

FamilyMatters

The newsletter for parents, families and practitioners

Welcome to Family Matters, the Family Information Service (FIS) newsletter for Warwickshire parents and carers of 0-20 year olds. Each issue we try to offer helpful advice to families and make it easier for them to find out more about services and support available locally.

With Christmas around the corner and some wintry weather on its way, this issue gives advice on keeping warm and well, and maximising your money. Stretching the theme a little we've also included articles about school closures, free school meals and consumer rights - most important at this time of year with all the present buying. If you want to save some extra pennies, try making some homemade gifts and treats; we were impressed with **www.netmums.com** who have some tasty recipes and creative ideas to keep the family busy.

We hope that you enjoy this edition. If you would like to comment on anything that you have read, make suggestions for future articles or need further information from the FIS please get in touch. Call **0845 090 8044**, email **fis@warwickshire.gov.uk**, or find us online at **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis**.

Many Happy 'Returns'?

There are few things more disappointing to a child than to open a present on Christmas Day, only to find that it is damaged or doesn't work! But if this happens to your child, what can you do?

Be prepared -if you are buying toys, keep the receipts. A receipt is your proof of purchase if something goes wrong. Check the toy before you wrap it and, if it is faulty, take it back to the shop for a refund or replacement.

If you need to return faulty or mis-described toys after Christmas, remember, it is the retailer's responsibility to put things right. Don't be fobbed off with claims that you need to contact the manufacturer! For items that were damaged, mis-described or not fit for purpose, you should be able to get a full refund from the store or, if you wish, a replacement item. Don't accept a credit

note or be put off by notices such as 'no cash refunds'.

You don't, however, have a legal right to return goods simply because you did not like them. However, many shops will do so as a good will gesture. To make a consumer complaint phone: **08454 040506** or visit **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards**



21st century social club

The widespread use of social media has prompted Warwickshire County Council to remind young people and parents about keeping safe when updating Facebook or posting on Twitter.

Cllr Heather Timms, Warwickshire County Council's Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families, said: "Social media is the fastest-growing phenomenon on the internet. It provides a brilliant way to stay in touch with friends and share photographs, comments, or even play online applications but, if used carelessly, can expose you and your children to identity theft and online predators.

"I'm not intending to scaremonger, but parents and young people need to be aware of the risks, and there are a few simple things you can do to make the whole process safer."



Simple social media rules:

- Pay attention to age restrictions – for example Facebook and Bebo are only for people aged 13 years and older.
- Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Bebo, have a range of privacy settings. These are often setup by default to 'expose' your details to anyone. When 'open' anyone could find you through a search of the networking site or even through a search engine, such as Google. So it is important to change your settings to 'Friends only' so that your details and profile content can only be seen by your invited and accepted friends and don't forget to remove yourself from search engine results.
- Have a neutral picture of yourself as your profile image. Don't post embarrassing material.
- You do not need to accept friendship requests. Reject or ignore unless you know the person or want to accept them. Be prepared that you may receive friendship requests or suggestions from people you do not know. It is not a competition to have as many friends as possible.
- Remember you can delete unwanted 'friends' from your social networking sites. On some you can also 'Block' them as well so they can't request your friendship again.
- Exercise caution! For example in Facebook if you write on a friend's wall all their friends can see your comment – even if they are not your friend.
- If you or a friend are 'tagged' in an online photo album the whole photo album may be visible to their friends, your friends and anyone else tagged in the same album.
- You do not have to be friends with someone to be tagged in their photo album. If you are tagged in a photo you can remove the tag, but not the photo.
- Your friends may take and post photos you are not happy about. You need to speak to them first, rather than contacting a web site. If you are over 18 the web site will only look into issues that contravene their terms and conditions.

The most important safety message of all about any contact through social media or the internet is to 'Never go alone to meet someone you have met online' and to 'Never reveal any personal contact details'.

Young people and parents are advised to visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk to find out the latest information on sites to visit, mobiles and new technologies.

'Surfing Safely', is a Family Information Service guide to help you protect your family online.

To request a copy call **0845 090 8044** or go to www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis



The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) is a government backed agency dedicated to keeping children safe on the internet. To find out more, visit: www.ceop.gov.uk

CEOP's Top Tips for Staying Safe Online are:

- Remember, everyone you meet online is a stranger, even though they might seem like a friend.
- Always use a nickname when you log on and never give out any details that would allow someone you meet online to contact you. That means your full name, home or school address, telephone number, personal e-mail or mobile number.
- If you publish a picture of yourself online, remember anyone can change it or share it, or use it to try and contact you.
- Never arrange to meet up alone with someone you make friends with online, but if you are going to anyway, take an adult you trust and meet in a public place.
- Accepting e-mails or opening files from people you don't really know, can get you into trouble - they may contain viruses, nasty messages or annoying links to stuff you don't want to see.
- Talk to an adult you know well and ask for help if you're worried or upset about anything you've sent or been sent online.



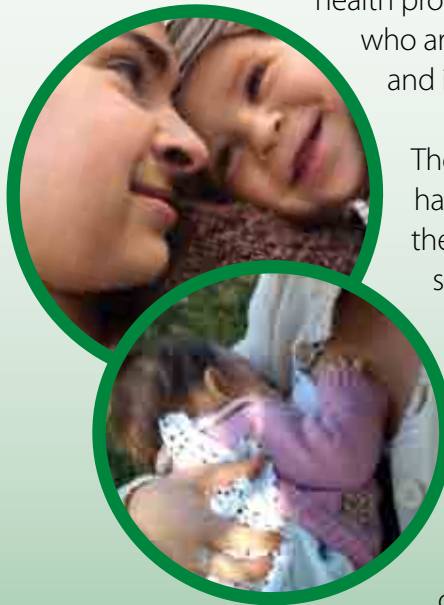
Have your say on maternity services

There are big changes ahead for maternity services in Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire.

Proposed changes are due to go out for public consultation in early December 2011 and it is really important that members of the local community take this opportunity to make their voices heard.

The Maternity Services Liaison committee, commonly known as the MSLC, is looking for people who are interested joining a group committed to developing the best maternity services possible for local families. If you or your partner is pregnant, if you have a baby, or are planning to have a baby in the near future, you're just the sort of person who could help the group.

The group consists of people who have recently used the service, and health professionals, such as midwives and doctors, who are employed to provide maternity care and it is looking to expand its membership.



The aim of the MSLC is to give people who have used maternity services a voice and the opportunity to change and improve the service and the quality of care delivered to women and their families.

The group meets at least 4 times a year to discuss relevant issues and review the comments of recent users. The committee will be a vital part of planning and assessing any upcoming changes to our local maternity services.

This MSLC is also developing a directory of 'baby friendly' public places where mother's are welcome to breastfeed their baby, and also places which have baby changing facilities and are accessible with a pushchair.

For more information on joining the MSLC please e-mail geh-tr.MSLC@nhs.net or ask your community midwife to pass on your details.

School closure information just a **CLICK** away

With a cold snap lurking around the corner Warwickshire County Council is reminding families how they can find out about emergency school closures.

There are a number of ways for parents to find out if their child's school will be closed. They can check the school status online, sign up for the council's text and email alerts, tune in to the local radio station or even follow tweets from **@wccschoolclosed** (become a follower online at **twitter.com/wccschoolclosed**).

The website, **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/schoolclosures**, and Twitter feed both provide an invaluable service if schools are forced to close due to severe weather conditions or through other emergency circumstances.

In addition to the information online, Warwickshire's free school closure text message service has proved popular with parents in previous years.



The service automatically issues a text message to all users of the service when schools have had to close. It takes just a couple of minutes to sign up at the website and up to three schools can be selected by each user.

Last year almost 3,000 people signed up for email and text message notification and approximately 18,000 text message notifications were sent out during the winter period. During the heavy snow fall in December 2010, the website closure pages received over 76,000 visits in just one day.

Subscription to the service expires at the end of the summer term each year, so parents and carers need to sign up at the start of each academic year to continue receiving updates.

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/schoolclosures

Hitting all the right notes

From music theatre to windbands, rock bands to recorders the County Music Service offers an amazing range of activities for all the family, including a music group for toddlers and parents called Together in Time, music tuition for school aged pupils and adult orchestras.

Whatever your ability or reason for picking up an instrument there are lots of opportunities for participation and performance both locally and nationally in all kinds of venues. The service has celebrated a number of recent successes, for

example the Warwickshire Boys' Choir were in the final for BBC Choir of the Year 2010 and the Youth Orchestra recently performed at the Royal Albert Hall.



New members are always welcome. Find out more about getting involved at the website **www.musicforlife.net** or call **01926 742630** for activities near you.

There is such thing as a free lunch

(and not enough people are claiming one)

Warwickshire County Council is encouraging more people to check if their children are eligible for free school meals (FSM) and is working on a project to improve the educational attainment of those eligible pupils.

Data gathered in the county shows that children and young people who qualify for a FSM do not do as well academically as classmates who are not eligible. This trend is evident at each educational key stage.

To address this imbalance, the government allocates extra funding to schools to invest in improving outcomes. The amount schools receive is based on the number of FSM pupils in the school but if not enough pupils are claiming schools are missing out on essential support families and money for schools.

A recent survey highlighted over 2000 families across Warwickshire that are potentially eligible to claim FSM, but are not. Compared against the 8000 pupils who are currently receiving a FSM, there is a 25 per cent shortfall in funding.

In Warwickshire, the county council's Learning Improvement Team is managing a project to increase take up of FSM and narrow the attainment gap, focusing on what is happening in schools and classrooms.

The project will focus efforts on encouraging all families to claim if they are eligible and also to address the barriers and challenges that may discourage families from claiming. Some schools have excellent results for their FSM pupils so the team will be doing

more to get these establishments to share best practice in classroom work and whole school approaches.

The project has drawn support from the county's Financial Inclusion Partnership. The partnership is a group of local agencies working together across the county to improve family finances, help individuals beat debt, and raise awareness of advice and support available to them. Frontline workers from agencies involved will be supporting the project by encouraging take up of FSM amongst the families they are in touch with.



If you have any suggestions about how to expand the project or would like more information please contact Debbie Hibberd debbiehibberd@warwickshire.gov.uk

Free school meals are available to children up to 19 years of age who attend Warwickshire County Council maintained schools and maintained nursery schools on a full-time basis if their parents/carers are in receipt of a qualifying benefit. To find out if your child is eligible call **01926 742060** or visit www.warwickshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals

Keep warm, keep well

This winter, local partners including NHS Warwickshire, Warwickshire County and all District Councils, Act on Energy, voluntary organisations and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service are once again joining together to establish a Warm and Well campaign to support residents through the cold season.

As part of Warwickshire's Warm and Well campaign, a free phonenumber – 0800 988 2881 – provided by Act on Energy, will be open Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm to offer information on reducing fuel bills, affordable warmth, what to do if heating systems break down and debt advice.



John Linnane, Director of Public Health at NHS Warwickshire and Warwickshire County Council, said:

"As the winter approaches and the temperature drops, we need to make sure that people – particularly the vulnerable and elderly – are prepared for the cold.

Around 273 people in Warwickshire die each winter as a direct result of not keeping warm

during cold weather. Staying warm can save lives.

There are simple things people can do to help themselves keep warm. Keep internal doors closed to trap heat in each room. Have at least one hot meal a day and wear layers of clothing. People should also contact their energy supplier to find out about any social schemes they may be offering to help financially.

It's also very important for people to check on elderly or vulnerable relatives or neighbours over the winter to see that their homes are warm enough, they are wearing appropriately warm clothing and that they are getting a hot meal."



Cllr Claire Watson, Chair of Warwickshire's Affordable Warmth Working Group, said:

"Last year was a terribly cold winter with temperatures plummeting and staying low for unusually long periods and we have to be ready for similarly harsh conditions. Clearly this has health implications so we want people to know that help is at hand this winter to stay warm."

Visit www.warwickshire.gov.uk/keepwarm for further information on the campaign.

How to keep the cost of keeping warm down

Energy bills are on the rise again and will leave more families struggling to make payments. There are various schemes which will offer help to pay bills, meet arrears, insulate homes and make homes and heating appliances more energy-efficient.

Here are a selection of schemes that will help you to keep costs down.

Home Energy Saving programme

This provides assistance to low-income households in making their homes more energy-efficient. All low-income households are entitled to free loft and cavity insulation; for everyone else it is half-price.

The government estimates that six million households will be able to benefit by the end of this year and aims to insulate every home in Britain by 2020.

Community Energy Saving programme

This service, provided by local councils, voluntary organisations and energy companies is, like the Home Energy Saving programme, funded by energy firms.

To see how either of these two schemes might benefit you, call the government help line number on 0800 512 012 for details.

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The Home Heat Helpline

This helpline (0800 33 66 99) advises British energy customers worried about paying their fuel bill and keeping warm during the winter.

It advises low-income households in urgent need of heating help and advice. It is free to call from 9am-8pm Mon-Fri and 10am-2pm on Saturday.

Advisors give quick information on grants, benefits and payment schemes as well as basic tips on steps to take to keep energy bills down.

The advisor will ask a few questions to identify which specialist to put you through to.

Cold Weather Payment

When the average temperature is recorded as 0°C (32°F) over seven consecutive days you are entitled to a payment of £25 for each seven day period between 1 November and 31 March. The payment is made automatically if you receive:

- Income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance and there is a child under the age of five in the family
- A disability premium or severe disability premium
- A disabled child premium or a child tax credit that includes an individual element for a child or qualifying young person who is disabled or severely disabled.

Warm Front England

This grant scheme provides heating and insulation in privately owned or rented homes.

Depending on the needs of the applicant, it will pay for things such as loft insulation, draughtproofing, gas room heaters with thermostat controls, gas, electric or oil central heating.

Energy advice and two low energy light bulb are also available and if you get one or more of the following benefits, you may receive a grant.

- Working tax credit with a disability element, or child tax credit, and an income below £15,460.
- Attendance allowance.
- Disability living allowance.
- Income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit with a disability premium.
- War disablement pension or industrial injuries disablement benefit.
- If you have a child under 16 years old, or are pregnant, and get income support, jobseeker's allowance, council tax or housing benefit.

Grants range up to £2,700 or £4,000 if your home needs oil central heating. Call 0800 316 2805 for details.



STR8 TALKING

Christmas is known as 'the most wonderful time of the year' for families. But the expense can be a terrible source of pressure for families. Presents, food and drink, entertainment – everything has to be paid for and every year, more and more people are going into debt as they try to make Christmas a time to remember. These eight suggestions from the Citizens Advice Bureau will help prevent your Christmas being a time you only want to forget.

- 1 Prioritise** – remember that bills, rent, mortgages all have to be paid and consequences can be severe if they aren't. It might be Christmas but the everyday expenses have to be met too.
 - 2 Don't bank on an overdraft** – If you do need more money, talk to your bank before running up an overdraft. In fact ...
 - 3 Pay up front** - If you can afford to buy goods outright by cash or debit card, do so. Don't use extended credit agreements unless they do work out cheaper.
 - 4 Shop around** – Try different places to find the best price and buy what you want not what people say you need.
 - 5 Are warranties warranted?** – Be wary of extended warranties. They may be dearer than the cost of a repair.
 - 6 Buy safe** – don't be tempted to buy from unauthorised traders or borrow from unauthorised lenders. The initial convenience may be a false economy.
 - 7 Read the small print** – check hidden extras in any credit arrangement. Interest-free credit can seem a good idea but can be costly if you miss a payment.
 - 8 Do your own credit checks** – check charges, interest rates and the pros and cons of deals. Budget for repayments and put payment dates in diaries before you incur additional charges.
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FamilyMatters

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue.
The next issue of Family Matters is due out in March 2012.

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