



Tenant Annual Report 2021/22



Message from the Chair, Stephen Funnell

It's a pleasure to welcome you to our Annual Report for 2021/22. Our vision at EPIC is simple – to be a good Landlord – helping to develop vibrant communities in the areas of our homes and supporting our tenants through investment in our services.

We have had a challenging year, on the back of the Covid 19 pandemic and a regulatory judgement downgrade and notice by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). We are now moving into a much-improved position and our recovery with the RSH is well underway. During the year, we brought in additional and diverse expertise through four new co-opted Board Members and an interim executive team. With their skills, passion, and experience, they have been vital in guiding the Association, paving the way for a newly established full-time executive team to deliver for our tenants in challenging times.

Our focus has remained consistent in driving the organisation forward. We are confident that through good services, which are inclusive and accessible, providing good quality and safe homes, valuing, and investing in our people to deliver great outcomes for our tenants, and operating as a well-governed and financially viable organisation, we will continue to thrive.

Welcome from the Chief Executive, Tracey Johnson

Hello and welcome to this year's Annual Report. My thanks go to everyone in our EPIC family – our tenants, staff, supporters, and Board – for everything that has been achieved over the past twelve months.

It has been another challenging year, as we moved on from the pandemic and began to feel the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. But we have lots of reasons to be positive and to look forward to the future, with new Board Members, new executive team and most importantly the clarity of direction in our Corporate Plan that will take us to 2025. Our improvement plan with the Regulator of Social Housing is key to our ongoing success and I am delighted to echo our Chair, in that we are well on our way with our recovery plan.

I joined EPIC on 18th July 2022 as the newly appointed Chief Executive, and I am delighted to be part of a community-based organisation and look forward to getting out and about, listening and introducing myself to as many of you as possible.

I am always keen to hear from our tenants and there are a variety of ways in which you can contact us. Take a look at our website to find out more. We are also running regular 'Big Conversation' events for all our tenants where there is an opportunity to come along and tell us what is working well at EPIC and what we could do to improve our services.

In line with the Corporate Plan, as at the time of drafting this report (October 2022) the new permanent executive team has been appointed and the interim team have now left the business.

1. About us

EPIC (Empowering People Inspiring Communities Ltd.) is a not-for-profit Registered Provider of Social Housing, with charitable status. We were formed in 1998 following a stock transfer from Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Our overall vision is to be a good landlord, helping to develop vibrant communities in the areas of our homes. Our mission is to do this by providing good-quality housing services, homes that are safe, delivering an effective repairs service, a service that is developed with, and influenced by, our tenants, responding to the needs and feedback of our tenants and through working in partnership with local landlords and community service providers.

We own just under 1,400 properties and work closely with three local authorities together with a range of partners to ensure our homes help to meet the needs of local people in Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the Staffordshire Moorlands. Over a quarter of our properties is made up of family sized homes and we offer a mix of houses, flats, and bungalows together with a small number of commercial retail outlets for rent.

Our Vision

TO BE A GOOD LANDLORD

Helping to develop vibrant communities in the areas of our homes.

Our Mission

Working to be a good landlord by:

- Providing quality housing services
- Providing homes that are building safety compliant
- Providing an effective responsive repair service
- Providing a service developed with, and influenced by, our tenants
- Responding to our tenants' needs and feedback
- Working in partnership with local landlords and community service providers

2. Our properties

We own just under 1,400 homes across North Staffordshire with properties in Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the Staffordshire Moorlands. Our properties are charged at either 'Social,' 'Affordable' or 'Intermediate' rents. Our portfolio includes 20 leaseholders, three homes in shared ownership plus 20 properties designated for supported living. The split of all the properties we own or manage is as follows:

Our properties as at March 2022	
Property Type	Number
1 Bedroom flat	261
2 Bedroom flat	749
1 Bedroom house	6
2 Bedroom house	180
3 Bedroom house	174
4 Bedroom house	5
1 Bedroom bungalow	4
2 Bedroom bungalow	29
3 Bedroom bungalow	1



Our flats in the Bentilee area were originally built in the 1950s and transferred to us from Stoke-on-Trent City Council in 1998. Since then, we have undertaken a major programme of property purchases and refurbishment including new kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, roofs, windows and rewires to bring properties up to modern living standards. We have since acquired over 450 properties and we work closely with the Empty Homes Teams in neighbouring local authorities. We also own a number of commercial and office units.

3. Asset Management

The last two years have been challenging for EPIC; in addition to responding to the pandemic we have carried out significant fire safety works to many of our blocks of flats, with works continuing into 2023. Our primary focus will continue to be on health and safety and compliance in 2022/23.

In 2021/22 we:

- Carried out 1,561 gas services
- Replaced 34 central heating boilers
- Installed 11 new bathrooms
- Installed 13 new kitchens

Gas Safety

We are required by law to ensure that your gas appliances are serviced on an annual basis.

Our target is to ensure that we achieve 100% of our gas-servicing obligations; our performance for 2021/22 was 99.64%. We rely on your support and co-operation to achieve this. Tenants who consistently fail to allow access for gas servicing run the risk of losing their home.

Electrical Safety

In line with our current electrical safety policy, all assets are required to have an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) at intervals of no more than five years by a qualified and competent person.

Our target in this area for our domestic properties is 100%, and in 2021/22 our actual performance was 93.89%. Measures have since been put in place to ensure that access was gained to those outstanding properties.

4. Repairs & Maintenance

We have entered into an agreement with our Repairs Contractor, Brendan Fern, for tenants to be able to contact them directly to report and request repairs, including the out-of-hours repair service. A focus for us in the coming year is to get a better understanding of tenant satisfaction with our repairs service.

In 2021/22 we:

- completed 3,084 day-to-day repairs
- carried out 139 emergency out-of-hours repairs
- carried out 45 major works orders
- completed repairs on 152 empty properties ready for reletting

We are committed to getting your feedback on how we manage our repairs service and will be working hard to achieve this in 2022/23.

5. Allocations

EPIC Housing understands the need to monitor performance in relation to the allocation of properties and continue to look at how we can improve on this.

During 2021/22 we received 322 applications for housing, of which:

- 67 were from applicants aged under 25
- 209 aged 25-50
- 46 aged 51 and over

Turnover of stock

We allocated 85 new tenancies in 2021/22 which was a reduction from previous years. This was because we made a decision not to allocate some of our flats whilst we carried out fire safety works.

	Number of New Tenancies	Turnover %
2019/20	147	12.19
2020/21	121	9.73
2021/22	85	6.03

6. Rents

The organisation's annual income from rent and service charges was circa £5.35 million in 2021/22. The rent we collect ensures that we are able to carry out repairs and deliver services which is why we aim to keep rent arrears low.

The following summary shows the organisation's arrears position compared with the previous three years.

	<i>Arrears at 31 March 2020</i>	<i>Arrears at 31 March 2021</i>	<i>Arrears at 31 March 2022</i>
Current Tenant Arrears	1.52%	2.05%	2.54%
Former Tenant Arrears	0.47%	0.45%	0.61%

(as a % of the years total rent to be collected)

The number of tenants who were evicted during the period 2021/22 was four.

No evictions took place during 2020-21 due to the pandemic and restrictions placed on legal proceedings.

The table below shows the organisation's average weekly rent you can expect to pay.

Property Type	2020/21	2021/22
1 Bedroom Flat	£59.77	£61.92
2 Bedroom Flat	£67.38	£68.67
2 Bedroom House	£90.35	£89.96
3 Bedroom House	£95.17	£95.98

The rent we asked you to pay was below the Local Housing Allowance Rate for those in receipt of Housing Benefit.

Local Housing Allowance Rates 2021/22	
One bedroom rate	£86.30
Two bedroom rate	£97.81
Three bedroom rate	£126.58

Services provided (service chargeable)

A number of properties pay additional charges on top of their rent; these charges enable us to deliver services which include:

- Grounds Maintenance/Grass Cutting
- Lighting (in communal areas)
- Communal aerials

7. Anti-social Behaviour & Tenancy Breaches

During 2021/22 we dealt with 254 tenancy breaches ranging from untidy gardens to noise nuisance and intimidation or threatening behaviour. 209 of these were resolved either through agreement with all parties or through formal action. Two tenants were evicted due to tenancy breaches during this period.

8. Access to Service and Customer Care

We are committed to offering our tenants a high standard of service. We will ensure that you can easily contact us in a variety of ways including, telephone, email, website, and in person. Our reception remained closed during the pandemic throughout 2021 and the early part of 2022.

As part of our plans for 2022/23, we will be updating our housing management system, to build on the ways in which you can contact us through a new tenant portal.

We will:

- respond to enquiries made by our website within one working day;
- respond to enquiries made via our social media channels within two working days;
- respond to voicemail within three working days;
- acknowledge correspondence within five working days and aim to provide a full response in 10 working days;
- respect your individual needs and take them into consideration when responding to you;
- where requested, visit you at home at a mutually convenient time;
- contact you, explain and re-arrange if we can't make an appointment for whatever reason; and
- ensure that tenant information is easy to read and understand.

Customer Service and Complaints

We are committed to providing a high-quality service for all our tenants; these include tenants, leaseholders, applicants, contractors and agents or anyone else who may use our services or is affected by our decisions. We welcome tenant feedback and where this is received, we will deal with it in a fair and impartial way.

During the period 2021/22 we received nine formal complaints: seven in relation to repairs reported and two in regard to communication. Of the nine, four were upheld. We review each case and aim to learn lessons from the complaints we receive.

Complaints received during 2021/22:

Apr – Jun 21	Jul – Sept 21	Oct – Dec 21	Jan – Mar 22
1	2	2	4

One complaint was escalated and investigated by the Housing Ombudsman Service; working with the complainant to resolve matters the Ombudsman Service found that there was no maladministration from EPIC.

We aim to resolve all complaints promptly, politely, and fairly in line with the appropriate standards set by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling code and the requirements of the Regulator for Social Housing.

We have a two-stage complaints process with clear timescales which we aim to adhere to. Information about how to make a complaint or give feedback can be found on our website <https://epichousing.co.uk/manage-my-home/feedback-form/>

9. Tenant Engagement

HOW AND WHEN WE WILL INVOLVE TENANTS

In line with the regulatory framework, we will develop a set of standards for our tenants, which set out what they can expect from us in relation to tenant engagement and involvement.

We will involve tenants in the development of these standards and keep them informed of performance against these via the Annual Tenants Report.

We believe that our tenants have a right to influence decisions that we make. Specific examples of how we may involve tenants include:

- Site visits and 'Estate Walkabouts';
- Tenant panels including scrutiny, either in person or virtual; and
- Consultation register, where tenants advise us how and when they would like to get involved.

We will ensure that our methods of involving tenants are transparent and meet the provisions of our Tenant and Engagement Policy. Where relevant we will also involve tenants at an early

stage of developing new initiatives in order to agree criteria for evaluating success and tenant satisfaction with the final product.

We will carry out regular consultation with tenants on our performance and their experience of our services.

We will also carry out detailed consultation with tenants on any issues that will materially affect them.

Since January 2022 we have produced regular newsletters keeping you informed of our progress. Copies of these can be found in the 'News' section of our website – www.epichousing.co.uk

We are listening!

Complaints and compliments – we will use feedback and learning from complaints to improve our services and use feedback from compliments to ensure our employees know when we get things right. We will ensure that our tenants know we welcome complaints and feedback and ensure we put things right promptly when things go wrong.

Surveys – we will carry out satisfaction and opinion surveys and utilise the feedback to ensure we develop our services to meet the views of our tenants.

Consultation Events – where appropriate, we will hold consultation events to seek feedback from our tenants on specific issues that affect their homes or our services.

Involvement and Engagement – we will provide a range of mechanisms to ensure you are involved and engaged in the development of our policies and services.

Estate walkabouts and inspections – we will carry out estate walkabouts and inspections to ensure our estates are clean and safe, and involve our tenants in these in order to hear views on the areas they live in.

Tenant panels – we will develop tenant panels in partnership with our tenants in order to engage with them on specific areas of our services to help us develop and improve our performance.

Tenant Empowerment – we will support and empower you to ensure that you can help us shape and develop our policies and services to meet your needs and aspirations, where possible.

Tenant Groups – we will support the formation of tenant groups should our tenants wish to be involved in this way.

We will also publicise the results of engagement activities in order to demonstrate to tenants the benefits of becoming involved and encourage further participation.

We will publish regular tenant newsletters to keep tenants up to date and well informed about our services and performance.

Ways to Stay Informed

Our website – this will be key to ensuring that tenants have the information they need about our services and how to access them.

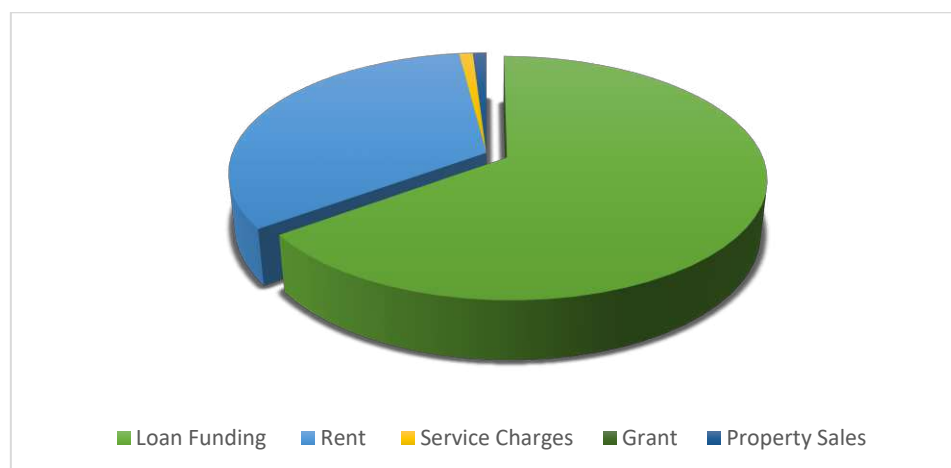
Communication – we will ensure that we communicate effectively on any issues that affect your tenancy in a timely manner and in a way that suits you.

EPIC News – our tenant newsletter will be published regularly to keep tenants up to date and well informed about our services and performance.

10. Income and Expenditure

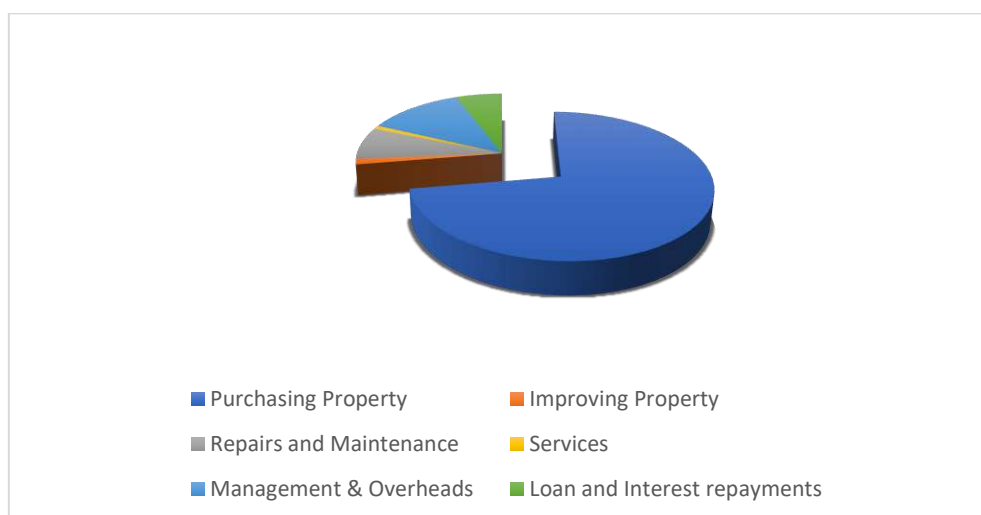
Where the money came from

Loan Funding	£10,300,000	Rent	£5,198,283
Service Charges	£157,806	Grant	£21,572
Property Sales	£104,303		



What we spent the money on

Property Purchases	£11,945,768	Property Improvements	£218,231
Repairs & Maintenance	£1,239,524	Services	£141,636
Loan & Interest Payments	£956,114	Management & Overheads	£1,998,135



11. Value for Money

Value for Money (VFM) underpins the delivery of our purpose and strategic aims. Our overarching aim is to achieve our VFM priorities in order to provide better services to our tenants and maintain our capacity to deliver our Corporate Plan with the resources contained within our Financial Plan.

Value for Money is a term used to assess whether an organisation has obtained the maximum benefit from the goods and services it acquires and/or provides, with the resources it has available. It not only measures the cost of the goods and services, but it also takes account of the mix and quality, cost, and timeliness in order to assess VFM.

Understanding the cost of our services, how they change over time, how we compare to others and our future cost estimates within our Financial Plan is crucial to managing our costs and delivery.

We will focus our activities on performance management, social value, and procurement. These activities will be the driver to efficiency within our operation.

Value for Money Objectives

Strategic Aims
Asset Management
Maintain our assets to meet our Homes Standard and ensure they meet Decent Homes Standard.
Review our asset portfolio to ensure we understand the performance of our asset
Services
Ensure that we understand the costs of our service and how they compare to others in relation to the quality provided.
Aim to deliver our KPIs and VFM metrics within the targets set out in the Corporate Plan.
Implement the upgrade of the Civica CX Housing Management and Financial Systems and implement the remaining modules in the Housing Management System.
Asset Management and Services
Consider VFM in all our spending decisions.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

EPIC aims to maximise service efficiency, reduce costs, and increase tenants' satisfaction through ICT developments and enhancements that will benefit service areas. EPIC will achieve this by making best use of ICT systems and, where appropriate, the introduction of new technologies to deliver VFM.

KPIs

A comprehensive suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) has been agreed by the Board and will be reviewed again in 2023; KPIs provide a picture of how we are performing.

Benchmarking

EPIC is a member of the Acuity Benchmarking club; as we gather more information in relation to our services and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) we will use benchmarking to identify how we are performing against our peers.

Procurement

Procurement forms an integral part of Value for Money and has the potential to deliver VFM and service improvements. Consideration will be given to the use and appropriate available mechanisms to deliver VFM, which may involve the use of consortiums, frameworks, e-procurement, partnering and collaboration with other organisations.

Communication

We will publish an annual Value for Money statement in our Annual Accounts to demonstrate how we are performing against VFM metrics and internal targets.

If you have any queries in respect of this report please contact:

Cindy Gleghorn Director of Housing

In writing to:
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