

23 September 2019

Dear Householder,

We need your help to solve a key issue facing Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres. We are looking for 50 residents to come together for two weekends to make recommendations to Dudley Council on the important question:

What can communities and the Council do together to make Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres places that are vibrant, welcoming, and somewhere we are proud of?

We are inviting everyone who lives at this address to register their interest in attending a People's Panel in Brierley Hill and Dudley, to be held **over two weekends: 2 / 3 November in Brierley Hill and 30 November / 1 December in Dudley**. Participants would attend both weekends. If you are selected to take part we will provide your food, cover your transport costs, and give you **£300** to thank you for your time.

The People's Panel will bring together people from all walks of life to hear evidence, discuss together, and recommend ways forward on this important issue. You don't need any prior knowledge to take part. There are no easy answers and this is an opportunity to tell us what you think needs to be done. All we require from you is that you give your time to listen to the information available and share your opinions with us and your fellow residents.

Every person 16 years old and over, who lives at this address, can register their interest by visiting www.sortitionfoundation.org/rsvp or by calling Freephone **0800 009 6486** (9am-5.30pm, Monday-Saturday). The deadline to register is **Monday 7th October**.

We will randomly select 50 participants from responses to this letter, while ensuring that the people selected broadly represent the whole population. More details about the event are available overleaf.

We thank you for your interest and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,



Kevin O'Keefe
Chief Executive



Cllr. Patrick Harley
Leader of the Council



Cllr. Qadar Zada
Opposition Group Leader

Frequently Asked Questions: Dudley People's Panel on Improving Our Town Centres

What is a People's Panel?

A People's Panel is a Citizens' Assembly, which is an innovative democratic tool used all over the world. It brings together a randomly selected group of people who broadly represent the wider population of the borough. The people who attend learn about important issues, discuss them with one another, and then make recommendations about what should happen and how things should change.

Why are you running the Dudley People's Panel?

We want to give members of the public more say over decisions that affect them and their communities. Councillors who make decisions will benefit from the knowledge and ideas that local people can give.

What will happen after the event?

The recommendations that the People's Panel comes up with will be presented to Dudley Council in December 2019. A report on 'the future of town centres' will also go to Dudley Council's Place Scrutiny Committee in January 2020. Councillors will then use these recommendations to help them decide what to do in the short, medium and long-term to make Dudley's town centres vibrant and welcoming.

Are you only considering Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres?

As part of the Dudley Forging a Future for all vision we want to create vibrant towns and neighbourhoods across the borough by 2030. The People's Panel will allow us to capture local people's thoughts and ideas on the future of the borough's town centres. This will be most effective if the Panel can focus on a small area, to allow them to consider evidence in depth.

Current regeneration projects in Dudley and Brierley Hill have the potential to significantly change how these town centres are used in the next five years, so it is important to have public input here. However, as part of the process, ideas from other town centres will be shared with the People's Panel. All lessons learnt from the People's Panels can then be considered for our other towns in the borough.

What will taking part involve?

If you are selected to take part you will have the opportunity to meet with individuals from all walks of life who live in Dudley borough. You will hear from expert speakers, and you will discuss the issues involved in small groups with support from facilitators to make sure everyone has their voice heard. You do not need to have any prior knowledge of the topics – all the information you need will be provided during the two weekends.

Who is funding the event, and who is running it?

Dudley Council have been awarded funding and support from the UK Government's Innovation in Democracy Programme¹ to hold this People's Panel. The programme is supported and run by the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Two independent organisations are delivering the event:

- The **Sortition Foundation** promotes the use of randomly selected groups of people in decision-making. The Sortition Foundation is responsible for recruiting a diverse and broadly representative group of people to take part in this event.
www.sortitionfoundation.org
- The **Democratic Society** ('Demsoc') is a UK-wide not-for-profit organisation that promotes participation and dialogue in democracy. Demsoc will run the Citizens' Assembly - facilitating the process by which the members learn, discuss, and come to recommendations about the topic. They will also write a report on the outcomes.
www.demsoc.org

How will you ensure that the event is accessible?

If you are selected to take part, all reasonable transport costs will be reimbursed, and lunches and refreshments during the Panel will be provided. You will also receive **£300** to thank you for your time.

We will ensure that the venue is fully accessible, and if you require BSL interpretation, hearing loops, or any form of additional support such as childcare or other caring duties, then every attempt will be made to provide this. If you are selected to participate we will call you and you can let us know about your specific requirements.

Will the £300 affect my benefits?

If you are receiving state benefits we strongly encourage you to get advice from a trusted source of welfare benefits advice before you agree to receive money for your involvement in the People's Panel. We are happy to explore other options with you, such as providing gift vouchers – for example for your preferred supermarket. But even in this case your benefits may still be affected. You are also welcome to attend the Panel without accepting the gift if you wish to do so. We can cover your food, drink, and travel expenses without it affecting your benefits.

How do I get to the event?

All reasonable travel expenses to get to the event will be refunded, such as standard class bus fares or car mileage (at 25p per mile) and parking costs. You will need to make your own travel arrangements.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovation-in-democracy-programme-launch>

We will give you information on how to claim your travel and other expenses if you are selected to take part. You will also be able to let us know if you have any specific transport needs.

If you have any concerns about having the money to pay for expenses up front please speak to us about this.

Who can apply?

Everyone, 16 years old and over, living in a household that has received this invitation, can register their interest in attending, with a few exceptions set out below. Please note that a maximum of one adult from any single household will be selected to participate.

The following people cannot apply: Elected representatives from any level of government, local authority staff working in planning, paid employees of any political party, or staff or board members of organisations actively campaigning on planning issues.

How was I selected to receive this invitation?

Your household was one of 10,000 addresses across Dudley borough that was randomly selected by the Sortition Foundation from Royal Mail's address database.

After I register my interest, what happens next?

Once registration has closed, the Sortition Foundation will select 50 people at random, from those who registered their interest, to take part in the event. This random selection will be weighted to make sure that there are people from all walks of life represented in the group.

If you are selected, we will contact you by phone and email on or around **Tuesday 8th October** to let you know. We will then arrange a call with you to explain transport arrangements, discuss any requirements you may have to help you attend, and explain what happens next.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like to talk to someone about the People's Panel before registering, please call the Freephone number below. Alternatively, information about the Panel is available at <http://www.dudley.gov.uk/peoples-panel>

To register your interest visit:
www.sortitionfoundation.org/rsvp
or call Freephone 0800 009 6486
(9am-5.30pm, Monday-Saturday)
before Monday 7th October