



MESSAGE FROM STEPHEN FUNNELL – CHAIR OF EPIC



Welcome to the Spring edition of EPIC News. I wanted to share my very own personal message, and fond farewell, as my time as Chair of EPIC came to an end in March.

My time at EPIC started in April 2017 as a member of the Board and then in September 2019 I was delighted to have been appointed as Chair. We've had some challenging times at EPIC over the last couple of years, but I am delighted to see the improvements that have been and continue to be made. Working alongside the rest of the Board and the Executive Team, the focus continues to be on improving the services offered to you, our tenants, and the quality of your home. I am confident that I leave the organisation in safe hands with a new Chair, Simon Wilson, and a refreshed Board and our Executive

Team, led by Tracey Johnson, CEO. I know there is more news about the refreshed Board later in this edition. I will continue to be a strong advocate and ambassador for EPIC and for you, our tenants. That only leaves me to send you my very warm wishes for the future.

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO, TRACEY JOHNSON



Welcome to EPIC's Spring newsletter. I hope that you find it of interest and useful.

Firstly, a big thank you and fond farewell to Steve Funnell, Chair of EPIC, who left at the end of March. It has been a delight working with Steve since I joined the organisation in July 2022 and I know he won't be a stranger to EPIC. You'll also see in this edition an update in relation to our new appointments for a Chair of EPIC and also three new non-executive directors. Their details can be found on our website, alongside details of the Executive Team here: [The Executive Team - epichousing.co.uk](https://www.epichousing.co.uk).

I've been with EPIC for 8 months now, and it's been a busy and challenging time organisationally, but even more so for you, our tenants, with the rising cost of living. Our service delivery and the maintenance of your homes is my first priority, alongside ensuring that colleagues at EPIC are motivated and engaged to deliver great services to you.

The spotlight on housing has never been greater and I would encourage, and welcome, your involvement. We have a number of opportunities and these will increase over the coming months as we develop even further ways in which you can engage with us and us with you.

If you would like to become involved, then please get in touch by calling 01782 252575, emailing us at mailbox@epichousing.co.uk or visiting our website.

My very best wishes to you all.

Tracey

Tracey Johnson

CEO



EPIC APPOINTS NEW CHAIR AND THREE NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS



Newly appointed Chair of EPIC, Simon Wilson, joined the Board from 1st April 2023. Simon is currently Chief Executive of a community-led Housing Association in Birmingham and has over 25 years experience of working in the social housing sector.

Having previously served as a Non-Executive Director with an organisation based in Bradford, Simon brings a wealth of experience to EPIC. Working alongside the Board and the Executive Team, Simon is looking forward to continuing to shape and deliver on the Corporate Plan for EPIC and ensuring that tenants continue to be at the heart of what EPIC does.

Simon is joined by three new Non-Executive Directors – Margaret Dodwell, Alun Bragg and Jonathan Moore. Their full profiles and those of the whole Board can be found here: [The EPIC Board – epichousing.co.uk](https://www.epichousing.co.uk)



GARDEN MAINTENANCE SERVICE RESUMED FOR SPRING

In our communal gardens our garden maintenance contractors, Croppers Ground Maintenance, have resumed the grass-cutting service. Please ensure these areas are accessible and that furniture, toys, plant pots, etc. do not obstruct the gardens.

Croppers will be unable to carry out the work if there is dog faeces on the grass or other communal areas. As well as being a breach of the Tenancy Agreement, not cleaning up dog mess can become a major health risk, sometimes leading to blindness, asthma or other conditions. If you are a dog owner please do not leave your pet unsupervised in any communal garden and ensure all mess is cleaned up and disposed of immediately.

Any tenant thinking of getting a pet should first request and obtain permission from EPIC.

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 reduce 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 PRE-PAYMENT METERS



Pre-payment meters (PPMs) allow consumers to credit their account. Their meter deducts credit from the account based on the amount of energy used by the consumer and the rates that apply to the consumer's tariff.

PPM customers typically pay more for their energy than those paying by direct debit; but the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, recently announced that from 1st July 2023 the "prepayment penalty" will end, cutting bills for over four million households.

Prepay households will save an average of £45 a year on their energy bills as a result of the move, according to the Treasury, and will no longer pay more compared to people on direct debits. Currently, the extra cost for energy firms to manage meters – such as supplying vouchers and collecting payments – is passed on to customers.

If you're struggling to pay for energy, talk to your supplier as soon as possible. Some of the help they may provide includes:

- A full payment plan review.
- Affordable debt repayment plans.
- Payment breaks (though this won't be right for everyone).
- Payment reductions.
- More time to pay.
- Access to hardship funds where appropriate.



HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Please remember: if you are planning to make any alterations or improvements to your home, especially where this affects the structure, fixtures or fittings, it's important you request and obtain our permission beforehand.

Some examples here include alterations to the kitchen or bathroom suites, installing your own light fittings or any work which impacts on your neighbours.

To complete one of our permission request forms please visit

www.epichousing.co.uk/customer-forms/





FOCUS ON CONDENSATION, DAMP & MOULD



Many people experience 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 plus 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 for consideration:

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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 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, where possible.



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.

COVID-19 spring booster

As part of the COVID vaccination programme, people at highest risk of severe illness will be eligible for a spring booster. The dose will be offered to :

- everyone aged 75 and over
- residents in care homes for older adults
- immunosuppressed people aged 5 and over



Anyone who is eligible will be contacted by the NHS. [Find out more information about the COVID-19 spring booster campaign.](#)





PUZZLE CORNER

Fed up with Winter? Have a go at our Spring themed wordsearch:

B	N	U	R	G	E	C	Y	F	L	I	N	G	I	P	
R	O	M	H	A	D	H	K	U	H	L	H	S	M	A	
V	P	D	C	R	N	G	S	P	R	O	U	T	S	Z	<u>SPRING</u>
J	E	A	I	D	I	R	N	U	K	J	P	G	Q	M	
V	M	F	P	E	S	E	J	J	L	H	L	Y	T	W	CHANGE
D	A	F	A	N	W	E	C	S	A	G	D	X	D	N	CROCUS
E	A	O	K	C	R	N	L	R	N	Z	H	J	W	G	DAFFODIL
C	B	D	Z	F	E	V	E	R	R	C	Y	A	L	X	FEVER
Z	R	I	N	T	N	W	X	D	Y	E	L	X	H	T	FLING
K	F	L	N	Z	E	H	I	Z	Z	Z	E	Q	W	B	GARDEN
S	W	B	T	L	W	C	H	A	H	N	F	E	G	P	GREEN
E	W	N	Z	U	U	L	L	G	A	Z	E	Z	D	X	HATCH
C	W	B	T	U	A	J	M	Y	T	U	G	K	O	N	RENEW
P	S	K	R	C	P	M	B	R	C	R	O	C	U	S	SPROUT
Z	C	B	C	H	A	N	G	E	H	M	F	I	N	X	



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.

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 Tenant Satisfaction

Tenant satisfaction measures

We want to know what you think



From 1st April 2023 Housing Associations are required to make their performance more visible to tenants, and to help tenants hold their landlords to account.

There are 22 questions within the **Tenant Satisfaction Measures** (TSMs) which cover 5 themes:

- Keeping properties in good repair
- Maintaining building safety
- Respectful and helpful engagement
- Effective complaints handling
- Responsible neighbourhood management

Landlords will be required to report their performance to the Regulator of Social Housing on an annual basis next year. You can find out more about Tenant Satisfaction Measures [HERE](#)

We want you to tell us what you think about your home and the services we offer and will be asking Acuity to help us to carry out a Survey of Tenants and Residents known as STAR this summer. The results of the STAR survey will help us complete our first TSM submission and to help engage with you to help shape our services and the services you want.

Help us to continue to improve and to shape our services by completing the survey when you receive it.

If you would like more information, please contact us at: reception@epichousing.co.uk



Focus on our Six-Blocks in Bentilee



We have been carrying out a spring clean of our Bentilee 'Six-Blocks' including:

- Cleaning windows and windowsills.
- Sweeping and mopping the staircase and hallways.
- Cleaning the handrails, doors, walls, and ceilings.
- Sweeping paths and removing any debris.

Also, our Housing Officers have been visiting each of the tenants to talk about the new fire safety and evacuation arrangements, along with explaining a number of other improvements due in the near

future. Over the next few months, we will be looking more closely at our communal areas and gardens, as well as carrying out a comprehensive review of our service charges, to ensure they are providing good value for money for customers.

Tenant 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.



Reporting Repairs

We want to make sure that all our homes are kept at a fully maintained standard and that none of our tenants have outstanding long-term repairs that we are not actively working on remedying.

If you have a repair that you have not yet reported, this includes Damp and Mould issues, please do so as soon as possible to our repairs contractor, Brenden Fern Limited, on 01782 818577.

If you have a repair that has been reported and which you do not have an appointment for, or any other issue with your property, please call us on 01782 252575 and ask to speak to a member of our Asset Team.

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

www.epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/report-a-repair/

- ✓ **email us at mailbox@epichousing.co.uk**

- ✓ **or call us on 01782 252575**

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



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

visit: www.thistlemyhome.co.uk



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CLARION
FUTURES

Where could your next opportunity take you?

Introduction to working within the Care Industry

Enroll now for this brief two day course on 27th and 28th April

Being held at St John's Centre, Newcastle Road, Trent Vale, ST4 6QD

- Busting the myths around working in care
- Care scenarios and how to support
- First impressions for both service user and employer
- Preparing for your care interview
- Meet employers with vacancies

To register your interest please visit Eventbrite;
<https://ClarionCareIndustryStoke.eventbrite.co.uk>

myclarionhousing.com/opportunities



Scan to register



Emergency Alerts

[On Sunday 23 April 2023, there will be a national test of the UK Emergency Alerts service.](#)

Emergency Alerts is a UK government service that will warn you if there's a danger to life nearby.

In an emergency, your mobile phone or tablet will receive an alert with advice about how to stay safe.

The government does not need to know your phone number or location to send you an alert.

Reasons you might get an alert

You may get alerts about:

- severe flooding
- fires
- extreme weather

Emergency alerts will only be sent by:

- the emergency services
- government departments, agencies and public bodies that deal with emergencies

What happens when you get an emergency alert

Your mobile phone or tablet may:

- make a loud siren-like sound, even if it's set on silent
- vibrate
- read out the alert

The sound and vibration will last for about 10 seconds.

An alert will include a phone number or a link to the GOV.UK website for more information.

You'll get alerts based on your current location - not where you live or work. You do not need to turn on location services to receive alerts.

What you need to do

When you get an alert, stop what you're doing and follow the instructions in the alert.

If you're driving or riding when you get an alert

- You should not read or otherwise respond to an emergency alert whilst driving or riding a motorcycle.
- If you are driving, you should continue to drive and not respond to the noise or attempt to pick up the mobile phone and deal with the message.

- Find somewhere safe and legal to stop before reading the message. If there is nowhere safe or legal to stop close by, and nobody else is in the vehicle to read the alert, tune into live radio and wait for bulletins until you can find somewhere safe and legal to stop.

It is illegal to use a hand-held device while driving or riding.

If you cannot receive emergency alerts

If you do not have a [compatible device](#), you'll still be informed about an emergency. The emergency services have other ways to warn you when there is a threat to life.

Emergency alerts will not replace local news, radio, television, or social media.

If you're deaf, hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted

If you have a vision or hearing impairment, audio and vibration attention signals will let you know you have an emergency alert.

Alert languages

Emergency alerts will be sent in English. In Wales, they may also be sent in Welsh.



Live in Stoke-on-Trent? You'll need photo ID to vote in this year's council election

New rules requiring voters to show photo ID at polling stations will come into effect at May's local elections.

For more information please go to www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20017/elections/582/elections_may_2023



Electrical Safety Checks – Keeping Your Home Safe

We are responsible for ensuring that your home is a safe place to live. As part of our duties, we need to complete an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR). This allows our electrical contractor to make sure that electrical appliances, wires, and fuse boxes are safely installed and working as they should be. Faults with appliances, wires or fuse boxes may cause electric shock or fire, causing injury to occupants and damage to

property. Therefore, if any issues are found during the check on your home, our contractor will complete any necessary repairs so that your home is left in a safe condition.

Unlike gas safety checks, which occur every year, EICR checks are only required once every five years. Brenden Fern will contact you when it is time for your EICR check to be completed to ensure a convenient appointment is made. **Please ensure that you allow access first time**, so that we can fulfil our obligations as your landlord.

