

MESSAGE FROM REBECCA RANCE, INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Welcome to the second edition of 'Epic News'!

The staff at EPIC are continuing to work hard to deliver your services on a daily basis. We are planning how we can improve the services we provide and invest in your homes to keep them safe and up to standard.

The Board is looking closely at our governance and making sure actions are taken to improve what we do. The Chair of the Board and myself meet regularly with the Regulator to make sure we are on track with our action plan.

We want to improve how you can influence and shape services. We want to know when we are doing well and when we need to improve. Your voice is extremely important to us and details of how you can feedback to us are within this bulletin, along with how you can join our Virtual Engagement Panel which will be launching soon.

Becky

Health and Safety Compliance

The first phase of the fire safety works which involved the installation of alarms to a specific number of blocks of flats is now complete and the interim fire safety works have commenced. Further works will then be planned to install fire door and windows where necessary and undertake loft compartmentation works. We are in direct contact with the tenants affected by these works and they are being fully up to date as the programme of works progresses.

Please be assured that your safety is at the heart of our business. All the necessary Fire Risk Assessments have been completed for the homes we own and manage. We aim to achieve 100% performance in relation to gas safety checks. Please help us achieve this by contacting our gas service contractor, Brenden Fern Ltd. as soon as you are notified your gas service is due. **This is essential to ensure the safety of you, your family and those who live in neighbouring properties.**



REGULATORY UPDATE

Governance

The EPIC Board and the Interim Executive Management Team are working closely with the Regulator for Social Housing to ensure that the issues they highlighted with our governance arrangements are resolved to meet all regulatory requirements.

YOUR RENT INCREASE

You will shortly be receiving a letter outlining the details of the annual rent increase. The way we increase your rent is contained within government guidance and is based on the September Consumer Price Index plus 1% each year. This means your rent will increase by 4.1%.

Your rent includes:

- A charge to cover the cost of managing and maintaining your home.
- Service charges (where applicable) for any communal facilities or services.
- Buildings insurance, to cover the structure, fixtures and fittings of your home.

Your rent does not include:

- Insurance for the contents of your home and your personal belongings – this is your responsibility
- Utilities such as water, gas and electricity
- Council tax

If you're struggling to pay your rent, please contact us straight away as we want to help. We can offer you support to manage your finances and with welfare benefits or we may refer you to support agencies. We can also agree a payment plan with you to help you pay your rent and stop you building up arrears. Admitting you are struggling and getting help is an important first step towards resolving any debt problems.



The following organisations offer **FREE** advice:

Citizen's Advice:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/> **Debt helpline:** 0800 240 4420

Step Change:

<https://www.stepchange.org/> **Call:** 0800 138 1111

National Debt Line:

<https://www.nationaldebtline.org/> **Call:** 0808 808 4000

You may also be aware that the **cost of living is increasing**. In February, Ofgem announced the energy price cap will rise by £693 from April.

Why has it increased? The wholesale price of gas in January 2022 was almost four times higher than in early 2021, with large rises since summer 2021. Limited stocks of natural gas and supply constraints have also driven prices higher.

The impact: The increase will cause bills for the average customer to rise to £1,971, with those on prepaid rising by £708 to £2,107.

If you feel that you are going to be impacted, please do get in touch with us or contact one of the 'free advice' organisations listed above.



HOME STANDARD

This is one of four consumer standards that registered providers of social housing must comply with. It relates to quality of accommodation and repairs & maintenance. Health & safety is a key element of this. We want to ensure that your home is maintained to a decent standard and meets the standards of design and quality that applied when your home was built. EPIC has developed its own 'Your Home Standard' which ensures we meet the regulatory standard set out by the regulator.



REPORTING A REPAIR

You can visit our website and complete an online form: <https://epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/report-a-repair/>

or call **01782 252575**.

Or email: mailbox@epichousing.co.uk

If your repair is an emergency, please call **0800 6940434**.



STAYING SAFE IN YOUR HOME IN THE EVENT OF A FIRE

REMINDER –

Things to do to keep yourself and others safe:

- If you live in a house, **make an escape plan** with your family.
- **Evacuate** your home/building if you hear a **smoke detector or fire alarm**, or if you see smoke or fire.
- If you live in a block of flats, make sure you know where your **nearest exit** is and be clear about your quickest escape route from your home/building.
- Make sure you and your family are familiar with the instructions on the **Fire Action Notice** for your building if you live in a block of flats.
- **Do not take risks** or attempt to fight a fire. Do not return to your home/building for any reason until authorised to do so by the Fire and Rescue Service or an EPIC representative.

FIRE SAFETY ADVICE

- Keep your escape routes clear and do not store belongings, including mobility scooters, in stairwells and corridors. **We have zero tolerance to items left in communal areas.**
- Never leave appliances such as cookers, tumble dryers, heaters or fires switched on when you are either asleep or out of your home.
- Never place flammable items (e.g. clothes, paper) near to or covering storage heaters, stove tops or gas/solid fuel fires.
- Take extra care when you are cooking.

- Never prop open or remove the closing mechanism from the front entrance door to a flat.
- Test the smoke detectors in your home every week.

Please contact us if you have any concerns in relation to fire safety.

MEET EPIC'S BOARD MEMBERS

EPIC's Board is responsible for:

- Setting the strategic direction of Epic Housing and ensuring we meet all the regulatory requirements;
- Setting and agreeing financial plans and monitoring the financial health of the organisation;
- Managing and monitoring risk;
- Taking an overview of operational performance.



Stephen Funnell, Chair of the Board - Stephen has been an elected Councillor for Bentilee and Ubbertley for the last six and a half years. He also chairs the City Council's Housing, Growth and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



Peter Lunio, Vice Chair - Peter is currently joint owner of a advisory consultancy specialising in the social housing sector. He has 15 years' experience in consulting and has also held senior operational roles and several Non-Executive roles; he is Vice-Chair for Citizens Advice Bureau, and



Aman Jhawar - (New Board Member) - Aman has been in the social housing sector of 15 years; and currently works for Orbit Group. The common values shared between EPIC and Orbit persuaded Aman to join EPICs Board and he will offer his best to ensure that tenants are put at the heart of what



Rob Emery - (Board Member – Local Authority Representative) – Worked in social housing for over 40 years – currently the Strategic Manager for Housing Management at the City Council and has held senior management roles at Housing Associations and Councils around the Country.



Rachel Challinor - (New Board Member and Chair of the Boards Recovery Working Group) - Rachel works for Longhurst Group and is responsible for Governance and Compliance. Rachel has worked in the housing sector for 11 years. Rachel lives locally and has a passion for the area and communities.



Andy Milroy – Andy is a retired housing professional, having worked in housing for 35 years. The last 23 years were spent at Stoke Council, where he undertook a variety of operational and strategic roles. Andy has a wide knowledge of housing matters and is committed to ensuring we provide the best quality housing services for tenants.



Dave Newmarch - (New Board Member) – Dave has been leading and delivering housing services and related support for 29 years. He is committed to delivering services which meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. He is currently Corporate Services Director at Framework Housing.



Robert Kent – Robert is retired and for over 35 years worked as a risk manager/internal Auditor for several varied organisations including housing associations. His role has been to review and provide advice and assurance on organisational control arrangements.



Colin Small - (New Board Member) - Finance Director in the housing sector, with over 30 years direct experience, with Company Secretary and Human Resources responsibilities also. Also, a portfolio holder of a number of Board memberships, with three currently. Colin is very much looking forward to helping Epic achieve its goals.

Juliet Powell – Juliet, a Chartered member of IOSH, is our tenant representative and is eager to help put forward the resident's point of view while bringing a strong H&S knowledge base to the Board. She is also a trustee of a local animal rescue charity.

Nicholas Leggett – Nicholas is a Rector of a group of churches near to Banbury he has now been in Holy Orders for 20 years. He has served on several boards over the last 20 years and has also chaired a number of audit, Finance, remuneration and nominations committees. His board work has covered three sectors of Health, Housing and Education. He is also a chaplain for the Army Cadet Force.



PUZZLE CORNER

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

SPRING

ALIVE
CLEAN
RAIN
TIME
TULIP
WARM

Please be assured that we continue to monitor all Government Covid guidance and will let you know of any changes to our service.

Currently on hold:

Reception Service at our Bentilee Office.
Face-to-face customer engagement activities.

Coming soon:

Virtual Engagement Forum.



COVID 19

If a member of our team is due to visit you, or if you have a contractor booked in for a repair, please inform us if you develop any Covid symptoms or have tested positive.

The main symptoms are a **high temperature, a new, continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste.** The NHS website is helpful if you are unsure or need to book a test.

If you are interested in being involved in our **Tenant Virtual Engagement Forum's**, please get in touch: mailbox@epichousing.co.uk / 01782 252575

Your 'voice' is extremely important to us. We would love to hear your views.



HOW ARE WE DOING?



If you are unhappy about the service you have received please let us know and we will do our best to resolve your issue as soon as possible. We value customer feedback (**including complaints**) and use it to drive service improvements.

You can give us feedback on any of our services anytime:

Online (www.epichousing.co.uk)

By phone 01782 252575

Or feel free to drop us a **letter**:

EPIC, 141/141 Ubbberley Road, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 0EF or **email** mailbox@epichousing.co.uk

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE COMMUNICATED WITH?



If you would prefer to receive this newsletter and any other correspondence via a different method, please get in touch – details above.

We hope you enjoyed our second newsletter – If you have any ideas for our next edition or stories to share, please let us know!
