

# Our Solihull

Solihull Council Staff Magazine

December 2024

**Blast off for Apollo  
Spreading Christmas cheer  
Make your nominations now!**



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*Front cover: Jamie Rynberk, Stephen Steinhaus and Marie Meehan at the opening of the Apollo Centre*



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## Welcome

Here's the December edition of Our Solihull staff magazine.

This month we celebrate the opening of the new alternative provision facility - Apollo Centre, find out how the Supported Employment scheme is supporting one local resident at Chelmsley Wood Library, and learn more about the new Family Hubs outreach centre.

We also get into the festive spirit at the Fostering Christmas party and thank colleagues for donating gifts to our most vulnerable children.

If you have any ideas for articles for future editions, please get in touch: [comms@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:comms@solihull.gov.uk)

We hope you enjoy reading Our Solihull.

The Communications Team



# Blast off for Apollo

This Apollo isn't a rocket, but it does have the potential to carry children's aspirations into the stratosphere.

The new alternative provision centre officially opened on Friday 15 November and will accommodate up to 20 primary-aged children across four newly refurbished classrooms and a variety of other spaces.

The centre will educate children who have been excluded or are at-risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream schools as part of Solihull Alternative Provision Multi Academy Trust (SAPMAT), who run several other schools in the region.

Targeted support will be available on site from an Educational Psychologist and Speech and Language Therapist, who will work alongside specialist teachers.

The Apollo Centre will also serve as a base for support to primary schools across Solihull to help prevent disengagement and suspensions, with pupils being invited in for certain sessions or staff visiting them in their own schools.

**Jamie Rynberk, Commissioning Manager in Children's Services and Education (pictured with Stephen Steinhaus, SAPMAT CEO, and Marie Meehan, Apollo Centre Director) said:**

*"I've worked on this project from the start, it's absolutely fantastic to see it over the line and ready to welcome pupils. Apollo will make a real difference for some of the most vulnerable children in Solihull.*

*"SAPMAT have a great track record in this field, it's been a pleasure working with them to get this off the launchpad!"*



*Jamie, Stephen and Marie at the opening of the Apollo Centre*

## **Mission Control – Preparations for launch**

The Apollo Centre, previously the site of a primary school, has been extensively refurbished over the course of 15 months.

The project, commissioned by the planning, performing and commissioning team in Children's Services, and designed and delivered by the Strategic Land team, turned a disused site into a welcoming, warm, and calming space for pupils.

Security and safety were a central consideration, but the key aim was to provide a learning environment that would complement the specialist staff as they rehabilitate the children towards a return to mainstream education.

Lucy Bayliss, interior design manager, said:

*"We focused on striking a balance between durable finishes and a sense of tranquillity. The soft, nature-inspired colour palette and minimalist approach to classroom displays were all to avoid sensory overload, which is important for some children.*

*"I'm delighted we were able to bring this to fruition, and it's great that we'll have contributed to the education of these vulnerable children."*

GE



# The importance of checking

Our **Corporate Warning Marker Register (CWMR)** is in place to help ensure your safety while at work.

It is a centralised database containing names and/or addresses of individuals living in Solihull who could pose a threat to Council staff due to physical and/or verbal abuse. It also holds a record of dangerous animals at those addresses.

The importance of checking the system before visiting individuals and recording warnings that you've become aware of cannot be underestimated.

Rodo Elmi, social worker in the community & older people's team in Adult Social Care, explains:

*"We were working with an individual (TF) who is a carer for their spouse. It was identified from a multi-agency risk assessment conference that TF had a history of physical violence and alcohol addiction.*

*"As such, we requested that a warning marker was put in place and approved under the category physical assault.*



Rodo Elmi

*"An extra note was also placed on the system to explain that visits must always be carried out in pairs, so it's important that colleagues check the system to be aware of this. We also notified the care agency providing care to TF's spouse to ensure they were aware of the marker and sufficient controls were put in place in their organisation to minimise any risk to their staff."*

This example shows the importance of making sure warnings (meeting the criteria) are logged on the corporate system, so that colleagues' lives aren't put in danger.

Videos are available on the **intranet** to explain how to use the CWMR. You can also read the **policy** and **guidance notes**.

LB

## Beate gets her OBE

Congratulations to our Director of Children's Services, Beate Wagner, for receiving her OBE at Buckingham Palace on 28 November.

Beate attended the service with her family (pictured) and was presented with the prestigious accolade by The Princess Royal for her services to children and education.

Well done!



LB

# HAF Christmas hampers

1,000 Christmas hampers are being handed out across the borough, to families eligible for benefits related free school meals.

The food and activity hampers will include ingredients for breakfast, lunch and dinner covering two days – a welcome boost, helping families during an expensive time of year.

Complementing the existing Christmas HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme, the hampers are being provided for the third consecutive year.

In terms of activities, the HAF programme offers eligible children a wide range of fun and innovative sessions, whilst combined children's and parent/ carer activities are also available.

During the Christmas school holidays, up to four activity sessions per child can be booked, at one or more providers.

These range from multi-sports and robotics to indoor tennis, swimming and ice skating.



Tom Eley and Elvira Wilson from the HAF team

Are you a children's professional from this **list of roles** and know a child who you think would benefit from access to free HAF activities?

If so, you can make a child referral (for a non-FSM child) for a HAF place using the same link.

RS

## Lunch & Learn

### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy

The next Lunch & Learn session will focus on our new EDI strategy and will take place on Wednesday 29 January from 12-1pm. The EDI strategy sets out the Council's commitments and plans to improve the quality of life and life chances for everyone who lives, works, studies in or visits the borough.

EDI is everyone's business. Gain an insight and practical knowledge on how this strategy is being applied across the Council and how it relates to your daily work.

The session will take place online via Microsoft Teams.

[Register your place now](#)

You can find information about our Lunch & Learn series and previous recordings **on the intranet.**

CC





Some of the evening's award winners at the event

# SEND Awards success!

On Tuesday 3 December, the SEND strategy team ran an awards evening in partnership with Solihull Parent Carer Voice.

The events celebrated the achievements of our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), along with school staff and community SEND champions. Some of the children and young people also performed in a choir supported by Solihull Music, providing the entertainment on the night.

Bridget Morris, SEND 0-25 operations manager, said:

*"The Civic Suite was a happy place to be that evening, but that doesn't mean we didn't need to reach for the tissues on a few occasions!"*

*"One young boy said that he'd always hoped something good would happen to him – and his award and the evening were just that."*

*"The performances by the choir made the whole event really uplifting, and I particularly want to thank Jamie Rynberk, who did a fantastic job in his role as Roast Master!"*

*"The awards, along with our upcoming mental health event in January and forums we held earlier this year, have really helped us to connect with the children and young people we serve and put their voices at the centre of what we do."*

GE

## Know how to report ASB

Are you based in or around Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre? Have you witnessed any anti-social behaviour?

The community safety team are working to combat anti-social behaviour local to Chelmsley

Wood Shopping Centre and would like you to report any incidents you have witnessed.

Reporting is simple, and you can quickly make a report via the Council's **anti-social behaviour webpage** or on the hotline on 0121 717 1500.

Your reports are important and will help to identify and reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour in the future.

DC



Michelle, Fiona, Corey, David and Joe from the team at Chelmsley Wood Library

# Take part in inclusive employment

Every Friday morning, Corey welcomes residents to the Chelmsley Wood Library with a bright smile.

He joined the team in June 2023, thanks to the Supported Employment scheme which aims to help adults with learning disabilities into paid work.

Corey had always wanted to find a job after college. He was thrilled when he secured this role and shared:

*"I told my friends and family. I had been here before so I felt at ease. My team welcomed me. The wages help me pay for hobbies like football."*

Corey's mum, Tracey, added:

*"He's even got himself a telly to watch Ant & Dec! Social life is important for him, so this job is great. He's valued in the community and I'm so proud of him."*

Corey's supervisor is Michelle Jones, Chelmsley Wood Library manager. She said:

*"Corey has always been a great help in the library. It's great to see his confidence grows as he develops new skills. He's our superstar!"*

*"I believe that any learning disability comes with a special strength. For Corey, he is really good at picking up on people's feelings."*

*"If someone's having a bad day, he never hesitates to show his care. That warms my heart every time."*

When asked what she can share with other teams, she said:

*"Just go for it! You've got everything to gain and nothing to lose. We didn't create a new role for Corey. We just found tasks that he would be able to do and enjoy such as book processing. Support for inclusive employment is always available."*

To learn more about the scheme and support workplace inclusion, **please refer to this page** or contact **Annice Larsen**, supported employment adviser.

JT

## Household Support Fund

We **recently announced** details of the latest round of funding through the Household Support Fund.

The fund provides help to those most at need with support ranging from assistance with energy bills, energy efficiency advice, access to food, and wider essentials.

If you are a resident in Solihull, know of family or friends who could access this support, or if it is relevant within your service area, please visit the Council's **Here2Help** page for details.

# Be part of the change

This week sees the launch of the region's annual Change into Action winter campaign.

The campaign aims to raise awareness about the added health risks for people sleeping rough over winter and also remind local residents about their role in helping homeless people.

Sophie Perrett, who heads up the Council's rough sleeper outreach team, said:

*"Firstly, if you see anyone that you think might be sleeping rough please report it to Streetlink [here](#).*

*"This is a national reporting scheme which works with outreach teams up and down the country ensuring that people are found and given help.*

*"In Solihull they liaise with my rough sleeper outreach team who help connect them to all the necessary support services so that they can move off the streets and into safe accommodation.*

*"The winter campaign also promotes Change into Action as a safe and reliable option for donating money across the region to help people at risk of rough sleeping.*

*"Generous public donations to Change into Action help to provide much needed additional support and protection across the region.*



Sophie (second from right) and the rough sleeper outreach team

*"In Solihull the campaign has raised just shy of £70,000 to date and works alongside residents, partners, local businesses and my team to support our most vulnerable."*

If you're inspired to find out more you can watch last month's **Lunch and Learn on rough sleeping** or visit **Solihull Change into Action**.

DH

## Have your say

Have you or a family member used our community advice hubs at the Core or Chelmsley Wood library? They provide information and advice on topics including care options, accessing benefits and grants, housing issues and energy efficiency.

We want to hear people's views and experiences of using the hubs, as well as ideas about the service in the future.

**Take this short survey or read more on the Council website.** Survey closes on 18 December.

CS



# Spreading Christmas cheer

A huge thank you to everyone who kindly donated to our Christmas appeal. Colleagues in Children's Services have been inundated with presents to give to those on a children in need plan, child protection plan and our care experienced young people, and they have been busy sorting them ready to be distributed by social care staff in the run-up to Christmas.

Teams in Economy & Infrastructure chose to dedicate their secret Santa gift exchange to children instead of themselves.

We also received van loads (literally!) of donations from local businesses, elected members and a football club, in their role as community parents.

Everyone's generosity is really appreciated, and we know that it will bring a smile to the faces of some of our most vulnerable children at this special time of year.

LB



Colleagues from Economy & Infrastructure with their Secret Santa gifts

# Fostering Christmas party

Fun, food, face painting, Father Christmas making an appearance and a present for every foster child, ensured the annual fostering Christmas party was a memorable event for all families attending.

More than 100 Solihull foster children, their foster families and members of the fostering team, enjoyed the celebration, held at the Civic Suite on 6 December.

It was a great way to round off the year, with the opportunity for families to catch up with each other, and in some cases meet for the very first time.

Beth Corrigan, fostering team manager, said:

*"Every year the Christmas party puts a real smile on the faces of our children and this time was no different."*

*Witnessing such a wide age range of children, both fostered and the birth children of our carers, coming together to enjoy a fun, festive evening, was really pleasing to see."*

Could you foster a Solihull child?

As a fostering friendly employer, Council staff receive benefits including up to five days' additional leave for assessments, training and child review meetings.

**Find out about fostering.**



Children meet Santa at the party

RS



# Out-reach for the stars!

Looking back at 2024, we've taken a peek behind the curtain of all four Solihull Family Hubs – Elmwood, Evergreen, Hatchford Brook, and Riverside – to highlight the wonderful work of staff behind the scenes.

Next up is Shirley Heath Junior School! This is where the first Family Hubs outreach centre will be bringing support services closer to residents situated in Shirley and surrounding areas.

So, what's the difference between the outreach centre and the main Hubs?

Whilst the four Hubs are operated by full-time Council staff, the centre is run entirely by trusted partners leading the various activity and support sessions there.

In essence, the centre provides another destination for Family Hub partners to run their sessions from.

**Kara Evans, the headteacher at Shirley Heath Junior School, explains how the centre is a natural fit:**

*"Hosting the outreach centre here at Shirley Heath is a no-brainer for us because we have that existing connection with our pupils and their families."*

*"Our staff understand the importance of early help and how crucial it is for children to start their lives on the right foot."*

*"Whether they're already connected with the school or part of the wider community, we want to do everything we can to help people by facilitating that support."*

**Sarah Cole, the business manager at Shirley Heath Junior School, explores the next steps:**

*"The need for family support is there, now it's all about welcoming people in and doing the best we can to help the children and families in the heart of our local community."*



*Kara and Sarah in the outreach centre*

*"It's about extending our existing trust and confidence with parents into the wider community, and we want people to know that it's not the school's centre, it's Shirley's centre."*

*"We'd like to encourage everyone to help us spread the word – staff, parents, and the wider community*

*– so that people know this wonderful resource is available and ready to help people in Shirley and the rest of Solihull."*

If you or someone you know could benefit from Family Hubs activities or support, please refer them **here** to find out more.

JG





*Helen (centre) joined by other members of the project team from SCH*

# Setting the standard for energy

The first set of residents in Kingshurst have picked up the keys to their sustainable new homes in time for Christmas.

Managed by our social housing provider, Solihull Community Housing (SCH), this smart new development has been built with sustainability at the forefront.

Huge care has been taken to maximise energy efficiency providing residents with warmer homes and lower running costs.

As well as focusing on thermal efficiency in the build, each property has been equipped with a range of low carbon and renewable technologies to help generate heat and power.

In the place of traditional gas boilers, air source heat pumps have been installed.

This low-carbon heating alternative takes warmth from the air outside and uses it to supply heating and hot water, even when temperatures get as low as -15C.

Each home has also been fitted with integrated solar PV panels to provide additional power and an EV charging point.

The 25 newly built homes on the site of the former Mountfort pub form part of the wider regeneration scheme that we are delivering, with our partners, to completely transform **Kingshurst Village Centre**.

**Helen Bielby, UKC senior project manager, said:**

*"Handing over the first sets of keys represents a really important milestone for us.*

*"We still have lots to do in Kingshurst but it marks a significant initial contribution to the 78 new homes envisioned in our Masterplan and finally brings the long vacant Mountfort site back into use.*

*"Obtaining an A rating on the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for each property was a significant achievement.*

*"I think it's fair to say that these are amongst some of the most energy efficient homes anywhere in the borough."*

Once complete, the final scheme will provide a new mix of sustainable housing and modern retail space, centred around a brand-new community health and wellness hub.

# 16 Days campaign collaboration

Staff shopping on their lunch break recently may have seen some colourful displays in Touchwood and the Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre.

Displays by the **Soroptomists** were just one of many events taking place to promote the 16 Days of activism against gender-based violence campaign across Solihull.

**The 16 Days**, which ran from 25 November to 10 December, is an annual campaign that calls for an end to violence against women and girls (VAWG).

The campaign helps raise awareness of the different forms domestic abuse can take and the **help and support** that is available for those who need it.

Starting with the **Mayor's launch event** on 21 November, the campaign included (deep breath): six Soroptomist displays, stall events in Solihull town centre, Shirley and Chelmsley Wood, "coffee with a copper" drop-in sessions, online workshops and an art display in Touchwood's Starbucks.

The campaign saw Council teams working together with partner organisations including the Soroptomists, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid and West Midlands Police.



Ann (centre) at the launch of the 16 Days campaign

Ann Keepax, Soroptomist, said:

*"It's been really great to team up with the Council for the campaign, to raise awareness of VAWG to as many people as we can."*

*"I know a great deal of work has gone into the campaign, and my heartfelt thanks go out to everyone involved across the Soroptomists, Council and other organisations."*

TH

## Holocaust Memorial Day 2025

A public service will be held at the Civic Suite from 11am on Monday 27 January to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2025.

Every year, this day of remembrance brings people together to reflect on the Holocaust and more recent genocides, honouring those who lost their lives and those who have had their lives changed

beyond recognition by genocide. The upcoming HMD will mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest concentration camp, and the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia.

2025's theme, 'For a Better Future', explores **what we can do** to create a brighter and more united future by educating others about the Holocaust and more

recent genocides, challenging prejudices and speaking up against Holocaust and genocide denial and distortion.

Staff are welcome to attend the service in person – the event will also be live-streamed on the Council's webcasting service.

For enquiries about the service please contact [comms@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:comms@solihull.gov.uk)

SA

# Make your nominations now!

We are delighted to announce the nominations are now open for the 2025 Employee Awards!

In order to make a nomination, and vote once the finalists are announced in February, you will need to have an account on our engagement platform, **Your Voice Solihull**.

Many of you will have registered over the last couple of years, so please visit the **2025 Employee Awards page**, where you will be prompted to log in. You'll then be able to read all the information about the 2025 Employee Awards, what we're looking for under each category and make your nominations via a nomination form. You might need to reset your password if you've forgotten it!

For those of you that have not used the system before, you should have received an email from 'Your Voice Solihull' entitled 'Complete your registration'. This contained instructions and a link to follow. Once you have created a password your registration will be complete. You will then be able to access the **Employee Awards page** and the nomination form.

Nominations will close at 4pm on Friday 17 January.

Should anyone in your teams have any issues making their nominations, please get in touch with the communications team at **comms@solihull.gov.uk**

LM

## Our Solihull is produced by the communications team

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