



# EPIC NEWS

Issue 10 – October 2023

## Message from CEO, Tracey Johnson

Welcome to the Autumn edition of EPIC News.

I hope you find the time with a cuppa to read through the updates shared in this edition, with a special focus on how you can get involved to shape and influence our services to you.

You may have seen previous communications from us about hosting another 'Big Conversation' on 9 December. We are keen to continue to develop engagement opportunities with all tenants, but on reflection, recognise that hosting an event two Saturdays before Christmas Day might not be the best time. So, with that in mind, we will be rearranging for some time in the New Year. Please remember though that you can get in touch with us through our established engagement methods, as detailed [here](#).

Thank you to everyone who took the opportunity to complete the STAR survey that was sent out earlier in the year. We had a great response with an overall satisfaction with our services of 81%. Some of you also took the opportunity to tell us that you would like to be involved in influencing the shape of our services and those of you that had concerns about damp and mould. For those who would like to be more involved, you should have received an email from us last week in relation to this. We are contacting all tenants who raised concerns about damp and mould.

We are also looking at refreshing our Corporate Plan and I would love to hear your views and thoughts on this. Watch out for a simple form to complete by email to tell us more.

This is our last EPIC News of the calendar year, so my best wishes to you and yours for the festive break. I know that for so many of you it can be a difficult time, especially in the current economic climate, but remember if you are struggling, get in touch with us and we will try our very best to help. See you in 2024!



Best wishes  
Tracey



### IN THIS ISSUE:

- ★ Meet our Tenant Engagement Team Leader
- ★ Results from our recent STAR Survey
- ★ Celebrate Halloween with us
- ★ Prepare your home for winter
- ★ Help with debt and the cost of living
- ...and much more!



**CELEBRATE HALLOWEEN WITH US!**  
Find out more on page 2.

## Please welcome our new Tenant Engagement Team Leader – Mark!

Hi, I'm Mark, the new Tenant Engagement team leader at EPIC Housing.

My role is to work alongside tenants to make sure that you have the opportunity to let us know how you feel about the services we deliver. I will also make sure that tenants have a voice in how we work and influence the decisions we make as a landlord.

Over the coming months, we'll be exploring the different ways that you can get involved – from completing surveys to attending meetings and meeting staff.

We value everyone's views and need you to help us identify where we can improve services, giving us a tenant's perspective on how we work.

If you would like to know more about how to get involved, please feel free to contact me at [m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk).



## STAR Survey

Thank you to all tenants who took the time to complete our recent Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR). The headline results are –



**81%**

Overall satisfaction.



**79%**

Provided with a safe home.



**81%**

Satisfied with the repairs completed in the last 12 months.



**80%**

Satisfied with the time taken to complete the last repair.



**81%**





Think we treat people fairly and with respect.

The results from the STAR survey will not only provide the Regulator of Social Housing with an insight into how we are doing but will also enable you to hold us to account. The measures are aimed at helping improve standards for people living in social housing, by making the performance of social landlords more visible.

## Celebrate Halloween with us!

Things are looking spooky at our Bentilee reception! Call in to see us to pick up free sweets and colouring books kindly donated by our contractor [Hankinson](#).

We are also holding a pumpkin carving competition open to all local residents!

-  Pick up a free pumpkin from us.
-  Carve it and upload a picture to Facebook, sending us a direct message with the picture too.
-  The winner will get a £25 shopping voucher.
-  Full information can be found on our website [here](#).

See page 8 for a delicious soup recipe to use up any leftover pumpkin.

## Office Opening Times

You can visit us at our reception in Bentilee on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9.00am – 2.30pm.  
Address: 131-141 Ubberley Rd, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 0EF



You can visit us at our community building in Meir every other Tuesday, 8.00am – 3.00pm. Our next available date is Tuesday 31 October.

Address: Normacot Grange Community Building, Burgundy Grove, Meir, ST3 7GW

### Free period products now available from our Bentilee reception

Thanks to a generous donation from Period Power, we now have free period products available to staff and tenants at our office in Bentilee.



We have set up a designated box in our reception area where you can help yourself to whichever products you need.

Find out more by [clicking here](#) and visiting our website.

### Bentilee Summer Fun Day

We had a great day at the Bentilee Summer Fun Day in August. We met lots of local residents and support organisations, all whilst raising money for our charity of the year, St Stephen's Church!

Congratulations to the lucky winners of our three great raffle prizes – an air fryer, swingball and a slow cooker.

### Staff Litter Pick

In September, our team did a great job cleaning up the local area by carrying out a litter pick of Ubberry Road in Bentilee.

In partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, we have pledged to litter-pick once every three months.



### Changes to Social Housing Consumer Standards

Following the Grenfell tragedy, in which 72 people devastatingly lost their lives after a fire broke out in a London block of flats, new social housing regulations are being put in place.

The new requirements will provide the Regulator of Social Housing stronger powers and give tenants greater power to hold their landlord to account.

As a responsible landlord, we review our compliance with the Regulatory Standards every year to ensure we continue to meet the expectations of our customers and stakeholders. We will carry out a new assessment against the standard once the new requirements are released and will publish the results on our website.

More information on the new standards and what they mean can be found on our website [here](#).

### Coming soon – Your Housing Perks

In the coming weeks, you will receive details about how to download the Housing Perks app which gives you discounts of up to 10% with 100 brands and stores, to help you save money with everyday spending.

The free app will help you to save money on essentials such as groceries, car fuel and family days out.

Get discounts from places such as Sainsburys, Asda, Argos, B&Q and much more.



## **Disrepair Claim Advice**

We are aware that some of our tenants are receiving home visits or phone calls from people claiming to be from a disrepair claim company.

We are here to ensure that your home is well maintained and safe at all times. If you have received a visit or a call from a disrepair claim company and you are not sure what to do, please contact us first to discuss it.

[Visit our website](#) to read more about:

- What to do if you think you have disrepair in your home
- What happens if you decide to claim for disrepair

## **Damp and Mould - preparing your home for winter**

As we transition into the colder months, it's essential to ensure that your home is ready to withstand the challenges of winter, and one of the primary concerns during this season is damp and mould. Damp and mould not only affect your living conditions but can also have adverse effects on your health. To help you maintain a comfortable and healthy home, we've put together some practical tips on how to prepare your home to prevent damp and mould in the coming winter months.

- Ventilation is key – open windows and air vents to allow humid air to ventilate out of the property.
- Dry clothes properly – if you don't have a vented tumble dryer, make sure you dry clothes in a well-ventilated space or use a dehumidifier to remove excess moisture.
- Keep furniture away from walls – leave a gap between your furniture and the walls to allow air to circulate. This prevents moisture from being trapped behind furniture.
- Remove excess moisture – wipe moisture from windows so it doesn't re-evaporate during the day.

If you would like to speak to us about damp and mould in your home, please contact us using [the form on our website](#).

We are contacting all tenants who raised concerns about damp and mould in our recent STAR survey so please try to answer the call.

## **EnviroVent Humidity Fans Running Costs**

For tenants with EnviroVent humidity fans, it is important that you keep these switched on as they will improve the ventilation of the room as well as reduce moisture and unwanted odours.

The yearly running costs are very low; running a bathroom fan costs approx. £3.68 per year and running a kitchen fan costs approx. £9.61 per year. In comparison, a 32" LCD TV costs £24.53 to run per year and a built-in fridge freezer costs £76.65 to run per year.



*Estimated based on electricity cost of £0.28 KW/h. Information provided by EnviroVent, copies can be supplied on request.*

# YOUR PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY

## Meir Matters

Meir Matters is a community lounge held in the former library on Sandon Road in Meir (ST3 7DJ). They host a variety of events open to local residents and the wider area:

- Monday – community lounge, all-inclusive food pantry, theatre kids
- Tuesday – community lounge, craft, coffee and chat, all-inclusive food pantry
- Wednesday – community lounge, all-inclusive food pantry, craft, coffee and chat
- Thursday – mental health support group, theatre kids, fitness class
- Friday – community lounge, all-inclusive food pantry



[Follow Meir Matters on Facebook](#) to find out more and keep up-to-date with everything they have going on.

## Recharge Policy

We have recently released a Recharge Policy which sets out the steps we will take to recover monies owed to us from current and former tenants because of wilful neglect and damage to a property or a breach of the tenancy agreement which has resulted in repairs being carried out that are not due to fair wear and tear.

[Please click here](#) to view the document. If you have any feedback about the policy please email [c.gleghorn@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:c.gleghorn@epichousing.co.uk).

## Home Standard

We have also recently revised Our Home Standard. This is a document that sets out the standard at which we will maintain your home.

You can view this document on our website [here](#), we would really appreciate your feedback. Please let us know what you think of the standard, for example, is there anything you think should be added or taken out?

Please send your feedback to [assetmanagementsharedmailbox@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:assetmanagementsharedmailbox@epichousing.co.uk).

## Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

Following recent reports in the media, some customers may have concerns about the presence of RAAC in their homes.

EPIC Housing would like to provide assurance that the presence of RAAC in our homes is extremely unlikely, having been a method more commonly used in commercial and public buildings during the 1960s rather than in domestic housing.

The information we hold on our systems about our properties does not highlight the presence of RAAC in our buildings. However, as a precautionary measure, we have carried out intrusive surveys by archetype in blocks that were built in this era, which has proven there is no RAAC present.

At EPIC Housing, we are committed to keeping our customers safe. We hope that these proactive measures help to assure you.



## MONEY MATTERS

### Help with Debt and the Cost of Living

We know that times are difficult and you may be struggling. Lots of things are increasing in price such as energy and food and it can leave you feeling overwhelmed and worried. If you are struggling with debt or the current cost of living, please speak to us – we are here to support you. We can provide basic money advice, mental health support and refer you to other useful support services and organisations.

The following organisations also offer free advice and access to debt counselling:



<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/>  
0800 240 4420



<https://nationaldebtline.org/>  
0808 808 4000



<https://www.stepchange.org/>  
0800 138 1111

### Local Foodbanks

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.

Click on the links below for information on the different locations:

[Stoke-on-Trent](#)

[Newcastle-under-Lyme](#)

[Leek and District](#)



### The Bread and Butter Thing – Bentilee Family Hub

The bread and butter thing affordable food hub recently launched at the Bentilee Family Hub, formerly known as the Treehouse Children's Centre.

By signing up for this initiative, you can save over £20 per week on your groceries! The food assortment varies every week, but you can expect to receive a range of items, including fresh fruits and vegetables, chilled foods, and essential pantry staples.

Find out how you can sign up by visiting [The bread and butter thing website](#).







# PAYING YOUR RENT

## Rent Reference

When submitting your rent payment, please ensure you include your rent account reference in the 'reference' section of your bank account. Without the correct reference, your rent could get posted to an incorrect account.

You can obtain this information from the rent payment card provided at the start of your tenancy or from other correspondence received from us. If you require this information again, do not hesitate to contact us.

## 6 Ways to Pay

There are various different ways for you to pay your rent.

If you require any further information or support please email us – [rents@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:rents@epichousing.co.uk).

1

The EPIC Housing website –

<https://epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/make-a-payment/>.

*Please quote your rent account reference e.g. ABC123A or REA000000*

2

Set up a standing order from your bank account.

EPIC Housing account number: 50069842

EPIC Housing sort code: 08-90-09

*Don't forget to quote your rent account reference.*

3

Using online banking.

*Don't forget to quote your rent account reference.*

4

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

5

Card payment over the phone. You can call us on 01782 252575.

6

Through the housing costs element of your Universal Credit form.



## SEASONAL RECIPE

### Pumpkin Soup with Homemade Croutons

If you have pumpkin leftovers from Halloween, why not give this delicious recipe a try?

*[Recipe from BBC Good Food](#)*

Prep: 20 mins | Cooks: 25 mins | Difficulty: easy | Serves: 6



#### Ingredients

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 1kg pumpkin, peeled, deseeded and chopped into chunks
- 700ml vegetable stock or chicken stock
- 150ml double cream

#### For the croutons

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 slices wholemeal seeded bread, crusts removed
- Handful pumpkin seeds

#### Method

##### STEP 1

Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a large saucepan, then gently cook 2 finely chopped onions for 5 mins, until soft but not coloured.

##### STEP 2

Add 1kg pumpkin or squash, cut into chunks, to the pan, then carry on cooking for 8-10 mins, stirring occasionally until it starts to soften and turn golden.

##### STEP 3

Pour 700ml vegetable or chicken stock into the pan and season with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 mins until the squash is very soft.

##### STEP 4

Pour 150ml double cream into the pan, bring back to the boil, then purée with a hand blender. For an extra-velvety consistency, you can pour the soup through a fine sieve. The soup can now be frozen for up to 2 months.

##### STEP 5

To make the croutons: cut 4 slices of wholemeal seeded bread into small squares.

##### STEP 6

Heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a frying pan, then fry the bread until it starts to become crisp.

##### STEP 7

Add a handful of pumpkin seeds to the pan, then cook for a few mins more until they are toasted. These can be made a day ahead and stored in an airtight container.

##### STEP 8

Reheat the soup if needed, taste for seasoning, then serve scattered with croutons and seeds and drizzled with more olive oil, if you want.

Do you have a recipe that you would like to share? Send it to [s.tatton@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:s.tatton@epichousing.co.uk) and we might include it in the next newsletter!





# **VOLUNTEER WITH US**

## **Service Centre**

Unit 4, Newstead Industrial Estate, Alderflat Dr, Stoke on Trent ST4 8HX

**Proud to support Recycling and Sustainability**

**Could you or someone you know volunteer  
with us?**

**Scanning: Media, Books, Bric-a-Brac, General Sorting**

For more information visit our website or call the number below

**(9am-5pm Mon-Fri)**



**For more information**

**Visit: [www.dougiemac.org.uk/volunteering](http://www.dougiemac.org.uk/volunteering)**

**Call: 01782 344332 or scan the QR code**



# TENANTS RESPONSIBILITY...

## DID YOU KNOW?

Under the terms of your tenancy agreement you may under certain circumstances be liable for the repairs to your home.

### How could such situations arise?

- If the neighbour upstairs left the bath running or if they had a burst pipe and the water caused damage to your decorations it may be your responsibility to redecorate your home.
- If you had your keys stolen you may have to pay for the cost of replacing the locks.
- If a vandal broke one of your windows you may be liable for the replacement cost of the window.

## DON'T WORRY HELP IS AT HAND!

Your landlord has teamed up with the National Housing Federation and Thistle Tenant Risks to offer tenants and leaseholders the My Home Contents Insurance Scheme which, subject to policy limits and exclusion, provides cover for your home contents against such events that you may be affected by and financially responsible for, alongside cover for losses arising from perils such as Fire, Theft, Water and Storm damage.

Optional extensions are available for an additional premium, you can include, extended accidental damage, personal possessions (cover away from the home), wheelchairs, hearing aids, and cover is also available for the structure of garden sheds, garages and greenhouses.

You can pay cash fortnightly or monthly using a swipecard, you can set up a monthly direct debit, or pay annually (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge).

**Exclusions & limits apply.**

**A copy of the policy wording is available on request.**

So if you want to find out more you can ask your landlord for an application pack or

**contact My Home Contents Insurance on 0345 450 7288**

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

**You can even request a member of the My Home Insurance Team to call you back!**

