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We're growing so we're making some changes!

As EPIC continues to grow through acquiring properties across North Staffordshire we are making some changes to continue to provide you with a high quality service. The main change we are making is to increase the number of housing officers from two to three. This means that there will be some changes to which housing officer manages which road. **You can see who your Housing Officer is by looking at page 2 just inside this newsletter!**

The best way to contact your housing officer is to email us at mailbox@epichousing.co.uk. Your housing officer can then either email you a response, speak to you over the phone or arrange to meet with you depending on the issue. Our housing assistant and administration team can deal with most day to day queries and can be also contacted at the same email address. There is also a wide range of information on our website at www.epichousing.co.uk, including our Tenant Handbook which contains the answers to the most common questions asked by our customers.

Useful Information:

Did you know that our website has lots of interesting information about EPIC and how we are performing? Click on the links below to read our Value for Money Statement, latest performance against our key targets and annual report for the last financial year:

- [The Value for Money Statement](#)
- [Annual Report for 2015/16](#)
- [Our latest Key Performance Indicators](#)

Continued from page 1:
Who is your Housing Officer?

Patch 1 - Richard Lovatt	Patch 2 - Paul Carey	Patch 3 - Nicola Keates
Street Name	Street Name	Street Name
Applegarth Close Aylesbury Road Beverley Drive Birch Street Boon Avenue Brecon Way Brewster Road Congleton Road Corfe Green Cornwall Street Dickenson Road East Dimsdale Parade West Dorchester Walk Elliot Road Filey Close Florence Road Fullwood Walk George Avenue Grangewood Road Irene Avenue Kendal Grove Leaward Road Lillydale Road Lockington Avenue Lundy Road Maidstone Grove Melbourne Street Neath Close Newhouse Road Newstead Road Norwich Road Pickwick Place Piggot Grove Plainfield Grove Pleydell Street Priors Road Roseland Crescent Ruthin Road Seddon Road Skipacre Ave Taunton Way Taylor Road Tyrell Grove Westfield Road Whitehouse Road Williamson Avenue Winchester Avenue	Barnwell Grove Bartholemew Road Boulton Street Brick Kiln Lane Bridge Road Brundall Oval Burt Street Carlton Ave Cedar Grove Cemlyn Avenue Central Drive Community Drive Eastdean Avenue Emery Avenue Farrington Close Friar's Place Frodingham Road Galloway Road Glenfield Way Gristhorpe Way Grovesnor Road Hawthorne Avenue Heathcote Road Hethersett Walk Lauder Place Leason Road Leek Road Leek New Road Little Cliffe Road Lowthorpe Way Orton Road Robertville Road Romsey Close Sheridan Gardens Spalding Place Stanway Avenue Thames Road Thornhill Road Townsend Place Ubberley Road Vivian Road Weighton Grove Welbeck Place Wendling Close	Abbey Lane Abbey Road Abbot's Road Allendale Walk Arbourfield Drive Bitterne Place Blurton Road Brackenfield Avenue Calvary Crescent Chelmsford Drive Dalecot Green Dawlish Drive Dividy Road Fitzherbert Road Gilliat Walk Greenbank Rd Hamner Green Hatrell Street Heathcote Street Hesketh Avenue Holly Road Homestead Street Housefield Road Keene Close Langford Road Latimer Way Leicester Place Maple Close Maureen Avenue Middlefield Road Nethercote Place Northwood Green Pacific Road Paisley Close Peascroft Road Pinfold Avenue Ridge Road Rownall Road Smithyfield Road St Bernard Place St Mary's Road Star & Garter Road Sundorne Place Sydenham Place Templeton Avenue Tenbury Green Tintagel Place Tiverton Road Topham Place Trimley Way Truro Place Tyson Green Waverton Road Wellfield Road Westacre Whitridge Grove Wignall Road Woodlands Road



FIRE SAFETY

Further to the recent fire at a block of flats in Grenfell Tower, London, we would like to assure all of our tenants that we have undertaken a review of our fire safety arrangements and practices to ensure your safety and the safety of our properties.

As a result of this review, we would like to confirm that we have no properties with the type of cladding used on the Grenfell Tower. In addition, we will be fitting hardwired smoke alarms in the communal areas of our 6 blocks.

To offer further reassurance to our tenants, we can confirm that the following fire safety measures are in place:

- Each block with a communal area is fire risk assessed. The last fire risk assessments were completed in November 2016 and the next ones have been brought forward to August 2017.
- We complete an annual check to the gas system to each property.
- We are part way through completing a programme of electrical testing to the flats.
- We fit cookers free of charge to ensure that they have been installed correctly.
- We fit smoke detectors in each property; these are tested annually at the same time as the gas service.
- There is emergency lighting to the communal areas of blocks of 6 flats, which is tested annually, by a specialist contractor and last completed in March 2017. The lighting is approximately 15 years old and considered by our contractor to be in good condition.
- The annual gas check requests the operative to assess the properties for any tenant installed works or electrical sockets which may be a cause of concern, for example broken or scorched sockets. The assessment also assesses the condition of the property as a whole. Any suspicion of tampering with meters is reported to the energy suppliers and the Police.

The above measures are only effective however, if all tenants comply with their responsibilities, including allowing us access once a year to undertake the Gas Safety check and annual check of your smoke alarm and ensure that you do not use the communal areas to store furniture or any other flammable objects.

If any tenants are concerned about fire safety in their home then please contact us on 01782 252575 and we will be happy to discuss your concerns.

What do I do if I have a Hotpoint fridge freezer?

Anyone who has a white Hotpoint fridge freezer model number FF175BP or Graphite fridge freezer model number FF175BG should register their appliance with the manufacturer to receive any updates.

Generally, the model number is found on a bar code on a sticker behind the salad container in the fridge.

These models were manufactured between March 2006 and July 2009. About 64,000 were sold but it is not known how many are still in use.

Owners should ring 0800 316 3826 or visit [the Hotpoint website](#).

Fires connected to fridge freezers and other electrical appliances are relatively common. More general advice on registering an appliance, should there be a recall, and other safety tips are available online on [charity Electrical Safety First's page](#).



Achieve your full potential with the John Flock Bentilee Empowerment Fund.

Going to College?

Learning to Drive?

Applying for Training?

We can help you achieve your dreams!

The John Flock Bentilee Empowerment Fund

The John Flock Bentilee Empowerment Fund can award you a grant of up to £200 to help you to kick start a business or even further your career opportunities by funding a laptop, block of driving lessons, a training course and much, much more.

To qualify you just need to live in Bentilee or Berryhill, and be on an income of less than £15,000 per year or in receipt of benefits.

The next round of funding is due to be allocated in January 2017, so get moving and contact Lisa Dulson on 01782 222369 or l.dulson@epichousing.co.uk for more information or for an application form.

Condensation in your Home

Condensation in homes is very common and in time this can lead to the growth of black mould. Although condensation levels may increase in winter there are still ways you could work to reduce it during the summer months. This includes ensuring clothes are left to dry outside.

A guide is available on our website www.epichousing.co.uk in the downloads — customer leaflets section — which shows you how to avoid condensation forming and how to treat areas of mould should it appear.



Website: www.epichousing.co.uk

Did you know EPIC has a Facebook page? If you would like to keep up to date with what's going on at EPIC please 'Like' our page at www.facebook.com/EPICHousing for news and information.

Gas Safety

Gas Safety in your Home

We have a legal requirement to complete a gas check to your home each year and we therefore need access to complete this work. This is to help ensure your safety and you should receive a letter informing you of the appointment. If this time is not suitable for you please call the number on the letter to rearrange.

If we attend and are unable to complete the service then it will affect you receiving the full EPIC Tenant Reward which is due later in the year.

What we do to ensure your safety?

We will carry out a gas service to your home every year, this is currently done by Brenden Fern Ltd.

During a gas service we:

- ◆ Check and service all gas appliances (such as the gas fire, if there is one) including flues and ventilation to ensure they are safe to use
- ◆ Check smoke alarms are working and show you how you can check them
- ◆ Test your gas pipes to ensure there are no leaks
- ◆ Advise you how to use your system most efficiently

We are also the only landlord we know of who will fit your gas cooker for free to ensure that it has been done safely.

What can you do to ensure your safety?

What to do if you smell gas:

- ◆ Switch off the gas at the meter
- ◆ Ring **National Grid** immediately on Free Phone **0800 111 999**
- ◆ Ventilate the room by opening windows
- ◆ Do not use a naked light or any electrical equipment
- ◆ Contact us on 0800 6940434.

You must not:

- ◆ Tamper with the gas meter or any associated pipework.
- ◆ Use a gas appliance if you think it is not working properly.
- ◆ Cover an appliance or block air vents or flues.
- ◆ Connect your gas cooker. Please contact us and we will fit it for you.

Do you pay your rent by cash at our office?

From 1st August 2016 we stopped accepting **cash** payments at our office on Ubbberley Road. This change was introduced to minimise the security risk with handling cash and because there are plenty of local shops and post offices where cash payments can still be made. We still accept debit card payments at the office or over the phone. The nearest places where you can pay your rent by cash (or debit card) are:

- John's Booze convenience store (previously the Spring Cottage pub)
- Co-operative Store, Ubbberley Road
- Post Office, Dawlish Drive

Other ways you can pay your rent are:



Using your EPIC rent card at any PayPoint outlet or Post Office- If you need a replacement card please email mailbox@epichousing.co.uk or call us.



Through your own internet banking (if you have this facility)

By Standing Order (from your bank account). Please collect a form from the EPIC office or download one from our website <http://www.epichousing.co.uk/your-home/make-payment/>

Standing Order Mandate

Registered Office:
132-144 Ubbberley Road
Bosley,
Stoke-on-Trent
ST10 2BP
Telephone: 01782 252575
Mobile: 07928 800017
Fax: 01782 252571
mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk
www.epichousing.co.uk

To: _____ Bank
Address: _____

Please pay to the Co-operative Bank, 42 Goswami Street, Stafford, ST16 2BU Sort Code: 06-90-09 for the credit of Empowering People Inspiring Communities Limited account number 80668842 the sum of £ _____ p.m. each week/month commencing payment on _____ starting reference number _____ until you receive further notice from mailbox in writing and debit my/our* account accordingly.

Account Number

Sort Code

Signature _____ Date _____

Customer's Name _____
Address _____

Telephone _____

Please return to: Empowering People Inspiring Communities Limited, 132-144 Ubbberley Road, Bosley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST10 2BP
Telephone: 01782 252575

<http://www.epichousing.co.uk/your-home/make-payment/>



By debit card in the office or over the phone.

Via the EPIC website <http://www.epichousing.co.uk/your-home/make-payment/>



For more information contact your Housing Team on 01782 252575



The Government have said Universal Credit will be extended to **all** new claimant types (e.g. families, disabled) from:

- March 2018 - in Stoke-on-Trent
- September 2018 - in Newcastle-under-Lyme

The main differences to the old benefit systems are:

- You have to claim Universal Credit online.
- You may not get any money for up to 6 weeks from the date you claim.
- You get your payments monthly rather than fortnightly.
- Universal Credit also replaces Housing Benefit – any payments towards your rent will be made to you – **you must then pay your full rent over to EPIC !**

If you make a claim for Universal Credit **PLEASE LET US KNOW**

01782 252575

mailbox@epichousing.co.uk



Customer Reward Scheme 2017

Last year 527 of our tenants qualified for our Customer Reward Scheme. As a thank you for being a good tenant, each eligible customer received a **£25** Love2Shop card to spend at a range of stores.

This December we plan to continue the scheme. To qualify you should:

- √ Have passed your probationary (Shorthold) tenancy
- √ Pay your rent on time
- √ Respect your neighbours
- √ Keep your home clean & tidy
- √ Report repairs promptly
- √ Allow access when we need to visit you

Our Enforcement Successes

During the first six months of 2017, our Housing Officers have addressed 232 alleged tenancy breaches. Of these, 132 cases (57%) were found to be proven.

Thankfully, the majority of the cases we deal with are less serious, and concern issues such as rubbish dumping (30% of proven cases), tenants failing to allow access (19%), noise nuisance (11%), and pet-related problems (10%).

Our Housing Officers have had to deal with ten serious tenancy breach cases – a relatively small number - by serving legal notices. This includes cases where tenants have repeatedly failed to allow access to their homes.

At EPIC we are committed to ensuring that tenancies are conducted properly. As a result our tenants generally tell us that Bentilee and the surrounding area is a good place to live.

If you are aware of any tenancy breaches, or you would like to speak to your Housing Officer about a problem with your neighbour, please call our office on 01782 252575. You can also contact us via our website at www.epichousing.co.uk or email mailbox@epichousing.co.uk.

Stock condition survey

From September onwards we will be using a specialist company to check the condition of around a third of our properties.

This survey is important as it will help us determine the future investment needs of our housing stock.

If chosen, we do need access to your home as this will enable us to keep improving our service. It would also be helpful because, to get accurate results, we require a representative sample of properties.

Further and more detailed information will be provided by our contractor in due course.

Electrical Testing

We have recently started a programme to test the electrics at **all** of our properties. For this work we are using the contractor AML Electrical Services who will contact you directly to arrange an appointment that is suitable for you. We hope this offers some reassurance following the recent fires in London. **You can however minimise these risks at home yourself by:**

- Ensuring power sockets are not overloaded.
- Purchasing electrical goods from a reliable source.
- Checking cables are not worn or frayed



See <https://www.uswitch.com/gas-electricity/guides/electricity-safety-guide/> for further information. Following your visit you may receive a phone call from our office asking for feedback. As AML is a new contractor we want to make sure you are satisfied with the service offered. This feedback will then help us to improve.

Tenant Board Membership

Back in 2014, you elected Kirsty Holmes as your Tenant representative on the Board of EPIC. Since this time Kirsty has served as your tenant board member and as the Chair of our Quality Panel.

It is in our Company rules that all Board Members must stand down after 3 years and so Kirsty is due to stand down at our Annual General Meeting in September 2017. However, we have received no interest from any other tenant in standing for this role and so as a result, Kirsty has agreed to serve another 3 year term on your behalf.



Kirsty Holmes, Tenant Director and Chair of the Quality Panel

Therefore, unless you as the tenants object, we will be recommending that the members re-appoint Kirsty at our Annual General Meeting. Objections can be lodged by emailing Lisa Dulson, Executive Assistant, on l.dulson@epichousing.co.uk.

Kirsty has been a tenant of EPIC Ltd since 2013 and was keen to join the Board of EPIC to help to improve the area within which she lived. Having previously worked with EPIC both in a voluntary capacity and then later as a Trainee Housing Assistant for 12 months in 2014, she has had the benefit of seeing 'both sides of the coin'.

Kirsty currently Chair's our Quality Panel which is the forum for service reviews and monitoring standards within our front lines services. Back in 2014 Kirsty completed a Certificate in Mentoring with the Institute of Counselling and regularly expands her knowledge of housing through attendance of relevant courses and conferences.

The Quality Panel—Your Opportunity to have Your Say!

Our Quality Panel is the place for you if you're interested in helping improve our services, check how we're performing and deciding how we plan new ideas like our customer reward scheme. The Panel meets in the early evening twice a year (usually in March and October) and has the opportunity to visit our empty properties to review standards, help us decide which property improvements will benefit our customers the most and reviews any complaints that we receive.

The Quality Panel is a good training ground for any tenant wishing to join our Board.

If any of this interests you then you can attend a meeting to see how things work without obligation. Our next Quality Panel meeting is on **Thursday 19th October 2017 at 5pm**. If you would like to come along and find out more, or would like to have a chat about joining our Quality Panel, please contact Lisa Dulson on 01782 222369 or email l.dulson@epichousing.co.uk.

How is EPIC Governed?

EPIC are managed by a Board of Directors who oversee the strategic direction of the organisation. The Board is usually made up of 9 Board Members, including one tenant member (see the opposite page), one local authority member (currently a Council Officer) and the remainder are independent members. Independent members are generally employed or retired business professionals with skills that would benefit the board such as accountants, solicitors, police officers etc. In addition, the Board can co-opt up to another 5 Board Members to ensure that it has the right skills to manage the organisation.

The Role of the Board

The core responsibilities of the Board are to:

- Define and ensure compliance with the values and objectives of the Company;
- Set a positive culture, with strong customer focus;
- Establish and review Company policies, strategies and forward plans that will achieve the objectives;
- Ensure that the Company complies with all statutory and good practice requirements;
- Ensure the strong financial standing of the Company; and approve each year's budget and accounts prior to publication;
- Provide oversight, direction and constructive challenge to the organisation's chief executive and executives.

Our Board Members are recruited following a full application and interview process where their skills are assessed. All our board members possess the following personal qualities:

- Commitment and enthusiasm
- Strong interpersonal and communications skills
- Able to challenge and negotiate
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Honesty and integrity
- Commitment to our mission and values.

You will find full details of all of our Board Members on our website, here: <http://www.epichousing.co.uk/about-us/how-we-are-managed/>.

If you would like to meet our Board and hear how EPIC performed over the last financial year, then we would love to see you at our Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 13th September 2017. The meeting will be held at Bentilee Neighbourhood Centre from 5pm onwards. Please contact Lisa Dulson, Executive Assistant on l.dulson@epichousing.co.uk to confirm your attendance or for more details.

Our Proposed Local Customer Standards

Our Local Standards set out the level of service that you can expect from EPIC. We are keen for our customers to help shape our standards, so this is your chance to have your say. We have set out below our thoughts about the standards we should set. We would love to hear from you to see whether you think we have picked the right areas to focus on and the targets we have set.

Please let us know your views about the proposed standards by emailing mailbox@epichousing.co.uk and putting Customer Standards in the subject line by the 31st August. We will then produce a final set of standards that will be published on our website. We will report how we measure up to the standards to our Quality Panel and also publish the results on our website too.

Customer Service:

- √ **We will respond to emails, texts and letters within 5 working days for straight forward matters and within 10 days for more complicated queries.**
- √ **We offer a variety of ways for you to pay your rent: Standing Order, through our website, at any Post Office or PayPoint outlet or by debit card over the phone.**
- √ **We will not keep you waiting more than 10 minutes for a pre-arranged appointment.**



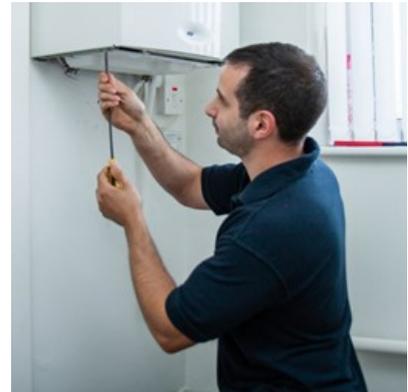
Customer Rewards:

- √ **We will reward our Assured Tenancy customers who keep to their conditions of tenancy with a gift card in the run up to Christmas each year.**



Repairs and Maintenance:

- ✓ You can report repairs via our website at any time.
- ✓ We provide an emergency out of hours repairs service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The emergency service can be contacted on 0800 694 0434.
- ✓ We will provide you with a morning or afternoon appointment to complete your repair on a date convenient to you. We offer appointments avoiding the "school run".
- ✓ We will contact you by email or text to let you know if we are going to undertake any work around your home, for example, painting.
- ✓ We will make minor changes to your home where you are finding it difficult because of age or mobility – please contact us to discuss.
- ✓ We will check and service the central heating boiler and gas fire (if you have one) in your home once a year and issue you with a certificate to confirm this has been done.
- ✓ We will fit your gas or electric cooker free of charge to make sure that it is done safely and legally.
- ✓ We will respond to all Landlord Permission requests (for changes that you wish to make to your home) within 7 working days.



New Customers:

- ✓ We will visit you in the home you currently live in (wherever possible) to complete your housing application.
- ✓ We will help you plan for the future and prepare for a tenancy through our coaching programme.
- ✓ We will ensure that any home you are offered meets our Lettable Standard, meaning that it is Safe, Legal and Clean.
- ✓ We will provide neutral coloured paint free of charge to help you decorate your new home.





Tenant Competition!!

In the Word Search below are 10 words that appear in this Newsletter! Find all 10 words, and send us your completed word search (including your list of 10 words) either by post or hand deliver it to a member of our reception staff including your name and address by no later than Monday 4th September 2017.

All entries will be entered into a prize draw to win a £10 Post Office Gift Card that can be used at many high street outlets.

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A P H D L Z L N V P P M E Y A
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D M L R E Y A E C D O V E E Y
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List the 10 Words you find below:

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