



# Epic News

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*Your Information Newsletter - Issue 5 – August 2022*

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## A Message from our new Chief Executive, Tracey Johnson



Hello and welcome to your latest edition of 'Epic News'. It's a bumper edition this time round with lots to share with you about tenant engagement and involvement.

I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you all, having joined EPIC on 18<sup>th</sup> July, as the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer. I am delighted to be part of a community-based organisation and look forward to getting out and about, listening and introducing myself to as many of you as possible. You may be aware that the leadership team, and the wider workforce, at EPIC has been through a significant period of change, but through the hard work, commitment and loyalty of our colleagues, services have continued to our customers. With a new leadership team in place by the end of August, I am positive that you will start to see changes across the business that will be of benefit to you.

A little bit about me - I have worked in social housing for over 17 years across, across Merseyside, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Staffordshire, as an Executive and Non-Executive Director. I have lived in Stoke-on-Trent for the past 8 years and the welcome and warmth I have always received means that this is where I intend to stay. The times we currently live in are extremely challenging and my commitment to you is that through compassion and understanding of your experience with us, we will do the very best that we can to support you.

Your voice is so important too, so please do take advantages of the ways in which to get in touch, which are detailed below.

*Tracey*



## REGULATORY UPDATE

### **Governance**

The EPIC Board and the Executive Leadership 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.

As part of EPIC's planned investment works, some of you will have received a letter regarding the need for our contactors to undertake Electrical Safety Checks on your home to ensure your home is safe. If you have received a letter relating to this, it is important you allow us to carry out this work. You will be contacted by our contractor to arrange a mutually agreed appointment.

### **Fire Safety**

All the necessary Fire Risk Assessments have been completed for the homes we own and manage and the programme of fire safety works identified in relation to the blocks of flats in Bentilee is ongoing. This work will include the upgrade of flat entrance doors, upgrading internal kitchen doors in two bedroom properties, installing fire rated windows (where these face on to the communal area) and ensuring loft spaces are fully compartmentalised. Individual tenants will be contacted in relation to these works. This next phase of the works is due to start in September 2022.



## YOUR RENT

It is important that you pay your rent and other charges regularly in accordance with your tenancy agreement. 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 signpost 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 your debt problems.

For any queries about your rent or rent payments please email us at [rents@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:rents@epichousing.co.uk) or ring us on 01782 252575.



The following organisations also 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



# 6 WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT

Set up a Standing Order - out of your bank account



Our account number is: 50069842  
Our sort code is: 08-90-09

**PLEASE QUOTE YOUR RENT ACCOUNT REFERENCE**



Via [www.epichousing.co.uk](http://www.epichousing.co.uk)

(click on 'Make A Payment')



Via online banking



Using your EPIC rent card at any PayPoint outlet or Post Office



By debit card over the phone



Through the 'Housing-Costs Element' of your Universal credit claim

**For more information:**

✉ [rents@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:rents@epichousing.co.uk)

🌐 [www.epichousing.co.uk](http://www.epichousing.co.uk)



## Focus on Resident Involvement and Engagement

We have reviewed our Resident Engagement and Involvement Policy and want your views. Please let us know what you think. You can email us at: [mailbox@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk).

**This is an important policy for tenants and residents and your views are important to us.**

Please see below the revised policy.

### INTRODUCTION AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

#### The Consumer Standard – Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The Regulator of Social Housing's 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard' outlines social landlords' obligations with regards to customer service, tenant involvement and empowerment, and responding to the diverse needs of tenants. Section 1.2 requires that:

*"Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:*

- (a) the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities*
- (b) the making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards*
- (c) the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved*
- (d) the management of their homes, where applicable*
- (e) the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and*
- (f) agreeing local offers for service delivery."*

The standard puts a requirement for housing providers to ensure that tenants and residents are given a range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the development of policies, decision-making, scrutiny, right to manage and, where, appropriate agreeing local offers.

## The Charter for Social Housing residents: Social Housing White Paper

The government's charter for social housing: social housing white paper sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect from their landlord:-

1. **To be safe in your home.** The government will work with industry and landlords to ensure home is safe and secure.
2. **To know how your landlord is performing,** including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so that tenants and residents can hold their landlord to account.
3. **To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,** with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. **To be treated with respect,** backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. **To have your voice heard by your landlord,** for example, through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its board. The government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
6. **To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in,** with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. **To be supported to take your first step to ownership,** so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

The white paper sets out what the government will do to ensure landlords live up to the new charter. The Draft Social Housing Regulation Bill will bring in many of the proposals contained in the white Paper. The government states that the most important step is to work with the Regulator of Social Housing to create a strong, proactive consumer regulatory regime, strengthening the formal standards against which landlords are regulated and requiring them to:

- be transparent about their performance and decision making – so that tenants and the regulator can hold them to account;
- put things right when they go wrong, and;
- listen to tenants through effective engagement.

## The National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants Charter

The Together with Tenants charter aims to strengthen the relationship between residents and housing association landlords. EPIC has committed to working towards adopting this charter, which asks housing association landlords to commit to:

- **Relationships** – Housing associations will treat all residents with respect in all their interactions. Relationships between residents and housing associations will be based on openness, honesty and transparency.
- **Communication** – Residents will receive clear, accessible and timely information from their housing association on the issues that matter to them, including important information about their homes and local community, how the organisation is run, and information about performance on key issues.
- **Voice and Influence** – Views from residents will be sought and valued and this information will be used to inform decisions. Every individual resident will feel listened to by their housing association on the issues that matter to them and can speak without fear.
- **Accountability** – Collectively, residents will work in partnership with their housing association to independently scrutinise and hold their housing association to account for the decisions that affect the quality of their homes and services.
- **Quality** – Residents can expect their homes to be good quality, well maintained, safe and well managed.
- **When things go wrong** – Residents will have simple and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress. Residents will receive timely advice and support when things go wrong.

## EPIC's Vision for Resident Involvement and Engagement

EPIC's vision is to put residents at the heart of everything we do to ensure that our homes and neighbourhoods are sustainable, safe and secure.

- To make resident involvement an integral part of the business by involving and consulting residents to enable services to be shaped to meet the needs of tenants.
- To widen and increase involvement by offering a range of ways that residents can get involved, comment and participate in decision-making.
- To ensure that our Corporate Plan and strategies reflect residents' interests.
- To ensure that we support residents in obtaining the knowledge and skills required to play an effective part in the management of the Company.

## Our Corporate Plan 2022 to 2025

Our new Corporate Plan and strategy sets out EPIC's clear purpose **to be a good landlord** and also focuses on our key themes of:

- Services – providing inclusive and accessible services meeting local and regulatory standards.
- Asset Management – providing good quality and safe homes.
- People – valuing and 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.

## Policy Statement

We are committed to delivering high quality services which meet residents' needs, and recognise that resident involvement should be a core driver for improvements to services. We are also committed to holding ourselves accountable to residents, ensuring they are able to judge our services and tell us how we might need to improve.

Furthermore, we believe we have a duty to help develop the social capital of Bentilee and the wider North Staffordshire area, and that customer involvement can help build links between residents and improve the confidence of the communities in which we operate.

**We define residents as anyone living in one of our homes, including tenants and leaseholders. We define resident involvement and engagement as all of the activities and processes that we carry out to: help us know what our customers want, enable residents to be involved if they wish and allow them to have influence over decisions that affect them.**

## HOW AND WHEN WE WILL INVOLVE RESIDENTS

In line with the Regulatory Framework, we will develop a set of standards for our residents, which set out what they can expect from us in relation to tenant engagement and involvement. We will involve residents in the

development of these standards and keep them informed of performance against these via the Annual Tenants Report.

We believe that our residents have a right to influence decisions that we make. Specific examples of how we may involve residents include:

- Site visits and 'Estate Walkabouts';
- Attendance at the Annual General Meeting;
- Tenant panels including scrutiny, either in person or virtual;
- Consultation register, where tenants advise us how and when they would like to get involved.

We will ensure that our methods of involving residents are transparent and meet the provisions of this policy. Where relevant we will also involve residents at an early stage of developing new initiatives in order to agree criteria for evaluating success and customer satisfaction with the final product.

We will carry out regular consultation with residents on our performance and their experience of our services. We will also carry out detailed consultation with residents on any issues that will materially affect them. This may include:

- Changes to services or the Tenancy Agreement;
- Policy reviews, where appropriate;
- Any new initiatives funded by rental income;
- Opportunities to scrutinise our performance;
- Opportunities to scrutinise and help us develop our services.

We will provide information to residents and invite feedback in the course of day-to-day business. Where appropriate, we will handle negative feedback via our Complaints Policy. We will also publicise the results of involvement activities in order to demonstrate to residents the benefits of becoming involved and encourage further involvement.

We will publish regular customer newsletters to keep residents up to date and well informed about our services and performance.

## Ways to get involved and ensure our residents can have their say

### Information

**Our website** will be key to ensuring that our residents have the information they need about how to access our services and about our services.

**Communication** – we will ensure that we communicate effectively on any issues that affect your tenancy in a timely manner and in a way that suits you. E.G. by letter, by email.

**EPIC News**, our customer newsletter will be published regularly to keep residents up to date and well informed about our services and performance.

**Our Tenants Annual Report** will be published annually and will include all the performance data our residents need in order to see how we are performing and our plans to improve performance, where we are not meeting our targets.



## Consultation, Involvement and Engagement

**Complaints and compliments** – we will use feedback and learning from complaints to improve our services and use feedback from compliments to ensure our employees know when we get things right. We will ensure that our residents know we welcome their complaints and feedback and ensure we put things right promptly when things go wrong.

**Surveys** – we will carry out satisfaction and opinion surveys and utilise the feedback to ensure we develop our services to meet the views of our residents.

**Consultation Events** – where appropriate, we will hold consultation events to seek feedback from our residents on specific issues that affect their homes or our services.

**Involvement and Engagement** – we will provide a range mechanisms to ensure you are involved and engaged in the development of our policies and services.

**Estate walkabouts and inspections** – we will carry out estate walkabouts and inspections to ensure our estates are clean and safe and involve our residents in these in order to hear their views on the areas they live in.

**Customer panels** - we will develop tenant panels in partnership with our tenants in order to engage with them on specific areas of our services to help us develop and improve our performance.

**Resident Empowerment** – we will support and empower you to ensure that you can help us shape and develop our policies and services to meet your needs and aspirations, where possible.

**Resident Groups** – we will support the formation of resident groups should our residents wish to be involved in this way.

## HOW WE WILL RESOURCE INVOLVEMENT

We will allocate staff resources to deliver regular involvement activities.

We will ensure that staff receive appropriate training to allow them to meet the fundamental provisions of this policy, in the course of carrying out their roles.

We will identify opportunities for partnership working with other agencies where appropriate; to reduce the risk of consultation fatigue and achieve more cost-effective involvement activities.

We will provide training opportunities for residents interested in becoming involved, in order to provide them with the skills necessary to develop their capacity for involvement.

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STATEMENT

We are committed to ensuring and promoting equality of opportunity for all. We are therefore opposed to unfair discrimination on any grounds, including race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age, or any unjustifiable criteria. In accordance with this commitment, we will provide a range of opportunities for involvement, and make information available in a variety of formats, to ensure accessibility to all residents.



## Dog Fouling



### PLEASE REMEMBER TO CLEAN UP AFTER YOUR DOG!

Our grass-cutting contractors have reported a number of cases around our flats where they have been unable to carry out the service due to dog fouling.

Not looking after your pet properly could be a breach of tenancy conditions and dog fouling can cause major health problems. Please remember to clean up after your dog immediately and dispose of the bagged waste in your household wheelie bin. Thank you

**LOAN SHARKS ARE ILLEGAL**

**DON'T GET BITTEN BY A LOAN SHARK**

We can help you  
(in the strictest confidence)  
Tel: 0300 555 2222  
Text us on: 07860022116  
Email us:  
reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk

#StopLoanSharks  
Website: stoploansharks.co.uk

### Stop Loan Sharks

Stop Loan Sharks investigates and prosecutes illegal money lenders and provides support for borrowers in the UK.

If you have borrowed from a loan shark or are worried about someone, else, the advisers at Stop Loan Sharks can offer help and keep you safe.

Their specially trained advisers will provide you with emotional and practical support that is tailored to your needs.

You can call them 24 hours a day on 0300 555 2222 or you can use Live Chat via their website.

[www.stoploansharks.co.uk](http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk)

**STOP LOAN SHARKS**

# are you covered?

## My Home Contents Insurance

### Designed for tenants in social housing

Your Landlord does not insure your furniture and belongings and personal possessions. However we are able to offer all our tenants the chance to insure their home contents and belongings.

#### Some of the benefits are:

- There are no minimum home security requirements (just a lockable front door)
- Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen
- Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge)
- Storm and flood damage is covered (excludes damage caused by frost or anything that happens gradually)
- Damage to fixed glass in doors and windows which you are responsible for is also covered
- Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000)

**Terms & conditions, limits and exclusions apply, a copy of the policy wording is available upon request.**

# info

For more information contact

**My Home on 0345 450 7288**  
or email: [myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk](mailto:myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk)  
visit: [www.thistlemyhome.co.uk](http://www.thistlemyhome.co.uk)

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**My Home**  
Contents Insurance

NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
FEDERATION

Preferred  
supplier



## Reporting a Repair

You can visit our website and complete an online form at:

<https://epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/report-a-repair/>

or call us on 01782 252575

or email us at [mailbox@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk)

If your call is an emergency and out of office hours, 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.

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*We hope you enjoyed our 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 about any of our services anytime:

**Email** [mailbox@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk)

**Online** [www.epichousing.co.uk](http://www.epichousing.co.uk)

**By phone** 01782 252575

Or feel free to **write to us at:**  
EPIC, 131-141 Ubbberley Road, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent ST2 0EF