



# **EPIC NEWS**

Issue 12 – April 2024

## **Message from CEO, Tracey Johnson**

Welcome to our latest edition of your newsletter. There are a number of great articles to share with you this time round, together with great information on support and help that is available to you.



The English weather continues to be a challenge as we move into Spring. I know April is meant to be 'showers' but the constant deluge during April is much too much for my liking. I hope that it improves over coming weeks.

Lots going on at EPIC Housing, focussed around continually improving our services to you and ensuring that your homes are well maintained and safe. I hope that you have had a chance to take a glimpse at our new [Corporate Plan](#), which I had the joy of working together on with our Board, colleagues, and several of our tenants too. For me, it really does bring together the focus for the next three years for EPIC Housing – you, your homes, your communities, how good our information is, and of course our people. I'm a strong believer that if we don't treat our people well, then they won't treat our tenants well. We know that as a small organisation, we can't do everything that we would want to, but through improving our connections in the communities and working together collaboratively, we will bring about positive outcomes for all.

I've been delighted over the past 6-9 months to see an increase in tenants' desire to become more involved in what we do at EPIC, sharing with us ways in which we can improve. I hope to see many more of you involved in this and if you are not already, then the way to get involved can be found [here](#).

Enjoy the rest of the newsletter and bring on Summer!  
Tracey



**MAGNIFICENT MARCH!**  
Find out more on page 2.

### **IN THIS ISSUE:**

- ★ Launch of our new Corporate Plan
- ★ Tenant Engagement Update
- ★ Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities
- ★ Help with Debt and the Cost of Living
- ...and much more!

## Magnificent March!

March was a busy month for us here at EPIC Housing. Here is a round-up of what we have supported and achieved:

- 🍪 We sponsored the Easter Egg Hunt and Activity Session at Meir Matters on Easter Sunday.
- 🍪 Staff and contractors donated a whopping 160 Easter eggs to the Community Easter Egg Hunt at St. Stephen's Church.
- 🍪 Through sales of raffle tickets to staff to win a giant Easter egg, we raised a whopping £143 for St. Stephen's Church – our charity of the year.
- ★ We raised £131 for Comic Relief's Red Nose Day by dressing up in onesies and a bake sale at our quarterly staff meeting.
- ★ We sponsored a referee at the Stoke-on-Trent Lord Mayor's charity football match, helping raise money for Savana, Stoke-on-Trent Foodbank and Action for Children.
- ★ On International Women's Day we honoured the exceptional women of EPIC Housing, comprising 57.6% of our workforce. We showed our support by taking on the #InspireInclusion pose.
- ★ We attended the Stoke Thrive at Five Easter Play and Read event on Wednesday 27 March. We were kept very busy helping children aged 0-5 make their own paper plate fish.
- ★ Our Meir Drop-in Session was well attended by tenants with lots signing up for the allotment club.



## Corporate Plan, April 2024 – March 2027

We recently launched our refreshed Corporate Plan for the next three years.

The plan sets out our direction over the next three years with a focus on you – our tenants as well as your community and your homes. We will also be concentrating on our people and working in partnership with others.

Please [click here to read it](#) and if you have any further questions or feedback, you can email [mailbox@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:mailbox@epichousing.co.uk).



## Housing Perks

Housing Perks is an exclusive app with discounts on everyday spending to help you save money on the essentials.



Since the launch at the end of November 2023, EPIC Housing tenants have saved over £1,000 collectively on instore and online purchases of groceries, fuel, home furnishings and more.

There have been some updates to the app recently so please take a look to see the changes.

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.](#)

## Tenant Engagement Update

We now have a small team of 3 Tenant Ambassadors (TAs) who are working alongside our staff to improve the services we offer and give us a tenant's view on what we do.

The TAs will be working with us to guide further involvement from our tenants and soon we will be able to offer more options for tenants to get involved. They are also helping us to plan our next Big Conversation event which will take part later in the year.

TAs can take part in one-off meetings to influence what we do and how we do it or help us from home by giving feedback on surveys. If you are interested in become a Tenant Ambassador, please contact our Tenant Engagement Team Leader, Mark by emailing [m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk).

## Office Opening Times

We recently extended our opening times so that you can now visit us at our reception in Bentilee on a Monday as well as a Tuesday and Thursday. Pop in anytime between 9.00am and 2.30pm.  
Address: 131-141 Ubbberley Rd, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 0EF



You can visit us at our community building in Meir every other Tuesday, 8.00am – 3.00pm. The next date that we will be there is Tuesday 30 April.

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



Follow us on Facebook to keep up-to-date with all the latest news and events  
[www.facebook.com/EPIC Housing Association](https://www.facebook.com/EPIC Housing Association)



## YOUR PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY

### **Bentilee six-block bathroom windows**

We have recently completed significant works to our six-blocks to improve the fire safety within our tenants homes. This has included ensuring there is adequate compartmentation within the loft space to prevent the spread of fire, as well as fitting new fire doors to flat entrances.

Back in early 2022, we also completed works to remove bathroom windows which faced onto the communal area. These windows were replaced with fire boarding, and it was always our intention that we would re-visit these remedial works to improve the visual look of your home and the communal area.

We are pleased to advise that we now have plans to complete works to your home in 2024/25 which will involve plaster boarding over the old window space and then plastering the affected area to match your existing wall. We will then decorate the wall to finish the works.

For those affected by these works, updates will be provided in due course once we have selected a contractor to complete the improvements. If you have recently changed your mobile number or email address, please contact the office to update your details so there are no delays to arranging these works.

Should you wish to discuss this further, please call our office on 01782 252575 where a member of our team will be happy to answer any questions you have.

### **Garden maintenance and cleaning up after your dog**

As we move into Spring, our garden maintenance has started up again. To enable our contractor to cut the grass, we would like to remind you to ensure that your garden is kept clear of dog mess.

Dog mess should always be cleaned up immediately and dogs must not be left unattended in shared gardens.

If you are thinking of getting a pet, please contact us before doing so.



### **Allotment space available in Meir**

Thank you to all tenants who came to see us at our Meir drop-in event in March. We were also joined by Councillor Faisal Hussain who stopped by to see what we're doing and to talk about future plans. We are hoping to hold more events like this in the future so keep an eye out on our website and social media for more details.

If you are interested in having an allotment plot next to the Normacot Grange Community Building, there are two spaces still available. Please contact Mark to secure your space – [m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk).

### **Bentilee Community Lounge**

On the last Thursday of every month, you can come and see us at the Bentilee Community Lounge at the Neighbourhood Centre on Dawlish Drive.

Pop along to speak to our friendly staff about any concerns you have, to share feedback, to tell us about something we're doing right or areas that we can improve.



## YOUR PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY

### Rent Changes

At the start of the month, and in line with our Regulator of Social Housing, rents were raised. The level of the increase applied will help us to continue to deliver the good quality services you expect as well as investing in your homes. The money we get from your rent is by far our largest source of income, it pays for the services we deliver and the investments we make in your homes and communities.

Our priority is to support every tenant to stay in their homes. If you have any concerns about being able to afford the increase, please email us at [rents@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:rents@epichousing.co.uk) or call 01782 252575.

### If you claim Universal Credit

This year is known as a '53-week rent year', which means your rent will be charged 53 times instead of 52. This is because in 2024/25 there are 53 Mondays in the year.



The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has said it won't pay any extra Universal Credit to cover this. This means that if you receive Universal Credit you will need to pay a little extra each week or month to ensure your rent is covered and you don't fall into arrears.

You can work out what you will need to pay by multiplying your weekly rent by 53, then dividing that number by 12. This will give you your monthly rent charge for this year.

If you are unsure what to do, please contact us at [rents@epichousing.co.uk](mailto:rents@epichousing.co.uk) or on 01782 252575.

### Training and Apprenticeship Opportunities

Stoke-on-Trent College offers a range of adult courses that may be available for free, depending on your circumstances. Courses include English & Maths, Skills for Employment, Counselling and much more.

[Click here to visit their website and find out more.](#)

Staffordshire University's Enterprise Academy runs courses and masterclasses covering a range of topics including Business & Marketing, Healthcare, Carbon Net Zero and more. Funding is subject to availability making the courses completely free.

[Click here to visit their website and find out more.](#)

Stoke-on-Trent based business Training and Business Solutions Limited are holding an Apprenticeship Information, Advice and Guidance Workshop on Sunday 5th May. The event is suitable for anyone unemployed, school & college leavers and parents or carers of children in years 9, 10 and 11.

[Click here to visit Facebook and find out more.](#)

### Thrive at Five Parent Outreach Survey

Stoke Thrive at Five want to make sure all families can get the support and information they need as a parent in a way that works for them. They are looking for parents of children under 5 to complete a short survey to share their views so that they can better support families in Stoke.

Complete the survey by 26 April to be entered into a draw to win one of four £25 vouchers.

[Click here to complete the survey.](#)





## 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](mailto: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](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

### Leftover Easter Egg Traybake

This quick, tasty traybake uses up any chocolate leftover from Easter (if you have any!). It only has three ingredients and is also gluten free.

[\*Recipe inspiration from Co-op\*](#)

Ready in: 55 mins | Feeds: 15



### Ingredients

- 175g unsalted butter, plus extra for greasing
- 350g leftover Easter chocolate, milk and dark, roughly broken up
- 50g dark chocolate and 50g white chocolate (or whatever you have) to decorate
- 6 eggs

### Method

#### STEP 1

Preheat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/Gas 4. Grease a traybake tin (about 18cm x 25cm) and line with greaseproof paper.

#### STEP 2

Put the Easter egg chocolate in a microwaveable bowl with the butter and heat on medium for 1-1½ mins, or until melted. Set aside to cool slightly.

#### STEP 3

Whisk the eggs for about 5-6 mins, using an electric hand whisk, until light, fluffy and doubled in size. Fold a quarter of the whisked egg through the melted chocolate, then carefully fold the chocolate mixture back through the remaining egg, until well combined. Pour into the tin.

#### STEP 4

Fill a large roasting dish with 2cm hot water, then carefully sit the tin inside, taking care not to splash any water on the batter. Transfer to the oven and bake for 30 mins, or until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean.

#### STEP 5

Take the traybake out of the oven and allow to cool completely, then remove from the tin and place on a board.

#### STEP 6

To decorate the traybake, put the dark and white chocolate in 2 separate bowls, then melt in the microwave in short bursts, being careful not to let it burn. Using a spoon, drizzle the surface of the sponge first with dark chocolate and then with the white.

#### STEP 7

Leave to set, then cut into 15 squares and enjoy!

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 it could be included in the next newsletter!



# 10 reasons to choose My Home Contents Insurance Scheme

- 1) Apply over the telephone or complete an application form
- 2) Covers loss or damage to food in a fridge/freezer (excludes damage caused if the electricity supplier deliberately cuts off the supply to your home)
- 3) Covers theft, water damage, fire and many more household risks
- 4) Covers tenant's improvements (up to £2000 or 20% of the sum insured whichever is the greater)
- 5) Covers theft or attempted theft of contents in sheds, outbuildings and garages (up to £3,000)
- 6) Covers damage to external glazing for which you are responsible
- 7) Covers replacement and installation of locks for outside doors or windows and alarms, if keys are lost or stolen
- 8) You don't need to have special door or window locks (just a lockable front door)
- 9) Up to 35% of the contents sum insured for damage to your landlord's fixtures and fittings which you are legally liable for as a tenant (excludes loss or damage whilst your home is unoccupied)
- 10) Flexible regular Pay-As-You-Go payment options (fortnightly and monthly premiums include a transaction charge)

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



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