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## VALUE FOR MONEY IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO

# Council tax is frozen for the fifth year running

**Value for money is at the heart of everything we do at South Staffordshire Council, and this year local residents will again benefit from a freeze in their council tax.**

After an initial proposal was set out at cabinet, the council undertook a consultation with local people. The freeze was then formalised at a meeting of the Full Council on February 25.

**Council tax in South Staffordshire has remained at the same rate for five years in a row.**

This means that the tax for a Band D property in South Staffordshire will remain at £95.34 for the fifth year in a row, despite financial pressures on local councils. This also means the council still has the fourth lowest council tax out of all 201 local district councils across the country.

Council tax is a local tax which is set and collected by every local council. It helps to pay for the local services provided by South Staffordshire Council, plus the services of Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police Authority, Stoke on

Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority and your local parish council.

Every year, councillors decide whether to increase council tax or freeze it for the next financial year. This latest freeze means council tax in South Staffordshire has remained at the same rate for five years in a row.

Councillor Brian Edwards, Leader of South Staffordshire Council said: "Despite national cuts in spending, we have remained steadfast in our ambition to have one of the lowest council taxes in the country. In our council plan up to 2016, we have made a firm commitment to maintain council tax at one of the lowest rates of all the 201 district councils in England.

"We have been able to maintain this by being innovative in the way we deliver our services. Over the past few years we have

formed many effective partnerships that not only deliver high quality services to local people, but also represent excellent value for money.

"With pressure on budgets, it is important that we as a council do everything we can to look after those who need our help."

**For more information about paying your council tax, and where the money goes to, visit [sstaffs.gov.uk](http://sstaffs.gov.uk)**



**The Chairman of South Staffordshire Council, Councillor Rita Heseltine, officially opened Codsall Leisure Centre's newly built fitness suite. See page 8**



**Hello and welcome to the latest edition of the South Staffordshire Review.**

Ensuring there is enough housing in the district to cope with demand and ensuring the Green Belt is protected can often be a careful balancing act. Over the past few years, the council has been working hard to strike the right balance between accommodating an increased need for housing in the district and protecting at least 99% of Green Belt land from development.

Last December South Staffordshire Council won a decisive victory for the Core Strategy, the document that tells us, amongst other things, how many houses are needed across the district over the next few years. The council had been

challenged on a particular part of this, and I'm pleased to say that the High Court decided emphatically that the housing allocated in the Core Strategy was correct. Now the plans can be continued.

This work can't be done without your help. South Staffordshire Council needs you to give your views on the plans for your area as part of the Site Allocations consultation, as these will be taken into account when the final plan is put together. After all, you are the experts on your local area. Over the page you will see the many ways to get in touch with the council and get the latest information on this issue. The council is keen to hear your views, so please get in touch.

*Cllr Brian Edwards, Leader of South Staffordshire Council*



# In Your Area...

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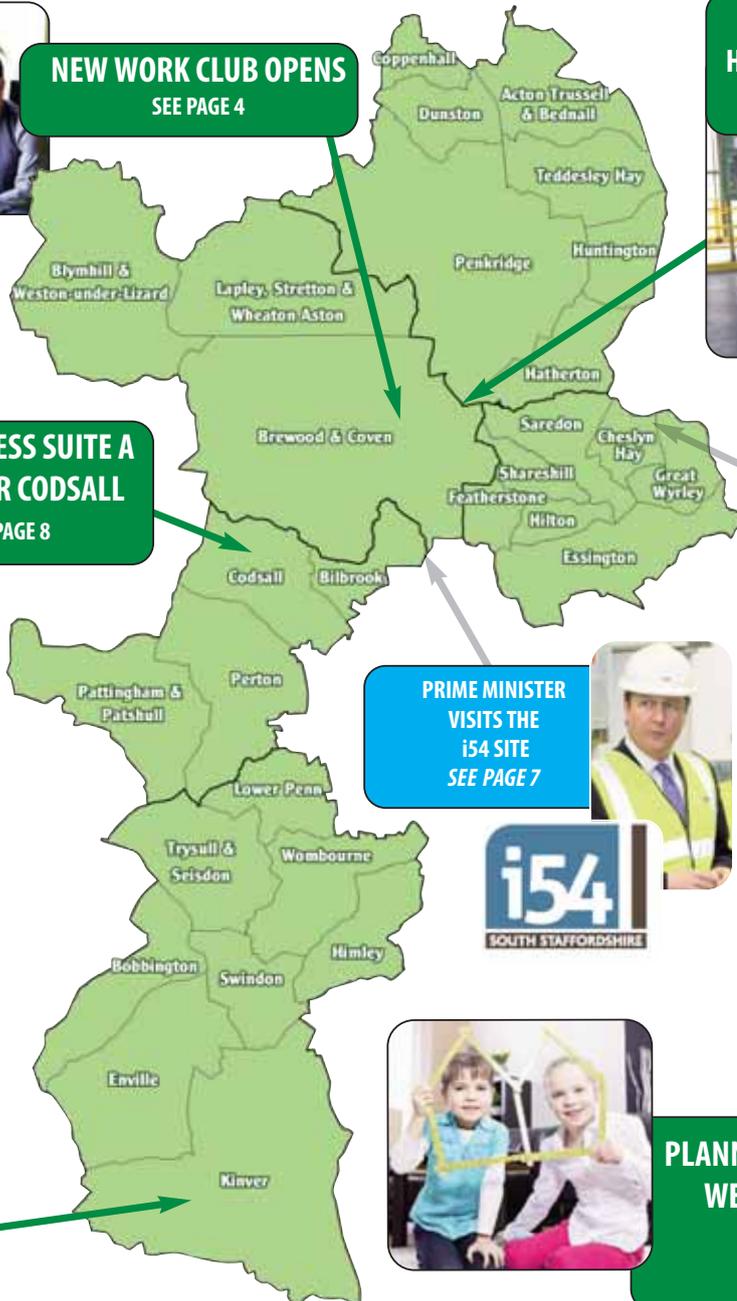
**NEW WORK CLUB OPENS**  
SEE PAGE 4



**WHERE DOES YOUR HOUSEHOLD WASTE GO?**  
SEE PAGE 6



**NEW FITNESS SUITE A TONIC FOR CODSALL**  
SEE PAGE 8



**HIGH COURT CHALLENGE TO COUNCIL'S CORE STRATEGY IS REJECTED**

A legal challenge to the number of houses that should be built in Great Wyrley was soundly rejected by the High Court.

A small part of the council's Core Strategy was challenged by a local developer who claimed that the apportionment of housing between the main villages in South Staffordshire, and in particular Great Wyrley, was not correct.

The court ruled that the challenge was unjustified, and the housing allocations stated within the strategy were indeed sound.

Speaking about the ruling, Leader of South Staffordshire Council Brian Edwards said: "The ruling was a victory for common sense. We have a duty to protect our villages from developments that are not in line with our carefully developed strategies, and the Core Strategy sets out to do just that.

We maintained throughout this case that there was no evidence to substantiate this challenge, and I am pleased that the court saw the challenge for what it was and ruled in our favour."



**SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY SUCCESS**  
SEE PAGE 5



**PLANNING STRATEGY, WE NEED YOUR VIEWS!**  
SEE PAGE 3



# PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

**Every council in the country has a plan setting out the planning strategy for their area.**

**In South Staffordshire, we're asking you for your views on a plan for your area.**

The plan will help the council make decisions on the many planning applications received each year. The first part of the plan is known as the Core Strategy, which tells us how many houses are needed in each area. This was years in the making, and was put together as a result of continual consultation with local residents. The second is the Site Allocations document, which will decide where new houses should go. Again, we need the help of local residents on this.



We will be consulting with local communities as part of our bid to help provide around 1,100 new homes in the district over the next 15 years. We anticipate that the lion's share of the new homes will be built across the district's nine main villages at Bilbrook, Brewood, Cheslyn Hay, Codsall, Great Wyrley, Kinver, Penkridge, Perton and Wombourne.

The council is completely committed to preserving the Green Belt, so much so that a key priority is to ensure no more than 1% of it should be

lost to development. Although we know that in some villages new development in the Green Belt is our only option, this review will help us to select the least harmful sites to meet the requirements of the strategy.

We have even commissioned consultants to look very carefully at the Green Belt surrounding the villages where there will be new growth and to provide us with a detailed study.

These are only initial plans at the moment, and there will be lots of opportunities for everyone to have their say on what they think are the most suitable sites for housing. This is the first stage of the consultation process and once we have all the responses from local people and from the statutory agencies that cover such issues as education, highways, or environment, we will whittle the number of sites down. This will lead to a smaller selection of sites and we plan to do further consultation on these sites again, later in 2014.



Councillor Bob McCardle, Cabinet Member for Strategic Services said: "This is all about providing the right homes in the right places at the right time. House prices in the district are way above the national and regional average and we run the risk of forcing local people, especially young families who have lived in the district all their lives, out of the area because there simply aren't enough homes."

Steve Winterflood, Chief Executive of South Staffordshire Council added: "Every council needs to have a plan which sets out how many homes are needed their area. In South Staffordshire, over half of the homes needed by 2028 have already been built or are in the pipeline. This means that less than 100 new homes now need to be built each year right across the district to meet our housing numbers.

"The Site Allocations document gives us a powerful tool to protect the Green Belt over the long term, but the process laid down by government will not be easy. However, though land owners and developers may put forward certain sites, we estimate that we will only need about 8 per cent of these to meet Core Strategy targets."

The Site Allocations document not only looks at housing but other uses such as employment, open space, and Gypsies and Travellers. Consultation with local residents and community groups is due to begin in Spring 2014 so look out for bulletins on our website and information at the Council Offices, your local library or parish council office. We will also be holding local exhibitions so you can discuss your views and concerns with the Local Plans Team.

The best way to keep in touch and to have the most up-to-date information is to register on our online database and this way you will be notified as soon as we begin the consultation. You can do this at [sstaffs.gov.uk/consultation](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/consultation)

**For more information, email us at [localplans@sstaffs.gov.uk](mailto:localplans@sstaffs.gov.uk) or call 01902 696593 and ask for a member of the Local Plans Team.**

**A Frequently Asked Questions sheet is available to help explain the process.**

**This is available at [sstaffs.gov.uk/siteallocations](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/siteallocations)**



# New work club launches in Brewwood and Coven

## Job hunters in the Brewwood and Coven area are getting an extra bit of help with the setting up of a Work Club on their doorstep.

The club, the eighth to be launched in South Staffordshire, opened its doors to clients in early February.

Based at Brewwood Library, in Newport Street it will provide local job seekers from the Brewwood, Coven and surrounding areas with advice and support to help them get back on a payroll.

The support covers things like writing CVs and covering letters, volunteer work, career direction, benefits and debt management. There is free internet access for job searching and pointers to other support services, including the opportunity to find a placement with South Staffordshire Council through the work club's work placement scheme.

The club will also allow attendees to swap job opportunities and experiences in an informal setting over a cup of tea or coffee.

Local councillor Wendy Sutton, who pushed for the latest club to be set up in her local area, said: "Although the economy is recovering, we still need to do everything we can to ensure local people have the support to help them find jobs and give them the best possible opportunities to be successful at gaining employment. Having seen how successful the work clubs are in other areas of South Staffordshire, I wanted to ensure the people of Brewwood, Coven, Coven

Heath and the surrounding areas can also benefit from the help and advice on offer."

South Staffordshire's work clubs are held regularly throughout the month, and joining couldn't be easier. They now have the support of a dedicated Careers Support Coach from Eyes Wide Open Careers Coaching, who will develop individual action plans with clients and regularly review their progress in an informal one-to-one setting.

Cllr Mac Harris, Leader of the Labour group said: "Giving people the confidence and the skills to look for a job and get back into work is essential. These work clubs are a really good way of supporting people who are looking for a job, ensuring they are making the best use of their skills and expertise, and helping them hone their job-seeking skills to ensure they successfully gain employment."

Local businesses can get involved and support the work clubs by helping to promote them, advertising their vacancies, attending an occasional session or supporting members by giving them work experience.

You can find out more about the work clubs at: [www.southstaffsworkclubs.co.uk](http://www.southstaffsworkclubs.co.uk)

Club	Location	Times	Frequency	Contact
<b>Wombourne</b>	Wombourne Library WV5 9EZ	10am-12pm	Fortnightly on a Tuesday	Sarah Mansell Jones 07540 642653
<b>Brewood &amp; Coven</b>	Brewood Library, Newport Street, Staffordshire. ST19 9DT	10am-12pm	Fortnightly on a Tuesday	Cllr Wendy Sutton 01902 851682 w.sutton@sstaffs.gov.uk
<b>Bilbrook &amp; Codsall</b>	Childrens Centre, Lane Green First School, WV8 1EU	10am-12pm	Fortnightly on a Thursday	Cllr Val Chapman 01902 846413
<b>Perton</b>	Perton Library WV6 7QU	2.15pm-4pm	1st and 3rd Thursday of the Month	Jordan Whitehouse Jordan.Whitehouse@bromford.co.uk 07734 857 154
<b>Featherstone</b>	Featherstone and Hilton Community Centre, WV10 7TR	10am-12pm	Every Friday Weekly	Cllr Bob Cope 01922 414420 Liz Minshall 07870 383628
<b>Essington</b>	Search Essington Work club on facebook for our virtual club	24hr virtual support with one to one appointments available on request		Cllr David Clift 01922 401105
<b>Great Wyrley</b>	Harrisons Sports & Social Club WS6 6EU	2pm-4pm	Fortnightly on a Friday	Liz Minshall 07870383628
<b>Huntington</b>	The Barns Hotel, Cocksparrow Lane, Huntington, Cannock, WS12 4PB	9.30am -11.30am	Fortnightly on a Monday	Sarah Mansell Jones 07540 642653





# Did you 'Keep it Local' on Small Business Saturday?

**Residents in South Staffordshire rose to the challenge of Small Business Saturday - by shopping and spending local.**

December 7th 2013 was set as the day to ditch the big shopping malls and national chains, buying instead from your local butcher, baker, boutique or bookstore, eating in at your local restaurant or getting a take-away from around the corner.

For South Staffordshire, the event was very important since, according to the Office for National Statistics, nearly all consumer outlets in the district can be classed as "small businesses".

Some 87 of these businesses came on board with special offers, deals or attractions. Local people responded to the challenge to take advantage of a range of great offers. Here is just a sample:

- **In Brewood, The Mess Bistro offered a free mini mince pie with every hot drink and customers at Hush Dress Agency received a 10% discount on all clothes sales.**
- **Pet Stop, Codsall, invited a pet food expert into store to give advice to owners.**
- **Paradiso Restaurant, Wombourne offered a free coffee or tea with every cake or sandwich purchased.**
- **Radiant Glow, Kinver, held a competition on Facebook, with the winner being chosen on Small Business Saturday.**
- **Lords & Ladies Hair Salon, Cheslyn Hay, offered a special price for hair products.**



In partnership with the University of Wolverhampton's Innovation 1st project and local small business Calloway Green Ltd, South Staffordshire Council also supported businesses by holding a social media workshop. The workshop offered guidance on how to make better use of social media to improve their online presence.

Liquid Glamour Lounge of Cheslyn Hay, and The Moat House, Acton Trussell also exhibited for a day each in the council offices to showcase their products and services to visitors.

On Small Business Saturday itself, local councillors were involved by keeping it local and championing small businesses.



Leader of the South Staffordshire Council, Cllr Brian Edwards said: "This initiative highlighted to residents the importance of shops and services in their local area, and hopefully will encourage people to continue to support them all year round. This is vital in South Staffordshire as small businesses form a huge part of our local economy. I was delighted to visit many shops and businesses in Kinver who had joined in the day to promote their business. I wish them all the best for the future."



Portfolio holder for Strategic Services, Councillor Bob McCardle, said: "This campaign celebrates the wealth of independent shops and services we have on our doorsteps in South Staffordshire. Many of these businesses are the livelihoods of our own residents so supporting them is especially important. Initiatives like Small Business Saturday are key to ensuring our villages remain vibrant and our businesses prosper."

The council will continue to support businesses in South Staffordshire throughout the year by developing comprehensive online resources for both new and existing businesses to refer to for information and advice. The sign-posting service will also be maintained, providing an extensive list of organisations in the area that offer specialist business support.

Local businesses can find out more by visiting

[sstaffs.gov.uk/business](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/business)

## Word Search Competition

Can you find, hidden in this puzzle, words of Counties in England?

They may be horizontal, vertical or diagonal and could be backwards or forwards.

- AVON, BEDFORDSHIRE,
- CORNWALL, CUMBRIA,
- DORSET, ESSEX,
- HAMPSHIRE, HUMBERSIDE,
- KENT, NORFOLK,
- OXFORDSHIRE, SHROPSHIRE,
- STAFFORDSHIRE, SUFFOLK,
- SUSSEX, YORKSHIRE

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

There is one word in the list that is NOT included in the grid.

Write it on the back of a postcard (or sealed envelope) TOGETHER WITH YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS and send to:

**Craig Walker**  
**Word Search Competition,**  
**South Staffordshire Council,**  
**Council Offices, Codsall,**  
**South Staffordshire. WV8 1PX**

The first correct entry picked after the closing date of

**16th May 2014**

will win a

**£25 Prize**

### CONGRATULATIONS & THANK YOU!

*Congratulations to Samantha Chetwood from Kinver who won £25 in the Word Search Competition in Issue 56 of the South Staffordshire Review.*

*The correct answer was*

**MISTLETOE**

*A big thank you to everyone who entered and well done to those who got the answer correct!*

# Beyond the bin -

## how we're being kinder to the environment



### Ever wondered what happens to your household waste after it has been collected?

In the past, it used to disappear into a big hole in the ground - literally.

Not any longer. More and more of what we discard is now being recycled into useful material, while 'landfill' is all but a distant memory.

When it comes to waste, South Staffordshire Council is ahead of the game.



The council's blue bin is now a fixture for resident recycling.

All of the material in your blue bin is delivered to a Material Recycling Facility (MRF) in Aldridge, West Midlands. At the plant it is sorted using a series of mechanical equipment, such as screens, trommels (big cylinders that separate large and small objects) and magnets; while plastics are separated according to their polymer type. This is done by special equipment that reads the code of the plastic and uses jets of air to separate the different types.

Once recyclable material has been separated, it is sent onto a range of reprocessors to be used again in everyday products. For example, newspapers are recycled into more paper products including newspapers, envelopes and packaging. Glass is recycled back into bottles or jars and cans into new containers. Advances in plastic recycling means that some plastic bottles are now turned back into plastic bottles, which couldn't be done until quite recently.



There is more good news for the environment: since November 2013, South Staffordshire Council sends no non-recyclable waste from your grey bin direct to landfill.

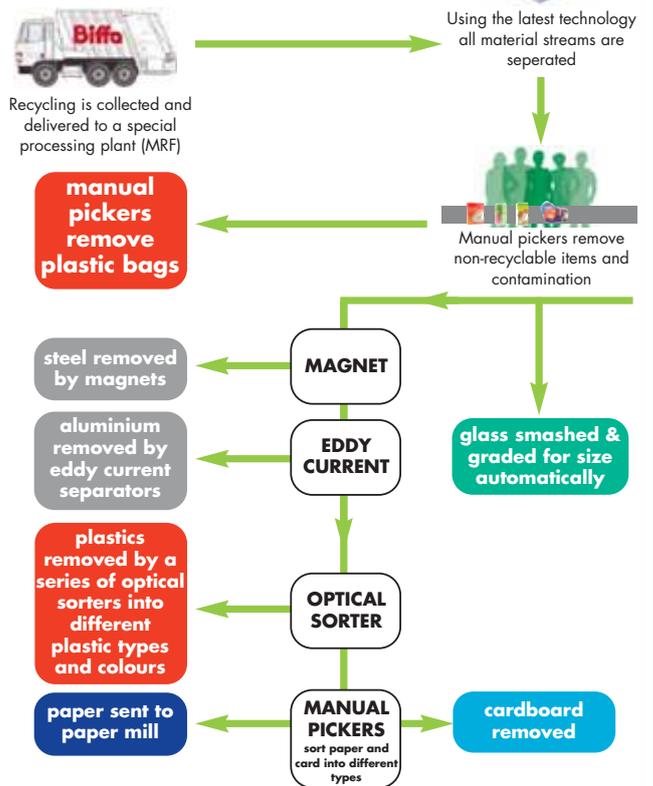
Instead, it is delivered to the brand new energy recovery facility (ERF) at Four Ashes, where the waste is used to create energy. Once fully operational the facility will provide power for an estimated 32,000 homes.

Cllr Mary Bond, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services explains: "Technological advances mean that we can now accept more material for recycling in the blue bin than ever before. For example, our contractors now have a secure market for plastic packaging (e.g. margarine tubs, yoghurt pots)



and waxed cartons (e.g. Tetra Pak) which means that we can extend this service to our residents. We are always looking to increase the range of material that we can collect for recycling and will keep local people informed throughout the year of any more developments."

### WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD WASTE?



Since the introduction of the blue wheeled bins in April 2013, the weight of recyclable material collected from the kerbside has increased by 25%. This is great news economically and environmentally, as fewer raw materials and energy are needed to make new products.

Cllr Bond added: "Thanks to the fantastic support of our residents we hope to recycle and compost 55% of household waste during this year, more than ever before."

**Full details of what you can recycle at the kerbside using your blue bin can be found at [sstaffs.gov.uk/waste](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/waste).**



# HELPING VILLAGES TO THRIVE AND PROSPER

**In South Staffordshire we are committed to ensuring our local villages have the chance to prosper.**

Nationally, villages are facing a lot of challenges. The national trend for higher earners to relocate to the countryside has turned many into 'dormitory villages.' In some instances, local people born and bred in these villages can be faced with inflated house prices, and as a result are often forced to move away. The subsequent decline in local services then threatens communities that have been in existence for many years.

In South Staffordshire, the average house price as of October 2013 was £216,796, making the open market unaffordable for many local people. Our Housing Market Assessment of 2013 also indicated a need for 338 units of affordable housing every year for the next five years.

We are committed to protecting the rural idyll that so many of our residents value, but we also recognise that our villages need some development in order to thrive. This is why we need to maximise opportunities to develop the right type of housing in the right locations. One of the ways we can do this is through building what's known as rural exception sites.

Rural exception sites are small, limited developments on Green Belt land next to existing villages. The housing is ring fenced for people from that local community, who have been identified in need of affordable housing in a local Parish Needs Survey. Such a survey may also identify if there is a need for starter homes to allow some of the village's young families to get on the housing ladder; or accommodation that allows older people to downsize and free up much needed housing stock in the village.

Rural Exception housing is of a high quality and built to be sympathetic to the local environment. The entire process is led by a parish council which has an

input in every stage of the process from considering possible sites to the final design and layout.

Councillor Bob McCardle, Cabinet Member for Strategic Services said: "It is essential that we protect our local villages and allow them to thrive and prosper. With house prices rising and more people moving into rural areas, this can mean that local people find houses in the village they grew up in are out of their price range. Rural exception sites allow housing to be built that is in-keeping with the area, and that is at a price that local residents can realistically afford. This means young families can get on the housing ladder and can stay in the village where they grew up, or older people can downsize and still remain in familiar surroundings."

For information go to [sstaffs.gov.uk/ruralexceptions](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/ruralexceptions)



## Prime Minister sees for himself how i54 is creating jobs and growth



**Prime Minister David Cameron has had a preview of Jaguar Land Rover's new Engine Manufacturing Centre at i54 South Staffordshire.**

He was given a tour of the new plant where he saw the on-going installation of the manufacturing equipment first-hand. Representatives of the three councils behind i54 were also on hand to answer any questions about how the site is developing.

Jaguar Land Rover's state-of-the-art Engine Manufacturing Centre is the first new facility that the company has built from the ground up. Representing an investment of more than £500 million, almost 1,400 jobs will be created by the time the plant reaches its full capacity.



Picture courtesy of Jaguar Land Rover

Leader of South Staffordshire Council, Cllr Brian Edwards met with the Prime Minister after his tour of the centre. He said "We are delighted that the Prime Minister has come to see for himself progress at one of the most exciting new manufacturing and engineering developments in the region, and indeed in the whole of the UK. Jaguar Land Rover's investment in i54 South Staffordshire, announced back in September 2011, injected confidence into the British economy and into British manufacturing at a crucial time and it is fantastic to see the new facility nearing completion, with the promise of new jobs and opportunities that it will bring.

"Our three councils forged a pioneering partnership to develop the i54 site and attract JLR here against fierce competition. Our investment and approach is already bearing fruit with two major employers up and running on the site, two more - including JLR - building new premises here, and work well underway on a brand new motorway junction on to the M54 opening later this year. We are also working hard to ensure benefits for the wider region, working with schools and colleges to train up the next generation, and working with companies in the supply chain to ensure that i54 South Staffordshire drives economic growth in the West Midlands for years to come."

# At Your LEISURE

[sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure)

## Shape up in style at Codsall's new suite

### Codsall Leisure Centre's £250,000 newly built fitness suite is now open for business - and is already proving popular.

The wraps formally came off the newly built facility when Chairman Rita Heseltine and Councillor Mary Bond cut the ribbon on 9th January 2014.

The fitness suite has been completely remodelled and what was once the gym has been transformed into a dedicated spinning studio and exercise area.

With brand new equipment installed, customers can benefit from the latest in fitness technology.

The suite affords a much more spacious environment so more people can enjoy an expanded timetable of exercise classes as well as taking full advantage of the excellent facilities on offer.

In line with the launch of the new exercise studio, the leisure centre has extended its already comprehensive programme of classes and boast a wide range of sessions which are on offer every day of the week.

Work on the new fitness suite started in July 2013 and also included an extension to the car park. Funded by South Staffordshire Council, it has taken five months to complete and is already receiving positive feedback from customers.

Membership to the gym starts from just £19 per month and other membership packages are available to suit every wallet size.

Cllr Mary Bond, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services said: "The newly built fitness suite is a great addition to South Staffordshire Council's leisure facilities. By investing now, we are ensuring the leisure centre can compete with more commercial gyms, and make it sustainable for the future.

"The refurbishment will not only allow the leisure centre to extend its exercise programmes, but by expanding the gym, the refurbishment has helped to increase access for local people."

Councillor Rita Heseltine, Chairman of South Staffordshire Council said: "The new fitness suite will hopefully encourage more local people to use the gym and this opening comes just as people are looking to kick start their fitness regime. Gym memberships represent great value for money and creating the perfect gift to help people get fit."

**For more information on the fitness suite and exercise classes visit [sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure) or call Codsall Leisure Centre direct on 01902 844032.**

## Kids Easter activities that are far from eggspensive

### A great programme of children's activities has been lined up by South Staffordshire Council for the Easter holidays.

Under the now-familiar SUSSED banner, the huge range of activities taking place at South Staffordshire's leisure centres are sure to keep them entertained throughout the school break.

What's more, they won't cost parents an arm and a leg and there is even a FREE swim pass for every primary school child in the district.

SUSSED school holiday programmes are running at Cheslyn Hay, Codsall, Penkridge and Wombourne leisure centres from Monday 14th April to Friday 25th April, catering for children aged 5 to 12 years.

Here's a sample of what's on offer: *Supreme Science sessions, The Animal Man, Trampoline and various sports courses in addition to crash course Swimming Lessons.*

### LOOK out for your FREE swimming vouchers...

ALL South Staffordshire primary school children will be issued with a SUSSED taster card at their school offering a free swim pass plus a voucher for a free Judo session with Wombourne and Codsall Judo Club.

For more information visit [sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure) or call the leisure centres direct to book.

## Learn to Swim with the newly launched South Staffordshire Swim Academy



### Learner swimmers in South Staffordshire look set to benefit from a new "swim academy" aimed at improving teaching methods.

The Council's leisure centres have signed up with the Swimming Teachers' Association to instigate a recognised teaching system and a standardised programme for swimming lessons.

The South Staffordshire Swim Academy was officially launched in January at Penkridge, Cheslyn Hay, Wombourne and Codsall leisure centres.

The academy, the seventh set up by the STA in England, aims to raise the standards of swim teaching through STA's International Learn to Swim Programme (ILSP).

Theo Millward, STA's Operations Director, said: "The new academy status for four South Staffordshire leisure centres means parents can be reassured about the high quality of swim lessons for their children.

"The Academy model has worked very well in local authority run pools across the country and we are delighted that it is now being launched in South Staffordshire.

"By operating as an academy the centres can provide a very high standard of teaching in a cost-effective way. Learning how to swim is a crucial life skill and through this partnership, the learners and the teachers will benefit hugely."

Cllr Mary Bond, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services said: "This new academy will enable South Staffordshire Council to really build on the existing swimming classes and it will assist us in providing a comprehensive aquatic programme. I am delighted that we can offer local people of all ages the opportunity to learn to swim for health, safety and for fun."

For further information visit [sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/leisure) or contact the leisure centres direct:

Cheslyn Hay Leisure Centre	01922 417790
Codsall Leisure Centre	01902 844032
Penkridge Leisure Centre	01785 714152
Wombourne Leisure Centre	01902 898202





### Keeping active and watching what you eat can give you some extra time - to enjoy life.

Taking control of your lifestyle is not as tough as it seems, in fact it can be made a whole lot easier through South Staffordshire's Good Life website.

The site is bigger and better than ever before, packed with information and ideas on what's available in your local area to help you live a healthier, happier life.

It's packed with ideas and information on community groups, venues, activities and even videos to show what's happening around South Staffordshire.

Access the site at: [www.southstaffordshire.thegoodlife.uk.net](http://www.southstaffordshire.thegoodlife.uk.net)

Follow the Good Life on Twitter @sstaffsgoodlife for the latest information on what's happening in your area.

If you don't have internet access, call our Customer Services Team on 01902 696000.

Leader of South Staffordshire Council, Cllr Brian Edwards said: "The Good Life website is a really great way of finding out what's going on in your local area, and what you can do to keep yourself fit and healthy. Many people just aren't aware of the variety of activities that are taking place across South Staffordshire, so the Good Life is definitely the best way forward in terms of seeing what's out there, and encouraging people to try out new activities and generally keep active."

### Sugar can sour your health

The news has been full of stories about how too much sugar can be bad for you, but how do you cut down?

You wouldn't eat sugar straight from the bowl, you carefully measure how much goes in your tea or on your cornflakes, but tend to forget about the sugar hiding in other things that we eat and drink.

Sugar is a good source of energy, yet contains few other nutrients. Any energy that the body doesn't need is stored as fat, so consuming too much sugar can result in a gain in weight. This isn't healthy, as it increases the risk of serious health conditions like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke. Eating too much sugar can also result in tooth decay.

### Beware of hidden sugar

It is amazing how much sugar is lurking in our food - even food that doesn't taste particularly sweet can be loaded with sugar. Here are a few facts about sugar and where it's hiding:

- The average person in Britain consumes about 700g of sugar a week\* - the equivalent of 140 teaspoons
- 500ml of cola contains the equivalent of 17 cubes of sugar.
- There are lots of different words used to describe sugar - sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltose, hydrolysed starch, invert sugar, corn syrup, honey - they are all different kinds of sugars. Watch out for them on the label.

\* Source: National Diet & Nutrition Survey 2008/11

For more information on sugar swaps and eating well check out [www.change4life.co.uk](http://www.change4life.co.uk)



# ONE VOLUNTEER IS WORTH...?

**Give a little - and gain a lot. That's the reward for the many ordinary people across South Staffordshire who are volunteering to help the community.**



There are dozens of ways in which you can give up just a little of your free time to assist - from sports to special needs, kids to counselling.

Support Staffordshire, South Staffordshire\*, Volunteer Centre is here to match you up with your perfect volunteering opportunity in whatever field you feel comfortable.

Volunteer work means such a lot to the people and organisations lucky enough to have you on board.

In return there is an opportunity to try something new, meet new people, make new friends. It could help you develop new skills and

gain more confidence in using them. Above all, it is about doing something useful and giving back to the community.

### Something for Everyone

Some say the most difficult part of volunteering is taking the first step and that is where our accredited Volunteer Centre can help you get started. Anyone can volunteer, regardless of age, ability or job status.

Whatever your skills and ambitions, our Volunteer Centre provides a free and friendly service that can match you with your perfect opportunity, help you access training courses, and support you throughout your volunteering.

There are more than a thousand organisations on the database with a wide variety of opportunities to choose from. Here's just a sample:

- Sports coaching • Youth work • Admin and office duties • Conservation • Retail
- Counselling • Befriending • Music • Teaching • Gardening

Get in touch with Gill or Tess in the Volunteer Centre by calling 0300 777 1207, by email on [vols@sscva.org.uk](mailto:vols@sscva.org.uk), or by visiting us at 1 Stafford Street, Brewood, South Staffordshire, ST19 9DX (opening times vary, so please call in advance).

### Attention all Organisations and Voluntary Groups:

The Volunteer Centre helps match volunteers to organisations in South Staffordshire, building communities and making a real difference in people's lives. The Volunteer Centre can help whether you are a new group with no experience working with volunteers, or an existing organisation looking to build better relationships.

### There is help with:

- Creating volunteer vacancies and matching suitable volunteers to the roles
- Promoting your volunteer opportunities
- Volunteer management training
- Developing a volunteer policy
- Registering your vacancies on the Do-It website
- Getting funding and DBS checks

\*Support Staffordshire is an operating name of South Staffordshire Community & Voluntary Action, a Company Limited by Guarantee in England and Wales. Registration Number 4388223. Registered Office as noted above. Registered Charity Number 1093899.



# Support for claimants over welfare reforms



## People in South Staffordshire affected by the Government's welfare reform changes are getting help and advice from their local council.

A cap on benefits, changes to the council tax relief scheme and the so-called 'Bedroom Tax', all introduced last year, have impacted on many families in the district.

But officers from South Staffordshire Council have been quick to identify who and where these changes are likely to be felt and have been going out to see families and individuals in their own homes to discuss the situation.

The task is not straightforward - each family is different, bringing with it a set of different issues and difficulties.

The council's Benefits Team quickly realised that there was no 'one size fits all' way of dealing with each affected family, so advice and guidance is tailored to their particular set of needs.

The new rules include restricting the size of accommodation people could receive housing benefit for, based on the number of people in a household - dubbed the 'Bedroom Tax' by the national media.

The majority of people in South Staffordshire have been unaffected by this, and those who are have been getting advice from the council about what they can do.

The introduction of the Benefit Cap in July last year has meant small reductions for some families, whereas others have lost nearly £130 per week.

But it is the replacement of Council Tax Benefit with the new localised Council Tax Support scheme which has seen the largest number of working-age households affected. Some households no longer get any support and have to pay full council tax.

The council's revenues team has been working alongside the Citizen's Advice Bureau and other debt advice agencies to support these households with debt and budgeting advice.

Working together with housing associations and local support teams has also been going on to evaluate the needs of each family.

For a relatively small local authority like South Staffordshire, the effort has been very intensive.

Cllr Roy Wright, Cabinet Member for Direct Services said: "Working with families is key to ensuring they make the most of the benefits they have, and letting them know directly about any changes that could happen. By working with families early on, we can ensure they are getting the right help and advice at the right time, and help prevent them storing up problems for the future.

"Often, it's not as simple as having less money; each family has a wealth of different issues and by continuing to work closely with them and our partners, we can support their issues and lessen the impact the changes have on their lives."

**For more information on benefits or to contact the housing benefit/council tax support office, call 01902 696668, visit [sstaffs.gov.uk](http://sstaffs.gov.uk), email: [benefits@sstaffs.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@sstaffs.gov.uk) or visit the Council Offices, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, WV8 1PX - Monday to Friday 8.45am - 5pm.**

## DODGING LOCAL TAXES WILL COST YOU A PACKET

### Council tax and business rates defaulters will face hefty fees under new rules due to take effect in April 2014.

Residents and businesses who don't pay up on time will initially get a reminder from the council.

But further delay in payment is likely to result in a summons notice at a cost of £53 asking for a Liability Order costing a further £45.

The council may then pass the debt to an enforcement agent (previously the bailiff) to collect on its behalf.

To simplify the cost process, standard fees charged to non or late-payers have been introduced:

Fee Stage	Fixed Fee	Percentage fee (regulation 7): percentage of sum to be recovered exceeding £1,500
Compliance stage	£75.00	0%
Enforcement stage	£235.00	7.5%
Sale or disposal stage	£110.00	7.5%

### • If you are struggling to pay Council Tax or Business Rates, don't ignore the debt - it won't go away!

Contact the council's Revenues Team on 01902 696669 or email: [taxation@sstaffs.gov.uk](mailto:taxation@sstaffs.gov.uk) to discuss the options you have. Arranging to pay off small amounts is better than paying nothing at all.

## GENERAL DEBT ADVICE

If you owe money on loans, credit cards or hire purchase and can't afford repayments, contact the lenders, tell them the situation.

Be honest with them: they may accept reduced monthly payments, or to miss some payments. *(Bear in mind this would take you longer to repay the whole debt and may cost more overall.)*

*If lenders won't accept any offer to repay, get some advice from:*

- **Citizens Advice Bureau** - gives FREE confidential and unbiased advice on debt. You can find your nearest bureau in the phone book or visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)
- **National Debt Line** - a FREE helpline for people with debt problems. Phone 0808 808 4000 or visit [www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)
- **Stepchange** - FREE advice on problem debt. Phone 0800 1381111 or visit [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)
- **'Moneymadeclear'** - an advice line from the Financial Services Authority (FSA) helping people to be better informed when it comes to money. Call the Helpline on 0300 500 5000 or visit [www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk)

"Your local council and police working together to keep your community safe"



# Community Safety



[sstaffs.gov.uk/communitysafety](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/communitysafety)



## FIGHTING CRIME WITHOUT PICKING YOUR POCKETS

**Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Ellis, whose 'patch' includes South Staffordshire, is promising to keep the lid on spending local taxpayers' money, while keeping community safety as the top priority.**

Mr Ellis is responsible for setting the budget for policing, community safety and reducing crime across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in 2014/15.

And he is bucking the national trend by refusing to increase the police and community safety portion of South Staffordshire residents' council tax bill.

Due to savings made in the last 12 months, the budget for 2014/15 will see neighbourhood policing numbers protected, more recruitment of new police officers and further investment in technology and other new processes which will save even more money.

Mr Ellis said: "With a £4.3 million reduction in overall budget for 2014/15, the easy option would be to turn to local council taxpayers in South Staffordshire and elsewhere to meet the additional short-fall. But I don't want to do that. Through good house-keeping I want to spend every penny of public money better, meaning local tax-payers are an absolute last resort."

"I'm going to continue to drive efficiencies, spend money more effectively in a joined up way and ensure Staffordshire Police and local authorities have the resources to keep crime reducing. In the coming year, £2.5 million will be going to local areas to fund community safety projects, which is more than twice as much as ever before."

The PCC is ensuring that 100 per cent of the money received by Staffordshire Police from proceeds of crime seizures is going back to local communities.

As an example of this in action, a local organisation that tackles hate crime in South Staffordshire has received a £12,000 grant from the Commissioner's Proceeds of Crime Fund. Chase Against Crimes of Hate visits schools and community hubs teaching people of all ages about differences within society and supports hate crime victims. More details about funding opportunities for community projects can be viewed at [staffordshire-pcc.gov.uk/fund](http://staffordshire-pcc.gov.uk/fund)

**Find out what's going on, get local news and hear about PCC events and ways you can get involved as a volunteer by registering for updates at [staffordshire-pcc.gov.uk/email](http://staffordshire-pcc.gov.uk/email)**



**Would you like to be kept informed about crime, suspicious incidents and scams in your local neighbourhood?**

OWL (stands for Online Watch Link) is the award-winning communication network used by thousands of residents and businesses in Staffordshire, to receive alerts and advice from Staffordshire Police and Neighbourhood Watch about incidents in their local area.

Anyone can register, and it is completely free. Already well over 20,000 addresses are registered in Staffordshire and hundreds more are added each month. Your details will not be disclosed.

Messages are sent by official police staff, via email, phone call, fax or text message, about crimes, scams and suspicious incidents, and are targeted to your area only – you will not receive irrelevant messages or advertising.

It can alert you to urgent incidents, often within minutes, such as a bogus-official burglary or a missing child. Local, personal contact is available by telephone or email, providing advice and reassurance.

**Those registered are very positive, with many comments received such as:**

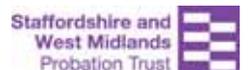
- "OWL is excellent and makes us villagers feel really cared for"
- "Fantastic service. We wouldn't have a clue what was going on in our local area without it"
- "We find your service very useful indeed"
- "OWL has made us more security conscious, and alert to scams and cold-callers"
- "The OWL alerts act as a reminder to remain vigilant at all times"
- "I cannot sing its praises enough, and my view is that it should be extended as far as possible"

We know it works, and so do thousands of other local people. Crime and scams can happen to anyone. Being aware of what to look out for can help you avoid becoming the next victim.

Register your details at [owl.co.uk](http://owl.co.uk), or phone Staffordshire Police on 101, extension 4216



*Left to Right: Voluntary Cadet Instructor PC Julie Lovatt, Chase Against Crimes of Hate Coordinator Anna McLauchlan, Cadet Bethany Fletcher (16), Cadet Chloe Taylor (14), PCC Matthew Ellis, Cadet Charlie Walker (15) and Cadet Hannah Atherden (16).*





South  
Staffordshire  
Council

# South Staffordshire Review

## More Accessible Customer Services

**If you need the services of South Staffordshire Council, they're ready to help and more accessible than ever.**

After a trial run in January, the council's customer services department now has new, longer opening hours. It is now open to answer telephone queries from 8.30am until 5.30pm.

Added to this, social network users with questions for the council can now contact customer services via Twitter @south\_staffs.

Advisers monitor the Twitter account regularly throughout the day and can respond to a variety of queries, usually pretty quickly. The dedicated team answers an average of 500 customer queries a day - on anything from rubbish collection to housing and benefits.

Followers of @south\_staffs will also have access to the latest updates from the council.

The latest moves are part of a £127,000 investment in customer services over the next two years, to drive up efficiency and ensure the service is well placed to cope with increasing demand.



Cllr Roy Wright, Cabinet Member for Direct Services said: "We are committed to excellent customer services at South Staffordshire Council, and want to ensure we offer the very best service to anyone who contacts us. We want to become a truly customer-focussed organisation that gives value for money to council taxpayers, and that means embracing new technology and being as accessible as possible.

"More people than ever before are using social media to do their daily business - it's not just an optional extra any more. If a resident has a question about the services that they pay their council tax for, they want to be able to do this in a way that is easy and convenient for them. We are committed to getting them an answer to their query as quickly as possible, and ensuring we are providing the very best service to local people."

**Follow South Staffordshire Council on Twitter at @south\_staffs, or call the council on 01902 696000.**



twitter  
@south\_staffs

Telephone: **(01902) 696000**

**Mon to Fri 8.30am to 5.30pm**

Website: **sstaffs.gov.uk**

Email: **info@sstaffs.gov.uk**

For personal visits to the Council's Customer Service Team the opening times are:

**Monday to Friday 8.45am to 5.00pm**

If you would like a copy of this document in another language or format (e.g. Braille, audio cassette) please contact us.



**NEW - Stay connected with South Staffordshire Council**

**Keep up to date on local issues and council services with our FREE email alerts.**

Choose from a range of topics such as:

- Waste & Recycling
- Leisure Services
- Council Tax & Benefits
- Jobs
- Business News

You decide what you want to hear about and subscribing is easy.

Visit our website to register [sstaffs.gov.uk/ealerts](http://sstaffs.gov.uk/ealerts)



## Easter Closing Times

The Council Offices will close at 5.00pm on 17th April and re-open at 8.45am on Tuesday 22nd April 2014



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