



A GUIDE TO LIVING WELL THIS WINTER



A MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER OF SANDWELL COUNCIL



We know the cost of living crisis continues to affect people across Sandwell. We are a caring council and we are doing all we can to help people of all ages.

This booklet provides advice on staying healthy and safe this winter – as well as sharing NHS advice and information on how to find support if you need it.

The government has confirmed that the Household Support Fund will be extended and Sandwell has been allocated more than £3.4million for the period up to March 2025.

This funding will help us to:

- Support pensioners on low incomes who won't receive a Winter Fuel Payment (those who receive Council Tax reduction but not Pension Credit).
- Provide families eligible for Free School Meals with vouchers in December to support them at what is often the most challenging financial period of the year.
- Financially support food banks, food pantries, foster carers, special guardians and care leavers.
- Continue to provide Welcoming Spaces all year round at our libraries, council buildings and community venues (find out more on page 38).
- Extend our Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF).
- Financially support council tenants and private tenants struggling with the cost of living and helping people struggling to pay their Council Tax bill.

Supporting Sandwell through the cost of living crisis continues to be an absolute priority for the council and, along with our partners, we are working hard to provide advice and support on staying healthy and safe this winter.

For more about how we're Supporting Sandwell go to:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell

Councillor Kerrie Carmichael

Councillor Kerrie Carmichael
Leader of Sandwell Council



A MESSAGE FROM COUNCILLOR JACKIE TAYLOR

As the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, I'm proud to share this year's Winter Booklet.

Winter can be tough with colder weather and more time indoors. This booklet is here to help everyone stay healthy, safe and connected to any support they may need.

Inside, you'll find helpful tips, local services and ways to stay warm and active. I hope that everyone finds this booklet of good use and that it will let you know about all of the activities designed to help you this winter.



Councillor Jackie Taylor

Councillor Jackie Taylor

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

We welcome your feedback on this booklet to help improve future editions. If you have any feedback, please email us at marketing_publicity@sandwell.gov.uk or write to us at Communications Unit, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury, B69 3DE.





KEEPING WELL IN WINTER

As winter gets colder and days get shorter, it's important to take care of your health. This guide gives you simple tips to stay well and happy. We have advice on how to get vaccinations to help your body fight germs, how to stay active, and how to keep stress low. Let's make this winter a time to feel good and stay healthy!

STAYING SAFE IN COLD WEATHER

Cold weather can be hard for some people. It's important to stay warm and get help early if you feel unwell.

People most at risk are:

- adults 65 and older
- babies and children under 5
- people with low income who can't afford heating
- those with long-term health conditions or disabilities
- pregnant women
- people with mental health conditions.

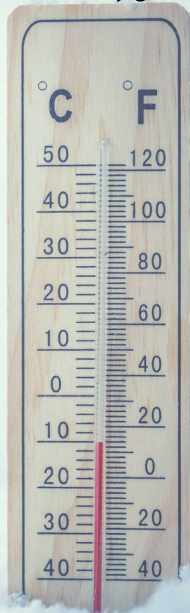
Feeling unwell? Get help early! If you're in any of these groups, get medical advice as soon as you feel unwell. Visit your pharmacy for minor illnesses, call your GP, or contact NHS 111 if you are not sure. For emergencies, call 999 or go to A&E.

Stay warm and keep your home at 18°C, especially in the living room and bedroom. Check your heating and get your gas appliances checked for safety. For fire safety, complete a home safety check online. If you're struggling with bills, look into government benefits, grants, or

advice to keep your home warm.

Check on vulnerable neighbours and relatives

Look out for neighbours and family members who may need help with food, medicine, or staying safe outside. Ensure they wear shoes with good grip and wrap up well if they go out in the cold!



UNLOCK A HEALTHIER YOU WITH HEALTHY SANDWELL

The Healthy Sandwell team is here to help you to improve your health and well-being.

Whether you want to quit smoking, manage your weight, reduce alcohol or lead a healthy lifestyle, our friendly advisers are ready to guide you.



Your unique health journey

We understand everyone's health journey is different.

Here at Healthy Sandwell, we listen, answer questions and guide you every step of the way to help you to reach your health goals to live a fitter and healthier life.

Easy and convenient ways to connect

Getting in touch with Healthy Sandwell is easy and you can connect with us in the way that works best for you:

- **Phone: 0800 011 4656 or 0121 569 5100**
- **Email: LS@nhs.net**
- **Text: GETHEALTHY to 87007**
- **Follow us on Facebook: @HealthySandwell**

EXPLORE OUR SERVICES ONLINE



Want to learn more?

Visit our website: www.healthysandwell.co.uk

for lots of information on our health programmes and tips for staying healthy.



YOUR GUIDE TO ESSENTIAL VACCINATIONS

Protect yourself, your family, and friends by staying up to date with important vaccinations. Cold weather increases the risk of illness, and vaccines help prevent some illnesses. Learn how to keep your loved ones safe and ensure a healthy winter for everyone.

Eligible people are invited to come forward for a flu and COVID-19 vaccine. Similar to last year, those eligible for a COVID-19 and flu vaccine include:

- all adults aged 65 years and over
- people who live in a care home for older adults
- people aged 6 months to 64 years with health conditions that make them more vulnerable
- frontline health and social care staff, including in care homes for older adults
- pregnant women.

The flu vaccine is also available to children aged 2 to 3 years, school-aged children (Reception to Year 11) and children with certain long-term health conditions.

You can book an appointment via the NHS website, on the NHS App or by calling 119.

Calls to 119 are free from mobiles and landlines and the booking service provides support in 200 different languages. Those who have difficulties communicating or hearing or are a BSL user can use textphone 18001 or the NHS 119 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter service.

To book your flu vaccine, visit:
www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/flu-vaccine

To book your COVID-19 vaccine, visit:
www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/covid-19-services/covid-19-vaccination-services/



RSV VACCINE

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a virus that affects the airways and lungs. It often causes symptoms similar to a cold like a runny nose, cough, and fever, which usually go away on their own. But for babies and older adults, RSV can cause more serious illness and may need hospital treatment.

The NHS now offers a free RSV vaccine to everyone aged 75 to 79 to help protect them from RSV. Pregnant women are also being offered the vaccine from 28 weeks into their pregnancy to help protect their babies from RSV during the first few months after birth. You can get the RSV vaccine from your GP or antenatal clinic. If you're more than 28 weeks pregnant and haven't been offered the vaccine, talk to your midwife or GP to schedule an appointment.

WHOOPIING COUGH - STAY PROTECTED

Cases of whooping cough (pertussis) are increasing. Babies who are too young to be vaccinated are at the highest risk. Young babies with whooping cough can become very ill and may need hospital treatment, as it can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage.

If you are pregnant, getting vaccinated can help protect your baby. It's best to get the vaccine between 16 and 32 weeks of pregnancy. The immunity from the vaccine will pass to your baby through the placenta and protect them until they are old enough for their own vaccination at eight weeks old.

You can get the whooping cough vaccine from your GP or some antenatal clinics. If you're more than 16 weeks pregnant and haven't been offered the vaccine, talk to your midwife or GP to schedule an appointment.





STAY ACTIVE AND HEALTHY IN SANDWELL!

Sandwell Council offers fun activities to keep you fit during winter. Join walking groups, falls prevention programmes, free swimming, and cycling events.

Transform your health with Sandwell's Lifestyle Change Programme

Improve your health with Sandwell's 12-week Lifestyle Change Programme! Weekly sessions—both in-person and online—cover weigh-ins, health checks, exercise support, and healthy eating tips. You can also join the Albion Foundation's Fit Baggies for fitness, nutrition, and mental health guidance.

**To find out more about Fit Baggies, visit Healthy Sandwell:
www.healthysandwell.co.uk/healthy-body**



Save on fitness at Sandwell's leisure centres this winter!

The Concessionary Pass and Portway Pass provide affordable access for individuals, families, and residents with special needs. Free sessions and discounted rates are available, but pre-booking may be required, so check with your local centre for details.

**Concessionary Pass:
www.slt-leisure.co.uk/memberships/concessionary-leisure-pass**



**Portway Pass
www.slt-leisure.co.uk/memberships/portway-pass**



Walk to keep warm this winter!

Don't let the cold keep you inside! A brisk walk to work, school, or the shops can keep you warm, fit, and energised. Walking is a great way to beat the winter blues and stay active.

Stay warm: Walking is your body's natural heater—grab a hat, coat, and gloves!

Keep fit: Explore Sandwell's parks with the Go Jauntly app for walking routes.

Feel energised: Boost your mood and circulation with fresh air.

Join Sandwell Stride: Walk with local groups and stay social this winter.

Join Sandwell Stride: Walk with local groups and stay social this winter:

www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/wellbeing-walks-groups/ramblers-wellbeing-walks-sandwell



Enjoy free swimming this winter!

Good news for Sandwell residents! Free swimming is available at local leisure centres:

- for children (18 and under): Free swims during designated sessions in school holidays. Check schedules online
- for seniors (60+): Free swims before 1pm daily
- for disabled residents: Free swimming passes available at Sandwell pools.

Register for free swimming:

www.slt-leisure.co.uk/free-swimming-in-sandwell

West Bromwich Leisure Centre:

www.placesleisure.org/centres/west-bromwich-leisure-centre/centre-activities/swimming-lessons

Enjoy the benefits and make a splash!





WINTER DRINKING TIME TO CUT BACK AND FEEL BETTER!

As winter arrives, it's easy to drink more to socialise or relax. But drinking more than 14 units of alcohol a week—about six pints of beer or six medium glasses of wine - can hurt your health.

Simple tips to drink less:

- **Plan ahead:** Set a limit on how much you'll drink before you start. Having a goal can help you stay on track.
- **Stick to a budget:** Only carry the cash you're willing to spend on alcohol. It's a simple way to avoid overindulging.
- **Tell friends and family:** Let them know you're cutting down – they can help you stay committed, and they might even join you.
- **Take it one day at a time:** Reduce your intake gradually. Even small daily reductions can make a big difference.
- **Opt for smaller servings:** If you do have a drink, go for smaller sizes to reduce your intake without feeling you're missing out.
- **Stay hydrated:** Alternate between alcohol and water to keep hydrated and slow down your drinking.
- **Take alcohol-free days:** Give your body a break by having several drink-free days each week. It is recommended that if you drink as much as 14 units it is spread evenly across three days of the week – with an alcohol-free day between each day you have an alcoholic drink.



This winter, try cutting back on alcohol. For more information, visit Healthy Sandwell: www.healthysandwell.co.uk/healthy-body

GAMBLING AWARENESS: STAY SMART AND SAFE

From online bingo to social media raffles, gambling is everywhere. It's not just casinos and sports betting—scratch cards and friendly bets can spiral out of control if you're not careful. Every type of gambling comes with the risk of losing your hard-earned cash, and online gambling is particularly dangerous. With 24/7 access and the thrill of the chase, it can quickly lead to unhealthy habits.

Here are some crucial steps to help you take charge of your gambling:

Spot the warning signs: Keep a close eye on your gambling habits. Are you spending more time and money than you planned? Hiding your gambling? Trying to win back lost cash? If you answered “yes,” it's time to seek help.

Protect yourself: Set strict limits on how much time and money you gamble. Watch out for those “easy win” promotions. They're designed to suck you in and can lead to reckless gambling.

Take action: If you're worried about yours or someone you knows gambling, talk to someone you trust or seek professional help. Whether it's to cut back or quit altogether, taking action is essential.

Get the help you need: If gambling has you or someone you care about in a bind, don't wait—support is available! Look for counselling, support groups, and self-exclusion programs to limit your access to gambling sites and apps. Plus, there are tools to help you manage your spending and keep track of your gambling activities. Stay smart and safe!

GAMBLING SUPPORT

Aquarius: Provides help for people aged 16 and over who are affected by gambling, whether it's their own or that of a family member, friend, or partner. You can contact them by email at gambling@aquarius.org.uk or by calling 0300 456 4293.



Gambling Harms: The West Midlands Gambling Harms Clinic offers free, confidential NHS treatment. They provide specialist psychological therapies, treatment, self-help tools, and support for recovery. For more information, visit www.midlandsgamblingclinic.org

QUIT SMOKING WITH SMOKE FREE SANDWELL

Claim your 12 weeks free stop smoking support offer which includes tailored individual support suited to your needs from our specialist advisors. We understand that everyone's quit journey is different.

In Sandwell we have a specialist stop smoking service available to anyone who lives, works, or is registered with a Sandwell GP. We offer 12 weeks of free behavioural support including all forms of nicotine replacement, such as lozenges, patches and vapes, as well as advice on specialist stop smoking medication.

There are lots of different ways to access our free support offer through face-to-face appointments, via telephone support or our specialist smokefree app.

It's completely free and it does not matter if you have tried before. Our offer is open to all smokers, if this is not your first quit attempt that's ok too – we understand that quitting smoking can be hard and we are here to support you.

Did you know? If you quit smoking for 28 days, you are five times more likely to quit for good.

Get in touch today to start your smoke free journey.

Website: www.smokefreesandwell.co.uk

Call: 0121 7400 040

Email: abl.sandwell.nhs.net



NHS
Black Country



Your child has a **cough and cold** and you don't know what to do?

Get health advice for your child at blackcountry0-18.nhs.uk



Those who are pregnant and young families can get free vitamins with the NHS Healthy Start Scheme



Check if you're eligible and apply online at www.healthystart.nhs.uk



PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY THIS WINTER

Family Hubs

Sandwell's Children Centres are now known as Family Hubs. Our mission as a Family Hub is to help all families in Sandwell to thrive and to find the right help, in the right place at the right time.

We are here to help you at every stage of your journey as a family, with free sessions such as antenatal classes, stay and play sessions, baby massage and parenting programmes. We also offer families free advice on welfare benefits, housing, debt and general family support.



“ Our mission is **TO HELP ALL** Sandwell families **THRIVE** ”

Sandwell **Family Hubs**
Helping Families Thrive

For more information on what we offer and how we can support you and your family visit our website:

www.sandwellfamilyhubs.com



WINTER WELLNESS



This section is your go-to for vital health support, mental health services, and cost of living assistance. Access the resources that will help you tackle health challenges, improve your mental wellbeing, and find financial support during tough times.

NHS 111

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. NHS 111 can help if you think you need medical help right now but you're not sure what to do. If you need to go to A&E, NHS 111 can book an arrival time so they know you are coming. **Check your symptoms on 111 online or call 111 to speak to someone if you need help for a child under five.**

If you find yourself in a mental health crisis, it can be difficult to know what to do. NHS 111 is here to help with the introduction of a mental health option for urgent mental health support. **To access the service call 111 and select option two. Please note that if you would prefer to text this service, you can contact 07860 025 281.**



Are you in a mental health crisis?

NHS 111 are here to help. Call today and select the mental health option (option 2) to speak to a mental health professional.

GET THE RIGHT HEALTHCARE



As winter sets in, it's crucial to know which healthcare service to use for quick and appropriate support. Here's how you can make the right choice:

Self-Care: Many minor ailments, like headaches or colds, can be managed at home. Stock up on essentials like paracetamol, ibuprofen, and a first aid kit.

Pharmacies: Your local pharmacist can help with minor illnesses such as sore throats and stomach aches.

GP Appointments: If your symptoms persist, contact your GP for further assistance. Repeat prescriptions can be sent to any pharmacy of your choice.

NHS 111: For urgent but non-life-threatening issues, NHS 111 can guide you to the right service, available 24/7.

Remember: Reserve 999 and A&E for serious emergencies only.

Your GP practice is here for you

In Sandwell, GP practices have a new way of working called Modern General Practice, making it simpler to get help. With the Total Triage system, you can ask for appointments or other services using an online form on their website. If you can't use the internet, no worries! You can still call or visit the practice, and the staff will help you fill out the form. This way, everyone can get the care they need quickly.

How to contact your GP practice:

Online: Use the practice website to request appointments or services.

Phone: Call during business hours, typically 8 am to 6:30 pm, Monday to Friday.

In-Person: Visit your GP during operating hours.

No matter how you contact them, you'll get a quick reply and be sent to the right healthcare professional. Some GP teams now have extra helpers like pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists, and mental health experts to give you special care when you need it.

Evening and Weekend Appointments

Appointments are also available in the evenings (6:30 pm to 8 pm) and Saturdays (9 am to 5 pm). These can be face-to-face, phone, or video consultations. If you need an appointment out of hours, call your practice and listen to the out-of-hours message for information.

Download the NHS App

The NHS App allows you to manage appointments, order prescriptions, view your medical record, and more, from your phone or tablet.

For more information, visit NHS 111 online or dial 111.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR EYES

The NHS advises that most people should have their eyes tested every two years. If you qualify for a free NHS sight or eye test, the NHS covers the cost entirely.

If you need an optician in an emergency

The Community Urgent Eyecare Service (CUES) provides urgent assessment and treatment for sudden onset eye problems such as flashes, floaters, vision loss or minor eye injuries, for people in the Black Country.

Accessing CUES is simple: you can either refer yourself or be referred by a health-care professional, such as a GP, pharmacist, or optician. Once referred, a phone or in-person appointment will be arranged—just make sure to call ahead, as an appointment is required to be seen.

To self-refer find a local optometry practice that offers Community Urgent Eyecare Service appointments.



LOOKING AFTER YOUR TEETH

A dentist can provide essential information and treatment for your teeth and gums. Regular check-ups help identify dental problems, and your dentist can perform treatments like fillings or root canal work if needed. You do not need to register with a dentist like you do with a GP. Simply find a dental surgery convenient for you and call to check for available appointments.

If you need a dentist in an emergency

Dentists are available for urgent and routine treatments. If you have a regular dentist, contact their surgery; many practices offer short-notice appointments. If you don't have a dentist, call NHS 111 for advice. Do not contact a GP, as they cannot provide emergency or out-of-hours dental care.

You can find a dentist near you by visiting the NHS website.




MAKE YOUR PHARMACY YOUR FIRST STOP THIS WINTER

Your local pharmacy should always be your first choice for help, advice and treatment for common conditions. Community pharmacists are qualified health professionals who can offer expert advice on lots of minor ailments and conditions.

They can help you with common problems such as coughs, colds, aches and pains, as well as perform health checks and screenings and treat minor injuries and ailments.

Most pharmacies can help you with **seven common conditions** without needing a GP appointment

 Providing NHS services

Speak to your pharmacist if you suspect you have:

- **Sinusitis**
(adults and children aged 12 years and over)
- **Sore throat**
(adults and children aged 5 years and over)
- **Earache**
(children aged 1 year to 17 years)
- **Infected insect bite**
(adults and children aged 1 year and over)
- **Impetigo**
(adults and children aged 1 year and over)
- **Shingles**
(adults aged 16 years and over)
- **Urinary tract infection**
(women, aged 16 to 64 years)

Visit your
Pharmacy First!



For more information about Pharmacy First visit:

www.blackcountry.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/find-right-service-you/your-local-pharmacy



Minor Ailments Scheme

The Minor Ailment Scheme is a service available for patients registered with GP practices in the Black Country. Anyone who doesn't normally have to pay for prescriptions from their GP, like those under 16, over 60 or on benefits, can get the medicine they need for several ailments free of charge at a local pharmacy.

Learn more about the minor ailment scheme and find a participating Sandwell pharmacy near you:

www.blackcountry.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/health-services/minor-ailment-scheme



MIDLAND MET HOSPITAL- WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital (MMUH) in Smethwick, run by Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, now manages all emergency care.

One accident and emergency department (A&E) is now at MMUH. Residents needing emergency care should use the new hospital. **Both A&Es at Sandwell and City Hospitals have now closed.**

MMUH also provides other key services, including maternity, children's care, inpatient wards, critical care, and a specialist Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Centre. The hospital is located at Grove Lane, Smethwick, B66 2QT. For general enquiries, call 0121 553 1831.



At the Sandwell Health Campus (formerly Sandwell Hospital), there's no A&E, but non-life threatening cases can be seen at the Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) by booking via NHS 111. Open 7am-1am daily, the UTC handles less severe conditions. Outpatient services, short stay surgery, chemotherapy, and the Lyndon Primary Care Centre are still available here.

Meanwhile, the City Health Campus (formerly City Hospital) continues to operate the Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre, offering eye care, inpatient surgery, and outpatient clinics. The Birmingham Treatment Centre also remains for outpatient appointments and short stay surgeries, while therapy services like cardiac rehabilitation are housed in the Sheldon Block.

Travelling to the Midland Met.

Dedicated bus service routes to the new hospital are now in place.

They are:

- No. 54/54A – is combined into one route.
- No. 89 – this service terminates at the Midland Met instead of Bearwood.
- No. 82/87 – journeys from Birmingham are diverted to serve the new Grove Lane stops.

Journeys towards Birmingham continue their existing route and serve the bus stop on Dudley Road.



For more information go to:

www.swbh.nhs.uk/our-new-hospital/midland-metropolitan-university-hospital



LOOKING AFTER YOUR WELLBEING THIS WINTER

Winter can be a tough time for mental health. Colder weather and shorter days can affect our mood and wellbeing. Help is available with a range of mental health services for all ages, providing support for adults, young people, bereavement, suicide prevention and more.

Recovery College



Recovery College courses range from half day workshops to eight-week courses in mental health, employment and volunteering, life skills, the arts and wellbeing, delivered digitally and face to face in the community.

Visit: www.therecoverycollege.co.uk

Telephone: 0121 543 4061

Email: info@therecoverycollege.co.uk

Let's Talk Sandwell

Do you or someone you know struggle with social isolation or loneliness? Let's Talk offers support through face-to-face, telephone, and video sessions to anyone aged 18+ in Sandwell and the Black Country. Professional referrals are accepted, but clients can also self-refer by calling or emailing.

Telephone: 01922 608 500 /
01922 922 443

Email: bchft.letstalk@nhs.net

Sandwell Talking Therapies

Sandwell Talking Therapies is a confidential service for individuals aged 16 and older who are registered with a local GP. It provides professional support for mental health challenges like anxiety, stress, and depression. You can refer yourself into your local talking therapies service, without seeing your GP.

The team are based at: Whiteheath Medical Centre, Badsey Road, Oldbury B69 1EJ

Telephone number: 0121 612 6650

Email: bchft.sandwelltalkingtherapies@nhs.net



Sandwell Sanctuary Hub

If you feel like you need face to face support out of usual mental health service hours, then you can visit the Sanctuary Hub in Sandwell. The hub can provide emotional support to those in distress, in need of reassurance or at times when people need to be listened to most. Sandwell Sanctuary Hub is based at Hope Place, 321 High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8LU and is open Monday-Friday, 6-11pm; and Saturday and Sunday 12noon-11pm. No referral is required.

You must be aged 18+ and live in or be registered with GP in the Black Country.

Wellbeing Directory

Sandwell Council and partners have created a one-stop shop of local and national mental health services for you. This is for all ages and stages of life. The support is available for:

- adults
- children and Young People
- suicide Prevention
- bereavement support
- drugs and alcohol support, and lots more.

Scan the QR code or visit the website below to explore what's available in the community for yourself and others.

www.healthysandwell.co.uk/healthy-mind



REACH OUT FOR BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Losing someone close to you is one of the hardest things to go through. The pain and emotions that come with grief can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to face it alone. There are services ready to help you navigate this difficult time:

Cruse Bereavement

Support: Whether your loss is recent or some time ago, Cruse is here to help. You can talk to someone who understands what you're going through.

Call: 0808 808 1677

Hours: Mon & Fri: 9:30am - 5pm; Tue, Wed & Thu: 9:30am - 8pm

More Info: cruse.org.uk

Black Country Support

After Suicide: Offers one-on-one counselling and peer support groups, dedicated to helping those affected by suicide.

Call: 0800 008 6516

Email: blackcountry.supportaftersuicide@rethink.org

More Info: rethink.org

Papyrus Hopeline

(For Children & Young People): Available 24/7, this service is here to support young people through their grief.

Call: 0800 068 4141

Text: 078600 39967

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

GET HELP WITH ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

If you have a concern about your use of drugs or relationship with alcohol, there is help available.

At Cranstoun, you are respected, valued and understood. It's important that you have a safe space to find solutions and recover in a supportive environment. Cranstoun can open new doors, reduce harm and guide you to a healthy, happy, safe life.

There is a growing network of Recovery Navigators in community centres, advocacy and welfare rights support, mutual aid fellowship meetings, and life skills training. There are many opportunities to try new things and build your peer support network.

You can refer yourself for help by visiting:
<https://cranstoun.org/substance-self-referral-form/> or calling 0121 553 1333.

You can find the full list of projects and mutual aid meetings as well as the latest monthly Recovery & Wellbeing in Sandwell newsletter, under 'Recovery Support' at: www.healthysandwell.co.uk/healthy-body



LOOK AFTER YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

Looking after your sexual health is important, and it's easier than you think! We offer services to keep you in control of your health and feeling great, whether you visit a clinic, a pharmacy, or use our home services.

You can:

- order at-home STI testing kits
- access free condoms
- get free emergency contraception
- receive face-to-face advice.

Testing made easy: You can now order a free, confidential STI test kit without leaving your home. Our at-home kits can test for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.



You can order your free testing kit by visiting www.sh.uk
You can also book an appointment at Sandwell's sexual health clinic by calling 0121 612 2000.



STAY STRONG AND STEADY WITH AGE UK SANDWELL'S FALLS PREVENTION PROGRAMME!

Calling all Sandwell residents aged 50 and over! Don't let the fear of falling keep you down. Age UK Sandwell has a fantastic free 12-week Falls Prevention Exercise Programme designed just for you.

Get moving with safe, fun exercises at local community venues to boost your mobility, balance, and strength. Can't make it to a session? No worries - they'll give you a handy workbook to exercise safely at home. And they'll guide you on preventing falls and staying steady on your feet. For more info, call 0121 437 0033 or visit Age UK Sandwell.



LET'S GO SANDWELL

Volunteering is a great way to make friends, be more active and even gain new skills and qualifications – as well as giving a helping hand to a local good cause.

You might be surprised at how many different ways there are to help out in Sandwell, from telephone befriending to leading walks around the park. You can find more than 300 different volunteering opportunities listed on **www.letsgosandwell.info**

Have a look and see how you could make a big difference to your life and others.



Route2Wellbeing

There are many people who face difficulties, be it money matters or not knowing who to turn to for some advice. Help is at hand through the Route2Wellbeing website with information on hundreds of places where you can find that little bit of extra help. All activities and services are local and open to all residents.

You can find the information at www.route2wellbeing.info – give it a try!



SUPPORTING SANDWELL

Struggling with increasing bills?

We know many of our residents are continuing to struggle to make ends meet due to the cost-of-living crisis.

You can go online for advice and support from Sandwell Council, the Government, partner agencies and community organisations. Go to our Supporting Sandwell information hub at: www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell

There's advice and information on reducing your energy bills, accessing help if you need it and financial support. There are also face-to-face sessions in every town where you can sit down and chat with someone as part of our Cost-of-Living Support Programme.

If you're not online, you can contact our Welfare Rights team or call our benefits phone line on 0121 368 1155. Our benefits phone line is available: Monday to Friday 8.45am – 5pm (Wednesdays, 9am-5pm).

You can also request council services and report problems to the council 24/7 through MySandwell. It's easy to create an account – go to: www.sandwell.gov.uk/mysandwell



Get help with benefits

Do you need advice on claiming benefits? Are you on a low income and wondering if you may be entitled to support?

Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights team gives free, independent, and impartial advice about benefits. During the last financial year, the Welfare Rights team advised 14,971 Sandwell residents and helped them to claim money they were entitled to totalling more than £20.9million.

The team can help:

- older people
- families with children
- people experiencing ill health (including mental health)
- carers

- people with learning disabilities
- people in low paid work
- jobseekers.

They can:

- give general guidance and support
- help with benefit forms and applications
- support people who have been overpaid benefits
- advise on benefits payments when they are reduced or stopped
- offer representation at appeal tribunals.



Do you know someone aged 66 or over?

They could be entitled to **Pension Credit** and get **Winter Fuel Payment**.

Check your **eligibility for Pension Credit** online at www.gov.uk/pensioncredit or call our Welfare Rights advice line on **0121 569 3158** between 9am-1pm

Get in touch

To contact the Welfare Rights team, go to:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/welfare-rights

If you don't have access to the internet, call 0121 569 3158, Monday to Friday, 9am – 1pm.

You can also access face to face advice from the Sandwell Consortium. Visit www.sandwellconsortium.co.uk/service/community-advice-services for more information



Are you claiming Income-related Employment and Support Allowance?

The Government had previously advised that if you claimed Income Related-Employment and Support Allowance you would not move to Universal Credit until 2028. The Government have now brought this date forward and claimants will start to receive a migration notice from autumn 2024 until December 2025.

I SEE...UC
Universal Credit Changes

Universal Credit replaces the following:

- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credits
- Income Support
- Working Tax Credits
- Job Seekers Allowance
- Income-related Housing Allowance

Are you ready for the move to **Universal Credit**?
If you are a Council tenant then **call 0121 737 5148 to find out more**
If you are not a Council tenant then **call 0121 569 3158 to find out more**

Rent First Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

The infographic features a hot air balloon with the title 'I SEE...UC' and 'Universal Credit Changes'. Below the balloon, a list of six benefits being replaced by Universal Credit is shown in a circular arrangement. The background is a colorful illustration of a town street with houses, a bus, a car, and people walking. Logos for 'Rent First' and 'Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council' are in the top right corner.

Universal credit – managed migration

What is Managed Migration?

Managed Migration is the Department of Work and Pension's (DWP) approach to move households on legacy or 'old' benefits over to Universal Credit (UC).

The benefits affected are:

- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Child Tax Credits
- Working Tax Credits

What do affected residents need to do?

Residents claiming a legacy benefit will be notified by letter when they need to claim Universal Credit. This letter – called a Migration Notice – will provide the date by which you need to make your claim and details of the support available.

You will have three months to make your claim. If you fail to claim within this time, your benefits will end.

Residents claiming Tax Credits who are of State Pension Age will be sent a letter to apply for either Universal Credit or Pension Credit, depending upon your circumstances.

You are advised to get a full benefit check from a local advice provider as soon as you receive your Migration Notice.

When is this happening?

Managed Migration in Sandwell started in February 2024. The final group of Claimants asked to move will be those receiving Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, who will be

asked to claim sometime between September 2024 and December 2025.

What if I need support with my UC claim?

If you are a council tenant, you can contact Sandwell Council's Rents Team on 0121 737 5148 from Monday to Thursday 9am to 5.30pm and 9am to 5pm on a Friday for advice and support.

If you are not a council tenant please contact the Welfare Rights Team on 0121 569 3158, Monday to Friday 9am to 1pm, or go online at:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/welfarerights

Visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/benefits-support/universal-credit-2 for more

details on the move to UC and the timeline for migration. Alternatively, please scan the QR code using a mobile or tablet device.





Are you a Council tenant and worried about paying your rent?

The year April 2024 – March 2025 is a 53-week rent year. This means that whether you rent weekly, fortnightly or four weekly there will be an extra week of rent to pay. If you pay monthly, you need to ensure the extra week is covered in your monthly rent payment.

Lots of support is available to help you manage your rent payments, including advice on setting up a Direct Debit which can help you with budgeting.

Our rents team can also talk you through:

- money and budgeting tips
- extra help with your rent
- mental health support
- getting digital
- employment support
- language support
- benefits advice.

Don't let your rent snowball out of control this Winter

If you want to pay by Direct Debit or are struggling with your rent then we're here to help
Call us on 0121 737 5148 for advice

For more information about how to adjust your rent payments and how you will be affected if you are on Universal Credit or Housing Benefit please visit:
www.sandwell.gov.uk/extrarentweek



HELP WITH DEBT AND MONEY WORRIES

We know that for many people, money is tight. If you are struggling with debt, advice is available – whether your debt is big or small.

It is important to seek advice as early as possible before things get out of control.

Visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/helpwithdebt for services that can help you deal with debt and manage your money, or drop in to your local Citizens Advice office.

Visit www.sandwell.gov.uk/homeless for help if you're at risk of losing your home.

For help paying your rent, please give our friendly team a call on 0121 737 5148

To view the support on offer, visit:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/tenanthandbook/homepage/6/rent-first



THINGS TO DO IN THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

We have a range of activities available to keep children entertained and active during school holidays!

It's a brilliant way to try new things, make friends and learn skills. There's plenty of choice including sports, music, art, cooking, days out and more. All providers are welcoming, and activities are safe and engaging.

When bookings open, if you meet the criteria, you will receive an e-voucher with a unique code. If you don't meet the criteria visit our website:

holidayactivities.sandwell.gov.uk for activities that provide FREE or subsidised places. Or you can follow HAF on social media – search @SandwellHAF

We also have more brilliant and free activities for children through Go Play – go to **www.goplaysandwell.co.uk** for details.

Other activities and events in Sandwell can be found at **www.visitsandwell.com**

JOIN US AT OUR COMMUNITY HUBS

We have two community hubs in Rowley Regis and West Bromwich for when you need to speak to someone face-to-face.

If you need advice on an issue or query, help with accessing council services, well-being advice, housing information or just someone to talk to, the hubs are at:

Central Library, High Street, West Bromwich, B70 8DZ
Tuesdays 10am to 4.30pm

Blackheath Library, High Street, Blackheath, B65 0EA –
Wednesdays 10am to 4.30pm

There's also access to computers and Wi-Fi, benefits, Council Tax advice and you can get help to sign up for a MySandwell account if you want one.

This pilot project is to help us provide face-to-face help for people in both towns.

Please pass this message on to anyone living in these areas who needs to speak to someone in person.

YOUR BEHAVIOUR IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

We all have bad days and that's okay. But what's not okay is for you to take your feelings out on others in a way that is harmful. No matter what you are feeling, there is absolutely no excuse for abuse.

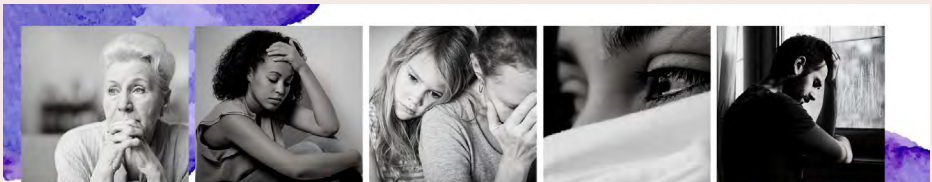
Domestic abuse can devastate the lives of your partner, children and friends – both now and in the future. Take a moment to think how you would feel if you were suffering physical, emotional, sexual, financial or mental abuse.

If you're worried that you may be a domestic abuse perpetrator and want to take steps to change your behaviour, Respect Phonenumber is there for you. Equally, if you're concerned about your own safety or the behaviour of someone you know, Respect can offer help and advice.

This is a team of friendly advisors who will listen to you without judgement and will offer you confidential and honest advice to help you stop being violent and become safe around your partner and children. Their website also has lots of information to support anyone affected by abuse.

If you're concerned about your behaviour or the behaviour of someone you know, contact the Respect Phonenumber on 0808 802 4040 or head to their website.

Remember to always dial 999 in an emergency.



Black Country Women's Aid
we listen, we support, we care.

Black Country Women's Aid support women, men and children affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Call our **24-hour helpline** on 0121 552 6448
Text or **WhatsApp** on 07384 466 181 (9am-9pm weekdays)
Visit: www.blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk

WINTER READY

Get your home prepared for the colder months. From energy efficiency tips and fire safety advice to crime prevention during darker nights, we've got you covered. Plus, learn how to keep your air clean with Sandwell's smoke control rules.



STRUGGLING TO HEAT YOUR HOME?

Here are some energy saving tips:

- **Turn your thermostat down** – ideally you should heat your home to a temperature of at least 18 Celsius.
- **Adjust your boiler temperature** – an average household could save around £112 per year in energy bills by adjusting the boiler flow settings to 60 degrees or below.
- **Replace bulbs with LEDs** – LED bulbs use about half the energy of the bigger fluorescent spiral 'energy-saving bulbs'.
- **Plug those gaps** - where there is a draught, see if you can block it. You could use door sealant or a draft excluder.
- **Wash clothes more efficiently** - try to do fewer loads and fill up the machine each time you run it.
- **Only boil the water you need** - the more water you boil, the more energy you use.
- **Don't leave your devices on standby** - the Energy Saving Trust suggests up to £40 a year saving by switching devices off standby.
- **Use your radiator thermostats** - if you have them use them, you may not need to heat every room.
- **Bleed your radiators** - you should bleed your radiators regularly to prevent air being trapped inside. Air being trapped makes the heating system less efficient.
- **Insulate your hot water cylinder** - if you have a hot water cylinder that is uninsulated, it will be losing heat. Fitting a hot water jacket could save around £40 a year.
- **Keep an eye on your boiler pressure** - this tells you the pressure of the water circulating in the heating system. If this is too slow, it takes more energy to heat your home.

Find out more at:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/energysavingtips

Warmer Homes West Midlands

offers personalised energy advice to households who are currently struggling to heat their homes visit www.warmerhomeswm.org.uk or call 0800 988 2881 or 0808 196 8298 and press option 2.



STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR ENERGY BILLS?

If you are struggling to pay your energy bills, don't wait to seek help. Here's what you should do:

- Contact Sandwell Council advice line 0121 569 3158 (opening hours 9am-1pm) or seek help via MySandwell portal.
- Contact your energy support and agree a payment plan and ask if they provide hardship funds.
- Contact Warmer Homes West Midlands to speak to qualified energy adviser.
- Get in touch with free advice service such as Citizens Advice Sandwell and Walsall, who can help check if you are eligible for any benefits such as Winter Fuel Payments or charitable grants.
- Visit the Ofgem website about getting help if you can't afford your energy bills.
- Find out more about the Government's Energy Support schemes.

Find out more at www.sandwell.gov.uk/energy



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council

SUPPORTING SANDWELL
WITH THE COST OF LIVING

Save money on your water bill

Struggling to pay your water charges? You could be eligible for a reduction if you are on a low income

www.sandwell.gov.uk/waterbills

The complex block features a light blue background. On the left, there is an illustration of a silver water tap with a grey handle, from which a single large water drop is falling. Inside the water drop is a blue pound sterling symbol (£). To the right of the tap and drop are the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council logo (a grid of squares) and the 'Supporting Sandwell' logo (a house icon with an upward arrow). Below these logos is the main heading 'Save money on your water bill' in a large, white, sans-serif font. Underneath the heading is a paragraph of text in a smaller white font: 'Struggling to pay your water charges? You could be eligible for a reduction if you are on a low income'. At the bottom right of the block is a dark blue rounded rectangle containing the website URL 'www.sandwell.gov.uk/waterbills' in white text.

REPORT DAMP HOUSING

Are you concerned about damp or mould in your home? Is poor ventilation, poor heating or poor insulation causing a problem?

If you're concerned about condensation it is important that you know how and when to heat or ventilate your home and even when to dry clothes.

If you think your home needs a repair you should report it as soon as possible. You can report your repair by telephone on 0121 569 6000 between 8am - 8pm, or online via MySandwell 24 hours a day at: www.sandwell.gov.uk/repairs



For more information about this, including a condensation booklet, please visit: www.sandwell.gov.uk/damp



If you are a private tenant and need support getting help from your landlord, please visit: www.sandwell.gov.uk/housingconditions



PEST CONTROL

Sandwell Council's Pest Control Team provides a range of pest control treatments for residents who live in Sandwell.

Bookings for treatments can be made online using your MySandwell account. If you do not have a MySandwell account, you can book a pest control treatment by calling our contact centre on 0121 3681177 Option 2.

You can find charges for services and more information at www.sandwell.gov.uk/pestcontrol





KEEP YOUR AIR CLEAN AND SAFE

Sandwell is now a Smoke Control Area, which means everyone needs to follow the rules to keep our air clean. Here's the rules:

- **No smoke allowed:** Whether you live in a house or on a canal boat, smoke from chimneys is strictly off-limits.
- **Choose your fuel wisely:** Burning wood or coal is not allowed in open fireplaces or stoves unless it's a Defra-approved smoke-exempt stove.
- **Go smokeless:** Stick to 'Ready to Burn' smokeless fuels like briquettes or anthracite coal. Look for the 'Ready to Burn' logo to be sure.
- **Penalties for rule breakers:** Ignore the rules, and you could get a fine of up to £300!

Burning wood and coal might seem cozy, but it releases harmful particles that can cause serious health problems - especially for kids. Think asthma, lung disease, and heart issues.

Want to keep the air in your home clean? Follow these tips to protect your family's health:

- **Use central heating:** If you've got it, use it! Turn off radiators in rooms you're not using to save money.
- **Burn less:** Ask yourself if lighting that fire is really necessary. Cutting back on burning helps reduce harmful emissions.
- **Buy the right fuel:** Only use 'Ready to Burn' fuel and look for the logo. It guarantees good quality, dry wood.
- **Never burn waste:** Don't burn treated wood, old furniture, pallets, or household rubbish. These can release toxic fumes and harmful pollutants.



**For more info and tips on reducing indoor burning risks, visit: Sandwell Air Quality Advice.
www.sandwell.gov.uk/airquality**



DARKER NIGHTS

West Midlands Police are working hard to tackle crime in your local area. During the darker nights, we are increasing our patrols in hot spot areas, acting on public intel and engaging with partners to help keep you safe.

If you're heading out, remember to lock up your windows, doors and porches. Check you have removed all valuables from your vehicle, locked it and put your keys in a secure location.

Hosting an event? We recommend keeping your side entrances, garden doors and porches locked – this will deter thieves from stealing car keys or other valuables while you are distracted.

You can find tips on using fireworks safely, reporting anti-social behaviour and protecting your home here:

www.westmidlands.police.uk



You can also report anti-social behaviour via 101 or through Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR HOME SAFE FROM FIRES

As the nights get longer and the weather colder, we can all take steps to prevent accidental fires at home. Check your heating appliances are in good working order.

If you haven't used your boiler, open fire or electric heater for a while, get it checked by a registered professional. Landlords must arrange annual gas safety checks in rented accommodation.

If you have an open fire or electric heater:

- don't sit too close, in case you set fire to your clothes or chair
- if you need to dry clothes in the same room as a heater or open fire, keep them well away from the heat

- don't overload plug sockets or extension leads, and avoid trailing heater cables where you might trip
- ensure portable heaters are switched off, unplugged and fully cooled before moving them
- hot water bottles, mattress toppers and higher TOG-rated duvets are safer than electric blankets.

We've got lots more safety advice on our website: www.wmfs.net



WMFS
West Midlands
Fire Service



STRUGGLING WITH HOARDING?

ESSENTIAL SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

If you're facing challenges with hoarding, there are resources ready to assist you.

The Sandwell Council's Healthy Homes Project offers vital help, including small-scale interventions such as moving furniture or fixing household issues.

The Kaleidoscope Plus Group also provides a monthly Hoarding Support Group

meeting at Hope Place, West Bromwich High Street, opposite the library.

No referral is needed to attend. For information on future meetings, please call 0121 565 5605.

A WARM WELCOME GUARANTEED!



All Sandwell libraries and a wide range of community centres provide a Welcoming Space for anyone who needs it.

A Welcoming Space is somewhere you can go for help and advice, to join in free activities, to have a warm drink or to use the free Wi-Fi. We also have access to services if you have money worries or need help to access the internet.

Wherever you live in Sandwell, you can find a nearby Welcoming Space.

You can find out more about Welcoming Spaces on our website. Go to: www.sandwell.gov.uk/welcomingspaces

If you're not online and you want to find out about other community buildings in your area offering a Welcoming Space, visit any library or council office and staff will be happy to help you.



LET'S MAKE SANDWELL HEALTHIER TOGETHER

Meet Sandwell's Public Health Development Officers (PHDOs), your guides to better health and wellbeing!

Each of Sandwell's six towns has a PHDO. Have ideas to improve health? We'd love to hear from you!

Visit www.healthysandwell.co.uk/about-us for more information.



Sandwell's Public Health Development Officers



**Protect your family and
book any missed vaccines
with your GP surgery now**



If you see someone **sleeping rough
let us know
so we can **help** them**

Online: www.sandwell.gov.uk/roughsleepers
Email: rough_sleepers@sandwell.gov.uk
Phone: 0121 368 1166 / 0121 569 6883 (out of hours)
www.streetlink.org.uk



Get Cost of Living tips and advice to your phone



**Add us on WhatsApp
07585 997453 and text YES**

TO UNSUBSCRIBE TEXT STOP

Visit our Supporting Sandwell online hub for more information

www.sandwell.gov.uk/supportingsandwell