ⇒ *Hints & tips for new treasurers*

All of the toolkits, advice sheets and software can be downloaded from the support section on the website and is

In addition from the support section you can also sign up to use our FREE funding search tool that can help you to find funding grants from a few hundred pounds up to a £1M and beyond.

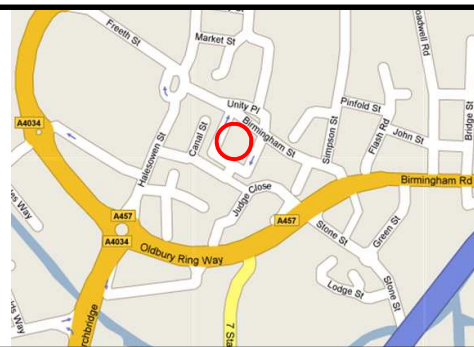


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*SCIPS is a registered charity no 1097702. If you would like to find out more about us and the work we are involved in, please visit our website at [www.scips.org.uk](http://www.scips.org.uk)*

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