



EPIC NEWS

Issue 11 – January 2024

Message from CEO, Tracey Johnson

Welcome to our latest edition of EPIC News. It's our first one for 2024, so it would be remiss of me not to wish you a 'Happy New Year', even though it feels a while ago now!

There's lots of great articles in this edition and I hope that you find at least one or two useful. If there are other things you would like to see featured, please email s.tatton@epichousing.co.uk.



2024 looks to be another big year across the housing sector. The Social Housing Regulation Act, approved in July 2023 with many provisions in law now, but a number too for implementation from April 2024. The Act responds to the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire and the 2020 death of Awaab Ishak due to serious mould exposure and introduces changes in managing social housing, enhancing regulations for landlords, and implementing new rules to safeguard tenants from hazards in their homes.

With the drive and commitment of all at EPIC Housing and input from you, our tenants, we are dedicated to being an outstanding landlord. Being well governed and managed, with tenants and communities at the heart of everything we do, is what EPIC Housing is about and continues to drive me and my colleagues. We've come a long way over the past couple of years and I'm delighted that we are on the cusp of publishing a refreshed Corporate Plan for 2024 to 2027, driving forward positive collaboration and connections for the benefit of all. Many thanks to so many of you who took the opportunity to share your thoughts with me.

We continue to build on our tenant engagement activity and so many more of you have recently been engaging with us to help shape our services – thank you! If you would like to get involved, please contact us here m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk. Working alongside others in the community will help us to bring about positive change that we can all see. I was delighted recently that we were able to support local organisations to do more too – watch out for updates on social media and our website. More of this in 2024!

My best wishes to you and yours for 2024.
Tracey



CHRISTMAS CATCH UP
Find out more on page 2.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ★ Save money with the Housing Perks app
- ★ Protecting your home from damp and mould
- ★ Stoke Thrive at Five
- ★ Help with debt and the cost of living
- ...and much more!

Christmas Catch Up!

December was a busy month for us at EPIC Housing, here are some of the things we got up to...

We are proud to announce that we raised a remarkable £371 for our charity of the year at two festive events. The Bentilee Christmas Fair, held on Tuesday 28 December, and the Discovery Academy Winter Fayre, held on Saturday 2 December, were a tremendous success, with local businesses and staff generously donating tombola prizes.

The money raised through these events will be donated to our charity of the year – St. Stephen's Church in Bentilee who work tirelessly to support the local community and improve the lives of those in need.

Then, on the afternoon of Wednesday 11 December, tenants and staff attended the Lord Mayor's Charity Afternoon Tea at the prestigious King's Hall in Stoke-on-Trent.

The table of guests included EPIC Housing's CEO, Tracey Johnson, and the Chair of the Board, Simon Wilson. Also in attendance were five tenants and two dedicated staff members. All attendees enjoyed the opportunity to spend time together and get into the Christmas spirit.

Finally, just before we wrapped up for Christmas, we were delighted to drop off a variety of chocolate to St. Stephen's Church. The church planned to distribute the goodies among their various community groups and the local food bank. We would like to thank our contractor [Hankinson Whittle](#) who donated much of the chocolate, alongside some members of our staff.



Housing Perks

Housing Perks is an invite-only app with exclusive discounts on every day spending to help you save money on the essentials.



Tenants can now download the app to save up to 18% on instore and online purchases on groceries, fuel, home furnishings and much more.

The app is easy to download and install, but you will need your tenancy reference number which you can find on letters and emails from us. [Click here to visit our website to find out more and get saving!](#)

Free incontinence products are now available from our Bentilee reception

Following feedback from one of our tenants, we are pleased to share that we are now able to offer free incontinence products, in addition to the period products already available.

The products can be collected from our reception in Bentilee during normal reception opening hours – Tuesday and Thursdays 9.00am - 2.30pm.

The same service will soon be available from our community building in Meir, [keep an eye on our Facebook page for details of this.](#)



Interpreting Service

We are now able to offer a telephone interpreting service that takes just seconds to connect and has access to 200+ languages.

If you would like to make use of this service, please let us know at the start of your call to us.

Lucky Tenants Win Shopping Vouchers

In late 2023, we gave away nine £25 shopping vouchers to tenants and local people! Four lucky winners earned theirs by participating in our pumpkin carving competition which was open to everyone in the community. We even provided free pumpkins for those who wanted to join the Halloween fun.

The other 4 vouchers went to tenants who were randomly selected after completing our STAR Survey. We invited these tenants into the office to meet with our CEO, Tracey and Tenant Engagement Team Leader, Mark, who enjoyed chatting with them about their homes and communities over tea and cake.



Office Opening Times

You can visit us at our reception in Bentilee on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9.00am – 2.30pm.
Address: 131-141 Ubberry 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 6 February.

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



YOUR PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY

Damp and Mould – looking after your home for winter

One of the primary concerns during the colder months is damp and mould. Damp and mould not only affect your living conditions but can also have adverse effects on your health. We wanted to remind you of these practical tips on maintaining a comfortable and healthy home.

- **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](#).

Rent Payments in 2024

Please be aware that if your rent is charged weekly and you pay calendar monthly, you will need to increase your payments slightly this year. This is because there are 53 weeks in the year rather than the usual 52.

If you are unsure whether you are on weekly or monthly rental, you can find this information on your tenancy agreements.

Alternatively, please email us at rents@epichousing.co.uk and we will be happy to help.

Volunteering Policy

On International Volunteer Day (5 December), we launched our Volunteering Policy.

The policy allows our staff the opportunity to give their time to support organisations in our community. This could be through offering expertise, lending a helping hand, or giving our time to bigger community projects.

If you are aware of any community groups that could use our help, please email s.tatton@epichousing.co.uk.

Signage in Meir

Following tenant feedback, we recently installed new signage in Burgundy Grove, Meir. We hope this will help services such as delivery drivers and taxis find properties more easily.





YOUR PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY

Stoke Thrive at Five

Stoke Thrive at Five know that it takes a community to raise a child, so their local teams boost collaboration between the organisations that can work together to positively shape and support early childhood development. Thrive at Five join the dots in Abbey Hulton and Bentilee between midwives, health visitors, family support workers, social care workers, nurseries, schools, community organisations, faith groups and more. Working collectively, providing, and supporting spaces and events in the local community to put the local families and their young children at the forefront of the community.

[Click here to follow them on Facebook to find out more and to see what they are up to.](#)



Community Scrap Shack

Have you heard of Scrap Shack & Community RePaint North Staffordshire?

Based in Fenton, they offer an Aladdin's Cave full of exciting and affordable re-claimed resources that you can use for play and creativity.

In addition, they stock a rainbow of paint saved from waste streams. Prices range from £1 – £2.50 per litre.

Check them out on [Facebook](#) to see what they currently have available or visit their website – communityscrapshack.chessck.co.uk.

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.



Bentilee Community Lounge

On 14 December, Stoke-on-Trent City Council launched the Bentilee Community Lounge in the Neighbourhood Centre.

The lounge is open every Thursday between 9.30am – 12pm and residents can go along to access advice and support on everything from mental health and wellbeing to training and employment.

A member of staff from EPIC Housing will also be in attendance so if you have any questions relating to your tenancy, please feel free to pop along for a friendly chat.



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, please email us – rents@epichousing.co.uk.

6 Ways to Pay

There are several ways for you to pay your rent.

If you require any further information or support, please email us – 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

Slow Cooker Vegetable Lasagne

January is often a time for being healthier after indulging over Christmas. Give this healthier, warming lasagne a go and let us know what you think!

[Recipe inspiration from BBC Good Food](#)

Prep: 30 mins | Cook: 2 hrs 30 – 3 hrs 25 mins | Difficulty: easy | Serves: 4



Ingredients

- 1 tbsp flavourless oil
- 2 onions, sliced
- 2 large garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 large courgettes (400g), diced
- 1 red and 1 yellow pepper, deseeded and roughly sliced
- 400g can chopped tomatoes
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 vegetable stock cube, crumbled
- 2 tsp dried basil
- 1 large aubergine, sliced across length or width for maximum surface area
- 6 wholewheat lasagne sheets (105g)
- 125 mozzarella, chopped

Method

STEP 1

Heat the oil in a large non-stick pan and fry the onions and garlic cloves for 5 mins, stirring frequently until softened.

STEP 2

Tip in the diced large courgettes, peppers, chopped tomatoes, tomato purée, stock cube and the dried basil.

STEP 3

Stir well, cover and cook for 5 mins. Don't be tempted to add more liquid as plenty of moisture will come from the vegetables once they start cooking.

STEP 4

Slice the aubergine and lay half in the base of a slow cooker then top with 3 sheets of lasagne.

STEP 5

Add a third of the vegetable mixture, then the remaining aubergine slices, 3 more lasagne sheets, then the remaining vegetable mixture.

STEP 6

Cover and cook on high for 2½ - 3 hours until the pasta and vegetables are tender. Turn off the machine.

STEP 7

Scatter the mozzarella over the vegetables then cover and leave for 10 mins to settle and melt the cheese.

STEP 8

Serve with your favourite sides, we'd recommend salad and garlic bread!

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

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
or visit: www.thistlemyhome.co.uk

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