



**empower**  
Housing Association

We are:  
Caring, Supportive  
& Inclusive

## Winter Newsletter



### Christmas Greetings

On behalf of the Senior Management Team and colleagues of Empower Housing Association we would like to wish everyone a happy and safe Christmas and New Year

### Christmas Opening Times & Emergency Repairs

Empower's offices will be closed from 3pm on Friday 23rd December 2022 and will re-open at 8.45am on Tuesday 3rd January 2023.

Should you have an emergency repair whilst Empower's offices are closed during the Christmas period, please contact our emergency on-call number 01257 260712. If this number is unavailable please dial 07791763570.

Empower class the following as emergencies:

- ◆ No heating or hot water,
- ◆ Plumbing faults,
- ◆ Electrical issues or
- ◆ Broken windows

**Please do not call Empower during the Christmas period should your repair not be an emergency**



### New Members to the Empower Team!

We would like to introduce and welcome our new members to the team:



#### Maintenance Technician

Dominic joined Empower Housing in July 2022 in the maintenance department as a technician with a varied set of skills including experience in construction. Dominic has completed PAT and Legionella awareness courses to enable him to carry out compliance checks to our properties.



#### Maintenance Technician

Stan joined Empower in August 2022 as a maintenance technician and carries out general day to day repairs. Stan holds a NVQ level 2/3 in both joinery and painting & decorating. He has experience in the housing sector having previously worked as a joinery technician for many years.



#### Finance Manager

Tauseef joined EHA in October 2022, he has worked in finance for over 10 years, including working within the social housing sector, and is AAT qualified. Tauseef will manage our financial and accounting systems and will provide information to support business decisions .



#### CEO

Sara joined Empower in November 2022. She is a qualified accountant and has worked in finance for over 35 years . Sara has over 20 years experience in the social housing sector working at a senior/executive level and was previously Executive Director of Resources at Salix Homes in Salford.

## Stay Safe

Carbon monoxide is a deadly gas that cannot be seen, smelt, or tasted. The common signs of carbon monoxide are gas flames burning orange or yellow instead of the normal blue, soot stains on or above the appliance and/or coal or wooden fires that burn slowly or go out. Carbon monoxide can be produced by faulty fuel burning appliances.

As part of our cyclical maintenance programme we will ensure appliances such as fires, boilers and gas cookers are regularly serviced by a qualified engineer. Empower have installed a carbon monoxide detector within your home, which will be checked and replaced on a cyclical basis.

As you rent your home, Empower are required by law to complete an annual safety check and provide you with a Gas Safety Certificate from British Gas. **If you smell gas call the 24-hour Gas Emergency Hotline on 0800 111 999. You will also be required to notify Empower on 01257 260712 of the issues you are experiencing and the action taken by the engineer.**



## Cost of Living Support Package

The Government has announced a series of one-off measures to help households with the high cost of energy this winter.

These are currently being reviewed and amended on an ongoing basis and the most up-to-date information can be found on the new Government cost of living website Help for Households [www.costoflivingsupport.campaign.gov.uk](http://www.costoflivingsupport.campaign.gov.uk)

National Energy Action (NEA) also regularly update their website, [www.nea.org.uk/cost-of-living-support](http://www.nea.org.uk/cost-of-living-support)

## Winter Contingency Plan

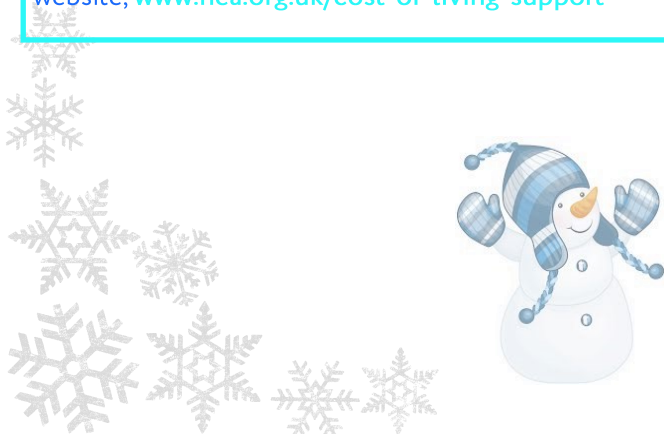
During the colder months it is important your home has a contingency plan in place for emergencies, especially loss of heating or broken washing machine. It is recommended for you to have alternative forms of heating where it is safe to do so, such as electric heaters etc. We are working with British Gas to ensure all boiler faults are reported and dealt with as soon as possible, however completion times may be longer than usual due to the lack of engineers working and extended lead times for parts. It will also be beneficial to hold details of a local launderette in the event your washing machine stops functioning.

## Contractors

There has been a lot in the media recently regarding difficulties businesses across the UK are experiencing in terms of recruiting new employees and sourcing materials. Our in-house Maintenance Team have been facing significant issues sourcing materials and recruiting specialised tradesmen to deliver our reactive repairs works. Please accept our apologies if you have been waiting longer than anticipated to have a repair completed.

In October 2022 we introduced a Repairs Satisfaction Survey which we are asking tenants to complete in order to provide further insight on how you found your experience with Empower when reporting a repair and if a repair has been completed to your satisfaction. Issues surrounding repairs or any of Empower's services can also be discussed during Performance Review Checks (PRC) and Compliance visits.

Thank you for your patience.



## Power Cuts & Blackouts

The Government recently stated it would be unlikely that there would be winter power cuts in the UK, but advised they have crisis plans in place should gas supplies run too low over the winter months, with the National Grid hoping that it would not have to resort to the proposed rolling blackouts if paying households turn down their heating or stop using washing machines at peak times.

However, there is no certainty there will be blackouts, as it depends on the gas supplies at the time and the demand on the network.

If you suspect you have a power cut please contact National Grid on 105 and you will be put through to your local network operator. It does not matter what time of day or night your call, the trained operators will be working round-the-clock waiting to take your call.

### How to prepare for a power cut or blackout



It is always a good idea to be prepared should you experience a power cut

- ◆ Make sure to unplug non-essential appliances like TVs, so that the electricity surge doesn't fry the circuit when the power comes back on.
- ◆ Find other sources of light i.e. torches and battery operated lights, but leave a light switched on so you know when the power outage/blackout has been resolved
- ◆ Make sure you have a torch and spare batteries in a safe, accessible place.
- ◆ Avoid candles however, as they are a fire hazard. Battery operated candles are safe to use.
- ◆ Don't forget to charge your devices such as mobile phones, laptops and tablets so that you'll have something to pass time while you wait for the power to get back on.
- ◆ It is important to also list down important contacts, just in case your phone battery runs out and you need someone else to contact another person.
- ◆ Make sure to keep a first aid kit around and if you need any medical device which requires electricity, make sure to speak to your doctor as soon as possible about finding another solution.
- ◆ Make sure to find ways to keep warm. For example, prepare some blankets and thick clothes to keep you warm and if possible, prepare a thermos flask with some hot beverages in it.
- ◆ When it comes to your garage, if it has an electric door, make sure you know how to run the manual release, just in case you have to take your car out.

## Energy Discounts or Payments

### Winter Fuel Payment

If you were born on or before a specific date (this date changes each year and is currently 26<sup>th</sup> September 1955 and can be found on the Gov.uk website) you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills. This is known as a Winter Fuel Payment. It is paid automatically between November and December if you have claimed before or are in receipt of some other benefits. Others will need to apply for it. Call the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on 0800 7310160.

### Cold Weather Payment

Some households could be eligible for a Cold Weather Payment of £25 per qualifying week. This is paid automatically to those on certain benefits when the average temperature in their area is recorded as, or forecast to be, 0°C or below for 7 consecutive days. You will get £25 for each seven-day period of very cold weather between 1<sup>st</sup> November and 31<sup>st</sup> March.

## Tenant Satisfaction Surveys

In April 2022 we resumed our Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, which allows our tenants and their representatives to have the opportunity to tell us how satisfied you are with your home and the services we provide. At Empower we always aim to offer the highest standard of service to our tenants. We care about what you think and we will listen to your feedback to help us understand what we are doing well and what we need to get better at. We will use your response to help us become a better landlord and to plan for future services to ensure we are constantly improving. We also want to ensure all our tenants find it easy to participate in and influence the decisions we make about the services we offer to you along with gaining an understanding of your experience as an Empower tenant.



Between April and November 2022 we have received 145 completed Tenant Satisfaction Surveys out of our 210 property portfolio, with the majority providing positive feedback surrounding the services provided and Empower's performance as a landlord.

Tenant Satisfaction Surveys will be circulated again during our 2023 PRC visits, with our main focus within this questionnaire surrounding tenant engagement and how as a landlord we can improve our interaction and inclusion of our tenants within the services we provide and decision making. If you would like to be more involved, please see the Your Voice Your Choice section on the back page.

### Performance Review Checks

With covid restrictions easing earlier this year, we were able to resume face to face Performance Review Checks (PRC), with an aim to visit all of our properties twice a year with an additional telephone PRC between visits. Over the recent months our Housing Management Team have exceeded their target of 53 PRCs a month and by the end of our PRC program in mid-December will have had contact with all of our 210 properties at least twice.

PRCs will resume in January 2023 allowing continued contact with all our tenants and their support staff. PRCs continue to be a key part of our Housing Management strategy and are beneficial for tenant inclusion and engagement.

### Specialised Supported Housing Criteria

As a Registered Social Landlord providing Specialised Supported Housing (SSH) we are required by the Regulator of Social Housing to complete a review of our tenant portfolio on a regular basis to ensure all of our tenants still meet the criteria for SSH. In this instance our tenants must be in receipt of a high level of support which approximates to the services or support which would be provided in a care home, for residents for whom the only acceptable alternative would be a care home. A review of all our tenancies was successfully completed in 2022 with only a few outstanding questionnaires remaining. Should you wish to discuss the content of your review form please contact our Housing Management Team on 01257 260712 and select option 3.

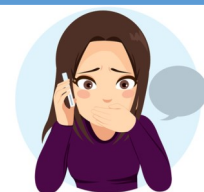
This review will take place every 24 months to ensure the information we hold on our Housing Management database is correct and up to date for all our tenants and their appointees along with satisfying the Regulator, whose standards we must adhere to. The information provided will be held in the strictest of confidence as outlined within EHA's Data Retention Policy.

### Complaints

Empower's Complaints Policy & Procedure is available on our website, [www.empowerhousing.org.uk](http://www.empowerhousing.org.uk). Complaints which are raised will be logged by our Housing Management team. Empower are a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service. In 2020 the Housing Ombudsman launched their Complaint Handling Code, which sets out good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. Changes to this Code took effect in April 2022, details of which can be found at:

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/>

Should you wish to make a complaint or would like to discuss a housing management issue please contact our offices: Tel: 01257 260712 and select option 3 or Email: [HM@empowerhousing.org.uk](mailto:HM@empowerhousing.org.uk)





## Preventing Damp & Mould

Many people have experienced issues with damp and mould within their home at some point, especially in the colder months. Most mould growth people will experience is most likely to be the result of condensation, however in some instances, this may be the result of damp. **Please contact Empower on 01257 260712 option 1 should you have any concerns regarding damp or mould within your home.** Below you will find some information about damp and mould, looking at the main sources and some helpful tips for how to minimise damp, condensation and mould in your home.

### Causes of Dampness and Mould

Moulds and other fungi can grow in damp homes, particularly in areas where there is restricted ventilation, such as inside cupboards and wardrobes.

The main causes of damp and mould are:

- ◆ Lack of adequate heating and/ventilation
- ◆ Leaks—please notify us if you notice any leaks within your home
- ◆ Water coming in from the outside due to leakage, seepage
- ◆ Rising damp—dampness from the ground rising up into the building fabric
- ◆ High levels of moisture/water vapour being produced inside the house

### How to treat Condensation within your Home

Condensation is the most common form of damp in properties. It appears when excess moisture in the air comes into contact with a cold surface, such as a window or a cold wall. It can lead to mould growth and tends to be worse in winter.

Ensure your that your home is ventilated and you heat your home properly so that damp does not build up.

Wipe down the windows and sills every morning. Wring out the cloth rather than drying it on a radiator.

Condensation channels and sponge strips can be installed by Empower if you are concerned about damp or condensation.. These are fitted to windows to collect the condensation and thus help prevent window frames from rotting and avoid damp forming under sills.

### How to spot mould and damp in your home

- Black spots on your walls
- Wallpaper lifting or wet
- Plaster flaking or damp to touch
- Wet Stains on your walls ceilings



### How to avoid Condensation

There are lots of things you can do to minimise dampness and condensation in your home.

#### Key actions

- ◆ Reduce the amount of moisture produced in the home
- ◆ Use ventilation, particularly in moisture-prone areas
- ◆ Cover pans when cooking
- ◆ Use extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms
- ◆ Close internal doors when you cook or shower/bathe
- ◆ Leave a gap between furniture and external walls
- ◆ Dry clothes outdoors or use a vented tumble dryer (where possible)
- ◆ Try to keep your home properly heated. It usually helps to have a low background temperature of at least 15 degrees in all rooms.
- ◆ Open bedroom windows for 5-10 minutes when you get up (if possible)

### Things to keep in Mind

- ◆ Do not block permanent ventilators
- ◆ Do not completely block chimneys. Empower will ensure a louvered grill is fitted where required.
- ◆ Do not attempt to draughtproof rooms where there is condensation or mould
- ◆ Do not attempt to draughtproof a room where there is a cooker or a fuel burning heater, such as a gas fire
- ◆ Do not attempt to draughtproof windows in the bathroom or kitchen



# Your Voice, Your Choice



## Feedback/Suggestions

Nobody knows your community like you, our tenants do. That is why we want tenants, families, care providers and advocates to give us their opinions and share ideas on what we do, from contributing to new policies to helping us change our services. If you have any suggestions or feedback as to how Empower can improve how we interact and involve our tenants with decision making please comment below. Alternatively you can provide your comments via the contact page on our website [www.empowerhousing.org.uk](http://www.empowerhousing.org.uk)

Feedback/comments: .....  
.....  
.....  
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Please return to: Empower Housing Association, 33-35 Hollinshead Street, Chorley, PR7 1EP

## What's in it for Me?

You can:

- ◆ Influence the services you receive from Empower
- ◆ Meet others during **Your Voice, Your Choice** tenant engagement meetings
- ◆ Gain better understanding of Empower and the services we provide.



## Tenant Engagement Group

As tenants we want you to feel valued and that your voice makes a positive difference. We would like to invite you to join our new tenant engagement group, **Your Voice, Your Choice**, where we can listen to what you, our tenants and your representatives are telling us and use the feedback to understand what matters most to you. Hearing the views and experiences of our tenants and their representatives is essential to make sure we understand your diverse needs.

If you would like to become involved with the **Your Voice, Your Choice** engagement group please complete the form below to allow your details to be added onto our register of interest. Due to the geographical area of our properties all engagement meetings will be held virtually via Teams.

First name: ..... Last name: .....

Address: .....

Name of Representative attending: .....

Are they: Parent/Family member:      Care Provider      Financial Appointee      (please circle)

Contact email address: .....

Preferred meeting time:      Morning      Afternoon      Evening      (please circle)

Please return to: Empower Housing Association, 33-35 Hollinshead Street, Chorley, PR7 1EP