



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO, TRACEY JOHNSON



Welcome to the Winter issue of EPIC News which is full of information and advice.

As we near the end of 2022 we want to share an update on a number of things, so please do take the time to sit down with a warm drink and have a read. You will also see an article on providing advice on preventing condensation, the main sign of damp and mould in your home. Please do contact us if you notice any signs. We will respond quickly. We hope that you find the advice provided here helpful.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity of wishing you all the warmest greetings for the Christmas Season and a Happy New Year.

Best Wishes

Tracey

The John Flock Bentilee Empowerment Fund



We are delighted to support our partners at *The Community Foundation for Staffordshire* who administer the *John Flock Empowerment Fund*. This was set up in 2011 in memory of a former Chairperson of our Board of Directors. The fund is specifically for residents of Bentilee and Berryhill and aims to provide “practical support to empower people in the small things in life that can really make a difference”. This could be to help fund a community event, improve the local environment or for an individual resident to replace an important household appliance, such as white goods.

Decisions on applications are made on a case-by-case basis. Individual applicants should contact their Housing Officer in the first instance. For more information about the John Flock Fund including more details on how to apply, please visit <https://staffordshire.foundation/grants/johnflockfund/>



FIRE SAFETY IN SIX-BLOCKS



Evacuation Policy

EPIC operates a simultaneous evacuation policy in our 6-block properties. To avoid any confusion, 6-block properties share a communal area space. This means that in the event of a fire, and your fire alarm is sounding, you must leave your home and evacuate the building.

Once you have left the property you will need to call the emergency services, by dialling 999 or 112, and provide your address.

We will be writing to all tenants living in our 6-blocks to provide more detail on the evacuation policy in the next few weeks.

Fire Doors

Works to improve the fire safety of our 6-block properties are continuing. As part of these works we are adding fire doors to the flat entrances.

Fire doors play an important part in containing any fire within a flat in which it starts. Therefore, when a fire door has been installed in a property it is important to:

- Keep fire doors shut when not in use.
- Not to tamper, or allow any guests to tamper, with self-closing devices.
- Immediately report any faults with, or damage to, fire doors to EPIC.

It is important to also not cut out any pet flaps or drill the door, or to add any extra locks or handles as this may affect the integrity of the door.



PAYING YOUR RENT AND MANAGING YOUR MONEY

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 or ring us on 01782 252575.

For some useful links on how to manage your money go to www.epichousing.co.uk/your-tenancy/your-money/



FOCUS ON CONDENSATION, DAMP & MOULD



Many people have experienced issues with damp and mould in their home at some point. Even in warm, well-looked after properties mould growth can occur in some parts of the home, especially in the colder months. Most mould growth people will experience is usually the result of condensation, however some instances of mould may be the result of damp.

Below you can find some information about damp and mould in the property looking at the main sources and some helpful tips for how to minimise damp, condensation and mould in your home.

Causes of dampness and condensation in your home

- Lack of adequate heating and/or ventilation
- Water coming in from the outside through leakage/seepage
- Rising damp – dampness from the ground rising up into the building fabric
- High levels of moisture/water vapour being produced inside the house

How to keep your home dry and avoid condensation

There are a number of things you can do to minimise damp and condensation in your home. Three key actions are:

- ✓ Reduce the amount of moisture produced in the property
- ✓ Provide ventilation, particularly in moisture-prone areas
- ✓ Increase heating to raise the temperature of the air and the cold surfaces

Other possible solutions:

- ✓ On dry days, open some windows to allow humid air to ventilate out of the property. It's better to open a few windows a little throughout the whole property. This helps the air to move through your home. One window open wide in one room may not be as effective. Try to do this as often as possible (2-3 times a week), but keep windows closed on wet days as damp air may increase indoor humidity.
- ✓ Keep lids on your pots and pans when you cook – simmer rather than boil hard.
- ✓ Keep the doors to the bathroom and kitchen closed when you are bathing or cooking.
- ✓ Use thermal or lined curtains, keeping them open in the day and closed before dusk. This will capture the free heat from the sun and help to lift indoor temperatures.
- ✓ Wipe excess moisture from windows – if you don't it may also re-evaporate during the day, raising humidity levels and making condensation worse when the room cools down.
- ✓ Limit the number of pot plants in your home.
- ✓ Try to keep furniture away from outside walls to allow air circulation. Cool areas behind furniture will be high humidity areas conducive to mould growth.

Drying clothes

- ✓ Wherever possible, dry your clothes outside.
- ✓ If you use a tumble dryer, make sure that it is vented outside (you need to get our written permission to make any alterations to brickwork).
- ✓ If you must dry your clothes on a clothes rack inside, do this in a well-ventilated room with doors closed to the rest of the property.



We recently held two *Big Conversation* Events inviting residents to come and talk to us, to hear their views on how they felt EPIC is doing - and to raise any concerns with us. For those unable to attend we held an online consultation. As a thank you from us, those who took part were placed into a prize draw for High Street Shopping Vouchers (1st Prize £100.00 and 3 runners up prizes of £75.00).

We asked for feedback on 3 main areas:

- What we do well.
- What improvements are needed.
- Which opening times for Reception people would like to see.

From the feedback we received:

- People said they were generally happy with the office opening during normal business hours but would like to see the occasional late evenings or weekend.
- People said they found staff to be friendly and helpful, and it was good that they could email us outside of office hours. They said we listened to their concerns and complaints and responded appropriately.
- People said that communication around the repairs service could be better and that we need to raise our profile at local community events.
- Some people said they found it difficult to contact us because of our current opening times and would like to see future Resident Engagement Events on evenings or at weekends, to enable working tenants to be able to attend.

Over the coming weeks we will be reviewing all the points you raised with us and look to improve our services on offer.



TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS

tpas

As part of increasing our tenant involvement activities, EPIC is proud to have become a member of TPAS.

TPAS is a not-for-profit organisation and England's leading tenant engagement experts. They will provide us with growing the skills and knowledge we need to work together with our tenants in accordance with the Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards. As part of our membership, we will be carrying out a self-assessment. We look forward to working with them over the coming months and benefit from their experience and advice.



HELP WITH DEBTS AND THE COST OF LIVING

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



www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money

Debt helpline: 0800 144 8848



www.stepchange.org

Call: 0800 138 1111



www.nationaldebtline.org

Call: 0808 808 4000



Local Foodbank contact details:

stokeontrent.foodbank.org.uk

tel. 08082 082138 / 01782 317942

newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk

tel. 08082 082138

leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk

tel. 03003 302164

The Trussell Trust supports communities and churches to open foodbanks across the UK. Our local Foodbanks are part of [The Trussell Trust](#)'s network of 428 foodbanks, working to tackle food poverty and hunger in our local communities, as well as across the UK.

6 WAYS TO PAY YOUR RENT



Via 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

🌐 www.epichousing.co.uk



Focus on Resident Involvement and Engagement

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, shared owners and leaseholders.

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';
- 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.





10 reasons to choose My Home Contents Insurance Scheme this winter



- ❖ Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge).
- ❖ Apply over the phone or by completing an application form.
- ❖ You don't need to have special door or window locks (just a lockable front door).
- ❖ Covers theft, water damage, fire.
- ❖ Covers tenants improvements (up to £2,000 or 20% of the sum insured whichever is greater).
- ❖ Accidental damage to TV's and aerials and home computers is covered as standard (excludes items designed to be portable including mobile phones, ipods etc). A £50 excess may apply, full details are available on request.
- ❖ Covers damage to external glazing for which you are responsible.
- ❖ Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen.
- ❖ The sum insured will be increased by £1,500 or 15% (whichever is the greater) for one month before and after Christmas to cover presents bought or received (excludes theft which does not involve forcible or violent entry into your home).
- ❖ Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000).
- ❖ Optional extras are available for an additional premium.

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 or visit 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 FBN 110419. Registered in England under No. 00318645. Registered office: Boscington's Business Park, West Carr Road, Retford, Nottinghamshire, DN22 7SW. Thistle Insurance Services Ltd is part of the PIB 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

If your call is an emergency and out of office hours, please call 0800 6940434.



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

STOPLOANSHARKS



We're pleased to announce that our Reception desk at the Bentilee Office (131-141 Ubbertley Road, ST2 0EF) is now open **Mondays to Fridays** from **9:00am to 2:30pm**.

CHRISTMAS BISCUITS

Ingredients

100g unsalted butter, softened at room temperature

100g caster sugar

1 free-range egg, lightly beaten

1 tsp vanilla extract

275g plain flour

To decorate

400g icing sugar

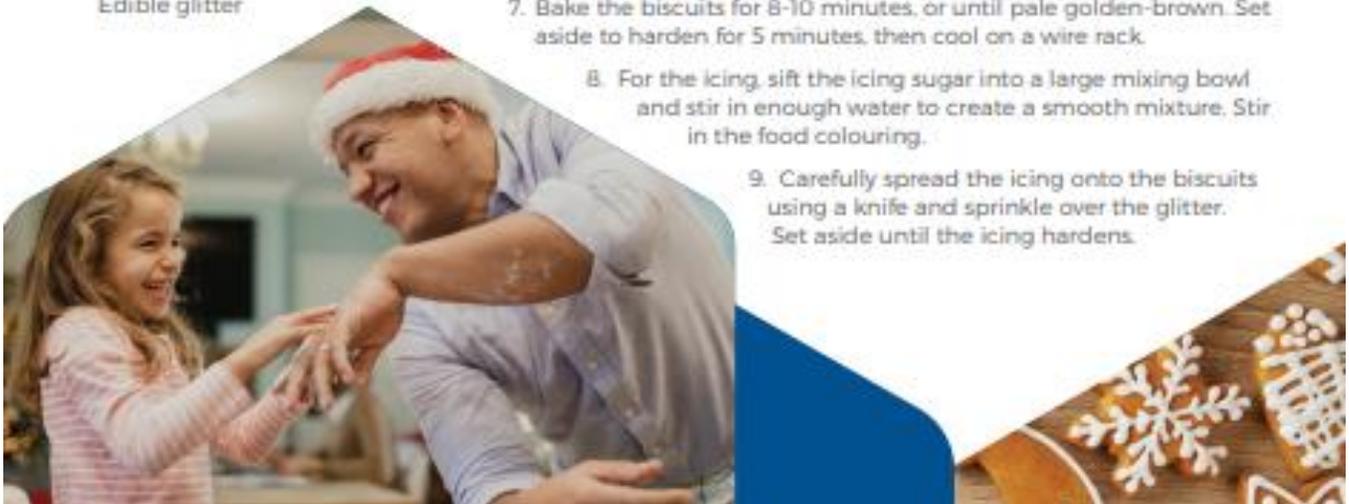
3-4 tbsp water

2-3 drops food colourings

Edible glitter

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper.
2. Cream the butter and sugar together in a bowl until pale, light and fluffy.
3. Beat in the egg and vanilla extract, a little at a time, until well combined.
4. Stir in the flour until the mixture comes together as a dough.
5. Roll the dough out on a lightly floured work surface to a thickness of 1cm/1/2in.
6. Using biscuit cutters or a glass, cut biscuits out of the dough and carefully place onto the baking tray. To make into Christmas tree decorations, carefully make a hole in the top of the biscuit using a straw.
7. Bake the biscuits for 8-10 minutes, or until pale golden-brown. Set aside to harden for 5 minutes, then cool on a wire rack.
8. For the icing, sift the icing sugar into a large mixing bowl and stir in enough water to create a smooth mixture. Stir in the food colouring.
9. Carefully spread the icing onto the biscuits using a knife and sprinkle over the glitter. Set aside until the icing hardens.



Exchanging Your Housing Association Home

For those who would like to upsize, downsize or move home for another reason, eligible tenants can apply for a mutual exchange. This is where tenants of two different council or housing association properties

apply to swap homes and tenancies. As an EPIC tenant you can apply for a mutual exchange if:

- ✓ You have an Assured Tenancy.
- ✓ You do not have any current breaches of your tenancy agreement.
- ✓ You do not have any valid legal notices served against you.

Some tenants find potential exchange partners through word of mouth, but we can also assist you in finding an exchange partner by helping you register to HomeSwapper®. For more information go to www.epichousing.co.uk/your-tenancy/transfers-and-mutual-exchanges/ and also speak to your Housing Officer.



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

Online www.epichousing.co.uk

Telephone 01782 252575

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

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





Myth Busting

FALSE

Leaving the heating on all day on a low temperature is cheaper than turning the heating up and down or on and off as needed.

Cranking the thermostat up heats the home faster.

Electrical appliances such as TV's, phone chargers, laptops etc. don't use electricity when they are plugged in but not used.

With traditional light bulb fittings, you cannot do a straightforward swap with energy saving bulbs.

It is always cheaper to use electrical appliances at night.



TRUE

Leaving your room thermostat on a lower temperature all day will waste heat when you do not need it. By combining the use of a thermostat with a timer control the house will be heated to the desired temperature for just the time you need it.

No matter how high you set the temperature, the speed the house heats up remains the same. So there is no need to crank it up to 30 degrees

Some electric appliances still use energy even when the device isn't being used!

Energy saving bulbs and LEDs now come in all shapes and sizes.

This will be true for those tenants on an Economy 7 tariff, however the majority of householders are not on this form of tariff and pay the same rate at all times of day and night.



For more energy saving tips go to: www.groundwork.org.uk/greendoctor/tips-and-support/
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/hub/quick-tips-to-save-energy/

(EPIC is not responsible for any external websites)



Arrangements over the Christmas period

Our phone lines will close for the Christmas break at **1:00pm** on **Friday 23rd December** and will re-open at **9:00am** on **Tuesday 3rd January 2023**.

Repairs

If you have an EMERGENCY repair during this period (e.g., no heating/hot water; major blockage of drains/toilets; serious water leak) please call our 24-hour emergency repair line on **0800 694 0434**.

If you smell GAS, please call National Grid (24 hours a day) on 0800 111 999 immediately.

If your repair is not an emergency, please report it via www.epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/report-a-repair/ or email us at mailbox@epichousing.co.uk and we will attend to this as soon as possible in the New Year.

Rent Payment

Rent continues to be payable over the Christmas period as normal. During this time, you can pay your rent by:

- Visiting www.epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/make-a-payment/
- Using online or mobile banking and sending a payment to Account Number: 50069842; Sort Code: 08-90-09. Please use your Tenancy Reference Number in the 'Reference' or 'Comment' field. You can find this on your EPIC Rent Payment Card or on any EPIC Rent Statement. If you cannot find your tenancy reference, please enter your house/flat number and street name in the 'Comment' field.
- Visiting any shop that has a PayPoint facility or any Post Office. You will need your EPIC payment card to make a payment.

Anti-Social or Criminal Behaviour

Please call Staffordshire Police on 101. In an emergency or if a crime is in progress dial 999.

For more information on dealing with ASB, including hate crimes and domestic abuse, please visit www.epichousing.co.uk/anti-social-behaviour-2/

Other Queries

For any other enquiries please visit www.epichousing.co.uk or email us at mailbox@epichousing.co.uk and we will be in touch after the Christmas break.

Everyone at EPIC would like to wish all our customers a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year

