



# Epic News

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*Your Information Newsletter - Issue 3 – April 2022*

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## Welcome to the April edition of Epic News

### **Your landlord – delivering your services**

The EPIC Board has recently undertaken a fundamental strategic review to decide what is most important as your landlord.

This has set a clear priority:

#### **To be a Good Landlord**

This will be EPIC`s Vision.

To support this vision the Board has agreed 4 important areas we will of focus on as your landlord called strategic objectives, these area:

- Services
- Asset Management
- People (our tenants and our staff)
- Governance

This means going forward there will be:

- More investment in your homes
- Stronger customer focused service delivery
- Meaningful involvement of you our tenants in the way we deliver services
- Greater investment in our staff
- Better use of technology to improve service delivery.

A new Corporate Plan has been agreed by the board in order to ensure we deliver on the Vision and Objectives outlined above.

To make this happen the Board has agreed a budget and a long-term financial business plan that confirms EPIC is financially viable and will continue as your landlord.

*Becky Rance*  
*Interim Chief Executive*



## REGULATORY UPDATE

### **Governance**

The EPIC Board and the Interim Executive Management Team are continuing to work 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.

### **Health and Safety Compliance**

Please be assured that your safety remains at the heart of our business and with your support in relation to access to your homes we aim to achieve 100% in gas safety, water and electrical safety compliance.

### **Fire Safety**

The works to improve the safety of our blocks of flats subject to fire safety works has continued. In March, our contractor has completed the interim fire safety works. We are now running an exercise to find the best contractor to complete the permanent fire safety improvement works to the homes within this programme of works. These works will consist of fitting new external fire doors, adding fire rated windows within the communal areas where required and ensuring loft spaces are fully partitioned.

We hope to contact the tenants affected by these works in the near future.

We also understand that the works carried out so far has had some impact on the tenants living in the affected blocks of flats, we apologise for any inconvenience caused and thank you for your continued support & co-operation as we work to improve the safety of your homes.

All the necessary Fire Risk Assessments have been completed for the homes we own and manage.

## EPIC'S NEW CORPORATE PLAN



### Corporate Plan 2022 – 2025

#### To be a good landlord

EPIC's new Corporate Plan was agreed by the Board on 29 January 2022. The Corporate Plan and strategy sets out EPIC's clear purpose, to be a good landlord and our strategic objectives of:-

- **SERVICES - providing inclusive and accessible services meeting local and regulatory standards**
- **ASSET MANAGEMENT - providing good quality & safe homes**
- **PEOPLE - valuing & investing in our people to deliver desired outcomes**
- **GOVERNANCE - operating as a well governed financially viable organisation and ensuring our services meet the required standards**

This Corporate Plan outlines our Vision, Mission, Values, and the delivery model, giving regard to the Regulator of Social Housing (RoSH) Value for Money (VfM) standard.

It is important to be clear that 'good' does not mean 'good enough' – it means good sound, safe, quality, responsive, modern and contemporary services where tenants are front and centre and fully integrated in what we do.

EPIC will deliver the objectives within the Corporate Plan over the next 3 years to ensure your homes are maintained to a good quality and are safe.

The Corporate Plan can be found on our website [www.epichousing.co.uk](http://www.epichousing.co.uk)

## YOUR RENT

### UNIVERSAL CREDIT – GETTING YOUR RENT COVERED

A few weeks ago you will have received a letter confirming the increase in your rent from April. For customers claiming Universal Credit it is important that you notify the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) of the correct figure to ensure you are claiming the right amount of support towards your housing costs. The easiest way to do this is to sign in to your online account at [www.gov.uk/sign-in-universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/sign-in-universal-credit) and follow the 'Confirm your housing costs' to do section.

For any queries about your rent or rent payment please email us at [rents@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:rents@epichousing.co.uk).

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 access welfare benefits or we can signpost you to other 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 your debt problems.



The following organisations offer **FREE** advice:

#### **Citizens 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

## About the Local Foodbank Network:

The Trussell Trust supports communities and churches to open foodbanks across the UK. The local foodbanks are part of the Trussell Trust's network of 428 foodbanks working to tackle food poverty and hunger in communities across the UK. The Foodbank Network was founded in 2004 and since then The Trussell Trust has helped communities to work together to launch foodbanks nationwide in a range of towns and cities. In 2020/21, The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network provided 2,537,198 three-day emergency food supplies and support to UK people in need. Of these, 980,082 went to children.

Details of local foodbanks, how to get help and apply for a foodbank voucher can be found at:

Websites - [www.stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk)  
[www.newcastlestaff.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.newcastlestaff.foodbank.org.uk)  
[www.leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk)

Email – [info@stokeontrentfoodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@stokeontrentfoodbank.org.uk)

|             |                      |                             |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Telephone - | Stoke-on Trent       | 08082 082138 / 01782 317942 |
|             | Newcastle-under-Lyme | 08082 082138                |
|             | Leek                 | 03003 302164                |

Address – Stoke-on-Trent Foodbank, Magdalen Road, Blurton, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 3HS



## FOCUS ON ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND HATE CRIME

We believe everyone should have the right to enjoy their home and live safely and peacefully. We are committed to working with our communities to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), hate crime and other neighbour nuisance.

### Our Aims

- Our residents can enjoy quiet occupation of their homes.
- Our residents should not be subjected to harassment or abuse based on ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, gender or disability.
- Our staff and tenants will understand that we take ASB seriously and are committed to tackling it in all its forms.
- Residents understand that the most effective resolution is often for neighbours to resolve disputes amicably between themselves.
- We will take positive action - working closely where appropriate with partners such as the Police and local authorities – to tackle crime and ASB in our neighbourhoods.
- We will use evidence obtained from a range of sources, including statutory agencies, to take enforcement action where appropriate.
- Victims and witnesses of ASB will receive a tailored response and appropriate support and advice.
- We will support initiatives to prevent ASB occurring.

### What is ASB?

Anti-Social Behaviour is defined by Section 2(1) of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime & Policing Act 2014 as:

"...conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person..."

"...conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person's occupation of residential premises..."

"...conduct capable of causing housing-related nuisance or annoyance to any person."

Ground 14 of the Housing Act 1988 defines ASB as where the tenant or visitor:

*"has been guilty of conduct causing or likely to cause a nuisance or annoyance to a person residing, visiting or otherwise engaging in a lawful activity in the locality..."*

*"has been convicted of – using the dwelling-house or allowing it to be used for immoral or illegal purposes, or an indictable offence committed in, or in the locality of, the dwelling-house".*

Housing-related nuisance or annoyance means behaviour that affects EPIC's ability to manage its tenancies and for our tenants to experience quiet enjoyment of their homes.

Examples include:

- loud noise from neighbours.
- harassment such as verbal abuse or threatening behaviour.
- vandalism, property damage and graffiti.
- rubbish dumping and abandoned cars.
- nuisance caused by animals/pets.

## Hate Crime

The Crown Prosecution Service classify hate crime as:

“Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on a person's disability or perceived disability; race or perceived race; or religion or perceived religion; or sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation or transgender identity or perceived transgender identity.”

It can be expressed in many forms such as through:

- verbal abuse.
- disputes via social media.
- threatening behaviour.
- Assault.
- Vandalism.

### Reporting ASB to EPIC

You can report ASB to us:

\*By completing a form on our website – [www.epichousing.co.uk/community/anti-social-behaviour](http://www.epichousing.co.uk/community/anti-social-behaviour)

\*Via email – [mailbox@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk)

\*By telephoning 01782 252575

\*In writing to EPIC Housing, 131-141 Ubbertley Road, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent ST2 0EF.

Our Housing Team will carry out an initial assessment of the report. In some cases, if it is reasonable to do so we will ask you to speak to your neighbour to try to agree a resolution. If this is not appropriate, we will investigate the matter and determine:

How you can work with us to provide the necessary evidence (including keeping a diary of ongoing nuisance).

The most appropriate method of resolution, with realistic outcomes.

How and how often we will contact you while the case is ongoing.

We aim to carry out an initial investigation and contact the complainant within a maximum of 5 working days. Whilst we try to resolve cases as quickly and effectively as possible, the process can be complex and legal action can sometimes be lengthy.

## COVID 19

Please be assured that we continue to monitor the situation in relation to Covid19 to ensure you our tenants, our staff and contractors are as safe as possible.

### Currently on hold:

Face-to-face customer engagement activities.

### Coming soon:

Virtual Engagement Forum  
Reception Service at Bentilee Office

The government has now removed all the restrictions relating to COVID 19. We do however still want to protect our tenants and our staff. Therefore, 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 19 symptoms or have tested positive.

The National Health Service has recently amended guidance relating to COVID 19 symptoms.

The main symptoms in adults are:

- a high temperature or shivering (chills) – A high temperature means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours
- a loss or change in your sense of smell or taste
- shortness of breath
- feeling tired or exhausted
- an aching body
- a headache
- a sore throat
- a blocked or runny nose
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick or being sick

The symptoms are very similar to symptoms of other illnesses, such as colds and flu.





## 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](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk)

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

## 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.

## HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

The Housing Ombudsman Service is set up by law to look at complaints about housing organisations that are registered with them. The service is free, independent and impartial. The Housing Ombudsman resolves disputes between tenants and leaseholders of social landlords (housing associations and local authorities). Residents can contact the Ombudsman at any time for support in helping to resolve a dispute. It is mandatory for all housing associations and local authorities to be members of the Ombudsman Scheme.

The Ombudsman considers complaints using their dispute resolution principles and encourage social and residents to use these principles to resolve complaints together at the earliest possible opportunity.

EPIC uses the Housing Ombudsman's dispute resolution principles when we receive your complaints. These are:-

1. Be fair – treat people fairly and follow fair processes.
2. Put things right.
3. Learn from outcomes.

EPIC follows the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which was updated to take effect from 1 April 2022.

The key areas of the code are:-

- A universal definition of a complaint.
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access to the Housing Ombudsman.
- The structure of the complaints procedure – only two stages are necessary and clear timeframes are set out for responses.
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process.
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies are put in place.
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement.
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports.
- Carrying out an annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code.

Our aim is to resolve complaints effectively without you or our tenants needing to seek recourse from the Housing Ombudsman. We welcome complaints and aim to ensure that we use the outcomes to drive service improvements.

### Contact details:

Email – [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Online – [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Telephone – 0300 111 3000

Address – Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ

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*We hope you enjoyed this newsletter – If you have any ideas for our next edition or stories about your communities to share, please let us know*

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## 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](http://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](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk)