

# WHAT'S ON?

Struggling with something to do at the weekend? Then look no further! We'll give you some ideas of what you can get up to in the Black Country!

## Cinema:

If you enjoy the cinema, there are plenty of films coming out for all of the family. Just take your pick....

### The Da Vinci Code (Certificate 12A, out now)

The film version of Dan Brown's international bestseller finally reaches the big screen, in the year's much awaited Hollywood Blockbuster. Professor Robert Langdon, played by Tom Hanks, is summoned to the Louvre in Paris where the elderly curator has been found murdered. To make things more complicated, in the dead man's final act, he leaves a series of baffling codes and riddles. Working alongside French cryptologist Sophie Neveu, played by Audrey Tautou, Robert begins to solve many puzzles and realises that the secret lies in the works of Leonardo Da Vinci.

### Confetti (Certificate 15, out now)

Improvised from start to finish, the film deals with the announcement by Confetti Bridal magazine to find 'Most Original Wedding Of The Year'. With a £500,000 dream home as first prize, couples from across the UK excitedly apply. Starring Jimmy Carr, Martin Freeman and Jessica Stevenson.

### The Wild (Certificate U, out now)

Disney's computer animated offering for 2006 is set in a New York zoo where the animals talk to each other when the human visitors are not

around. Samson the lion (voiced by Kiefer Sutherland) is distraught when his cub son Ryan is accidentally locked in a packing crate and shipped off to Africa. Giving chase, Samson boards a tug boat along with his chums. The unlikely group arrive in Africa where they must fend for themselves in the wild and hopefully track down little Ryan.

## Day Trips:

If you want to spend a family day out, there are plenty of attractions in the local area.

### Cadbury World, Bournville

Ever wanted to see how your favourite chocolate bar gets made? Then visit Birmingham's chocolate paradise! With new attraction Essence, this Spring or Summer is the ideal time to go.

Tickets are just £9.50 for children and £12.50 for adults (family tickets are also available). Call 0845 450 3599 or visit [www.cadburyworld.co.uk](http://www.cadburyworld.co.uk)

### Drayton Manor Park & Zoo, near Tamworth

A great day out for all the family! From white knuckle rides to exotic creatures, there's something here for everyone.

Tickets are from just £10.95 for children and £14.95 for adults from [www.lastminute.com](http://www.lastminute.com)

Call 08708 725252 or visit [www.draytonmanor.co.uk](http://www.draytonmanor.co.uk) for more details.

## Website of the Month

The complete guide to, well, cleaning absolutely everything.....[www.howtocleananything.com](http://www.howtocleananything.com)



# BLACK COUNTRY CHAT

The Newsletter for tenants and customers of Black Country Housing

SUMMER 06

## What's inside this issue

### Real Life Success Stories

## Frank Skinner at UCE

### Win a fabulous summer

# PRIZE!

## A day in the life of a Housing Officer

We hope you enjoy this issue. Please let us know what you think of it and if you have any ideas for future issues. If you would like to be involved with the production of Chat, or write an article, don't hesitate to contact us!

## CHAT Free Adverts

Are you a childminder? Beautician? Dog-walker? Black Country Housing Group is inviting their tenants to make use of free advertising space in the next tenants' magazine. For more information contact us on 0121 561 3845, at Black Country Housing Group, 1 Causeway, Rowley Regis, West Midlands, B65 8AA or email [chat@bcha.co.uk](mailto:chat@bcha.co.uk)

### CAROL AND JOHN BELWOOD

Registered Childminders.

Vacancies for school runs for Highfields Primary School and fulltime places.

Tel 0121 559 2742 for more information.

## Spencer Foot Care

Foot health care in your own home

Treatments include:

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Telephone Glennis on:

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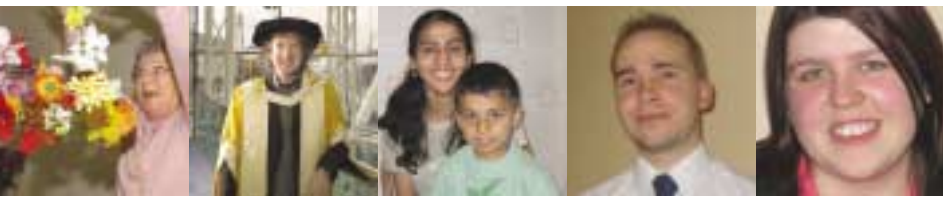


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Contact us by post at 'Chat Magazine', Black Country Housing Group, 1 Causeway, Rowley Regis, B65 8AA

By calling us on 0121 561 3845 Or emailing us at [chat@bcha.co.uk](mailto:chat@bcha.co.uk)



# Welcome to the new look Chat Magazine!

This is the first edition of the new look Chat Magazine - your very own magazine from Black Country Housing Group.

We have a new editorial team and a host of new features which we hope you will enjoy, such as:

Real Life articles – stories from tenants of Black Country Housing Group

Competitions – your chance to win some fabulous prizes

A Day in the Life Of.... – find out what the people at Head Office get up to

Celebrity Feature – famous people from the Black Country

What's On – things to do in the local area

And much more!!

The new Chat will be packed with information that will help you get the most out of Black Country Housing Group and also get more involved.

We hope you enjoy this issue. Please let us know what you think of it and if you have any ideas for future issues. If you would like to be involved with the production of Chat, or write an article, don't hesitate to contact us!

Contact us by post at 'Chat Magazine', Black Country Housing Group, 1 Causeway, Rowley Regis, B65 8AA

By calling us on 0121 561 3845

Or emailing us at chat@bcha.co.uk

# Meet the Editor!

Every issue we will introduce you to a member of the Editorial Team. First up is resident Paul England, our Editor.

- Q** What's your favourite film?  
**A** That's quite difficult, but I think "The Shawshank Redemption"
- Q** What's your favourite book?  
**A** Again, a very hard choice because there are so many good books but I think "The Lord of the Rings" by J.R.R. Tolkien
- Q** What's your favourite TV programme?  
**A** Without a doubt "Lost"
- Q** What's your favourite food?  
**A** Good old Christmas dinner – roast turkey & all the trimmings
- Q** What do you do in your spare time?  
**A** What's that?????
- Q** What's your day job?  
**A** I'm in sales, selling hardboard, chipboard, MDF, plywood & Laminates for a very successful Business in Oldbury
- Q** Why are you involved in Chat magazine?  
**A** To try to help give the residents a voice & a platform to be heard from!!!!!!
- Q** What's your claim to fame?  
**A** Meeting Jasper Carrott while I was at college & having a nice long chat about the Midlands



Earlier this year, Frank Skinner received an honorary doctorate from the University of Central England in Birmingham in recognition of his achievements as a comedian and his personal connection with the University as one of its former students.

Known as one of the funniest comedians in Britain, he was born Christopher Collins at Sandwell General Hospital, West Bromwich, in 1957. He changed his name to Frank Skinner when the actors' union Equity told him there was already someone of that name on their books. He took the name from a member of his late father's dominoes team.

An avid West Bromwich Albion supporter, Frank grew up in Oldbury, attending Moat Farm Infant School, St Hubert's Roman Catholic Junior School and Oldbury Technical Secondary School. However, just six weeks into his studies at sixth form, he was expelled after being caught embezzling the school meals service by selling cut-price meal vouchers to pupils. "All I did was find where they dumped the old meal tickets and sold them on cheap to other kids. I'm not ashamed of it; it seemed like an honourable, Robin Hood kind of thing to do."

# Frank Skinner

For several years after, he was well known to the police after a series of minor offences, including putting a length of pipe across a road and causing a car crash. He worked in a local foundry but was unhappy there. "We hammered lumps of metal into shape. Everyone there was deaf and had three fingers."

However, he turned his life around by taking four A-Levels at night school and then graduating from Birmingham Polytechnic, now known as the University of Central England, with a degree in English Literature. Frank then spent the next four years as an English lecturer at Halesowen College, whilst being a stand-up comedian on the side, before quitting his job in 1989 to pursue his comedy career full-time.

Frank became close friends with David Baddiel who he befriended at Jongleurs in Camden, and they soon went on to live and work together on the late night entertainment show 'Fantasy Football League' and 'Baddiel and Skinner Unplanned'.

In 1996, Frank co-wrote and performed the Euro '96 anthem 'Three Lions' with David Baddiel, which they performed with The Lightning Seeds and the England national football team. It was re-released for the World Cup in 1998. Both times the song reached number one in the charts.

Frank soon had his own TV chat show on ITV and has appeared in a number of sitcoms including 'Blue Heaven' and 'Shane'. In 2003, The Observer listed him as one of the funniest acts in British comedy. He has lived in London since 1991 but still supports West Bromwich Albion football club and Warwickshire County cricket club.

Frank was awarded Freedom of the Borough in 2004, along with actress Julie Walters and football hero Cyrille Regis, receiving their honours in a special ceremony. The award recognised not only their talent but also their pride in their birthplace.



# NEWS

## Bobby Charlton

In February this year, the official opening of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and refurbished tennis courts at the Priory Park took place. The opening was performed by Sir Bobby Charlton, Ann Jones and the Mayor of Dudley.

The MUGA is dedicated to the memory of local footballing hero Duncan Edwards, and the tennis courts are dedicated to 1930's tennis star Dorothy Round.

Sir Bobby Charlton is one of football's legends, playing for England in the 1966 World Cup victory, and was one of the few survivors of the Munich air disaster.

Ann Jones was the first left-handed female player to win Wimbledon in 1969; she also won the mixed doubles championship. Her performances led to her being voted as the BBC Sports Personality of the Year.

## Fly-tipping

New changes to waste regulations aim to reduce the thousands of tonnes of household waste that are illegally fly-tipped each year.

New regulations have come into force regarding fly-tipping and how waste should properly be disposed. As of last November, waste that is not disposed of correctly now carries a fine of upto £5000.

Last year, there were 500,000 fly-tips of household rubbish; much of which was dumped by operators posing as legitimate waste carriers. Fly-tippers rely on people not asking questions, and not checking for registration - but now all householders have a responsibility to ask those questions, and check that they are registered.

The new regulations emphasise the fact that everyone is responsible for taking steps to make sure their waste is passed on to an authorised person and that it is not transported illegally and dumped. Unauthorised waste carriers can make huge sums of money by charging to take household rubbish away, before dumping it illegally. If that rubbish is traced back to the household it came from, the householder could now be fined.

If you are unsure if the person moving your rubbish is a registered waste carrier, call Dudley Council on 01384 812345 to find out.





# Doveton Dialogue Spring '06

During November, pupils from Elmfield School planted bulbs in the front garden of Doveton House. It is so nice to have these children as our neighbours and we are grateful to them and the school for their efforts.

Christmas was a very busy time, with a full programme of events. There were Carol Concerts, a pub lunch and a party with entertainment. The building was also wonderfully decorated. Special thanks must go to the Tenant's Committee and manager Karen Ellis and her staff for making them so successful.

The Tenant's Committee continues to work hard and every other Friday we hold a 'Fish & Chips' lunch in the main lounge.

An Easter Bonnet parade was held in April, where residents displayed the bonnets they had made themselves.

Once a month, the Reverend Jennifer Doores conducts a service at Doveton House. To show their gratitude, the residents presented her with a bouquet of flowers.

*Would you like to help us with Chat?*

Here at Chat, we'd love to hear your news and views. Would you like to write an article for us? Be involved in the production of Chat? Then contact us!

Telephone: 0121 561 3845  
Email: [chat@bcha.co.uk](mailto:chat@bcha.co.uk)

Tenant Involvement Team  
1 Causeway  
Rowley Regis  
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B65 8AA

Newspaper reports have recently highlighted the price increases by British Gas, with fuel costs increasing by 22%. In addition, npower have also had their second price rise since the beginning of the year, which has seen a total increase of more than 29% in gas and 27% in electricity costs.

Energyextra, our energy savings club, is here to offer you cheaper fuel prices. Scottish Power, the fuel partner of Energyextra, has increased their prices for gas by 15% and electricity by just 8%.

## FUEL PRICE INCREASES

In addition to lower fuel prices, Scottish Power are also offering a Pricetracker option, which guarantees to be cheaper than British Gas until 31st December 2007.

A number of extra services are available to members, ranging from heavily discounted insulation and heating products for homeowners, to a free benefits health check, whereby members can find out if they are entitled to claim a number of different welfare benefits. There is also a free energy advice telephone line.

To get an up-to-date, accurate quote of how much you could save, just ring free of charge on 0800 027 0305, quoting reference SDJ9, and the application can be dealt with over the phone. There are no application forms to complete; we deal with the whole transfer process for you.

There is also an additional discount of £10.50 per year if both services are transferred. Both prices and customer service are regularly monitored, ensuring they stay competitive. As an extra incentive, you will also receive two free low energy light bulbs once your application has been processed.

Visit [www.energyextra.co.uk](http://www.energyextra.co.uk) or call us on 0121 561 3845 for more details.

## Garden competition!

Is your garden full of flowers? Do you have a wonderful water feature? Enter our competition to win a fabulous summer prize!!

Join your fellow tenants and enter your garden into a summer garden competition for your chance to win a barbeque.

All you need to do is send us a photograph of your garden, along with your name, address and contact details, to 'Garden Competition', Chat Magazine, 1 Causeway, Rowley Regis, West Midlands, B65 8AA.

The closing date for the competition is **31st July 2006.**



## YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY ON HEALTHCARE

It's time to make your voice heard. We're looking for local people to join their local Patient and Public Involvement in Health Forums (known as PPI Forums), which are the local voice of the patients and the public in the NHS.

The role of the Forums is to independently monitor the quality of local health services by visiting local hospitals, helping patients and the public influence the way that local healthcare is organised and delivered. Forum monitoring ranges from services provided at hospitals to local ambulance services. Others relate to the activities of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), which means they look at the health services outside hospitals including doctors' surgeries, NHS dentists, opticians and pharmacists. These forums also look at issues on public health and health promotion, such as obesity in children or the MMR vaccination, as well as organise events to promote PPI Forums and health concerns.

**Volunteers are required to improve health services in West Midlands.**

If you can spare around two to three hours a week and could also attend monthly meetings, we'd like to tell you more about the PPI Forums. For further information please contact the Forum Support Team in our Community Regeneration Department on 0121 561 3845 or email: [ppih@bcha.co.uk](mailto:ppih@bcha.co.uk)

# MOVING UP!

Black Country Housing Group has many success stories arising from our various schemes and projects. Two people who have successfully made use of the help and support given by Black Country Housing schemes are Amanda Prosser and Lakhvinder Phull. Both have spent time living at Highland Road, our supported housing scheme in Dudley, and have also used our floating support service.

Highland Road is one of our supported housing schemes, offering semi-independent accommodation for young people aged between 16 and 24. Reach, our Tenancy Support Service, provides floating support to semi-independent individuals wanting to live independently.

At 17 years old, Amanda Prosser moved into Highland Road. Unable to live at home, she needed somewhere where she could obtain the help and support she needed. Now, thanks to Black Country Housing Group, she is working, has her own tenancy and is helping others in the community.

Lakhvinder Phull, 25, moved into Highland Road with a lot of independence but needed support and encouragement to build up her confidence; she now has her own house and two young boys, and is receiving support from Reach.

Moving into Highland Road helped Amanda and Lakhvinder to build on their independent living skills. Being responsible for their own cooking and cleaning, they quickly had to adapt to the independent lifestyle. They had their own rooms with the additional help of a network of support to aid them. From running workshops teaching practical skills, to sitting down and talking through employment and training options, the staff helped them to sort out their lives.

Amanda and Lakhvinder are extremely appreciative of their time at Highland Road and the experiences and life skills they gained. Amanda commented, 'If I'd

have moved from my Mum's straight to the flat I wouldn't have known what to do. At Highland Road they really prepared me and supported my independence.'

Amanda moved into her own tenancy after two years at Highland Road, taking with her the skills she had learnt. Lakhvinder moved into her own house after her time at the supported housing scheme, having built up her confidence.

Aware of their vulnerability, Black Country Housing's Tenancy Support Officer offered them help. Through the Reach programme, both received the help and support needed to run their homes, through motivational and support techniques. They were each set short and long term goals, such as sorting out bills and finding training and employment, to help achieve their set targets. Support was provided for the development of life skills, helping with budgeting and confidence building.

*"It was really useful: they helped with things like paying my bills and filling out forms that I'd never done on my own before",* said Amanda.

Reach helped them with finding educational training courses. Amanda gained NVQ qualifications in Food Hygiene, Health & Safety and Computer Training, and Lakhvinder studied for a catering course.

Eager to give something back to the community that helped her, Amanda now does volunteer work in her local charity shop. Her future ambition is to work as a manager within the retail environment. Lakhvinder has two children and is aiming for a career in interior design.

For further information on our supported housing and floating support schemes, email us on [supportedhousing@bcha.co.uk](mailto:supportedhousing@bcha.co.uk) or [floatingsupport@bcha.co.uk](mailto:floatingsupport@bcha.co.uk) or

# ON



Amanda Prosser



Lakhvinder Phull



REACH

## A Day in the Life of.....a Housing Officer

Each issue we will provide you with an insight into a different occupation at Black Country Housing Group. This issue, you can see what a Housing Officer gets up to on a typical day.

The main role of a Housing Officer is to manage the properties of Black Country Housing Group and to provide a high level of service to our customers. The typical patch size for each full time Housing Officer is 350 units – which includes rented, shared ownership and leasehold properties. The aim of the Housing Officer is to help maintain successful tenancies and promote sustainable neighbourhoods.

Chat spoke to Housing Officer Simon Reeves about his job.

Rent collection provides a major source of income for Black Country Housing Group, and pays for services such as repairs and maintenance. We work to promote a culture of rent payment.



*"An important part of the job is monitoring rent accounts, and working with tenants who fall into rent arrears."*

There are many different aspects of the job such as dealing with enquiries and complaints, providing housing advice, controlling rent accounts, and working closely with other agencies such as Police, Social Services, and Environmental Health.

Simon visits new tenants shortly after they move into their new home and out-going tenants shortly before they depart. He will also visit our customers to discuss transfers, exchanges, rent arrears, nuisance, and other tenancy issues. The Housing Officers work closely with Maintenance in reporting repairs, Care & Repair in considering adaptations, and Development on new build properties.

In summing up his role Simon states:

*"Time management is very important to a Housing Officer – it's a challenge to balance all the aspects of the job and prioritise my workload accordingly. The best part of the job is working closely within a dedicated team - the work can be stressful and it's good to be able to speak to colleagues who have to deal with similar issues on a daily basis".*

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