



EPIC NEWS

Issue 17 – May 2025

Message from CEO, Tracey Johnson

Welcome to the latest edition of EPIC News – a one stop shop to find out what's been happening across EPIC over the last few months and also what's coming up. It feels like Spring has certainly sprung with a good few days of sunshine!

The start of the new business year for EPIC, 1 April 2025, means that we are ready for another positive year of working together and alongside our tenants to ensure that our services are meeting the needs of every tenant and are continuously improving through what you tell us. We will shortly be sharing our annual tenant survey, which gives you another great opportunity to share your experience of EPIC as your landlord. I do hope you take the opportunity to complete it, as it really does help in shaping the way we deliver your services. Watch out for the communications around mid-June.

During 2024/25 we've had great discussions with our Tenant Ambassadors, including:

- Input to our refreshed Corporate Plan for 2024-27;
- Agreed and reviewed format for Tenants Annual report ([view here](#));
- Helped to define our Customer Experience Pledge ([view here](#));
- Helped to co-design our approach to quarterly Community Voice meetings;
- Considered choices in relation to kitchen installations.

These are just a few of the things the Tenant Ambassadors have been involved in. If you would like to become more involved and are interested in becoming an Ambassador, please contact Mark Bourne on m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk, or call 01782 252575.

We are also in the midst of our Inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing and in June/July this year we will hear more about how we've done and any areas for continuous improvement, which I will share with you all. We have come a long way over the last 3 years, but we always recognise that there is more to do to ensure that our vision of "empowering tenants with the resources and support they need to thrive, while also making a positive impact on the wider community" is still work in progress.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this newsletter and if there is anything you would like to know more about, then please do contact us [here](#).

Tracey



EPIC BECOMES AN ACCREDITED PARTNER OF 'STOP LOAN SHARKS'

EPIC is delighted to announce that we are now an official accredited partner of the England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) known as 'Stop Loan Sharks'. The IMLT is a national organisation, dedicated to investigating and prosecuting loan sharks and supporting borrowers. The partner accreditation is in recognition of the work being done by EPIC staff to support the IMLT's work and raise awareness of the dangers of loan sharks in the North Staffordshire area.

Mark Bourne, Customer Service Team leader at EPIC said:

"EPIC is delighted to partner with the Illegal Money Lending Team and promote the work of Stop Loan Sharks to tenants and the wider communities. Many tenants' homes are in areas that are targets for loan sharks and we recognise the impact that borrowing from an illegal lender can have, so we are delighted to join up with the IMLT to give our staff a better understanding of the signs that someone may be borrowing from a loan shark, and equip them with the knowledge of what help and support is available. We have plans to do much more collaboration with the IMLT and other partners in the future to help keep tenants and communities safe from the dangers of loan sharks."

Dave Benbow, head of the IMLT, said:

"We are delighted to have EPIC on board as our newest partner agency. The staff there have undergone specialist IMLT training to help them

spot the signs that someone might be in debt to an illegal lender, even if they sometimes don't realise it themselves. As a national team, partners like EPIC act as our eyes and ears in local communities like this where illegal lenders can be found lurking, ready to target the most vulnerable. We are so grateful for everything they do to help tackle this issue. Congratulations to everyone at EPIC and welcome aboard!"

Loan sharks are people who lend money without the necessary authorisation from the Financial Conduct Authority. They do not follow the rules, such as completing affordability checks – meaning they are lending to people who are unable to pay them back. They may impose very high interest or add extra charges and can resort to threats, intimidation and even violence if repayments are not made. Borrowers do not have the protection of consumer law such as cancellation periods and the ability to apply for help if they can't pay. This causes huge amounts of stress and can impact their other finances – leaving them unable to pay rent or other priority bills.

Since it was set up in 2004, the IMLT has made hundreds of arrests and secured 427 successful prosecutions, with illegal lenders locked up for more than 609 years. More than £91.6 million in illegal debt has been written off, and around 32,500 borrowers have been supported.

To find out more about the IMLT's partner recognition scheme, visit stoploansharks.co.uk

Anyone who has been affected by illegal money lending should call the Stop Loan Sharks 24/7 Helpline on 0300 555 2222 or access support online at www.stoploansharks.co.uk. Live Chat is available on the website from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

You can also speak to us here at EPIC, by contacting our Reception on 01782 252575, sending an email to mailbox@epichousing.co.uk or using the Contact Us form available [here](#).



BENTILEE VOLUNTEERS ANNOUNCED AS EPIC'S CHARITY OF THE YEAR 2025-26!

EPIC is delighted to announce that in collaboration with tenants and staff, Bentilee Volunteers has been chosen as our Charity of the Year for 2025-26. This partnership reflects EPIC's ongoing commitment to supporting local communities and enhancing the lives of families in need throughout Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding areas. Bentilee Volunteers offer invaluable services to the residents of Bentilee and Stoke-on-Trent. Their overarching aim is to be at the heart of the community by providing vital support and services that help to raise aspirations, enable and empower local people, support the disadvantaged and improve overall quality of life.

EPIC is dedicated to not only providing homes but also empowering tenants with the resources and support they need to thrive, while making a positive impact on the wider community. By partnering with Bentilee Volunteers, EPIC aims to make a positive impact on local families. Bentilee Volunteers' clubs and services include the following:

- Charity Shop and The Shed which holds a range of furniture and large appliances. Both are open 10am to 3pm.
- Seniors Lunch Club – every Tuesday & Thursday from 10:30am to 2pm, offering a space to chat and socialise while having a nutritious and delicious home cooked meal.
- Rainbows Club – a social group for adults with learning disabilities, held on Wednesdays from 10am to 2pm.
- Youthlink for children aged 7 to 17, held Monday to Thursday from 3:30pm to 6:30pm, offering somewhere for young people to meet new people and try new skills such as indoor sports.
- Digital Support – IT suite is open Tuesday and Wednesday mornings from 10am for support with things like applying for jobs or filling in online forms.

All of the above activities are available at the Bentilee Volunteers hub on Brackenfield Avenue, with the exception of the Youthlink Club which is held at the Pavillion on Ubbberley Road.



EPIC CEO, Tracey Johnson said "We were keen to give EPIC tenants and our staff the opportunity to vote for our Charity of the Year 2025-26, and I'm delighted that a local organisation has been chosen. Bentilee Volunteers provide services which help local people thrive, a key part of our corporate vision at EPIC. We're really looking forward to working closely with them over the next 12 months and raising funds to support as much as we can."

EPIC NEWS

EPIC's third Community Voice Meeting on 14 May at the Pavillion in Bentilee

On Wednesday 14 May we held our third Community Voice at the Pavillion on Ubberry Road between 6:30pm and 8:30pm.

Six tenants joined EPIC staff, including chair of the Board Simon Wilson and CEO Tracey Johnson. It was a great opportunity for tenants to share their experience of EPIC and where improvements could be made. The session was used to kickstart our consultation on an updated Allocations Policy – more of which will be shared soon – and to learn more about the complaints we received in the previous 12 months and the resulting changes that were made. We also shared an overview of achievements from 2024-25 as well as plans and projects for 2025-26.

Tenants who attended also had the opportunity to talk to us about developments in their local area – issues raised included repairs enquiries and parking issues. Overall, there was a really positive vibe to the meeting and tenants were generally content with the services provided by EPIC. The 'chippy tea' went down well too!



It was great to be able to have an informal conversation with those present and discuss other ways to get involved and shape decisions that matter to tenants. If you'd like to know more, please contact Mark Bourne at m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk

Our next Community Voice session will be held on Saturday 16 August, between 10am and 12pm, at our community venue on Burgundy Grove in Meir. More details will be available closer to the event, and we can provide transport if needed.

Fancy being in with a chance of winning one of 3 £20 shopping vouchers?*

If you do, click [here](#) to enter our quiz and answer 5 multiple choice questions - you'll find all of the answers in this edition of our tenant newsletter! **Closing date is 3 June 2025.**

***Open to EPIC tenants only. One entry per person. Winners will be contacted directly.**

EPIC NEWS

Getting to Know You

Throughout March we rang tenants to ask for some basic info around things like disabilities, language needs and contact details. We use this information to make sure that our services meet your needs and it also helps to inform future plans and decisions about how we deliver services. If you didn't receive a call from us asking these questions, and would like to share this with us, please contact our Reception team on 01782 252575 to complete a short survey – it will only take 2-3 minutes of your time.



Financial Year End

The end of March 2025 was our financial year end, and we're busy preparing the statutory accounts ahead of audit and compiling all the facts and figures that will weave their way into your Annual Tenants' Report due out later in the year.

It's been a busy year for EPIC teams with a major focus on investing in your homes, 2024-25 has seen our biggest programme of investment ever, with around £1m worth of new kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, and doors being fitted to your homes. We're proud to say that this level of investment is set to continue over the coming years because you and your home matter to us.

Tenant Portal

We're working hard behind the scenes on our promised Tenant Portal. For anyone who isn't aware the portal is a digital way of accessing your tenancy account details and logging enquiries. Here at EPIC, we take your online security extremely seriously and we won't launch our digital platform until we're satisfied that your personal information is secure. Please be patient with us while we work with the provider and undertake some rigorous testing to ensure the portal is somewhere we'd all be happy to store our own personal data. Watch this space, we'll keep you informed on progress.



YOUR HOME

Awaab's Law

This October marks the introduction of the first phase of Awaab's Law - a vital change that builds on ensuring tenant safety and housing standards are front and centre with an initial focus on damp, mould and condensation.

For EPIC, it reinforces our continued commitment that everyone deserves a safe, healthy, and secure home, as we continue to refine and adapt our approach further ahead of Awaab's Law's introduction. We recognise that maintaining a home free from damp, mould and condensation can be difficult in some circumstances. Please remember that you can contact us [here](#) at any time if you are struggling and we'll work together with you to resolve the issue.

Planned Improvements to Your Home

We know how important your home is to you, and we're always working to make it better through planned upgrades and maintenance (e.g. kitchens, bathrooms, boilers). These planned improvements are part of our ongoing effort to maintain and improve your home, boost energy efficiency, and help build a more sustainable environment for everyone.

We know that improvements can sometimes cause a bit of disruption, but we'll do our best to make things as easy as possible and we'll keep you in the loop about the progress of the work, timelines, and any disruptions that might happen.

Through our continued investment in your homes, our plans for 2025-26 include:

- 100x kitchen replacements
- 32x bathroom replacements
- 13x full window renewals
- 5x roof replacements
- 52x new boilers

We'll always liaise and contact tenants at least 4 weeks' prior to any works planned to ensure our timing and approach fits with the needs of every tenant.



YOUR HOME

Grounds Maintenance

As we move into spring and the weather begins to change, our contractor Croppers is beginning our grass cutting programme. This programme includes communal areas only. Where possible, Croppers will visit twice a month, weather permitting, to cut the grass.

The new season usually takes a couple of cuts to get it started, so hopefully you'll start to see a difference in your area soon. Please ensure that Croppers has access to all communal grass areas, and that toys, play equipment or garden furniture is away, and dog fouling is cleaned up.

We encourage you to report any issues with grounds maintenance by contacting our reception on 01782 252575, sending an email to mailbox@epichousing.co.uk or using the Contact Us form available on our website which can be accessed [here](#). Your feedback is essential in helping us maintain and improve the appearance of your communal spaces.

If you're interested in joining us on one of our Estate Walks, please let us know by filling out this form with your contact details.



Stock Condition Surveys

We carry out a visual inspection of your property, known as a Stock Condition Survey, at least every 5 years.

A Stock Condition Survey is an important assessment of the condition of the main elements in your home; including the roof, windows, external doors, kitchen, bathroom, ventilation and smoke detection. This is another great way of ensuring that your home is being maintained by us to meet your needs and current living standards. The great news is that across all our tenants homes, we currently have 90% that have had a survey within 5 years.

It can sometimes be challenging to gain access to tenants homes, for a number of reasons, but this service is provided by EPIC to ensure that your home continues to be safe, warm and secure, so please do help us to help you in maintaining your home.

If you've received a call, calling card or letter regarding a Stock Condition Survey, please contact our Asset Team on 01782 252575 to book an inspection. If you've got any questions or concerns don't hesitate to reach out.

GET INVOLVED

Become a Tenant Ambassador

We're looking for more tenants to join our Tenant Ambassadors Group and help to shape our services. Tenant Ambassadors currently meet once every 2 months and help us by raising issues affecting tenants, scrutinising performance, giving feedback on plans and policies and much more. There are also opportunities to take part in other activities, such as regional conferences, to learn from other housing providers and see how EPIC measures up to what they provide. If you'd like to know more, please contact Mark Bourne on m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk, or call 01782 252575.



Other Ways to Get Involved

As well as Tenant Ambassadors, EPIC has a number of ways that you can have a direct influence over the services we provide. You might want to join an Estate Walk, or help us to create a group that looks at a specific service like repairs or allocations or join in one of our quarterly Community Voice events. If you don't have much time during the day to take part, maybe you'd like to take part in Armchair Engagement, which you can do at a time that suits you and allows you to give feedback on services or policies. Don't forget to keep an eye on our [website](http://epichousing.co.uk) too, as we always share the opportunity to provide feedback directly on policies that affect you here.

If you're interested in finding out more, please visit our website at Get Involved - epichousing.co.uk or contact Mark Bourne on m.bourne@epichousing.co.uk, or call 01782 252575.



GET INVOLVED

Working Alongside Other Organisations

EPIC often works alongside partners to help provide advice and support on a range of issues. Last year, we worked alongside Alice Charity as our Charity Of The Year to support their work in helping vulnerable families, and we joined Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire Police in their “Making Great Places” campaign on Bentilee.

We also opened up our new Resource Room at our offices on Ubbertley Road, so that partners could provide support sessions to residents – this has been used by Severn Trent Water, Staffs Police, Moneyline and other local groups to promote the work that they do and the support that they offer.

We’ve also gained Partner status with the Illegal Money Lending Team, ‘Stop Loan Sharks’, whose role involves tracking down and charging Loan Sharks who prey on financially vulnerable people (read more on page 2). Currently, Moneyline are available in our Resource Room every Wednesday between 10am and 4pm to offer affordable and ethical short-term loans to people, and we plan to invite more partners along to help people with day-to-day problems and support.



Keep an eye out for our newsletters and email updates to take part in any upcoming campaigns over the summer months – when we’re able to, we like to offer campaigns to help out!

WHO WE ARE

Ever wondered who sits behind the scenes at EPIC? Well, you can read all about our Board, our Executive Team, and our Senior Management Team on our website, just [click here](#) .

The team are all passionate about tenants and their homes, and come with years of knowledge and experience in their various fields. And in case you weren't aware, the Board don't just read loads and loads of papers, they are actively responsible for setting EPIC's strategy and future direction.

They are eager to ensure that your voice helps to shape that strategy and direction and you will see a member of the Board at each quarterly Community Voice event, sharing back their experience to the wider Board. If you ever want the opportunity to speak with a Board member, pop along to a Community Voice event. Our Community Voice events are held every three months (read more about our latest one on page 4), and information on upcoming meetings is sent to all tenants in the run-up to the event and included on our website. If you would like to know more about the Community Voice events please contact our Reception team on 01782 252575.

The Board are ultimately responsible for Health and Safety, Compliance, and Complaints. Rob Emery is our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) and takes the Board lead in ensuring that we have a positive complaint handling culture, so if you complain, rest assured the Board do hear about it. We also have two other committees that support the Board, our Audit Risk and Assurance Committee meet at least 3 times a year to review risk management and the internal audit programme as well as a host of other things, and our Governance and Remuneration Committee, who meet at least twice a year to review terms and conditions, and other governance issues. Our board members give a lot of time to ensuring that EPIC is well governed and is doing what we say we will. Please take the time to read all about them [here](#).



PROPOSED REDUCTIONS TO DISABILITY BENEFITS

Many people will have heard about the government's announcement on 18 March 2025 about changes to some benefits. The government says it wants to save money and get more people into work. There are plans to make it harder to claim Personal Independence Payment and to reduce the amount of Universal Credit for people with health problems and also for younger people. Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

PIP is a benefit if you need extra help because of an illness, disability or mental health condition. You can make a claim whether or not you get help from anyone. You don't need to have worked or paid National Insurance to qualify for PIP, and it doesn't matter what your income is, if you have any savings or if you're working.

From 2026 the government are planning to tighten up the rules on claiming PIP, potentially resulting in reduced payments for many. It will become harder to qualify for the 'daily living component' of PIP, which starts at £72.65 a week. There will be no changes for people with more serious health conditions and also no changes to the 'mobility component' of PIP.

Universal Credit (UC)

UC is a payment to help with your living costs (including rent) and is paid monthly. You may be able to get it if you're on a low income, out of work, or unable to work due to an illness or disability. The 'incapacity element' in UC will be frozen until 2029/30. Also, those aged under 22 will no longer be able to claim this element under the new proposals.

How We Can Help

At EPIC, we know some of our tenants are likely to be affected by the changes when they come into effect, and we are keeping a close eye on the news and future announcements from the Department for Work & Pensions. We want your tenancy with us to be a success and we can give you support or signpost you to other organisations for more help. If you're struggling financially please get in touch and we'll discuss the support available to you.

To check your entitlement to benefits, work out a household budget, discuss any urgent household expenses or to make an arrangement to clear any rent arrears, you can contact us in the following ways:

- By phone 01782 252575
- Via our [website](#)
- Via email rents@epichousing.co.uk
- At our office 131-141 Ubberley Road, Bentilee, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 0EF or 1 Bordeaux Road, Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 7GW

Other Organisations*

www.citizensadvice.org.uk
www.stepchange.org
www.nationaldebtline.org
www.pmwonline.org.uk
www.saltbox.org.uk
www.moneyhelper.org.uk

*EPIC Housing is not responsible for any external organisations or websites.

PIP & AA Clinic

Reaching North Staffs and Thrive Hive are providing a series of **free** telephone clinics during May and June, designed to offer initial advice and guidance to individuals seeking to understand Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Attendance Allowance (AA) applications, reviews or appeals. Click [here](#) to find out more.



EPIC Housing are now on Instagram!
Follow us for all the usual updates
@epic.housing



Did you know that as an EPIC tenant, you can sign up to the Housing Perks app to save money on your shopping?

Discounts are available on everything from everyday supermarket shops, DIY, and fashion to jewellery and experience days. Throughout 2024-25, tenants who signed up to the app saved a combined savings total of just over £2,800. If you aren't already signed up to the Housing Perks app you can find out more [here](#) or contact our reception team on 01782 252575.

 01782 252575

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