

## TWO MONTHS IN POST.....A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO, TRACEY JOHNSON



I joined EPIC on the 18<sup>th</sup> July this year and since then my feet haven't hit the ground. What have I found in those few weeks.....well, we are an organisation proud of our heritage and the work that we do; we have great colleagues who strive to deliver great services to our tenants with a passion and drive to do more. The environment continues to be a challenge with high inflation and increases in utility bills, despite the recent announcement from the new Prime Minister. We are working hard at EPIC to look at what else we could be doing to support our tenants as well as our colleagues, as I am a strong believer that if our colleagues are happy, then our tenants will be too.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, a consultation was launched to invite views from social housing tenants and landlords on a proposed rent cap to understand how best to support households with the cost-of-living crisis. Under the proposals, a cap on social housing rent increases would be put in place for the coming financial year (1<sup>st</sup> April 2023), with options at 3%, 5% and 7% being considered. The consultation closes on 12<sup>th</sup> October. We welcome the government's consultation and the opportunity to discuss these important issues. I recognise that the current high rates of inflation and energy costs are a significant concern for our tenants and striking a balance against the need to maintain and improve homes, and the high costs for vital materials for repairs and maintenance work, which we've seen an increase in as much as 15%, is going to be extremely challenging.



It would be wrong for my message this month not to include a mention of the sad passing of Queen Elizabeth II, and whilst it was expected, it was a day that many dreaded. You don't need to be a royalist to recognise the hard work and dedication the Queen has given over the past 70 years. She has served our nation tirelessly, with humility and a sense of humour too.

I hope you enjoy the remainder of the newsletter this month. And don't forget there are plenty of ways to get involved, which are detailed below.

*Tracey*



## FIRE SAFETY

### Ventro – Resident Engagement Day



On Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September our fire safety contractor, Ventro, held a residents' engagement day at our Ubbertley Road office. This was an opportunity for our six-block residents to discuss what works are due to be completed in their home, as well as their communal block, and to ask any questions that they may have. Those who attended found the day to be informative and were lucky enough to be treated to coffee and biscuits and

were also given Ventro goodie bags (containing more edible treats!). Residents living in six blocks will be contacted by Ventro in due course to confirm appointments for when works at their home will start, or for when we will require access to measure doors in preparation for the works starting. Works to blocks will be completed in four phases, so depending on what phase your block is in will depend on how soon Ventro will contact you to make these arrangements – phases and expected start dates will be confirmed with residents as soon as we are able to share this information.

We again thank you for your patience whilst these works are completed which are essential to ensuring the safety of you and your neighbours.

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## KITCHEN & BATHROOM RENEWALS



A question that we are often asked is "am I eligible for a new kitchen/bathroom?" It is essential that we give the safety of our tenants the priority it deserves and as such we have recently completed, and are in the process of completing, substantial works to our six blocks to improve the fire safety of these properties.

Other programs such as Kitchens and Bathrooms have been postponed whilst the Fire Safety Works have been implemented but are due to commence with high priority works in 2023.

We are putting together a list of properties for ongoing works so that we can continue the programmes, whether this be in relation to kitchens, bathrooms, or other works. In order for us to ensure we prioritise works we may ask if we can survey your home; this information will be collated, and programmes put into place. Please note, the surveyor will not be able to tell you what works or when any works will be done as programmes are put together in priority order and to budget. Should you have any day-to-day repairs that are required, then please continue to report these to Brenden Fern on 01782 818577 as you would do normally.



## PAYING YOUR RENT

It's important that you pay your rent and other charges regularly in accordance with your tenancy agreement. If you're struggling to pay your rent at any time, please contact us straight away as we'd like to help.

We can offer you support to manage your finances and claiming welfare benefits, or we can signpost you to support agencies. We can also agree a payment plan with you to cover your rent and reducing any arrears. Admitting you're struggling and getting help as soon as possible is an important first step towards resolving 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.



## HELP WITH DEBTS

The following organisations offer **FREE** advice and access to debt counselling:



[www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/)  
Debt helpline: 0800 144 8848



[www.stepchange.org/](http://www.stepchange.org/)  
Call: 0800 138 1111



[nationaldebtline.org](http://nationaldebtline.org)  
0808 808 4000

# 6 WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT



Via [www.epichousing.co.uk](http://www.epichousing.co.uk) (click on 'Make A Payment')

*Please be sure to quote your correct rent account reference (e.g. ABC123A or RE000000...)*



Set up a Standing Order (from your bank account)

*Our account number is: 50069842*

*Our sort code is: 08-90-09*

*Please quote your correct rent account reference*



Via online banking

*Please quote your correct rent account reference*



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 Involvement & Engagement Policy and we 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.**

A summary of the policy is detailed below. The full policy can be found on our website at: [www.epichousing.co.uk](http://www.epichousing.co.uk)

### EPIC's 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

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

**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, 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 of 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 – where possible.** 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.

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



We are delighted to work with our partners at Brighter Futures and The Gingerbread Centre. These are both locally based charities whose activities include providing supported accommodation to vulnerable members of the community. For over 20 years Brighter Futures have managed 8 of our properties across the Bentilee area. Gingerbread manage 10 supported living homes plus one office unit, all based on the outskirts of Hanley. We look forward to continuing working with them both.

For more information about each organisation please visit:

<https://www.brighter-futures.org.uk/>

<https://gingerbreadcentre.co.uk/>



## 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

A vertical advertisement for 'Stop Loan Sharks'. The top half has a red background with the text 'LOAN SHARKS ARE ILLEGAL' in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this is a blue background with a shark's head and open mouth, showing sharp teeth. The shark is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a yellow tie. On the left side of the red background, there is white text: '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', and 'Website: stoploansharks.co.uk'.

**LOAN SHARKS ARE ILLEGAL**

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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)

**STOPLOANSHARKS**





# 10 reasons to choose My Home Contents Insurance Scheme

- 1) Apply over the telephone or complete an application form
- 2) Covers loss or damage to food in a fridge/freezer (excludes damage caused if the electricity supplier deliberately cuts off the supply to your home)
- 3) Covers theft, water damage, fire and many more household risks
- 4) Covers tenants improvements (up to £2000 or 20% of the sum insured whichever is the greater)
- 5) Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000)
- 6) Covers damage to external glazing for which you are responsible
- 7) Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen
- 8) You don't need to have special door or window locks (just a lockable front door)
- 9) Up to 85% of the contents sum insured for damage to your landlord's fixtures and fittings which you are legally liable for as a tenant (excludes loss or damage whilst your home is unoccupied).
- 10) Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge)

Exclusions & limits apply. A copy of the policy wording is available on request.

Ask your landlord for an application pack or to apply for cover today, call My Home on:

**0345 450 7288**

email: [myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk](mailto:myhome@thistleinsurance.co.uk) or visit [www.thistlemyhome.co.uk](http://www.thistlemyhome.co.uk)

The National Housing Federation working in partnership with Thistle Insurance Services Ltd. Thistle Insurance Services Limited is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) 191210419. Registered in England under No. 00288465. Registered office: Nottingham's Business Park, West Carr Road, Solloway, Nottinghamshire, NG22 7BN. Thistle Insurance Services Ltd is part of the TS Group. Our Data Protection Privacy Policy is online at <http://www.thistleinsurance.co.uk/privacy-policy>





## 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.

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We will shortly be announcing plans to reopen our Reception desk at the Bentilee Office (131-141 Ubbertley Road, ST2 0EF). Please stay tuned to our website and future editions of this newsletter.

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## Local Foodbank contact details:

[stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk](http://stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk)

tel. 08082 082138 / 01782 317942

[newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk](http://newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk)

tel. 08082 082138

[leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk](http://leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk)

tel. 03003 302164

BENTILEE COMMUNITY  
REFERENCE PANEL ARE  
HOSTING A

# Bentilee fun day

For  
all ages

Celebrating the  
best of Bentilee!

Saturday  
8th October 2022



## Activities:

- Craft activities
- Smoothie making
- Tombola
- Challenges
- Demonstrations
- Free refreshments

Meet your local community groups  
at St Stephen's Church

161A Dawlish Dr,  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST2 0ET

from 12pm - 4pm



Pass this flyer  
to a friend!



For more  
information  
scan the  
QR code



## 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 we use this 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)

**Telephone** 01782 252575

Or feel free to **write to us at:**

EPIC  
131-141 Uubberley Road  
Bentilee  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST2 0EF